Eschatological Living in John Wesley’s Theology: 
A Doctrinal Analysis and Contextual Reflection

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Abstract

This thesis aims to establish that eschatological living in Wesley’s thought is a lifestyle which takes peaceful relationship with the triune God as its foundational basis and ultimate End. At the same time, it receives the Kingdom of Grace and the future Kingdom of Glory in heaven as its eschatological-teleological vision. This End and vision in turn guide and shape our eschatological pilgrimage between the Kingdom of Grace on earth and the Kingdom of Glory in heaven.

Eschatological living begins as a new creation in us by God’s justifying grace and continues in the way of salvation until we are perfected in God’s sanctifying grace. Throughout the way of salvation, we open ourselves to the infusion of God’s love so that our sins will be purged and the image of God in us will be healed and restored.

Eschatological living continues through deepening our faith and repentance, thirsting after grace and righteousness, cultivating Christian happiness, obeying God’s law, and attending various means of grace. It is a development of faith in God’s grace with our responsible participation till we are made glorious in the new heaven and new earth.

Eschatological living is an effort to live out the beauty of the Kingdom’s values through our love for God, love for our neighbours and for all God’s creatures in our social context. It seeks to share God’s love through responsible stewardship and our peaceful lifestyle in the world which is hostile to its message. It is thus not a remythologization of eschatology but a responsible expression of our peaceful relationship with God, with ourselves, with our neighbours and other God’s creatures. This preserves us from being so engrossed with the future Kingdom of glory that we neglect our responsibilities within the present Kingdom of Grace.

Wesley’s view of eschatological living, as discussed in this thesis, commends itself to all Christians of all ages. But each age calls for reflection, reinterpretation, and application of its main principles. Thus, a contextual theological reflection in the concluding chapter is important to show the relevance of these main principles for the contemporary Malaysian social, religious, and cultural context.
Statement of Originality

I affirm that this thesis is the original work of the author. It contains no material taken from a thesis submitted for another degree or diploma. To the best of my knowledge, any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been duly indicated and acknowledged.

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Abbreviations

**HLS**  

**Letters (T)**  

**NT Notes**  

**OT Notes**  

**SM**  

**Works**  

**Works (J)**  
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Bibliography
Chapter 1  Introduction

1. Why John Wesley in 21st Century?

Why study John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder and the theological-spiritual mentor of the Methodist movement in the eighteenth century of England? First of all, it links to the long searching journey of my ecclesiastical tradition. As an ordained minister of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, the largest Protestant denomination in Malaysia, I find it is beneficial for me to become acquainted with Wesley’s life and thoughts. This is, in fact, a pilgrimage of retrieving the theological-spiritual heritage of my ecclesiastical tradition. Furthermore, other than Lorna Khoo’s *Wesleyan Eucharistic Spirituality,* there is no work yet to examine the relevance of Wesley’s teachings for Christians in the South East Asia region.

Secondly, Wesley was a pastoral theologian who was sensitive to his immediate context. He experienced the socio-economic changes which the sprouting new industries brought to England. He saw the inhumanity of the rich, in particular that of the substantial landowners and the upper classes. He sympathised with the deplorable condition of the rural poor who flocked into the cities especially London, Bristol, York, Exeter, Norwich, Newcastle and Birmingham for work, welfare and wealth despite the almost total lack of public transport. Furthermore, he discerned the theological flaw of the then flourishing latitudinarianism and post-Lockean English deism and lamented the lack of sound leadership and the impoverishment of church life of the Church of England of his age. It is in such context that Wesley chose neither to construct a structured

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1  Hereafter, John Wesley will be abbreviated as Wesley.
3  Agriculture and industry linked closely to lands. Hence the ownerships of lands were the mark of real power in eighteenth century of England. In Wesley’s times, the aristocracy and gentry owned most of the lands. Below them lay larger and smaller farmers, some owners, many proprietors, tenants and landless labourers. Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 4.
5  Though the eighteenth century Church of England was dominant in numbers, legal rights and privileges, social weight and influence, it was greatly affected by the aftermath of both the prolonged theological
theological system as Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), John Calvin (1509-1564), or Karl Barth (1886-1968) did not to preach philosophically to his academic audience despite his privileged education and theological formation. Instead, he chose to go to the grass roots with strong religious appeal. He preached faithfully the biblical themes of the Kingdom of God, of the message that Christ died for all, and of salvation by faith. It is through these messages preached that Wesley saw lives coming to God in Christ and being sanctified in His Spirit. This effort of Wesley was, as Hildebrandt comments:

a recall from a materialist and secularized generation to the essence of scriptural Christianity, a recall of the Church from her peripheral preoccupation with ‘meat and drink’ to the heart of the Gospel, and a new definition of the cardinal terms in the Pauline vocabulary: righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

This has much to say to the Christian ministers and theologians who serve in the pluralistic context of Malaysia despite the differences between Wesley’s eighteenth century context and ours. The starting point for our theological and pastoral pursuits is neither racial-religious pluralism nor poverty of the urban grassroots, nor environmental concern though these are our immediate context, but the biblical themes of the Kingdom of God, of the message that Christ died for all, and of salvation by faith.

Thirdly, Wesley was a scholarly minister as well as a pastoral theologian who kept on growing through reading the Bible and different books. As such, he was not only faithful to the Scripture and Christian Tradition, i.e. Church Fathers, Anglicanism, Puritanism and Pietism, but sensitive to his contemporary scholarly milieu. He was well-versed in philosophy and the metaphysical tenets of his day. He employed even the ‘Brownean-Lockean’ approach to present his messages which were grounded in biblical text and the rich heritage of Christian traditions. Yet, he refused to preach in a philosophical or speculative way. His key preference was “to relate scriptural values and controversy and ecclesiastical conflicts of the preceding century. The lack of sound leadership and the impoverishment of church life are two of the many. Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, 10; Dallimore, George Whitefield, 22.

For Wesley, “religion is the most plain, simple thing in the world. It is only, ‘we love Him, because He first loved us.’ “An Extract of a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law,” Works (J), 9:466; Duncan S. Ferguson, “John Wesley on Scripture: The Hermeneutics of Pietism,” Methodist History 22, no. 4 (July 1984), 235 fn.4.

Franz Hildebrandt, Christianity according to the Wesleys (London: Epworth Press, 1956), 10.

norms to the context of the people to whom he ministered practically.\(^9\) He preached “practical divinity” rather than “controversial divinity”.\(^10\) To him, the term “practical divinity” does not mean doing ministry without sound theological reflection. Rather, it is an effort to link theological reflection and pastoral praxis integrally. His scriptural-theological preaching, his writings, and his edition of hymns clearly presented this theological style. He was, as Wood comments, a gospel preacher in the line of Peter and Paul, of Augustine and Chrysostom, of Bernard and Francis, of Luther and Calvin, of Baxter and Bunyan, of Wishart and Welsh.\(^11\) This is an appealing invitation for the contemporary Malaysian theologians and theological educators as we engage in theological pursuits. A theological enterprise with impact needs to be grounded in the Scripture, centred in Christ’s gospel, faithful to the Christian tradition, and in dialogue with our living context.

Fourthly, Wesley maintained that theology must be practical. On the one hand, he opened his doctrinal belief for interaction with practical questions. On the other hand, his ministerial praxis in responding to these questions was reflected and decided by theological norms. Theology and Christian life were both necessary (as Wesley’s “faith and works” dynamic affirmed); each helped form the other.\(^12\) His rich pastoral-theological advice emerged out of an active interaction with both the Christian tradition and his social-political context. Theological reflection thus was the thread that held together the fabric of Wesley’s being.\(^13\) He reflected seriously upon the needs of his ministerial context on the basis of the inherited practice of the early church. His pastoral reflection and ministry praxis was undergirded with a substantial theological foundation. His praxis-oriented sermons and essays are, as Runyon notes, an appropriate way for

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\(^10\) *NT Notes*, on Romans 14:19.


thinking and reflection to occur within the life of the church in today’s world. Wesley’s way of doing theology and ministry has much to offer to Asian theologians who find the post-Enlightenment North American-European academic theology inadequate or not engage enough to address the contextual issues in Asia, e.g. poverty, inequality in wealth distribution, religious-ethnic relational tensions, environmental conservations, and political oppressions.

Fifthly, though Wesley does not write a “systematic theology” and has “little interest in theology for its own sake”, his thought system of Christian faith is, as Allan Coppedge comments, holistic, organized, consistent, and comprehensive. Throughout his life span, he did not disregard the importance of Christian theology. In spite of rigorous travel and multiple demands for pastoral and administrative attentions to the growing Methodist movement, he remained theologically centred. He was a Christian theologian who observed, prayed, and thought theologically, preached and discussed theologically, taught and wrote theologically, and even strategized and managed the Methodist movement theologically. The whole ecclesiological structure of Methodism, which includes its bands, classes and love feasts, its itinerant and local preachers, and its hymns and publications, is undergirded with sound theological reflection. Wesley’s openness, his innovated-integration, his prayerful and participatory scholarly-pastoral activities provide a theological-pastoral paradigm for Malaysian churches to deepen our theological enterprise as well as our pastoral pursuits.

Sixthly, he was a theological-spiritual mentor who mentored his assistants and co-workers personally through: (1) the theological discussions in the annual ‘Conferences;’ (2) theological-spiritual advice through correspondence; (3) doctrinal clarification, guidance and teaching through literature publication, e.g. Sermons on

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18 Carder, ”What Difference Does Knowing Wesley Make?,” 23.
Several Occasions, Notes upon the New Testament, and doctrinal treatises on Original Sin and An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion. Through these efforts, his key theological and pastoral tenets were communicated and taught.

Through his over six decades of itinerant preaching and nurturing, his theological and pastoral advice in the annual Conferences and his published literature, Wesley not only functioned as a spiritual director and theological mentor to the Methodist movement, but brought new form and power to practical divinity. He had altered and enriched the theological climate of his time, and set a notable mark on English Christianity.\(^\text{19}\) He therefore deserves our careful theological attention even in this twenty first century.

Finally, I am convinced by the fact that Wesley’s efforts of preaching, nurturing, and social care which were based on the three-fold theme of the Kingdom of God, of the message that Christ died for all, and of salvation by faith, leading to an international religious movement with millions of adherents\(^\text{20}\) is still growing and therefore has much to offer even in the pluralistic Malaysia of 21st century.

2. Why Wesley’s understanding of Eschatological Living?

2.1 Background to Study

As early as 1733, Wesley has spelled out that “heaven” is the teleological-eschatological goal of our Christian pilgrimage on earth. The possibility of living in heaven is an affirmation that human longing to see God face to face will one day be fulfilled. This teleological possibility, on the one hand, attracts us to journey heavenward; on the other hand, preserves us from the troubles and challenges posed by the earthly pilgrimage. Wesley’s early sermon “On the Circumcision of the Heart” (1733) clearly presents his theological conviction:


It is He who giveth them a lively expectation of receiving all good things at God’s hand; a joyous prospect of that crown of glory, which is reserved in heaven for them. By this anchor a Christian is kept steady in the midst of the waves of this troublesome world, and preserved from striking upon either of those fatal rocks, — presumption or despair. He is neither discouraged by the misconceived severity of his Lord, nor does he “despise the riches of his goodness.” He neither apprehends the difficulties of the race set before him to be greater than he has strength to conquer, nor expects them to be so little as to yield in the conquest, till he has put forth all his strength. The experience he already has in the Christian warfare, as it assures him his “labor is not in vain,” if “whatever his hand findeth to do, he doeth it with his might;” . . . or, indeed, by any but those who pursue the same course with the great Apostle of the Gentiles “I,” says he, “so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air . . .”

When Wesley published the first series of his Sermon on Several Occasions in 1746, he articulates that his chief concerns are to teach and describe the scriptural and experimental religion to help those who set their faces toward heaven—(1) to persist on their pilgrimage, (2) to avoid from religious formality; (3) to keep the law through faith; and (4) to work out their faith by love.

Later, in A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists which Wesley edited in 1780, there are thirteen hymns “describing heaven” (Nos. 65-77) in the section II of Part I. Hymn 69 “Leader of faithful souls, and guide” narrates:

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

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

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22 “Preface of Sermons on Several Occasions,” §6, Works, 1:106.
23 Most of these published hymns were written by Charles Wesley, but vetted and edited carefully by John. Thus they represented John’s theology as well as Charles.
We have no 'biding city here,
But seek a city out of sight;
Thither our steady course we steer,
Aspiring to the plains of light,
Jerusalem, the saints' abode,
Whose founder is the living God?

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.

Through thee, who all our sins hast borne,
Freely and graciously forgiven,
With songs to Zion we return,
Contending for our native heaven,
That palace of our glorious king—
We find it nearer while we sing.

Raised by the breath of love divine,
We urge our way with strength renewed;
The church of the first-born to join,
We travel to the mount of God;
With joy upon our heads arise,
And meet our Captain in the skies.24

The brief discussions above indicate that Wesley understood Christian life is of a linear pilgrimage which heads toward the “heaven.” In other words, “heaven” is the End of our “heavenward” pilgrimage.25 Therefore, “heaven” is an important concept in Wesley’s view of Christian life. The crucial questions, then, will be: “Why did Wesley stress the concept of ‘heaven’ as the End?” “What does this ‘heaven’ refer to?” “Does the ‘heaven’ refer to the new heaven and new earth at the final End?” or “Is this the Kingdom of Heaven, a theme which Wesley emphasized throughout his life?”26 “How do these two relate to new creation, a concept which Wesley stressed in his mature age?” and “How do these concepts relate to Christian life?”

25 Hereafter, ‘the eschatological End’ will be abbreviated as ‘the End.’
2.2 Literature Review

Recent Wesleyan scholars who have treated Wesley’s eschatology examine it from different theological perspectives. John Bowmer suggests that since Wesley considers the Lord’s Supper as a “pledge of heaven,” Wesley’s teaching of the sacramental meal stresses the basic idea of realized eschatology.27 Colin Williams, following Henry Carter, also find in Wesley a type of realized eschatology, particularly in his teachings on the Kingdom of God and sanctification.28

Though Bowmer and Williams termed Wesley’s eschatology as realized eschatology, Bruce Rodger Marino in his detailed research of Wesley’s eschatology, an unpublished PhD thesis Through a Glass Darkly: the Eschatological Vision of John Wesley, maintains that the points of similarity between Wesley’s eschatology and C.H. Dodd’s realized eschatology “appear to be more external coincidence than essential harmony. There is a great gulf fixed between the two.”29

Noting Williams’ statement that “the central focus of Wesley’s theology is on the saving work of Christ and the human appropriation of that work,”30 Clarence Bence, however, differs from Williams and designates Wesley’s eschatology as “processive eschatology”. This is so because Bence argues that Wesley’s “hermeneutical focus is a teleological orientation that interprets salvation as ‘pressing toward the goal’”.31 In the eyes of Bence, Wesley’s view of Christian life is “a process toward an eschatological goal attainable in its fullness in the world to come, but attainable in part within time and history”.32 Hence, Bence, though he discussed Wesley’s view of the way to the heaven

30 Williams, John Wesley’s Theology Today, 41.
31 Clarence L. Bence, “John Wesley’s Teleological Hermeneutic” (PhD, Emory University, 1981), 3.
in its individual sense and the way to the Kingdom in its socio-historical process, did not mention the implication of Heaven or Kingdom for Christian life within time and history.\textsuperscript{33}

Hoo-Jung Lee’s doctoral dissertation examines the doctrine of new creation in the theology of John Wesley. Though he did not designate Wesley’s eschatology with a special term, he followed Bence and pointed out that Wesley’s theology can be re-read teleologically. According to this re-reading, ultimate renewal is the goal of Wesley’s eschatology. Hence he concludes that Wesley’s eschatology should not be equated “with a flat form of realized eschatology that does not allow any room for supramundane realm of glory”.\textsuperscript{34} After discussing the re-reading of Wesley’s theology teleologically, Lee concludes his research with an examination as to how Macarian Homilies influenced Wesley. In his dissertation, Lee discusses Wesley’s concept of the Kingdom of God in a quite detailed manner. However, he did not explain the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the new heavens.\textsuperscript{35}

Randy Maddox appraises Bence’s defence and deems it appropriate.\textsuperscript{36} In addition, he discusses Wesley’s eschatological ethics briefly after some discussions on the historical context of Wesley’s eschatology, i.e. Wesley’s Millennialism and the Kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{37} In his discussions, Maddox highlights the connection between Wesley’s eschatological vision of the Reign of God and his ethical convictions concerning individual lives, social structures and creation at large.\textsuperscript{38} Theodore Runyon, theological mentor of Bence, Lee and Maddox reasons along this line although he does not discuss Wesley’s eschatology much in his recent publication: The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today.\textsuperscript{39} Though this publication is named as The New Creation, its telos is focused within the context of God’s transforming work in both the present individual and

\textsuperscript{33} See Bence’s discussions in chapter 3 and 4 in Bence, "John Wesley's Teleological Hermeneutic", 96-263.
\textsuperscript{34} Hoo-Jung Lee, "The Doctrine of New Creation in the Theology of John Wesley" (PhD Thesis, Emory University, 1991), 93.
\textsuperscript{35} Lee, "The Doctrine of New Creation", 90-114.
\textsuperscript{36} Randy L. Maddox, Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 235 fn27.
\textsuperscript{37} Maddox, Responsible Grace, 231-42.
\textsuperscript{38} Maddox, Responsible Grace, 243.
society. Hence, Runyon did not discuss the connection between the new creation and the new heaven and new earth or the Kingdom of Heaven.

Roger Hahn argued differently. He considered “inaugurated eschatology” a more accurate term to characterize Wesley’s eschatology. “This means that the promises and blessings of the last days have already been secured by means of Christ and in that sense the future hope has been ‘realized’. It also means a steadfast grip on the future consummation of that hope.”

William Greathouse, based on his examination of the Christus Victor motif, considered Hahn’s designation “abundantly sustained”. He explains:

The tension between the “already” and the “not yet” is basic to Wesley, in both Christ’s kingly reign and sanctifying work, as it is in Jesus and Paul. In Christ’s victory over the powers of evil, the Kingdom has actually been inaugurated in history, even though its final consummation awaits His return in glory.

To Donald Dayton, the diverse conclusions about Wesley’s eschatology stem from difficulties in interpreting Wesley himself. Nevertheless, he comments that there is no obvious sense of betrayal if Wesley’s followers “combine a basically Wesleyan scheme of salvation with a variety of eschatologies”.

From the above discussions, we can observe that Wesley’s eschatology is quite a well ploughed ground in Wesley studies. The different theological interpretations suggest that Wesley’s eschatology is not an afterthought, but “an expanse of extensive interest which was well integrated into his overall theological framework”. Yet, my research so far shows that not much work has been devoted to examining in a detailed manner the

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41 Greathouse, "John Wesley's View of the Last Things," 149.
42 Greathouse, "John Wesley's View of the Last Things," 149.
44 Dayton, Theological Roots of Pentecostalism , 153.
45 Marino, "The Eschatological Vision of John Wesley" , 251.
relationships between his understanding of the End, of which the Kingdom of Heaven, the new heaven and new earth, and the new creation are key aspects, and his understanding of Christian living.\footnote{Naglee’s work is an attempt to present Wesley’s understandings of Christian life in terms of pilgrimage between time and eternity. However, he does not discuss the connection between Wesley’s understanding of the eschatological End and his understanding of Christian life. David Ingersoll Naglee, \textit{From Everlasting to Everlasting: John Wesley on Eternity and Time} (New York: P. Lang Pub., 1991).}

2.3 \textbf{Importance of the Research Project}

Why? Is it because this has no importance in Wesley’s thoughts? Is it because Wesley did not have a rich vision of Christian life? Or is it because Wesley does not single out a sermon for the detailed treatment of the mentioned theological aspects?

However, Colin Williams points out, in his \textit{John Wesley’s Theology Today} (1960), that Wesley’s eschatology “has a great deal to do with his view of the way the Christian lives now”.\footnote{Williams, \textit{John Wesley's Theology Today}, 191.} Yet not much scholarly follow up was done. In 1970, in the \textit{Introduction} to \textit{The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley}, Albert Outler comments strongly that Wesley’s sermons from the last two decades of his ministry, which was a time of further theological maturation, are of great importance for any rounded view of Wesley’s vision of Christian life.\footnote{Outler, \textit{John Wesley’s Sermons: An Introduction}, 55.} These theological references show that Wesley has not only a rich vision of Christian life, but this vision has close connection to his understanding of the End, of which the new creation in the new heaven and new earth is the culminating stage.

Wesley’s own argument in his sermon “On Predestination” (1773) that the work of salvation “may appear in a still clearer light, if we view it backward, from the end to the beginning”\footnote{Sermon 58, “On Predestination,” §11, \textit{Works}, 2:419. See also §15, \textit{Works}, 2:420-21.} further substantiates the above claim.

Though Runyon’s \textit{The New Creation} does not discuss the connection between the new creation and the new heaven and new earth or the Kingdom of Heaven, sparks some considerable interest in examining Wesley’s understanding of new creation and its relationship with Christian life. These efforts saw its culmination when the Eleventh
Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies (August 2002), fixed its theme as “The New Creation”. The essays which were presented in this Institute were edited by Meeks and published as a book *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation* in 2004.\(^{50}\) However, other than Maddox’s “Nurturing the New Creation: Reflections on a Wesleyan Trajectory” \(^{51}\) and Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore’s “New Creation: Repentance, Reparation, and Reconciliation,”\(^{52}\) the other essays did not make substantial references to Wesley’s corpus. Furthermore, both Maddox and Moore’s essays do not discuss the connection between the new creation and the Kingdom of Heaven. For Wesley, this connection is of essential importance for his eschatology.

Kenneth Collins, in his recent published *The Theology of John Wesley*, though incorporating a section of discussion on the new creation, limits it to the context of the new heaven and new earth.\(^{53}\) By doing so, Collins neglects the present dimension of the new creation which Wesley comments in his notes on 2\(^{nd}\) Corinthians 5:17. Furthermore, Collins does not discuss Wesley’s understanding of the Kingdom of God though this section of discussion comes under the subheading of “Eschatology and the Reign of God”.\(^{54}\)

Thus this research sets out to examine the End and its relationship with Christian life, which I term as eschatological living, in Wesley’s thoughts. It attempts to fill this gap in past Wesley research and thus make a new contribution to Wesleyan studies.

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\(^{54}\) Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 316.
3. **The Approach to understand Wesley**

3.1 **Aim and Focus of the Thesis**

The title “Eschatological Living in John Wesley’s Theology: A Doctrinal Analysis and Contextual Reflection” outlines the key aspect of this research, which is to establish that Wesley’s understanding of the End has important relationships with Christian living and this understanding of his is self-consistent and develops in depth and breadth as his life and ministry matured. In saying this, I am defending the view that Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living is a key theme of his entire theology which is not confined to a special period in his theological development. As the discussion goes on, I shall also assert that central to this understanding of Wesley are four key themes: firstly, Wesley’s understanding of the eschatological End as the basis of the way Christians should live; secondly, the connection between Wesley’s understanding of the End and his soteriology and its implication for Christian living; thirdly, the need of nurturing our eschatological living through the means of grace; and fourthly, the reality of living out our inner sanctification.

For Wesley, to take the End seriously is neither escapism nor a retreat from society. His approach serves to provide Christians with a responsible interpretation of the End to enable us to commit seriously to responsible living heading towards this End. It “encourages us to do what we can to serve the present age, indeed to *preserve* it, rather than to flee it or hope for its soon demise”. 55 Wesley asserts through one of his edited hymns,

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A charge to keep I have,  
A God to glorify,  
A never-dying soul to save,  
And fit it for the sky;  
To serve the present age,  
My calling to fulfil:  
O may it all my powers engage  
To do my Master’s will! 56
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An inquiry into Wesley’s understanding of the End, therefore, is essential to help us to understand what this End is that the present must journey towards, and what is this End whose light affects the present.

Why is eschatological living being posited as the focus of this research? This is because eschatological living is one of the key themes in Wesley’s teachings. Wesley’s corpus, especially his thirteen discourses on the Sermon on the Mount and later sermons contain rich discussions on this theme. His reasoning in the fourth discourse of the Sermon on the Mount presents a glimpse of his understanding of eschatological living on earth:

“Let your light so shine:”…Endeavour not to conceal this light, wherewith God hath enlightened your soul; but let it shine before men, before all with whom you are, in the whole tenor of your conversation. Let it shine still more eminently in your actions, in your doing all possible good to all men; and in your suffering for righteousness’ sake, while you “rejoice and are exceeding glad, knowing that great is your reward in heaven.”

In his old age, he reasons in his sermon on “The Difference between Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith” (1788):

They that live by faith, walk by faith. But what is implied in this? They regulate all their judgments concerning good and evil, not with reference to visible and temporal things, but to things invisible and eternal…they account invisible things to be of high value, because they will never pass away…By these they form their judgments of all things. They judge them to be good or evil, as they promote or hinder the welfare, not in time, but in eternity. They weigh whatever occurs in this balance: “What influence has it on my eternal state?” They regulate all their tempers and passions…, all their thoughts and designs, all their words and actions, so as to prepare them for that invisible and eternal world to which they are shortly going. They do not dwell but only sojourn here; not looking upon earth as their home, but only travelling through Immanuel’s ground, to fairer worlds on high.


Christian living is a journey which begins from the present heading towards the End. Christian faith demands that its followers be mindful of the End. However, it is also a movement of God’s glory that begins from the End to the present in which the End casts its light on the present Christian living.

3.2 Overview of the research

The principal purposes of this research, therefore, can be outlined as below:

1. to investigate what does “heaven” refer in Wesley’s thoughts;
2. to establish that peaceful relationship with the Triune God is the controlling thread which penetrates Wesley’s *via salutis*, and thus his understanding of eschatological living.
3. to explain that the Kingdom of Grace on earth and the Kingdom of Glory in heaven is God’s prepared eschatological destination for us;
4. to look at the various aspects of Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living;
5. to examine Wesley’s understanding of eschatological praxis as a living out of the inner sanctification;
6. to reflect on the relevance of Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living.

3.3 Scope and Limitations

The present inquiry aims not to research a specific stage of the development of Wesley’s thought, but to demonstrate its whole scope and its theological legitimacy, consistency and cohesiveness. It does not aim to trace all the implications of Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living for the Christian faith as Wesley perceived and taught it. Nor does it attempt a detailed comparative study of other historical or contemporary views of

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Current Wesley scholarship distinguishes Wesley’s theological convictions into three classifications: the “early Wesley” (1733-38), the “middle Wesley” (1738-65), and the “late Wesley” (1765-91). However, I am convinced with Randy Maddox’s approach of the whole because Wesley’s “mature” position on many issues coalesced long before 1765. Maddox, Responsible Grace, 20-21.
eschatological living except in so far as such research bears directly upon the elucidation and evaluation of Wesley’s view.

3.4 Research Design

The research design for the present research may be described under the following headings: research approach, research procedures, and research references.

(I) Research Approach

According to Richard Heitzenrater, the General Editor of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, Wesley studies can be categorised into four levels: (1) primary studies which intends to provide reliable texts of primary resources, (2) specialist studies that aims to analyse and interpret particular topics, (3) comprehensive studies that summarise and synthesis the studies done at the second level, and (4) popular studies which are written for the general public. The present research fits the second level, i.e. ‘specialist studies.’ Hence, the primary approach employed in this research is textual and theological.

(II) Research Procedures

I have decided to commence with Wesley’s later sermons and his thirteen discourses on the Sermon on the Mount which he wrote in the middle phase of his ministry. There are few reasons for such decision: (1) Wesley’s written sermons, which are in most cases theological treatises in sermon form, acted as theological boundaries for the preaching ministry of Methodist preachers; (2) the later sermons which Wesley wrote in the phase of his further theological maturation serve as a visionary lens to view Wesley’s own presentation of Christian living from an eschatological perspective; (3) they provide a framework for us to understand his early sermons and tracts; (4) they connect us, directly or indirectly, to the life context of Wesley which he describes more in his journals and letters; (5) the discourses on the Sermon on the Mount, which occupied one-third of the

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Standard Sermons and which Wesley did not rework once published, contain his rich teachings on via salutis and Christian life.

Wesley did not set out to develop a “theological system” as the post-Enlightenment European theologian did and he left us no single body of systematic reflection on eschatological living. In order to retrieve his view on eschatological living, I have read through other Wesley’s writings to identify, to collate and to analyse the relevant key terms, scriptural references, main insights, and emphases of his own thought. The main aim, here, is to have Wesley speak for himself with clear voice, as far as this is possible. By doing this, I focus in the face value of Wesley’s words.

(III) Research References

In order to present as rounded a view as possible of Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living, it will be necessary to review his corpus which spans approximately 64 years, from 1727 to 1791. The primary reference will be the collected works of The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley which was first published by Oxford Press and now by Abingdon Press. Apart from focusing on Wesley’s primary resources, I have also referred to relevant secondary writers.

3.5 Key Terms and Definitions

Wesley is the abbreviation for John Wesley (1703-91). He was born in the rectory of Epworth, Lincolnshire, the fifteenth child of Samuel and Susannah Wesley. Although his religious conversion occurred in 1725, he was greatly influenced by his evangelical experience of personal salvation on 24 May 1738. His experiences of both the witness of the Spirit in his own spirit and his field preaching ministry brought him to an unprecedented ministerial path. From then on, together with Charles (his younger bother and a hymn writer), he gave leadership to the 18th century Methodist movement.

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63 This includes sermons, Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, Minutes of the conference, journals, letters, tracts, hymns, and Articles of Religion.

Kingdom of Heaven is a key theme in Wesley’s preaching and teaching. It, on the one hand, refers to “the sovereign right of all things that are or ever were created”. On the other hand, it means the unchanging realm where God dwells and rules.

Final End refers to the culminating point of Christian eschatology, i.e. seeing the Triune God face to face in the new heaven and new earth in eternity.

Eschatological Living means Christian life on earth in the light of this eschatological End.

Via salutis This is a term which Wesley used primarily in his major sermons, such as “The Way to the Kingdom” (1746), “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765), and “The More Excellent Way” (1787) to illustrate the gradual nature of salvation. Salvation is seen as an order as well as a way in Wesley’s eyes.

Sanctification is primarily the dynamic cleansing and maturing work of the Triune God in the life of Christians between conversion and death. However, it also denotes a state in which Christians must remain by living in correspondence to their given holiness, as well as to a state to which they must strive in order to attain it. Sanctification, thus, is seen as a one-time event and as a process. It will find expression in works of piety, i.e. life of worship, fasting and prayer, spiritual disciplines and spiritual warfare, as well as works of mercy, i.e. “good works that benefit people for time and eternity”.

Christian Perfection is another term for “entire sanctification”. It is one of Wesley’s most distinctive doctrines. It is a continuing gift of God, resulting from His perfecting love alone. It is a process through which God’s deeper work of grace “removes original sin and brings the believer into a life of holiness, or Christian perfection”. It refers neither to sinless perfection nor to a state of freedom from temptation and probation.

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65 NT Notes, on Matthew 6:13.
67 Bockmuehl, "Sanctification,” 615.
3.6 The Structure of the Research

This research is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is the introduction of this thesis. Chapters two, three, four, and five analyse the various aspects of Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living. Chapter six, which is also a concluding chapter, aims to evaluate the relevancy of Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living for the contemporary Malaysian Christian living.

The First Chapter of this thesis has presented a background as to why John Wesley is the theological figure for this exercise and why his understanding of eschatological living is posited as the focus of this research. The importance of this research, the aim and focus, the design and the structure of the research are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Two centres on the key question “What is the theological basis of Wesley’s eschatological living?” This inquiry seeks to examine the particular influences which help shape the theological basis for his understanding of eschatological living.

Chapter Three seeks to examine the pilgrimage of eschatological living, i.e. Wesley’s teachings on the new way of life in the Kingdom of Grace. To Wesley, eschatological living does not end at the point of justification. The nature of eschatological living is closely related to the living out of inner sanctification. This chapter, then, is an extensive examination of aspects which closely associate with Wesley’s notions of sanctification and perfection.

Chapter Four aims to present the fact that nurturing through means of grace is essential to enhance the quality of eschatological living continually. Within this chapter, Wesley’s categorisation of the means of grace and the contribution of means of grace for the deepening of our eschatological living will be discussed.

Chapter Five is a discussion of the practical expression of eschatological living. Wesley’s understanding of stewardship and peaceful lifestyle as an expression of the love of neighbours will be examined in detail.
Chapter Six, the concluding chapter, is a contextual reflection. Eschatological living concerns Christian living for the future in the created earth of God. To live in the created earth of God also means to live in the melting pot of various cultures in the world. In what way does Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living have relevance for contemporary Christians? This chapter therefore examines twenty first century Malaysia as a contemporary context where Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living will be applied. In doing so, I attempt to go beyond Outler’s proposal of phase III, which stresses on historical context and ecumenical relevance of Wesley’s theology, in order to probe the relevance of Wesley’s theology for our contemporary context.

Chapter 2  The Basis of Eschatological Living:
Peace with God in the Kingdom of Grace

As discussed briefly in Chapter one, “heaven” and “heavenward” are controlling concepts in Wesley’s understanding of Christian life. It shapes his theological and practical effort. Yet, what is heaven? Why did Wesley hold these as key concepts affecting his preaching, teaching and ministerial efforts? What has happened with the earth and humanity to lead Wesley to give such an emphasis? How does the teleological goal of heaven shape Wesley’s view of the heavenward journey? To answer these questions, it is necessary for us first to examine Wesley’s understanding of the Triune God for the following reasons: (1) Wesley considers that to look to Heaven is to look to God Himself;¹ (2) The Triune God is our Abba (Father) who is in Heaven;² and (3) He is “the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End”.³

1. The Triune God, the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Creation

1.1 The Triune God as the Father of All

In the eyes of Wesley, the thoughts of the French philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Francois-Marie Arouet, whose pen-name was Voltaire (1694-1778), and the Scottish David Hume (1711-1776) have increasing influenced the eighteenth century Europeans.⁴ They stressed rationalism, sought independence from any divine revelation, and saw humanity as the essence of religion. Against these tides, Wesley stood firm in the Hebraic-apostolic tradition,⁵ believing and preaching throughout his life a faith which is rooted in the Triune God.

¹ OT Notes, on 1st King 8:30.
² NT Notes, on Matthew 6:9.
³ NT Notes, on Revelation 1:8; 21:6.
⁴ Sermon 120, “The Unity of the Divine Being,” §19, Works, 4:49. Though they have asserted great influence, Wesley rejected their thoughts. He wrote in his journal: “I read with much expectation a celebrated book, Rousseau upon Education. But how was I disappointed! Such a more consummate coxcomb never saw the sun....I object to his temper more than to his judgement: he is a mere misanthrope, a cynic all over. So indeed is his brother infidel, Voltaire and well-nigh as great a coxcomb.” Wesley, February 3, 1770, Journals and Diaries V, in Works, 22:214-15.
⁵ This tradition stresses the recollection of God’s words and actions in history, the three creeds (Apostles’, Nicene-Constantinopolitan, and Athanasian creeds), the reformers teaching, and his Anglican heritage. Thomas C. Oden, John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity: a Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian

In the same period, he also declares in the First article of the Twenty Five Articles of Religion which he prepared for the American Methodists in 1784:

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

For Wesley, then, God is first and foremost God in unity of three persons in Godhead, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God is Three and One. The Hebrew name of God, Elohim, hence, is a plural form which conveys the plurality of persons in the Godhead. Elsewhere, Wesley affirms this through one of the hymns in A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists:

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16 This is a terminological accommodation of Wesley. However, Wesley also uses ‘Trinity’ or ‘Person’ without any scruple. See Sermon 55, “On the Trinity,” §§4, 15-17, Works, 2:377-8, 384-5; NT Notes, on Luke 4:18; on 1st Corinthians 2:8. Geoffrey Wainwright, ”Why Wesley was a Trinitarian,” The Drew Gateway 59 (Spring 1990), 28.
Hail, Father, Son, and Spirit, great
Before the birth of time,
Enthroned in everlasting state,
Jehovah, Elohim!

A mystical plurality
We in the Godhead own,
Adoring One in Persons Three,
And Three in nature One.\textsuperscript{17}

Wesley held firm to this central belief which stands against the anti-trinitarianism of the Arians, Socinians, and Deists of his time.\textsuperscript{18} He reasons in his sermon “On the Discoveries of Faith” (1788):

By faith I know, “there are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and that these Three are One;” that the Word, God the Son, “was made flesh,” lived and died for our salvation, rose again, ascended into heaven, and now sitteth on the right hand of the Father. By faith I know that the Holy Spirit is the giver of all spiritual life; of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; of holiness and happiness, by the restoration of that image of God wherein we are created...\textsuperscript{19}

Other than Elohim, God is also addressed peculiarly as Jehovah or “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex. 3: 14) or “the Lord”.\textsuperscript{20} This denotes the fullness of God’s Being, e.g. His self-existence and eternity, His all-sufficiency and inexhaustibility, His omnipresence and omnipotence, His greatness, goodness and faithfulness.\textsuperscript{21} The Triune God is the Ultimate who inhabits eternity.\textsuperscript{22} He is “the fountain of being and blessedness, and infinite perfection”.\textsuperscript{23} He is the Father of all who performs what he had promised and perfects what he had begun.\textsuperscript{24} He is the Parent of Good whose blessings flow.

\textsuperscript{18} Wainwright, “Why Wesley was a Trinitarian,” 26-7.
\textsuperscript{20} OT Notes, on Genesis 2:4-7; on Exodus 6:2; on Joshua 5:14(3); on Judges 3:20; on Second Chronicles 13:10.
\textsuperscript{21} OT Notes, on Exodus 3:14, 20: 2(1), 34:6; “SM-VI” (1748), §§III.7, Works, 1:581.
\textsuperscript{22} OT Notes, on Genesis 1:1.
\textsuperscript{23} OT Notes, on Genesis 2:4-7; on Habakkuk 2:20.
\textsuperscript{24} OT Notes, on Genesis 1:1; on Exodus 6:2; NT Notes, on Matthew, 6:9-10; Letter to a Roman Catholic (July 18, 1749), §6, Letters (T),3:8-9.
Parent of Good, thy bounteous hand
Incessant blessings down distils,
And all in air, or sea, or land,
With plenteous food and gladness fills.
All things in thee live, move, and are,
Thy power infused doth all sustain;
Ev’n those thy daily favours share
Who thankless spurn thy easy reign.
Thy sun thou bidst his genial ray
Alike on all impartial pour;
To all who hate or bless thy sway
Thou bidst descend the fruitful sway.

As expressed in the hymn, God, as the Father of all, is also the Creator/the Author, the Supporter/Preserver, and the Governor. Furthermore, He is also the Redeemer, and the End of all things. However, Wesley maintains also that God is first and foremost the Creator and the Governor. He summarises his belief:

But I know by faith that...He that is, that was, and that is to come; that is God from everlasting, and world without end; He that filleth heaven and earth; He that is infinite in power, in wisdom, in justice, in mercy, and holiness; He that created all things, visible and invisible, by the breath of his mouth, and still upholds them all, preserves them in being, “by the word of his power;” and that governs all things that are in heaven above, in earth beneath, and under the earth.

Wesley believes that God has revealed His sovereignty, justice and mercy in His two-fold character of the Creator-the Governor. The relationship of this two-fold character is distinctive, yet inseparable. Wesley argues:

He is 'the true God', the only Cause; the sole Creator of all things...The true God is the Governor of all things: “His kingdom ruleth over all.”...He

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29 “Serious Thoughts upon God’s Sovereignty,” Works(J), 10:361
is the Lord and disposer of the whole creation, and every part of it. And in how astonishing a manner does he govern the world…³⁰

God as Creator is omnipotent. He created everything according to His sovereign pleasure.³¹ He is the One from whom all graces and blessings flow. This includes the whole of creation and all that is in it. However, God, though is omnipresence and omniscience, imposes self-restrictions and invariable justice³² when He exerts His role as Governor. He grants freedom to humanity to exercise their stewardship responsibly and rationally. Hence, Allan Coppedge rightly comments that when God governs the eternal destiny of men “it is clear that not sovereignty alone, but justice, mercy, and truth holds the reins”.³³ For Wesley, God’s self restrictions and the gift of responsibility to human beings are critical elements in understanding God’s prevenient and justifying grace. Humanity is free to embrace God’s natural and particular revelation.

Here we see Wesley’s creative “holding together” God’s sovereignty and other attributes. On the one hand, God’s sovereignty is inseparable from the rest of God’s attributes. On the other hand, it never supersedes God’s justice and mercy.³⁴ The beauty of God’s attributes is beyond human apprehension. Wesley sums up the magnificence of all God’s attributes as God’s holiness!

This holiness is the sum of all praise, which is given to the almighty Creator…And when God is termed holy, it denotes that excellence which is altogether peculiar to himself; and the glory flowing from all his attributes conjoined, shining forth from all his works, and darkening all things besides itself, whereby he is, and eternally remains, in an incomprehensible manner separate and at a distance, not only from all that is impure, but likewise from all that is created. God is separate from all things. He is, and works from himself, out of himself, in himself, through himself, for himself. Therefore, he is the first and the last, the only one and the Eternal, living and happy, endless and unchangeable, almighty, omniscient, wise and true, just and faithful, gracious and merciful.³⁵

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³¹ “Serious Thoughts upon God’s Sovereignty,” Works (J), 10:361-3.
³² “Serious Thoughts upon God’s Sovereignty,” Works (J), 10:362.
³⁵ NT Notes, on Revelation 4:8.
God is holy. It is this eternal and holy triune God who captures Wesley’s lifelong devotion in believing and worshipping him, and in preaching and writing about Him.

1.2 The Triune God and the Kingdom of Heaven

As the Governor of His own creation, God’s kingdom rules over all. Yet, what is God’s Kingdom? For Wesley, this is “the sovereign right of all things that are or ever were created”. It is God’s glorious reign from eternity a parte ante (eternity before time) to eternity a parte post (eternity after time and yet to come). It is the eternal-heavenly rule of the glorious King which is not apart from Him. As such, Eldon Ralph Fuhrman comments wrongly that the eternal kingdom is distinctive from the Kingdom of Glory when he argues that “Wesley’s thought move from the original universal kingdom of the Triune God through the mediatorial kingdom of grace and glory, back to the eternal kingdom”. However, Wesley considers God’s eternal Kingdom is the Kingdom of Glory. It is the unchanging realm in contrast to the starry heavens. It is the heaven of heavens where God dwells and rules in infinite glory. It is where God’s glory shines forth.

Elsewhere, Wesley also reasoned that the Kingdom of Glory or the Kingdom of Heaven is the synonym of the third heaven, the highest of heavens. At this point, Wesley assumed an interpretation which saw heaven as threefold division. The low and middle regions or the first and second heavens refer to the visible and vast expansion between the earth and the third heaven which I shall discuss a little more in the following section. Whereas, the third heaven is the “Heaven” which Wesley refers to when he wrote about the heaven where God reserves the crown of glory for the glorified righteous

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36 Sermon 77, ‘Spiritual Worship,’ §§1.8, Works, 3:93.
37 NT Notes, on Matthew 6:13.
38 Though Wesley employed the popular idea of seventeenth century Puritan theology to categorize eternity as eternity a parte ante, and eternity a parte post, his focus is more on eternity a parte post. Naglee, From Everlasting to Everlasting: John Wesley on Eternity and Time, 88, 102.
42 Sermon 26, “SM-VI,” §III.8, Works, 1: 582; OT Notes, on Genesis 1: 6, 7, 8; on Deuteronomy on 10:14; 1st King 8:27.
in his early sermon “On the Circumcision of the Heart”. This is where Christians should set their faces towards. This is also the teleological goal which functions as the anchor for Christians to keep steady in the midst of the waves of this world. Since the glorious God is love, and since the Heaven is where God inhabits, the Heaven of heavens, thus, is love.

Is the Kingdom of Heaven a place or a state? For Wesley, it is both a place and a state. He comments:

There is no opposition between these two: It is both the one and the other. It is the place where God more immediately dwells with those saints who are in a glorified state.

In view of the above discussions, I would suggest that the Kingdom of Heaven for Wesley means the reign of God as well as the state where He dwells and rules. God’s people are to set our faces towards where He dwells and rules as well as to the fullness of the reign of God.

However, Wesley also points out that “the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him (God); but He is in every part of His dominion”. Hence, to set our faces toward the Kingdom of Heaven means also to set our faces toward God. It is a journey which takes peaceful relationship with God as our eschatological-teleological goal. It is also an eschatological journey on earth in the light of this goal.

It is crucial, then, to ask why I begin with the Kingdom of Heaven in discussing Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living. This is so because it is an important theme for Wesley’s theological groundwork though it is “one of the most neglected areas in Wesleyan studies” as Ben Witherington III comments. Furthermore, Wesley

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45 Letter to Miss Bishop (April 17, 1776), Letters (T), 6:213.
maintains that (1) the Kingdom of Heaven is God’s sovereign reign that all things are or ever were created;\(^48\) (2) it is the teleological goal of God’s people, and thus, casts it light on our eschatological pilgrimage; (3) its eternal glory and newness provides us hope as we continue our pilgrimage on earth.

1.3 The Triune God and the Primeval Creation

The fact that God is first and foremost the Creator and the Governor leads us naturally to the discussion of Wesley’s understanding of creation. This discussion is essential for Wesley maintains that “creation is the foundation and specimen of the whole divine economy”.\(^49\) Furthermore, if there is no primeval creation, there will be no happenings which resulted in the distortion of the primeval creation. Hence, there will not be a need for God’s renewing work on His creation, which is the focus of Wesley later sermons.

(I) The Creation as Common Ground

As one who grounded himself in biblical teaching and the Anglican tradition,\(^50\) Wesley read primeval creation as the heavens and earth which God created in the beginning of time. As mentioned earlier, he assumed the Old Testament’s threefold division of heaven and maintained that the heavens here refer to the visible and vast expansion between the earth and the third heaven. It consists of lower and middle region. The lower region is the lower atmospheric heaven and the middle region is the starry heaven which he also calls the firmament of heaven.\(^51\) The earth, on the other hand, is the paradisiacal place on which the animated and the inanimate are placed. They are “the ground of all the works of God”.\(^52\)

\(^{48}\) *NT Notes*, on Matthew 6:10.

\(^{49}\) *NT Notes*, on Hebrews 11:3


\(^{51}\) *OT Notes*, on Genesis 1:6-8, 14-19; *NT Notes*, on Revelation 21:1.

\(^{52}\) *NT Notes*, on Revelation 4:11.
For Wesley, the primeval creation was called out of nothing by God’s all-powerful word.\textsuperscript{53} All that is in it, from its constituent parts to the whole system of creatures (which includes humanity), from the sea to the sun, and from the day to the night was created and designed “to promote the good of the whole, and the glory of the great Creator”.\textsuperscript{54} It was without blemish, without corruption and death for there was no defect in the power, goodness and wisdom of God, the Creator. The glory, the wisdom and the power of God radiates through all the creatures of God.

It was good. Good, for it is all agreeable to the mind of the creator. Good, for it answers the end of its creation. Good, for it is serviceable to man, whom God had appointed Lord of the visible creation. Good, for it is all for God’s glory; there is that in the whole visible creation which is a demonstration of God’s being and perfections, and which tends to beget in the soul of man a religious regard to him.\textsuperscript{55}

God saw the created order was very good and He wills all that is in it, including humanity, to live in peaceful order and enjoy the pleasure of living in the paradisiacal earth.\textsuperscript{56} Wesley illustrates:

Now all was made, every part was good, but all together very good. The glory and goodness, the beauty and harmony of God’s works both of providence and grace, as this of creation, will best appear when they are perfected…\textsuperscript{57}

There was a “golden chain” (to use the expression of Plato) “let down the throne of God,” an exactly connected series of beings, from the highest to the lowest; from dead earth, through fossils, vegetables, animals, to man, created in the image of God, and designed to know, to love, and enjoy his Creator to all eternity.\textsuperscript{58}

The whole creation in its primeval state was glorious and good. It is, therefore, on the one hand, a sacrament of God’s goodness which conveys God’s knowledge to

\textsuperscript{54} Sermon 56, “God’s Approbation of His Works,” §1, Works, 2:387.
\textsuperscript{55} OT Notes, on Genesis 1:31.
\textsuperscript{56} Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” §1.5, Works, 2:441.
\textsuperscript{57} OT Notes, on Genesis 1:31.
\textsuperscript{58} Sermon 56, “God’s Approbation of His Works,” §14, Works, 2:396.
humanity. On the other hand, it is “a testimony to God’s creative and sustaining power at work”. It is the common ground for the common good of all that God has created. It is indeed a masterpiece which reflects the power, wisdom and goodness of the Creator and the Preserver.

After the works of creation, God, as the Preserver and Governor, continues to sustain and govern. How does God govern and sustain? Wesley claims that neither man nor angel could explain. However, God sees, God knows and God cares with His power, wisdom and goodness for the good of all His creatures.

He beareth, upholdeth, sustainteth, all created things by the word of his power, by the same powerful word which brought them out of nothing. As this was absolutely necessary for the beginning of their existence, it is equally so for the continuance of it: Were his almighty influence withdrawn, they could not subsist a moment longer. Hold up a stone in the air; the moment you withdraw your hand, it naturally falls to the ground. In like manner, were he to withdraw his hand for a moment, the creation would fall into nothing.

Later, he cites Jeremiah 23:24 and asserts that

God acts everywhere, and, therefore, is everywhere; for it is an utter impossibility that any being, created or uncreated, should work where it is not. God acts in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, throughout the whole compass of his creation; by sustaining all things, without which everything would in an instant sink into its primitive nothing; by governing all, every moment superintending everything that he has made; strongly and sweetly influencing all, and yet without destroying the liberty of his rational creatures.

“There is no point of space, whether within or without the bounds of creation, where God is not”. God is “All in the whole,” and “All in every part” by His omnipresent Spirit. “He is every moment above us, beneath us, and on every side”. 

59 Sermon 69, “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge,” §1.5 Works, 2:571.
He reigns; He governs with the power of His Word for the whole creation is His. His sustaining presence is, indeed, an expression of His love and the presence of His invisible Kingdom in His creation.

(II) Humanity as Steward of the Common Good

While the primeval creation was a glorious masterpiece of God, God entrusted it into the caring hands of humans. It is a divine gift which is meant to be cherished, cared for and enjoyed. Humanity is charged not only with governing the whole creation which is lower than them but with serving as “the channel of conveyance between his Creator and the whole creation”. With such a central place in the whole web of God’s creatures, humanity is entrusted with the gift of creation as well as the gift of stewardship. He/she is, as Runyon comments, the caretaker of creation. This is the theological basis which undergirds Wesley’s emphasis on God’s gift and the stewardship of humanity which we shall further discuss in chapter five.

As long as humanity is obedient to God, the creation is obedient to him and the peaceful order will be sustained. The glorious God desires to dwell among the righteous people in a peaceful web of loving relationships. Wesley depicts this thought:

And as a loving obedience to God was the perfection of man, so a loving obedience to man was the perfection of brutes. And as long as they continued in this, they were happy after their kind; happy in the right state and the right use of their respective faculties. Yea, and so long they had some shadowy resemblance of even moral goodness. For they had gratitude to man for benefits received, and a reverence for him. They had likewise a kind of benevolence to each other, unmixed with any contrary temper. How beautiful many of them were, we may conjecture from that which still remains; and that not only in the noblest creatures, but in those of the lowest order. And they were all surrounded, not only with the

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plenteous food, but with every thing that could give them pleasure; pleasure unmixed with pain; for pain was not yet; it had not entered into paradise. And they too were immortal: For “God made not death; neither hath he pleasure in the death of any living.”

As long as we function faithfully and properly, there will be a continuing harmony in the loving relationship of God and humanity, God and His created earth, and humanity and God’s created earth. As long as this continues, the glory of God’s invisible kingdom shines forth through these loving relationships. Love as God’s ultimate purpose of creation is then clearly manifested.

Who is this human being who stands in so central a place in the whole creation of God? What constitutes his uniqueness in this creation? For Wesley, humanity is first and foremost “a little world, consisting of heaven and earth, soul and body”. On the one hand, human being is honoured and favoured for he/she is created last of all the creatures. On the other hand, human being is only a point, or a cipher in comparison to the immensity and infinity which is filled by God.

Humanity is such a mixture “of littleness and greatness, baseness and greatness”. What contributes to this uniqueness? Wesley replies that it is the image of God. It is the presence of this image of God that humanity is honoured and favoured. Wesley depicts in his sermon on “Justification by Faith” (1744):

In the image of God was man made, holy as he that created him is holy; merciful as the Author of all is merciful; perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect. As God is love, so man, dwelling in love, dwelt in God, and God in him. God made him to be an “image of his own eternity,” an incorruptible picture of the God of glory. He was accordingly pure, as God is pure, from every spot of sin. He knew not evil in any kind or degree, but was inwardly and outwardly sinless and undefiled. He “loved the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his mind, and soul, and strength.”

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70 OT Notes, on Genesis 2:4-7.
71 OT Notes, on Genesis 1:26-28.
73 Sermon 129, “The Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels,” §1, Works, 4:162. Hereafter will be abbreviated as “The Heavenly Treasure”.
Since humanity is created in the image of God, we are created and designed “to know, to love, to serve, and to enjoy his Creator to all eternity”\textsuperscript{75} Knowing, loving, enjoying, and serving God should be the telos which marks our uniqueness in God’s creation\textsuperscript{76}.

Yet, what is the image of God? For Wesley, it is the immortal spirit or soul which animates our life.\textsuperscript{77} God’s image upon humanity consists of the following dimensions: firstly, in his nature; secondly, in his place and authority; and thirdly, in his purity and rectitude.\textsuperscript{78} Wesley, therefore, claims that the image of God can be understood in three aspects, i.e. natural image; political image, and moral image. Theodore Weber points out rightly that these “three images are interrelated yet dissimilar”.\textsuperscript{79} Nevertheless, he misinterprets Wesley when he refers only to Wesley’s sermon on “The General Deliverance” (1782) and claims that (1) the presence of the natural image enables humanity to be “capable of God, capable of knowing, loving, and obeying his Creator”.\textsuperscript{80} (2) This capability alone distinguishes human beings from the beasts.\textsuperscript{81} (3) This determines the positioning of humankind in the graduated creational order which Wesley termed the “scale of beings”.\textsuperscript{82} Based on such misinterpretations, Weber considers the moral image is simply a mirroring of God established in loving and willing obedience. It is “the continually seeing and loving and obeying the Father of the spirits of all flesh”.\textsuperscript{83}

Weber is right in saying that the natural image is the creature’s essence\textsuperscript{84} because, as Wesley describes, it is the immortal spirit which is lodged in humanity. It is endued


\textsuperscript{76} Lodahl, God of Nature and of Grace , 197-99; Runyon, The New Creation , 13.


\textsuperscript{78} OT Notes, on Genesis 1:26-28.


\textsuperscript{82} Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” §III.6, Works, 2:448.


\textsuperscript{84} Weber, Politics in the Order of Salvation , 393.
with understanding, will and liberty. However, it is not this dimension of the image of God, as Weber claims, that distinguishes humanity from the animals for Wesley considers this dimension is not the exclusive right of humanity. He argues in his sermon on “The End of Christ’s Coming” (1781) that “every spirit in the universe [or every intelligent nature] is endued with understanding, and in consequence with a will and with a measure of liberty”. The original state of the brute creatures was, in fact, characterized by an innate principle of self-motion, a degree of understanding, a will including various passions and liberty. This has important implications for both the entire animal realm and humanity. For the former, it implies participation in the natural image of God, as Collins describes. Wesley, therefore, urged us to love the creature for it leads to the Creator. For the latter, it implies that humanity possesses the meaning of life which God gifted. Humanity should discern this life meaning rationally and to live it out freely. For Wesley, the rationality and freedom to be a human is of importance for a responsible eschatological praxis which we shall discuss in chapter five.

The political aspect of God’s image in humanity points to the fact that humanity is created to govern the lower world which God created and to serve as “the channel of conveyance between his Creator and the whole brute creation”. Weber thus correctly describes the political image as having a twofold character.

It is an ordering of responsibility and stewardship in which humankind as a whole represents God in the governing of whatever else dwells on earth.

Yet, he is not right when he argues that this positioning of human being is linked to the natural image which he understands wrongly as the dimension which distinguished humanity from the animals. In contrary, I would argue that the positioning of human being to govern and to channel God’s blessings to His created earth is linked closely to

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89 Sermon 17, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” §1.12, Works, 1:408.
91 Weber, Politics in the Order of Salvation , 393.
both the natural and the moral aspects of God’s image. This is so because Wesley maintains that it is the moral image that distinguishes humanity from animals and enables humanity to be capable of relating to God.  

He reasons:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him. Not barely in his natural image, a picture of his own immortality, a spiritual being endued with understanding, freedom of will, and various affections; nor merely in his political image, the governor of this lower world, having 'dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth'; *but chiefly in his moral image*, which, according to the Apostle, is 'righteousness and true holiness'. *In this image of God was man made.* 'God is love': accordingly man at his creation was full of love, which was the sole principle of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions. God is full of justice, mercy, and truth: so was man as he came from the hands of his Creator. God is spotless purity: and so man was in the beginning pure from every sinful blot. Otherwise God could not have pronounced him as well as all the other works of his hands, 'very good'…  

The above reasoning shows that the moral image is the principal image in Wesley’s thought. Kenneth Collins, from his readings of Wesley, argues that there are three reasons to explain why the moral image is singled out as the principal image: (1) this image, conceived as both true righteousness and holiness, represents a dimension that distinguishes humanity from the rest of creation; (2) it is crucial because it is the context for the very possibility of sin; and (3) it is intimately related to the moral law which we shall discuss later. Furthermore, Laura Bartels comments that Wesley did write about the renewal of the *moral* image but never that of the *political* image. This thus demonstrates that Weber takes the moral image too lightly in claiming that it is simply a mirroring of God established in loving and willing obedience.

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(III) The Gift of Moral Law

The moral law was a gift from God given to the Angels and human beings as “a complete model of all truth”. Its origin can be traced back to even beyond the foundation of the world. Wesley reasons:

In like manner, when God, in his appointed time, had created a new order of intelligent beings, when he had raised man from the dust of the earth, breathed into him the breath of life, and caused him to become a living soul, endued with power to choose good or evil; he gave to this free, intelligent creature, the same law as to his first-born children; not wrote, indeed, upon tables of stone, or any corruptible substance, but engraven on his heart by the finger of God; wrote in the inmost spirit both of men and of angels; to the intent it might never be far off, never hard to be understood, but always at hand, and always shining with clear light, even as the sun in the midst of heaven.

This moral law of God, which is exemplified by the Ten Commandments, is as Wesley describes “a copy of the eternal mind, a transcript of the divine nature”. It is the supreme, unchangeable reason from which all things were created. It is the “divine virtue and wisdom assuming a visible form”. It is also “the original ideas of truth and good” which was given to human understanding. Wesley’s reasoning reads:

This law is an incorruptible picture of the High and Holy ONE that inhabiteth eternity. It is He whom, in his essence, no man hath seen or can see, made visible to men and angels. It is the face of God unveiled; God manifested to his creatures as they are able to bear it; manifested to give, and not to destroy, life,—that they may see God and live. It is the heart of God disclosed to man. Yea, in some sense, we may apply to this law what the Apostle says of his Son: It is...—the streaming forth or out-beaming of his glory, the express image of his person.

99 Sermon 34, “The Use of the Law,” §II.6, Works, 2:10
Since the law is an incorruptible picture of the Holy God, it is holy, just and good. “It is pure from all sin, clean and unspotted from any touch of evil”.\textsuperscript{104} It itself is righteousness. When it is transcribed into our life, as well as our soul, “it is pure religion and undefiled”.\textsuperscript{105} It is “a witness between God and men, declaring the duties which God expects from man, and the blessings which man may expect from God”.\textsuperscript{106} It causes holy fear\textsuperscript{107} and enables us “to rejoice evermore, in the testimony of a good conscience toward God”.\textsuperscript{108} It, therefore, requires “the obeying every command of God, negative and positive, internal and external”.\textsuperscript{109}

1.4 The Primeval Creation and the Fall

Though the primeval creation is good, it was marred by the pride of the devil\textsuperscript{110} and the unbelief or disobedience of humanity. Wesley holds that human choice of unbelief or disobedience is the root of all unrighteousness and pain in God’s created world.\textsuperscript{111} His comments on Heb. 3:12 read:

“Unbelief is the parent of all evil, and the very essence of unbelief lies in departing from God...—the fountain of all our life, holiness, and happiness.”\textsuperscript{112}

Unbelief or disobedience is a perversion of the God-human relationship which has resulted in the alienation of our souls from the life of God.\textsuperscript{113} It is an inward idolatry which brought great debilitation to all three aspects of the image of God, especially the moral aspect, in humanity. Wesley argues vividly:

\textsuperscript{106} OT Notes, on Psalms 78:5; OT Notes, on Exodus 25:10.
\textsuperscript{107} OT Notes, on Psalms 19:9.
\textsuperscript{112} NT Notes, on Hebrews 3:12; on Luke 15:12.
It was by his willful rebellion against God that ‘sin entered into the world… ‘By one man’s disobedience… ‘the many’… ‘were made’, or constituted, ‘sinners:’ not only deprived of the favour of God, but also of his image; of all virtue, righteousness, and true holiness; and sunk partly into the image of the devil, in pride, malice, and all other diabolical tempers; partly into the image of the brute, being fallen under the dominion of brutal passions and groveling appetites.\textsuperscript{114}

With the loss of the moral image, humanity lost both the knowledge and the love of God. Corruption took place in human nature, which brought not only destruction to his/her relationship with God, but debilitation to his/her natural and political image. Mary Elizabeth Moore thus soundly comments that: “God created people in His own image, but people created \textit{themselves} in another image-evil, carnal, and inimical toward God”.\textsuperscript{115}

With the disruption of God’s image in humanity, human being no longer function well as God’s representative in channelling His blessings to other creatures, though we retain our governance over other creatures. Instead of responsible stewardship, human beings begin to exploit God’s created earth. This leads Lodahl to comment that “when we are alienated from our Creator we are also out of right relations with fellow creatures”.\textsuperscript{116} Human disobedience brought about the loss of his perfection and thus the loss of the perfection of the creation.

The intercourse between God and the inferior creatures being stopped, those blessings could no longer flow in upon them. And then it was that “the creature,” every creature, “was subjected to vanity, “to sorrow, to pain of every kind, to all manner of evils…\textsuperscript{117}

This resulted in far-reaching consequences. (1) As Bartels aptly states, “Most of the animals now view human beings as the enemy. Humanity only retains dominion over the domestic animals”.\textsuperscript{118} (2) Humanity was excluded from the glorious communion with God. They forfeited peace. (3) Human unbelief or disobedience “involved all his

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\textsuperscript{114} Sermon 61, “God’s Love to Fallen Man,” §1, \textit{Works} 2:423.
\textsuperscript{115} Moore, "New Creation," , 110.
\textsuperscript{117} Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” §II.1, \textit{Works}, 2: 442.
\textsuperscript{118} Bartels, "The Political Image as the Basis for Wesleyan Ecological Ethics," 297.
\end{flushright}
posterity in sin and ruin by it”,\textsuperscript{119} a view which Collin Williams claimed is closely parallel to the teaching of Luther and Calvin.\textsuperscript{120} (4) Humanity now has a natural propensity to sin and falls short of the original righteousness.\textsuperscript{121} These consequences provoke God’s wrath\textsuperscript{122} and invite God’s sentence and death, which has been decreed by God.\textsuperscript{123} Wesley’s strong reasoning reads:

“Dust thou art,” said the righteous Judge to his rebellious creature, till then incorruptible and immortal, “and to dust thou shalt return.”…From the moment that awful sentence was pronounced, the body received the sentence of death itself; if not from the moment our first parents completed their rebellion, by eating of the forbidden fruit. May we not probably conjecture that there was some quality naturally in this, which sowed the seeds of death in the human body, till then incorruptible and immortal?\textsuperscript{124}

In view of this, human life is a journey travelling toward death. “When we first appear on the stage of life,” Wesley laments, “we are preparing, whether we will or no, to return to the dust from whence we came!”\textsuperscript{125} Human life is threatened by death and fear.

The beauty and harmony of the primeval creation has gone. It was disrupted by human rebellion against God. Humanity, as Runyon illustrates, misused God’s given freedom, turned away from Him and constructed a self-sufficient world.\textsuperscript{126} However, this self-constructed world is sufficient only to turn humanity away from God and away from the harmonious relationship with other creatures. The whole creation, therefore, was thrown into misery and disorder.\textsuperscript{127} The good of the whole has become “grossly

\textsuperscript{119} OT Notes, on Genesis 3: 6-8. See also Collins, The Theology of John Wesley, 64-73.
\textsuperscript{120} Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today, 50-51.
\textsuperscript{122} NT Notes, on Romans 1:18, 6:23.
\textsuperscript{124} Sermon 129, “The Heavenly Treasure,” §II.1, Works, 4:164.
\textsuperscript{126} Runyon, The New Creation, 11.
\textsuperscript{127} Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” §II.1, Works, 2:442.
skewed and scrambled”.128 This eventually resulted in the tragic cycle of “survival of the fittest”129

For Wesley, the human fall and its negative effects on humanity and God’s other creatures is the reversal of the original harmony which God gifted to human beings—humans are created for free life and happiness on earth as it is in heaven and peaceful relationship with God and His creatures. This, therefore, explains why Wesley posits the heavenward journey as one of the key themes of his preaching and teaching. He was convinced that a persistent heavenward journey is a teleological means which God uses to reverse the course of the Fall and restore the lost perfection which God gifted to humanity.

On the other hand, Wesley, who was committed to the Felix culpa tradition,130 argues from the typological relation between Adam and Christ that God permits the Fall in order to bring out a greater good. He reasons in his sermon on “God’s Love to Fallen Man” (1782):

Mankind in general have gained by the fall of Adam a capacity of attaining more holiness and happiness on earth than it would have been possible for them to attain if Adam had not fallen. For if Adam had not fallen Christ had not died...Unless all the partakers of human nature had received that deadly wound in Adam it would not have been needful for the Son of God to take our nature upon him...So there would have been no room for that amazing display of the Son of God's love to mankind...131

What, then, of the cosmic creation? Wesley maintains that we should not misunderstand him in seeing the fallen creation as “a fixed realm of mere corrupted disorder”.132 He was convinced that this creation of God is constantly being renewed by the presence of God’s providential prevenient grace, which he also understood as the

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128 Oden, John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity, 102.
130 Felix Culpa is a Latin phrase that literally means a “blessed fault” or “fortunate fall”. Theologically, it refers to Adam and Eve’s fall which was the source of origin sin as a blessed fall which results in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.
132 Lee, "The Doctrine of New Creation", 100.
renewing power of the Spirit. While groaning in pain, the fallen creation experiences the Spirit’s renewing work. While experiencing the Spirit’s renewing work, the fallen creation also longs for the final liberation from the bondage of decay.

Yet, when will this liberation take place? How will this happen? What will happen to the present creation after this liberation? These are the issues which greatly concerned the mature Wesley.

1.5 The Universal Renewal and the New Creation in New Heaven and New Earth

The mature Wesley argued that the liberation of the first creation is through the mode of universal destruction or dissolution. The first creation has to be dissolved for it has been defaced by the darkness of sin. However, this dissolution is not annihilation. Wesley reasons:

Yea, by this [consuming fire] the heavens themselves will be dissolved; “the elements shall melt with fervent heat.” But they will be only dissolved, not destroyed; they will melt, but they will not perish. Though they lose their present form, yet not a particle of them will ever lose its existence; but every atom of them will remain, under one form or other, to all eternity.

Wesley further supposed that this universal dissolution, which excludes the imperfect qualities of the creation marred by the Fall, will be followed by God’s renewing work after the resurrection of the dead and the general judgement. This renewing work of God will abide until the new heaven and new earth is prepared.

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133 As a matter of fact, Wesley’s view of God’s renewing work in His creation which began to take shape as early as 1744 was an important theme in his thoughts. See Sermon 6, “Scriptural Christianity,” §III.1, Works, 1:169.


137 OT Notes, on Isaiah 65:17. Lodahl, God of Nature and of Grace, 92.
For Wesley, “the new heaven, the new earth, and the new Jerusalem, are closely connected” though he did not explain in detail the nature of this connection. They belong to the eternity \textit{a parte post}. This is the place where the omnipresent, omniscience, and omnipotent God rules eternally.

He fills the new heaven and the new earth. He surrounds the city and sanctifies it, and all that are therein. He is “all in all.”

This is the paradisiacal world of eternal redemption and Sabbath which God has prepared for the glorified righteous from the foundation of the world. This is the “unmixed state of holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in paradise” which the righteous long for. It is here that the final salvation as everlasting life of glory will see its realization. It is here that the righteous will receive the crown of glory which God has long prepared in His Kingdom as Wesley mentioned in his early sermon “On the Circumcision of the Heart”. God will be with the righteous eternally and they will enjoy perfect happiness in seeing, knowing and loving God. It is also here that the righteous reign with God for ever and ever. The glorified righteous behold God’s glory and see God as their All and their End. For Wesley, “this is the highest expression in the language of Scripture to denote the most perfect happiness of the heavenly state”. This shows the uniqueness of the glorification of the righteous in the whole plan of God. The righteous are re-created to be the friends of the Triune God in the eternity \textit{a parte post}! They will enjoy God’s love infinitely for love is “the essence of heaven” and the sum of perfection in heaven.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotefont{138} NT Notes, on Revelation 21:2.
\footnotefont{139} NT Notes, on Revelation 21:12.
\footnotefont{141} Sermon 64, “The New Creation,” §18, Works, 2:510.
\footnotefont{144} Sermon 61, “The Mystery of Iniquity,” §36, Works, 2:470; NT Notes, on Revelation 22:4-5.
\footnotefont{145} NT Notes, on Matthew 5:8; 1 John 3:2.
\footnotefont{146} NT Notes, on 1 Corinthians 15:28.
\footnotefont{147} NT Notes, on Revelation 22:4.
\footnotefont{148} NT Notes, on John 3:36.
\end{footnotes}
Wesley was also convinced that God’s final renewal includes the cosmic dimension. The cosmic new creation is “a new and eternal state of all things”. Grounding himself in Romans 8:19-23, he proclaims boldly through his later sermon on “The General Deliverance” (1781), that the animals will be delivered from the bondage and groaning of pain and will live peacefully with the righteous. He further speculates:

And whatever affections they had in the garden of God, will be restored with vast increase; being exalted and refined in a manner which we ourselves are not now able to comprehend. The liberty they then had will be completely restored, and they will be free in all their motions. They will be delivered from all irregular appetites, from all unruly passions, from every disposition that is either evil in itself, or has any tendency to evil…”the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.” (Isa. 11.6-9)

Wesley believes that God will finally turn “the Fall into the final advantage not only of ‘fallen man’ but of the entire creation as well”. Lodahl thus correctly comments that “God answers even the cries of the creatures in the future glory of the new creation”. The Edenic beauty and ultimate newness of the new heaven and new earth is far beyond the primeval creation. It reflects the all power, all wisdom and all goodness of the triune God: the Creator, the Preserver and the Redeemer. By maintaining this position, Wesley, as Lee succinctly comments, envisioned “a wider context of

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150 NT Notes, on Revelation 21:1; on 2nd Peter 3:13.
155 Lodahl, God of Nature and of Grace , 237.
creation/re-creation within which the Fall is so reversed as to lead to a far superior New Creation”.  

Does the joyful living in the new heaven and new earth have any relationship with our living on earth? Wesley believes that there is a close relationship because joyful living in the new heaven and new earth helps us to view death positively as the end of earthly sins, infirmities, pain, and other earthly experience. It paves the way for us to enter eternity. Furthermore, it serve as an invitation as well as a motivation for us to live in God’s desired way so that we shall one day be glorified and live joyously as new creation in the new heaven and new earth. He reasons:

Seeing, then, all these things are for our sakes; seeing we have the promise of perfect happiness annexed to our obedience, of 'an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away'; 'what manner of men ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!' What diligence, even according to human prudence, should we use to make our calling and election sure!  

This explains why Wesley puts such a stress on heaven as the End of our eschatological pilgrimage. He sees in the new heaven a glorious place where we can enjoy perfect happiness and peaceful relationship with our Triune God. This glorious and joyful destination in turn provides glittering hope for those who live and journey in the light of this hope.

Seeing Wesley’s theological development of the future new creation in his later sermons, Maddox comments that the mature Wesley shifted the focus of his ultimate hope from “heaven above” to the future new creation. On the one hand, I would agree with Maddox that the mature Wesley saw the heaven as not only a place where the righteous ascend to after their death, but also a place for the ascended righteous to wait for their reunification with their resurrected bodies and the recreation of the first heavens and first earth.

159 Maddox, "Nurturing the New Creation," 47.
160 Sermon 64, “The New Creation,”§§5-6, Works 2:502; Maddox, "Nurturing the New Creation," 46; Discussions on the nature of the resurrected bodies, see Marino, "The Eschatological Vision of John Wesley", 203-11.
On the other hand, I would disagree with Maddox and argue for a different interpretation. As I see it, Wesley did not in fact shift his focus but built his later theological conviction of new creation upon his understanding of heaven, i.e. new heaven, which he formulates in the early and middle phase of his ministry. The future new creation comes to the fore on the foundation of his understanding of heaven.

What, then, is the relationship between the new heaven/new earth and the Kingdom of Glory in Heaven as Wesley mentioned in his commentary on the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13)? Marino and Maddox do not examine this relationship in their writings. Bence comments that Wesley’s writing of “the intimate and uninterrupted union with the triune God in the new heaven and new earth” in his sermon on “The New Creation” is the highest expression of the Kingdom of Glory. Does Bence suggest that Wesley saw the new heaven and new earth equating to the Kingdom of Glory? Or the new heaven and new earth as distinctive from but closely associated with the Kingdom of Glory? Bence does not explain in a clear manner. Furthermore, Wesley himself did not explicitly say that the new heaven and new earth is the highest expression of the Kingdom of Glory in his sermon on “The New Creation”.

My research so far shows that Wesley equates the new heaven and new earth as the Kingdom of Glory. This is because he says that we will one day enter or be removed into the Kingdom of Glory. This suggests that the Kingdom of Glory is, in fact, the paradisiacal world of eternal Sabbath which God has prepared for the glorified righteous from the foundation of the world. On this basis, I would argue that the “heaven” which Wesley stressed throughout his life refers to this new heaven and new earth or the Kingdom of Glory in heaven.

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162 Marino, "The Eschatological Vision of John Wesley" , 180, 194-96; Maddox, Responsible Grace , 239-40, 252-53.
164 NT Notes, on Matthew 6:10 (II.2); on Luke 22:29.
2. Christ, Justification by Faith, and the Kingdom of Grace

Blessed are the righteous who will be glorified in the new heaven and new earth for seeing the glorious God face to face is their eternal portion. But, how is the fallen humanity be glorified in the new heaven and new earth? For Wesley, the way to be glorified is this--to be first justified in Christ and live in the Kingdom of Grace.

2.1 God’s Grace and Christ’s Righteousness

(I) God’s Grace Sustains

Wesley holds that humanity is in need of God’s grace to be justified and restored to God’s favour. But, what is God’s grace? Collins rightly points out that Wesley defines the grace of God in two ways. On the one hand, it is the “free love” or “unmerited mercy” or “undeserved favour” of God. On the other hand, Wesley, out of his considerable readings of the broad Catholic tradition (both Greek and Roman), also defines grace as “the power of the Holy Ghost”. God’s grace enables humanity to walk in God’s ways. Grace in this sense, is understood through the Catholic theme of participation. It is, as Runyon comments, “the cooperative working together of the divine and the human”.

Why do we need God’s grace after we have fallen? The answer to this question hangs on Wesley’s understanding of God as love, his doctrine of creation ex nihilo and his first definition of God’s grace as God’s free love. Out of love, God created us in His image. After we were created, God sustains us with His creative grace. However, humanity transgressed this grace and sinned. Our sins alienate us from God, the Source

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167 NT Notes, on 2 Corinthians 8:9; Ephesians 1:6; Galatians 1:15.
of grace. Out of love, God did not retract His image from us. “God did not, because He cannot counteract or contradict Himself, or undo what He has done”. If His image is retracted from humanity, human liberty is also being retracted. Humanity would “no longer be a moral agent”. Out of love again, God sustains us through His “preventing” or “prevenient grace”, i.e. the grace which “comes before” human action or human response of faith. With this gift of prevenient grace, “a measure of free will supernaturally restored to every man” together with “a greater or less measure of natural conscience”. This clearly shows that God actively loves all of humanity though we have fallen.

Does this mean that Wesley promoted universalism? No. However, neither was he a predestinarian who claims that some are decreed by God for damnation, as did George Whitefield and the Calvinists. He determined not to fall in with the polarization of “grace” and nature” as did most of the Western Protestant theologians, but links humanity’s total depravity to God’s universal preventing grace. God’s grace is free for all, yet humanity is to choose with our freewill whether we want to embrace this grace of God.

Wesley, who draws his notion of prevenient grace chiefly from the Eastern Fathers, believes that “no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath”. To him, God’s gifted natural conscience is some measure of supernatural light which God gives to enlighten us. With the glimmering ray of our conscience, we can know God through the universally available knowledge of Him and the knowledge of some measure of moral law which re-inscribed in our hearts. Our awareness of sins will then be deepened and our sinful tendency will also be

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177 The word “prevenient” or “preventing” is a combination of two Latin words: prae (before) and venire (to come). It means “coming before” or “preceding”. Rob L. Staples, Outward Sign and Inward Grace: the Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1991), 177.
182 NT Notes, on John 1:9; on Romans, 1:19.
restrained. Furthermore, we are empowered by God’s prevenient grace to utilize our freewill to repent and yearn for God’s salvation in and through Christ. This is exactly what Gordon Rupp means when he commented that Wesley’s view of humanity is a combination of pessimism of nature and optimism of grace. God’s grace enables us, though we have fallen, to yearn for lives which are sensitive to sin and away from sin.

Having said so, Wesley maintains that the fallen humanity is “void of the life of God; void of the image of God, of all that righteousness and holiness wherein Adam was created” though God’s prevenient grace is present in our life. We are incapable of being at peace with God. We are incapable of comprehending the dictates of God’s law. The meaning of our existence is marred. We long to be freed from the entanglement of sin, yet we fail if we depend on our own striving. Wesley explains:

Now he truly desires to break loose from sin, and begins to struggle with it. But though he strives with all his might, he cannot conquer: Sin is mightier than he. He would fain escape; but he is so fast in prison that he cannot get forth. He resolves against sin, but yet sins on...Such is the freedom of his will; free only to evil; free to “drink in iniquity like water;” to wander farther and farther from the living God, and do more “despite to the Spirit of grace!” The more he strives, wishes, labours to be free, the more does he feel his chains, the grievous chains of sin, wherewith Satan binds and “leads him captive at his will;” his servant he is, though he repine ever so much; though he rebel, he cannot prevail. He is still in bondage and fear, by reason of sin: Generally, of some outward sin, to which he is peculiarly disposed, either by nature, custom, or outward circumstances; but always, of some inward sin, some evil temper or unholy affection. And the more he frets against it, the more it prevails...

Humanity is in need of God’s deeper work of grace to be at peace with God, to restore godly righteousness and holiness, and to discover the meaning of life. For Wesley, this deeper work of grace is none other than God’s convincing grace, the death of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Humanity is graced to enjoy this providence of God’s grace before death arrives. This is God’s inspiring hope gifted to His beloved humanity though we have fallen. This is God’s free love for us. This is,
indeed, the nature of God’s grace, which Runyon defines creatively as “the Creator’s re-
creative power to renew creation”. 189

(II) God’s Grace and God’s Law

To be at peace with God, the fallen humanity is in need of God’s convincing grace.
Before we further discuss this convincing grace, it is appropriate at this juncture first to
examine the role of the moral law in the human pursuit of being at peace with God.

Wesley maintains that despite the human fall, God upholds the value of His
moral law. This moral law is exemplified by the Mosaic laws so that God’s law may be
made known to those yet to know God. 190 However, the Mosaic laws are not to be
compared with the original moral law in its height, depth, length, and breadth. 191

For Wesley, the functions of the moral law can be classified into two main
categories, namely the functions of the law in relation to humanity in general, and the
functions of the law in relation to justified Christians. We shall discuss briefly the
functions of the law in relation to humanity here and shall return to the functions of the
law in relation to justified Christians in next chapter.

After the human fall, the law becomes an irreconcilable enemy to sin for without
it we may not know sin. 192 The first function of the law is to be used by the Holy Spirit to
convince us of our sin. The Holy Spirit, through the law, pierces through all the folds of
deceitful hearts. Wesley depicts:

It is the spirit of love which, by this painful means, tears away our
confidence in the flesh, which leaves us no broken reed whereon to trust,
and so constrains the sinner, stripped of all, to cry out in the bitterness of
his soul, or groan in the depth of his heart,
I give up every plea beside, —
Lord, I am damn’d; but thou hast died. 193

189 Runyon, The New Creation, 43.
In convincing us that we are dead in our sin, the Holy Spirit makes use of the law to point us to Christ for His justifying grace. The second function of the law, therefore, is to bring us unto life in Christ. Seen from this perspective, the law is at an end when we come to Christ for His justification. Why it is so? This is because the law requires “of perfect man a perfect and uninterrupted obedience to every point of the law of God”.

This universal obedience should be perfect in degree. It is indeed a far off requirement for us. Those who trust in the righteousness which is of the law will soon find themselves in the wrong for “the law condemns all who do not perform uninterrupted as well as perfect obedience”. Furthermore, this righteousness of the law was never designed for the recovery of the favour and life of God once lost, but only for the continuance and increase thereof, till it should be complete in life everlasting.

The law justifies none but serves as “a means of procuring our justification”. Those who are under the law, as Wesley considers, are under the “spirit of fear and bondage”. They pant for the liberation which brought forth by the incarnated, crucified, and risen Christ. Christ, therefore, “is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth”.

(III) Human Repentance and Christ’s righteousness

With the work of convincing grace, God brings to us a deeper awareness of our sinful nature and of our need of repentance. God’s desire is that we will have a chance to repent, to be justified through the death of Christ, and to be at peace with Him. Wesley remarks:

He willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; by repentance, to faith in a bleeding Lord; by faith, to spotless love, to the full image of God renewed in the heart, and producing all holiness of conversation. Can you doubt of this, when you remember, the

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Judge of all is likewise the Savior of all? Hath he not bought you with his own blood, that ye might not perish, but have everlasting life; O make proof of his mercy, rather than his justice; of his love, rather than the thunder of his power! He is not far from every one of us; and he is now come, not to condemn, but to save the world! He standeth in the midst! Sinner, doth he not now, even now, knock at the door of thy heart? O that thou mayest know, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! O that ye may now give yourselves to Him who gave himself for you, in humble faith, in holy, active, patient love! So shall ye rejoice with exceeding joy in his day, when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.  

As shown in the above reference, repentance is “the very first motion of the soul toward God”. It is the necessary preparation for the Kingdom of Grace in our souls. Furthermore, it consists of two branches, namely legal repentance and evangelical repentance. Legal repentance is “a thorough conviction of sin”. It precedes evangelical repentance, i.e. “a change of heart (and consequently of life) from all sin to all holiness”.

By stating this, Wesley’s notion of co-operant grace—divine-human cooperation—comes into the picture. Wesley, on the one hand, considers the legal repentance as the “first repentance which is previous to faith in Christ”. It is a gift from God, a prevenient work of the Spirit. For Wesley, this work of the Spirit is essential for we, as fallen humanity are “by nature not only sick, but ‘dead in trespasses, and sins’”. Without this prevenient work of the Spirit, we, like the rich man who turned away from Jesus (Matt. 19:23, 26), could not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. On the other hand, Wesley reasons that we should play our part in sorrowing for our sins. “Since God

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201 NT Notes, on Acts 20:21.
202 NT Notes, on Matthew 4:17.
204 NT Notes, on Matthew 3:8. See also Sermon 78, “Spiritual Idolatry,” §II.4, Works, 3:113.
205 NT Notes, on Matthew 3:8.
works, we must work and we can work”.\textsuperscript{210} We work through grieving for our sins and ceasing from sin.

We then need to ask: “Does this means that Wesley was in favor of justification by works as seen by the Countess of Huntingdon and her Calvinists’ connection?” Wesley dismisses this charge because he sees repentance and justifying by faith differently from the Reformers. Williams points out that both Luther and Calvin included two movements in justifying faith: (1) repentance (2) trust in Christ.\textsuperscript{211} They understood repentance as works of faith. However, Wesley limits justifying faith to the conscious acceptance and trust in Christ. To him, repentance, i.e. legal repentance, is “a response to God’s gracious prevenience in awakening”\textsuperscript{212} prior to justifying faith. It is a preparation, if there be time and opportunity, for justification by faith in Christ. It is thus not equal to justification by faith. It is only “the porch of religion,”\textsuperscript{213} but not the door or the religion itself.

For Wesley, those who repent are those who are poor in the spirit (Matt. 5:3). Poverty of spirit lays “a general foundation whereon the whole fabric of Christianity may be built”.\textsuperscript{214} It is “a right judgement of ourselves”.\textsuperscript{215} It convinces us “that all the foundation of our nature is out of course”.\textsuperscript{216} It is, thus, a just sense yearning for repentance which is previous to faith in Christ.\textsuperscript{217} When we repent, we not only convict ourselves of our own guiltiness and utter helplessness, but of our inability to deliver ourselves from this spiritual state.\textsuperscript{218} Hence this brings forth a strong desire to embrace Christ’s righteousness through the death of Christ. This is the beginning of the blessedness of living in the Kingdom of Grace.

\textsuperscript{211} Williams, John Wesley’s Theology Today, 64.
\textsuperscript{212} Maddox, Responsible Grace, 162.
\textsuperscript{215} Sermon 17, “Circumcision of the Heart,” §1.2, Works, 1:403.
\textsuperscript{216} Sermon 17, “Circumcision of the Heart,” §1.2, Works, 1:403.
\textsuperscript{217} Sermon 21, “SM-1,” §1.4, Works, 1:477. See also NT Notes, on Matthew 5:3-4; Sermon 7, “The Way to the Kingdom,” §II.1, Works, 1:225.
Wesley holds firmly that the death of Jesus Christ is God’s divine remedy for us. Through Christ’s death, we are made righteous before God. It assures us of God’s forgiveness and restores us to the peaceful relationship with God. Christ is our peace.219

The holy, meek, unspotted Lamb,  
Who from the Father’s bosom came,  
Who died for me, ev’n me t’atone,  
Now for my Lord and God I own.  

Lord, I believe thy precious blood,  
Which at the mercy-seat of God  
Forever doth for sinners plead,  
For me, ev’n for my soul was shed.  

When from the dust of death I rise,  
To claim my mansion in the skies,  
Ev’n then this shall be all my plea,  
Jesus hath lived, hath died for me.  

O let the dead now hear thy voice!  
Now bid thy banished ones rejoice;  
Their beauty this, their glorious dress,  
Jesu, thy blood and righteousness.220

This hymn identifies the critical point which distinguishes Christianity from Deism which denies God’s love present in and through Jesus Christ.221 Wesley defends further:

We allow farther, that the use of all means whatever will never atone for one sin; that it is the blood of Christ alone, whereby any sinner can be reconciled to God; there being no other propitiation for our sins, no other fountain for sin and uncleanness. Every believer in Christ is deeply convinced that there is no merit but in Him; that there is no merit in any of his own works; not in uttering the prayer, or searching the Scripture, or hearing the word of God, or eating of that bread and drinking of that cup. So that if no more be intended by the expression some have used, “Christ is the only means of grace,” than this, — that He is the only meritorious cause of it, it cannot be gainsayed by any who know the grace of God.222

219 NT Notes, on Ephesians 2:14.  
221 Letter to Marry Bishop (February 7th, 1778), Letters (T), 6:297-98.  
How could Christ become the only meritorious cause of grace? The answer is found in His righteousness. For Wesley, Christ’s righteousness is Christ’s justice, mercy, and truth which is identical with God’s righteousness for the Father and the Son are one. However, it also denotes the human image of Christ which is a transcript of God’s essential righteousness.

Christ’s righteousness can be understood through the perspectives of passive righteousness and active righteousness. However, these perspectives are not separated from each other. We need to understand them conjointly. It is through this conjoining of active and passive righteousness that Jesus is called the Lord our righteousness (Jer. 23: 6). Christ’s active righteousness refers to His active obedience to God’s will in fulfilling God’s law in both his words and acts.

Christ’s passive righteousness means that Christ did the whole will of God even as he was crucified on the cross. As the Son of God, Christ refused to resist the crucifixion which God the Father willed. This is crucial for our salvation. Wesley depicts it in his doctrine of imputation. He asserts that the imputation of righteousness of Christ is free for us in Christ’s own mercy. This carries two implications. This passive righteousness is where God’s justice and mercy is exhibited and met. It is “where God is reconciled with Himself”. At the same time, this righteousness “provides the grounds for the progressive conformity to God’s righteousness in man”.

It is through Christ’s passive righteousness in refusing to resist God’s will for His crucifixion together with His active righteousness in obedience to God’s law that Christ becomes the only meritorious cause of grace.

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223 Sermon 20, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” §I.1, Works, 1:452. Though the Son and the Father are one, the Son is distinct from the Father by his incarnation. See OT Notes, on Isaiah 9:6; NT Notes, on John 8:16; on 1st John 2:22.
226 Discussions on Christ’s active obedience and its implication, see Deschner, Wesley’s Christology, 154-7.
227 Deschner, Wesley’s Christology, 162.
228 Deschner, Wesley’s Christology, 162.
When Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us, we are saved and justified. This is, indeed, the gateway where humanity “experiences the proper Christian salvation”.229 Wesley affirms:

we are justified by the grace of God, that Christ is our righteousness, that righteousness was procured for us by the death and resurrection of Christ, import the same thing; namely, that the righteousness of Christ, both his active and passive righteousness, is the meritorious cause of our justification, and has procured for us at God’s hand, that, upon our believing, we should be accounted righteous by him.”230

William Cannon thus is right in commenting that “justification is the sign of God’s mercy, and as such it rests on the merits of Christ’s work”.231 However, one may wonder whether Cannon understands Wesley accurately when he says that “Wesley always begins with man,” and that “the deciding factors in its (justification’s) attainment do not lie with God but remains solely within the bounds of man’s own decision”.232 For Wesley, the freedom of will in responding and embracing God’s justification in and through Christ is made possible by God in His prevenient grace. Hence, strictly speaking, we are saved by God’s free grace or the power of the Spirit through the merits of Christ.233 Based on this, Ole Borgen is right in contending that “salvation has God for its foundation and source, as well as its continuous fountain”.234 God initiates our salvation through Christ’s righteousness. The righteousness of Christ is the manifestation of God’s love upon the fallen humanity. It is “the whole and sole foundation of all our hope”235 as well as the ground of Christian faith which “supports the whole frame of it”.236

When does this imputation of Christ’s righteousness take place? It does not take place through abstaining from outward sin, doing good or using the means of grace, e.g. going to the church or attending the Lord’s Supper but through our faith and our thirst

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232 Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley, 246.
for this righteousness. “Faith and the righteousness of Christ are inseparable,” Wesley maintains.237 For if we believe according to Scripture, we believe in the righteousness of Christ. Hence the moment we believe in Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us. In view of this, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is solely for Christians.238 This has important implications for our eschatological praxis in conversation with neighbors of other faiths and in preaching Christ which we shall further discuss in chapter five.

2.2 Justification by Faith and Christ’s Kingship

(I) Justification by Faith

We are justified when Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. This is the key theological position which Wesley inherited from the Articles of Religion and Homilies of the Church of England. He states in “The Principle of a Methodist” (1740):

I believe, three things must go together in our justification: Upon God’s part, his great mercy and grace; upon Christ’s part, the satisfaction of God’s justice, by the offering his body, and shedding his blood; and upon our part, true and living faith in the merits of Jesus Christ.239

In “The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained” (1746), a tract which was occasioned by the Rev. Mr. Church’s second letter to him, Wesley traced the historical development which led to this theological position. Prior to 1734, his preaching ministry yielded not much fruit due to his preoccupation with “holy living” and the lack of preaching faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, though he preached on repentance. Wesley saw the turning point when he began to speak more of faith in Christ since 1734 after the Moravian Peter Böhler’s encouragement.240 However, the watershed came on March 6, 1738 when he began to preach justification by faith.241

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241 Wesley, March 6, 26, 1738, Journals and Diaries I, in Works, 18:228, 232. See also Sermon 20, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness,’ §§II.6-9, Works, 1:458; Maddox, Responsible Grace, 148-51.
From then, he made the crucified Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven, and justification by faith, the doctrinal themes which were under-represented in eighteenth century England, the key tenets of his preaching. His retrospection in 1746 reads:

From 1738 to this time, speaking continually of Jesus Christ, laying Him only for the foundation of the whole building, making him all in all, the first and the last; preaching only on this plan, “The kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel;” the “word of God ran” as fire among the stubble; it was “glorified” more and more; multitudes crying out, “What must we do to be saved?” and afterwards witnessing, “By grace we are saved through faith.”

For Wesley, “Christ’s atoning death was sufficient to cover the sins of the world, however it was only efficient for those who believed in Christ,” as Witherington III soundly states. Faith is essential as Wesley emphatically reasons,

Without faith we cannot be thus saved; for we cannot rightly serve God unless we love him. And we cannot love him unless we know him; neither can we know God unless by faith. Therefore, salvation by faith is only, in other words, the love of God by the knowledge of God; or, the recovery of the image of God, by a true, spiritual acquaintance with him.

Justification by faith implies that it requires us to do nothing but to believe in God who imputes Christ’s righteousness to us.

For you the purple current flowed
In pardons from his wounded side;
Languished for you th'eternal God,
For you the Prince of glory died.
Believe, and all your sin's forgiven,
Only believe—and yours is heaven!

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With faith, we are connected to the crucified Christ in the past as well as the risen Christ who intercedes for us in the Kingdom of Heaven. We who receive this justification in Christ will have a sure trust that Christ died for our sins, and He gave Himself for us. Furthermore, we shall have an enlightened intuition to see that God reconciled us to Him. We shall have peace with God through Jesus Christ, and thus enjoy “that peace which delivers us from all perplexing doubts and all tormenting fears, especially the fear of death”. Elsewhere, Wesley asserts these convictions through one of his edited hymns—“O for a thousands tongue to sing”:

Look unto him, ye nations, own
Your God, ye fallen race;
Look, and be saved through faith alone,
Be justified by grace!

See all your sins on Jesus laid:
The Lamb of God was slain,
His soul was once an offering made
For every soul of man.

With me, your chief, ye then shall know,
Shall feel your sins forgiven;
Anticipate your heaven below,
And own that love is heaven.

Faith in justification through Christ’s death secures the hope of heaven. This is consistent with his understanding of the different orders of salvation.

Faith is so central that Wesley not only mentions it in almost every day’s entry in his Journal, and preaches “Salvation by Faith” before the University of Oxford on June 18, 1738, but comments that it is the centre of all in his commentary on Romans 6:18. But, what is faith? Rex D. Matthews’ insightful examination helps us to understand that Wesley used three distinct types of faith language, i.e. (1) faith as fides, which mean assent to propositional truth of divine revelation; (2) faith as fiducia,
means a “sure trust and confidence” of one’s salvation; and (3) faith which means direct spiritual experience of God and the divine realm.252

Matthews further indicates that this third type of faith language appears in its first complete expression in Wesley’s An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion (1743). Wesley defines:

Faith...is, “the demonstrative evidence of things unseen,” the supernatural evidence of things invisible, not perceivable by eyes of flesh, or by any of our natural senses or faculties. Faith is that divine evidence whereby the spiritual man discerneth God, and the things of God. It is with regard to the spiritual world what sense is with regard to the natural. It is the spiritual sensation of every soul that is born of God.253

As Wesley experienced more deeply the works of the Spirit and the deficiencies of our reason and senses in perceiving the invisible things of God,254 he gave further prominence to the third type of faith language which is based upon Hebrews 11:1. He was convinced that faith as spiritual sense is God’s gifted spiritual remedy for us to perceive and understand the invisible things of God. With this gift of faith, we receive other spiritual senses. We can then hear God’s voice, sense His forgiveness, see and taste His graciousness, feel and know His love shed in our heart.255 For Wesley, these are the great privileges of those who are born of God.256

On this ground, he increasingly took “a divine evidence and conviction of God and of the things of God”257 as his general definition of faith. This general definition in turn becomes the basis of his particular definition of faith which is a divine evidence or conviction that the loving God gave His begotten Son, Jesus Christ for us, and through

253 “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” §6, Works, 11:46. Hereafter will be abbreviated as “An Earnest Appeal”.
Him reconciled the world unto Him.\textsuperscript{258} Wesley considers it is by this particular sense that we are saved from eternal damnation and justified in Christ.\textsuperscript{259}

In his letter to the editor of the \textit{Lloyd's Evening Post} in 1760, he writes:

\begin{quote}
``Faith is an evidence or conviction of things that not seen, of God, and the things of God. This is faith in general. More particularly it is a divine evidence or conviction that Christ loved \textit{me} and gave Himself to \textit{me}. This directly leads us to \textit{work out our salvation with fear and trembling}...''\textsuperscript{260}
\end{quote}

Later in 1765, he reasons in a similar tone in his most successful summary of his vision of the \textit{way of salvation} in his entire sermon corpus, i.e. ``The Scripture Way of Salvation'' (1765):

\begin{quote}
Faith in general is defined by the Apostle, \textit{έλεγχος πραγμάτων οὐ βλεπομένων}-'an evidence', a divine 'evidence and conviction' (the word means both), 'of things not seen'—not visible, not perceivable either by sight or by any other of the external senses. It implies both a supernatural evidence of God and of the things of God, a kind of spiritual light exhibited to the soul, and a supernatural sight or perception thereof...Taking the word in a more particular sense, faith is a divine evidence and conviction, not only that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself', but also that Christ 'loved me, and gave himself for me'. It is by this faith...that we 'receive Christ'; that we receive him in all his offices, as our Prophet, Priest, and King. It is by this that he 'is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption'.\textsuperscript{261}
\end{quote}

From the above references, we can observe that faith for the mature Wesley is a wedding of the concept of ``spiritual experience'' and the notion of ``a divine evidence or conviction of things not seen''. In doing this, he seems to suggest that that faith which means direct spiritual experience of God and the divine realm becomes the foundation for faith as \textit{fiducia} and faith as \textit{fides}.

\textsuperscript{259} ``The Principles of a Methodist,'' §§3-5, 9, \textit{Works}, 9:51, 53.
\textsuperscript{260} Letter to the Editor of Lloyd's Evening Post'' (Dec. 1, 1760), \textit{Letters (T)}, 4:116.
Our faith in God’s justifying work thus is “not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head”, but a living conviction which is wrought in the soul by the Spirit in and through the merits of Christ’s righteousness. This experience enforces our *fiducia*, i.e. “sure trust and confidence” of salvation, which in turns enlightens us in deeper understanding the *fides*.

The message of justification by faith is so dear to Wesley that he upheld this biblical-cardinal doctrine even in his old age. He is firmly convinced that through Christ’s death, we are justified by faith in God’s sight. With God’s *justifying grace*, we are “saved from the guilt of sin, made righteous, and restored to the favour of God”. In his later sermon “On Living without God” (1790), Wesley once again explains the fundamental importance of justification against the context of atheism. When justification takes place, even the atheists will experience the breaking of the hardness of their heart. In turn, they will see “the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”. In holding this, Wesley distinguished Christian faith from all forms of moralism and universalism.

At this point, it is relevant for us to discuss briefly the relationship between faith and repentance, i.e. legal repentance, in embracing God’s justification through Christ’s death. In his “Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion” (1745), Wesley argues that repentance and its fruits are not necessary in the *same sense or same degree* with faith.

And yet I allow you this, that although both repentance and the fruits thereof are in some sense necessary before justification, yet neither the one nor the other is necessary in the same sense, or in the same degree, with faith. Not in the same degree; for in whatever moment a man believes (in the Christian sense of the word) he is justified...But it is not so at whatever moment he repents...Faith alone, therefore, justifies; which repentance alone does not, much less any outward work. And, consequently, none of these are necessary to justification, in the same degree with faith.

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Nor in the same sense. For none of these has so direct, immediate a relation to justification as faith. This is proximately necessary thereto; repentance, remotely, as it is necessary to the increase or continuance of faith.\footnote{“A Farther Appeal, Part 1,” §II.11, \textit{Works}, 11:117.}

By maintaining that repentance and its fruits are only \textit{remotely} necessary or \textit{necessary conditionally} for justification,\footnote{Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” § III.2, \textit{Works}, 2:162. See also Sermon 20, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” §II.11, \textit{Works}, 1:458.} Wesley, who fights against antinomianism throughout his ministry, values the role of repentance while not undermining the essentiality of faith in the course of justification. Seeing the importance of repentance for justification by faith in Wesley’s thoughts, Runyon quotes concisely from Wesley’s sermon on “The Lord Our Righteousness” (1765):

\begin{quote}
We must 'repent' before we can 'believe the gospel'. We must be cut off from dependence upon ourselves before we can truly depend upon Christ. We must cast away all confidence in our own righteousness, or we cannot have a true confidence in his. Till we are delivered from trusting in anything that we do, we cannot thoroughly trust in what he has done and suffered. First 'we receive the sentence of death in ourselves'; then we trust in him that lived and died for us.\footnote{Sermon 20, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” §II.11, \textit{Works}, 1:458; Runyon, \textit{The New Creation}, 33.}
\end{quote}

Hence, Wesley does not contradict himself when he says, on the one hand, “we are saved only by grace through faith,” and “repentance is the necessary preparation for the Kingdom of Grace in our souls,” on the other. This thought is again affirmed in his sermon on “The Repentance of Believers” (1767):

\begin{quote}
And this is undoubtedly true that there is a repentance and faith, which are, more especially, necessary at the beginning: A repentance, which is a conviction of our utter sinfulness, and guiltiness, and helplessness; and which precedes our receiving that kingdom of God…and a faith, whereby we receive that kingdom, even “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”\footnote{Sermon 14, “The Repentance of Believers,” §2, \textit{Works}, 1:335.}
\end{quote}

With repentance and justification by faith, we are no longer sinners, but God’s children. We are now restored to God’s favour and enjoy the reconciled peace. We are at
the outset of the pilgrimage of sanctification. Wesley describes this change as relative change. The relative change is foundational for real change to take place in our life. In other words, the real change is the continuation of relative change. Through the new change in Christ, the image of God in our life will be renewed. Wesley reasons in his sermon on “The Scripture Way of Salvation”:

And at the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins. In that instant we are born again, born from above, born of the Spirit: 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 mankind, and more especially to the children of God; expelling the love of the world, the love of pleasure, of ease, of honor, of money, together with pride, anger, self-will, and every other evil temper; in a word, changing, the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, into “the mind which was in Christ Jesus.”

In holding this, Wesley modifies the Reformers and Moravians’ understanding of salvation. For them, justification and sanctification are accomplished when Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us forensically. They consider that “the principle goal of salvation has been reached” with God’s justification in Christ. Wesley, however, contends that such theological perspective has “collapsed sanctification into justification” and “extended the forgiveness of sin (imputed righteousness) into freedom from sin (infused righteousness).” It is short of the renewal of the imago dei in this life. To him

“[Justification] is not the being made actually just and righteous. This is sanctification; which is indeed in some degree the immediate fruit of justification, but nevertheless is a distinct gift of God, and of a totally different nature. The one implies what God does for us through his Son; the other what he works in us by his Spirit.”

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272 More discussions, see Runyon, The New Creation, 83, 90. Martin Luther once said: “The whole life of the new people, the believing people, the spiritual people, is this: with the sigh of the heart, the cry of the deed, the toil of the body to ask, seek, and pray only for justification ever and ever again until the hour of death.” Martin Luther, “Lectures on Romans,” The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), XV, 128.
273 Runyon, The New Creation, 90.
The way of salvation begins when Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us and continues in Christ’s inherent or imparted righteousness. This explains why Wesley’s manifesto of Methodism was entitled “Salvation by Faith” but not “Justification by Faith”.

Wesley’s theological creativity is clearly seen through the holding together of these two dimensions of Christ’s righteousness, i.e. imputed righteousness and imparted righteousness. He holds firmly to the distinction between justification and sanctification. Sanctification, a theme which we shall discuss further in the following chapter, is about the impartation and implantation of Christ’s righteousness in us by the Holy Spirit so that the image of God in us will be restored and renewed.

(II) Christ’s Kingship and the Kingdom of Grace

Christ died for us. Christ also reigns in us. Wesley held these two features together firmly. The past work of Christ which results in justification is intrinsically related to the present and future work of Christ which begets sanctification. Hence he maintains that those who embrace Christ as their priest will also embrace Christ as their King.

As a matter of fact, Christ as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords is a clear theme in Wesley’s corpus. On the one hand, Christ, as the second person of the Trinity, rules with God the Father and God the Spirit from eternity to eternity. On the other hand, as a divine-human mediator who was anointed by God the Spirit, He also exercised His kingly rule on earth. Evil spirits were subjected to Him, human sins were forgiven and miracles took place when He asserted His kingly authority. Yet, the grand revelation of His kingship was through the decisive moments of His crucifixion and

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277 Detail discussions on the relation between justification and sanctification, see Harald. Lindstrom, Wesley and Sanctification: a Study in the Doctrine of Salvation (Stockholm: Nya Bokforlags Aktiebolaget, 1946), 83-87.
278 Letters to Charles Wesley (December 28 1774), Letters (T), 6:134.
279 NT Notes, on Matthew 28:18; on 1st Corinthians 15:24-25, 28.
280 NT Notes, on Matthew 8:26; on Mark 7:34; on John 11:41.
resurrection. Through these decisive moments, Christ conquered death, sin and Satan.\textsuperscript{281} This, in turn, paved the way for the inauguration of His mediatorial kingdom which we shall discuss later.\textsuperscript{282} After the ascension, He was raised to heaven. He has all power in heaven and in earth. He rules His mediatorial kingdom from the right hand of God the Father\textsuperscript{283} and will subdue all things to himself eventually.\textsuperscript{284} Hence, He holds the key to the Kingdom of Heaven. He is “the object of our hope, and the glory we hope for”.\textsuperscript{285}

What is this mediatorial kingdom which Christ rules after His ascension? This is the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. This is a key theme of Wesley’s post-Aldersgate preaching and teaching ministry. It is closely associated with his two other repetitive themes which we have just discussed briefly, i.e. (1) Christ died for all; and (2) justification by faith. In positing the Kingdom of Heaven as one of his key themes, Wesley was, in fact, living and preaching the central theme of the proclamation of Jesus Christ. He was in step with Jesus Christ.

For Wesley, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth is not an external kingdom, but the inward kingdom, “the kingdom of God begun below, set up in the believer’s heart”.\textsuperscript{286} It “is (in a degree) heaven opened in the soul”.\textsuperscript{287} It is “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”.\textsuperscript{288} It is the inward religion, the way to eternal glory.\textsuperscript{289} It is the spiritual locality where the Kingdom of Glory casts its light on.\textsuperscript{290} It is the gracious reign which God the Father handed over to Christ.\textsuperscript{291} It is, therefore, also called the Kingdom of Grace. Elsewhere, Wesley also comments that this Kingdom of Grace “will silently increase, wherever it is set up, and spread from heart to heart, from house to house, from

\textsuperscript{281} NT Notes, on Matthew 27:46; on Luke 12:50; on 1\textsuperscript{st} Corinthians 15:26; on Ephesians 4:8; on Hebrews 2:14.
\textsuperscript{283} OT Notes, on Psalms 47:8; on Isaiah 53:12; NT Notes, on Luke 22:16; on Acts 2:33; on 1\textsuperscript{st} Corinthians 15:24, 25, 28; on Ephesians 1:21; on Hebrews 4:14.
\textsuperscript{284} NT Notes, on Matthew 1:16; on Ephesians 1:21-22; Wesley, Letter to a Roman Catholic (July 18, 1749), §7, Letters (T), 3:8.
\textsuperscript{285} NT Notes, on Hebrews 6:18, 19.
\textsuperscript{286} Sermon 26, “SM-VI,” §III.8, Works, 1:581.
\textsuperscript{288} Sermon 42, “Satan’s Devices,” §2, Works, 2:139.
\textsuperscript{289} NT Notes, on Matthew 13:24.
\textsuperscript{290} NT Notes, on Luke 17:21.
\textsuperscript{291} NT Notes, on 1\textsuperscript{st} Corinthians 15:24.
town to town, from one kingdom to another.” It spreads through the gospel preached. In this sense, the Kingdom Grace also means “the Gospel preached”.

What is the relationship between those who embrace Christ as their King and the Kingdom of Grace? Wesley asserts that those who embrace Christ as their King will inherit the Kingdom of Grace. This inheritance is essential, without which we could not inherit the eternal glory. Wesley explains in his tract “A Blow at the Root”:

none shall live with God, but he that now lives to God; none shall enjoy the glory of God in heaven, but he that bears the image of God on earth; none that is not saved from sin here can be saved from hell hereafter; none can see the kingdom of God above, unless the kingdom of God be in him below. Whosoever will reign with Christ in heaven, must have Christ reigning in him on earth. He must have “that mind in him which was in Christ,” enabling him “to walk as Christ also walked.”

Those upon whose souls the Kingdom of Grace rests will experience the infilling of righteousness, joy and peace by the Holy Spirit together with holiness and happiness. This is part of the experience of the eternal newness which will be perfected in the new heaven and new earth. Elsewhere, Wesley asserts that to have this experience is to own the love in Heaven.

We see here a strong flow of eschatological optimism which grants us hope to journey heavenward. In fact, as we read through Wesley’s thirteen discourses of the Sermon on the Mount, we can discern this eschatological optimism flow through most of these discourses. This presents a strong sense of hope promised by the coming of the new heaven and new earth.

The Kingdom of Grace, therefore, could also be understood as a kingdom of hope which invites human beings to be pilgrims on the journey towards the new heaven and new earth. However, those on this pilgrimage, although in the kingdom do not yet possess the kingdom in fullness. They are on the journey of the Kingdom of Grace on

293 NT Notes, on Matthew 13:45; on Matthew 21:43.
294 “A Blow at the Root,” §1, Works (J), 10:364.
296 Deschner, Wesley’s Christology, 127.
earth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as well as the light of the Kingdom of Glory. They are to live out the eternal newness in the present, i.e. righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, while they are heading towards the fullness of God’s reign with anticipation. This is the nature of Wesley’s notion of “heavenward journey”.

At this point, it is appropriate to examine the relationship between the Kingdom of Grace and the Kingdom of Glory which we have discussed earlier. For Wesley, they are one kingdom when the two are taken together. They are distinctive yet continuing. Wesley says:

They mean, not barely a future happy state, in heaven, but a state to be enjoyed on earth: the proper disposition for the glory of heaven, rather than the possession of it… It properly signifies here, the Gospel dispensation, in which subjects were to be gathered to God by his Son, and a society to be formed, which was to subsist first on earth, and afterward with God in glory. In some places of Scripture, the phrase more particularly denotes the state of it on earth: in, others, it signifies only the state of glory: but it generally includes both.

Since the Kingdom of Heaven is one, why did Wesley see the present dimension of the Kingdom of Heaven, i.e. the Kingdom of Grace, as so important? There are a few reasons to explain: (1) God loves the humanity whom He created though we have fallen and marred His creation; (2) God longs to see humanity experiencing divine renewal through embracing Christ’s gracious reign; (3) God wills humanity to be at peace with Him, to resume the role of conveyance of blessings and to live in a peaceful web with other creatures; (4) the improvement of the present creation is not realized primarily by human-centered efforts, but by living in God’s gracious reign and taking part in the renewing activity of the Spirit, as Lee points out; (5) “The power of the Kingdom,” as Runyon remarks, “provides both the goal and the motivation to those who in sanctification have been taken into partnership with the divine,” and (6) God hopes to see humanity live in righteousness, be prepared to inherit the new heaven and new earth, and thus enjoy His immediate presence eternally.

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298 NT Notes, on Matthew 3:2.
3. The Holy Spirit, New Birth, and New Creation

3.1 The Witness of the Spirit

As discussed above, salvation is the loving initiative of the Triune God. Therefore, the three persons of the Godhead take part in the work of salvation. Having discussed what Christ has done in realizing God’s loving plan of salvation, we should at this juncture understand briefly who the Holy Spirit is. Wesley affirms in his open letter “To a Roman Catholic” (1749) that the Spirit is equal with the Father and the Son. As the Father and the Son, the Spirit is not only perfectly holy in Himself, but

the immediate cause of all holiness in us; enlightening our understanding, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions, purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies, to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.

Elsewhere in one of his sermons, he explains that the Spirit is “the giver of all spiritual life, of righteousness, peace, and joy, of holiness and happiness”. Hence, Wesley understands the Spirit relates to us chiefly in the context of the experience of our salvation in Christ.

How does the Spirit relate to our salvation? Wesley maintains that it is through His perceptible inspiration or testimony that we are the children of God once we are justified in Christ by faith. What is the witness of the Spirit? For Wesley, it is

an inward expression of the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God, that ‘Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even, I am reconciled to God.

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301 Wesley affirms in his open letter “To a Roman Catholic” (1749) that the Spirit is equal with the Father and the Son.
302 Letter to A Roman Catholic (July 18, 1749), §8, Letters (T), 3:9.
With this witness of the Spirit, which is distinguished from other “indirect” witness such as good conscience, reflection, and the fruits of the Spirit, our souls will perceive or feel His operations. Our understandings are enlightened, our will are rectified, and our doubts are excluded. We are assured of our son-ships in God. Wesley sings out this conviction of his:

My peace, my life, my comfort thou,  
My treasure and my all thou art!  
True witness of my sonship, now  
Engraving pardon on my heart,  
Seal of my sins in Christ forgiven,  
Earnest of love, and pledge of heaven.

Come then, my God, mark out thine heir,  
Of heaven a larger earnest give!  
With clearer light thy witness bear;  
More sensibly within me live:  
Let all my powers thine entrance feel,  
And deeper stamp thyself the seal!

This explains why Albert Outler refers the witness of the Spirit as “the objective ground of Christian assurance” in his introductory comment to “The Witness of Our Own Spirit” (1746). With this gift of assurance, we know that God first loved us. We experience and delight in God’s love. We are thus motivated to live a life of faith and love. This is, in fact, the foundation of our eschatological living. This is also where the focus of our eschatological living, i.e. love for God, love for God’s creation, and love for our neighbours, begins.

This witness of the Spirit, which relates intrinsically to justification by faith, is therefore the gracious attestation of the Spirit. It “indicates a confirmation of adoption”. Wesley maintained that this doctrine of the witness of the Spirit is substantiated by the scriptural teaching (Ro. 8:16), apostolic tradition, and confirmed by Christian experience. One of the convincing examples which he referred to was his

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father’s expression at the end of his life. Wesley quoted this in his letter to Mr. John Smith in order to defend the soundness of this doctrine. He testifies:

My father did not die unacquainted with the faith of the Gospel, of the primitive Christians…the same which, by the grace of God, I preach, and which is just as new as Christianity. What he experienced before, I know not; but I know that during his last illness, which continued eight months, he enjoyed a clear sense: of his acceptance with God. I heard him express it more than once, although at that time I understood him not. “The inward witness, son, the inward witness,” said he to me, “that is the proof, the strongest proof, of Christianity.”…I think the last words he spoke, when I had just commended his soul to God, were, “Now you have done all.” And with the same serene, cheerful countenance he fell asleep, without one struggle, or sigh, or groan. I cannot therefore doubt but the Spirit of God bore an inward witness with his spirit, that he was a child of God.  

As a matter of fact, this doctrine was hammered out through Wesley’s intense doctrinal arguments with his anonymous correspondent, “John Smith”, in the late-1740. Wesley admitted that this is one of the key areas where he and “Smith” remained at odds. He defends:

We mean that inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit whereby he fills us with righteousness, peace, and joy, with love to him and to all [people]. 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. This is the substance of what we all preach.  

For Wesley, the witness of the Spirit is not only an important evangelical truth, but “one of the peculiar privileges of the children of God”. To preserve this truth is to treasure the great privilege of being God’s children and to embrace the gifts of God. On the other hand, to deny the witness of the Spirit is to deny justification by faith. It may imply that we never experience the witness of the Spirit, or we never were justified, or we have forgotten the fact that we are justified. Hence he defended this doctrine even to the end of his life. Three years before he died, he affirms in his sermon “On Faith, Heb. 11:6” (1788):

311 Letter to “John Smith” (22 March, 1748), §6, Works, 26:288.
Thus the faith of a child is properly and directly a divine conviction whereby every child of God is enabled to testify, ‘The life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.’ And whosoever hath this, ‘the Spirit of God witnesseth with his Spirit that he is a child of God.’

Wesley further asserts that to embrace the witness of the Spirit is to preserve the middle course between the rationalists, who fear of the excesses of the enthusiasts and repudiate the direct witness of the Spirit, and the enthusiasts, who rest solely on the witness of the Spirit to the neglect of the fruit of the Spirit and rational evidence. It is the way to prevent Christian faith and living from degenerating into mere formality or running into the wildness of enthusiasm.

The crucial question now is: “How can we be assured that we are the children of God?” Though Wesley found that it is “too wonderful and excellent” for him to explain, he pointed us to the witness of our own spirit. But what is the witness of our own spirit? On the one hand, it is as Starkey defines:

an inference of the Holy Spirit’s work which man draws from the quality of his life according to certain criteria of the Christian life set forth in Scripture.

On the other hand, it is the “nursery” where we perceive the witness of the Spirit. It informs us that we are loved by God. It is the indirect witness of the Spirit which is antecedent to the witness of our own spirit.

Since our witness is an indirect one, it does require different evidences to confirm its witness. According to Wesley, these evidences are of the marks of new birth, i.e. faith, hope, love, obedience to the commandment of God, and conscience. Those who possess these marks will know that they are the children of God.

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3.2 New Birth and New Creation

(I) The Nature of New Birth

As mentioned before, Christians who experience the witness of the Spirit will not only be assured that we are children of God, but are filled with God’s love. Wesley maintained that those who are filled with God’s love are those who experience new birth. What is new birth? How does it relate to justification? For Wesley, new birth is as Peter Hicks precisely illustrates, “an all-embracing change, a Copernican revolution, in which God becomes, for the individual, the centre or the key which gives reality, meaning and life to everything else”. It is the renewing change or spiritual renovation which the Spirit of God brought to us at the moment when we are justified.

It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when it is “created anew in Christ Jesus;” when it is “renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness;” when the love of the world is changed into the love of God… it is that change whereby the earthly, sensual, devilish mind is turned into the “mind which was in Christ Jesus.”

When the Spirit works in us, our minds and our lives are deeply affected and change accordingly. Hicks remarks vividly:

We still have the same mind, and the same body, but God has begun a process of change, renewing our minds and our lives… There is, then, a new dimension to knowledge, understanding, peace, joy, and love; but it is not to be seen as something wholly other; it is the same mind and the same body living in the same world, but with the added dimension of the personal experience of God’s grace and presence through the Holy Spirit.

New birth is thus the beginning of the process of sanctification whereby our image of God will be healed and restored. Wesley maintains that new birth is essential

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322 Peter Hicks, Evangelicals & Truth (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), 174.
325 Hicks, Evangelicals & Truth , 173-74.
for either entering the Kingdom of Grace or inheriting the eternal glory.\textsuperscript{326} On the one hand, it connects present and eternity. On the other hand, it is the gateway to the pilgrimage of eschatological living. To substantiate this position of his, he invokes Rom. 8:5-8 and Gal.5:16-17 and argues that those who do not experience this spiritual renovation are no part of the Kingdom of Heaven.\textsuperscript{327}

With regard to the relation between new birth and justification, Wesley clarifies that they constitute the nature of Christianity.\textsuperscript{328} They are two aspects of one experience. They denote the same thing with different expressions. Hence, they are distinctive though they are closely related. In his sermon on “The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God” (1748), Wesley explains justification and the new birth are, in point of time, inseparable from each other, yet are they easily distinguished, as being not the same, but things of a widely different nature. Justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real, change. God in justifying us does something \textit{for} us; in begetting us again, he does the work \textit{in} us. The former changes our outward relation to God, so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed, so that of sinners we become saints. The one restores us to the favor, the other to the image, of God. The one is the taking away the guilt, the other the taking away the power, of sin: So that, although they are joined together in point of time, yet are they of wholly distinct natures.\textsuperscript{329}

In short, justification, as Mark L. Horst summaries, “refers to God’s act of pardon; new birth, to its effects in us”.\textsuperscript{330} Or in Robert Tuttle’s words, “justification is the turning \textit{from} sin; the new birth is turning \textit{to} righteousness”.\textsuperscript{331}

\textsuperscript{328}Letter to the Rev. John Taylor (July 3, 1759), \textit{Letters (T)}, 4:67.
\textsuperscript{330}Mark L. Horst, “Christian Understanding and the Life of Faith in John Wesley's Thought” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1985), 93.
(II) New Birth and Baptism

As discussed above, Christians are to be born of the Spirit. Should then Christians born of water? Wesley maintains that we must be born of water and the Spirit. Hence, he sees Christians Baptism as “the initiatory sacrament which enters us into covenant with God”. It is “a sign and seal of regeneration by His Spirit” or “the ordinary instrument of our justification”. It is ordinarily annexed to new birth. It signifies that we are rooted and grounded in the faith in Jesus Christ and willing to venture into the pilgrimage of sanctification.

In baptism, we are buried in Christ and the guilt of our sin is washed away by the merits of Christ’s death. We renounce, through baptism, the devil and his works. It is a means to consecrate and present our body and soul to God. We are adopted by God as His covenanted children, in-grafted into Christ, and experience the presence of the Spirit through water baptism. Furthermore, we are also admitted into the Church, whose Head is Christ Himself through the rite of baptism.

Having explained the benefits received through baptism, Wesley asserts that baptism is only a means. In asserting this, Wesley implies that he affirmed the importance of the true nature of the baptised life but not the outward sign. As a matter of fact, this has been his conviction as early as 1739. He once said to his brother Charles:

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332 *NT Notes*, on Acts 10:47.
337 *NT Notes*, on Romans 6:4; on Colossians 3:12.
338 “Treatise on Baptism,” §II.1, *Works (J)*, 10:190; *NT Notes*, on 1 Peter 3:21; Letter to Thomas Church (June 17, 1746), §3 (3), *Letters (T)*, 2:227.
342 *NT Notes*, on Romans 6:3.
I stood in the garden (at Islington) and showed them how vainly they trusted in baptism for salvation unless they were holy of heart, without which their circumcision was actually become uncircumcision.\(^{346}\)

To him, God can bring new birth into our lives through other means as well.\(^{347}\) The true mark of being Christian is not baptism or any other outward sign, but the fruits of the Spirit, especially faith, hope, and love, as Wesley explains in his sermon on “The Marks of the New Birth”.

(III) **New Birth and New Creation**

Wesley further maintained that Christians who experience new birth are real Christians. They are a new creation in the Kingdom of Grace. “The old has gone, the new has come!” (2Co. 5:17)

He is in a new world. All things round him are become new. Such as it never before entered into his heart to conceive. He sees, so far as his newly opened eyes can bear the sight, The opening heavens around him shine, With beams of sacred bliss. …He sees a 'new way' that is 'opened into the holiest by the blood of Jesus'…He hears…the voice of him that is the resurrection and the life…he receives other spiritual senses, capable of discerning spiritual good and evil. He is enabled to taste, as well as to see, how gracious the Lord is. He…tastes of the powers of the world to come…He feels the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him…\(^{348}\)

Since the new creation tastes the graciousness of Christ, he/she will seek to “think, speak, and live, according to the method laid down in the revelation of Jesus Christ”.\(^{349}\) He/she is graced with a new perspective in seeing our relationships with God, with ourselves, with our neighbours and other creatures of God. Wesley explains further:

He has new life, new senses, new faculties, new affections, new appetites, new ideas and conceptions. His whole tenor of action and conversation is


new, and he lives, as it were, in a new world. God, men, the whole creation, heaven, earth, and all therein, appear in a new light, and stand related to him in a new manner, since he was created anew in Christ Jesus.\textsuperscript{350}

New Creation in the Kingdom of Grace is not only the beginning of our eschatological living, but should be its paradigm. This is the eternal newness in the present. This is, in fact, the first crucial contact point with our final salvation.\textsuperscript{351} It is the foretaste of the goodness of the Kingdom of Glory.\textsuperscript{352} Its teleological dimension nurtures our eschatological hope as we pilgrim towards the new heaven and new earth. This is the hope which is given to us by the power of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{353} It impinges on the present. In God’s grace, it sees that things will be better in this life. We can anticipate a future other than what is already present here and now. New creation in the Kingdom of grace is graced with new motivation to pray for the coming of the Kingdom. This is important because the Kingdom of Heaven comes with its promised free gift of righteousness for humanity.

\textbf{Summary}

So far in our discussion, we observed that peaceful relationship with the Triune God in God’s primeval creation, in the temporal Kingdom of Grace on earth, and in the future new heaven and new earth is the controlling thread which links Wesley’s notions of creation, justification and new birth. Peaceful relationship with the Triune God forms the basis of Wesley’s \textit{via salutis}, and thus his understanding of eschatological living.

Wesley’s stress of peaceful relationship with God both on the present earth or in the future new heaven and new earth serves as the ultimate End which shapes our heavenward pilgrimage. The Triune God is the End in the sense that He constitutes our eschatological \textit{telos}. Our life on earth is an ascending journey toward this \textit{telos}. On the other hand, Wesley’s understanding of peaceful relationship with God is the

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\textsuperscript{350} \textit{NT Notes}, on 2nd Corinthians 5:17.

\textsuperscript{351} This is one of the points which Wesley responded to the sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Horne at the University of Oxford at about 1762. Letter to the Rev. Dr. Horne (1762), §II.7, \textit{Works (J)}, 9:115.

\textsuperscript{352} \textit{NT Notes}, on Matthew 11:11.

\textsuperscript{353} \textit{NT Notes}, on Hebrews 6:11.
eschatological thread which connects the present and the eternity. Living in peaceful relationship with the Triune God, our living on earth is as in heaven.

Since peaceful relationship with the Triune God is our ultimate End, it characterizes our life in the Kingdom of Grace. Wesley’s notion of the Kingdom of Grace and the Kingdom of Glory is a way of expressing both the gracious reign of God in time and the glorious reign of God in eternity. God’s gracious reign is realized in the renewal of His creation and restoring that part of its beauty which has been marred by the fall of humanity. It is perfected by God’s glorious reign in eternity through His works of re-creation. On the one hand, this informs us that we should not be earthbound, but nurture and live our eschatological life in the light of God’s kingdom. We should prepare ourselves for eternity and be accountable to God for this is the sole End of our life. 354 On the other hand, this assures us of the promised hope that the renewal of the whole creation matters to God. The present creation, though fallen, is still the good old creation, as Lodahl holds, with the presence of God’s grace. 355 This helps us to beware on the one hand of a spirit which looks solely to the future glory and neglects the beauty of the present creation, and on the other, of a spirit which which has no concern to address outward evils apart from evangelistic effort. 356

Wesley’s emphasis on peaceful relationship with God and life in God’s kingdom inform us that his theology does not stop with the order of salvation. It is “far wider than the individualism and personalism”. 357 It encompasses individual as well as cosmic dimensions. The restored humanity is to live with other restored creatures in a web of peaceful relationship as we enjoy the peaceful relationship with God. This, in turn, shapes our eschatological living—to live a peaceful life with God, with our neighbours, and with other creatures as a preparation for future peaceful relationships in the new heaven and new earth.

355 Lodahl, God of Nature and of Grace, 140-43.
357 Lodahl, God of Nature and of Grace, 16.
Chapter 3   The Pilgrimage of Eschatological Living: 
New Way of Life in the Kingdom of Grace

1. Nurturing Our Sanctification

1.1 The Nature of Sanctification

Life as a new creation in the Kingdom of Grace is a pilgrimage that begins when we are justified in Christ on earth and heads towards God’s future work in bringing newness and wholeness into our souls. It is a pilgrimage of gradual growth until our image of God is fully restored in His grace. This thought of Wesley is presented through one of his edited hymns:

Messiah, Prince of peace,  
Into my soul bring in  
The everlasting righteousness,  
And make an end of sin.  

Into all those that seek  
Redemption in thy blood,  
The sanctifying Spirit speak  
The plenitude of God.  

Let us in patience wait  
Till faith shall make us whole,  
Till thou shalt all things new create  
In each believing soul.¹

Therefore, a life of new creation is a life thirsting for God’s grace, particularly His sanctifying grace. For Wesley, this thirst for God’s grace implies “a vehement, and active, and restless desire after it”.² Christians should thirst for this sanctifying grace for several reasons: (1) though we are justified, we are not thereby sanctified.³ Sin does remain in us. Wesley maintains that we do need to grow “horizontally” toward God after our “vertical” justification before God.⁴ This is so because Wesley was convinced that

² OT Notes, on Isaiah 55:1.
“holiness completes what forgiveness begins”. 5 (2) God is not satisfied with only forgiving and reconciling us. He desires us to grow in grace and press after perfection in the entire gradation of Christian sanctification until we are formed in Christ. Wesley elaborates:

…he who is thus justified, or saved by faith, is indeed born again… as a new-born babe he gladly receives the άδολον “sincere milk of the word, and grows thereby;” going on in the might of the Lord his God, from faith to faith, from grace to grace, until, at length, he come unto “a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”6

(3) Sanctifying grace heals our sickness,7 feeds our soul, and enhances our spiritual health which in turn spurs our spiritual growth and well-being.8 (4) It is in this sanctifying grace that we are formed and shaped in the light of the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven. Wesley sings out resonantly:

Let the fruits of grace abound,
Let in us thy bowels sound;
Faith, and love, and joy increase,
Temperance and gentleness;
Plant in us thy humble mind,
Patient, pitiful, and kind;
Meek and lowly let us be
Full of goodness, full of thee.

Make us all in thee complete,
Make us all for glory meet,
Meet t'appear before thy sight,
Partners with the saints in light.
Call, O call us each by name
To the marriage of the Lamb;
Let us lean upon thy breast!
Love be there our endless feast!9

Salvation, therefore, is not completed when human beings are justified. It will continue as an eschatological-teleological process till God’s salvific work is

8 NT Notes, on II Peter 3:18.
consummated in the Kingdom of Glory.\textsuperscript{10} It embraces the whole range of Christian salvation proper, i.e. salvation in its inception, continuation and, conclusion.\textsuperscript{11} Within this way of salvation, Wesley lays stress on salvation as God’s continuing work in us or salvation at work in the present, i.e. sanctification.

By salvation I mean, not barely...deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth...\textsuperscript{12}

Sanctification is emphasized here for Wesley believes that this is exactly when the vision of the renewal of creation in the Kingdom of Grace begins to become real. It is the preparation for our glorification in the new heaven and new earth.\textsuperscript{13}

Based on this eschatological-teleological conviction, Wesley asserts that restoration to God’s favour should be followed by restoration to God’s image. There is a need for sanctification. But, what is sanctification? Grounded in biblical teaching and influenced by Henry Scougal,\textsuperscript{14} Wesley defines sanctification as

an inward thing, namely, the life of God in the soul of man; a participation of the divine nature; the mind that was in Christ, or, the renewal of our heart, after the image of Him that created us.\textsuperscript{15}

In view of this, sanctification is an eschatological-teleological process where Christians receive God’s love in Christ and allow our sins to be purged by this love of God. It is a process which takes time and gradual development to restore the distorted image of God in our life and to form our mind in Christ in the light of the peaceful union with God in the new heaven and new earth. Employing St. John’s threefold distinction of Christian believers, Wesley describes this process as one in which we grow from little

\textsuperscript{13} Letter to Samuel Sparrow (December 28, 1773), \textit{Letters (T)}, 6:61.
\textsuperscript{14} Scougal’s definition of “true religion” in his \textit{Life of God in the Soul of Man} reads: “They know by experience that true religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul.” Quoted from Starkey, \textit{The Work of the Holy Spirit}, 53.
\textsuperscript{15} Wesley, September 13, 1739, \textit{Journals and Diaries II}, in \textit{Works}, 19:96-97.
children to young men and from young men to fathers in Christian faith. Due to this idea, Wesley holds that this gradual development can be seen from the perspective of degrees or measures. Lindström properly summarised that there are degrees of love, peace, joy, self-denial, and sincerity. There are degrees of God’s favour, faith and assurance. Both inward and outward holiness can also be expressed in degrees. By asserting this, Wesley emphasizes the importance of Christian discipleship and Christian maturation in our eschatological pilgrimage.

Having said this, one should be aware that Wesley’s way of sanctification is not a mere series of ascending steps to heaven. Rather, it is an earth-grounded pilgrimage toward God with both the eschatological hope that our original righteousness will be restored and the teleological vision that seeing God face to face will one day be realized when we are glorified in the new heaven and new earth. Since sanctification is an earth-grounded pilgrimage, Wesley expects Christians to live lives sanctified in nature and quality.

As a matter of fact, Wesley’s thought on this issue coalesced even when he was in the middle stage of his ministry. In the fourth discourse of the Sermon on the Mount, he points out that the root of Christian faith lies in “the union of the soul with God, and the life of God in the soul of man”. He argues further that if “this root be really in the heart, it cannot but put forth branches”. Hence, it is natural for those who have the genuine experience of sanctification to live out a responsible eschatological living in God’s created world. The vertical relationship to God (inward holiness) will eventually lead to the horizontal relationship to other God’s creatures in God’s world (outward holiness).

1.2 In Step with the Spirit

The critical question now will be: “How can we nourish this life of sanctification?” Wesley’s advice was to keep in step with the Spirit. This is essential because we are the

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17 Lindstrom, Wesley and Sanctification, 120-1.
19 Wesley considers the separation between the inward and outward righteousness as the device of Satan. Sermon 26, “SM-VI,” §1, Works, 1: 572.
temples where the Spirit dwells.\textsuperscript{20} The Spirit “preserves the life of God in our souls,”\textsuperscript{21} and “begins the great work of inward sanctification”.\textsuperscript{22} Wesley maintains that Christians who keep in step with the Spirit live in God’s grace. This is because Wesley understood the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit as grace.\textsuperscript{23} In claiming this, Wesley stood against the world view of rationalism and Deism which saw God as a distant Creator and removed Him out of the world.

Wesley affirms that God is present in the world through His Spirit. The Spirit will not only convict us “that we are not yet whole,”\textsuperscript{24} but quench our thirst and wash us clean.\textsuperscript{25} He directs and governs us in our actions and conversations and sanctifies us.\textsuperscript{26} He leads us into every holy desire, into every divine and heavenly temper, till our thought and conversation is holy unto the Lord.\textsuperscript{27}

How could this happen? Wesley affirms that this happens through the Spirit’s implantation of Christ’s righteousness in our life.\textsuperscript{28} Through this implantation, our soul will be purified and the image of God in our soul will be renewed.\textsuperscript{29} We shall then imitate Christ and walk as Christ walked until we are perfected in God’s grace.

This purification and renewal of our souls is, in fact, the second change or sanctification. It takes place within the process of the Spirit’s continual witness and the constant response of our souls to this work of the Spirit. Wesley explains:

\begin{quote}
the life of God in the soul of a believer...immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit; God’s breathing into the soul, and the soul’s breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, and a reaction of the soul upon
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\textsuperscript{20} \textit{NT Notes}, on John 16:13; on I Corinthians, 6:19.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{NT Notes}, on 1 Corinthians 12:13.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{NT Notes}, on Romans 4:5.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{NT Notes}, on Titus 3:5.
God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart, and perceived by faith; and an unceasing return of love, praise, and prayer, offering up all the thoughts of our hearts, all the words of our tongues, all the works of our hands, all our body, soul, and spirit, to be a holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus. And hence we may…infer the absolute necessity of this reaction of the soul, ( whatsoever it be called,) in order to the continuance of the divine life therein.30

It is within this process of constant spiritual respiration between God and us that a real change will be wrought in our life. It is within this process that our life of sanctification will be further nourished. It will gradually increase

as “a grain of mustard-seed, which, at first, is the least of all seeds,” but afterwards puts forth large branches, and becomes a great tree; till, in another instant, the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled with pure love to God and man. But even that love increases more and more, till we ‘grow up’ in all things into Him that is our Head;” till we attain “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”31

The above discussion points us to the dialectical dimensions of sanctification, i.e. the negative and positive dimensions. For Wesley, the negative dimension—“the heart is cleansed from all sin”—is only “the negative part of the great salvation”.32 It contains the elements of purging, cleansing, mortification, self denial, and sacrifice.33 Whereas, the positive dimension is that the heart is filled with pure love to God and man. Sanctification is an experience as well as a process of the Spirit’s purgation and of the Spirit’s infilling of God’s holy love.

Wesley maintains that this infilling of God’s holy love is of fundamental importance for it is “the very first fruit of faith.”34 When we are filled with this holy love, we are also bestowed with other earnest of God,35 such as holiness, peace, and joy in the

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30 Sermon 19, “The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God,” §III.2-3, Works, 1:442.
33 Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 252-70.
35 “Earnest” is a theological concept which Wesley drew from Brevint. It denotes a part payment of things which gained through the means of grace, as peace, joy, charity, and holiness. These earnest will be forever retained. Stevick, The Altar's Fire, 132.
Holy Spirit, assurance of present salvation, and hope of eternal glory. Furthermore, we shall be transformed and empowered to love God, ourselves, our neighbours, and God’s other creatures. It will evidence its authenticity through its characteristics of joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, and temperance. A life of love with these characteristics testifies that we live a life in-step with the Spirit.

Furthermore, Wesley holds a double theory of inspiration, believing that the Spirit not only once inspired those who wrote the Bible, but “continually inspires, supernaturally assists, those that read it with earnest prayer”. The Spirit, our guide and principal leader, “reveals, testifies, and defends the truth” and leads us into all truth. Wesley was convinced that the Word is “living and powerful” and becomes the “grand instrument of purifying the soul” when it is “applied by the Spirit.” “Without this application by the Spirit, the written word is powerless”. Hence, Staples rightly remarks that

Wesley had a clear understanding of the bi-unity of Word and Spirit and that he held the two in proper balance, neither merging Spirit into Word so that the former is imprisoned in the latter, nor separating them to the extent that there are two separate sources of revelation. Word does not work automatically, and Spirit does not work autonomously.

On this basis, Wesley sees that the Spirit applied Word is “a complete rule of faith and practice”. Nevertheless, Wesley also stresses the importance of reason in understanding the Word. He believes that the same Spirit teaches and guides our reason to understand the Word. For Wesley, the work of the Spirit in linking the Word, our

36 Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 230.
38 *NT Notes*, on II Timothy 3:16.
40 *NT Notes*, on John 14:17.
41 *NT Notes*, on Acts 7:38.
42 *NT Notes*, on John 15:3.
44 Turner, The Baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Wesleyan Tradition ([cited)
reason and our experience of Him is important for Christian holistic growth. This helps to prevent Christian living from becoming a kind of eighteenth century enthusiasm, on the one hand, or, on the other hand, formalism which stresses the rational knowing about God and correct beliefs but without experiencing the presence of God.

As Witherington III comments, through the illumination of the Spirit, reason, experience and even tradition become the necessary windows to see into the Scriptural truth on the one hand, and on the other hand, serve as the avenues through which the central truth of Scripture can be confirmed, expressed and interpreted.48

1.3 Thirsting after Righteousness

Closely related to Wesley’s understanding of sanctification is his notion of thirsting after righteousness. What is righteousness? It is “the life of God in the soul”49 and “the fruit of God’s reigning in our heart”.50 It is every holy and heavenly temper in one.51 It is holiness.52 It is the love for God and love for our neighbors springing forth.53 It presents through right disposition of heart, good character, and holy actions. Wesley further depicts:

And what is righteousness, but love? the love of God and of all mankind, flowing from faith in Jesus Christ, and producing humbleness of mind, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering, patience, deadness to the world; and every right disposition of heart, toward God and toward man. And by these it produces all holy actions, whatsoever are lovely or of good report; whatsoever works of faith and labor of love are acceptable to God, and profitable to man.54

47 Bishop George Lavington, Bishop of Exeter and Bishop William Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester misunderstood Wesley and published tracts to charge Methodism as enthusiasm. These tracts were Lavington’s The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared (issued in three parts, 1749-51), Warburton’s The Doctrine of Grace; or The offices and Operations of the Holy Spirit vindicated from the Insults of Infidelity, and the Abuses of Fanaticism (2 vols. 1738). This invoked Wesley to response in lengthy rejoinders. See “An Earnest Appeal,” Works, 11:359-436, 459-538.
48 Witherington III, “Praeparatio Evangelii,” 68.
51 Sermon 22 “SM-II,” §II.2, Works 1:495.
Elsewhere, Wesley defines righteousness as Christ’s righteousness imparted to our life by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This shows the relationship between Christ’s righteousness and our thirst after righteousness. Christ’s righteousness is the basis for our thirst after righteousness. Wesley explains:

The former is necessary to entitle us to heaven; the latter to qualify us for it. Without the righteousness of Christ we could have no claim to glory; without holiness we could have no fitness for it. By the former we become members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. By the latter “we are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”

Thirsting after righteousness, therefore, is yearning for the right state of soul which is wrought by the Holy Spirit. It is thirsting after holiness and love, the essence of perfection! It “is the strongest of all our spiritual appetites”. It is the best and only means to restore the favor and the image of God. It motivates us to search for a deeper life of piety and a richer life of love in Christ. It is of eschatological importance for this is the single requirement enabling us to pass through the narrow gate of salvation and head towards the singular pilgrimage of holiness and eternal glory.

How should we preserve this thirst after righteousness? Negatively, Wesley cautions us to beware of the parent-sins and other sins which derived from these parent sins for they are the hindrances of holiness. Positively, he urges us to observe the way which the Lord has ordained, that is to search the Scripture, to listen to and meditate upon His word, to fast, to pray, and to partake the Lord’s Supper. Furthermore, he asserts that our righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and the

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57 Sermon 22 “SM-II,” §II.2, Works 1:495.
Pharisees in terms of its extent, its purity and spirituality and its fulfilment of the spirit of the law.⁶³

1.4 Deepening our Faith and Repentance

Since we have been justified by faith, is faith essential for our sanctification? In what way does faith relate to our sanctification? For Wesley, faith “is immediately and directly necessary to sanctification”.⁶⁴ This is because faith is the only heavenly medicine given to heal the sickness of our souls.⁶⁵ It alone is able to make our souls whole. It, therefore, is the condition and the instrument of our sanctification.⁶⁶ This faith by which we are sanctified is a divine evidence and conviction that (1) God has promised sanctification in the Holy Scripture; (2) What God has promised, He is able to perform; (3) God is able and willing to do it now; and (4) God does it.⁶⁷

Wesley further contends that faith, in its general sense, is “only the faith of a servant”.⁶⁸ At this point, Collins comments that Wesley defines the faith of a servant in at least two key ways. The first, which is a broad usage, excludes justification, regeneration, and assurance and corresponds to the spirit of bondage. The second, which is a narrow usage, includes justification and regeneration but not assurance. The faith of a servant in this narrow sense brought forth both the keeping of God’s commandments and the good works out of fear.⁶⁹

Wesley thus asserts that Christians should not stop at the faith of servants, but to attain the faith of sons, and believe in Christ with this particular sense of faith. With this faith of sons, Christians will believe that our Abba Father will lead us to the sanctified life. Wesley affirms:

⁶⁶ “The First Annual Conference” (June 26, 1744), Q.2, in Outler, ed., John Wesley, 140.
Plead we thus for faith alone,
Faith which by our works is shown;
God it is who justifies,
Only faith the grace applies,
Active faith that lives within,
Conquers earth, and hell, and sin,
Sanctifies, and makes us whole,
Forms the Saviour in the soul.

Let us for this faith contend,
Sure salvation is its end;
Heaven already is begun,
Everlasting life is won.
Only let us persevere
Till we see our Lord appear;
Never from the rock remove,
Saved by faith which works by love.\(^{70}\)

Furthermore, Wesley argues that those who have the faith of sons will not only acknowledge God as the Inspirer and Perfecter of both our faith and works,\(^ {71}\) but will also see both God Himself and the eternal things.\(^ {72}\) Childlike obedience and confidence in Abba will then emerge out of love, not fear.

As a matter of fact, Wesley’s reasoning that those who experience the witness of the Spirit and the shedding forth of God’s love are God’s children (or “altogether Christians”) remained constant throughout his life since he developed this thought in the early phase of his ministry.\(^ {73}\) He maintains that we are to grow from faith to faith, from babes in Christ to young men and then fathers in Christ, till we enjoy the plerophory or full assurance of faith.\(^ {74}\) He was convinced that when we deepen our faith, our hearing of God’s voice, our sensing of His forgiveness, our seeing and tasting of His graciousness, and our feeling and knowing of His love shed in our heart will be further enhanced. He affirms in one of his edited hymns:

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Still, O Lord, our faith increase,
Cleanse from all unrighteousness;
Thee th' unholy cannot see,
Make, O make us meet for thee:
Every vile affection kill,
Root out every seed of ill,
Utterly abolish sin,
Write thy law of love within.

Hence may all our actions flow,
Love the proof that Christ we know;
Mutual love the token be,
Lord, that we belong to thee.
Love, thine image love impart!
Stamp it on our face and heart!
Only love to us be given—
Lord, we ask no other heaven.

Wesley was convinced that faith in God leads to a knowledge of God. When our faith increases, our knowledge of God will be deepened. The more we advance in the knowledge of God, the more do we discern of “the necessity of our being entirely renewed in righteousness and true holiness”.76 This in turn will enhance our yearning of God’s sanctifying work in our life and thus increase our holiness. Hence Lindström soundly comments that “faith and sanctity are directly proportionate to one another”77 in Wesley’s understanding of sanctification.

Other than faith, Wesley also saw the importance of repentance in the course of sanctification. In his sermon on “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” a sermon which Heitzenrater describes as “the single best Homiletical summary of Wesley’s soteriology,”78 Wesley reasons that the repentance consequent upon justification and its fruits, i.e. the practice of works of piety and work of mercy,—are remotely necessary to full sanctification.79 What does this mean? It means that this repentance which is consequent upon justification and its fruit “are not necessary either in the same sense with faith or in the same degree”.80 They are only remotely necessary or necessary

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77 Lindstrom, Wesley and Sanctification, 140.
78 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 220.
conditionally, “if there be time and opportunity for them”. The repentance is necessary because sin does remain in our soul. Wesley argues:

there does still remain, even in them that are justified, a mind which is still in some measure carnal…and heart bent to backsliding, still ever ready to “depart from the living God,” a propensity to pride, self-will, anger, revenge, love of the world, yea, and all evil; a root of bitterness, which, if the restraint were taken off for a moment, would instantly spring up; yea, such a depth of corruption, as, without clear light from God, we cannot possibly conceive. And a conviction of all this sin remaining in their hearts is the repentance which belongs to them that are justified.

By maintaining this, Wesley links sin to a sense of responsibility. The repentance after justification is necessary although it is of remote necessity for we are yet to be perfected. It is necessary for “our continuance and growth in grace”. However, we should note that this repentance is different from that which is antecedent to justification. This repentance which is after justification “means an inward change, a change of mind from sin to holiness”.

It is properly a conviction, wrought by the Holy Ghost, of the sin which still remains in our heart; of the Φρονημα σαρχος, the carnal mind, which “does still remain,”…It is a conviction of our proneness to evil, of an heart bent to backsliding, of the still continuing tendency of the flesh to lust against the spirit…It is a conviction of the tendency of our heart to self-will, to Atheism, or idolatry; and, above all, to unbelief, whereby, in a thousand ways, and under a thousand pretences, we are ever departing, more or less, from the living God…a conviction of our helplessness, of our utter inability to think one good thought, or to form one good desire…

In the light of our discussions, we can see Wesley’s position on the role of responsible human participation in our eschatological living in Christ. Faith and repentance are closely connected in the course of sanctification. His arguments in “The Repentance of Believers” (1767) clearly present his mind:

There is also a repentance and a faith…which are requisite after we have “believe the gospel”; yea and in every subsequent stage of our Christian course, or we cannot “run the course which is set before us.” And this repentance and faith are full as necessary in order to our continuance and growth in grace, as the former faith and repentance were, in order to our entering into the Kingdom of God.  

Repentance and faith exactly answer each other. By repentance we feel the sin remaining in our hearts, and cleaving to our words and actions: By faith, we receive the power of God in Christ, purifying our hearts, and cleansing our hands… Repentance disclaims the very possibility of any other help: Faith accepts all the help we stand in need of, from Him that hath all power in heaven and earth. Repentance says, “Without him I can do nothing;” Faith says, “I can do all things through Christ strengthening me.”

The repentance of faithful believers, on the one hand, is vigilance against self-will, pride, and idolatry. On the other hand, it will further expose us to the holy love of God in Christ and motivate us to be more committed to a deeper degree of sanctification. With such intentional repentance and the therapeutic work of the Spirit, Wesley was convinced that this pilgrimage of sanctification makes it possible to arrive at the state of perfection.

Having discussed the relation between faith and repentance in the course of sanctification, it is appropriate at this juncture to examine briefly Wesley’s view of the relationship between faith and good works, i.e. the fruits of repentance. After he was convinced of the importance of justification by faith for Christian life in 1738, Wesley reversed his pre-1738 position and maintained that good works are necessary and they should follow our justifying faith but not vice versa. On this basis, Wesley disagreed with the Moravians who held that good works have no place in Christian life.
By using the parable of the healthy tree growing good fruits, Wesley argues confidently that it is not faith and good works, but faith that works. Good works are the evidence or fruits of justifying faith. Repentance and good works as a consequence of justifying faith are necessary for two chief reasons. (1) Faith without works is not faith. It is “a mere dead, empty notion”. (2) Good works are means to strengthen our faith, and further our life of sanctification. Wesley himself argues:

It is incumbent on all that are justified to be zealous of good works. And these are so necessary that if a man willingly neglect them, he cannot reasonably expect that he shall ever be sanctified. He cannot 'grow in grace', in the image of God, the mind which was in Christ Jesus; nay, he cannot retain the grace he has received, he cannot continue in faith, or in the favour of God.

In view of this, we can also see life of sanctification as “a continued course of good works”. Having said so, Wesley was clear that it is not our faith that produces good works, but the Spirit. Hence, he also called good works the fruits of the Spirit. He was convinced that those newly created in the Kingdom of Grace who are filled with the Spirit will bear good fruits, among which are good works, i.e. works of piety and works of mercy.

Closely associated to Wesley’s view of good works in the course of sanctification is his notion of “working out our salvation”. What does it mean by this? In his sermon “On Working out Our Own Salvation’ (1785), a mature delineation of at least forty years of reflection on the via salutis, Wesley applies the principle which is recorded in Eph. 6:5ff. and points out that Christians should make our responsible decision in all the stages of the whole via salutis and serve our master who is in heaven “with the utmost earnestness of spirit and with utmost diligence and exactness”.

93 NT Notes, on James 2:17.
out our salvation? Wesley cites Isaiah’s teaching and states: “Cease to do evil; learn to do well” (Isa. 1:16-17), an answer which reflects the spirit of the General Rules.99

Yet, is this working out of our salvation by the grace of God or by our own works? Wesley’s reply is straight forward: “It is by grace that we are enabled to work out our salvation”. However, the gracious work of God is not in opposition to our works. Since God works, we can work and we must work.100 The fact that God works is of fundamental importance for if He did not work, it is impossible for us to live a responsible eschatological life.

Since we can live a responsible eschatological life in the presence of God’s grace, we must live it out wholeheartedly. God’s work will cease if we do not work with Him. With reference to St. Augustine’s saying: “He that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves,” Wesley reasons further:

He will not save us unless we “save ourselves from this untoward generation:” unless we ourselves “fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life;” unless we “agonize to enter in at the straight gate,” “deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily,” and labour by every possible means to “make our own calling and election sure.”101

As discussed above, Wesley’s notion of “working out of our salvation” is in fact closely connected to his understanding of the responsible eschatological living. A fruitful eschatological living is possible only if we participate responsibly in God’s enabling-sanctifying grace.

1.5 Obeying the Moral Law

Wesley affirms that there is a place for moral law as we continue our growth in grace. To him, grace “is most often ‘normed’ grace”.102

It [Grace] arises and flowers in a valuational, prescriptive context and is illuminated by the moral law of God, a standard that transcends, at least in some respects, both human will and desire. Without this other half of the conjunction, so to speak, grace would perhaps quickly devolve into presumption, self will, and the antinomianism that Wesley so rightly deplored.\footnote{Collins, \textit{John Wesley: A Theological Journey}, 159.}

Hence, Wesley maintains that “to abolish the moral law, is, in truth, to abolish faith and the law together”\footnote{Sermon 35, “The Law Established through Faith, I,” §2, \textit{Works}, 2:21.} though he resonates with Luther’s notion of \textit{sola gratia}. Wesley indeed held a high regard for the law in his account of eschatological living:

Therefore I cannot spare the law one moment, no more than I can spare Christ; seeing I now want it as much to keep me to Christ, as I ever wanted it to bring me to him. Otherwise, this “evil heart of unbelief” would immediately “depart from the living God.” Indeed each is continually sending me to the other, — the law to Christ, and Christ to the law. On the one hand, the height and depth of the law constrain me to fly to the love of God in Christ; on the other, the love of God in Christ endears the law to me “above gold or precious stones;” seeing I know every part of it is a gracious promise which my Lord will fulfil in its season.\footnote{Sermon 34, “The Use of the Law,” §IV.4, \textit{Works}, 2:17.}

Based on this conviction, Wesley saw that the law of God has its \textit{accusatory} role and its \textit{prescriptive} role. In its accusatory role, God’s law convicts us, brings us to Christ and keeps us alive in Christ.\footnote{NT Notes, on Galatians 3:24.} It is the schoolmaster designed to train us up for Christ.\footnote{NT Notes, on Romans 10:4.} In other words, Christ is the end of the law.\footnote{NT Notes, on Matthew 5:17; Sermon 25, “SM-V,” §§ 1.3, \textit{Works}, 1:552.}

This means neither Christ abolishes the moral law nor that we should no longer use the law or use it minimally. Christ did not abolish the moral law but establishes, illustrates, and explains its highest meaning.\footnote{NT Notes, on Romans 3:31; Sermon 25, “SM-V,” §§ 1.1-2, \textit{Works}, 1:551-52.} Since Christ establishes the law, we should also establish the law.\footnote{“The First Annual Conference” (June 25, 1744), Q.25, in Outler, ed., \textit{John Wesley}, 140.} Our freedom is freedom from ceremonial law, not from the moral law.\footnote{“The First Annual Conference” (June 25, 1744), Q.25, in Outler, ed., \textit{John Wesley}, 140.}
On this basis, Wesley stood against the quietists of the Lutheran tradition and the antinomians who played down the necessity of keeping the moral law after justification because they believed faith supersedes the necessity of holiness.\textsuperscript{112} He worried that this will lead to various sorts of licentiousness. Hence, he held firmly to the prescriptive role of the law and claimed that Christians should continue our daily living in grace through obeying the moral law because the law was the summary of God’s commandment to love God and our neighbors (Mk. 12:29-31).\textsuperscript{113} He believes that faith in Christ should be in harmony with life in accordance with God’s will recorded in the law. On this basis, obeying the moral law is a necessary fruit of our faith in Christ.\textsuperscript{114} Furthermore, it, on the one hand, nourishes Christian love and results in the fruits of righteousness, peace and assurance.\textsuperscript{115} On the other hand, it confirms

our hope of whatsoever it commands and we have not yet attained—of receiving grace upon grace, till we are in actual possession of the fullness of His promises.\textsuperscript{116}

Therefore, throughout his years, he urged his preachers to preach first the love of God for love is the end of all God’s commandments\textsuperscript{117} and then the law of God. There is a need to explain and enforce the commands of Christ\textsuperscript{118} after offering Christ in love because this is a way to avoid “healing the wounds of the people lightly”.\textsuperscript{119}

For Wesley, to preach God’s law means to preach in terms of the Ten Commandments\textsuperscript{120} and the commands of Christ contained in the Sermon on the

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\item[112] Sermon 35, “The Law Established through Faith, I,” §II.2, Works, 2:26; Sermon 127, “On The Wedding Garment,” §18, Works, 4:148. Antinomianism is a terminology which derived from Greek ἀντι, “against” and νομος, “law” which carried the meaning of “lawlessness”. Its chief tenet is that faith alone in Christ is counted righteousness. It is not necessary to observe law after justification. It is thus the polar opposite of legalism, which claims that salvation is attained through obeying a set of religious law. W. Stephen Gunter, The Limits of ‘Love Divine’ : John Wesley’s Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1989), 11.
\item[113] Letter to John Hosmer (June 7, 1761), Letters (T), 4:155.
\item[118] “Letters on Preaching Christ,” Works (J), 11:486. 
\item[120] OT Notes, on Exodus 20: 1-17.
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Mount. Since “it was the Son of God who delivered the law to Moses, under the character of Jehovah,” Wesley saw, on the one hand, that the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount as christologically linked. On the other hand, the Decalogue is a shorter sketch of holiness than the Sermon on the Mount. While the Decalogue is a complete rule of life and manners, the Sermon on the Mount is the whole plan of Christ’s religion, a full prospect of Christianity. He further depicts his conviction, in his fifth discourse of the Sermon on the Mount, that the moral law finds its clearer and fuller expression in the Sermon on the Mount:

And this our Lord has abundantly performed in the preceding and subsequent parts of the discourse before us; in which he has not introduced a new religion into the world, but the same which was from the beginning; — a religion, the substance of which is, without question, as old as the creation...a religion witnessed to both by the Law and by the Prophets, in all succeeding generations. Yet was it never so fully explained, nor so thoroughly understood, till the great Author of it himself condescended to give mankind this authentic comment on all the essential branches of it; at the same time declaring it should never be changed, but remain in force to the end of the world.

To preach the law is, in fact, a crucial way to defend the Reformers’ spirit and to guard against the abuses of Antinomianism.

1.6 Guarding Our Faith from Satan’s Devices

To preserve our life of sanctification, Wesley cautions Christians to recognize Satan’s four major devices, namely, casting doubts in our mind; instilling disbelief, evil thoughts and ill-nature in our souls; hindering us from good work; and tempting us to do evil. (semi colon; to show the four points) Identifying these evil devices is the first step to protect our peaceful relationship with God from being ruined by Satan. In his sermon on

121 Letter to an Evangelical Layman (December 20, 1751), Letters II, in Works, 26: 482.
122 NT Notes, on Acts 7:35.
“Satan’s Devices” (1750), Wesley lists some of the doubts which the devil will cast in our minds:

Are you fit to see God? ...God is holy: You are unholy. What communion hath light with darkness? How is it possible that you, unclean as you are, should be in a state of acceptance with God? ...How can you presume then to think that all your sins are already blotted out?...you know it well; you know holiness is the full image of God; and how far is this above, out of your sight? You cannot attain unto it...128

The devil will use these doubts primarily to ruin our faith for our faith is inseparably connected to our love, joy, and peace. Wesley further reasons:

So long as faith subsists, we remain in peace; our heart stands fast, while it believes in the Lord. But if we let go our faith...our peace is at an end, the very foundation on which it stood being overthrown. And this is the only foundation of holiness, as well as of peace; consequently, whatever strikes at this, strikes at the very root of all holiness...And this is not only the most effectual, but also the most compendious, way of destroying all holiness...so far as it succeeds, tears up the very root of the whole work of God.129

Hence Wesley exhorts Christians to guard our faith by not giving ourselves to any temptation, such as wealth,130 disturbance of the mind and emotions,131 weakness,132 and any kind of inward sin, especially pride, love of the world, and inordinate self-love.133 Furthermore, Christians are exhorted to fix our eyes on Christ the Priest who has borne all our sins134 and hold fast to what we have attained in grace.135 Guarding our faith against Satan’s devices is of eschatological importance for losing of faith will result in losing love, joy, peace, and power.136 In Wesley’s own words, we are to preserve

ourselves from heaviness and darkness of the soul for once “the fountain being dammed up, those living waters spring no more to refresh the thirsty soul”.

2. Pressing after Perfection

2.1 The Shaping Factors

Having discussed Wesley’s notion of nurturing our sanctification, we shall spend the following sections of the chapter in examining one of Wesley’s most distinctive, but complicated doctrinal themes, the concept of Christian perfection as perfect love, which is the goal of the process of sanctification.

For a better understanding of this concept, it is appropriate first to examine briefly the factors which contributed to shaping Wesley’s understanding of Christian perfection as perfect love. Ever since his early days, Wesley, together with his brothers and sisters, had been nourished with daily meditation of Scripture and the Patristic writings by his parents, Samuel and Susanna Wesley, who were influenced by both the Puritan spirit and the High Church Nonjurors. Years in Christ Church, Oxford (July 1720-1726), under the tutorship of Dr. George Wigan, Henry Sherman, and Jonathan Colley, who were of the conventional High Church tradition, further familiarised Wesley with Scripture, the patristic corpus, classical literature, history, and Anglican and Puritan divinity.

Upon Wesley’s decision to enter into orders as deacon in 1725, his father, Samuel Wesley, instructed him to read John Chrysostom’s On The Priesthood (Sacerdotia) and to master Chrysostom. Following Samuel’s advice, Wesley’s understanding of Christian

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139 Letter to his Mother (September 23, 1723), Letters I, in Works, 25:144-45.
life was deeply influenced and shaped by Chrysostom’s thoughts, as Outler and McCormick hold.141

In the same year, Wesley studied Bishop Jeremy Taylor’s *Rules of Holy Living and Dying*. Through these readings, he resolved to dedicate his life to God and began to pursue perfection through rationally disciplined exercises, 142 i.e. Bible studying, frequent prayer and communion, keeping a diary as the Puritans did and observing other general rules for governing his life. This pious commitment was further reinforced through his reading of Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ* (or *Christian Pattern*), and William Law’s *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* and *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection*.

From his reading of Kempis, Wesley understood that the Triune God is in fact the *telos* of Christian life.143 Since God is the *telos*, a life of self-denial and love for the Triune God should be the goal of Christian life. Wesley, therefore, resolved to refocus his life. At the same time, Law informed him of the importance of simplicity of intention and purity of affection.144 Kempis’s notions of self-denial and love for the Triune God and Law’s stress of simplicity of intention and purity of affection in turn became the unchanging aspect of Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection.

Beginning from 1731, through the guidance of the Nonjurors, Robert Nelson and John Clayton, Wesley began his lifelong study in the Patristic corpus, with special interest in Macarius the Egyptian and Ephraem Syrus.145 In reading their writings, he was impressed by the description of “perfection” (∑κόπος) as a process and the goal (σκόπος) of the Christian life.146 He attempted to amalgamate his previous discoveries

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142 I have adapted this summary from D. Marselle. Moore, *Development in Wesley's Thought on Sanctification and Perfection* (Fall 1985 [cited July 8th 2005]); available from http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/16-20/20-12.htm


with this new discovery in Eastern patristic tradition. This, in turn, brought new richness and lasting influence to his theology and ministry. Outler describes the contribution of this amalgamation of Wesley succinctly:

…the ancient and Eastern tradition of holiness as \textit{disciplined} love became fused in Wesley's mind with his own Anglican tradition of holiness as \textit{aspiring} love, and thereafter was developed in what he regarded to the end as his own most distinctive doctrinal contribution.\footnote{Outler, ed., \textit{John Wesley}, 10.}

Wesley’s decision to pursue holiness, his training in Oxford, the influence of the reading outlined above and the conception of perfecting perfection (\textit{teleiotes}) which he drew from the Eastern patristic tradition, all contributed to shaping his conviction that Scriptural Christianity is about a continuing pilgrimage of inward renewal. Wesley’s conception of perfection is different from the Western Latin conception of perfected perfection (\textit{perfectio} or \textit{finis}), a concept which carries the more static connotation of an “attained” or “ended” state. John Tyson clearly notes that perfection for Wesley and his brother Charles does not claim perfect performance or “having arrived” as spotless believers.\footnote{John Tyson, \textit{Charles Wesley on Sanctification: a Biographical Theological Study} (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Francis Asbury Press, 1986), 165.} Rather it is a teleological process of attainment of spiritual goals and invitation or expectation for further goals until the image of God is fully restored, as Bence rightly argues.\footnote{Bence, “John Wesley's Teleological Hermeneutic”, 7.}

Wesley’s effort to crystallize this concept of Christian perfection was seen as early as 1733 in his sermon on “The Circumcision of the Heart” which he preached at St. Mary’s, Oxford on January 1. In this sermon, Wesley describes circumcision of the heart as

that habitual disposition of soul which in the Sacred Writings is termed 'holiness', and which directly implies the being cleansed from sin, 'from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit', and by consequence the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus, the being so 'renewed in the image of our mind' as to be 'perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect'.\footnote{Sermon 17, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” §1.1, \textit{Works}, 1:402-403.}
This view of perfection which Wesley formed in the early phase of his ministry did not change after he went through his Aldersgate’s strangely heart-warming experience in May 1738. His striving for perfection in Christ upon this foundational structure of justification by faith through the witness of the Spirit was further enhanced and remained one of the key thrusts of his pastoral, preaching and teaching ministry throughout his life. His retrospection in A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (1777) reads:

…I saw, that giving even all my life to God… would profit me nothing, unless I gave my heart, yea, all my heart, to him. I saw, that “simplicity of intention, and purity of affection,” one design in all we speak or do, and one desire ruling all our tempers, are indeed “the wings of the soul,” without which she can never ascend to the mount of God…I determined, through his grace, (the absolute necessity of which I was deeply sensible of,) to be all-devoted to God, to give him all my soul, my body, and my substance.  

Wesley constantly maintains that perfection in the sense of simplicity of intention and purity of affection, though not “sinless perfection” as Thomas Maxfield and George Bell held in the early 1760s, is the best end for fallen humanity. It is the end of our salvation. We should press after perfection for if not we shall be in danger of falling away. Christian perfection, therefore, should be the constant telos of our eschatological living. It is so dear to Wesley that he exhorted the Methodist to go on to perfection. Yea, and when ye have attained a measure of perfect love, when God has circumcised your hearts, and enabled you to love him with all your heart and with all your soul, think not of resting there. That is impossible. You cannot stand still; you must either rise or fall; rise higher or fall lower. Therefore the voice of God to the children of Israel, to the children of God, is, “Go forward!” “Forgetting the things that are behind,

152 Maxfield and Bell, who were influenced by John and Robert Sanderman’s antinomian teachings, denied at the London society the need for the continuing atoning work of Christ and Christian growth after justification. “Angelick” or absolute perfection was instantaneously attained by the simple affirmation “I believe”. To counter this antinomian teaching, Wesley together with his 1763 conference of preachers set Wesley’s four volumes of sermons and his Notes upon the New Testament as doctrinal guides for those permitted to preach in Methodist preaching houses. Later, he articulated clearly the theological uniqueness of his soteriology in “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765) and “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection” (1777). Ronald H. Stone, John Wesley’s Life & Ethics (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 147; Moore, Development in Wesley’s Thought on Sanctification and Perfection (cited).
and reaching forward unto those that are before, press on to the mark, for
the prize of your high calling of God in Christ Jesus!”

As Moore comments, perfection for Wesley was “first and foremost a practical
document”. On the one hand, it serves to caution his followers that perfection is not
attained simultaneously with justification. We are to engage in good works in the way of
sanctification and press after the telos of perfection which casts its light on our
eschatological living. On the other hand, it exhorts us to yearn for salvation from the root
of sins and to be made perfect in God’s love before the next life. This doctrine of
perfection is so dear to him that he even claimed in the year before he died: “This
document is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists;
and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up”.

2.2 The Nature of Perfection

As discussed above, Wesley developed his conception of Christian perfection as perfect
love in terms of the Eastern conception of teleiotes (perfecting perfection), but not the
Western Latin translation of perfectio (perfected perfection). In his sermon “On
Perfection” (1784) which exegetes Heb. 6:1, the mature Wesley quoted different
scriptural references to explain what perfection is. These references are: (1) “Love the
Lord and your neighbour.” (Mt. 22:37; 19:19) (2) “Let this mind be in you which was
also in Christ Jesus.” (Php. 2:5) (3) It is the one undivided fruit of the Spirit: “The fruit
of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness,
temperance.” (Gal. 5:22-23) (4) “Putting on the new man” and “the new man renewed
after the image of him that created him.” (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10) (5) “As he that hath
called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.” (1Pe. 1:15) (6) “The
God of peace himself sanctify you wholly and may the whole of you, the spirit, the soul,
and the body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Th.

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156 Moore, Development in Wesley's Thought on Sanctification and Perfection ([cited]
157 Letter to Robert Carr Brackenbury (Sep. 15, 1790), Letters (T), 8:238.
Creation, 91.
159 This is one of the most important scripture texts which Wesley used to support his doctrine of
perfection. He used it fifty times between 1739 and 1785. The other most referred text was Matt. 5:45.
Wesley used it for eighteen times between 1740 and 1785. Outler, “An Introductory Comment to ‘On
Perfection’,” Works, 3:71.
5:23) (7) “I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God.” (Ro. 12:1) (8) “Ye are a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1Pe. 2:5) (9) He will “save his people from their sins.” (Mt. 1:21)

The above scriptural quotations indicate that Wesley’s conception of perfection can be viewed from different angles. Nevertheless, taken together, it can be viewed in both positive and negative terms.

In negative terms, perfection means salvation from the root of sins or from all sins. Yet, could we really being saved from all sins while we are still in this earthly body? To answer this question, we need to return to Wesley’s conception of sin. Against the Lutheran tradition of *simul Justus et peccator*, the Calvinist tradition of perseverance of the saints and the eternal security of the saved, and the Moravian’s teaching of sinless or guiltless perfection, Wesley proposed a fourth alternative. He defines that an actual or proper sin is an actual, voluntary transgression of a divine law and improper sin as an involuntary transgression of a divine law. In stating this, Wesley does not see sin as transgression *per se*, but only transgression which stems from voluntary intentions, or *wilful sin*. We are entangled by the guilt of sin when we transgress the moral law intentionally. Actual sin is, as Tuttle illustrates, “the abuse of our freedom to choose by consciously disobeying God.” It is from sin understood in this way that Wesley argues it is possible for God to save us on the merits of Christ’s atoning work while we are still in this earthly body. This stand which Wesley took differed from the Church of England and Charles Wesley who held that perfection can be attained only at the threshold of death or in the next life. Wesley was convinced that if there is no possibility of “doing the perfect will of God within the scope of time and history,” God would not have commanded us to love Him with all our souls and all our minds. Hence he held firmly that perfection of intention through faith is attainable subjectively in this life though it is

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161 Oden, John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity, 334.
164 Tuttle, Sanctity Without Starch, 73.
not equal to sinlessness. Our perfection on earth is neither the angelic nor the Adamic perfection. Christians who press after perfection “are not perfect in knowledge.”

So that how much soever any man has attained, or in how high a degree so ever he is perfect, he hath still need to ‘grow in grace’ and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour.

The highest perfection which Christians can attain on earth does not exclude temptation, ignorance, errors and other infirmities. It is the perfection achieved through faith but subjected to the limitations of human life.

Furthermore, Wesley maintains that sin does remain though it does not reign. The Pauline dualities of “flesh and “spirit” or “nature and grace” remain a reality in justified Christians. However, Wesley also contends that “having sin does not forfeit the favour of God, giving way to sin does”. Hence, he keeps on exhorting Christians to “watch against the flesh, as well as the world and the devil” for

Christ indeed cannot reign where sin reigns; neither will he dwell where any sin is allowed. But he is and dwells in the heart of every believer who is fighting against all sin; although it be 'not' yet 'purified according to the purification of the sanctuary'.

Yet, how could we fight against sin? It is through keeping in step with the Spirit and allowing the Spirit to purge our idolatries and sins. How does the Spirit purge our sins? Wesley replies that it is through the Spirit’s infusing of God’s love.

It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love “rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks.”

In his letter to Walter Churchey in 1771, he states in a similar tone:

entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is neither more nor less than pure love; love expelling sin, and governing both the heart and life of a child of God. The Refiner's fire purges out all that is contrary to love...\(^{175}\)

The question now will be: “Is this purging of our sins by the Spirit’s infusion of God’s love an instantaneous moment?” Wesley’s reply is a definite yes. He believes that the moment of instantaneous transformation is the second change which the Spirit raises us to a higher sanctified ground.\(^{176}\) In his sermon on “The Repentance of Believers: (1767), he reasons:

…if there be no second change, if there be no instantaneous deliverance after justification, if there be none but a gradual work of God…then we must be content, as well as we can, to remain full of sin till death; and if so, we must remain guilty till death, continually deserving punishment.\(^{177}\)

Ten years later, in “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” he appeals to the experience of the early Methodists and explains:

There is indeed an instantaneous, as well as gradual, work of God in his children; and there wants not, we know, a cloud of witnesses, who have received, in one moment, either a clear sense of the forgiveness of their sins, or the abiding witness of the Holy Spirit...\(^{178}\)

However, Wesley also contended that there is “a gradual work both preceding and following that instant”\(^{179}\) when he wrote to his brother, Charles, in 1767. Later, in his sermon “On Working out Our Own Salvation” (1785), he reasons similarly:

All experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment, as “a grain of mustard seed, which, at first, is the least of all seeds,” but afterwards puts forth large branches, and becomes a great tree; till, in another instant, the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled

\(^{175}\) Letter to Walter Churchey (February 21, 1771), Letters (T), 5:223.

\(^{176}\) Letter to Arthur Keene (June 21, 1784), Letters (T), 7:222.


\(^{178}\) “A Plain Account of Perfection,” §13, Works (J), 11:380.

\(^{179}\) Letter to Charles Wesley (January 27, 1767), §2, Letters (T), 5:39. See also “A Plain Account of Perfection,” §18, Works (J), 11:396.
with pure love to God and man. But even that love increases more and more, till we “grow up in all things into Him that is our head;” till we attain “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

But why there is a need of gradual work before and after an instantaneous experience of perfection in the way of sanctification? There are a few reasons to explain: (1) As we mentioned earlier, perfection in Wesley’s thought is not a perfected perfection, but a perfecting perfection. Or in his own words: “entire holiness does not exclude growth”.

(2) Though we can preserve ourselves from actual or proper sin, we are subjected to involuntary transgressions and other limitations of human life, such as temptation, ignorance, errors, and other infirmities. (3) The instantaneous transforming experience which the Spirit brings though elevates us for further growth in grace, it still leave us far short of the perfect law of God. (4) There is a possibility for us to fall from grace even subsequent to the crisis of perfection.

The above discussions show that perfection for Wesley is a series of instantaneous crises experiences in the way of gradual growth from babes to mature adulthood in Christ. As we grow in grace, we move toward a further instantaneous crisis experience which the Spirit brings. Each of these instantaneous experiences in turn will move us to a higher ground in the course of our Christian growth. Hence, Lindström rightly comments that the instantaneous and gradual effects of sanctification are closely associated in Wesley.

As discussed above, perfection can be understood negatively as the Spirit’s purging of our sins by the infusion of God’s love. Wesley, therefore, reasons that we could also see Christian perfection positively as perfect love. Yet, what is perfect love? He defines this relationally as:

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183 Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, 185.
The loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. This implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and all the thoughts, words and actions are governed by pure love.\footnote{187}{"A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," §19, \emph{Works (J)}, 11:394.}

"Love is the great medicine of life; the never failing remedy for all the miseries and vices of men"\footnote{188}{Sermon 112, “On Laying the Foundation of the Chapel, near the City Road, London,” §II.1, \emph{Works}, 3:585.}. It frees us from our inordinate passions, evil thoughts and evil tempers, e.g. pride, self will, covetousness and sensuality, and love of the world. On the other hand, it is the fountain of our holy tempers, — in particular, lowliness, meekness, gentleness, temperance, and long-suffering,\footnote{189}{Sermon 127, “On the Wedding Garment,” §17, \emph{Works}, 4:147.} our works of piety and works of mercy. It sits upon the throne of our inmost souls\footnote{190}{Sermon 92, “On Zeal,” §II.5, \emph{Works}, 3:313.} and rules our tempers, words, and actions.\footnote{191}{“Letter to Charles Wesley” (January 27, 1767), \emph{Letters (T)}, 5:38.}

We should yearn for and live in this love for it is “the end of all God’s commandments”\footnote{192}{Sermon 36, “The Law Established through Faith, II,” §II.1, \emph{Works}, 2:38.} and “the greatest of all”.\footnote{193}{Letter to Ann Bolton (December 5, 1772), \emph{Letters (T)}, 5:349} Wesley exhorts eschatologically in “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection” (1777):

‘The heaven of heavens is love.’ There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way... Settle it then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth of the Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, till you are carried into Abraham’s bosom.\footnote{194}{“A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” §25 Q33, \emph{Works (J)}, 11:430.}

Later in his sermon “On Zeal” (1781), he urges in a similar tone:

Be most zealous of all for love, the queen of all graces, the highest perfection in earth or heaven, the very image of the invisible God, as in men below, so in angels above. For as God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."\footnote{195}{Sermon 92, “On Zeal,” §§ III.12, \emph{Works}, 3:320.}
Dwelling in this love, we would grow as fathers in Christ.\textsuperscript{196} We would love God, the Source of love and “those whom God has given us to love on His behalf”.\textsuperscript{197}

We may conclude at this juncture that perfection is the fruit of the Spirit’s infusing of God’s love to purge our evil tempers and to give rise to Godly tempers. It is “love governing the heart and life, running through all our tempers, words and actions”.\textsuperscript{198} It is “a heart ruled by love such that every voluntary action (inwardly and outwardly) fulfills the moral law”.\textsuperscript{199} It is thus the fruit of the faith that works by love with universal obedience as its characteristic.\textsuperscript{200} Wesley summarises his theological conviction as below:

In one view, it (Christian perfection) is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God… it is one desire and design ruling our tempers. It is the devoting…all our soul, body, and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves...this is the whole and sole perfection, as a train of writings prove to a demonstration, which I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year 1725 to the year 1765.\textsuperscript{201}

When our intentions are purified, our life will focus singly upon God. We, in turn, will be filled with God’s glorious light, holiness and happiness\textsuperscript{202} and flamed with the love for God and the love for our neighbors. These notions of love for God and love for our neighbors have been in Wesley’s mind from the early phase of his ministry. His reasoning in the “Principles of a Methodist” (1742) was one of the depictions:

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\item \textsuperscript{196} \textit{NT Notes}, on 1 John 2:12-14; Letter to John Fletcher (Mac. 22, 1775), \textit{Letters (T)}, 6: 146.
\item \textsuperscript{197} Runyon, \textit{The New Creation} 89.
\item \textsuperscript{198} “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” §19, \textit{Works (J)}, 11:397.
\item \textsuperscript{199} Philip Roger Meadows, "Sadhana and Salvation: Soteriology in Ramanuja and John Wesley" (PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1996), 97.
\item \textsuperscript{201} “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” §27, \textit{Works (J)}, 11:444.
\end{enumerate}
He ‘loveth the Lord his God with all his heart,’ and serveth him ‘with all his strength.’ He ‘loveth his neighbor,’ every man, ‘as himself;’ yea, ‘as Christ loved us;’ them, in particular, that ‘despitefully use him and persecute him…Indeed his soul is all love, filled with ‘bowels of mercies, kindness, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering.’ And his life agreeoth thereto, full of ‘the work of faith, the patience of hope, the labor of love. And whatsoever he doeth either in word or deed, he doeth it all in the name,’ in the love and power, ‘of the Lord Jesus.’ In a word, he doeth ‘the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven.’

For Wesley, this love for God and our neighbours which are infused by the Spirit are two branches of perfect love. These two branches of love “contain the whole of Christian perfection”. This love is the centre of Christian perfection as well as the real nature of Christian religion.

2.3 The Love for God

Wesley contends that loving God is the mark of a new creation in the Kingdom of Grace. In one of his early tracts, “The Character of a Methodist” (1742), Wesley reasons:

A Methodist is one who has ‘the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him’ (Ro. 5:5); 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’ (Mk. 12:30). God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever’ (Ps. 73:25-26).

Loving God is of eschatological importance for five chief reasons: (1) God is the Fountain of peace, the Author of faith and salvation, the sole Giver of all good gift, the only Rest of our souls, and the Foundation of our prayer; (2) it will allow us to

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207 NT Notes, on Philippians 4:9.
participate continually in God’s love; (3) it leads to the restoration of God’s image in our souls and refinement of our life meanings; (4) it is “the root of all holiness”,\footnote{Sermon 40, “Christian Perfection.” §II.1, \textit{Works}, 2:105.} and (5) it results in the spurring of our love of God and love of neighbours.\footnote{NT Notes, on Colossians 3:5.}

To love God and to unite with Him does not mean that “it forbids us to take pleasure in any thing but God”.\footnote{Sermon 17, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” §I.12, \textit{Works}, 1:408.} It means that there is no god other than Jehovah, the Creator and the Preserver. It also denotes that we resolve not to give our hearts to idolatry or to other creatures,\footnote{NT Notes, on Colossians 3:5.} but we are to adore God with humble reverence, to set our affections entirely upon Him and to trust Him as our strength and our End. Wesley exhorts emphatically:

Before ye give place to any other thought or care, let it be your concern that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ…may reign in your heart…that he may “cast down every high thing which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Let God have the sole dominion over you: Let him reign without a rival: Let him possess all your heart, and rule alone. Let him be your one desire, your joy, your love; so that all that is within you may continually cry out, “The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”\footnote{Sermon 17, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” §I.12, \textit{Works}, 1:408.}

We should offer our worship due to God. He should be the teleological End of our search and worship.

The one perfect Good shall be your one ultimate end. One thing shall ye desire for its own sake, — the fruition of Him that is All in all. One happiness shall ye propose to your souls, even an union with Him that made them; the having “fellowship with the Father and the Son;” the being joined to the Lord in one Spirit. One design you are to pursue to the end of time, — the enjoyment of God in time and in eternity. Desire other things, so far as they tend to this. Love the creature as it leads to the Creator. But in every step you take, be this the glorious point that terminates your view. Let every affection, and thought, and word, and work, be subordinate to this. Whatever ye desire or fear, whatever ye seek or shun, whatever ye think, speak, or do, be it in order to your happiness in God, the sole End, as well as Source, of your being.\footnote{Sermon 17, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” §I.12, \textit{Works}, 1:408.}
Wesley thus asserts that to love the Lord our God wholeheartedly (Matt. 22:37) is the royal law of heaven and earth. If we love God wholeheartedly, we shall conform to His will, obey His commands, converse with Him and pray to Him. Our minds will be opened “to see the glorious love of God”. We shall have the mind of Christ Jesus and present ourselves as a living sacrifice unto God (Rom. 12: 1; 1st Pet. 2:5). We shall put on the new man and strive to be holy in all manner of tempers and conversation (1st Pet. 1: 15). In other words, love for God “gives life an ultimate end”. It shapes the way of our eschatological living. This is, in fact, the central emphasis of Wesley’s conception of perfection which reflects the influence of à Kempis, Taylor and Law.

Closely related to Wesley’s stress on loving God is his understanding of circumcision of heart and cultivation of Christian affections. For Wesley, the circumcision of heart with humility, faith, hope, and love is essential because it is the seat “wherein the Spirit dwells and intercedes”. It is “the true centre of person”. It is the core of our intention and is essentially definitive of who we are. It forms our life. Furthermore, it is the locus where we exhibit our affections.

Yet, what is affection? For Wesley, affection, as Clapper points out, carries the meaning of “the generation orientation of the person”. This generation of orientation is affected by its object, telos, or proper end. In other words, our affections do not only dispose our behaviours in certain ways, but say something of our motives and our telos. Godly telos and Godly motives shape our affections to become Godly. Furthermore, Godly affections will shape our worldview and value system.

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222 Horst, “Christian Understanding and the Life of Faith” , 140.
223 NT Notes, On Romans 8:27
Seeing the close relationship between our heart and our affections, Wesley exhorts that we should preserve our heart and nourish our affections with contemplation of the inheritance which God has stored for us, desire of true happiness, seeking God’s Kingdom and His righteousness, keeping Sabbath, humility, charity, and serving God with a single eye.

How should we strengthen the preservation of our heart and cultivation of Christian affections? Wesley maintains that we should live a life of self denial and obedience. Self denial and obedience characterise our love for God and our commitment to take up our cross and walk as Christ walked. To love God and to walk as Christ walked is to renounce ourselves, turn away from our pride, our love for wealth, and idolatry. It means that we deny our own will where it does not fall in with the will of God, and that however pleasing it may be. It is to deny ourselves any pleasure which does not spring from, and lead to, God.

We are to turn to God and pray that “Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). We pray this prayer because we are convinced that God’s will is not only “a path leading straight to Him,” but “the only own rule of action to us.” “Love rejoices to obey,” Wesley reasons. Whereas a person who claims to love God without obeying Him is a presumptuous pretender, a true lover of God will embrace self-denial for it is a means to obey His will. Such an embracing, on the one hand, guards our will from the proneness to evil, and enhances our Christian discipleship, on the other.

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2.4 The Nurturing of Christian Happiness

Though Wesley joined the love of God and neighbours together, I find it is appropriate before discussing the love for our neighbours, to refer briefly Wesley’s notion of nurturing of Christian happiness. Wesley, who drank deep in the Anglican (catholic) tradition which understands holiness and happiness are reciprocals,\textsuperscript{237} considers holiness and happiness are joined in one too.\textsuperscript{238} Christian happiness begins when we begin our personal and intimate walk with God in Christ.\textsuperscript{239} It begins when we experience God’s love shed in our heart. He explains:

Without love nothing can so profit us as to make our lives happy. By happiness I mean, not a slight, trifling pleasure, that perhaps begins and ends in the same hour; but such a state of well-being as contents the soul, and gives it a steady, lasting satisfaction.\textsuperscript{240}

God’s love brings forth Christian happiness just as it brings forth holiness. This is where true contentment comes from. The more we know God, the more we experience His love. The more we experience His love, the more we love Him and the more we become happy and content. This is the nature of Wesley’s notion of religion. Religion is the “happy knowledge of the true God,”\textsuperscript{241} Wesley claims. We could not have religion without having happiness because religion is happiness.\textsuperscript{242} Unhappiness is unnatural!\textsuperscript{243} Wesley thus exhorts that we should treasure and cultivate Christian happiness for, originally, God made all things to be happy (Gen.1:31).\textsuperscript{244} In stating these views, Wesley distinguishes religion as happiness from religion as morality or opinion for the happy knowledge of the true God encompasses these.\textsuperscript{245} Hence, I agree with Horst’s remarks

\textsuperscript{238} Sermon 7, “The way to the Kingdom,” §I.12, \textit{Works}, 1:224. As a matter of fact, holiness and happiness is one of Wesley’s most consistent themes throughout his preaching-teaching ministry. It appears in no less than thirty of his sermons. See Albert Outler, “Introduction to Sermons: III. The Sermon Corpus,” \textit{Works}, 1:35 n.28.
\textsuperscript{244} Sermon 120, “The Unity of the Divine Being,” §9, \textit{Works}, 4:63.
that Wesley used Christian happiness as a concept to observe, describe, sketch and delineate the transformation of a person’s life by God’s grace.\footnote{Horst, "Christian Understanding and the Life of Faith," 40.}

How could we cultivate our happiness? Look neither to the pleasures of the world, or the religion of the world, nor other creatures, but to God, the Creator\footnote{Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship,” §§III.7-8, \textit{Works}, 3:101.} because “all the spring of happiness are in Him”\footnote{Sermon 28, “SM-VIII,” §21, \textit{Works}, 1:626.}.

In this alone can you find the happiness you seek—in the union of your spirit with the Father of spirits; in the knowledge and love of him who is the fountain of happiness, sufficient for all the souls he has made.\footnote{Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship,” §§III.8, \textit{Works}, 3:101.}

Since true knowledge of God and union with Him is happiness, we should look to God. Wesley’s advice to Ann Taylor in his old age is also his advice for us as we progress in cultivating Christian happiness:

Happiness is not in man; no, nor in any creature under heaven. Search the whole creation round, Can it out of God be found? No. When you begin to know God as your God, then, and not before, you begin to be happy; but much more when you love Him. And as you increase in loving faith your happiness will increase in the same proportion. Steer steady to this point. Keep these issues of your heart!\footnote{Letter to Ann Taylor (March 8, 1787), \textit{Letters (T)}, 7:374.}

Let us look to God, for our faith and happiness will increase accordingly. We shall be empowered to see the world and weigh ourselves, not with the uncertain riches of the world, but the measures of faith and love which God give us.\footnote{Sermon 28, “SM-VIII,” §§17-20, \textit{Works}, 1:622-25.} We shall give thanks in everything and rejoice evermore. We indeed have “a spring of happiness within”\footnote{“A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” §19, \textit{Works (J)}, 11:399.}. The ministry of sharing God’s love and happiness with our neighbours begins from here. This leads us to the exploration of Wesley’s notion of the love for neighbours.
2.5 The Love for Neighbours

Wesley considers the love for our neighbours as the other branch of Christian perfection because he holds that “the necessary fruit of this love of God is the love of our neighbour”.  

If any man truly love God, he cannot but love his brother also. Gratitude to our Creator will surely produce benevolence to our fellow-creatures. It we love Him, we cannot but love one another, as Christ loved us. We feel our souls enlarged in love toward every child of man. And toward all the children of God we put on “bowels of kindness, gentleness, long-suffering, forgiving one another,” if we have a complaint against any, “even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven us.”

Elsewhere in his sermon on “The Unity of the Divine Being” (1789), Wesley asserts that:

True religion is right tempers towards God and man. It is, in two words, gratitude and benevolence; gratitude to our Creator and supreme Benefactor, and benevolence to our fellow-creatures. In other words, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves... Gratitude towards our Creator cannot but produce benevolence to our fellow-creatures. The love of Christ constrains us, not only to be harmless, to do no ill to our neighbor, but to be useful, to be “zealous of good works;” “as we have time, to do good unto all men;” and to be patterns to all of true, genuine morality; of justice, mercy, and truth.

Loving God will eventually lead to loving others in the world. From our peaceful union with God and our singleness in God will spring forth the love for our neighbours.

Wesley was convinced that we who receive God’s gifts of faith and love could not resist sharing the love which we had received. When we love our neighbours, we serve not only all who are sustained by God’s prevenient grace, but God who is invisible. Wesley says: “we are to serve him (God) in our neighbours; which he receives as if done to himself in person, standing visible before us”.

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Consequently, Christianity is essentially a social religion. It is impossible to conceal its influence any more than that of the city upon the hill and the lit candle. Wesley even considers that the thought of withdrawal from the world is a deception of Satan. Therefore, there is hardly any reason for Christians to withdraw from the world and still claim that we are living our eschatological life in the Kingdom of Grace. For Wesley, right faith inevitably leads to serving people and earth. “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness”. To be Christians are for us to be with God as well as to be with others in the world. Christianity, according to Wesley, is not a solitary religion. It cannot exist without God. Likewise, it cannot exist without others in the world too. Christians are called to share God’s hope and love in Christ with others in the world. The world is the context where we live out our uniqueness and thus attract others to join the pilgrimage towards the kingdom of Heaven. The world is the locality where Christians’ love shines forth its radiance. Wesley maintains that

“Ye are the salt of the earth.” It is your very nature to season whatever is around you. It is the nature of the divine savour which is in you, to spread to whatsoever you touch; to diffuse itself, on every side, to all those among whom you are. This is the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with other men, that whatever grace you have received of God may through you be communicated to others; that every holy temper and word and work of yours may have an influence on them also. By this means a check will, in some measure, be given to the corruption which is in the world, and a small part, at least, be saved from the general infection, and rendered holy and pure before God.

“How could we live out our uniqueness?” “How could we share God’s hope and love to others?” Wesley’s first and foremost reply is: “To do good to our neighbours.” Christian life which is defined by God’s love lives out its uniqueness through doing good to our neighbours. But what is doing good? Wesley distinguishes between human effort of outward performance of good and the good deeds that spring out from the Spirit’s infusion of God’s love in our life. He considers only the latter which are shaped and

motivated by God’s love should be characterised as good.\textsuperscript{260} We shall return to this discussion in chapter five.

**Summary**

As discussed above, eschatological living in Wesley’s thought is a fusion of the Protestant emphasis of justification by faith and the Eastern patristic stress of sanctification/perfection. It is a process by which the Spirit infuses God’s love and restores the image of God in our life. It is also a process in which we respond in love through deepening our faith and repentance, thirsting after grace and righteousness, cultivating Christian happiness, and observing God’s law. Faith, repentance, obedience, thirsting after righteousness, and cultivating Christian happiness are inseparable in the course of our sanctification. Our eschatological living thus links the sovereign work of God and our freewill together. It is a pilgrimage of maturing our human responsibility in God’s sovereign grace till we are made glorious in the new heaven and new earth.

Since our eschatological living concerns both the present and eternity, it sees Christian perfection as its eschatological-teleological goal. Christian perfection, therefore, has its temporal and eternal dimension. In its eternal sense, it prepares us to inherit the perfected holiness and happiness when we are created anew in the new heaven and new earth. Viewing from a temporal dimension, it is an effort to live out the beauty of the Kingdom’s values through our love for God and love for neighbours in our social context. Runyon reasons appropriately when he comments:

As the image of God we are called not just to receive but to reflect this perfect love into the world, to share it with our fellow creatures—and to share it *perfectly,* that is, to share it in such a way that it can be received and appropriated by others…perfection is not for our own sakes but for the fulfilment of the vocation to which we are called, to image and reflect to others that which we have received from God.\textsuperscript{261}


A responsible eschatological living which presses after Christian perfection would take repentance for sin seriously because sin is the contrary of Christian perfection. It is a voluntary act of refusal to be pure, refusal to imitate Christ, and refusal to love. To counter sin, we are to press after perfection though it is perfection within the limitations of human life. We are to grow from fear to joy, from doubt to confidence, from grace to grace, from little children to young men and from young men to fathers in faith. In growing in this teleological direction, we journey towards the goals of purification of intention and affections, imitation of Christ, and deepening of our love of God and our neighbours. It is a development of faith in love till we meet the God of love in the new heaven and new earth. Hence the connection between soteriology and eschatology: eschatology completes soteriology.
Chapter 4  The Nurturing of Eschatological Living:
Growth through Means of Grace

As discussed in the last chapter, the nature of our eschatological living is perfect love, i.e. love of God and love of our neighbours. We are to grow in love and grace. The deeper we grow in God’s love, the stronger the shining forth of the inner quality of sanctification through our love of neighbours. We also understand that being in step with the Spirit is a very key factor in nourishing our life of sanctification. This is because Wesley understands the empowering presence of the Spirit as grace. Yet, how can we receive this grace of God? Wesley’s reply is: “Through attending the means of grace which God has ordained.”

1. Nurturing through the Means of Grace

1.1 Attending the Means of Grace

Wesley’s deep appreciation of the importance of discipline in the religious life and his habit of attending to the means of grace owes much to the family in which he was reared. He kept this habit even after he left home for Charterhouse and later Oxford. He recalled after his heart warming experience at a society in Aldersgate Street on May 24, 1738, that he “carefully used, both in public and in private, all the means of grace at all opportunities”.

Though he wrote in 1731 that laying too much stress on the instituted means of grace may lead to the negligence of the weightier matters of the law or the end of the means, i.e. faith, mercy, love, holiness, he persisted on attending the means of grace with the hope of attaining “inward holiness or a union of the soul with God”. In 1736, after much reflection on his readings of the Theologia Germanica and the books by the mystics Johann Tauler and Miguel de Molinos, Wesley decided not to follow their way

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1 Wesley, May 24, 1738, Journals and Diaries I, §§1-6, in Works, 18:242-45.
2 Letter to Mrs. Sussana Wesley (June 11, 1731), Letters I, in Works, 25:282-84.
of slighting the means of grace, though he agreed with them that “the love of God is the supreme end of all exercises of devotion”.\textsuperscript{4} He expresses his inner thoughts in his letter to his brother, Samuel Wesley, in November 1736:

‘I think the rock on which I had the nearest made shipwreck of the faith was the writings of the Mystics; under which term I comprehend all, and only those, who slight any of the means of grace.’\textsuperscript{5}

Wesley disagreed with Law who was influenced notably by Jacob Boehme, a German mystic. He rejected the claim of direct access to God and the idea of divine grace coming directly to the soul. He wrote to Law and argued that--

This is most true that all the externals of religion are in order to the renewal of our soul in righteousness and true holiness. But it is not true that the external way is one and the internal way another. There is but one scriptural way wherein we receive inward grace—through the outward means which God had appointed.\textsuperscript{6}

Wesley maintained that attending the means of grace is a key way to wait upon God, to attain inward holiness, and to battle against antinomianism. This insight became his firm conviction and was fully affirmed by him in his rejection of Philip Molther’s doctrine of stillness in 1739.

This doctrine of stillness which Wesley was vehemently against was preached by Mr. Bray, a Moravian, in the Fetter Lane Society and confirmed by Philip Henry Molther, the private tutor of Count Zinzendorf’s son in November 1739. It holds that there is a distinction between God’s working immediately and directly on human hearts and the mediating means which at best are of secondary importance.\textsuperscript{7} Therefore, it is unnecessary to follow the ordinances of God, especially the Lord’s Supper before one is assured of his/her justifying faith. In other words, one should wait for God’s grace in stillness, but not through the means of Grace "for Christ is the only means".\textsuperscript{8} For Wesley, this view of

\textsuperscript{4} Runyon, The New Creation, 108.
\textsuperscript{5} Letter to Samuel Wesley, Jun. (November 23, 1736), Works, 25:488.
\textsuperscript{7} Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 85.
\textsuperscript{8} Howard A. Snyder, The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1980), 40.
waiting for God opens to the danger of enthusiasm. He comments in “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection”:

One general inlet to enthusiasm is the expecting the end without the means—the expecting knowledge, for instance, without searching the Scripture and consulting the children of God; the expecting spiritual strength without constant prayer; the expecting growth in grace without steady watchfulness and deep self-examination; the expecting any blessing without hearing the Word of God at every opportunity.

Wesley holds firmly that Christ is truly the means of grace but the grace of God in Christ is channelled to us through different means. These means are channels which God offers His spiritual remedy for healing and holistic restoration.

Seeing that John Gambold and Wesley Hall were won over by this quietist piety and seeing the disruption caused in the life of the Fetter Lane Society and other religious societies within the Anglican parishes, Wesley, in agreement with the Thirty-nine Articles, the Book of Common Prayer (1661-62), Ordinal (1661-62), Homilies, and Catechism of the Church of England, argues firmly that (1) although salvation is a gift of God, He uses certain outward means as the ordinary channels of His grace. (2) There is no distinction between “immediate” and “mediate” in God’s economy of salvation. (3) Christians experience different blessings, e.g. remission of sins, assurance of faith, restoration of heart and life, when they are attentive to God’s presence through using the means of grace. (4) Attending the means of grace is a Christian discipline which can trace back to the primitive church. (5) There are degrees of faith, and Christians should use the means of grace to receive more of God’s grace and grow in faith. (6) Those that are “cut off from public ordinances, usually by degrees lose all religion for the life and power of godliness will not long be kept, without the form and profession of it”.

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14 OT Notes, on Joshua 22:25.
On this basis, Wesley maintains that Christians should use the means of grace to wait upon God and grow in holiness. This conviction of his is seen in his sermon on “The Nature of Enthusiasm” (1750) through which he warns the enthusiasts who expect to attain the end without the means:

‘Beware, Lastly, of imagining you shall obtain the end without using the means conducive to it. God can give the end without any means at all; but you have no reason to think he will. Therefore constantly and carefully use all those means which he has appointed to be the ordinary channels of his grace. Use every means which either reason or Scripture recommends, as conducive (through the free love of God in Christ) either to the obtaining or increasing any of the gifts of God. Thus expect a daily growth in that pure and holy religion which the world always did, and always will, call enthusiasm; — but which, to all who are saved from real enthusiasm, from merely nominal Christianity, is “the wisdom of God, and the power of God;” the glorious image of the Most High; “righteousness and peace;” a “fountain of living water, springing up into everlasting life!”

Wesley was convinced that the more we attend the means of grace, the more we shall grow in grace. His view of waiting upon God through attending the means of grace is scripturally grounded and supported by Christian tradition. This should be the mark of the Methodists who were mentored by him. This conviction of his was clearly presented through the Article XIII “Of the Church” of the Methodist Twenty Five Articles of Religion:

“The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ’s ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.”

Rob Staples therefore observes aptly that Wesley’s notion of church is in agreement with the Protestant Reformers who defined the church in similar terms. The church is not defined in terms of its organization or ministry, but in terms of the means of grace. The means of grace are constitutive of the church.

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17 Staples, Outward Sign and Inward Grace , 100.
1.2 The Nature of the Means of Grace

Having discussed Wesley’s position on nurturing our growth through attending the means of grace, we should then ask: “What are the means of grace?” Wesley, in his sermon on “The Means of Grace” (1739), a sermon used to counter the doctrine of stillness, defines the means of grace as

outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.\textsuperscript{18}

He considers this definition the most appropriate for it has been used by the church for ages and in particular the Church of England, which teaches that a sacrament is “an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same”.\textsuperscript{19}

What are these outward signs that God ordains to convey His grace? Wesley pointed us to his articulations in “Directions given to the Band-Societies” (1744), the “Doctrinal Minutes” (1744-47) and the “Large Minutes” (1744-89). The “Directions given to the Band-Societies” begins with the concern of doing no harm, doing good, and then concludes with the attendance upon the ordinances of God. This third pastoral guidance of Wesley reads:

Constantly to attend on all the ordinances of God; in particular,--
1. To be at church and at the Lord’s Table every week, and at every public meeting of the Bands.
2. To attend the ministry of the word every morning, unless distance, business, or sickness prevents.
3. To use private prayer every day; and family prayer, if you are at the head of family.
4. To read the Scriptures, and meditate therein, at every vacant hour.
And,-
5. To observe, as days of fasting or abstinence, all Fridays in the year.\textsuperscript{20}

About 7 months later, John and Charles Wesley, and eight other persons gathered at the New-Room in Bristol on Aug. 2, 1745 to discuss matters pertaining to Christian

\textsuperscript{18} Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace,” §II.1, Works, 1:381.
\textsuperscript{19} Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace,” §II. 1, Works, 1:381.
\textsuperscript{20} “Direction Given to the Band-Societies,” §III, Works, 9:79.
sanctification. During this conference discussion, they classified prayer, searching the Scripture, communicating [fellowship], and fasting as particular means.\textsuperscript{21} Besides, they also categorised the attitudes and practices which pervade our Christian growth, e.g. keeping all the commandments, denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily and exercise of the presence of God, as general means.\textsuperscript{22}

Elsewhere in the context of nurturing the Methodists and the Methodists helpers, Wesley classified the means of grace, in the Large Minutes of 1778, as either Instituted or Prudential. The instituted means of grace are prayer, fasting, searching the Scriptures through hearing, reading, and meditating, receiving the Lord’s Supper in a church’s worship context, and Christian conference or conversation.\textsuperscript{23} These instituted means, which Wesley also calls ‘works of piety’,\textsuperscript{24} cover those mentioned in his ‘Direction Given to the Band-Societies’ and include those listed as the particular means in the Doctrinal Minutes. In this context, works of piety are orthopraxis as discussed in last chapter as well as means through which we receive God’s grace for the furtherance of our growth. They are good works for our benefit.

For Wesley, these instituted means are for nurturing of our life of sanctification, and thus our eschatological living. He narrates this in the 10\textsuperscript{th} discourse of the Sermon on the Mount:

\begin{quote}
Ask, that ye may thoroughly experience, and perfectly practice, the whole of that religion…to be holy as he [our Lord] is holy, both in heart and in all manner of conversation. Seek, in the way he hath ordained, in searching the Scriptures, in hearing his word, in meditating thereon, in fasting, in partaking of the Supper of the Lord, and surely ye shall find: Ye shall find that pearl of great price, that faith which overcometh the world, that peace which the world cannot give, that love which is the earnest of your inheritance. Knock; continue in prayer, and in every other way of the Lord…Press on to the mark: Take no denial: Let him not go until he bless
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{22} In the “Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesleys and Others; from the year 1744 to 1789” (hereafter cited as “Large Minutes”), Wesley includes “exercise of the presence of God” as part of the general means of grace and discusses the general means of grace in detailed manner. “Large Minutes,” Q.48, \textit{Works (J)}, 8:322-24.
\textsuperscript{23} “Large Minutes,” Q.48, \textit{Works (J)}, 8:322-23. Wesley did not include baptism in this list because baptism is a singular event which will not be repeated in the course of Christian life.
\end{footnotes}
The door of mercy, of holiness, of heaven, shall be opened unto you.25

The prudential means of grace include arts of holy living,26 classes, bands, societies, watch nights, love feasts, covenant services, reading good books or letters27 and those practices listed as general means of grace in the Doctrinal Minutes. Wesley, therefore, considers “whatever is conducive to holiness and love becomes, to that extent, a means of grace”.28

2. Nurturing through the Instituted Means

Wesley stresses the importance of nurturing through the instituted means because he sees it as a process through which a sanctified life is formed and transformed.29 When God’s sanctifying grace is mediated through these means, our growth in “righteousness and true holiness”30 will be fostered.

2.1 Prayer and Fasting

In His love, God breathes spiritual life into our soul. In His love, we rejoice and breathe out love and prayer back to God.31 Wesley maintains that prayer in love is “the grand means of drawing near to God; and all others are helpful to us only so far as they are mixed with or prepare us for this”.32 It is “the lifting up of the heart to God”.33 He comments further in his tract on “The Character of a Methodist”:

26 “Large Minutes,” Q 48, Works (J), 8:323.
27 Letter to the Societies at Bristol (October, 1764), Letters (T), 4:272; Letter to Philothea Briggs (December 3, 1772), Letters (T), 5:348; Letter to Elizabeth Ritchie (Nov. 29, 1774), Letters (T), 6:125-26; Letter to Joseph Benson (October 22, 1776), Letters (T), 6:234.
28 Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 105.
29 Dean Gary Blevins comments that Wesley’s understanding of the instituted means of grace suggests an approach to Christian religious education which is best described as formation. Dean Gray. Blevins, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace: An Approach to Christian Religious Education” (PhD, Claremont School of Theology, 1999), 363.
31 NT Notes, on 1st John 3:9.
32 Letter to Miss March (March 29, 1760), Letters (T), 4:90.
But at all times the language of his heart is this: “Thou brightness of the eternal glory, unto thee is my heart, though without a voice, and my silence speaketh unto thee.” And this is true prayer, and this alone. But his heart is ever lifted up to God, at all times and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In retirement or company, in leisure, business, or conversation, his heart is ever with the Lord. Whether he lie down or rise up, God is in all his thoughts; he walks with God continually, having the loving eye of his mind still fixed upon him, and everywhere “seeing Him that is invisible.”

Prayer in love thus is an “exercise of the soul.” However, it is “not a self-sustaining impulse of the soul,” as Horst pointed out. It is “the breath of our spiritual life” and the fruit of our faith. It orientates us to depend on God and prepares us to receive God’s answers as we lay our needs before Him.

The end of your praying is not to inform God, as though he knew not your wants already; but rather to inform yourselves, to fix the sense of those wants more deeply in your hearts, and the sense of your continual dependence on him who only is able to supply all your wants. It is not so much to move God—who is always more ready to give than you to ask—as to move yourselves, that you may be willing and ready to receive the good things he has prepared for you.

In view of this, prayer can be considered as a refining test where our motives, our manners of asking God, our actions, and our tempers are purified. Wesley explains:

[Prayer] contains all we can reasonably or innocently pray for… it contains all we can reasonably or innocently desire; whatever is for the glory of God, whatever is needful or profitable, not only for ourselves, but for every creature in heaven and earth. And indeed our prayers are the proper test of our desires, nothing being fit to have a place in our desires which is not fit to have a place in our prayers; what we may not pray for, neither should we desire.

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36 Horst, "Christian Understanding and the Life of Faith", 221.
37 NT Notes, on 1st Thessalonians 5:16.
While fully aware that God’s grace and freedom are not at a human’s disposal, Wesley affirms prayer as human action to seek, await and receive God’s blessings for our growth in sanctification. He believes that God’s blessings in and through prayer would enable those with the faith of a servant to experience assurance of forgiveness and new birth, whereas those with the faith of a child will grow deeper in holiness of life and heart. Seeing the edification which prayer brings, he cautions Christians not to neglect prayer because negligence in prayer will suffocate the life of God in our soul. Christians are to pray continuously, privately, and publicly. The purpose in reprinting the collections of prayers, which he first published in 1733, was exactly to nurture Christians deeper in prayer.

It is on this basis that Wesley argued against the doctrine of stillness and affirms the value of prayer:

God plainly ordains prayer as the means of receiving whatsoever grace we want; particularly that wisdom from above which is the chief fruit of the grace of God. Here, likewise, God commands all to pray who desire to receive any grace from Him. Here is no restriction as to believers or unbelievers, but least of all to believers…

Other than explaining the importance of prayer, Wesley also teaches concerning the right attitude to prayer and effective ways of prayer. He stresses the integration of praying with our hearts and our lips. Prayer is our soul language flowing out from our deep experience of God’s sanctifying grace. For Wesley, there is no room for empty repetitions in prayer.

To enhance the prayer life of his followers, Wesley published four collections of prayers in his lifetime. A Collection of Forms of Prayer (1733) was the first collection which went through nine editions and was placed by Wesley in his collected works in

It consists of Wesley’s own written prayers as well as selection from others. *A Collection of Prayers for Families* and *Prayers for Children* were the second and third collection which Wesley published in his middle age. They are written prayers which assist the Christian family to develop a richer prayer life. The fourth collection was an abridgement and revision of a popular book written by John Austin for the *Christian Library*. Wesley saw in this devotional book a complete system of Christian doctrine in devotional form which could therefore bring nourishing benefits to its readers.

Other than promoting the usage of the above collections of prayer, Wesley also promoted the discipline of reading of and meditation on God’s Word together with prayer, for this would help us to sink deeper into the communion with God. The more we pray, the deeper the _plerophory_ or full assurance of hope we enjoy. Furthermore, prayer and rejoicing in God’s goodness begets thanksgiving. This is Christian perfection.

Thanksgiving is inseparable from true prayer: it is almost essentially connected with it. He that always prays is ever giving praise, whether in ease or pain, both for prosperity and for the greatest adversity. He blesses God for all things, looks on them as coming from him, and receives them only for his sake; not choosing nor refusing, liking nor disliking, anything, but only as it is agreeable or disagreeable to his perfect will.

Christians should, therefore, pray fervently in and through the Holy Spirit for He has laid the foundation of our prayer. Wesley maintains that “it is certainly right to pray whether we can pray or no. God hears when we hardly hear ourselves.”

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Pray, without ceasing pray
(Your Captain gives the word),
His summons cheerfully obey,
And call upon the Lord;
To God your every want
In instant prayer display;
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48 *NT Notes*, on 1st Thessalonians 5:16.

49 *NT Notes*, on 1st Thessalonians 5:16.

50 *NT Notes*, on Jude 20.

51 Letter to Mary Bonsanquet (March 26, 1770), *Letters (T)*, 5:187.
Pray always; pray, and never faint;
Pray, without ceasing pray.  

Fervent prayer will not only protect us from God’s wrath, or unholy actions, or lack of faith, but helps us to be watchful. Wesley exhorts: “Watch that ye may pray, pray that ye may watch”. Watchful prayer and prayerful watch will orientate our souls for the searching work of the Spirit. This will enhance our growth in Christ. The deeper we watch and pray unceasingly, the better we comprehend, with all saints, what is the length, and breadth, and height, and depth, and to know that love of Christ which passeth knowledge; yea, to “be filled with all the fullness of God.

Wesley exhorts that we should add seriousness and earnestness to our prayers. Fasting joins with fervent prayer on the one hand, as a means of “deadness to pleasure”, on the other hand, it is a means to seek God face. It helps us to pour our souls deeper before God, to bewail seriously of our sins and our neighbour’s sins, and to wait for a further increment of His purifying grace. It thus is both a season of godly sorrow for our sin and a season to lift our souls to God. It is a means to nurture our eschatological living. Wesley further teaches that--

[fasting] is chiefly, as it is an help to prayer, that it has so frequently been found a means, in the hand of God, of confirming and increasing, not one virtue, not chastity only, (as some have idly imagined, without any ground either from Scripture, reason, or experience,) but also seriousness of spirit, earnestness, sensibility and tenderness of conscience, deadness to the world, and consequently the love of God, and every holy and heavenly affection.

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53 These are the three grand hindrances of God’s hearing our prayers. NT Notes, on 1st Timothy 2:8.
55 NT Notes, on 1 Peter 4:7.
56 “The First Annual Conference” (June 26, 1744), Q10, in Outler, ed., John Wesley, 141.
60 Letter to George Cussons (November 18, 1768), Letters (T), 5:112.
Fasting had always been in Wesley’s heart as he emphasises in October 1790:
Exhort all our brethren steadily to wait upon God in the appointed means
of prayer and fasting. The latter of which has been almost universally
neglected by Methodists both in England and Ireland.\textsuperscript{63}

To enhance the effectiveness of fasting and prayer, we should (1) guard against
hypocrisy, i.e. saying what we do not mean, vain repetitions, praise of men, and our own
righteousness;\textsuperscript{64} (2) preserve our health that we fast in proportion to our health and
strength,\textsuperscript{65} and (3) engage in works of mercy.\textsuperscript{66} Prayer, fasting together with the Word of
God sanctifies our action.\textsuperscript{67} It is for the love of our neighbours and the glory of God.\textsuperscript{68}

2.2 Searching the Scripture

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Wesley was indebted to his parents for nourishing
him with daily meditation of Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers.
Throughout his life, “scriptural language shaped his style; scriptural content governed his
thought”.\textsuperscript{69} He considered that the Bible is the primary religious source and norm
sustaining his eschatological pilgrimage towards the new heaven and new earth. This
conviction of his was noted in the preface of the first series of his sermons in 1746:

I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow
through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: Just
hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence…I drop into an
unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing,— the way to heaven;
how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to
teach the way: For this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it
down in a book…In his presence I open, I read his book; for this end, to
find the way to heaven…I lift up my heart to the Father of Lights…I then
search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, “comparing
spiritual things with spiritual.” I meditate thereon with all the attention and
earnestness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I
consult those who are experienced in the things of God; and then the
writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I

\textsuperscript{63} Letter to James Macdonald (October 23, 1790), \textit{Letters (T)}, 8:243.
teach. I have accordingly set down in the following sermons what I find in the Bible concerning the way to heaven; with a view to distinguish this way of God from all those which are the inventions of men.\textsuperscript{70}

Wesley’s indebtedness to Scripture was clearly seen through his expounding and proclaiming of the Scripture, his writing of sermons and tracts, and his hymnody. He stresses that “all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in searching the Scriptures”.\textsuperscript{71} With the inspiration and assistance of the Holy Spirit, reading, searching, hearing, and meditating upon the Scripture is not only one of the key means “whereby God confirms and increases true wisdom”,\textsuperscript{72} but a means to nourish our souls that we may grow “in faith, love, holiness, unto the full stature of Christ”.\textsuperscript{73} Its benefits could be understood around the Pauline fourfold consideration: “for doctrine (teaching), for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.”\textsuperscript{74} Scriptural learning shapes our eschatological living. Wesley, therefore, exhorts:

Let us all observe these three rules, 1. Let our hearts be filled with the word of God... 2. Let our eyes be fixed upon the word of God: Bind them for a sign upon your hand…and as frontlets between your eyes, which you cannot avoid the sight of. 3. Let our tongues be employed about the word of God, especially with our children, who must be taught this, as far more needful than the rules of decency, or the calling they are to live by.\textsuperscript{75}

To achieve this end, Wesley admonishes Christians not only to spare some time every morning and evening to meditate God’s Word, but to read a chapter out of each testament prayerfully.

Serious and earnest prayer should be constantly used, before we consult the oracles of God, seeing “scripture can only be understood thro’ the same Spirit whereby “it was given.” Our reading should likewise be closed with prayer, that what we read may be written on our hearts.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{70} “Preface of Sermon on Several Occasions,” §§5-6, \textit{Works}, 1:105-106.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{NT Notes}, on 1 Peter 2:2; on John 17:17.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{NT Notes}, on 2 Timothy 3:16.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{OT Notes}, on Deuteronomy 11:18.
Scripture reading in prayer will result in the writing of God’s Word in our heart. This would not only expose our hearts and lives for God’s examination but enable us “to know the whole will of God and to conform to His blessed will”.\(^77\) This will, in turn, help us to see perfection as nothing higher and nothing lower that the love for God and our neighbors.\(^78\)

Wesley further maintains that Christians should read the scripture with “a constant eye to the analogy of faith” because this would help us to see the “connection and harmony there is between those grand, fundamental doctrines, Original Sin, Justification by Faith, the New Birth, Inward and Outward Holiness”.\(^79\) Wesley was convinced that this would bring utter nourishment for our eschatological living.

Having seen Wesley’s devotion to the Bible, does it imply that he read no other books other than the Bible? The answer is a definite no. It does not imply that he disregarded the value of other writings but indicates firmly that the Bible “is the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion”.\(^80\) For Wesley, being steeped in biblical knowledge has no contradiction with the learning of other knowledge.

Unite the pair so long disjoin’d,
Knowledge and vital piety,
Learning and holiness combin’d,
And truth and love, let all men see
In those whom up to Thee we give,
Thine, wholly thine, to die and live.

Father, accept them in thy Son,
And ever by the Spirit guide,
Thy wisdom in their lives be shewn,
Thy name confess’d and glorified,
Thy power and love diffus’d abroad,
‘Till all the earth is fill’d with God.\(^81\)

Wesley was, in fact, a biblical theologian who was well-versed in philosophy and the metaphysical tenets of his day, but refused to preach in a philosophical or speculative


\(^{80}\) “A Plain Account of Perfection,” §5, *Works (J)*, 11:373.

way. He tested all he read in the light of Scripture. The Bible is whole. It alone is the rule of Christian faith and praxis.

2.3 Church Life

Wesley insists that Christians should relate to the church. Yet, what is church? The mature Wesley appeals to Eph. 4:1-6 and argues in his sermon “Of the Church” (1785), the first written summary of his ecclesiology, that the notion of the church should first and foremost be understood intensively. The church is “a body of people, united together in the service of God” in a certain locality. However, the notion of “Church” carries also the extensive meaning. In a broader sense, the Church means “the catholic or universal Church, that is, all the Christians under heaven”. The Church is

all the persons in the universe whom God has called to be united as one body by the one Spirit, having one Lord, one faith, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

This definition of Wesley echoes his explanation of the Kingdom of heaven earlier.

[The Kingdom of Heaven] properly signifies here, the Gospel dispensation, in which subjects were to be gathered to God by his Son, and a society to be formed, which was to subsist first on earth, and afterward with God in glory.

Logan therefore succinctly comments that “the Kingdom of Grace consists in both the sanctification of persons in this life and the forming of the community of grace, which is the church”. The church is the ark of salvation which connects both present and eternity. It encompasses “the whole body of true believers, whether on earth or in

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86 NT Notes, on Matthew 3:2.
paradise,” the church militant as well as the church triumphant. It enables Christians to journey the eschatological pilgrimage in a communal form.

Having discussed Wesley’s intensive and extensive interpretation of the notion of “Church”, we should not neglect to recognise his combining of the concept of the visible ecclesia based on the nineteenth article of the Thirty Nine Articles with the Puritan (especially Richard Baxter) notion of the coetus electorum (the gathered church). His writing in “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion” (1744) is a succinct example of this distinction:

A visible Church (as our article defines it) is a company of faithful or believing people;—coetus credentium. This is the essence of a Church; and the properties thereof are, (as they are described in the words that follow,) "among whom the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered." Now then, (according to this authentic account,) what is the Church of England? What is it indeed, but the faithful people, the true believers in England? It is true, if these are scattered abroad, they come under another consideration: But when they are visibly joined, by assembling together to hear the pure word of God preached, and to eat of one bread, and drink of one cup, they are then properly the visible Church of England.

Living faith, pure Word preached, and sacraments duly administered are the three chief marks of a gathered church. However, Wesley, who embraces a catholic spirit, also holds that he would not exclude those congregations in which the word of God may not be purely preached nor the sacraments duly administered from his extensive understanding of the church, i.e. the catholic or universal church. To him, “one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one hope, one baptism, one God, and Father of all” are the basis which constitutes the church.

David Lowes Watson rightly claims that Wesley, on the one hand, “acknowledged the validity of a gathered community, elected by God for a purpose”. On

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88 NT Notes, on Hebrews 12:22.
90 “An Earnest Appeal,”§76, Works, 11:77.
the other hand, “he did not regard as invalid the wider concept of an inclusive and visible church, reaching out to all, firmly in and of the world, a means of God’s prevenient grace”. The Church exists as a means to foster Christian sanctification as well as a means to share God’s love through works of mercy and evangelism in God’s created world. It is a context where a group of people “work out their own salvation” together and share God’s salvation in Christ to others.

Throughout his ministry, Wesley not only held these two concepts in tension, but saw this tension as the distinctiveness of the Church of England. He considered “the Church of England was closest to the early church in faith and practice”. This thus explains why Wesley tried his very best to maintain unity with the Church of England not only by attending the public worship of the local Anglican parishes himself if permitted but by sending the Methodists to these local parishes for public worship, Holy Communion, pastoral care, and nurturing. He was convinced that the Church should provide a context for these corporate practices.

(I) Public Worship and Sabbath

Based on the above mentioned convictions, Wesley emphasised the necessity for Christians to be at church, i.e. to attend the public worship at church, to partake of the Holy Communion, and to receive pastoral care.

In fellowship, alone,
To God with faith draw near;
Approach his courts, besiege his throne
With all the powers of prayer.
Go to his temple, go,
Nor from his altar move;
Let every house his worship know,
And every heart his love.

92 Watson, The Early Methodist Class Meeting, 6.
Christians are to attend the public worship even if the clergy are very little concerned for piety, justice mercy and truth. This is so for (1) “religion is a higher and deeper thing than any outward ordinance whatever”; 96 (2) the efficacy of God’s ordinances “is derived not from him that administers, but from Him that ordains it”; 97 and (3) Christian worship is due not to human beings, but to God, who is a Spirit. Christians should not refrain from attending public worship by holding to the assertion that “the ministration of unholy men can do no good”. 98 We worship to glorify God for who He is and what He does. For Wesley, the creation, the redemptive work in Christ, the sanctifying work through the Spirit, and the renewing work of God’s image in humanity and His created world till the End are all testimonies of His loving work. We are to worship Him with “the truly spiritual worship of faith, love, and holiness” 99 for this is suitable to His nature.

Those who worship God in such manner are real Christians who worship God through the way revealed by Jesus Christ. 100 Adrian Burdon noted vividly that “by participation in worship, our relationships with one another and with God will develop, faith will grow, and, by the grace of God, the way to heaven shall be found”. 101 It is through worship that we become aware that we are in God’s presence. This will enhance our growth in the love and knowledge of God and will have profound formative effects on who we are.

Our own lives are continually shaped and our affections deepened by our encounter with this God over time. As we bring our whole lives to worship God, we render our lives worshipful. This is the essential interrelation of liturgy to ethics, or, in John Wesley’s language, of acts of piety to acts of mercy. 102

99 NT Notes, on John 4:24.
Attending public worship is thus for glorification of God and the nurturing of our life of sanctification. Furthermore, attending public worship in church helps to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.\(^{103}\)

At this juncture, it is appropriate for us to examine briefly Wesley’s concept of observing Sabbath, a theme which relates closely to the life of worship yet is seldom discussed. For Wesley, the Sabbath day should be spent in the worship of God by means of repeating what we have heard in the public worship, or reading the Scripture, or in private prayer, or talking of the things of God. He comments that the Sabbath is the day as ancient as the world. This is the day when God rested after His creating works and took delight in His creatures.\(^{104}\) This is the day which He instituted and sanctified as “a memorial of the creation.”\(^{105}\) However, this is also the day which He appointed for our rest and the furtherance of our holiness, comfort, and benefit. The fact that He rested after His creation is the reason why we should rest on the Sabbath. Furthermore, the institution of the Sabbath is a symbol of God’s favour upon His people and a sign that God has sanctified His people for His service.\(^{106}\) Wesley’s arguments read:

For thy own sake, therefore, God thy Maker doeth this… For thy own sake He demands a part of thy time to be restored to Him that gave thee all. Acknowledge his love. Learn, while thou art on earth, to praise the King of Heaven. Spend this day as thou hopest to spend that day which never shall have an end. The Lord not only hallowed the Sabbath-day, but he hath also blessed it. So that you are an enemy to yourself. You throw away your own blessing, if you neglect to “keep this day holy.” It is a day of special grace.\(^{107}\)

Sabbath is the day distinct from other days. We are to honour it and to rest from our works and other pursuits in this day.\(^{108}\) We are to devote ourselves, and all that we have to God’s glory, and to worship and enjoy God in this day for this is His day.\(^{109}\)

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104 OT Notes, on Genesis 2:1-3.
105 OT Notes, on Exodus 31:13.
106 OT Notes, on Exodus 31:13.
108 OT Notes, on Deuteronomy 5:12.
109 OT Notes, on Exodus 31:15; on Leviticus 25:2.
That the sabbath of the Lord is truly honorable, and we have reason to honor it; honor it for the sake of its antiquity, its great author, and the sanctification of the first sabbath by the holy God himself, and in obedience to him, by our first parents in innocency.\textsuperscript{110}

“Six days shalt thou do all manner of work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.” It is not thine, but God’s day. He claims it for his own. He always did claim it for his own, even from the beginning of the world. “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day and hallowed it.” He hallowed it; that is, he made it holy; He reserved it for his own service. He appointed, that as long as the sun or the moon, the heavens and the earth, should endure, the children of men should spend this day in the worship of Him who “gave them life and breath and all things.”\textsuperscript{111}

Observing Sabbath will insulate us from worldly distraction and inure us to God’s love. Observing Sabbath reminds us that the whole creation belongs to God and we are to depend on Him alone for our subsistence. Observing Sabbath will help us to visualise the eschatological-eternal rest which God has prepared for us in the new heaven and new earth.\textsuperscript{112}

Consequently, misspending or breaking the Sabbath day is “a bare-faced contempt of God and his authority.”\textsuperscript{113} It will eventually lead to slackness in worship and loss of the knowledge of the Creator, the Author of the Sabbath. It is “a known and willful sin.”\textsuperscript{114} Wesley even holds that the nature of Sabbath breaking is the same as the sin of a glutton, an adulterer, a drunkard, a thief, or a profane swearer. We are, thus, to avoid from this sin and treasure the Sabbath rest.

(II) The Lord’s Supper

Wesley, who was a “son of the Church”,\textsuperscript{115} saw the main function of the Lord’s Supper is to convey God’s sanctifying grace. He thus laid great stress on receiving the Lord’s

\textsuperscript{110} OT Notes, on Genesis 2:1-3.
\textsuperscript{111} “A Word to a Sabbath Breaker,” Works (J), 11:164.
\textsuperscript{112} OT Notes, on Leviticus 25:2.
\textsuperscript{113} “A Word to a Sabbath Breaker,” Works (J), 11:166.
\textsuperscript{114} OT Notes, on Numbers 15:32.
\textsuperscript{115} Baker, John Wesley and the Church of England , 7-21.
Supper though it was “offered only quarterly in most churches”\textsuperscript{116} in eighteenth century England. This stress of his was evidenced through (1) his frequent reception of the Lord’s Supper since his return to Oxford in 1729,\textsuperscript{117} (2) his effort in publishing “The Duty of Constant Communion” for his pupils in Oxford in 1732 and the \textit{Hymns on the Lord’s Supper} for his societies’ members in 1745 respectively,\textsuperscript{118} and (3) his persistent encouragement that the Methodists should attend Holy Communion in their respective local Anglican parishes.

Wesley, using an extract on Anglican Dean Daniel Brevint’s \textit{On the Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice} as the preface of his \textit{HLS}, held that there are three functions of the Lord’s Supper: (1) as a memorial, (2) as a means of grace, and (3) as a pledge of God’s glory.\textsuperscript{119} Taken together, Wesley saw the Lord’s Supper as a means which God uses, on the one hand, to remind us of what He has done in Christ and what He is doing through the Spirit at present, and on the other hand, to assure us of what He will do in the future.\textsuperscript{120} As Daniel Stevick succinctly comments,

\begin{quote}
The Lord’s Supper sets the communicant within the panorama of divine redemption where one touches immediately the ultimate origins of salvation in the cross, the active presence now of the living Christ, and final destiny in glory.\textsuperscript{121}
\end{quote}

Wesley maintains that the Lord’s Supper (a favourite description of his for Holy Communion)\textsuperscript{122} is a sacrament to commemorate the death of Christ.\textsuperscript{123} However, Wesley, in contrast to Zwingli, maintains that the Lord’s Supper is not only a reminder of Christ’s

\textsuperscript{118} This was one of the greatest Eucharistic hymnals produced in Christian literature for (1) it contains 166 Eucharistic hymns; (2) it is composed by Charles, edited and supervised theologically by John; (3) it is a good illustration of how the theological texts and worship worked together to help form the experience of the people. De Arteaga, Forgotten power 179-80; Steven T. Hoskins, Eucharist and Eschatology in the Writings of the Wesleys (Wesleyan Theological Journal 29, No.1) (Spring-Fall 1994 [cited April 12 2007]); available from http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/26-30/29-04.htm.
\textsuperscript{119} “The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice--Extracted from Dr. Brevint,” \textsection{}II.1, in \textit{HLS}, 4.
\textsuperscript{120} Blevins, ”John Wesley and the Means of Grace”, 289.
\textsuperscript{121} Stevick, \textit{The Altar’s Fire}, 55.
\textsuperscript{122} It appeared more than 200 times in Wesley’s journal. Khoo, \textit{Wesleyan eucharistic spirituality}, 62.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{NT Notes}, on Mathew 26:2; on Mark 12:24;
death, but as Borgen comments, it “shows forth Christ death”.\textsuperscript{124} It sets the crucifixion before our eyes. What does this mean? Tucker’s explanation helps us to understand Wesley better: “At the table, the believer is transported back to the foot of the cross while simultaneously receiving in the present the benefits of the passion”.\textsuperscript{125} We experience the “hereness and nowness”\textsuperscript{126} of Christ’s crucifixion through the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper thus becomes “a remembrance that entails present”.\textsuperscript{127} It is “the means by which the effect of God’s historic redeeming act in the past is kept alive in present experience”.\textsuperscript{128} Wesley believes that every time we receive the Lord’s Supper, we encounter the presence of the Triune God in Christ. We, in fact, receive the living Christ himself.

Receiving the Bread
On JESUS we feed,
It doth not appear
His manner of working; but JESUS is here!\textsuperscript{129}

In his \textit{NT Notes}, Wesley expounds that:

\textit{We have all drunk of the Spirit}—In that cup, received by faith, we all imbibed \textit{one Spirit}, who first inspired, and still preserves, the life of God in our souls.\textsuperscript{130}

In fact, Christians receive the whole Trinity through the Lord’s Supper:

Thou hast received his body to have within the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, for to endow thee with grace, and to comfort thee with their presence.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{124} Borgen, \textit{John Wesley on the Sacraments}, 88.
\textsuperscript{126} Stevick, \textit{The Altar’s Fire}, 63.
\textsuperscript{127} Collins, \textit{The Theology of John Wesley}, 260.
\textsuperscript{129} HLS, no.92:6.
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{NT Notes}, 1 Corinthians 12:13; Borgen, \textit{John Wesley on the Sacraments}, 208 n.119.
\textsuperscript{131} “A Farther Appeal, Part 1” §IV.5, \textit{Works}, 11:137.
Since the whole Trinity is present in the Lord’s Supper, we encounter the Triune God personally whenever we receive the Lord’s Supper. In encountering God, our past, present, and future are touched.\textsuperscript{132}

Other than the function of memorial, Wesley sees the Lord’s Supper as “an effective sign—a sign that enacts what is signifies”,\textsuperscript{133} i.e. God’s grace. It is the grand channel which the Spirit uses to confer God’s grace to us.\textsuperscript{134}

The Prayer, the Fast, the Word conveys,
   When mix with Faith, thy Life to me,
In all the channels of thy Grace,
   I still have the Fellowship with Thee,
But chiefly here my Soul is fed
With Fullness of Immortal Bread.\textsuperscript{135}

He further reasons:

Is not the eating of that bread, and the drinking of that cup, the outward, visible means, whereby God conveys into our souls all that spiritual grace, that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which were purchased by the body of Christ once broken and the blood of Christ once shed for us? Let all, therefore, who truly desire the grace of God, eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.\textsuperscript{136}

Through drawing near to the Lord’s Table and receiving the Lord’s Supper, Christians experience that their needs are fed. For those who fall in sin, the Lord’s Supper is a converting and a confirming ordinance which channels remission of sins.\textsuperscript{137}

For those who are eager to grow in God’s grace, the Lord’s Supper is a means through which “we may obtain holiness on earth and everlasting glory in heaven”.\textsuperscript{138} It is a

\textsuperscript{132} Khoo, Wesleyan eucharistic spirituality, 55-62.
\textsuperscript{133} Stevick, The Altar’s Fire, 89.
\textsuperscript{135} HLS, nos. 54:4.
therapeutic sacrament whereby God channels sanctifying grace for the purgation of our sins, the healing of our human nature, and the deepening of our life of sanctification.

Growth in sanctification in and through Eucharistic piety is part of the nature of our eschatological living. Based on this conviction, Wesley rejected the word “frequent” as being too weak in comparison with “constant”.\(^\text{139}\) He stated clearly that he did not see cause to change this theological-pastoral stance which he had held since 1733 when he republished his sermon on “The Duty of Constant Communion” sermon in 1788.\(^\text{140}\) It is against this background that Wesley exhorted the Methodists to receive the Lord’s Supper constantly. He reasons:

\begin{quote}
Lose no opportunity of receiving the sacrament. All who have neglected this have suffered loss; most of them are as dead as stones: therefore be you constant herein; not only for example, but for the sake of your own souls.\(^\text{141}\)
\end{quote}

He argues in his sermon on “The Duty of Constant Communion”:

\begin{quote}
The Grace of God given herein confirms to us the pardon of our sins and enables us to leave them. As our bodies are strengthened by bread and wine, so are our souls by these tokens of the body and the blood of Christ. This is the food of our souls: This gives strength to perform our duty, and leads us on to perfection. If, therefore, we have any regard for the plain command of Christ, if we desire the pardon of our sins, if we wish for strength to believe, to love and obey God, then we should neglect no opportunity of receiving the Lord’s Supper; then we must not turn our backs on the feast which our Lord has prepared for us.\(^\text{142}\)
\end{quote}

The early Methodists heeded this advice and received the Lord’s Supper constantly for they “experienced vital and direct contact with God in the sacrament”.\(^\text{143}\)

\begin{flushleft}


\(^{141}\) Letter to the Societies at Bristol (October, 1764), \textit{Letters (T)}, 4:272.


\(^{143}\) Hoskins, \textit{Eucharist and Eschatology in the Writings of the Wesleys} ([cited])
\end{flushleft}
Through attending the Lord’s Supper, the early Methodists constantly re-examined their lives, responded in repentance and radical trust in God.\textsuperscript{144}

For Wesley, the deepening of our union with God through the Lord’s Supper leads to the preservation and feeding of our souls in His grace. This gracious sustenance and nourishment through the Lord’s Supper, in turn, brightens the hope of those who journey the eschatological pilgrimage towards the new heaven and new earth. This leads us to the discussion of another function of the Lord’s Supper, i.e. as a pledge of the glory to come.

The Lord’s Supper as a pledge of future glory links both present and future, time and eternity together. As Ole Borgen summarizes, it functions on two levels: \textsuperscript{145}(1) the right or title to Christ’s promised inheritance is actually communicated to the believers through the sacrament,\textsuperscript{146} and (2) the sacrament is a pledge from the Lord that He has prepared immeasurable blessings for us in the eternity.\textsuperscript{147} Since it is a pledge, its function is accomplished when the thing pledged, i.e. the coming of the new heaven and new earth, is realised. The Lord’s Supper will become meaningless in heaven when we see face to face the Christ whom it symbolizes.\textsuperscript{148}

In view of this, the Lord’s Supper promises us the joyous new heaven and new earth. It is a prelude which assures us of the Heavenly banquet in the new heaven and new earth as well as a symbol which nourishes us as we journey toward this heavenly destination. It is through this prelude or symbol that we are convinced that we shall feast with the risen Lord when He drinks new wine in the Kingdom of Glory.

This is the richest Legacy
    Thou hast on Man bestow’d
Here chiefly, Lord, we feed on Thee,
    And drink thy precious blood.

Here all thy Blessings we receive,

\begin{itemize}
\itemKHao, \textit{Wesleyan eucharistic spirituality}, 184.
\itemBorgen, \textit{John Wesley on the Sacraments}, 218.
\itemRattenbury, \textit{The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley}, 62. See also \textit{HLS}, 100.
\end{itemize}
Here all thy Gifts are given;
To those that would in Thee believe,
Pardon, and Grace, and Heaven.

Thus may we still in Thee be blest
‘Till all from Earth remove,
And share with Thee the Marriage-feast,
And drink the Wine above.’

Therefore, Stevick rightly comments that “the Supper brings heaven near, and it transports the communicants to heaven itself”. Participation in the Lord’s Supper is both a present experience of God’s eschatological promise and an antidote to both antinomianism and perfectionism. It shapes our eschatological living, deepens our expectation of God’s renewing work, assures us indeed that God will keep His eschatological promise, and affirms our courage in continuing our journey towards the new heaven and new earth.

2.4 Christian Conversation

Wesley has a high regard for Christian conference. Christian conference here does not refer to those whom Wesley invited annually to confer with, but Christian conversations which a Christian has with others for the benefit of his/her soul. Christian conversation which is intermixed with reading, meditation and prayer is a means of learning and growth in Christian faith. It would heal our souls and enhance our growth in grace. Already in his years in Oxford, Wesley saw conversation as a means of grace. In a letter to his mother, he wrote about his effort in combining reading and conversation to teach the law of Christ to new converts. When they appeared seriously sensible to this teaching, Wesley encouraged them to use other means of grace to deepen their Christian growth.

Seeing the benefits which Christian conversations produce, Wesley selected friends who thirsted for holiness as conversation partners, exhorted the leaders of

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149 HLS, 42:4-6.
151 “Thoughts upon Some Late Occurrences,” §4, Works (J), 13:248; “Of Separation from the Church,” §6, Works (J), 13:256.
152 Letter to Elizabeth Ritchie (Nov. 29, 1774), Letters (T), 6:126.
Methodist societies to prevent religious gossiping among the Methodists,\textsuperscript{154} and encouraged his followers to select conversation partners.\textsuperscript{155} This leads us to a brief examination of the relationship between Christian conversation and Christian connection, a conviction which undergirds Wesley’s pastoral ministry. For Wesley, the nature of Christianity as a social religion has shaped his pastoral conviction that the close association of Christians with one another is an important means to facilitate Christian conversations and nurture Christian sanctification. Christian connection is necessary because Wesley believed that Christianity could not subsist at all “without society, without living and conversing with other men”.\textsuperscript{156} This explains why Wesley in his old age wrote to Frances Godfrey: “It is a blessed thing to have fellow travellers to the New Jerusalem”.\textsuperscript{157} Wesley firmly believed that Christians should find or make these fellow travellers for none can travel this eschatological journey alone. This is one of the chief reasons why he formulated the prudential system of societies/bands/classes.

3. Nurturing through the Prudential Means

3.1 The Nature of Prudential Means

As briefly discussed above, Wesley considered prudential means of grace as means which God provided for the particular contextual needs of Wesley’s age. They are not commanded by Christ but, are “grounded on reason and experience to apply the general rules given in Scripture according to particular circumstances”.\textsuperscript{158} As Horst notes, they “seem consistent with the aim of those instituted.”\textsuperscript{159} In other words, their role is to supplement or complement the instituted means and to provide the ethos, structure, and parameters through which the greatest advances in grace can be realised in a particular

\textsuperscript{154} Letter to Philothea Briggs (June 20, 1772), \textit{Letters (T)}, 5:323-24.
\textsuperscript{155} Letter to the Reverend John Fletcher (March 20, 1768), \textit{Letters (T)}, 5:82-85.
\textsuperscript{156} Sermon 24, “SM-IV,” §I.1, \textit{Works}, 1:533-34.
\textsuperscript{157} Letter to Frances Godfrey (August 2, 1789), \textit{Letters (T)}, 8:158.
\textsuperscript{158} “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” §VI.7, \textit{Works}, 9:268. Hereafter abbreviated as “A Plain Account of the Methodists”.
\textsuperscript{159} Horst, “Christian Understanding and the Life of Faith”, 206.
context. Hence, they may change according to common needs and circumstances. Wesley’s classification of different means for various groups is a vivid example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Christians</th>
<th>What rules are you follow to avoid evil and do good? To grow in grace?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methodists</td>
<td>Do you use the means of meeting regularly in the ‘classes’ or ‘bands’?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preachers</td>
<td>Are you diligent in meeting with the societies?—visiting the sick and instructing masters and parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistants</td>
<td>Are the societies properly administered, and watch nights and love feasts held regularly?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For many of his contemporaries, Wesley’s classification of prudential means is something extraordinary. When challenged, Wesley contended that they are not against Scriptural teaching. Furthermore, the ineffectiveness of the ministry of word, the improper administration of the ministry of sacraments in many churches of his time, and the rejections which the early Methodists faced are facts which Wesley could not ignore. Therefore, the innovation of societies/bands/classes was Wesley’s effort to come to terms with the Methodists’ rising needs in the midst of the shallowness of pastoral ministry. It did not mean to undermine the public worship in the Anglican parishes, but to supplement it. This was a realization of the idea of the prudential means of grace which was in Wesley’s mind as early as 1731.

Wesley considered that his innovation of societies/bands/classes system was not only providing a space in which the converts found acceptance and new dignity, but also a disciplinary system of prayer, worship, study, and care which provided mutual

161 “Large Minutes,” Q 48, Works (J), 8:322-23.
162 “A Plain Account of the Methodists,” §II.10, Works, 9:263.
163 Whitefield and Wesley united the Nicholas and Baldwin Street Societies. This united society met at New Room. The uniting of these societies was of exceptional importance in the life of Wesley. It marked the beginning of his movement as an organized entity. This, however, he did not call Methodism, but the United Society. Dallimore, George Whitefield , 1:389.
sustenance and accountability for the converts. It was an effective means of nurturing Christians for his age, especially those who were moved by the Methodists’ revival preaching, and for “guarding” the Methodist movement. As a matter of fact, this nurturing system of societies/bands developed independently of the Fetter Lane’s Moravians on July 16th 1740 following his failure to reach doctrinal agreement with Molther. This marked the new milestone of Wesley’s emphases on nurturing and discipling for his converts.

Later in 1742, the class meeting became another element of this nurturing and discipling system, which taken as a whole is called United Society. Wesley saw in it, not only “a renewing force within the Church of England, committed to proving in experience what the church professed in doctrine,” but also a key way to spread scriptural holiness across the land.

This conviction was further intensified after he witnessed the destruction experienced by the new converts at Tansfield, not far from Newcastle, due to the ineffectiveness of the Church and his negligence of follow up.

From the terrible instances I met with there (and indeed in all parts of England), I am more and more convinced that the devil himself desires nothing more than that the people of any place should be half-awakened and then left to themselves to fall asleep again. Therefore I determine, by the grace of God, not to strike one stroke in any place where I cannot follow the blow.

How did Wesley follow the blow which he had struck? His primary approach was to nurture through societies, bands, and classes As the Methodist revival movement grew, he became increasingly convinced that this nurturing system was a ministerial complement for his field-preaching. It was through this complementary combination that

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169 Snyder, The Radical Wesley , 49.
he saw his audience grow from stage to stage through *via salutis*, i.e. from awakening to conviction of sins, from conviction of sins to justification, and from justification to sanctification. His other efforts of nurturing, e.g. edition of hymns, correspondence and publications, surrounded this ministerial combination.

Furthermore, Wesley saw in the societies/bands/classes meetings a supporting system for Christians who suffer persecution, or loss of friends, business, and employment due to their commitment in Christian faith. In the midst of challenges and difficulties, Christians experience the comforting foretaste of the new heaven and new earth in these meetings. They found their faith maintained and nourished through these societies/bands/classes’ meetings apart from their disciplines of worship and participation in the Lord’s Supper in a church context. This thus leads Maddox to comment aptly that “Wesley’s ecclesiological interconnection of intentional small groups (ecclesiolae) and the worship of the larger church (ecclesia) is a central aspect of his dynamic conception of the means of grace”.

3.2 Prudential Means of Grace and Theological Accountability

Since the prudential means may vary according to needs and circumstances, the crucial questions will be: (1) Are these means valid as means of grace? (2) Was Wesley’s innovation of prudential means an attempt of mere pragmatism? (3) Is it an attempt to destroy the fellowship of the Church of England? (4) Was Wesley theologically accountable enough to consider those which are conducive to holiness and love becomes prudential means?

In replying to the objection or complaint about the changes or variations, Wesley argues that changes or variations provide a peculiar advantage which prevents this nurturing system from becoming a mere formalism. He maintains:

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By this means we declare them all to be merely prudential, not essential, not of divine institution. We prevent, so far as in us lies, their growing formal or dead. We are always open to instruction; willing to be wiser every day than we were before, and to change whatever we can change for the better.\(^{173}\)

Though the prudential means were attacked as lacking of “the same measure of scriptural warrant as the instituted means of grace,”\(^{174}\) Wesley insists that they are consistent with Scriptural teaching because evangelistic and nurturing function are realised through them. Taken as a whole, the instituted and prudential means of grace are all means through which God channels grace for the healing of our \textit{imago dei} and the deepening of our eschatological living. Christians should attend to all these means.

When being charged with destroying the fellowship of the Church of England, Wesley appeals to the precedent of the early church and declares that fellowship in bands/classes and societies “is the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity”.\(^{175}\) He further claims that this was a responsible means to offer pastoral care for people under his nurturing responsibility.

If it be said, “But there are some true Christians in the parish, and you destroy the Christian fellowship between these and them; “I answer, That which never existed, cannot be destroyed. But the fellowship you speak of never existed. Therefore it cannot be destroyed. Which of those true Christians had any such fellowship with these? Who watched over them in love? Who marked their growth in grace? Who advised and exhorted them from time to time? Who prayed with them and for them, as they had need? This, and this alone, is Christian fellowship: But, alas! where is it to be found? Look east or west, north or south; name what parish you please: Is this Christian fellowship there? Rather, are not the bulk of the parishioners a mere rope of sand...What a mere jest is it then, to talk so gravely of destroying what never was! The real truth is just the reverse of this: We introduce Christian fellowship where it was utterly destroyed. And the fruits of it have been peace, joy, love, and zeal for every good word and work.\(^{176}\)

The above response shows that Wesley was, on the one hand, sensitive to the needs of his ministerial context. On the other hand, he reflected upon these needs on the


basis of the inherited practice of the early church. The concrete needs of his ministerial context were closely related to his reflection of Christian tradition. His pastoral reflection and innovation thus was undergirded with a substantial theological foundation. This is the substance of Wesley’s notion of practical divinity.\textsuperscript{177} As Thomas Langford rightly remarks, Wesley

refused to draw sharp divisions between theory and practice; each influenced the other—practice shaped theory as much as theory shaped practice.\textsuperscript{178}

Indeed, Wesley observed and thought theologically, preached and taught theologically, discussed and wrote theologically, and even strategized and managed the prudential means theologically. The whole ecclesiological structure of Methodism, which includes its bands, classes and love feasts, its itinerant and local preachers, and its hymns and publication, was undergirded with sound theological reflection.

With regards to theological accountability, we should first understand Wesley’s conception of the purpose of theological activity. Throughout his ministry, Wesley has “little interest in theology for its own sake”.\textsuperscript{179} What concerned him was a theology which relates closely to Christian living and the proclamation of Christian faith. His chief theological deposit, namely his homilies, reflects this theological style.

From his homilies, the “Doctrinal Minutes’ and the “Large Minutes”, we observe the substantial theological foundation that underpins his practical and pastoral reflection. Hence, Thomas Langford’s critical appraisal of Wesley’s theological accountability is appropriate:

Wesley’s practical theology was not reducible to applicability, accommodation, or sheer pragmatism. Rather, it had to do with substantial theology being related to concrete life…Gospel and Christian life were both necessary (as Wesley’s faith and works dynamic affirmed); each helped form the other.\textsuperscript{180}

\textsuperscript{178} Langford, “John Wesley and Theological Method,” 37.
\textsuperscript{179} Langford, “John Wesley and Theological Method,” 35.
\textsuperscript{180} Langford, ”John Wesley and Theological Method,” 37.
As such, we may conclude that Wesley’s efforts in developing prudential means of grace are not mere pragmatism, nor even “inspired pragmatism,” as John Munsey Turner comments, but a sensitive pastoral response with sound theological reflection. It was a responsible theological-pastoral response to the needs of his age.

3.3 Societies/Bands and Classes

(I) Societies’ Meetings

In “A Plain Account of the People called Methodists” (1748), Wesley recalled that the Methodist society was organized as his response to the growing needs of those in London who looked for his pastoral nurturing as early as 1738. As he could not visit them personally, Wesley, who was familiar with the life of Anglican religious societies, told them to come together every Thursday evening for pastoral care and discipleship. This eventually became the genesis of the United Societies. He comments:

Thus arose, without any previous design on either side, what was afterwards called a Society; a very innocent name, and very common in London, for any number of people associating themselves together. The thing proposed in their associating themselves together was obvious to every one. They wanted to "flee from the wrath to come," and to assist each other in so doing. They therefore united themselves "in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they might help each other to work out their salvation."  

Wesley considers that this gathering of the converts “is the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity.” It resembled the existing religious societies common among the Church of England, as well as the Pietist.

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182 “A Plain Account of the Methodists,” §1.7, Works, 9:256.
183 “A Plain Account of the Methodists,” §1.10, Works, 9:258.
184 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists , 21.
As similar needs arose following his field preaching at Bristol in 1739, Wesley did the same by organizing societies for his converts “with the help of existing religious societies”. The only condition for admittance into these societies, which were not yet distinguished as “Methodist”, is eschatological—“a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins”.

(II) Bands’ Gatherings

As Frank Baker noted, Wesley’s enthusiasm in introducing bands’ gatherings to the religious societies in London, including the Fetter Lane Society, was mainly indebted to his learning experience from the system of “bands” in Herrnhut. When he saw the needs of nurturing his new converts in Bristol, he followed the Moravians’ model and organized those who had the assurance of justifying faith and wanted a more intimate form of fellowship and accountability into bands of five to ten, by age, sex, and marital status. By restricting its membership, Wesley saw bands’ gatherings as confessional units and spiritual cells structured for closer union, intensive exchange, nurturing of continuing faith and perfection fostering. This careful subdivision of the larger society which allows for the highest possible degree of openness and candor was the unique element which Heitzenrater described as “more distinctively Wesleyan than the societies as a whole”.

To enhance the effectiveness of these bands meetings, Wesley drew up the “Rules of the Band Societies” (25 Dec. 1738), a modification of the Fetter Lane Society rules which stresses the quality which the Moravian system of monitors lack of, i.e.

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185 Watson reasons that these religious societies not only provided a number of precedents for Methodism; initially they were its immediate context. Wesley was indebted to them in many instances for the incipient structure of his own organization, for they often were receptive to his evangelical message when parish clergy were not, and they provided the first Methodist societies with an important nucleus of membership. By gathering together his converts into society, Wesley, in fact, stood in the tradition of Anglican religious societies. The main difference between the Methodist society and Anglican religious societies was that the former were under Wesley’s direct supervision. Watson, The Early Methodist Class Meeting, 74, 85.

186 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 103.


188 Baker, John Wesley and the Church of England, 141.


190 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 104.
mutual confession and accountability. These “Rules” give us a glimpse of the nature of a band’s gathering.\footnote{“Rules of the Band Societies,” Works, 9:77.}

The design of our meeting is, to obey that command of God, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.” To this end, we intend,—

1. To meet once a week, at the least.
2. To come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason.
3. To begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour, with singing or prayer.
4. To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt, since our last meeting.
5. To end every meeting with prayer, suited to the state of each person present.
6. To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations.

To achieve the objective of searching each other responsibly, Wesley followed James 5 and proposed fifteen questions which asked of band members as to their state, temptations faced, and sins committed. Out of which, five of them must be asked in every gathering.\footnote{“Rules of the Band Societies,” Works, 9:77. The fifth question is dropped from the later editions, beginning about 1779 or 1780.}

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

To this end, band members were to attend a weekly band meeting apart from the general society meetings and the quarterly visitations. Knight III rightly observes that through the process of questions and answers, band leaders and members “endeavoured together to discern “the more hidden aspects of the dissipated life” and find ways to deal...
with them. Holistic healing is thus possible to realise in and through the discipline of mutual confession and mutual encouragement.

Later Wesley supplemented the “Rules” with the Directions Given to the Band Societies (1744). Following the “Rules” and the “Directions”, band members, as Watson notes, were “subjected to a more rigorous disciplinary oversight than the classes”.

Wesley developed this approach further in organizing Select Bands for those who spent more effort to press after perfection. He considered this group as not only a pattern of love, of holiness, and of good works to other members, but a select company, to whom he could share himself on all occasions without reserve.

He laid down rules beyond the Directions Given to the Band Societies for these Select Bands: (1) Confidentiality--let nothing spoken in this society be spoken again; no, not even to the members of it. (2) Obedience--every member agrees absolutely to submit to his Minister in all indifferent things. (3) Contributions--every member, till we can have all things common, will bring once a week, bona fide, all he can spare towards a common stock. This presents not only Wesley’s idea of a true community of goods among those who live out the value of the Kingdom of Heaven, but links his effort of nurturing them to his emphasis of solidarity with the poor which we shall discuss in the next chapter.

At this point, we may conclude that these various bands’ gatherings were a pastoral context where Wesley attempted to test and realise his theological conviction of pressing after perfection. It is a means by which he hoped to see his vision of eschatological living being nourished and strengthened.

194 Watson, The Early Methodist Class Meeting, 117.
(III) Class Meetings

Originally, the genesis of classes was to help in collecting the weekly subscriptions for the releasing of the debt of Bristol’s New Room chapel in early 1742. Leaders were appointed to collect weekly contributions to be handed to the stewards toward the debt for the chapel. When Wesley saw the advantage of this system, he not only made the classes as “the backbone of the Methodist financial system” to support the travelling preachers and poor, but he also instructed the leaders to “watch over the souls of their brethren”. This evolved to become classes of about twelve persons formed around appointed leaders in their respective dwelling areas. As such, the classes were different from bands in terms of size. Furthermore, they were divided by geographical orientation rather than age, sex, or marital status. Wesley saw in the class meetings the realisation of biblical and primitive church life and a bridge for the gap between bands’ gatherings and societies’ meetings. Wesley thus introduced them at the Foundry Society in London two months later and they eventually became the “the sinews of the Methodism” by 1746.

Wesley maintained that the desire for salvation, attendance at the weekly class meeting, and adherence to the 1743 codified General Rules are the key prerequisites for one to be admitted as a trial member of a class. What were these General Rules which Watson describes as “the dynamic catechesis in the classes”? For Wesley, this is a set of rule of life which is oriented to social context. It emphasises “doing no harm, and avoiding evil of every kind; doing good, and attending upon the ordinances of God”. It was understood as an edifying framework which provides structural guidance and support for the deepening of Christian repentance as well as a means by which God channels His sanctifying grace for the furtherance of holiness of heart and life. It could

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198 Snyder, The Radical Wesley, 55.
200 This is a phrase used by Watson. Watson, The Early Methodist Class Meeting, 93. See also Evelyn Douglas Bebb, Wesley, a Man with a Concern (London: Epworth Press, 1950), 126-29; John S. Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies (London: Epworth Press, 1923), 312.
202 Watson, The Early Methodist Class Meeting, 152.
thus be seen as the symbolic mark of the nurturing process of the people called Methodists and “the antithesis to antinomianism”.204

As normal practice, a trial member will be nurtured in and nurtured through class meetings for a period of three months before admittance into a Methodist society. In other words, membership in class meeting is compulsory in the Methodist infrastructure, whereas membership in band meeting is voluntary. Through this membership compulsion, Wesley saw the realization of his theological conviction and pastoral vision of “working out our own salvation”.

In a weekly class meeting, members met around the class leader to account for their weekly development.205 The discipline of accounting enables the class members to see clearly the fact that they “stood together before God as both sinners and as those promised new life”.206 It allows them to experience that they are on a common journey of experiencing God’s forgiveness and mutual support towards holiness. This not only enables the class members to rediscover their personal and social identity, but enforces the good habits of spiritual discernment, practical discipleship, mutual shaping and Christian formation. In turn, it became a key feature of spiritual discipline. Wesley notes:

It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to "bear one another's burdens," and naturally to "care for each other." As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other. And "speaking the truth in love, they grew up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, increased unto the edifying itself in love."207

It was exactly at this point that Wesley saw himself as differing from George Whitefield who failed either to provide spiritual discipline for his converts or form them into societies. He criticises:

204 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 139.
205 An example of class meeting catechesis, see Watson, The Early Methodist Class Meeting, 111-115.
207 “A Plain Account of the Methodists,” §II.7, Works, 9:262.
Those who were more or less affected by Mr. Whitefield’s preaching had no discipline at all. They had no shadow of discipline…They had no Christian connexion with each other, nor were ever taught to watch over each other’s souls. So that if any fell into lukewarmness, or even into sin, he had none to lift them up: He might fall lower and lower, yea, into hell, if he would: for who regarded it?

Class meetings were an edifying context for Christians to engage in Christian conversations, to nurture social holiness, to live out the spirit of Christian connection, and to “travel hand in hand to heaven!”

Let us join (tis God commands),
Let us join our hearts and hands;
Help to gain our calling’s hope,
Build we each the other up.
God his blessing shall dispense,
God shall crown his ordinance,
Meet in his appointed ways,
Nourish us with social grace.

Let us then as brethren love,
Faithfully his gifts improve,
Carry on the earnest strife,
Walk in holiness of life.
Still forget the things behind,
Follow Christ in heart and mind;
Toward the mark unwearied press,
Seize the crown of righteousness.

Class meetings with clear objectives are essential for both Christians’ growth and Church’s life. They are “excellent spiritual help” for those who desire seriously to be nurtured in Christian sanctification. This approach makes the weekly class meeting “the cornerstone of the whole edifice” where Christians’ eschatological living is nourished and formed.

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209 For Wesley, no-one can be a Christian on his/her own. Nurturing social holiness here refers to the fact that as fellow-Christians who bound together in Christ, we should build each other up through a healthy ecclesiastical context.
213 Snyder, The Radical Wesley, 54.
Hence Colin Williams comments insightfully that:

Wesley’s view of holiness was woven into his ecclesiology...Wesley believed that his class meetings represented the genius of primitive Christianity and that God had given him a vision of the way in which these ecclesiolae could be the means of spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land.\(^{214}\)

Wesley further holds that members of the classes/societies should evidence holiness themselves through living out the following marks: (1) avoiding all known sin; (2) doing good after their power; and (3) attending all the ordinances of God.\(^{215}\) He was convinced that these marks are an expression of Christian life which is rooted in the Kingdom of Heaven. They are the antithesis of the marks of a worldly life. Eschatological living with these marks is of importance for Christian witness especially in a context which is hostile to the Christian message.

To assist the members to live out these marks, he began to issue membership tickets, a letter of commendation as in the early Christian sense, beginning from February 1741, to class members in Bristol and Kingswood. He introduced this in London in April 1742.\(^{216}\) To ensure its effect, he also instituted a quarterly examination of the class by himself or one of his preachers. He would not renew these tickets for those who grew lax in discipline and did not attend the weekly class meeting regularly. As we see from Wesley’s stern advice to Joseph Benson in 1776:

We must threaten no longer, but perform. In November last I told the London Society, “Our rule is to meet a class once a week, not one in two or three. I now give you warning: I will give tickets to none in February but those that have done this.” I have stood to my word. Go you and do likewise wherever you visit the classes.\(^{217}\)

Without these tickets, disordered members were removed from the love feast for the next quarter in a quiet and inoffensive manner.\(^{218}\)

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\(^{218}\) The general rule, though unwritten, was that three consecutive absences constituted self-expulsion from a class. Wesley, Mar. 9-10, 12, 1747, *Journals and Diaries III, in Works*, 20:162-63; Letter to the Societies at Bristol (October, 1764), *Letters (T)*, 4:273; Letter to William Holmes (February 18, 1788), *Letters (T)*.
The combination of the issuance of class tickets and quarterly examination was, therefore, on the one hand, a disciplinary tool to guard against “disorderly walker”, and an important symbol of identity through which a class member is admitted to the quarterly love feast and covenant services, on the other. This proved to be an effective means to regulate discipline and nourish spiritual growth.

Furthermore, this quarterly examination was an important means for (1) Wesley or his preachers to improve the class and band leaders’ performance in caring for the souls of their brethren; and (2) Wesley to mentor his preachers on their supervision of the class and band leaders.

In comparison with band gatherings which we discussed earlier, the class meeting was less rigid. However, this does not mean that it was less obligatory. As discussed above, the centrality of the class leader, the practice of giving an account, the issuance of class tickets, and the quarterly examination are the characteristics of class disciplines. The growth of members and circuits proved the effectiveness of class’ disciplines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Circuits</th>
<th>Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1768</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27,341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1788</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>66,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1798</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>101,712</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 *Annual Conferences*

Annual Conference, the first of which was held in August 1743 in London, was a means Wesley used to mentor the nation-wide “Connexion” of Methodist circuits. Those who

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220 Snyder thus argues that this is a proof that membership in the class constituted membership in the Methodist society, not vice versa. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 57.

221 Bebb, *Wesley, a Man with a Concern*, 121-22.
attend these annual conferences were the assistants, travelling preachers, and other co-workers whom Wesley invited personally. The key purpose of the annual conference was to discuss and work through the regulation of Methodist doctrine, discipline, and practice within the Methodist revival movement. At this point, we should ask: “What is the relationship between the annual conference and eschatological living?” At first sight, it seems there is no direct relationship. However, if we see from the perspective that the Annual Conference is central a place where Wesley discussed and delineated his doctrinal convictions and pastoral tenets with his co-workers, it has important implications for eschatological living. Wesley was convinced that right doctrines will lead to responsible eschatological living.

The 1744 annual conference was a notable example because Wesley and those who attended spent one entire day (June 25th) conferring on the doctrine of justification by faith and a second day solely on the doctrine of sanctification. It laid the foundation of the key teachings which shape the Methodist understanding of eschatological living. Since 1745, the annual practice of Conference was established. This created a place where Wesley discussed Methodist polity and discipline with his ministry colleagues for the stable realization of the vision of eschatological living within the context of Methodist revival in the eighteenth century.

3.5 Love Feasts/ Watch-nights/Covenant Services

From the nurturing system of bands/classes/societies/conferences sprang another nurturing institution, namely the love feasts, watch nights, and covenant services. The tradition of love feast can be traced back to the Agape meal of the early church. Karen Westerfield Tucker pointed out that this practice was revived by certain Separatists, Baptists, and Anabaptists during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Wesley was exposed to the Moravians renovation of this practice at Savannah, Georgia, in 1737, and at the Moravian community of Herrnhut in 1738 and was convinced that it is a valuable means to foster Christian fellowship and to reinforce Christian growth. He introduced this practice into the Fetter Lane Society which he helped to found in 1738. When he

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223 Tucker, American Methodist Worship, 61.
224 Tucker, American Methodist Worship, 61.
broke with the Fetter Lane Society, he continued the practice of love feasts in the Methodist societies. Initially, attendance was limited to bands’ members with membership ticket. Eventually, members of the classes with good standing were allowed to attend. During the love-feast which was normally held on Sunday evenings and overseen by Wesley’s appointed assistants, those who presented prayed for each other, in particular for the faults which they had confessed, received healing, were strengthened in faith and love, and conquered temptations. Wesley saw in this monthly or quarterly love feast another prudential means by which his followers could be nourished. It thus became a distinctive practice of the Methodist societies.

Other than love-feasts, the Methodist watch-night, which Wesley derived from the Moravian’s practice, was developed around 1740 for the Methodist societies in Kingswood. Later, this spread to Bristol, Newcastle, and London, where the first watch night was kept on April 9, 1742. A watch-night service was normally held on a Friday night, or at the end of a Conference, or on New Year’s Eve. The service “begins at half past eight, and continues till a little after midnight”. Praying, singing hymns, praising God, rejoicing in God’s presence, and listening to the preached message are the key features of a watch-night service.

Experiences of God’s presence and His providence were common in these services so that all would stay until the service ended. These experiences were so overwhelming that Wesley used different descriptions to illustrate: “my voice was lost in the cries of the people”, “prayer was lost in praise and thanksgiving”, and “great
was the Holy One of Israel in the midst of us”. Over the years, the watch-night services have proved to be a means which the Methodists were renewed and nurtured. It was a means which Wesley treasured till the end of his life.

The Covenant Service which Wesley emphasized was a practice derived partly from the English Puritan Joseph Alleine and partly from Richard Alleine. It was held on the first Sunday of the year, meant for covenant renewal, and “usually concluded with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper”. Through covenant services, Methodists confessed their failures, experienced God’s forgiveness and faithfulness. In turn, they were empowered to restore their relationship with God, with self, with others, and became resolved to live responsibly.

3.6 Hymns

In addition to preaching and caring through bands/classes/societies meetings, Wesley also made use of hymns and hymn singing to transmit his theological ideas and pastoral care in accessible language. Hymn singing is a means for Christians to be formed in scripture and doctrine and to articulate their spiritual experiences. David Hempton aptly observes that Wesley “reached deep into the will and the emotions of the believers through meter, rhyme, and melody”.

Knowing the importance of hymns, Wesley translated some German hymns, edited hymns which were written by Charles Wesley and then published them from 1739 alongside scores of sermons and tracts. These hymns, on the one hand, show the development of Wesley’s theological world. On the other, they served as important guides for the Methodists to grow in via salutis.

The first of these volumes, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739) focused on the fact that being filled with the sanctifying Spirit was the central biblical promise and the

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privilege of all believers striving against inward sin. The second and third volumes, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (Spring 1740 and 1742) showed the further development of Wesley’s theology since 1739. The preface to these hymns recorded in the first volume describes Wesley’s view of sanctification in our salvific journey. Later, this became the centrepiece of Wesley’s *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.

The vision of teaching scriptural holiness to the Methodists and thus enriching their worship and their love for God motivated Wesley to publish his own *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* in 1745. The *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, as the *Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* which he published in the same year, aimed at “both deepening wonder at the sacrifice of Christ and strengthening faith in the sanctifying power that flowed from it through the Holy Spirit.”

Through the availability of these editions, hymn singing became one of the most distinctive marks of Wesley’s Methodism. “They supplied a poetic music of the heart for a religion of the heart”. They were widely used, in private and in public, until *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists*, the one single artefact which captures the essence of Methodism, was published by John Wesley in 1780.

For Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns* contains the key doctrines which he taught throughout his life. These key doctrines were arranged according to Wesley’s *via salutis*, i.e. exhortation to return to God and to know God, the nature of true (inward) religion, calling for believers with faith of different degrees, and hymns for the society meeting. With these arrangements, Wesley was convinced that *A Collection* is “a little body of experimental and practical divinity” which contains

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all the important truths of our most holy religion, whether speculative or practical; yea to illustrate them all, and to prove them both by Scripture and reason.245

As such, *A Collection* is a means by which Wesley’s doctrines touch the heart of the singers.246 It is “a means of raising or quickening the spirit of devotion, of confirming his faith, of enlivening his hope, and of kindling or increasing his love to God and man” 247

### 3.7 Correspondence

To those whom he couldn’t meet personally, Wesley offered pastoral nurturing through personal letters. The key purpose of his correspondence was to encourage the recipients to grow in sanctification. His letter to the Rev. Samuel Walker succinctly expresses this point:

> I have one point in view—to promote, so far as I am able, vital, practical religion: by the Grace of God to beget, preserve, and increase the life of God in the Souls of men.248

To achieve this purpose, he not only helped his inquirers to diagnose their spiritual condition, but also prescribed various religious exercises:

> It might be of use if you were to read over the first volume of *Sermons* seriously and with prayer. Indeed, nothing will avail without prayer. Pray, whether you can or not. When you are cheerful, when you are heavy. Pray: with many or few words, or none at all: You will surely find an answer of peace. And why not now? 249

Though Wesley’s ministerial target was the ordinary folks, he never neglected the needs of his converts which were of higher social standing. His letter to D’Arcy, Lady

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Maxwell, was an example. Soon after she had decided to join the Methodist society, Wesley encouraged her to persist in her growth and not to be put off by semi-Christians.

Do not mind them who endeavour to hold Christ in one hand and the world in the other. I want you to be all a Christian; such a Christian as the Marquis de Rentry or Gregory Lopez was; such an one as that saint of God, Jane Cooper, all sweetness, all gentleness, all love.\textsuperscript{250}

Furthermore, he also nurtured his band/class/society leaders, preachers and assistants through his personal letters. Since the assistants, preachers in administrative control of the circuits, were of key importance to the Methodist movement, Wesley made it a point to write to them each winter.\textsuperscript{251} His letter to Alexander Coates is an example:

Practical Religion is your point; therefore...keep to this: repentance towards God, faith in Christ, holiness of heart and life, a growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, the continual need of His atoning blood, a constant confidence in Him, and all these every moment to our life’s end.\textsuperscript{252}

Holy living in the light of the final End was the lifelong heartbeat of Wesley. It was so dear to him that he wrote to his nephew Samuel a few months before his death and urged the latter:

I fear you want (what you least of all suspect) the greatest things of all-Religion. I do not mean external religion, but the religion of the heart-the religion which Kempis, Pascal, Fenelon enjoyed: The life of God in the soul of man; the walking with God, and having fellowship with the Father and the Son...You are called to know and love the God of Glory: to live in eternity, to walk in eternity: to live the life which is hid with Christ in God. Hearken to the advice of one that stands on the edge of eternity.\textsuperscript{253}

Exhortation for responsible eschatological living through correspondence proved to be effective especially because of Wesley’s constant travelling. Furthermore, correspondence allowed him to establish a lasting personal relationship, either in the capacity of spiritual director-directees or in mutual guidance, with those whom he corresponded. This protected him from being misinterpreted as violating Christian

\textsuperscript{250} Letter to Lady Maxwell (September 22, 1764), \textit{Letters (T)}: 4:263-64.
\textsuperscript{252} Letter to Alexander Coates (July 7, 1761), \textit{Letters (T)}, 4:159.
\textsuperscript{253} Letter to Samuel Wesley (April 29, 1790), \textit{Letters (T)}, 8:218.
propriety were these correspondences to be carried out in the form of long individual
counselling or conversation sessions.\textsuperscript{254}

3.8 \textbf{Publications}

Other than the mentioned nurturing means, Wesley also published literature to defend, to
develop, to clarify, to guide and to teach the doctrines which he deemed appropriate for
advancement of scriptural holiness and the nurturing of eschatological living. His
published sermons, which were parallel to the Book of Homilies and early Christian
catechetical sermons, were his chief theological deposit. Through these sermons, Wesley
taught his conception of \textit{via salutis}, “the essentials of true religion”,\textsuperscript{255} and the sprawling
theological issues relating to eschatological living. They are Wesley’s key published
means for nurturing and education.

\textit{Explanatory Notes upon New Testament} was another important form of Wesley’s
theological effort. The main purpose of this work was to provide the exegetical basis for
Methodist leaders to delineate their doctrinal positions in controversy with Calvinism,
Antinomianism, and to a limited extent, Roman Catholicism. As John Lawson described,
it is a book of doctrine and a practical guide to the preachers.\textsuperscript{256} Together with the
\textit{Standard Sermons, Explanatory Notes upon New Testament} serve as \textit{theological boundaries}
for the personal nurturing as well as preaching ministry of the Methodist
preachers.\textsuperscript{257}

Besides, Wesley’s occasional open letters or theological treatises, e.g. \textit{An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, the Doctrine of Original Sin}\textsuperscript{258} presented
his theological thoughts spawned by the needs and controversies, e.g. predestination,
antinomianism, and enthusiasm, as the revival movement developed. These letters or

\textsuperscript{254} Wesley D. Tracy, \textit{John Wesley, Spiritual Director: Spiritual Guidance in Wesley's Letters [Letters to
Anne Bolton]} (Wesleyan Theological Journal 23, no. 1 and 2) (Spring-Fall 1988 [cited August 15 2007]);
\textsuperscript{255} “Preface-Sermons on Several Occasions,” §1, \textit{Works}, 1:103.
\textsuperscript{256} John Lawson, \textit{Selections from John Wesley's Notes on the New Testament} (London: Epworth Press,
1955), 10.
\textsuperscript{257} Heitzenrater, \textit{Mirror and Memory}, 179.
treatises served to complement Wesley’s published sermons, *Notes,* and *Hymns* in nurturing the Methodists.

Other than the above published materials, Wesley also abridged, extracted, and translated a wide range of devotional works for his edition of *Christian Library.* This edition, which contained a number of patristic and continental writings, introduces exemplary lives of different Christians in Church history and describes various spiritual exercises. Wesley was convinced that it is a resource, on the one hand, towards nurturing Christians to counter complacency, formalism, and enthusiasm, and on the other hand, towards motivating Christians to persevere in their journey towards the new heaven and new earth.

**Summary**

As discussed in previous chapters, Wesley sees growth in sanctification in the light of the new heaven and new earth as the teleological-eschatological goal for all real Christians. At the same time, he also knows clearly that this goal could only be realized through God’s grace. Yet how do Christians receive this grace of God? Wesley was convinced that it is through the means of grace that God channels His grace though He could do so without any means. In his own ministry context, Wesley attempted to formulate a strong regulative system of prudential means, especially societies/bands/classes meetings besides treasuring the instituted means. Taken together, both the prudential and instituted means laid a base for the communal, devotional, and liturgical nourishment and growth for the Methodists. The whole system of prudential means is to complement the instituted means so that the eschatological process of nurturing and living out of our inner sanctification will be further enhanced in God’s grace.

In view of this, we can affirm that Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living is closely related to his understanding of the means of grace, both instituted and prudential. Attending the means of grace is a way of nurturing our eschatological living so that it becomes a pattern of life.

Since the instituted and prudential means taken as a whole are all means of grace by which God channels grace, how should Christians use these means to nurture our
eschatological living? Wesley’s reply was that they should be used only “as means; as ordained”.

There is no intrinsic power in any of these means for “there is no power to save but in the Spirit of God, no merit but in the blood of Christ”. They are in themselves “poor, dead, empty” things. The power is wholly of Him, “the Giver of every good gift, the Author of all grace, whereby, through any of all these [means], there is any blessing conveyed to our souls”. Therefore,

In using all means, seek God alone. In and through every outward thing, look singly to the power of his Spirit, and the merits of his Son.

This will prevent us from falling into the trap of seeking salvation and sanctification by works. God is above all means therefore “eye on him in all, through all, and above all”. Apart from God, the opus operatum (the mere work done), brings no benefit. However, since God has ordained these means, we are to make full use of them for further growth in grace, even though they are only “remotely” necessary for our sanctification. Wesley’s reasoning in countering the doctrine of stillness helps us to see more clearly:

Before you use any means, let it be deeply impressed on your soul—there is no power in this. It is, in itself, a poor, dead, empty thing: Separate from God, it is a dry leaf, a shadow. Neither is there any merit in my using this, nothing intrinsically pleasing to God; nothing whereby I deserve any favour at his hands, no, not a drop of water to cool my tongue. But, because God bids, therefore I do; because he directs me to wait in this way, therefore here I wait for his free mercy, whereof cometh my salvation.

By holding firm to this tenet, Wesley neither undervalues the means of grace, as did the Moravians in the Fetter Lane Society, nor overvalues their importance as ends in themselves, as the formalists did in his times.

Chapter 5  The Expression of Eschatological Living:
Praxis of the Reign of God

1. The Quest of Christian Witness

Though Wesley’s immediate context of ministry was England, he nevertheless understood that the witness of real Christians in England has implications for the salvation of people in other parts of the world. In his sermon on “The General Spread of the Gospel” (1783), Wesley uses both ascending and descending-comparative methods to illustrate the world which he knows.

Qualitatively, Wesley argues against Lady Mary Wortley Montague (1689-1762) and holds that the Muslims, though above the Heathens in religious sense, do not have the depth of the knowledge of God which comes only with knowledge of Christ as do the real Christians. Neither does Wesley hold an optimistic view either of the Eastern, Southern, and Northern Christians or of the Western Christians. He considers the former do not have deeper knowledge of God than the heathens and the Muslims. Most Western Christians, though they have more knowledge, more scriptural and more rational modes of worship, are unacquainted with either the theory and practice of Christian religion, or Scriptural Christianity. For Wesley, real Christians are the minority who knows both the theory and practice of Christian religion.

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1 Lady Mary, who lived with her husband, the English England’s ambassador, in Turkey (1717-18) for eighteen months, held a positive view of the Turkish Muslims. Sermon 63, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” §3, Works, 2:486.

2 Wesley was influenced by the seventeenth-eighteenth contemporary English comparative studies which tend to categorize religions into four groups, i.e. Paganism, Mohametanism (Islam), Judaism, and Christianity. Maddox assumes that Wesley was chiefly influenced by Isaac Barrow, Richard Baxter, and Edward Brerewood in this. See Randy L. Maddox, Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation through Other Religions (1992 [cited June 18th 2007]); available from http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/26-30/27.1.htm.

3 For Wesley, Eastern Christians include Greek Orthodox Christians and those who lived in the Turkish dominions. Southern Christians are Christians who lived in Abyssinia, and the northern are those who lived under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow. Western Christians are the Roman Catholics or Protestants. Sermon 63, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” §§5-7, Works, 2:487-88; Sermon 122, “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” §§4-6, Works, 4:88-89.

In his sermon ‘On Faith’ (1788), Wesley, who sees faith as an empowerment for us to love God in Christ and others, considers that different people may differ in the degree of faith. He reasons in a way invidious to many that the faith of both the heathens and Muslims are better than that of both the deists and the materialists. As his comparison escalated, he saw that the faith of the Jews is above that of the heathens and the Muslims. And finally there are those who have the faith of the servants of God and the real Christians who live out the faith of the children of God.

Quantitatively, Wesley appeals to Edward Brerewood and sees the world as divisions of thirty parts. Out of these thirty parts, nominal Christians constitute only five parts which the real Christians are the minor portion.

For Wesley, this dismal picture is irreconcilable with the biblical prophecy that “the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea”. (Hab.2:14) Therefore, he urges Christians to grow as real Christians. At the same time, he sees the Methodists as the real Christians, the people God raises up to spread this knowledge of God which will produce holiness and happiness in human souls. In a manner which appears to be too self-confident in contemporary eyes, Wesley sees the Methodists of his age as the instruments which God use for both the dawn and the continuation of “the latter day glory”.

How could real Christians realize their call as God’s instruments for the continuation of the latter day glory? Wesley first pointed us to the metaphor of the root and the branches of Christian faith. To him, the root of Christian faith lies in the union of the soul with God, and the life of God in the soul of man “cannot but put forth branches”. The vertical relationship to God will eventually lead to the horizontal

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relationship to other creatures in God’s world as mentioned earlier in chapter three. Loving God is inseparably connected to loving God’s creatures in God’s world.

Influenced by (pseudo-) Macarius, Ephraem Syrus, and the German Pietist Gerhard Tersteegen, Wesley maintains that there should be a proper balance between faith and works. Those have the Kingdom of Grace within them would express its fruits through living a responsible eschatological life in God’s created world. The inner dimension of the Kingdom of Grace is intrinsically related to its outer dimension, i.e. living out the fruits of sanctification. As Logan correctly observes, “sanctification and Wesley’s view of the Kingdom of God go hand in hand”. Real Christians who live in the Kingdom of Grace will bring justice, peace, joy, and hope to the present world which was and is wounded by sin and misery. In other words, through our responsible eschatological living, we usher God’s renewing work into the present world as a foreshadowing of the new creation in the new heaven and new earth. Responsible eschatological living is a message and “an argument which others will not know how to resist”. It is a key means to remove the hindrance of bad witnesses and thus enhance the spreading of the knowledge of God among humanity. It is of crucial importance for the salvation of all humanity.

Wesley writes:

The grand stumbling-block being thus happily removed out of the way, namely, the lives of the Christians, the Mahometans will look upon them with other eyes, and begin to give attention to their words. And as their words will be clothed with divine energy, attended with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, those of them that fear God will soon take knowledge of the Spirit whereby the Christians speak. They will 'receive with meekness the engrafted word', and will bring forth fruit with patience. From them the leaven will soon spread to those who till then had no fear of God before their eyes. Observing 'the Christian dogs', as they used to term them, to have changed their nature, to be sober, temperate, just, benevolent—and that in spite of all provocations to the contrary—from admiring their lives they will surely be led to consider and embrace their

11 Collins, The Theology of John Wesley, 256.
12 Logan, "Toward a Wesleyan Social Ethic," 368.
And then the grand stumbling-block being removed from the heathen nations also, the same spirit will be poured out upon them, even those that remain in the uttermost parts of the sea...15

Since life witness is of crucial importance, how could Christians live out this witness responsibly and practically? Wesley maintains that firstly, we should have sufficient understanding of key Christian doctrines as discussed in Chapters two and three. Secondly, we should deepen our disciplines of self denial and attending the means of grace as discussed in chapter four. Thirdly, we should exercise responsible Christian stewardship and cultivate peaceful lifestyle which we shall explore in the following sections.

2. The Praxis of Christian Stewardship

As discussed in chapter two, humanity is created as steward of God’s creatures. Stewardship, a divinely given gift when we are created, rests upon the doctrine of creation and natural law. Our salvation in Christ and our growth in grace and truth further enhance this gift of stewardship. In other words, responsible stewardship is an outward manifestation of inner sanctification. It is the key to responsible eschatological living. Responsible stewardship is to be grounded in inner sanctification and sanctification is meant to be lived out in our living context. Holiness of heart is to be compatible with holiness of life and vice versa. This is the calling of Christians.

Wesley argues in his sermon on “The Good Steward” (1768) that humanity as steward is the most exact notion to illustrate the relationship web of humanity, God the Creator, and the creatures.16 This notion clearly expresses the situation of humanity in God’s created earth, and the kind of service which God expects from us towards each other. A steward

is not at liberty to use what is lodged in his hands as he pleases, but as his Master pleases. He has no right to dispose of anything which is in his hands, but according to the will of the Lord. For he is not the proprietor of any of these things, but barely entrusted with them by another; and

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entrusted on this express condition,—that he shall dispose of all as his Master orders.\textsuperscript{17}

Why is it so? This is so because “we are now indebted to Him for all we have”.\textsuperscript{18} Our souls, our bodies, our health, our strength, our understanding, our thoughts, our imagination, our memory, our beauty, our time, our talents, our goods, all the honours which we enjoy, all the power which we exercise, and all the influence which we have over others have all come from God and continue to belong to God.\textsuperscript{19} Wesley’s position was different from that of Locke’s theory of absolute protection of property rights.\textsuperscript{20} For Wesley, the final rights of property belong to God. We are to be good stewards of what God has given. Responsible stewardship is an outward manifestation of inner sanctification. It determines the nature and the meaning of an eschatological living. It marks real Christians out from the world. The gratefulness and the accountability of real Christians in utilizing God’s leased resources are a strong voiceless witness which appeals for attention and reflection.

Among God’s leased resources, Wesley considers money as “one admirable instance of the wise and gracious providence of God”.\textsuperscript{21}

It is of unspeakable service to all civilized nations, in all the common affairs of life: It is a most compendious instrument of transacting all manner of business and of doing all manner of good…in the present state of mankind, it is an excellent gift of God, answering the noblest ends.\textsuperscript{22}

How should Christians employ this providence of God? Douglas Meeks points us to Wesley’s inheritance of “the view of God’s oikonomia in the Torah”.\textsuperscript{23} According to Meeks, the ancient word: economy (oikos + nomos), which means literally the “law management of the household”, is found throughout the Septuagint and the New

\textsuperscript{17} Sermon 51, “The Good Steward,” §I.1, Works, 2:283.
\textsuperscript{22} Sermon 50, “The Use of Money,” §2, Works, 2:267.
Testament. In the biblical sense, oikonomía tou theou (the economy of God) speaks of God’s relationships to creation and understands “the church as a peculiar economy in service of what God is doing to redeem creation”.

In inheriting this biblical tradition, Wesley sees oikonomía as inseparable from the question of the distribution of God’s leased resources for human livelihood and human flourishing. In order to realize this vision of oikonomía, Wesley maintains that Christians are to “lay aside all thoughts of obeying two masters, of serving God and mammon”. Stewardship of economy is thus at the heart of Christian discipleship. We Christians are to work out our salvation until our stewardship matures as the stewardship of God’s children. Christians are to employ God’s leased riches as instruments of righteousness to bring utmost glory to God, to edify ourselves and to bless others till the end of our stewardship.

2.1 The Stewards and the Rich

For Wesley, stewards who fear God are different from the rich. They are those who know how to manage God’s leased resources for His glory’s sake, whereas the rich person is one who “possesses more than the necessaries and conveniences of life”. In his sermon on “The Danger of Riches” (1780/81), Wesley considers the rich are those who (1) desire to have more than basic needs; (2) endeavour after this desire; (3) lay up treasures on earth; (4) possess much quantity of world’s goods more than they use according to the will of God; and (5) delight in money and desire of having more.

They are those who serve mammon, trust in riches or in all that may be purchased. Trusting riches, in turn, implies that Christians love the world, trust in the

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24 Meeks, “Sanctification and Economy,” 84.
30 Wesley considers mammon could be understood as riches, money or all that may be purchased. Sermon 29, “SM-IX,” §4, Works, 1:634.
world of happiness, and so turn to be conformed to and even to obey the world. By doing these things, Christians are, in fact, thinking highly of the increment of our own wealth and making the world as the ultimate end.  

Love of worldly riches is indeed a distraction which entices us with voices other than God’s voice. It is a temptation which may result in Atheism. It hinders us from entering the Kingdom of Heaven. It is “the care of the heart” which “undermines the holy life and impedes the practice of works of mercy”, Horst comments. It is the grand plague which infects the Christian Church and is “destructive of Christianity,” as Wesley described in his last trip to Dublin in the spring of 1789.

Earlier, Wesley has warned in his ninth discourse of the Sermon on the Mount:

This care is not only a sore disease, a grievous sickness of soul, but also a heinous offence against God, a sin of the deepest dye. It is a high affront to the gracious Governor and wise Disposer of all things; necessarily implying, that the great judge…does not know what things we stand in need of;…does not provide those things for all who put their trust in him.

In the same sermon, Wesley comments that those who worship both God and mammon would have “no peace either in God or the world.”

Does not every man see, that he cannot serve both consistently with himself…He is indeed “ a sinner that goeth two ways;” one step forward and another backward. He is continually building up with one hand, and pulling down with the other. He loves sin, and he hates it: He is always seeking, and yet always fleeing from, God…He is a motley mixture of all sorts of contrarieties; a heap of contradictions jumbled in one...

Seeing the debilitation caused by serving mammon and increasing riches without sound purposes, Wesley maintained the importance of Christian stewardship.

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34 Horst, "Christian Understanding and the Life of Faith", 246.
The right motive and method in extracting, saving and handling riches is the heart of the matter.

2.2 The Art of Wealth Management

(I) Gain and Save

Wesley insisted that Christians should not focus on increasing riches, for the earth is the Lord’s. He exhorts vividly in his sermon “On Worldly Folly” (1790):

Thou no longer talkest thy goods, or thy fruits, knowing they are not thine, but God’s. The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof: He is the Proprietor of heaven and earth. He cannot divest himself of his glory; he must be the Lord, the possessor, of all that is. Only he hath left a portion of his goods in thy hands, for such uses as he has specified. How long he will be please to lodge them with thee, thou dost not yet know; perhaps only till to-morrow, or to-night. Therefore talk not, think not, of many years.  

Based on this premise, Christians are encouraged to manage riches wisely and employ it for the glory of God with Wesley’s propounded rules for wealth management, namely: gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can. These rules are essential for they will prevent us from sinking into the nethermost hell!  

Wesley maintains that it is our bounden duty to gain all we can gain. However, we ought not to gain at the expense of the holistic health of our own or our neighbours’ body, mind and soul. To him, honesty and commitment are the key rules to gain. He is particularly cautious with the motive of trade. In his tract on “Thoughts upon Slavery (1774),” he argues against the wrong motive and practice of slave trading critically:

Better no trade, than trade procured by villainy. It is far better to have no wealth, than to gain wealth at the expense of virtue. Better is honest

poverty, than all the riches bought by the tears, and sweat, and blood, of
our fellow creatures.44

How shall we manage those things which we gain through our honest work or
business? Wesley’s replies are two pronged. Negatively, we shall not waste any of them
to gratify the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, or the pride of life.45 Positively,
we shall save all that we can. However, we should not allocate too much wealth for our
children for this will “snare” them into the temptation of gratifying their sensuality and
indulgence.46

(II) Share and Give

The crucial question now will be: “Why should we work hard to gain and to save?”
Wesley asserts emphatically: “Give all that we can!”47 This is a stance in which Wesley
stood against the Scottish political economist, Adam Smith (1723-1790) who published
An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (1776) and advocated
the retention of wealth as the basic means of accumulating more wealth to use for best
advantage.48 For Wesley, the best advantage to use the accumulated wealth is to share
among the poor. The ground of such practice is that we are only the stewards of God’s
entrusted resources. He teaches:

…when the Possessor of heaven and earth brought into being, and placed
you in this world, he placed you here, not as a proprietor, but a steward:
As such he entrusted you, for a season, with goods of various kinds; but
the sole property of these still rests in him, nor can ever be alienated from
him. As you yourself are not your own, but his, such is, likewise, all that
you enjoy…And he has told you, in the most clear and express term, how
you are to employ it for him, in such a manner, that it may be all an holy
sacrifice, acceptable through Christ Jesus. And this light, easy service, he
hath promised to reward with an eternal weight of glory.49

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47 Wesley comments that those who observed the first two rules and not the third are “twofold more the
children of hell than ever they were before.” Sermon 122, “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” §8,
Works, 4:90.
48 Randy L. Maddox, ”"Visit the Poor": John Wesley, the Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers,” in The
Poor and the People Called Methodists, ed. Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books,
He further maintains that we Christians should examine ourselves prayerfully according to the following four-fold considerations should we have any doubt with regards to the expenses which we should make for ourselves or our household:

(1.) In expending this, am I acting according to my character? Am I acting herein, not as a proprietor, but as a steward of my Lord’s goods? (2.) Am I doing this in obedience to his word? In what Scripture does he require me so to do? (3) Can I offer up this action, this expense, as a sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ? (4.) Have I reason to believe, that for this very work I shall have a reward at the resurrection of the just?  

Based on the above reference, we can determine that the management of God’s given riches is of crucial significance in the light of the new heaven and new earth. Stewardship of earthly goods is closely linked to our rewards in the new heaven and new earth. Based on this eschatological vision Wesley tables his pastoral advice on responsible management: (1) to provide things needful to preserve ourselves in health and strength; (2) do not waste money, (3) practice “the care of the head” by proper planning and management,  

(4) to owe no man anything, (5) to provide for the present as well as for the future immediate needs of our immediate family members, (6) businessmen can lay up as much as is necessary for the carrying on of that business; (7) to leave our children what will supply them with what is necessary and convenient after we have left the world; (8) to take care of those who are in need with preference to the household of God, and (9) to give to the poor and do good unto all men.  

As a summary, Maddox aptly suggests that the four cornerstones of Wesley’s message concerning wealth and possessions are: (1) the source of all things is God and so all things belong to God; (2) earthly wealth has been placed in human hands to be stewarded on God’s behalf; (3) God expects that we use what we are given to provide for our own necessities and then the necessities of others; and (4) to spend our God given resources on luxuries while others are in need of necessities is to misuse what God has given us.

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53 Maddox, “Visit the Poor,” 62.
Based on these convictions, Wesley never lost sight of the importance of living in simplicity. To him, living in simplicity, on the one hand, enables us to be more responsible in our stewardship of God’s leased resources. On the other hand, it enables us to help the poor with the resources we have. It is in accordance with the Gospel mandate. It, in turn, impels him to keep on stirring “the public conscience through appeals in sermons, conversations, and the press.”\textsuperscript{54} It is good to be rich in giving to the needy in love. Giving all that we can is, as Wesley claimed, the key for storing for ourselves a good foundation against the eternity to come! Management of wealth is an art which reflects our love of God and our love of neighbours in the light of the Kingdom of Heaven.

3. The Praxis of Peaceful Lifestyle

Stewardship of God’s leased resources is a responsible praxis springing forth from the root of our Christian faith. It is a praxis which testifies to the fact that if the root of our faith be really in our souls, it cannot but put forth good branches.\textsuperscript{55} It is an act of glorifying God through our loving care for our own needs, our household, our church-mates and the needy in the society. “Faith is in order to love”.\textsuperscript{56} In short, it reflects Wesley’s emphasis on bringing together our vertical relationship to God and our horizontal relationship to our neighbours and other creatures of God. Wesley narrates:

True religion is right tempers towards God and man. It is, in two words, gratitude and benevolence; gratitude to our Creator and supreme Benefactor, and benevolence to our fellow-creatures. In other words, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves... Gratitude towards our Creator cannot but produce benevolence to our fellow-creatures. The love of Christ constrains us, not only to be harmless, to do no ill to our neighbour, but to be useful, to be “zealous of good works;” “as we have time, to do good unto all men;” and to be patterns to all of true, genuine morality; of justice, mercy, and truth.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{56} Outler, ed., \textit{John Wesley }, 221.
Our life in the triune God is increasingly oriented around gratitude and benevolence. It will be characterised by doing good to our neighbours. Loving God will eventually lead to loving others in the world. Outler thus points out vividly that “the genius of the gospel, in [Wesley’s] eyes is its power to generate a faith that impels the believer to the quality of love that works for righteousness”.58 Due to this nature, Christianity is essentially a social religion. It is impossible to conceal its influence just as the city upon the hill and the light of the lit candle cannot be hidden.59 Therefore, there is hardly any reason for us to withdraw from the world and still claim that we are living the new way of life in the Kingdom of Grace. To be Christian is to be with God as well as to be with God’s creation and with our neighbours in the world. Christianity could not subsist without God. Likewise, she could not subsist without others in the world too. We are to manifest the character as God’s new creation and the peaceful lifestyle of the Kingdom of Grace through our daily living. We are called to share hope and love to the others in the world as well as God’s creation. God’s created earth is the context where Christians’ holiness shines forth its radiance. It is the locality where we live out our uniqueness as new creation in the Kingdom of Grace, “bear witness about who God is and what God is about,”60 and invite others to join the pilgrimage towards the new heaven and new earth.

How should we live out our holiness in this earth of God? Wesley stresses that it is through the praxis of peaceful lifestyle. For Wesley, the definition of peace determines the nature of the peaceful lifestyle, and the nature of being the peacemakers. He maintains that peace implies “all temporal, spiritual and eternal blessings that relates either to the soul or the body, to time or eternity”.61 Hence, the term “peacemakers” carries a broad sense. Literally, it refers to those who try their best to avoid and stop all strife and debate, all variance and contention especially among God’s children.

They endeavour to calm the stormy spirits of men, to quiet their turbulent passions, to soften the minds of contending parties, and, if possible, reconcile them to each other. They… employ all their strength… to

58 Outler, ed., John Wesley, 221.
preserve peace where it is, as to restore it where it is not. It is the joy of
their heart to promote, to confirm, to increase, mutual goodwill among
men, but more especially among the children of God, however
distinguished by things of smaller importance…

This was also the stance of Wesley when he was accused of destroying the public
peace of the Church of England as well as the English society by preaching justification
by faith and nurturing his converts through Methodist societies. Throughout his ministry,
Wesley was never interested in controversial theology. His constant concerns are: (1)
living peaceably with others; (2) preaching the Gospel of peace; and (3) promoting
practical divinity that tends to peace and edification.

However, when public and private divisions occurred due to the preaching of the
Gospel of peace, he stood by the Gospel at all costs. He fully understood that the
preaching of the Gospel may not come with the immediate consequence of universal
peace.

In its fullest sense, the term “peacemakers” denotes those who cross the narrow
boundary to seize every single opportunity to share love to neighbours, strangers, friends
and enemies. They would not only care for their physical needs, but their spiritual
needs. They prove their life through putting on Christ, living peaceably with others
and they “do all possible good to all men”. Yet, what is peacemaking or doing good?
Wesley maintains that it is living a lifestyle which is not self-centred, but conducive to
the good of mankind by advancing peace and goodwill among men and promotion of the
happiness of our fellow-creatures. It is a lifestyle which lives out the values of the
Kingdom of Grace, i.e. righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Ro. 14:17) as
well as a lifestyle which concerns the holistic need of humanity. We live in the light of

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63 An Answer to the Rev. Mr. Church’s Remarks (Feb. 2, 1744-45), §1, Works, 9:81.
64 NT Notes, on Romans 14:19.
68 NT Notes, on Mark 9:50.
69 NT Notes, on Matthew 5:9.
the future new heaven and new earth when we live out our peaceful lifestyle. It is in this sense that Wesley sees peacemaking or doing of good as a necessary branch of true Christianity.\(^{71}\)

Since peace-making is a necessary branch of true Christianity, Wesley argues against mere solitude and considers the negligence or the setting aside of peace-making a daring insult to the authority of our Gracious God.\(^{72}\) To him, living within the society and conversation with others is absolutely needful as a way to exert Christian tempers. This is a way which points others to the Kingdom of Heaven.\(^{73}\) He argues:

Indeed were we wholly to separate ourselves from sinners, how could we possibly answer that character which our Lord gives us in these very words? “Ye” (Christians, ye that are lowly, serious, and meek: ye that hunger after righteousness, that love God and man, that do good to all…) “are the salt of the earth:” It is your very nature to season whatever is round about you. It is the nature of the divine savour which is in you…to diffuse itself, on every side, to all those among whom you are. This is the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with other men, that whatever grace you have received of God may through you be communicated to others; that every holy temper and word and work of yours may have an influence on them also. By this means a check will, in some measure, be given to the corruption which is in the world; and a small part, at least, saved from the general infection, and rendered holy and pure before God.\(^{74}\)

In his old age, Wesley once again asserts this conviction of his with a different perspective in his sermon “On Zeal” (1781). According to his reflection on comparative divinity, he worked out a framework of four concentric circles. Love, i.e. the double focus of love for God and for neighbours, “sits upon the throne which is erected in the inmost soul”.\(^{75}\) In a circle around this is what he calls holy tempers. The next circle contains works of mercy. Wesley’s own depiction is helpful here:

In an exterior circle are all the works of mercy, whether to the souls or bodies of men. By these we exercise all holy tempers; by these we

\(^{71}\) Sermon 24, “SM-IV,” §1.4, Works, 1:534.
\(^{73}\) Sermon 24, “SM-IV,” §1.6, Works, 1:536.
continually improve them, so that all these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to.\textsuperscript{76}

The fourth circle is the \textit{works of piety} (the traditional means of grace) and the outermost circle is care for the church.

All outer rings are held by the inner circle of love.\textsuperscript{77}

Love permeates our tempers, works of mercy and piety, and our care for the church.

Outer rings move towards to the centre of the circle of love.


\textsuperscript{77} I adapted this diagram from Robin Knowles Wallace, “Worship and Becoming Disciples,” \textit{Quarterly Review} 23, no. 2 (Summer 2003), 132.
Christians who care for the church should be zealous in attending the works of piety. As much as Christians attend the works of piety, we should also be zealous in works of mercy. Furthermore, this zeal for works of mercy should be surpassed by our zeal for the fruits of the Spirit and our love for God and our neighbours. Although these concentric circles are ranked, they are interrelated in nourishing our love for God and neighbours.

In other words, the outer rings around the inner circle of love are edifying insofar as they relate to and drive forward to the centre of the circle. As Rebekah Miles comments, “although all the rings are necessary in the Christian life, the rings have greater ‘comparative value’ as one moves closer to the centre of the circle”. A peaceful lifestyle which is rooted in God’s love thus is distinguished by its zeal in, yearning for the fruits of the Spirit, works of piety, works of mercy, and care for the church. Christians who do not live a peaceful lifestyle with the mentioned characteristics are like salt which has lost its savour. Wesley cautions:

If ye who were holy and heavenly minded, and consequently zealous of good works, have no longer that savour in yourselves, and do therefore no longer season others; if you are grown flat, insipid, dead, both careless of your own souls, and useless to the souls of other men; wherewith shall ye be salted? How shall ye be recovered? What help? What hope…If ye had never known the Lord, there might have been hope, — if ye had never been “found in him:” But what can you now say to that, his solemn declaration, just parallel to what he hath here spoken? “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he,” the Father, “taketh away. He that abideth in me, and I in him, bringeth forth much fruit.” “If a man abide not in me,” or do not bring forth fruit, “he is cast out as a branch, and withered; and men gather them,” not to plant them again, but “to cast them into the fire.” (Jn. 15:2, 5, 6.)

Real Christians should translate our faith into works. Love for God and neighbours should be concretized by regular engagement in works of piety and works of mercy.

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79 Sermon 24, “SM-IV,” §1.8, Works, 1:537.
3.1 Maintain Unity in the Church

(I) Maintain Unity within a Denomination or Local Parish

Since the church is holy and since attending church service is one of the means of grace, Wesley holds church unity in high regard throughout his ministry. He maintains that it is the responsibility of genuine Christians to uphold unity in a Christian community. He admonishes:

I entreat you, therefore, my brethren, all that fear God…do not rashly tear asunder the sacred ties which unite you to any Christian society. This indeed is not of so much consequence to you who are only a nominal Christian. For you are not now vitally united to any of the members of Christ. Though you are called a Christian, you are not really a member of any Christian Church. But, if you are a living member, if you live the life that is hid with Christ in God, then take care of how you rend the body of Christ by separating from your brethren.80

To him, Christians should learn the art of being peace-makers in the church for peace-making with Christian love will bring healthy growth to the church. The church (or community) which is sustained by Christian love will bring the following benefits to Christians: (1) to prevent schism in the church; (2) to enforce the life of sanctification; and (3) to nurture the responsible eschatological living. The brotherly love among the church members should be enforced because “the greater the love, the stricter the union”.81 This will prevent the church from schism.

What is schism? In his sermon “On Schism” (1786), Wesley defined “schisms” (σχισματα) as separation in a church but not separation from a church.82 To him, the separation in a church may appear in the following forms: (1) a disunion in mind and judgement which leads to a splitting into several parties with preference to different preachers (1Co. 1:10);83 (2) a division “into little parties which cherished anger and resentment one against another, even during the Lord’s Supper” (1Co. 11:18);84 and (3)

an alienation of affection in any church member toward his brethren and a lack of tender care for each other in any church, though they were still outwardly united together (1 Co. 12:24-25).  

Schism or a separation in a church should be guarded against because it itself is evil. Furthermore, it produces evil consequences. Why is schism evil? It is evil because it separates us from a body of living Christians, with whom we were before united. It is “a grievous breach of the law of love”. Wesley reasons further that schism will not only destroy the nature and power of Christian faith, but bring harm to the wholesomeness of Christian character, Christian action and Christian witness. His own writing explains his mind:

It opens a door to all unkind tempers, both in ourselves and others. It leads directly to a whole train of evil surmisings, to severe and uncharitable judging of each other. It gives occasion to offence, to anger and resentment, perhaps in ourselves as well as in our brethren; which, if not presently stopped, may issue in bitterness, malice, and settled hatred; creating a present hell wherever they are found, as a prelude to hell eternal.

In view of the debilitation which schism will bring to the church as well as to individual Christian growth, Wesley, throughout his ministry, argues strongly against both the separation in the church and separation from the church. His arguments against separation from the church read:

But what was the fruit of this separation? The same that might easily be foreseen. It increased and confirmed in an astonishing degree, the total corruption of the Church. The salt which was thus heaped up in a corner had effectually lost its savour. The light which was put under the bushel no longer shone before men. In consequence of this, ungodliness and unrighteousness reigned without control...

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Wesley asserts that Christians are allowed to separate from the church only if we could not continue our church life with a clear conscience and without sin. His assertions in his sermon “Of the Church” reinforce his position against separation from the church other than for the aforementioned reasons:

The Church is called *holy*, because it *is* holy, because every member thereof is holy, though in different degrees, as He that called them is holy. How clear is this! If the Church, as to the very essence of it, is a body of believers, no man that is not a Christian believer can be a member of it. If this whole body be animated by one Spirit, and endued with one faith, and one hope of their calling; then he who has not that spirit, and faith, and hope, is no member of this body…none that is dead to God, can be a member of his Church.

On this basis, we can appreciate why Wesley as a minister put his emphasis on rules of discipleship, but not on doctrinal arguments. By doing this, he prevented the Methodist societies from acquiring the nature of a *gathered* church. Furthermore, he spent his whole life encouraging the preachers as well as the Methodists in general to preserve the unity in the Church by neither disputing unprofitably nor separating from the church. The Church is holy; therefore, there is no excuse for any Christian to refrain from participation in church life.

(II) Maintain Unity within the Body of Christ

As a pastoral theologian who was indebted to at least five ecclesiastical heritages, namely Anglicanism, Puritanism, Moravian Lutheran Pietism, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy, Wesley sees the richness in tapping the ecclesiastical resources from the mentioned heritages though he remained an ardent Anglican throughout his life. The strong influence of the Lutheran doctrine of justification and the Eastern Orthodox emphasis on sanctification or perfection, and his edition of the fifty-volume *Christian Library*, in which most of the authors represented were Puritans and Roman Catholic

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91 Sermon 75, “On Schism,” §I.17, *Works*, 3:66-67. Wesley reasons that there are only two reasons which Christians at his age could use as a basis to separate themselves from church: (1) the parish minister is a notoriously wicked man; (2) he preaches Socinianism, Arianism, or any other essentially false doctrine. “Large Minutes,” Q 47, *Works (J)*, 8:322.


Mystics,\(^{95}\) are sound proofs of his effort in embracing the richness within the Body of Christ.

In dealing with different theological opinions across different denominations, Wesley first appeals to the fact that all Christians are purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, and thus are God’s people.\(^{96}\) Since all Christians are God’s people, we are to live out God’s love in loving each other with a Catholic spirit.\(^{97}\) Good will in loving each other is essential to express the fact that we are God’s people in Christ. Based on this conviction, Wesley maintains that the differences in theological expressions or opinions could be tolerated. He reasons in his important sermon “The Lord Our Righteousness” (1771) that

It is true believers may not all speak alike; they may not all use the same language. It is not to be expected that they should...But a difference of expression does not necessarily imply a difference of sentiment. Different persons may use different expressions, and yet mean the same thing...Men may differ from us in their opinions as well as their expressions, and nevertheless be partakers with us of the same precious faith...Their ideas may not be so clear, and yet their experience may be as sound as ours...though their opinions as well as expressions may be confused and inaccurate, their hearts may cleave to God through the Son of his love, and be truly interested in his righteousness.\(^{98}\)

Differences in theological expressions or opinions should not result in factions within the Body of Christ. Oden thus soundly comments, “Persons holding divergent opinions and shaped by different modes of thinking and worship may still be joined in love, warmth, and mutual affection”.\(^{99}\) This is because (1) the nature of the Kingdom of Grace consists neither in orthodoxy nor right opinions.\(^{100}\) (2) It concerns righteousness, peace and joy in the Spirit. (3) Life of sanctification is more important than orthodox opinions.\(^{101}\) (4) The task of Methodism, from its origin at Oxford, was “a reformation,

\(^{95}\) These Roman Catholic authors are: Marquis de Renty, François Fenelon, Jeanne Marie Bouvier Guyon, John of Avila, Brother Lawrence, Gregory Lopez, Miguel de Molinos, and Thomas à Kempis. Runyon, The New Creation, 212.

\(^{96}\) “A Letter to a Roman Catholic,” §§4, 16-17, Works (J), 10:80-81, 85-86.


\(^{99}\) Oden, John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity, 91.


not of opinions, but of men’s tempers and lives; of everything contrary to justice, mercy, or truth’. 102 (5) Opinions are “ideas nonessential for Christian teaching”. 103 They are “at best but a very slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part of it at all.” 104 as Wesley wrote to Vincent Perronet, whom Charles Wesley named as the Archbishop of Methodism. (6) The unity within the wider body of Christ has a higher priority than the differences in theological expressions or opinions.

Christians are to nurture and practice the art of “think and let think” 105 and embracing or tolerating the theological differences in God’s love. Hence, though Wesley’s reaction to Roman Catholicism was complex, 106 and though he may be misinterpreted as a papist, he pleads in “A Letter to a Roman Catholic” (1749) that Christians should resolve, first, not to hurt one another; to do nothing unkind or unfriendly to each other…Rather let us endeavour after every instance of a kind, friendly, and Christian behaviour towards each other. Let us resolve, secondly, God being our helper, to speak nothing harsh or unkind of each other. The sure way to avoid this is to say all the good we can both of and to one another; in all our conversation, either with or concerning each other, to use only the language of love, to speak with all softness and tenderness, with the most endearing expression which is consistent with truth and sincerity. Let us, thirdly, resolve to harbour no unkind thought, no unfriendly temper towards each other… Let us, fourthly, endeavour to help each other on in whatever we are agreed leads to the Kingdom. So far as we can, let us always rejoice to strengthen each other’s hands in God. Above all, let us each take heed of himself that he fall not short of the religion of love…” 107

He further contends in his sermon on “Catholic Spirit” (1750):

Although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though

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102 Letter to Samuel Sparrow (December 28, 1773), Letters (T), 6:61.
103 Oden, John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity, 92.
104 Letter to Vincent Perronet (1748), §1.2, Letters (T), 2:293.
107 “A Letter to a Roman Catholic,” §17, Works (J), 10:85-86.
we can't think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works.\(^{108}\)

It is in this catholic spirit that Wesley differed from the Presbyterians, Anabaptists, and Quakers by not insisting that holding to the same opinions and adhering to the same mode of worship with him was the requirement of entrance into the Methodist societies.\(^{109}\) To him, “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins”\(^{110}\) is much more essential to a clear knowledge of doctrine.

It is also in this catholic spirit that Wesley would lay aside the differences in theological opinions and modes of worship in trying to achieve ministry partnership with Christians of diverse traditions, e.g. Baptists, Calvinists, Dissenters, Quakers, and even Catholics for the common cause of witnessing Christ in the eighteenth century England.

The crucial question now will be: “Did Wesley condone latitudinarianism, which was espoused by the Cambridge Platonists in the seventeenth century?” The answer is a definite no for Wesley distanced himself from this indifferentism of doctrines, liturgical practice, and ecclesiastical structure which was still in vogue among some Anglican divines of his age. He considered speculative latitudinarianism as “the spawn of hell, not the offspring of heaven”.\(^{111}\) It is an unsettledness of thought which counters true Catholicism. Wesley criticized one who practices speculative latitudinarianism as being of a muddy understanding and as one who jumbles all opinions together.\(^{112}\) In contrast,

A man of a truly catholic spirit…is fixed as the sun in his judgment concerning the main branches of Christian doctrine. It is true, he is always ready to hear and weigh whatsoever can be offered against his principles; but as this does not show any wavering in his own mind, so neither does it

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\(^{109}\) Wesley, May 18, 1788, Journals and Diaries VII, in Works, 24:85.
occasion any. He does not halt between two opinions, nor vainly endeavour to blend them into one.113

Wesley maintains that a person of a truly catholic spirit is one who learns “the first elements of the gospel of Christ”.114 To him, these first elements of Christ’s gospel are no other than the essential doctrines which he differentiated from theological opinions, i.e. the Trinity, the deity of Christ,115 the Kingdom of Heaven, the fact that Christ died for all or the atonement,116 biblical authority, original sin,117 justification by faith, and new birth.118 These are the doctrinal elements which he would not compromise in any circumstances. Williams is right in saying that

His (Wesley’s) recognition of the call to seek for common witness with those he believed to be in serious error did not mean that Wesley was prepared to surrender any of these truths for pragmatic considerations of unity.119

Throughout his life, Wesley spent great efforts to defend, delineate, and teach the right doctrines to his preachers and the societies’ members while he worked in catholic spirit with Christians of other traditions to proclaim the central elements of Christ’s gospel to the world.120 At this point, Oden is insightful in commenting that Wesley was arguing for doctrinal purity manifested in “catholic love”.121 This I believe conveys Wesley’s intention more accurately then Chapman’s view that Wesley encourages “a form of theological pluralism”.122

115 “The Character of a Methodist,” §1, Works, 9:34.
116 Letter to Mary Bishop (February 7, 1778), Letters (J), 6:297-98.
118 Williams lists original sin, the deity of Christ, the atonement, justification by faith alone, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the doctrine of Trinity to be essential doctrines for John Wesley. Campbell however argues that there are seven essential doctrines in Wesley’s view. These are the doctrine of Trinity, deity of Christ, atonement, biblical authority, original sin, justification, and regeneration. Builds on my own research, I would include the Kingdom of Heaven as one of Wesley’s essential doctrines. Williams, John Wesley’s Theology Today . 16-17; Ted A. Campbell, “The Shape of Wesleyan Thought: The Question of John Wesley's "Essential" Christian Doctrines,” The Asbury Theological Journal 59, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Fall 2004), 27-48.
119 Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today , 19.
121 Sermon 39, “Catholic Spirit,” §III.4, Works, 2:94; Oden, John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity , 94.
122 Chapman, In Search of the Catholic Spirit , 34.
Furthermore, Wesley claims that a catholic spirit is not practical latitudinarianism which is indifferent to the modes of worship or the orders of a Christian congregation. One who possesses a catholic spirit holds fast to his theological opinions, mode of worship, and form of church government while respecting, reaching out, understanding, and embracing the distinctiveness of others.\textsuperscript{123}

3.2 Conversation with Others

Although the world in which we live is God’s created world, it is also an environment inhabited by those who do not know God, or who are not alive to God, or who are enemies of God.\textsuperscript{124} The presence of different groups of people, e.g. nominal Christians, Muslims, heathens, and evil people, brings not only pluralism, but also challenges and pressures. Should Christians, then, retreat from the world?

Wesley’s reply was a definite no for (1) Christianity is a social religion; (2) the whole humanity lives within the realm of God’s providence; and (3) the nature of peace, which is a characteristic of Kingdom of Grace, demands us to share blessings with our neighbours. Wesley thus exhorted Christians to live a responsible eschatological life as Christ-like witnesses. Though he did not engage in inter-religious dialogue,\textsuperscript{125} Wesley maintained that every human being has the right and freedom to choose their belief and be accountable to their own choice.

Religious liberty is a liberty to choose our own religion, to worship God according to our own conscience, according to the best light we have. Every man living, as man, has a right to this, as he is a rational creature. The Creator gave him this right when he endowed him with understanding. And every man must judge for himself, because every man must give an account of himself to God. Consequently, this is an indefeasible right; it is inseparable from humanity. And God did never give authority to any man, or number of men, to deprive any child of man thereof, under any colour or pretence whatever.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{126} “Thoughts on Liberty,” §16, Works (J), 11:37-38.
Christians are to respect those who do not know God as the creatures of God, to converse with them (2 Cor.1:12), and to live with them in the kindest manner on all necessary occasions.\(^\text{127}\)

What, then, is conversation with our neighbours? For Wesley, this denotes the expressed behaviour or manner of acting in common life when we interact with our neighbours.\(^\text{128}\)

It includes every motion of our heart, of our tongue, of our hands, and bodily members. It extends to all our actions and words; to the employment of all our powers and faculties; to the manner of using every talent we have received, with respect either to God or man.\(^\text{129}\)

Living within the society and conversation with our neighbours is a means to live out our inner tempers. But, how should Christians have conversation with others in such a complex world? Wesley reasons in his sermon on “The Witness of Our Own Spirit” (1746) that Christians should converse with simple intention and godly sincerity.\(^\text{130}\) Our intentions are like eyes to our souls. The simplicity of intention leads to simplicity in actions and conversations.

If therefore this eye of thy soul be single, all thy actions and conversation shall be “full of light…We are then simple of heart, when the eye of our mind is singly fixed on God…This is simplicity; when a steady view, a single intention of promoting his glory, of doing and suffering his blessed will, runs through our whole soul, fills all our heart, and is the constant spring of all our thoughts, desires, and purposes.\(^\text{131}\)

Godly sincerity is the expression of our simple intentions. It is a lifestyle not of fleshly wisdom but one that seeks for the glory of God. It is a lifestyle stressing that we need to gaze on God throughout our eschatological pilgrimage.

Built on this basis, Christians should converse gracefully. Graceful conversation with good substance, though during the time of taking food or entertainment, will bring

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edification to the hearers. Wesley depicts further in his sermon “On Pleasing All Men’ (1787),

See that your heart be filled at all times, and on all occasions, with real, undissembled benevolence; not to those only that love you, but to every soul of man. Let it pant in your heart; let it sparkle in your eyes; let it shine on all your actions. Whenever you open your lips, let it be with love; and let there be in your tongue the law of kindness. Your word will then distil as the rain, and as the dew upon the tender herb…

In order to achieve this end, Christians should put away our old-selves, such as ill-nature, envy, hatred, lying and cunning, and to be filled with compassion, courtesy, gentleness, humility, love, meekness, and truth. Wesley goes further and urges Christians to reprove our neighbours “of every evil way, and of every mistake which tends to evil.” He believes that the practice of reproving or telling another person of his or her faults, especially in the class meetings, provides a therapeutic context for repentance from errors or sins, receiving God’s healing, and responsible Christian growth. It is a way to share our love to our neighbours because love indeed requires us to warn them. He exhorts:

“Ye are the salt of the earth.” It is your very nature to season whatever is around you. It is the nature of the divine savour which is in you, to spread to whatsoever you touch; to diffuse itself, on every side, to all those among whom you are. This is the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with other men …that whatever grace you have received of God may through you be communicated to others; that every holy temper and word and work of yours may have an influence on them also. By this means a check will, in some measure, be given to the corruption which is in the world, and a small part, at least, be saved from the general infection, and rendered holy and pure before God.

Wesley was convinced that we make our neighbours’ sins our own if we neglect to reprove our neighbour. This is a sin of omission which “frequently brings the soul of a

believer into darkness.” To avoid this sin, we should therefore reprove our neighbour’s faults with humility, meekness, and love. Christians are to “flesh-out” Christ-like love through reproving our neighbours’ faults. However, Wesley also cautioned that we should reprove only those whom we can reasonably expect to profit from the practice.

3.3 Engage in Works of Mercy

Impressed by the example of De Renty, a wealthy French marquis who gave away most of what he had to care for the poor and the sick, the young Wesley engaged actively in the works of mercy among the poor, the sick and the prisoners though these “were not the normal daily activities expected of an eighteenth-century Oxford don”. Matthews appears to have overlooked this in saying that the form of Wesley’s spirituality prior to his Aldersgate experience was utterly “self-oriented, with its focus on self-examination, self-discipline, self-denial, and self-doubt”. As a matter of fact, though focused on pious disciplines, Wesley never neglected the works of mercy. Opportunities present themselves through different forms in caring for the holistic need of humanity, e.g. feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comforting the sick, visiting the poor, assisting the friendless stranger, relieving the afflicted and saving souls from death. For Wesley, works of mercy begin with Christian faith in the Triune God and spring forth as an offshoot of our love of God. It is a way of sharing God’s peace and living out Christ-like righteousness.

In his old age, Wesley included works of mercy as a means of grace, as we see in his sermon “On Visiting the Sick” (1786). “Surely there are works of mercy, as well as works of piety, which are real means of grace”, Wesley claims. By including works of

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140 Robert Tuttle’s discussions on Wesley abridgement of Monsieur de Renty informs us as to how Wesley was impressed by de Renty’s depth of piety and works of charity among the poor and the sick. Robert G. Tuttle, “The Influence of Roman Catholic Mystics on John Wesley” (PhD Thesis, University of Bristol, 1969), 266-91. See also Robert G. Tuttle, Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Francis Asbury Press, 1989), 162-66.
142 Matthews, “Religion and Reason Joined”, 212.
mercy into the means of grace tradition, Wesley considers works of mercy as not only *orthopraxis* (good works), but a means that channels God’s grace for a deeper character formation of those who minister personally to the poor, the sick, and the needy in humility and meekness. Joerg Reiger aptly notes:

A work of mercy is therefore no longer a one-way street, leading from the well-meaning Christian to the needy other. Something comes back in return, which transforms the doer of mercy as well. In doing works of mercy, a real encounter takes place with God which cannot be separated from the encounter with the needy other.144

This is indeed a new development in Wesley which Borgen and Knight have overlooked.145 Works of mercy can be a means of grace through which our love for God, love for selves, love for neighbours, and love for God’s creation are deepened and expressed.

By bringing together both of works of piety and works mercy as means of grace, the mature Wesley “locates the means of grace in a larger framework, i.e. love for God and love for neighbour, and unfolds the double focus of his theology in terms of the means of grace”.146 Works of piety without works of mercy is a hindrance to our growth in grace and holiness. Wesley makes his mind clear:

But that your prayer may have its full weight with God, see that ye be in charity with all men. For, otherwise, it is more likely to bring a curse than a blessing on your own head; nor can you expect to receive any blessing from God while you have not charity towards your neighbour. Therefore, let this hindrance be removed without delay. Confirm your love towards one another, and towards all men. And love them not in word only, but in deed and in truth…147

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Works of piety and works of mercy are the “fruits meet for repentance,” and of necessary to sanctification.\textsuperscript{148} Wesley argues:

And these are so necessary, that if a man willingly neglects them, he cannot reasonably expect that he shall ever be sanctified; he cannot grow in grace, in the image of God, the mind which was in Christ Jesus; nay, he cannot retain the grace he has received, he cannot continue in faith, or in the favour of God.\textsuperscript{149}

Through bringing together the works of piety and works of mercy, Wesley keeps the love for God and love for neighbours together in a special way that enables Christians to grow in a holistic way. Furthermore, Wesley grasps the spirit of the prophet Hosea and the evangelist Matthew and contends that whenever works of mercy and works of piety interfere with each other, the former is to be preferred. He notes in his sermon “On Zeal”:

Should he show his zeal for works of piety; but much more for works of mercy; seeing ‘God will have mercy and not sacrifice’—that is, rather than sacrifice. Whenever, therefore, one interferes with the other, works of mercy are to be preferred. Even reading, hearing, prayer, are to be omitted, or to be postponed, ‘at charity's almighty call’—when we are called to relieve the distress of our neighbour, whether in body or soul.\textsuperscript{150}

However, this does not imply that the works of piety are no longer important. On the contrary, the works of mercy is a test of the authenticity of our piety. Works of mercy and work of piety are in fact both sides of the same coin. Seeing the importance of this unique relationship, José Miguéz Bonino insightfully comments that:

Such a relationship ought to protect our piety from an introverted and escapist spirituality and our mercy from an evangelically aseptic neutrality that, far from respecting the freedom of the poor (as it is sometimes


\textsuperscript{150} Sermon 92, “On Zeal,” §II.9, \textit{Works}, 3; 314. Reiger, therefore, comments that Borgen lays too much emphasis on the works of piety, which he says are “of the greatest importance for Wesley.” Rieger, “Between God and the Poor,” 87 fn.14; Borgen, \textit{John Wesley on the Sacraments}, 105.
claimed), robs mercy of its deeper dimension: the invitation to live, joyfully, a new life in Christ.\textsuperscript{151}

We are to maintain this unique relationship in creative tension because it will contribute positively to the nurturing of our sanctification and thus our eschatological living.

(I) Visiting the Sick\textsuperscript{152}

Wesley holds that visiting the sick, as a form of the works of mercy, is an act of Christian care as well as a bridge to communicate the message of Christian salvation. Yet, who are the sick? Wesley did not limit the scope of “the sick” to the sick in hospital. The sick are those who are “in a state of affliction, whether of mind or body; and that, whether they are good or bad, whether they fear God or not.”\textsuperscript{153} Theodore Jennings, therefore, is sound in commenting that “what recommends a person as a candidate for visitation is simply and solely her or his need.”\textsuperscript{154} Visiting the needy will bring one to the street, to the hovel,\textsuperscript{155} to the slum, to the hospital, and even to the prison. This is the spirit of Wesley’s notion of visitation.

By saying visiting the sick, Wesley means to visit them in person. As a matter of fact, Wesley began to appoint twelve persons as visitors of the sick as early as 1741. They are appointed to visit the sick in their area and gathered on Tuesday evenings for ministry discussions with Wesley. Why this emphasis on visiting the sick in person? Firstly, the gulf between the strata of society, as Manfred Marquardt observes, appeared too great for the wealthier people to know the gravity of the actual situation of the poor.\textsuperscript{156} Secondly, it is a means to form our Christ-like compassion for the sick, to

\textsuperscript{152} Letter to Vincent Perronet (1748), §XL4, Letters (T), 2:306.
\textsuperscript{154} Theodore Jennings, Good News to the Poor: John Wesley’s Evangelical Economics (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 56.
\textsuperscript{155} See Letter to Miss March (June 9, 1775); (Feb. 7, 26, 1776), Letters (T), 6:153, 207-9.
\textsuperscript{156} Marquardt, John Wesley’s Social Ethics, 30.
increasing our benevolence, and all social affections. Thirdly, it is by visiting the sick in person that the rich may find the opportunities of comforting those that are in pain of body, or distress of mind; …of strengthening the feeble minded, quickening those that are faint and weary; and of building up those that have believed, and encouraging them to “go on to perfection.”

The rich are peculiarly called by God to visit the sick and tend their needs. It is through visiting the sick that the rich could share resources in love. Visiting the sick, therefore, is a concrete expression of our love of neighbors and a means which increases our sympathy with the afflicted.

(II) Life with the Poor

The further Wesley went in his ministry, the deeper he found himself in solidarity with the poor, the vulgar, the base, and the outcasts of men. But, who are the poor? Marquardt, Jennings, Meeks, and Walsh do not give a clear definition. Heitzenrater’s research shows the complexity in defining the poor of the eighteenth century England. Wesley himself, ignoring the elite’s idea of an absolute or quantifiable poverty line, relativized (reclassified) the definition of poverty and the poor with the sliding scale of superfluities, conveniences, necessities, and extremities. He thus saw the poor as those who go back to a cold and dirty lodging, and find out that there isn’t any food after a

160 I owe this phrase to Meeks. Meeks argues that Wesley’s turning to the poor was not simply service of the poor, but more importantly life with the poor. M. Douglas Meeks, “On Reading Wesley with the Poor,” in The Portion of the Poor, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1995), 10.
164 Poverty was defined by the elite, the wealthy, the officials, and the laws in terms of employment and wages as impacting the wealth and well being of the nation. But poverty was experienced by the people in terms of hunger, exposure, and powerlessness, which impacted the health and well-being of the individual and family. Heitzenrater, "The Poor and the Methodists," 23, 36.
For Heitzenrater, these poor people are the impotent or helpless poor who needed the most basic necessities of food, shelter and clothing. However, he also points out that Wesley saw the following four categories as people who need assistance too: (1) the unfortunate or able poor who needed assistance in bettering their economic situation; (2) the children who needed education for mind, body, and spirit; (3) the literate but uneducated adults who could benefit from Wesley’s publishing program; and (4) the sick and infirm with medical needs.

Though they are the poor, Wesley considers the gospel “may more readily take root among the poor than the rich”. Hence, we find him writing to Ms. Furly in 1757 saying: “I love the poor; in many of them I find pure, genuine, grace, unmixed with paint, folly and affection.” In 1782, he wrote again in his journal: “O how much better is it to go to the poor, than to the rich; and to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting!” However, this love of the poor, of whom many became members of the Methodist societies, should not be misunderstood as a sentimental attachment. For Wesley, life with the poor was mainly “a preferential option,” as Jennings maintains. Wesley understood that serving the poor is in fact serving Christ. Christians will see the face of Christ when we see the needs of the poor.

You went about doing good, and found out those who were not able to find you...You found out every scene of human misery, and assisted according to your power: Each form of woe your generous pity moved; Your Saviour's face you saw, and seeing, loved.

Wesley believes that “evangelization which corresponds to the gospel must begin with the poor”. He holds firmly that “religion must not go from the greatest to the least, or the power would appear to be of men.”

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167 Heitzenrater, "The Poor and the Methodists," 34.
168 Heitzenrater, "The Poor and the Methodists," 34.
169 Jennings, Good News to the Poor, 49.
171 Wesley, April 5, 1782, Journals and Diaries VI, in Works, 23:235.
172 Jennings, Good News to the Poor, 47-69.
173 Sermon 87, “The Danger of Riches,” §II.18, Works, 3:244.
175 Wesley, May 21, 1764, Journals and Diaries IV, in Works, 21:465.
To realize this solidarity with the poor, Wesley, who was convinced that the sharing of goods in common from Acts 2 is an eschatological goal of Christian faith, attempted to implement primitive communism as he could and saw it as important to visit them personally. It is through visiting them that Wesley lived out his biblical faith. He explains this conviction of his in 1777:

Yet, I find time to visit the sick and the poor; and I must do it, if I believe the Bible, if I believe these are the marks whereby the Shepherd of Israel will know and judge His sheep at the great day.

He considers visiting the poor as a biblical praxis. Through visiting them, he saw for himself the actual poverty of the poor. Such an experience would not only inform his heart, mind, and action, but motivates him to care, to do justice for the needy, and to mobilize the Methodist societies to do the same. For Wesley, to visit and care for the hopeless poor, the fatherless and the helpless widows is to live out the nature of true Christian religion. Solidarity with the poor was simply a consistent part of his overall scheme that looked towards the building of a community of faith in which everyone’s needs would be sufficiently met. Hence, he tells the stewards: “Put yourself in the place of every poor and deal with him as you would God should deal with you.” Elsewhere, he exhorts his societies’ members to

 disperser abroad and give to the poor. Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. Be a father to the fatherless, and a husband to the widow. Freely thou hast received; freely give.

In his sermon “On Dress” (1786), he admonishes in a stronger tone:

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177 Wesley considers this kind of organization which existed among the earliest Christians is the highest concept of economic organization. Madron, “John Wesley on Economics,” 108.
179 Wesley, February 13, 1785, Journals and Diaries VI, Works, 23:43.
180 NT Notes, on James 1:27.
182 Wesley, June 4, 1747, Journals and Diaries III, Works, 20:177.
Every shilling which you save from your own apparel, you may expend in clothing the naked, and relieving the various necessities of the poor, whom ye “have always with you.” Therefore, every shilling which you needlessly spend on your apparel is, in effect, stolen from God and the poor! And how many precious opportunities of doing good have you defrauded yourself of… When you are laying out that money in costly apparel which you could have otherwise spared for the poor, you thereby deprive them of what God, the proprietor of all, had lodged in your hands for their use. If so, what you put upon yourself, you are, in effect tearing from the back of the naked; as the costly and delicate food which you eat, you are snatching from the mouth of the hungry. For mercy, for pity, for Christ’s sake, for the honor of his gospel, stay your hand!\(^{184}\)

Wesley was deeply convinced that it is through caring for the poor and preaching the good news to the poor that the gospel mandate is fulfilled and that the Methodists are proven to be a sign of God’s work in the world.\(^{185}\) He stresses not only that the rich should care for the poor, but also admonished the poor to care for other poor members in the Methodist societies as well as the poor in the society. In stressing this, he universalized the response to poverty.\(^{186}\)

The question then would be: “Could all the poor in Wesley’s societies be supplied with the necessaries of their lives?” It was possible, for Wesley considers that all these needs could be fulfilled with two thousand pounds. Furthermore, this would enable the poor to supply their own needs in future. He further contends that there were Methodists who could provide those funds if they were so inclined and if they simply practiced his rule of “giving all you can”.\(^{187}\)

Wesley’s life with the poor motivated him not only to relieve the helpless (the impotent poor) through providing them nourishing food, decent clothes, and proper housing, but to beg or make collections for them.\(^{188}\) In his sermon “On Visiting the Sick,” Wesley exhorts his readers to be importunate beggars and never be ashamed to beg for the poor.\(^{189}\) To set an example, Wesley begged for the needy in snowy days when


\(^{186}\) Heitzenrater, “The Poor and the Methodists,” 36.


\(^{188}\) Wesley, June 19, 1757; January 7, 1759, Journals and Diaries IV, in Works, 21:110, 176.

\(^{189}\) Sermon 98, ‘On Visiting the Sick,’ §II.2, Works, 3:391.
he was eighty two years old!\textsuperscript{190} Besides, he also communalized this caring of the poor through establishing connectional collections within the societies.\textsuperscript{191} When the numbers of poor grew in the urban societies, Wesley formed “The Strangers’ Friend Society” in 1790 to care for the needy and the friendless strangers who are not the societies’ members, regardless their religious faith.\textsuperscript{192}

The above discussion shows that Wesley’s efforts to help the poor developed gradually from personal effort to ecclesial/societal praxis. Other than the mentioned efforts, Wesley established the Kingswood School, initiated sewing collectives,\textsuperscript{193} gave loans to struggling businessmen,\textsuperscript{194} provided free health care and medicine,\textsuperscript{195} and published several editions of \textit{Primitive Physick}, a book on inexpensive family medicine.\textsuperscript{196} Furthermore, he even started a poor house where he could accommodate the destitute widows and children.\textsuperscript{197} He allowed himself and other Methodist preachers to stay in this house. All these efforts are for the purpose of maintaining solidarity with the poor and embodying those features of primitive communism which he saw appropriate for his time. The social welfare of the poor is the criterion of the ministry of both Wesley and the Methodist preachers. Bonino thus aptly summarizes that “Wesley tried to make the social dimension of holiness operative in practical ways in the organization of groups, the networks of relations, and the creation of institutions to meet specific needs—economic, educational, and social”.\textsuperscript{198}

Wesley’s life with the poor did not stop at this level. Seeing the severe unemployment and poverty caused by distilling, taxes, luxury, recessions, and other negative social-economical factors,\textsuperscript{199} he moved to a further level to develop concrete proposals for public economic policy, one of which is “Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions” (1773). In this proposal, Wesley proposed (1) to prohibit distilling; (2) to

\textsuperscript{191}Heitzenrater, “The Poor and the Methodists,” 31, 35.
\textsuperscript{194}Wesley, January 17, 1748, \textit{Journals and Diaries III}, in \textit{Works}, 20:204.
\textsuperscript{196}Jennings, \textit{Good News to the Poor}, 60-2.
\textsuperscript{197}“A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist,” §§XIII.2-3, \textit{Works (J)}, 9:277.
\textsuperscript{198}Bonino, “The Poor Will Always Be With You,” 192.
reduce the numbers of horses for export and for luxurious chariots; (3) to reduce monopolies and the price of farm-lands; (4) to restrain luxury; (5) to halve the national debt; and (6) to abolish useless pensions as means to reduce poverty across England. Thus Wesley’s opposition to the distilling business and admonishment for restraining monopolies and luxury grew out of his care about the effects had upon the poor. They did not arise from mere individualistic moralism.

(III) Protest against Exploitation and Oppression

Other than caring for the welfare of the poor directly, Wesley also protested against different forms of exploitation and oppression of the poor, e.g. the unfair practice of the marketplace, iniquitous trade in spirituous liquors, greedy doctors and pharmacists, dishonest solicitors and attorneys, the evils of Colonialism, and the dehumanization of the slave trade.

James Cone, a leading Methodist theologian, once wrote: “reading his [Wesley] sermons and other writings, one does not get the impression that slavery was one of the burning issues on Wesley’s mind”. Cone does not give sufficient weight to Wesley’s view when he writes so. As a matter of fact, Wesley acted in a way contrary to Cone’s remarks after he came to know the forceful and fraudulently way of procuring Negroes from Africa and the fact that they are so deprived of the essentials of life when they are on shore in America. In the later phase of his ministry, based on his doctrine of

creation, natural law, *imago dei*, and the premise that all political or social authority is derived from God, Wesley vehemently criticized the practice of slavery.

For Wesley, the practice of slavery, which stripped freedom, human right and human dignity from the Negroes, is “the denial of freedom involves the spectre of dehumanization”, as Hynson remarks. It is a sin which goes against God’s created order and an injustice which violates all the laws of justice, mercy and truth for it exploits the entitlement of the Negroes to the guarantees of law, as the whites have.

Wesley, who was influenced by the Tory ideology of order, maintains that those who have power to exercise mercy and justice have an obligation to relieve those who are deprived of their human rights to defend the afflicted and punish the wrong-doer. They are to protect and preserve the life, liberty, property, and happiness of their people with mercy and justice. Wesley, therefore, rebukes strongly the irresponsible slave ship captains, the slave traders, and the plantation owners (the slave holders) for their practice of making money through the unjust slave trade:

Where is the justice of inflicting the severest evils on those that have done us no wrong? of depraving those that never injured us in word or deed, of every comfort of life? of tearing them from their native country, and depriving them of liberty itself, to which an Angolan has the same natural right as an Englishman, and on which he sets as high a value? Yea, where is the justice of taking away the lives of innocent, inoffensive men…many thousands, year after year, on shipboard, and then casting them like dung into the sea, and tens of thousands in that cruel slavery to which they are unjustly reduced?

Human dignity and human liberty cannot be exploited in the interests of business expansion and development. This is the principle to which Wesley firmly holds.

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211 More discussions see Hynson, "Implications of Wesley's Ethical Method and Political Thought," 373-4.
Furthermore, he maintains that it is a responsibility for Christian families to see their servants as a kind of secondary children because they must also give an account for these servants whom God committed to their charge. Wesley's reasoning is strong and vivid:

For every one under your roof that has a soul to be saved is under your care; not only indented servants, who are legally engaged to remain with you for a term of years; not only hired servants, whether they voluntarily contract for a longer or shorter time; but also those who serve you by week or day: For these too are, in a measure, delivered into your hands. And it is not the will of your Master who is in heaven, that any of these should go out of your hands before they have received from you something more valuable than gold or silver. Yea, and you are in a degree accountable even "for the stranger that is within your gates." As you are particularly required to see that he does "no manner of work" on the Lord's day, while he is within your gates; so, by parity of reason, you are required to do all that is in your power to prevent his sinning against God in any instance.  

Grieving for the fate of the poor slaves and convinced that slavery is a trade of blood, Wesley not only fasted and prayed that God would intervene and make a way for them, but he also followed in the footsteps of the American Anthony Benezet and the British Granville Sharp and wrote his "Thought upon Slavery" to rebuke those who engaged in slave trading. Furthermore, he supported the work of the Abolition Committee, called his government to account, and only few days before he died, he encouraged William Wilberforce to persist in his political effort to influence the parliament to enact a legislative abolition of slavery.

In conclusion therefore, why did Wesley engage so much in his life with the poor? There are a few reasons to explain: (1) the poor, as other human beings, are created in *imago dei*. They have the right to the benefits which are constituent to human life, i.e.

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217 Brendlinger's research shows how Wesley began to enter the cause of antislavery through reading of Benezet's tracts which supplied by Sharp, Irv A. Brendlinger, *Social Justice through the Eyes of Wesley* (Ontario, Canada: Joshua Press, 2006), 19-23.
life, liberty, property, and happiness.\textsuperscript{222} (2) Wesley was convinced that life with the poor is not only an ethical praxis of love as Marquardt argued,\textsuperscript{223} but a way of life as Walsh and Meeks held.\textsuperscript{224} “To be in Christ meant to take the form of Christ’s own life for and with the poor”.\textsuperscript{225} As Meeks claims, if Wesley himself and the Methodist societies did not contribute in caring for the poor, they forfeited the right to re-present Jesus Christ in the \textit{oikoumene}\textsuperscript{226}. (3) Life with the poor is not only a means of grace to channel grace and hope to the poor, but a means to increase our benevolence and virtue.\textsuperscript{227}

(IV) **Preaching the Threefold Message**

As discussed above, Christians who live a peaceful lifestyle have concern not only for the temporal and physical needs of their neighbors, but also for their spiritual and eternal needs. Peace-making is a discipline which strives to share temporal, spiritual and eternal blessings. Wesley reasons in “The Character of a Methodist” (1742):

A Methodist is 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 while he thus always exercises his love to God...this commandment is written in his heart, “That he who loveth God, loveth his brother also.” And he accordingly loves his neighbour as himself...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 labor to do good to their souls, as of the ability which God giveth; to awaken those that sleep in death; to bring those who are awakened to the atoning blood, that, “being justified by faith, they may have peace with God;” and to provoke those who have peace with God to abound more in love and in good works. And he is willing to “spend and be spent herein,” even “to be offered up on the sacrifice and service of their faith,” so they may “all come unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”\textsuperscript{228}

\textsuperscript{222} Hynson, "Implications of Wesley's Ethical Method and Political Thought," 375.
\textsuperscript{223} Marquardt, \textit{John Wesley's Social Ethics}, 33.
\textsuperscript{224} Walsh, "John Wesley and The Community of Goods," 35.
\textsuperscript{225} Meeks, "On Reading Wesley with the Poor," 10.
\textsuperscript{226} Meeks, "On Reading Wesley with the Poor," 11.
\textsuperscript{228} “The Character of a Methodist,” §§5, 9, 16; \textit{Works}, 9:35, 37, 41. Italic is mine.
He was convinced that the grand vision to “reform the nation, more particularly the Church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land” would not be realized through merely caring and advocating for the sick and the poor. He affirms that “to reform” and “to spread scriptural holiness” is one integral whole in defining the Christian mission. Hence, he sees that the amalgamation of genuine caring through living with the sick/the poor and the preaching of the “threefold” message, i.e. Christ died for all, our salvation is through faith and the kingdom of Grace, which has been inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus, is essential ever since his Aldersgate’s heart warming experience on May 24, 1738. In all these ways, Wesley sees that Jesus Christ is central in Christian life and witness. Wesley prays out this conviction of his:

My gracious Master, and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread through all the earth abroad
The honours of thy name.

James C. Logan, therefore, comments rightly that “the Wesleyan imperative was to “preach Christ””. Based on this Christocentric emphasis, Wesley seriously contends that the restoration of our souls in Christ and our commitment in preaching and living our Christian faith in love contribute significantly in the transformation of the society.

Since Jesus Christ is so central for the peace of humanity and the transformation of the society, Wesley made use of every possible means, e.g. conversation, preaching, teaching, writing, editing, and even meetings in classes to communicate the mentioned threefold message. He held that real Christians should do so because we enjoy the most

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229 “Large Minutes,” Q3, Works (J), 8:299.

230 The key themes which Wesley preached about Christ are “We preached Christ crucified [1st Corinthians 1:23].” (Journal entries, 29/06/80, 06/05/81, 25/08/87, 27/08/87); on “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ .” (Journal entries, 10/05/81, 03/06/81, 22/07/82, 24/04/87, 07/08/87, 29/04/89, 02/01/90); on “Jesus Christ, made of God to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, (Journal entries, 11/05/87, 14/08/87, 23/05/89).

231 Hymn 1, “Exhorting and beseeching to return to God,” vv.5-8, Works, 7:80.


233 Wesley’s published tracts, e.g. “A Word to a Sabbath Breaker,” “A Word to a Drunkard,” “A Word to a Smuggler,” “A Word to a Condemned Malefactor,” and “A Word to a Freeholder” are some exemplary writings to address problems and to present gospel message to different groups of persons.
of God’s providence in comparison with those who haven’t known Christ. However, he saw preaching as the key way through which he could invite, convince, offer Christ to his audience, and build them up. It is a means to evangelize, to invite his audience for eschatological living in the Kingdom of Grace, and to exhort for holiness. In 1746, he recounted the result of his preaching:

From 1738 to this time, speaking continually of Jesus Christ, laying Him only for the foundation of the whole building, making Him all in all, the first and the last; preaching only on this plan, ‘The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel: ‘the word of God ran’ as fire among the stubble; it ‘was glorified’ more and more; multitudes crying out, ‘What must we do to be saved?’ and afterwards witnessing, ‘By grace are we saved through faith.’

 Seeing the importance and the results of his ministry through preaching, Wesley said in 1757: “I do indeed live by preaching”. He preached to invite people to respond to Christ’s invitation, to live in Him, and to live for Him.

Come, sinners, to the gospel feast;  
Let every soul be Jesu's guest;  
Ye need not one be left behind,  
For God hath bidden all mankind.

Sent by my Lord, on you I call;  
The invitation is to all:  
Come all the world; come, sinner, thou!  
All things in Christ are ready now.

Ye vagrant souls, on you I call  
(O that my voice could reach you all!):  
Ye all are freely justified,  
Ye all may live—for Christ hath died.

This is the time: no more delay!  
This is the acceptable day;  
Come in, this moment, at his call,  
And live for him who died for all!

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235 “Large Minutes,” Q.36, Works (J), 8:317.
In 1772, Wesley stressed the importance of preaching again in his letter to his brother, Charles:

Your business as well as mine is to save souls. When we took priests’ orders, we undertook to make it our one business. I think every day lost which is not (mainly at least) employed in this thing. Sum totus in illo (I am entirely occupied with it).

In 1781, he still determined to go on with his preaching ministry: “I must go on; for a dispensation of the gospel is committed to me; and woe is me if I preach not the gospel”. It was this deep sense of indebtedness to Christ’s gospel that motivated him to seize any opportunity to preach regardless of the form of preaching. This was also the basis for which he found justification in recruiting, training and sending the lay preachers to preach the gospel wholly and solely to people in different corners of eighteenth century England and America. Wesley and his lay preachers, indeed, lived by preaching the gospel of Christ.

As a matter of fact, Wesley’s form of preaching went through a significant change after he responded to the invitation of George Whitefield at Bristol in April 1st, 1739. Witnessing the startling response from his audience, Wesley chose to enter into open air or field preaching though it appeared to be “a most unwelcome and unattractive ministry” in the eyes of most of his contemporaries. He saw field preaching not only as a means where he could gain greater access to the grassroots people who “would never have attended worship or darkened the doors of the churches of their day,” but as an effective way of realizing His extraordinary call, i.e. as an Anglican theologian with a special mission to look upon the world as his parish. His letter to Charles, his brother, spelled out his mind clearly:

But if any man (bishop or other), ordain that I shall not do what God commands me to do, to submit to that ordinance would be to obey man rather than God. And to do this, I have both an ordinary call and an

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239 Letter to Charles (April 26, 1772), Letters (T), 5:316.
240 “A Plain Account of Kingswood School (1781),” §23, Works (J), 13: 301.
244 Wesley, June 11, 1739; Journal and Diaries II, in Works, 19:65-68.
extraordinary. My ordinary call is, my ordination by the Bishop: “Take thou authority to preach the word of God.” My extraordinary call is witnessed by the works God doth by my ministry; which prove that He is with me of a truth in this exercise of my office. Perhaps this might be better expressed in another way: God bears witness in an extraordinary manner, that my thus exercising my ordinary call is well pleasing in his sight. But what if a Bishop forbids this? I do not say as St. Cyprian, *Populus a scelerato Antistite separare se debet*. But I say, God being my helper, I will obey him still: And if I suffer for it, his will be done...245

Wesley firmly believed that preaching the threefold message chiefly through field preaching is a key means to invite his audience to embrace God’s grace through and in Christ, and thereby provides an opportunity for his audience to decide as to whether they would embark on the eschatological pilgrimage in the Kingdom of Grace as Wesley did. Hence, his threefold message “came straight from his heart as well as from his sound, strong head”246 and created a strong impact among his listeners. Preaching the threefold message is, indeed, the essence of evangelism in the Wesleyan sense. This is an essential element of the vocation of both Wesley and his preachers.

(V) **Solidarity with the Poor and Preaching Christ**247

By linking preaching Christ and solidarity with the poor together in a vital and organic relationship, Wesley was, in fact, “in-culturing” primitive Christianity into eighteenth century English society. By living with the poor, Wesley brought both physical cares and the threefold message to the very centre and root of those lives which he met and served, and thereby resulting in the new way of life in those who accepted Christ as their King. Wesley’s actions of solidarity with the poor and preaching Christ complement each other in responding to the holistic need of the people whom he met and served. Both the loving deeds and Word are authentic means of promoting peace, justice, and wholesomeness. Loving deeds substantiate the preaching of Christ; the latter explains or clarifies the former. When the love and peace of God which is promised through preaching is shown by loving deeds, the impact becomes more credible.

247 Though Wesley engaged in evangelistic works, he did not use the term ‘evangelism.’ This term comes into common usage only in the nineteenth century. David B. Barrett, *Evangelize!: A Historical Survey of the Concept* (Birmingham: New Hope, 1987), 139.
The crucial question now is: Did Wesley give priority to social concern over preaching of Christ? If forced to choose, Wesley would give first priority to preaching of Christ for its eternal dimensions. Hence, he held preaching firmly as the central, but not the dominant position throughout his ministry as he lived a life of solidarity with the poor. However, as Maddox notes, Wesley, in practice, rejected valuing works of mercy as having a merely instrumental connection to evangelization. For Wesley, works of mercy should be rendered to all simply because of their need.

3.4 Environmental Conservation

Since part of the peaceful lifestyle concerns sharing temporal blessings with our neighbors, environmental conservation is one of the chief concerns in Christian eschatological living. This is true because the earth is the locality for our eschatological journey. It is also the context where we share God’s love through our works of mercy. Yet we can ask whether environmental conservation was an issue in Wesley’s theological agenda for his age. As a matter of fact, this was not the chief issue with which Wesley was directly concerned. Nevertheless, Wesley invites us to

survey heaven and earth, and all that is therein, as contained by God in the hollow of his hand, who by his intimate presence holds them all in being, who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is, in a true sense, the soul of the universe.

Wesley was convinced that God’s creation though marred by human fall is constantly being renewed by the presence of God’s providential prevenient grace or the renewing power of the Spirit. “God is in all things”. Elsewhere, Wesley notes in a similar tone: “all things were and are compacted in [Christ] into one system”.

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249 Maddox, “Visit the Poor,” 69.
251 Runyon’s discussion on environmental stewardship has shed lights for my discussion in this section. Runyon, The New Creation, 200-207.
254 NT Notes, on Colossians 1:17.
[Christ] is now the life of everything that lives in any kind or degree. He is the source of the lowest species of life, that of vegetables; as being the source of all the motion on which vegetation depends. He is the fountain of the life of animals, the power by which the heart beats, and the circulating juices flow. He is the fountain of all the life which man possesses in common with other animals. And if we distinguish the rational from the animal life, he is the source of this also.²⁵⁵

Therefore, the whole creation is still sacred in His sight. For Wesley, this is the “great lesson” which God inculcates so that we can see clearly God, the Creator and the Governor, in His creation. At this point, Laura A. Bartels succinctly remarks:

This “great lesson” exposes a reversal in the original created order. Whereas humanity was originally intended to convey God’s blessings to the creatures, now the creatures are reflecting God back to us. Our presence was supposed to give the animals knowledge of God, but now the creation is revealing God to us. Moreover, this dramatic reversal has ethical implications for the way humanity relates to the rest of creation.²⁵⁶

Though this “great lesson” is a reversal of the original created order, it is essential because it informs us that “we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God” for doing so is indeed “a kind of practical atheism”.²⁵⁷ We are to extract and use God’s leased resources with care for our healthy living and our neighbors who are unborn are closely associated with it.

However, such was not the usual case which Wesley saw in his times. Seeing the needless suffering of animals in irresponsible human hands, Wesley reasons in his sermon on ‘The General Deliverance’ (1782):

During this season of ‘vanity’, not only the feeblers creatures are continually destroyed by the stronger; not only the strong are frequently destroyed by those that are of equal strength; but both the one and the other are exposed to the violence and cruelty of him that is now their common enemy—man…He pursues them…through the thickest forests. He overtakes them in the fields of air, he finds them out in the depths of the sea. Nor are the mild and friendly creatures who still own his sway, and are duteous to his commands, secured thereby from more than brutal

²⁵⁶ Bartels, "The Political Image as the Basis for Wesleyan Ecological Ethics," 299.
violence, from outrage and abuse of various kinds. Is the generous horse that serves his master's necessity or pleasure with unwearied diligence, is the faithful dog that waits the motion of his hand or his eye, exempt from this? What returns for their long and faithful service do many of these poor creatures find? And what a dreadful difference is there between what they suffer from their fellow brutes and what they suffer from the tyrant, man! The lion, the tiger, or the shark, give them pain from mere necessity, in order to prolong their own life; and put them out of their pain at once. But the human shark, without any such necessity, torments them of his free choice; and perhaps continues their lingering pain till after months or years death signs their release.  

Wesley’s equation of greedy and irresponsible humans with human sharks and his stress on humanity as stewards invite us to be mindful of God and exercise a theocentric rather than anthropocentric stewardship when we manage and use God’s leased resources.

In view of the importance of this theocentric stewardship, Wesley argues for the necessity of the renewal of the moral image of God. He affirms that such renewal will result in purity of our heart which in turn enables us to see God personally in and through His creation. He reasons:

The pure in heart see all things full of God. They see him in the firmament of heaven, in the moon walking in brightness, in the sun when he rejoiceth as a giant to run his course…They see him 'preparing rain for the earth', 'and blessing the increase of it'…They see the Creator of all wisely governing all, and 'upholding all things by the word of his power'. 'O Lord, our Governor, how excellent is thy name in all the world!'  

At this point, Bartels finds Runyon’s interpretation of the renewal of the moral image, which is based on Wesley’s discourse on Matthew 5:8, to be promising for ecological ethics. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”. Such seeing is crucial for it will make us aware that God is the owner of all that is created. In contrast, we, who are created in God’s image, are only pilgrims on the earth and stewards of His created earth.

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Based on this theological-pastoral conviction, Wesley admonishes not only his preachers to take care of their horses, but his people to be merciful to God’s creatures. Furthermore, he advises parents to teach their children to be kind to that which has life:

Truly affectionate parents will not indulge them in any kind or degree of unmercifulness. They will not suffer them to vex their brothers or sisters either by word or deed. They will not allow them to hurt or give pain to anything that has life. They will not permit them to rob birds’ nests, much less to kill anything without necessity; not even snakes, which are as innocent as worms, or toads, which, notwithstanding their ugliness, and the ill name they lie under, have been proved over and over to be as harmless as flies. Let them extend in its measure the rule of doing as they would be done by to every animal whatsoever…Press upon all your children to walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and gave himself for us; to mind that one point, ‘God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.’

For Wesley, love of God would lead not only to love of neighbors, but to the love of animals and the environment where we live. A peaceful lifestyle aims to share peace with our neighbors as well as our environment. This is indeed the originality and creativity of Wesley’s eschatological praxis.

Summary

From our discussion, we observe that eschatological living in Wesley is a peaceful life in God’s love in the world which is hostile to its message. It is an effort which takes the context in which we live with hope and responsibility. Instead of moving away from his context which was damaged by sin, pain, and suffering, Wesley, was empowered by the hope which comes from the teleological vision of a new heaven and new earth, so that he moved right into the midst of such unpromising challenges.

Eschatological living in Wesley takes seriously the practical triad of his General Rules as its guiding principles. It is a life witness of imitating Christ which emphasizes

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261 “Large Minutes,” Q 37 (21), Works (J), 8:318.
the discipline of responsible stewardship and the art of peaceful lifestyle. It is a lifestyle which stresses the balance of individual and communal, private and public in God’s grace and truth. It is Christ’s invitation and calling for Christians who heed His command “to work for the in-breaking kingdom of God, for the new creation, while we remain in the midst of the world still groaning toward completion”.

Since the nature of peaceful lifestyle demands us to share temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings, Christians who imitate Christ are to care for the temporal, spiritual, and eternal needs of our family members, our fellow church colleagues as well as our neighbors. Preserving the unity of church, conversation with our neighbors, solidarity with the poor, preaching the threefold message, and environmental conservation are some of the key expressions of such care to our neighbors. These expressions are indeed the symbols of peace which God’s people could share with others in this world. These symbols lie at the heart of our eschatological living. Christians are to live with these symbols as the Kingdom of Grace presses toward fulfilment in the Kingdom of Glory.

Chapter 6  A Contextual Reflection on Wesley’s view of Eschatological Living

As discussed in the previous chapters, eschatological living in Wesley’s thoughts is a lifestyle which takes peaceful relationship with the triune God as its foundational basis and ultimate End. At the same time, it receives the Kingdom of Grace and the future new heaven and new earth as its eschatological-teleological vision. This End and vision in turn guide and shape our eschatological pilgrimage between the Kingdom of Grace on earth and the new heaven and new earth.

Living towards this End and this eschatological vision, we are to open ourselves to the infusion of God’s love that our sins will be purged and our image of God will be healed and restored. We are to continue our eschatological living through deepening our faith and repentance, thirsting after grace and righteousness, cultivating Christian happiness, obeying God’s law, and attending various means of grace.

Furthermore, we are to live out the beauty of the Kingdom’s values through our love for God, love for our neighbours and other God’s creatures in our social context. Responsible eschatological living seeks to share God’s love through responsible stewardship and our peaceful lifestyle in the world which is hostile to its message. It is a responsible expression of our peaceful relationship with God, with ourselves, with our neighbours and other God’s creatures. This preserves us from being so engrossed with the future Kingdom of glory that we neglect our responsibilities within the present Kingdom of Grace.

In view of the above summary, we may conclude that Wesley’s view of the Christian life, shaped, as has been demonstrated, by his understanding of the ultimate End and eschatological vision, commends itself to all Christians of all ages. But each age calls for reflection, reinterpretation, and application of its main principles. This is important so that these principles become relevant for particular social, religious, and cultural contexts. What follows is a theological reflection in relation to the current Malaysian context, from where I come, which seeks to show how Wesley’s view of eschatological living is of relevance to Christians in our context.
1. The Need for Contextual Theological Reflection

Why should the concluding chapter of a study of Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living take the form of a contextual theological reflection? First of all, Wesley’s theology was formed through actively bringing biblical teaching and Christian traditions into dialogue with his eighteenth century English context. His theological articulations on “plain truth for plain people” were hammered out of his pastoral and missiological engagement with his ministry context. Contemporary contextual theological reflection is thus needful if one would like to draw the strength of his theological thoughts for today because our contemporary context is different from his.

Secondly, the controlling pillars which form the basis of Wesley’s understanding of eschatological living, i.e. God’s creation, justification by faith, new creation in the Kingdom of Heaven, and peaceful relationship with God in the new heaven and new earth carry universal or global perspective. This global perspective could serve as a common theological platform “where we all can meet and where we can depart from”.¹ This uniqueness of Wesley’s theological activity invites us to integrate both the global and local perspectives in our theological-pastoral efforts: reflect globally and act contextually.

Thirdly, Wesley’s effort in engaging his theological activities with his ministerial context affirms that theology is not a mere academic science which builds on “an idealistic conception of truth”.² It should be an art to reflect our faith tradition in the light of our joy and pain, achievements and struggles with the hope to enable Christians to realise the essence of Kingdom of Heaven, i.e. righteousness, peace, and joy, while we pilgrim towards the new heaven and new earth. Responsible contextual theological reflection is needful to improve one’s ministerial effectiveness in service to the realisation of the Kingdom’s value. It seeks to make the Gospel alive in our Christian community so that

² Yung, Mangoes or Bananas?, 8.
the community, along with the world in which it lives, becomes what God is calling it to become: a just, gentle, creative, sharing fellowship, the family of God on earth, the Body of Christ, a lyric poem, a work of art of the Spirit.  

Fourthly, contemporary contextual theological reflection is an art to imitate the theological efforts of the early church in reflecting and living out the faith which the risen Christ and the apostles passed to them in their respective context. It helps us to recapture “the apostolic zeal and enthusiasm of the early church in our own times”.  

Fifthly, contextual theological reflection is important because we are called to live out a responsible living with sound Christian ethics in our present context. On the one hand, we can neither maintain our past nor sustain our faith with past experiences because our response to the challenges posed by our living reality “is a present action which cannot ape the past”. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that there are treasures in past traditions. The process of contextual theological reflection will enable us to correlate our life experience with the sources of biblical teaching and Christian tradition and to draw out responsible responses for Christian living in our context.

Finally, as discussed above, the 21st century Asia-Malaysia context is different from the 18th century English context of Wesley. The effort of contextual theological reflection therefore will help the Malaysian Church, on the one hand, to discover trajectories and appropriate insights from Wesley’s view to inspire and inform our daily living, on the other hand, to be more contextually relevant in a context where its political leaders have reservations concerning colonialism and Western versions of globalisation. Contextual theological reflection seeks to preserve the vitality of the relevance of Wesley’s thought for our contemporary context.

To achieve these aims, I find it is appropriate at this juncture first to survey briefly the context which I come from before we reflect on the relevance of Wesley’s

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5 Raymond F. Collins, Models of Theological Reflection (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 91.
understanding of eschatological living for some aspects of the contemporary context of Malaysia.

2. Malaysia: The Context for Reflection

Malaysia, which takes pride in its heritage from the Malay Kingdom of Malacca (15/16th century), is a secular country with Islam as its official religion. It is a federation of thirteen states divided by the South China Sea into two geographical regions, i.e. Peninsular (or West) Malaysia on the mainland of Southeast Asia (SEA), and East Malaysia, which is on Borneo, the largest islands in the maritime section of SEA. Prior to independence, the Peninsula was governed by the British (1867/1895-1941, October 1945-1957) and Japanese (1942-September 1945). It became the independent nation of Malaya in August 31, 1957 following decolonisation from British through the joint efforts of Tunku Abdul Rahman of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Cheng-Lock Tan of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and V. T. Sambanthan of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). On September 16, 1963, Malaya together with other British colonies, i.e. the self-governing colony of Singapore and the colonies of Sarawak and Sabah in Borneo became the independent Federation of Malaysia. Singapore separated from Malaysia on 7th August 1965 and became an independent country on its own. Malaysia is a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) which was founded together with Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines in August 8, 1967 to display the regional solidarity against the expansion of communism in the region.
2.1 Ethnicity, Religions, and Jus Soli

(I) Bumiputeras, non-Bumiputeras, and Religions

Contemporary Malaysia has a population of 27.17 million. Technically speaking, the Malaysia Citizenship Rules 1964 apply to all Malaysian citizens equally. However, due to historical-political reasons, Malaysians are classified into two main categories, i.e. the Bumiputeras (sons of soil) and the non-Bumiputeras. The Bumiputera is a Malay term derived from the Sanskrit word Bhumiputra. According to Article 153 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, those with cultural affinities indigenous to the immediate region, i.e. the Malays and Orang Asli or indigenous people in Peninsula, are defined as Bumiputeras (sons of soil). The special status of Bumiputeras is considered to be a quid pro quo or a social contract which the British Colonial Government struck with the Malay rulers or Sultans and UMNO to grant the Malays and the indigenous people special privileges in exchange for the granting of citizenship and shared political power and economic opportunity to the non-Malay people (mostly the Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indians) in Malaya before Malaya gained its independence from the British rule.

The Reid Commission, which prepared the framework for the Constitution in 1956, stated in its report that Article 153 is to protect the Malays from unfair disadvantage in competing with other races, mainly the Chinese and Indians, at that time. Furthermore, Article 153 should be reviewed 15 years after independence. Yet, this was later struck from the final draft. Hence, to review this Article is, on the one hand, a sensitive issue, for it may provoke racial tension such as racial riot as the May 13

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6 Jus soli (a Latin term for “right of the soil” or birthright citizenship) is a right by which nationality or citizenship can be recognized.

7 This is according to the statistic of the Department of Statistics Malaysia on July 13th, 2007. See http://www.statistics.gov.my/english/frameset_keystats.php.


9 Quid pro quo, a Latin term for ‘something for something,’ which carries the meaning of equal exchange.

incident in 1969. On the other hand, it is technically illegal to discuss the repeal of this Article from the Constitution even in the Parliament. For some contemporary young politicians who play the Malay nationalist card, to protect the bumiputeras’ privileges is to defend the political and economical primacy of Malays, though the Constitution does not mention “Malay Sovereignty” or any ideas related to *ketuanan Melayu*, the supremacy of Malays as the *tuan* (masters) of Malaysia.

With the legal provision of Article 153, the many migrants who migrated from Java, Sumatra and other parts of Indonesia between late 19th century and early 20th century are considered Malays, and thus bumiputeras, because their socio-religious organisation was recognisably similar to that of the Malays. Furthermore, many Muslims who recently migrated from the southern Philippines into Sabah have been classified as ‘Malay’ while non-Muslim, native Sabahans have not. This gives an impression that the fact that “Malaysia Citizenship Rules 1964 apply to all Malaysian citizens equally” is misleading.

According to Article 153, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (King of Malaysia) has the responsibility of protecting the special privileges of the Bumiputeras. These privileges include quotas for public education, public scholarships, entry into civil service, government granted permits or licenses to dominate certain industries, especially in the sectors of logging, saw-milling, timber export, mining, and rubber, and the bumiputeras’ reserved lands. After the formation of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, this was expanded to include the natives in Sabah and Sarawak. Currently, the Malays in both West and East Malaysia constitute 54.1% of the total population, while the non-Malay Bumiputeras is 11.8%.

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The non-Malay Bumiputeras comprises the Orang Asli (indigenous people), who migrated from Siam and inhabited in the Malay Peninsula since 2500 BC and the indigenous groups of Malayo-Polynesian origins (e.g. Kadazandusun, Iban, Dayak, Melanau) who live in Sarawak and Sabah. Until the 20th century, most of them practiced traditional animism and mysticism.

The Proto Malays were the second group of migrants who migrated from Java between 1500 BC and 500 BC and the Malay people who moved into the Malay Peninsula from Yunnan in Southern China since the 13th century. Initially they were animists, Hindus or Buddhists, but they have gradually converted to Islam since the 15th century. When Malaya gained its independence from Britain, the Article 160 of the Constitution of Malaya, defines Malays as those who speak the Malay language, conform to Malay customs, and profess the religion of Islam. In other words, all Malays are born to be Muslim and are governed by Islamic law. In most ways, Malays and Muslims are intertwined in the context of Malaysia. Other religions are prohibited by Article 11 (4) of the Constitution to propagate their faith among the Muslims. When the Federation of Malaysia is formed in 1963, Articles 153 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia defined the Malays and the indigenous people, i.e. Orang Asli in the Peninsula and the natives in Sarawak and Sabah, as Bumiputeras.

Though Article 11 of the Constitution clearly states that Malaysians have the right to profess and practice their religions respectively, the existence of Shariah courts, a Islamic law based justice system which is in parallel to the Parliament’s gazetted law based secular justice system, prevents the Malay Muslims from conversion to other faiths in an easy way. Malay Muslims who convert to other faiths are considered apostate. They will encounter unfriendliness and even persecution from the Malay Muslim community. In other words, Muslims face severe obstacles to enjoying full rights in practicing religion other than Islam and to marrying lawfully should their partners not convert as Muslims. Due to these hindrances, some Muslims who have converted to other faiths practice their faith quietly without declaring their conversion from Islam.

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16 Peter Church, ed., *A Short History of South East Asia*, Rev. ed. (Sydney: Asean Focus Group, 1999), 83.
17 The Constitution of Malaya, which came to force on August 27, 1957, is the supreme law of Malaya. When Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak joined to form Malaysia in 1963, it went through some minor changes to become the Federation Constitution of Malaysia. It comprises 181 articles. The Article 160 is an article which defines various terms used in the Constitution.
The main non-Bumiputera ethnic groups are the Chinese, which constitute 25.3% of the population and the Indians with 7.5%.\(^\text{18}\) Though the earliest Chinese settlement in Malaya can be traced back to the 5\(^{\text{th}}\) century, most of the Malaysian Chinese are descendants of Chinese who settled in Malaysia between the 15\(^{\text{th}}\) and the mid 20\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries.\(^\text{19}\) They came with Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Chinese folk beliefs (a syncretism of the mentioned beliefs and ancestor worship).

The Malaysian Indians are largely made up of Tamil Hindus whose ancestors came from Tamil Nadu (southern India) during the so-called “rubber boom” years. This large scale migration began in the late 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century and reached its peak in the 1910s and 1920s. Most of them practiced Hinduism or Sikhism.

The brief discussions above clearly show that the different ethnic groups living in Malaysia are groups with profound differences in racial origins, religions, and cultures. These differences were further deepened by British’s divide-and-rule policy. During Britain’s reign, the ordinary Malays worked as rice planters, farmers and fishermen in the rural areas though the minority Malay upper class received English education and worked within the government agency. The Chinese operated tin mines, engaged in business and banking in the growing towns of Colonial Malaya while the Indians worked in the rubber estates or in the development of infrastructure which was spurred by the rubber boom.\(^\text{20}\) This racial stereotyping policy resulted in “a plural society with separate economic sphere”\(^\text{21}\) which left serious negative consequences for the country especially during the initial decades after British de-colonisation.

(II) **Christianity in Malaysia**

Along with Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, Christianity is also practiced in Malaysia by almost all races. The recent presence of Christianity in Malaysia can be

\(^{18}\) Saw, *The Population of Malaysia*, 70.

\(^{19}\) In-Won Hwang, *Personalized Politics: The Malaysian State under Mahatir* (Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 2003), 21-23.


traced back to the early 19th century when the Catholic Father Lolivier re-opened the Catholic seminary, known as College General, in Penang in 1808.\textsuperscript{22} Thereafter, Catholicism began to take root in Malaysia. The earliest Protestant denomination to begin its missionary work in Malaysia was the Anglican Church which came after the British East India Company’s landing at Penang in 1786.\textsuperscript{23} The Methodist mission began in Singapore/Malaysia after the arrival of Dr. James Thoburn and William F. Oldham into Singapore on February 6, 1885.\textsuperscript{24} Today, the Methodist Church in Malaysia is one of the largest Protestant churches in Malaysia. According to the most recent statistic, there are 446 Methodist pastors and ministerial staffs serving 160,000 Methodist members of the 389 churches and 590 preaching points.\textsuperscript{25}

The first Basel church building for the Chinese labourers who were brought into Sabah by the British North Borneo Chartered Company was built in the plantation of Mr. Tai-Hong Lo at Lausan, Kudat, Sabah in 1886.\textsuperscript{26} This was the first Lutheran presence in Malaysia.\textsuperscript{27} In the first half of the 20th century, the Presbyterians, the Assemblies of God, and the Baptists also planted their respective churches in the Peninsula.

Over the years, the Christian population in Malaysia has grown from 8.1% (1,412,300 people) of the total population in Malaysia in 1992 to 9.1% (2,023,500 people) in 2000.\textsuperscript{28} Min-Choon Lee, the legal advisor of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia, points out that this made Christianity the fastest growing community in this period.\textsuperscript{29} Thus, it has grown as a significant electoral community since 1999. However, Christians in Malaysia are still the minority in comparison with the


\textsuperscript{24} Ng, \textit{Declaration of Malaysia as Islamic State} ([cited])

\textsuperscript{25} Ng, \textit{Declaration of Malaysia as Islamic State} ([cited])

\textsuperscript{26} Ng, \textit{Declaration of Malaysia as Islamic State} ([cited])

\textsuperscript{27} The Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore began its mission work only in 1953 after the eviction of the foreign missionaries from the mainland China to Northern Malaysia. Ng, \textit{Declaration of Malaysia as Islamic State} ([cited])


Buddhists (18.9%) and the Muslims majority (60.8 %) though its number exceeds the Hindus (6.2%). As a minority in a “Malay-Muslims dominant” plural society, Malaysian Christians do live with restrictions which I shall discuss more in the next section.

2.2 New Economic Policy, Islamization, and Vision 2020

After the racial riot of May 1969 which was caused by political instability and economical imbalance, Abdul Razak Hussein (UMNO), the second prime minister, Tan Siew Sin (MCA), and V. Manickavasagam (MIC) expanded the ruling Alliance coalition to become the Barisan National (BN, National Front) as a political strategy to rebuild Malaysia. Though it is a multi-racial coalition, it is primarily led by UMNO, the largest political party which is constituted only by Malay Muslims. Since it is led by UMNO, the BN government has made protection of Malays’ privileges, uplifting the social-economic standard of the Malays, implementation of Malay language as national language, and the process of Islamization as parts of its key agendas.

(I) New Economic Policy

The New Economic Policy (NEP) which was launched by the government led by Tun Abdul Razak in 1971 was and is a political-economical strategy in line with the spirit of Article 153. It is a policy aiming to eradicate poverty in the country irrespective of race and to restructure Malaysian society through reducing and eliminating the identification of race with economic function. The major activities to realise these goals are fourfold: (1) continued rural development, principally through land schemes, to commercialize peasant agriculture; (2) the promotion of manufacturing industry, especially export-oriented industrialization; (3) regional development (including new towns) to even out the large disparities between areas (e.g. the east and west coasts of the Peninsula), (4) to grant special privileges to the bumiputeras to enable them to move into the mainstream.

30 Population And Housing Census 2000 ([cited].
of the economy and to uplift the bumiputeras’ equity share of national economy from 2.4% in 1970 to 30% in 1990 by intentional expansion of national economic production and affirmative action.\textsuperscript{34}

With this codified affirmative action policy, the bumiputeras’ privileges were further extended through setting quotas for Bumiputera to hold 30% of equity in publicly listed companies, discounts on automobiles and real estate ranging from 5% to 15%, land lots set aside for housing projects, government projects increasingly reserved for Malay-owned companies, and Approved Permits (APs) for importing automobiles to be preferentially given to Bumiputeras. For the architects of this policy, this national development programme with special privileges for the Bumiputeras is rational and a valid compromise. This compromise is essential in establishing economic parity among ethnic communities for national unity. Yet, in practice, these privileges rarely reach Orang Asli and the non-Muslim Bumiputeras of Sarawak and Sabah.\textsuperscript{35} Hence, though the NEP aims to eradicate poverty in the country irrespective of race and to increase the non-bumiputera share from 34.3% to 40%,\textsuperscript{36} Hwang laments that its primary goals are viewed almost exclusively from a Malay perspective.\textsuperscript{37}

In the initial stage of the launching of the NEP, those who have a “get-rich quick” mentality, on the one hand, have been willing to take advantage of state patronage for contracts and funding,\textsuperscript{38} and on the other hand, setting up Ali-Baba partnerships with the non-Malays, particularly Chinese, especially in the agricultural wholesaling, construction, logging, and transport sectors where licenses are needed.\textsuperscript{39} Ali-Baba business partnership is a term which describes the irresponsible partnership between Baba, the hard-working non-Malays who acquire the business skills and techniques and Ali, the Malays who

\textsuperscript{35} Hooker, A Short History of Malaysia , 227, 243.
\textsuperscript{37} Hwang, Personalized Politics , 110.
enjoy the privileges of partnerships by bringing only his political connections into the business. Such a “dependency syndrome,” on the one hand, “has not encouraged self-improvement, self-reliance and enterprise,” as Ramon V. Navaratnam, the former deputy secretary-general of the Malaysian Treasury, soundly critiques, while on the other hand, it has resulted in cronyism, factionalism, money politics, corruption and inequality in wealth distribution.

Having said this, we cannot deny the fact that a significant number of Malay professionals and administrators were raised through the expansion in the number of state universities, from only a single university in 1969 (University of Malaya) to 9 state universities in 1995. Furthermore, important positions in the government departments are reserved only for Malays, while “the proportion of non-Bumiputera employment declined dramatically”. When Mahatir Mohammad became the fourth prime minister of the country in 1981, he determined to accelerate the pace of industrialization for he viewed it as a vital component of government policies designed to restructure Malaysian society.

Through this intentional industrialization and the privatization policy which took place after the economic depression in the 1980s, a Malay business class which has close ties to UMNO and has access to government contracts and funding has been created. This Malay middle class, which includes BN politicians, rose from 13% of the population in 1970 to 28% in 1993. Those non-Malay businessmen who have superior financial resources and are well connected with these Malay capitalists gain benefits from this connection. However, those with small and medium businesses have suffered the most from state favoritism and economic displacement.

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44 Gomez, Malaysia's Political Economy , 40.
46 Jomo, Growth and Structural Change in the Malaysian Economy , 211-8; Gomez, Malaysia's Political Economy ,75-100.
47 Jesudason, Ethnicity and the Economy , 159.
Although the success of this Malay business class has contributed to preserving stability and a safe environment for further development and economic growth, the gap between the rich and the poor has been widening. As a matter of fact, though the national GNP grew from RM 1,142 per capita in 1970 to RM 13,722 in 2002 and the proportion of the population in poverty dropped from 49.3% to 5.1%, urban poverty has increased from 27% in 1970 to 62% in 2000. Substantial portions of those who are affected by urban poverty are the Malays who have migrated from villages and settled as squatters in the cities. Many Indians who work in the rubber estates with a daily-rated wages system earned only an average of 300 to 500 ringgit a month in 2002. 49

When NEP was due for abolishment in 1990, it was replaced by the National Vision Policy (NVP), which was embodied in the unprecedented “Vision 2020 Plan: Malaysia—The Way Forward.” The NVP is due to expire in 2020. However, this policy which would be more equitable to the various ethnic groups was retracted by the Badawi led government in 2006. The original NEP was reinstated under its 9th Malaysian plan (2006-2010) and is set to continue to 2020 on the ground that the Bumiputeras’ equity has yet to reach the original 30% target.

In view of the above discussions, the NEP and its reinstatement, which UMNO leaders claimed to be necessary for national unity and stability, is seen to be an ethno-political move which favors the Bumiputeras, particularly the Malay voters. It is, thus, a policy which the non-Bumiputeras find unfair in distributing evenly the nation’s resources and wealth among the citizens who co-work for the building up of the nation. It presents a gloomy picture in suggesting that the non-Bumiputeras are not part of the main stream of the country. Hence, it is not surprising that Professor Kok-Chung Hou, the Dean of the Department of East Asian Studies of the University of Malaya laments: “I love Malaysia, but would Malaysia love me?” Professor Hock-Tong Cheu of the

Department of Anthropology and Sociology of the National University Malaysia went further to describe the Malay Special Rights as “a subset of Apartheid in the South African jargon”\(^\text{53}\) which is different only as a matter of degree.

(I) **Islamization and Vision 2020**

Ever since the independence of Malaysia, all of UMNO’s presidents, who also hold the post of Prime Minister,\(^\text{54}\) have promoted Islamic values in one form or another. Muslim prayers at official functions, the construction of mosques by the State, the holding of the Qur’an-reading competitions, and the organisation of the annual *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca through government agency are some key expressions of UMNO’s efforts in promoting Islamic faith.\(^\text{55}\) However, the effort of Islamization of the country was intensified since 1980s’, partly influenced by the worldwide resurgence of Islam, and partly as a political way to prove its Islamic credentials against the Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS)\(^\text{56}\) and to win the Malay votes.

The combination of Malay nationalism, affirmative action policy, Islamic value with a developmental orientation and the acceptance of the diversity of ethno-religious traditions saw its force when Mahatir launched the unprecedented “Vision 2020 Plan: Malaysia—The Way Forward” at the occasion of Malaysian Business Council on February 28 1991. Vision 2020 is a national response towards the economical, sociological and political challenges which confront the country internally and externally.\(^\text{57}\) The ultimate aim of the visionary plan is to transform the country into a progressive, prosperous and fully developed country which is committed to an Islamic


\(^{56}\) PAS, the second largest political party, is a Malay Muslims based political party which aims to establish an Islamic state based on Shariah law. It has often criticized UMNO since 1980s’ for not infusing Islamic values far enough in the public life.

and ethical framework. It visualizes that Malaysia will advance in terms of scientific technology, economy, politics, social, spiritual (kejiwaan), moral strength (kerohanian), and culture by 2020. It is hoped that by the year of 2020, Malaysians, as Bangsa Malaysia, can enjoy their holistic living in a democratic, tolerant, moral, fair, dynamic, competitive and highly capable (daya ketahanan) society. In other words, Vision 2020 is propelled, on the one hand, by a high emphasis on industrial, scientific technology and economical development, and on the other hand, by encircling all aspects of Malaysians’ daily living with Islamic values. It aims to transform Malaysia in its own term without being shaped by the Western version of globalization.

The first phase of the Vision 2020 is spelled out in the Second Outline Perspective Plan (OPP 2; 1991-2000). It embodied the NDP which replaced the NEP. The OPP2 shows clearly Mahatir’s political and economical amalgamation in the process of modernised development. Many huge projects, such as the Penang Bridge, the Petronas Twin Towers at Kuala Lumpur, the Kuala Lumpur Sentral, the Bakun Hydroelectric dam project at Sarawak, and the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), an encompassing area which links up the Kuala Lumpur Telecommunication Tower, the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), and Putrajaya, the Federal Government Capital City, were distributed in the form of contracts to create a pool of wealth which Malaysians, and in particular the Malays, could tap.

Hence, by the mid-1990s, Malaysia had become not only a key exporter of petroleum, tropical timber, palm oil, rubber, and pepper, but also a considerably industrialized and urbanized country with “large-scale export of electronic and electrical components” without getting caught in the trap of either mere Westernisation or Islamist extremism. However, with the controversial sacking and jailing of Anwar Ibrahim, the deputy prime minister, in 1998, and the pressing challenge of the Islam fundamentalists, extremists, and PAS, the process of Islamization shifted to a more

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58 Albin, "Wesley, John (1703-91),"
61 Anwar, who was influenced by the Islamic scholar Syed Naguib al-Attas, the founder of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), was co-opted by Mahatir in 1982 from Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia) to help in promoting Islam as a progressive way of life. Anwar was appointed as Mahatir’s deputy in 1993.
radical direction which further asserts Islamic identity and values. Mahatir, based on the fact that all the conditions for a Muslim state according to the teachings of Islam are found in Malaysia, proclaimed on 29 September 2001 that Malaysia is an Islamic state.\(^{62}\) This provoked controversial heated debate which is not yet settled for it is against the spirit of the Constitution.\(^{63}\) Despite this fact, the present Prime Minister, Dato Seri Abdullah Badawi, who took over the torch of leadership from Mahathir in 2003, continued the legacy of Islamization in a further manner though he held back some of the huge projects approved by the regime of his predecessor.

Due to this furtherance of Islamization, things happening in the public square have resulted in some degree of uneasiness among Malaysians who are non-Muslims. These include, (1) the newest format of *MyKad*, the Malaysian Identity Card divides Malaysians into various religious groups which is deemed discriminatory by non-Muslims; (2) all female police officers, including non-Muslim officers, are to wear Muslim headscarves during public ceremonies; (3) non-Bumiputeras’ cultural festivals are turned down by university authorities; (4) non Muslim students are not to bring in non-*halal* food during break time in a predominantly Malay school; (5) constructions of new church buildings are restricted; (6) in the Peninsula, distributions of Malay-language and Indonesian-language translations of the Bible, both known as *Al-Kitab*, Christian tapes, and other printed Christian materials are restricted to churches and Christian bookshops; (7) *Al-Kitab* must have the phrase “Not for Muslims” printed on the front;\(^{64}\) (8) some churches in Muslim-majority areas were demolished; (9) mosques are erected in Muslim-minority areas with public funds; and (10) Housing developers are to build mosques in every new housing area regardless of the racial and religious demographics. Conversely, annual convocations in universities are permitted to be accompanied by loud *nasyid* music, i.e., the Malay version of Islamic pop music, and Muslim pupils are not prohibited from having beef in schools which have pupils of Hindu-Indian origin.\(^{65}\) Such

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\(^{63}\) Ng Kam Weng, a Malaysia theologian, contends that the distinction between an Islamic country and an Islamic state must be maintained. An Islamic country is descriptive term to describe that Malaysia is a country which the Muslim majority exercising the leading role. Whereas, an Islamic state is a prescriptive term which presumes a State based its polity on Shariah law. Ng, *Declaration of Malaysia as Islamic State* ([cited])

\(^{64}\) Woon, *A Brief History of College General* ([cited])

biases have estranged the fragile relationships between Malays and non Malays, and between Muslims and non Muslims.

(III) Development and Deforestation

As discussed above, Malaysia’s government took systemic steps to expand the national economy through development since the launch of the NEP. To realise this goal, hectares upon hectares of tropic forests, which are known as vast macrocosms of intricately related ecosystems, have been cleared initially for land settlement and development schemes, roads, and other infrastructural developments including agricultural expansion, and later for commercial logging, developments of water dam, and industrialisation. However, in the past fifteen years or so, the rapidity of deforestation has been intensified, partly due to urbanisation and partly due to excessive commercial logging.

The internal migration from rural areas to the industrialized and urbanised regions which are concentrated on the west coast of the Peninsula, such as Kuala Lumpur-Klang Valley, Penang, and Johor Bahru has contributed to the un-controlled urban sprawling. What follows is the replacement of forest, countryside greenery and roadside palm oil and rubber plantations with the un-ending, soulless construction of the “concrete jungle”. Displaced rubber and oil palm workers are then forced to settle down in “squatter” areas which may not have adequate water supply, toilet and sanitation services. This intensifies urban problems, such as overcrowding, traffic jams, inadequacy of public transport, and a greater strain on energy use and other services such as the sewage system and garbage collection. Industrial development and urbanisation have become “ uglification” (from the word “ugly”) and “land scarification” (from the word “scar”) instead! Such living circumstances pose environmental threats to the urban dwellers.

66 The Federal Land Development Authority (Felda), created in 1956, is the largest and most important of the numerous agencies involved in land settlement and development and is one of the biggest agro-industrial corporations in the world. Jeffrey R. Vincent and Rozali Mohamed Ali, Managing Natural Wealth: Environment and Development in Malaysia (Singapore: ISEAS, 2005), 368-9.

67 More discussions on rural-urban migrations see Hassan, Growth, Structural Change and Regional Inequality in Malaysia, 85-117.

As more and more lowland forests were cleared, logging moved farther into the hill-top forests. The deforestation thus has not only resulted in the interruption of both the forest biophysical environment and the hydrological balance of the river systems but it has also caused further immense ecological impact, such as resource depletion, slowness in natural regeneration of the tropical rainforest, soil erosion, landslips, silting, degradation of water quality, and flash floods. 69

2.3 Contextual Challenges for Malaysian Christians

It is clear from the above discussions that there are different dynamics which pose critical challenges to Malaysians. (1) The political strength of UMNO and its coalition parties have brought development to the country. However, with its dominance, some of its young politicians have become abusive, arrogant, and insensitive to the importance of racial harmony. (2) The implementation of NEP in Malaysia has substantially benefited a class of UMNO-Bumiputeras, but is commonly perceived to have has resulted in mismanagement of resources, inequality in wealth distribution, corruption, marginalization, and discrimination. (3) The determination to industrialize the country, on the one hand, has transformed Malaysia into an urbanized country. On the other hand, it has not only forced the poor off their land, perhaps to become “squatter dwellers”, but has also caused environmental problems which all Malaysians cannot neglect. (4) The rapidity of Islamization has strengthened the identity of being Muslims, yet has provoked intolerance, uneasiness, tension and even controversy in our pluralistic society.

All these complex dynamics show their impact through the recent 12th General Election which was held on March 8th, 2008. In this election, Malaysians have swung against the BN in an unprecedented manner since independence in 1957 and voted for the opposition parties, i.e. the Muslim based PAS, the predominantly Chinese based Democratic Action Party (1966), and the multi-ethnic Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR, People’s Justice Party; 2003). 70 These parties successfully secured 82 parliamentary

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70 The political co-operation among these three parties is now known unofficially as Barisan Rakyat (People’s Front).
seats\textsuperscript{71} or 36.9\% of the new 222 seats assembly. This means that BN’s routine two-thirds majority and its ability to amend the constitution at will is now denied. Furthermore, the voters delivered the Federal Territory which contains the capital city, Kuala Lumpur, and the states at the industrial hubs of Peninsula, i.e. Kedah, Penang, Perak, and Selangor, and Kelantan in the east coast to these opposing parties. Through this election, the electorate conveyed that they hope to have a political system which respects human rights, political differences and governs with true justice and mercy.

With this new development, Malaysia enters a new era in which political and economical, civil and judicial accountability, transparency, and competence may be further enforced for the betterment of all Malaysians. Yet there are also some uncertainties. Will the new parliament with more opposition voices be more accountable and competent to work for the good of Malaysians in the parliament? Is this the ethno-genesis (birth of a new culture) of Malaysians-based politics to replace the long existing race-based politics? Or will the country’s politics become more divisive than before? Can we preserve the nation’s stability when BN has lost its two-thirds majority? Will a two-party-system emerge from this new political landscape? Will the opposing parties seek to transcend their political differences and work together effectively as a team to serve as servants of the people rather than masters? Will the opposing parties and now the ruling states’ governments rule with equality, justice, and ethical governance to bring economic growth and long-term racial harmony and stability? Will they gain the support of civil servants? Will these states’ governments work well with the Federal BN government in the national interest while maintaining a healthy political rivalry? These are some unknown areas which have yet to be unfolded.

In such a context, there are a few issues which Malaysian Christians should ponder deeper. (1) What is the real hope that sustains us to continue our stay, to work responsibly, and to live harmoniously with other races in such a situation? (2) Though the political landscape begins to change, we are the minority in a pluralistic society. In what way should we ground our faith for impacting Christian witness? How shall we nurture our faith deeply and live out our faith wisely while participating in the process of nation building? (3) As a minority, how then could we live out a uniform witness

\textsuperscript{71} PKR won 31 parliamentary seats, DAP 28 seats, whereas PAS got 23 seats.
irrespective of the denominational differences? (4) As mentioned earlier, while enjoying the benefits from the development through realizing Vision 2020, we also face substantial environmental issues. Furthermore, Christians, as other non-Bumiputeras, face different forms of inequality which are posed by the affirmative action policy. How then should we wrestle with these challenges?

It is with these questions in mind that I see the strength of Wesley’s view of eschatological living. The following sections thus aim to reflect on the relevance of Wesley’s view for Christians who live in the challenging context of the pluralistic Malaysia.

3. A Contextual Reflection: Wesley and a Way Forward for Malaysian Christians

3.1 Preserving our Hope on God’s Promises for our Eschatological Journey

As discussed in chapter two, God has prepared the new heaven and new earth for the glorified righteous to live as new creation and enjoy peaceful relationship with Him in eternity. Seen from this perspective, the Triune God is, on the one hand, the End who constitutes our eschatological telos. On the other hand, He is the God of hope who “renews” us as new creation and prepares the new heaven and new earth as our eternal home. For Wesley, this renewing act of God at the final End empowers us to stand against all calculations which hinder us from believing and hoping in His promise.72

Yet, how does God present His hope to us in the present earth? Wesley believed that the present dimension of God’s promised hope is realized through the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and the empowering presence of the Spirit. The resurrected Christ who ascended and rules His mediatorial kingdom from the right hand of God the Father is “the object of our hope, and the glory we hope for”.73 God who gave Himself to the world in Christ is the ultimate ground of our hope. In

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72 *NT Notes*, on Romans 4:18-21.
73 *NT Notes*, on Hebrews 6:18, 19.
Christ, the promised hope of God has irreversibly broken into our history to make the present worth living and the future worth hoping for. In Christ, our present and future hope in God is guaranteed. God’s promised hope in Christ through the Spirit concerns both our present and future. This, in turn, becomes the eschatological hope which motivates us to journey our heavenward pilgrimage with ascending faith, joy, and love.

Since God in Christ through the Spirit is the ground of our hope, we who live in His reign, i.e. the Kingdom of Heaven on earth or the Kingdom of Grace, are in fact living in the Kingdom of hope. We who dwell in His reign are people who live in the power of the Kingdom with real hope. We experience the foretaste of the eternal dimension of God’s promised hope while living a life of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Why did God share His hope to us in Christ through the Spirit? Wesley was convinced that God, on the one hand, hopes to see the fallen humanity be reconciled with Him in Christ. On the other hand, He longs to see us being healed, restored, and transformed through the work of His Spirit. He wills us to live in righteousness, persist in our eschatological journey, share His hope with our neighbors and His other creatures, be prepared to inherit the new heaven and new earth and enjoy His immediate presence eternally.

I find these convictions of Wesley are relevant to Malaysian Christians who find our living context is increasingly demanding to live through in the following ways: (I) The Triune God as our Hope; (II) New Heaven and New Earth as our Hopeful Homeland; and (III) Church as Bearer of Hope.

(I) The Triune God as our Hope

The fact that the triune God is our Hope reminds us that He is the source and the goal of our life. He is “before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” (Col. 1:17). He is “everything to everyone”. (1 Cor. 15:28) It is thus in Him that we find real hope for our lives, our death, and our new lives in the new heaven and new earth. Apart from Him, we can not find any real hope in this created earth. God as Hope aligns us to stay focused in Him as we pilgrim our eschatological journey here on earth. To have hope in God, then,
means to work with Him in His created earth into His given future. This hope of God sustains us through whatever situation appears, whether this be an unjust social order, suffering or persecution, for the sake of having this hope.

In contrast, those who do not have hope in God may generate hopes from material goods, higher education, political agendas, technological developments, and economic growth without asking seriously what the substantial ground of these hopes may be. These hopes may motivate us to work for the development and betterment of our society. Nevertheless, these hopes are normally generated at the expense of God’s leased resources in this earth. Every step we take forward in extracting and exploiting these resources is matched by a step backward in conserving the Father’s world. As such, these hopes which we could generate or find from this material world are usually earth bound and situationally confined. These hopes which appear to give us sound purpose and clear direction may one day become misplaced hopes.

Wesley’s strong conviction that God is our Hope informs us that our eschatological living even in an “unpromising situation” shouldn’t be meaningless. Instead, we should (1) discard all forms of idolatry as sources of earthly hopes; (2) search for the ground and real meaning of hope in God through Christ, (3) retune our search for hope not only away from the material world, but towards our focus in God, and (4) to preserve God’s promised hope as we live out the eschatological values that are characteristic of the Kingdom of Heaven, engage in the development of the nation and manage His entrusted resources in our living context.

(II) New Heaven and New Earth as our Hopeful Homeland

A society which distributes its national wealth unequally results in intense unhealthy competition. It conveys a wrong message that accumulated wealth is a symbol of power, security, and hope. In other words, living poor implies powerless and hopelessness. As such, Christians may also be tempted and be “dragged” into this wealth accumulating game. Yet, can wealth purchase hope? Does wealth equate to hope?

At this point, Wesley’s vision of new heaven and new earth strongly cautions us that God’s created earth is not our eternal homeland. We are not permanent citizens in
this earth, but temporary pilgrims. Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). This teleological vision “lifts our sights above the present earth” and helps us to see clearly that our self-worth and life meaning is not determined by what we gain and what we have on earth. Our earthly wealth is not our security and ultimate hope for these will one day fade away. Our self-worth, life meaning, and ultimate hope is in God who has stored the future Grand Hope in Christ and who realizes this hope at present through His Spirit.

It remains a free choice of ours whether we would like to embrace this Hope. Once chosen, this choice will constitute our life identity as Christian sojourners in our living context as well as Christian citizens in the Kingdom of Grace. God’s promise of the new heaven and new earth in and through Christ shapes our life direction, orients us to God’s future through the work of His Spirit, motivates us to preserve our eschatological choice, to live responsibly, and to journey forward and heavenward in hope. This also depicts that we are responsible for our succeeding decisions and transforming actions in realizing our responsibilities as Christian sojourners as well as Christian citizens in the process of stewardship and nation building.

(II) Church as Bearer of Hope

Since God in Christ communicates His hope to us and since new heaven and new earth is our eternal hopeful Homeland, the Christian Church, which is also the Body of Christ, should then be the bearer of hope in this world. As Alister McGrath succinctly describes, it is “an outpost of heaven in a foreign land”. Or in Anthony Kelly’s words, it “exists in history to be the space of hope in the world”. It is “the community of hope that never loses hope for our world”. A church with hope is a church which can grow deeper in its love of God and love of neighbours. It speaks the language of hope which can share comfort with those who find their lives in an unpromising situation to be meaningless. Its seasons should be seasons of hope for those who experience humiliations and desertion in times when economic competition is intensified and

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77 Kelly, Eschatology and hope , 8.
poverty becomes front and centre. Its space should be the space in which one could find hope and where Christian hope is nourished. The sharing of God’s love and hope is a way to provide Christian hospitality in the world which is still groaning toward completion. This will bring blessing to those who lack of hope. Through sharing God’s love and hope, the church “hosts the world”78 while we are sojourning on earth. Through “hosting” our society, we contribute to nation building in the midst of a discouraging situation.

God’s promised hope, but not human agendas, should orient the Church’s ministry. The presence of this eschatological hope guards us from sitting back passively. It motivates us for hopeful living while working with God’s Spirit to realise God’s willed healthy vision for all human beings in society. Nevertheless, we should be cautioned that we are neither the determiners of our history nor the builders of the Kingdom of God with human efforts within history.79 In contrast, we are to live hopefully, pray humbly, and to engage positively in Word and Deed while discerning God’s actions in bringing His purposes on earth to pass.

As such, the discipleship program, theological education, ministries and mission of our Church should bear the mark of God’s hope. As God’s creation being exploited, as the living situation becomes gloomy, as the suffering of the people becomes more inexplicable, the Church must “allow” God’s hope to arise and grow. This is the key mark of love for God and love for neighbours in a tough context.

3.2 Nurturing our Sanctification for a Peaceful Lifestyle

As discussed above, the option of embracing God’s promised hope will constitute our life identity. Wesley emphasized that the key mark of this life identity is to live a life of sanctification. A life of sanctification is needful because He who promises us both the new heaven and new earth is Holy (Isa. 6.3; 43.3; Rev.4.8). Our lives need to be healed

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and sanctified through His Sanctifying Spirit without which we could not “take God seriously and try to live a life that accords with Him”.  

(I) Sanctification of Life for Peaceful Lifestyle

Sanctification of life in the light of the Kingdom of Heaven will reorient our life focus for it has only a clear Centre: God, the Creator and the Governor. A life of sanctification is a life of worship. It, on the one hand, prevents us from accumulating wealth to buttress our egos or “worshipping” the other “gods” in the process of working for a better life in our social context. On the other hand, it will transform us so that we can (1) honor God as the Master of the universe and the Judge in the Final End; (2) see clearly our identity as God’s entrusted stewards to convey God’s blessings to God’s creatures, but not the exploiters of His leased resources; (3) embrace the reverence of life; (4) treasure the nurturing of our spirituality; and (5) administer justice and mercy in our capacity with sound Christian ethics and respect weaker life. Furthermore, it enables us to counter negative values, aberrant work cultures and erosive expectations of short-term gain. In view of this, a life of worship is linked inextricably to our responsible stewardship, works of mercy, and environmental conservation. We are called to be responsible stewards and faithful witnesses just as we are called to be genuine worshippers.

This life of sanctification is further cultivated through our prayerful meditation, constant prayer and fasting, public worship, and participation in the Lord’s Supper in the context of church service. These means of grace which Wesley emphasized are still sound sources for the nourishment of contemporary Malaysian Christians. A life of action needs to be balanced by a life of prayerful contemplation and mutual accountability for it is in prayerful contemplation and mutual accountability that we are formed for stronger witness in our living situation.

The importance of the means of grace for the nourishment of Christian life poses important questions for us: “Do we give enough concern to these works of piety? Do our works of piety enable us to deepen our love of God, experience deeper sanctifying work of the Spirit, and thus enhance our hope in God? Do the works of piety which we engage

in empower and equip us for stronger works of mercy?” These are issues which we cannot neglect for the grounding of our faith and witness in a contemporary society which shifts attention from the love for God and love for neighbors to theories construction, scientific innovations and developments, and economic growth.

Other than personal pious disciplines, a certain form of communal life under sound leadership and mature mentoring is essential for the enrichment of our growth for Christian witness. As a matter of fact, Wesley saw in the healthy church life a breeding ground to experience God’s presence through the work of His Spirit. When God’s presence is experienced through different forms of Christian communal life, our souls will be healed and renewed in His sanctifying grace, so that character formation, values and mindset reorientation, and commitment to a peaceful lifestyle will eventually take place.

The fact that Wesley saw Christian community in the forms of bands/classes/societies meetings and church services as the alternative yet parallel community to the greater society inspires us to reflect on the meaning of being church in this contemporary age which stresses de-Christianization and individualism. As Christian community, we are to live a different way of life from those who follow the negative tides of de-Christianization and individualism. We, who are formed by God’s sanctifying grace, are to commit ourselves to live out the identity of being a genuine worshipping community as well as a missional church because communal worship and mission are the symbols of being God’s children and being Christ’s Church.

Furthermore, Wesley’s affirmation of the essential criteria for joining in the societies’ meetings is to have a desire “to flee from the wrath to come”81 reminds us that a healthy communal life will help us to be mindful of the promised new heaven and new earth as we continue our eschatological living on earth. In turn, this will enhance our accountability to God, the Judge of the Final End, and our stewardship on earth.

As we noted in chapter four, at the annual conferences which Wesley called, he put to the preachers questions intended to clarify matters of doctrines and praxis. I find

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this style of delineating doctrinal and practical matters is still relevant in our 21st century Malaysian context. Some of the questions which we should address are as below: Is our Church which serves as an outpost of the Hopeful Homeland on earth healthy? Does our Church govern by this Homeland’s values and grow healthily in a society which follows other values? How can it grow healthily in God’s sanctifying grace? How can she “facilitate” our fellow brothers and sisters to experience the reality of God’s presence and in turn determine to live as God’s hopeful children? Are we willing to discard the comfort of “feeling at our own home” to be opened and welcome the new sojourners to be part of our church? Do we facilitate God’s hope enough that these new sojourners will find their identity and dignity in the Kingdom of Grace and in turn plan their future responsibly? Do we emphasize Christian discipleship and Christian formation for effective leadership in preaching, teaching, nurturing, pastoral care, and ministry in small groups as Wesley did? Do these small groups facilitate enough companionship, intimacy and nourishment that group members can be nurtured to live out the Kingdom’s value? In answering these questions, I find Wesley’s pastoral effort with sound theological under-girding to enrich church life for his age to be a good reference for us. The way he worked through these issues in his context is still of relevance as we attempt to map out appropriate strategies for Christian discipleship which aims to reflect our identity, our calling, and our mission as God’s children and Christ’s Church.

(II) Respectful Conversation as a Means for Sharing Christ’s Peace

As discussed in chapter three, Wesley’s notion of sanctification is closely linked to his practical emphasis on love for our neighbors. This love for neighbors is shown through our respectful conversation with our neighbors, caring for the poor and preaching Christ. Respectful conversation, caring for the poor and proclamation are mutually related and mutually dependent. Each enforces the other in sharing God’s love and peace in Christ to our neighbors. I find that these ways of sharing peace to our neighbors appeal to the multi ethno-religious society such as Malaysia.

Wesley’s approach of respectful conversation helps us to acknowledge the fact that there are neighbors of different faith traditions living around us. It presses us to

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82 Hereafter, “proclamation” denotes preaching the threefold message.
leave our comfort zone and to relate to our social reality relevantly. It also demand us to probe deeper the following heart-searching questions: “Who are my neighbors?” “Whose neighbors am I?” “Do I respect my neighbors “as unique individuals” or do I read into them our own presuppositions?” “Do I converse respectfully and humbly with them even if their religious traditions are different from ours?” “Do I live with them in the kindest manner in all necessary occasions?” In asking these questions, we aim to put effort to clear misunderstanding, eliminate irrelevant words, judgments, and actions, foster greater mutual understanding and reconciliation. Respectful conversation is, on the one hand, a way to nurture a peaceful and harmonious relationship among our neighbors in the context in which racial tensions or conflicts may sometimes occur. On the other hand, through mutual learning and understanding in openness and humility, it becomes a means for our own spiritual growth and faith development.

Through respectful conversation, on the one hand, we recognize the otherness of our neighbors. We listen to their life stories. We share their joys and pains. We care for their felt needs and if necessary, advocate on their behalf as Wesley did for the poor and the slaves of his age. From this listening, sharing, and caring, we learn and we may even discern God’s prevenient grace in our neighbors’ lives. Furthermore, respectful conversation also means that we respect and allow our neighbors to choose their own way for “other religious traditions are completely fulfilling for those within them,” as Elizabeth Harris remarks. On the other hand, we can share our authentic stories, our values, and our experiences of God’s grace in Christ respectfully with our neighbors. Through listening and learning from what we converse, our neighbors may discern the spirit of the crucified and resurrected Christ in us. Respectful conversation thus becomes a non-declarative means to witness Christ and an invitation for our neighbors to know the Triune God and the hope which is in us (1Pe. 3:15-16).

This Wesleyan conversational approach can serve as a foundation for the Christian minority to formulate our conversational approach to life as we participate with other religious heirs in the process of nation building and struggle for justice and human


dignity among the poor or the less fortunate. It could be one of the forms of witnessing Christ, and may be the only form possible in certain situations.

I am convinced that churches which form only a minority in a multi ethno-religious society should further this Wesleyan approach as one of our own missional approaches. This is because respectful conversation among cultural, or religious, or racial groups “is a presupposition for peace in the world”.85 This will equip us to live with our neighbours with the knowledge of our differences and help to build “relationships of trust through mutual understanding”.86 Furthermore, this will enable the non-Christian majority to understand more of the beauty of Christian faith. In turn, it will contribute in enhancing the living together in peace.

(III) Caring for the Poor as a Means for Sharing Christ’s Peace

Other than respectful conversation, we, as stewards, are to be sensitive to the real needs of our neighbors, especially the poor and the powerless. We are to take care of the poor in our society where the rich get richer and the powerful more powerful. Yet, who are the poor and the powerless? Reading through Wesley’s lens, the contemporary poor and powerless may be the marginalized, the less opportune, the urban “squatter dwellers”, the “landless wanderers”, or even the “non person” (the excluded poor) who suffer from the mismanagement of resources and inequality in wealth distribution. They may also be the oppressed who live in the insecurities caused by ethno-religious tensions or controversies or the powerless victims who are silenced by the abusive voices of the arrogant politicians.

The next questions then will be: “Are we willing to share God’s peace with the poor graciously, regardless of their social or religious background?” “How can we share hope with the poor, as we participate in nation building?” “Do the poor accept our sharing?” Wesley’s emphasis on Christianity as social religion and his praxis of lifelong solidarity with the poor motivate us to reflect deeper on Jesus’ parables of the rich fool (Lk.12:13-21), of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31), and of the great feast (Lk.

85 Walter Kasper, That They May All Be One (London: Burns & Oates, 2004), 36.
14:15-24). Sharing God’s peace in Christ in our context implies that we walk with the poor and the needy as Wesley did for the poor and the slaves. In doing so, we remind ourselves that we are also the poor who receive God’s grace unconditionally though materially we live a reasonably good life in an unpromising situation where we are not entitled to the Bumiputeras’ special privileges. This centripetal movement of remembrance before God in turn motivates us to engage in the centrifugal movement of providing hospitality to our neighbors who are poor and powerless. This is a way to shape our relationship with our neighbors as well as our growth in Christ. Though Malaysian Care and The Beautiful Gate Foundation for the Disabled which was started by the Chinese Annual Conference of the Methodist Church have contributed significantly to different groups of the poor, the Malaysian Church as a whole still has much room to develop in caring for the poor among our neighbors.

Poverty, exploitation, marginalization, discrimination, and other forms of injustice which cuts across all ethnic groups are often caused by those who abuse the social structures for more power and wealth. In view of this, caring for the powerless or the oppressed may sometimes imply that we, as stewards and citizens of our country, should speak against the unjust acts, especially of those who are in power, yet who do not care for the dignity of the nature and the basic human rights of the people. Are we then prepared to take stock of our understanding of mission? How shall we include “the exercise of one’s citizenship” and caring for the poor in our Christian education or discipleship training program? Are we willing to invest time and energy in doing relevant research and analysis, map out appropriate strategies to speak out for the powerless and the oppressed, which includes the foreign labourers and the voiceless exploited nature? How shall we advocate for the dignity and basic rights of the powerless and denounce all forms of exploitation and oppression with justice and integrity in the wider society? Do we contribute to providing relief and facilitating development for the poor? When it is needful, do we walk another mile to rebuke social sin and advocate for social structural change that the poor and powerless can be entitled to healthier dignity, greater freedom, economic justice, and environmental sustainability?

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87 The ideas of this sentence is adapted from Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness*.
89 These ideas are adapted from Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 139, 146-47.
work with our neighbors who are not of Christian faith to achieve these purposes? In answering these questions, I have found Wesley’s amalgamation of works of piety and works of mercy, his stress on personal and social holiness, thus his commitment to spreading scriptural holiness and reforming the nation, and his efforts in advocating for the poor and motivating the Methodists to “do good, as far as possible, to all men” through class meetings and other corporate and institutional means, to still be an inspiring reference for us even in this 21st century.

By referring to Wesley, I am convinced that we should include caring for the poor and the powerless into our understanding and praxis of mission. This is because creation and redemption are closely related in Christ. Furthermore, the risen Christ rules the whole universe with the Father from the Kingdom of Glory. His gracious reign concerns not only individual souls or church, but the social structures and nonhuman creation too. Therefore, social responsibility is inseparably intertwined with proclamation (evangelism) and church planting. They are different but related ways of living out the nature of the Kingdom of Grace. A mission of wholeness which is grounded in the values of the Kingdom aims to care for the wholeness of persons. Sharing God’s peace in Christ is thus much broader than verbal proclamation or communication of Christ, though the latter is central. We should care for the poor and powerless because they are the imago dei whom God cares and loves. They live under God’s providential government, as Wesley claims through his appropriated notion of the threefold circle of God’s providence. They are our neighbors whom God has sent us to pray for, to walk with, to share His love in actual actions, and to communicate His reconciling message in and through Christ.

By not turning our back to the poor, the unprivileged, the powerless, and the oppressed but hosting them despite their responses while we ourselves face inequality, the poor see in us the virtues of humility and love. Their acceptance of our sharing is a very convincing witness in a pluralistic society where Christians are a minority. On the other hand, those who may not be of Christian faith see in us the universal values of justice and peace while working hand in hand with us in the process of nation building.

This is a strong testimony of sound Christian discipleship in the midst of the temptations either of selfish individualism or of idolizing the accumulation of wealth, status and power.

(III) Proclamation as a Means of Sharing Christ’s Peace

Other than respectful conversations and caring for the poor and the powerless, Wesley encouraged us to engage in proclamation whenever it is possible. His untiring efforts of proclamation clearly show that he never identified respectful conversation and social responsibility with proclamation for he understood clearly that these mentioned means cannot solve human spiritual problems. Furthermore, only human persons can respond to God’s love and hope through proclamation, but not social structures. Hence, respectful conversation and responsibility are closely related to proclamation but not interchangeable with it. By maintaining this creative tension, Wesley, on the one hand, prevents us from narrowing the purpose of works of mercy only to saving individual souls. On the other hand, he affirms that sharing God’s peace in Christ encompasses the holistic being of a human person because God’s peace implies all temporal, spiritual and eternal blessings.

Therefore, we as a Christian minority in a pluralistic country should not replace the ministry of proclamation with respectful conversations and social care. To do this is to imply that we make our church into a social agency with a chapel service. Such a church may eventually lose its essence as a Christian church.

The ministry of proclamation should be strengthened because God loves this broken world. Proclamation is a crucial way to witness who this loving God is, what He has done in Christ, and what He is now doing through the Spirit. It explains what social care cannot explain and enforces what respectful conversation may have conveyed. Nevertheless, we should also be mindful that proclamation is neither an imperialistic activity nor a self-propagation aiming to proselytize others with force.\(^{92}\) On the contrary, it is a concrete action of sharing God’s peace with our neighbors, to whom we owe this message. It is to offer the One who offers Himself wholly for others in love and humility.

\(^{92}\) Kasper, That They May All Be One, 39.
Wesleyan proclamation informs us that to preach Christ is necessarily to preach that Christ died for all, that salvation by faith and that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. On the one hand, it stresses that we should bring Christ and His Kingdom to the Centre for those who decide to reconcile with God in and through Christ. Christ and His Kingdom should be the primary criterion of our eschatological living. Such a stress will bring forth transformation of hearts and lives of those who embrace God’s salvation in Christ. It results naturally in the new creation of people who care for the society in which they live. Hence, Wesleyan proclamation concerns holistic transformation of both the personal and social dimensions. It exerts a positive influence in the wider society.

On the other hand, Wesleyan proclamation affirms that God’s prevenient grace is available for all because Christ died for all is its foundation. This makes possible the salvation for those who do not confess Christ explicitly. To deny this possibility means to deny the possibility of salvation of the Old Testament people, the mentally handicapped, the little babies, and those who “worship” the unknown God but are yet to have the chance to listen to the verbal presentation of the Christian gospel.

Seen from this perspective, Wesleyan proclamation is inclusive. It is inclusive because it acknowledges God’s prevenient work in people’s lives and thus the possibility of knowing God outside “the empirical church or what is known historically as ‘Christianity’”. Yet, it is exclusive in rejecting the pluralism which denies the uniqueness of what God has done in Jesus Christ. The inclusiveness of God’s love and the uniqueness of Christ should be maintained while we attempt to construct our theology of proclamation as well as our theology of mission in our pluralistic context because this is the way to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven which promises genuine hope for all people. Preaching Christ’s message with its scandal of particularity in God’s universal love is the costly mark of all who heed God’s calling in Christ though Wesley.

Though it has its scandal of particularity, I am convinced that when it is shared in God’s love, Wesleyan proclamation will invite the hearers to meditate and reflect. We should be convinced that the Spirit will work in their hearts because God’s prevenient

grace has already been at work in them. In view of this, we should then ask: Is our proclamation an approach of “manipulative monologue” as George Morris and Eddie Fox criticise? Or is an “interactive-relational” mode of communicating Christ’s message more appealing? These are important pastoral issues which are worthwhile for further reflection in our context.

3.3 **Cultivating a Catholic Spirit for Common Witness**

As mentioned above, the British Colonial policy in Malaysia was to divide and rule. This is reflected somewhat in Malaysian church life. Most of the mainline denominations in Malaysia are ethnically based. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malaysia and Singapore is mainly constituted by Indians, whereas the Lutheran Church of Malaysia and Singapore is mainly Chinese. The Methodist Church in Malaysia comprises five annual conferences, one providential conference, and a mission conference which are mainly constituted by racial or language speaking group, e.g. the Chinese Annual Conference consists of Chinese-speaking congregations, whereas the Tamil Annual Conference consists of Tamil-speaking congregations.

Most Malaysian Christians are comfortable with worshipping and socializing with Christians who are of the same race. This gives a sense of commonality and security. This also gives a sense of “peace” for clashes of culture are avoided from worshipping and living together cross-culturally. However, does this kind of “segregation” reflect the fact that we are in Christ? How can we behave as Christians in such manner if there is racial conflict or violence in the clash of civilization in the wider society? How can we face the challenges ahead by continuing in this kind of segregation?

It is at such a critical juncture that Wesley’s emphasis of love for neighbors and peaceful lifestyle, of which catholic spirit and respectful conversation are part, can serve as strong pointers for Malaysian Christians of different denominations to work for

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95 A mission conference is an initial step to form Methodist churches as an annual conference. When its churches grow in number and strength, it will be constituted as a providential conference and then annual conference.
stronger common witness. As the situation becomes more demanding, one of our greater
tasks is “to work with all who earnestly sought to proclaim Christ as Savior,” though
we don’t have to be involved in the same ministry at the same time with the same
language. A common witness for Christ is possible and needful for (1) we are bound to
each other by “our common participation in the life of Christ through the Holy Spirit”; (2)
we are all one historically and theologically; (3) we are all baptized in the name of
Jesus Christ, and so belong to the one body of Christ; (4) “we have more in common
than what divides us,” as Walter Kasper sharply points out; and (5) this is a more
effective way to witness that we are the baptized community in Christ in a pluralistic
society where the Christian population is a minority. Hence, the differences of
theological opinions which are caused chiefly by historical divisions should not be the
barrier which hinders us from moving closer to each other in Christ. Wesley’s
distinction between essential doctrines and theological opinions can be a good reference
model for us in this regard.

We should pray for deeper catholic spirit because this will “provide a
framework” in which we can overcome divisiveness, discard narrowness and partisan
bigotry, ease confrontation, and clear all possible barriers which hold us back from
understanding the distinctiveness of each other’s teaching, tradition, spirituality and
structures for a richer mutual understanding. Besides, catholic spirit will help in
enhancing the arts of reaching out, mending historical gaps, strengthening respectful
conversation (or dialogue in the contemporary term) and embracing differences in
doctrinal opinions, modes of worship and church government among Christians or
churches of diverse traditions.

In the past years, Malaysian Christians have achieved considerable results in
these efforts. The establishment of the Council Churches of Malaysia (CCM), Malaysia
Theological Seminary (Seminari Theoloji Malaysia; STM), and the Christian Federation
of Malaysia (CFM), which represents the Catholics, the mainline denominations’
Christians, and Christians from evangelical churches, are some of the notable

98 Kasper, *That They May All Be One*, 43.
achievements. However, there is still a long way to go to foster a stronger common witness in all levels of church life.

To strengthen the unity among Christians, different levels of respectful dialogue should be encouraged. Christians from the same denominations should work for stronger discussion, dialogue, and communication for deeper common Christian identity, credibility, and unity. Christians or churches from diverse traditions should build upon the foundation which is laid by the past and current leaders to enrich the respectful dialogue for both the present common witness and the betterment of the coming Christian generations in a challenging pluralistic context.

To engage in such respectful dialogue does not mean to absorb our dialogical partners. Neither does it carry the implication to relativise or change the doctrinal beliefs of our partners. Rather, it is a means to allow the Spirit to lead us into the wholeness of His revealed truth, to heal “the wounds of our divisions and endow us with full catholicity”. 100 It is thus a way to enforce mutual understanding and to enrich mutual spiritual enrichment. It can even be a means to move us closer to the risen Christ as Kasper reasons insightfully:

The ecumenical dialogue calls us to the conversion of all to the full truth of Jesus Christ. When we move closer to Jesus Christ through the exchange of our different confessional experience and our different approaches, and grow into the full stature of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:13), we become one in Jesus Christ. He is our unity. In him we can also realize historically the whole fullness of catholicity after overcoming our divisions. 101

As the world becomes more complex and plural, the truth of this insightful comment of Kasper becomes clearer. Complexity, pluralism, and relativism in the world requires us to find ways to integrate resources, to engage in theological dialogue, common prayer, and ministerial and missional co-operation for a more effective way of Christian discipleship among Christians and a stronger common witness to reach the lost generations. We cannot afford to witness Christ independently in a world which is impacted by the rapidity of the spread of globalization, pluralism, and relativism.

100 Kasper, That They May All Be One, 169.
101 Kasper, That They May All Be One, 170.
Nevertheless, we should also be mindful of the wisdom of Wesley’s notion of catholic spirit. Christians who possess catholic spirit do not waver between two opinions, but are fixed as the sun in their judgment concerning the main branches of Christian doctrine. Hence, as we draw strength from the creativity and richness to be found in a plurality of theological thoughts, modes of worship, styles of liturgical rites, forms of piety and church government, and construct common pastoral ways to respond to the fast changing social needs, we can not compromise the central tenets of Christian faith and order which were entrusted to us by the forefathers in faith (2Ti. 1:13-14). To preserve this is to prevent us from falling into both the traps of fundamentalism and relativism which bring no benefits at all to the Christian church.

3.4 Deepening Responsible Stewardship for Harmonious Living

As discussed above, as non-Bumiputeras in Malaysia, we face different forms of inequality which are posed by the affirmative action policy. Though the Barisan Rakyat (People’s Coalition) proposed a Malaysian Economic Agenda which aims especially to (1) distribute the nation’s wealth with justice and equality; (2) counter corruption, cronyism, and nepotism; (3) provide assistance for the Malay poor as well as relevant opportunities for the poor of other races, the details are yet to be worked out. How then should we respond? Should we work harder for productivity, excellence and efficiency? Or should we drift with the tide and live leisurely?

I am convinced that Wesley’s emphasis on responsible stewardship would invite us to delve deeper into the nature of work which is an essential part of our eschatological living. God entrusted human beings to fill and subdue the earth which He created (Ge. 1:26-28). This mandate is further elaborated in Ge. 2:15 and Ps. 104:23: human beings are to work and take care of the earth. As Hathaway illustrates, “work is stewardship in action”. Hence, work is not simply a routine chore for the sake of meeting our needs (Ps. 128:2). We work because God worked and He continues to work. We work because

we are created in the image of God who works. He, who is the Great Worker, wills that “we should work with Him in His creation”. On this basis, work is central to God’s intention for humanity. Through work, we fulfill this intention of God, co-labor with Him to accomplish His preserving work in this created earth and bring glory to Him. Through work, we realize our calling to love God and our neighbors through stewarding God’s entrusted earth responsibly to release its potential. Work therefore is not an end in itself but neither can we sideline it from our eschatological living. This provides us with a different yet enlightening perspective when we reflect on the meaning of work in facing inequality or injustice in our marketplace.

Nevertheless, we should be aware that as we work, the created earth as an interconnected ecosystem is affected. How then should we maintain the balance between extracting and developing God’s leased resources on the one hand, and environmental conservations for the betterment of our holistic living and that of future generations on the other? Once again, Wesley’s stress on creation as web of life, love for God, self-denial, responsible stewardship, and love for our neighbours has much to say to us. As early as eighteenth century, he foresaw how disastrous our own homeland would become if God’s resources continued to be exploited and misused. If this situation persists, the beautiful Father’s world will one day become our graveyard! The ancient prophetic voice of Wesley thus presses us to reflect critically on the issues of responsible stewardship, environmental conservation, and care for the poor. A responsible way of developing God’s leased resources with careful environmental conservation plan would reflect the fact that we live and love our neighbors, including those who are unborn, responsibly.

We should be reminded that “the earth and everything in it is the Lord’s” (Ps. 24:1). The created ready earth and its resources are not unclaimed property. They are not “a thing” for us to manipulate, but God’s gift leased in trust. They are the common ground for all people to be used justly and enjoyed inter-generationally. Therefore, for Christians, a theocentric view of creation should be taught and nurtured so that we won’t dissociate God, the Creator, from the earth which He created and still sustains.

105 Mackenzie, "Thinking Biblically about Work," 11.
107 Robert Barry Leal, Through ecological eyes : reflections on Christianity’s environmental credentials (Strathfield, N.S.W.: St. Pauls, 2006), 11.
We, who are created in God’s image, are commissioned to subdue and have dominion over the creation. However, our “dominion is not domination”.\(^\text{108}\) It is a delegated authority for reverential care. “We are all trustees”\(^\text{109}\) with fallen limitations. We should stress the formation of Christian character and the nurturing of healthy affections so that we can exercise our dominion over the created earth with stewarded knowledge, creativity, love, and justice. While exercising our stewardship, we are, in fact, working with God in tilling and tending His sustained earth for the good of ourselves and our neighbors, including those who are unborn. Peaceful relationship with God’s creation is inseparable from peaceful relationship with God in Christ. We, especially those who are entrusted with political and/or economic power, are called to manage appropriate technological advancements with skill and stewardship while employing them to work for production and economic development. The fact that economics and ecology are interrelated words should be considered seriously and justly.

As people of hope living out the Kingdom’s values, we should share God’s hope with not only our neighbours but the created earth because we are intertwined with it. One of the concrete ways to share God’s hope with the created earth is to incorporate a robust environmental education into our Christian discipleship program. Other than evangelism and apologetics, Christians should be nurtured for environmental conservation and social care.

In light of the above discussions, we understand that responsible stewardship is demanding. Nevertheless, Wesley never lost sight of the importance of Sabbath and rest in the midst of our hardship. This reminds us that we could find rest in the Triune God in a busy industrious society. The time and space in rest points us to the Creator and the Governor of life and informs us that we are not the peak of creation, but God Himself who rested on the Sabbath after His creative endeavours. As a matter of fact, both the commandments of Sabbath rest (Exod. 20:8-11) and justice (Deut. 5:12-15) calls us “to pause, rest, and remember our dependency on God”.\(^\text{110}\) The discipline of Sabbath and rest which focuses on God leads us back to the centre of our eschatological living, God,

\(^{108}\) The Oxford Declaration on Christian Faith and Economics, 328.


the Creator and the Governor. It is for the restoration of ourselves as well as all other creation. It nourishes our relationships with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and other creatures.

Furthermore, the discipline of Sabbath and rest calls us to reflect on the depth of our life of sanctification, the richness of our love for God and neighbours, and our attentiveness in our works of piety and mercy. It reminds us that we are human beings and God’s stewards who are nurtured by His grace, not earth’s servants or industrious machines which are enslaved by either market economics or our own unhealthy desires.

A balanced rhythm of work and rest will eventually gear us to rethink and reorganize our lifestyle according to Wesley’s twofold emphasis on love for God and neighbors and threefold principle of gaining all that we can, saving all that we can and giving all that we can. This not only enables us to live a diligent yet simple lifestyle, but also allows us to be concerned for those who have spiritual, emotional, physical and social needs.

Working diligently will normally bring “good gaining”. Good gaining is, as Wesley maintained, for strategic giving in love and care. A strategic giving in love will provide opportunities for the needy and hope for the poor. A better societal community living is achieved through this effort. This is part of our calling to convey God’s blessing to our community, and one of the ultimate goals of living a responsible eschatological life on earth.
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