

## WESLEYAN ESCHATOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

### FOR THE CHURCH'S ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

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Eschatology as Christian doctrine seeks to express the Church's understanding of final events in the present age; the consummation of the created order when God will be "all in all;" and how the eschatological impacts contemporary life and reality. While some Wesleyan theologians have been reticent to address the subject, or reluctant to speculate on particular issues surrounding Christ's second coming and millennial reign, there has been a consistent articulation of a Wesleyan vision of the "life everlasting" since the 18<sup>th</sup> century Methodist revival, with provisional implications drawn for the present age.<sup>1</sup> Because John Wesley and his theological heirs believed "first evidences" of the "age to come" are being expressed already in the lives of Christians, adjectives like "realized," "anticipated," "inaugurated," and "processive" are used to describe their eschatology.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of my paper is twofold: (1) identify key features of this historic Wesleyan eschatological vision relevant for Christianity's engagement with different religions and (2) explore their implications within the larger framework of the Church's openness, dialogue and witness, and collaboration with other faiths. In the last twenty years there has been a renaissance among Wesleyan scholars attempting to connect Wesleyan "New Creation" eschatology with contemporary issues: ecclesial, social, economic, ecological, and inter-religious.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the work done on Christianity's relationship with other religions, while helpful, has been limited in scope; usually restricted to the applicability of John Wesley's eschatological views; to the

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<sup>1</sup>John B. Cobb in *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) does not address eschatology; H. Ray Dunning in *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), 569-89 relegates the bulk of his discussion on eschatology to an appendix. See Timothy L. Smith's *Called unto Holiness*, vol. 1, *The Story of the Nazarenes: The Formative Years* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), 35, 127, for a discussion of Wesleyans who affirmed the major points of eschatology, but refused to engage in "divisive themes" over unsettled issues regarding Christ's millennial reign. The reluctance of Wesleyan and Nazarene theologians to take any definitive stand on millennialism can be seen in "Article of Faith XV: Second Coming of Jesus Christ" and "Article of Faith XVI: Resurrection, Judgment and Destiny" in *Manual of The Church of the Nazarene 2009-2013* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2013), ¶ 19-22 and in "Article of Religion 18: The Second Coming of Christ" and "Article of Religion 19: The Resurrection of the Dead" in *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church 2008* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2008), ¶ 244-7. Among theologians who have explored the implications of a Wesleyan eschatology for the present age, most notable is Theodore Runyon's *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998); See also Randy Maddox' development of personal, social and ecological ethics out of Wesley's eschatology in *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 242-7.

<sup>2</sup>See Jerry Mercer, "The Destiny of Man in John Wesley's Eschatology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 2:1 (1967): 58-9; James Cyril Thomas Downes, "Eschatological Doctrines in the Writings of John and Charles Wesley," (Ph.D. dissertation at Edinburgh University, 1960), 17; James Cecil Logan, "Toward a Wesleyan Social Ethic," in *Wesleyan Theology Today*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville, TN: Kingswood, 1985), 363; and Clarence Bence, "Processive Eschatology: A Wesleyan Alternative," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 14:1 (1979): 45-59.

<sup>3</sup>The Eleventh Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, convened at Christ Church, Oxford, August 13-22, 2002 was devoted to the theme "The New Creation." The plenary lectures were edited by M. Douglas Meeks and published in *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2004). These lectures explore the implications of Wesley's "New Creation" eschatology from different theological disciplines for a full range of contemporary issues.

contributions other religions make to Wesleyan eschatology; to common conceptions of Heaven, to inter-religious cooperation; or to the fate of people in final judgment who have never heard the Gospel.<sup>4</sup> Hopefully, my paper will contribute to the expansion of recent work by going beyond Wesley, tracing a distinctive and clear eschatological perspective running through the major theologians in Methodist history, and by helping consolidate through an eschatological lens some of the essential points made by Wesleyan scholars about the Church's inter-religious relationships.

## I. A WESLEYAN VIEW OF ESCHATOLOGY RELEVANT TO CHRISTIANITY'S ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

While there are differences in eschatological understanding among major theologians in the Methodist tradition, certain fundamental ideas germane to Christianity's engagement with other faiths can be traced historically, originating in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and culminating in the present: from early Methodists: John Wesley, John Fletcher, and Richard Watson; 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Wesleyans: John Miley, William Burt Pope, and Thomas Ralston; and 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Nazarene and Methodist theologians: A.M. Hills, H. Orton Wiley, Kenneth Grider, Thomas Oden and Randy Maddox.<sup>5</sup>

Specifically, there are six relevant eschatological themes consistently held in the Wesleyan tradition, centering on Christ's second coming, the general resurrection, final judgment, and the eschaton. While eschatology traditionally addresses the doctrines of personal death, the intermediate state and the millennial reign of Christ on earth, these will only be secondary in concern.

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<sup>4</sup>For examples of these types of Wesleyan eschatological work, see Jong Chun Park, "Christian Perfection and Confucian Sage Learning: An Interreligious Dialogue in the Crisis of Life," in *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation*, 119-48; Joe Gorman, "Grace Abounds: The Missiological Implications of John Wesley's Inclusive Theology of Other Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 48:1 (2013), 38-53; Michael Hurley, "Salvation Today and Wesley Today," in *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition*, ed., K. A. Rowe (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1976), 94-116; Randy L. Maddox, "Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation through Other Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 7-29; Theodore Runyon's *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*, 215-221; Godwin R. Singh, "New Creation in the Contexts of Religious Pluralism and the Wesleyan Critique" at <http://oimts.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/2002-5-singh.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup>Central to my task is the identification of certain fundamental ideas about the eschaton running throughout the history of the Wesleyan tradition. To do so, I draw upon the works of early Methodists: John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; Reprint by Baker Book House, 1978) and *Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1976-); John Fletcher, *The Whole Works of the Reverend John Fletcher* (London: Partridge and Oakley, 1835); and Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1889) and *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856); from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century: William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1880); John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1894); and Thomas N. Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, ed. T. O. Summers, (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1924); and from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century: A.M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology: A Systematic Theology* (Pasadena, CA: C. J. Kinne, Pasadena College, 1931); H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1943); Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994); Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*; and Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: HarperOne, 2009). I will also draw upon the work of other theologians including Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Divine Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007) and H. Ray Dunning's *Grace, Faith and Holiness*. While there are obvious limitations to this approach, the attempt is to show the relevance of these elements of a Wesleyan eschatology consistently held throughout Methodist history to inter-religious engagement.

## A. The Centrality of Jesus Christ

Because the Wesleyan tradition as a whole has embraced historic orthodox Christology, as represented in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, the centrality of Christ to the eschatological is clear.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, there have been Methodist theologians who have challenged traditional Christology, but their appeal has been limited.<sup>7</sup> Wesleyan theology has consistently rejected any form of pluralism, conceiving of no redemption and final salvation apart from the person and work of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, one in nature with the Father, but distinguishable in person, who assumed full human nature in the incarnation to redeem humanity and the created order from all forms of sin and evil. He is the theandric one: fully divine and fully human.<sup>9</sup> Through his life, death, resurrection and exaltation he inaugurates the work of recreation in the present age and will consummate it in the coming eschaton. Christ is key to the eschatological: he will come again in his humanity to usher in the “Kingdom of Glory;” the general resurrection from the dead is made possible by and is patterned after his physical resurrection; he is the “great assize” of every human being in the final judgment; and he makes possible in heaven “an intimate, and uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-in-One God, and all the creatures in him.”<sup>10</sup>

## B. Renewal of the Created Order

In contrast to any form of pesky Gnosticism infecting Christian eschatology, a Wesleyan view of the “life everlasting” teaches that God does not destroy fallen creation. Because of the “goodness” of creation and divine love, God renews and perfects it. Humanity’s full nature (“body and soul”), the diversity of natures in the created order, and the entire universe will be redeemed from all forms of corruption and brought to their ultimate end: union with God.

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<sup>6</sup> As an example of the typical affirmation of historic Christology in the Wesleyan tradition, see *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2012* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), ¶ 102-4, particularly Articles of Religion I-III and Confession of Faith, Articles II and XII.

<sup>7</sup> A recent example is retired United Methodist Bishop C. Joseph Sprague’s *Affirmations of a Dissenter* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Here I am working with the standard categories of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism as popularized by Alan Race in *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Oden provides a helpful overview of the official doctrinal statements on Christology among the diversity of Wesleyan denominations in *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press of Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 132-6, 142-4, 156-8, 159-61, 163-72.

<sup>10</sup> The quote is taken from John Wesley, Sermon 64, “The New Creation,” § 18 in *Sermons II*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 2 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 510. The centrality of Christ in these eschatological categories can be seen in John Wesley, Sermon 15, “The Great Assize,” *Works*, 1:354-75; Sermon 51, “The Good Steward,” *Works*, 2:282-98; Sermon 64, “The New Creation,” *Works*, 2:500-10; Richard Watson, *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary*, 438-9, 445-6, 521-27, 554-6, 820-22; William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, III:367-454; John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, II: 430-80; Thomas N. Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, 473-544; A.M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology: A Systematic Theology*, II:337-431; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, III: 211-392; Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, 529-52; Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology*, 767-840; and Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*, 247-56. For the purpose of this study, I will cite theologians in their chronological order.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, John Wesley inherited from his Anglican tradition a form of medieval eschatology focused on a “spiritual” view of heaven. At death Christians are immediately ushered into a transcendent reality free of the physical world, obscuring traditional teaching of an intermediate state, bodily resurrection at Christ’s second coming, and a new heavens and earth.<sup>11</sup> However, Wesley rejected this model and shifted focus. He recognized a conscious intermediate state at death for humanity, in which there is separation from the body, but this is only temporary and anticipatory of ultimate glory.<sup>12</sup> At Christ’s second coming, the intermediate state of death will cease. The dead will be reunited with their bodies, now transformed and suited for their respective destinies through bodily resurrection.<sup>13</sup> After final judgment, the entire created order will be transformed and made incorruptible for “life everlasting,” no longer subject to disease, decay and death. This change is not a change in nature, but in “qualities,” encompassing plants, animals, and the geo-physical activity of the world.<sup>14</sup>

Wesley’s theological heirs generally followed in his same tracks, recognizing the place of human nature and the entire created order in the eschatological. Regarding humanity, they are keenly aware of the necessity of the human body to human nature. The human body is honored.<sup>15</sup> Without bodily resurrection, even though humanity has conscious existence in an intermediate state, they are incomplete.<sup>16</sup> Following the pattern of Christ’s resurrection, humanity’s resurrected body is identical with the one that died, although with a change in its properties; it will not be a different body, but a different form of the same body. The resurrected body of the righteous will be perfectly suited for the “new creation,” able to participate fully in creation and enjoy union with God and fellow humanity.<sup>17</sup> It will be “consummately radiant, agile, fine, and not subject to suffering,” reflecting the glory of God.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding the created order, Wesley’s heirs by and large made the connection between humanity’s bodily resurrection and the necessity of a physical world in which to live.<sup>19</sup> Christ’s bodily resurrection anticipates the future of all created existence, when God will transform the world and be “all in all.” Jesus glorified body is the sign of creation’s future. More specifically, humanity’s resurrected bodies must have a physical order in which to live. Humanity is inseparable from the created world. As creation has shared in humanity’s corruption and “fall” in

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<sup>11</sup> Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 231-5. Here, Maddox is reliant upon Colleen McDannell and Bernard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 132, “On Faith,” *Works*, 4:188-200.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Calamy, “The Resurrection of the Dead,” ed. John Wesley in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, VII:474-85.

<sup>14</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 64, “The New Creation,” *Works*, 2:500-10. See Randy Maddox’ discussion of Wesley’s vision of animals in the “new creation” in *Responsible Grace*, 246-7, 253 and in “Nurturing the New Creation: Reflections on a Wesleyan Trajectory,” 43-7.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Watson, *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary*, 820-1; William B. Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, III : 405-8; Thomas Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, 496-8; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, III: 325-6; and Thomas Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 791.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Watson, *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary*, 430-2; William B. Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, III : 406, 452; Thomas Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, 504-5; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, III: 235, 327-32; Thomas Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 784-5; and Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*, 248-50.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Watson, *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary*, 822; William B. Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, III : 406-8; John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, II: 453; Thomas Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, 408-9; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, III: 325-38; Thomas Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 794-5.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas as quoted by Thomas Oden in *Classic Christianity*, 794.

<sup>19</sup> William B. Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, III : 447-8; John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, II: 472-3; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, III: 388; Thomas Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 820-1.

the Garden, it will participate in the full work of God's redemption, in the glorified and incorruptible state of resurrection.<sup>20</sup> While few have addressed the full ramifications of the "new creation" in regard to animal and plant life, their theology certainly sets the foundation for such reflection. Indeed, Wesleyans more recently have begun to press the ramifications of the "new heavens and earth" for animal and plant life.<sup>21</sup>

### C. Renewal of the Full Divine Image in Humanity

If renewal of the created order is about the redemption of creation's diverse natures, the full restoration of the *imago dei* speaks to the reclamation of the human person. The former addresses humanity's "body and soul" nature, the latter treats human personhood. Both have prominent places in Wesleyan eschatology. Like other Protestant traditions, Wesleyan eschatology affirms the full restoration of the divine image in humanity, but what sets the Wesleyan perspective apart is the degree to which it can happen in the present life.

John Wesley believed humanity reflects the image of God in three ways: moral, natural and political.<sup>22</sup> The moral image enables humanity to enjoy true righteousness, holiness, love, and knowledge of God through the immediacy of a relationship with God. The moral image forms the guiding principle of humanity's disposition, thoughts, words and deeds. The natural image endows humanity with immortality, rationality, understanding, free will, and perfectly ordered affections.<sup>23</sup> The political image gives humanity the power of governance, whereby they exercise dominion in the created order and relate appropriately to God and humanity.<sup>24</sup> Before the Fall, holiness, righteousness and love informed humanity's reasoning, understanding, will and affections, resulting in the wise exercise of stewardship in the created order, rightly ordered relationships with fellow humanity, and perfect love and obedience to God.

However, as a result of original sin, the moral image was destroyed; the natural and political extensively marred.<sup>25</sup> Wesley believed that through participating in "God's eschatological work" in the present life, the moral image would be completely restored and progress could be made in the renewal of the natural and political.<sup>26</sup> This is Wesley's doctrine of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. See also H. Ray Dunning's discussion in *Grace, Faith and Holiness*, 267-9; W. T. Purkiser, Richard S. Taylor, and Willard H. Taylor, *God, Man, and Salvation: A Biblical Theology* (Kansas City: MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1977), 672-5; Christopher T. Bounds, "God's Ongoing Redemption of All Creation," in *Creation Care: Christian Voices on God, Humanity, and the Environment*, ed. Joseph Coleson (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2010), 40-57.

<sup>21</sup> Randy Maddox, "Nurturing the New Creation: Reflections on a Wesleyan Trajectory," 43-5; Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*, 200-6.

<sup>22</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 45, "The New Birth," §I.1, *Works*, 2:188.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.; John Wesley, Sermon 62, "The End of Christ's Coming," § I.3-7, *Works*, 2:474-6.

<sup>24</sup> Sermon 45, "The New Birth," §I.1, *Works*, 2:188. Excellent discussions of Wesley's moral, natural and political understanding of the *imago dei* can be found in Kenneth J. Collins's *The Theology of John Wesley*, 51-7 and Theodore Runyon's *The New Creation*, 13-9.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., § I.2-3, *Works*, 2:189-90; Sermon 62, "The End of Christ's Coming," § I.10, *Works*, 2:477. Also see John Wesley, Sermon 141, "The Image of God," *Works*, 4:290-300.

<sup>26</sup> Randy Maddox, "Nurturing the New Creation: Reflections on a Wesleyan Trajectory," 29; John Wesley, Sermon 77, "Spiritual Worship," §II.6, *Works*, 3:96; Sermon 62, "The End of Christ's Coming," § III.1-6, *Works*, 2:480-4; Sermon 76, "Christian Perfection," *Works*, 3:70-87; Sermon 141, "The Image of God," § III.1-3, *Works*, 4:299-300.

Christian perfection. Ultimately, what is left undone in God's restoration of the *imago dei* culminates in glorification and the full image is made incorruptible.<sup>27</sup>

While not all of Wesley's theological heirs appropriate his moral, natural and political paradigm, they do describe in similar ways the divine image in humanity, its ruin through sin, and its restoration through Christian perfection in the present life and glorification in the eschatological.<sup>28</sup> The image of God entails: holiness and love; rationality, understanding, judgment, affection, and will; and relationships of love.<sup>29</sup> What was lost of holiness and love in the divine image through the fall is recovered through Christian perfection in this life and made incorruptible in the eschatological.<sup>30</sup> This enables believers to walk in loving obedience to God and service to neighbor. While there can be progress presently in rationality, understanding, and judgment, these will not be fully renewed and made perfect until glorification.<sup>31</sup> Therefore Christians may be able to live a life motivated and empowered by holy love, but be subject to mistakes, misunderstandings, and errors in judgment until final restoration. Through the full renewal of the image of God, all forms of separation and alienation in every sphere of human relationships will exist no more.

#### **D. The Dynamic Nature of the Eschaton**

With the full renewal of human nature and the *imago dei* through Jesus Christ, humanity is equipped for dynamic growth and activity in the "new creation." A Wesleyan eschatological vision navigates well between two Christian extremes: an "anthropocentric" view focusing on heaven as an idealized picture of human life as presently known, with God receding to the background, and a "theocentric" understanding emphasizing contemplation and rest in the beatific vision of God, with God being fully known and human society fading in the light of divine glory.<sup>32</sup> In the intermediate state of "paradise" and in the "life everlasting," a Wesleyan eschatology sees the righteous growing in their love of God and each other, as well as in their knowledge and understanding of God and creation. While there is "rest" in heaven, there is perpetual increase and activity.

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<sup>27</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 76, "Christian Perfection," §I.1-3, *Works*, 3:72-4; Sermon 40, "Christian Perfection," §I.1-9, *Works*, 2:100-5.

<sup>28</sup> For examples of those who follow Wesley's basic paradigm, see Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1889), II: 8-18; William Burt Pope, *Christian Compendium*, I:424-28; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, II:32-39; Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 68-72; and Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation*, 14-9.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes*, II: 8-18; William Burt Pope, *Christian Compendium*, I:424-8; John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, I: 406-14; Thomas Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, 98-102; A.M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, I: 330-2; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, II:32-9; Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, 236-47; H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 278-83; Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 68-72.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1889), II: 450-68; William Burt Pope, *Christian Compendium*, III: 44-61; John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, II: 356-82; Thomas Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, 457-72; A.M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, II: 222-50; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, II:440-517; Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, 267-420; H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 478-504; and Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 176-90.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Watson, *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary*, 439; William Burt Pope, *Christian Compendium*, III: 450-4; John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, II: 473-5; Thomas Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, 538-42; A.M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, II: 411-14; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, III: 380-5; Thomas Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 794, 824-6, 836-9.

<sup>32</sup>Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History*, 88-93, 177-80, 303-6.

John Wesley believed when Christians die they are ushered directly into “paradise,” the intermediate state of the righteous, the “ante-chamber” of heaven,” waiting for the day of resurrection. There, their “physical” sense of sight and hearing are heightened; memory and understanding are freed from the limitations of the fallen world; will and affections are made incorruptible; new senses are given to perceive the imperceptible in the created order; and growth in knowledge and love occurs in the presence of God.<sup>33</sup> Christians enjoy the “intermediate” expressions of their full destiny.<sup>34</sup> As growth in love and holiness do not happen apart from community in present life, so the eschatological “communion of saints” continue their role.<sup>35</sup> After the general resurrection, final judgment, and the “new creation,” human destiny is fully expressed in “an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God...a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God and all the creatures in him,” where ongoing growth takes place in the knowledge and love of God, humanity and the created order.<sup>36</sup> Humanities physical, intellectual, rational, social and spiritual abilities transcend what was ever experienced in Adamic perfection and are directed to God, others, and creation.<sup>37</sup>

Wesley’s dynamic eschatological view of ever increasing degrees of glory in the intermediate state and in the “new creation” is embraced by the Methodist tradition that follows. With all impediments of sin and corruption removed, with the created order transformed into an incorruptible state exceeding original creation, with humanity renewed in the *imago dei* and fully in the likeness of Christ, humanity is set free for an eternal life of growth in the infinite love of God, in mutual love and service to one another, and the care of creation.<sup>38</sup> What begins in the present life, a participation in the life of God shared in “communion of saints” in the created order, intensifies in the intermediate state, and is experienced in ever increasing “full measure” in the “life everlasting.”<sup>39</sup>

## E. Divine Judgment

The dynamic nature of the eschaton is seen also in a Wesleyan understanding of divine judgment. Wesley and his theological successors believe each human being’s eternal trajectory is

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<sup>33</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 51, “The Good Steward,” §II.6-8, *Works*, 2: 288-90; Sermon 132, “On Faith,” *Works*, 4: 187-200.

<sup>34</sup> Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 249.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. One of Wesley’s most famous quotes in his “Preface” to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* 1739 in *The Works of Wesley* (Jackson), 14:321 makes this clear, “Directly opposite to this is the Gospel of Christ. Solitary religion is not to be found here. ‘Holy solitaries’ is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. *The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness.*”

<sup>36</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 64, “The New Creation,” §18, *Works*, 2:510; “Farther thoughts upon Christian Perfection, Q. 29,” ed. Thomas Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 11:426; See Randy Maddox’ discussion of Wesley’s commendation of Charles’ Bonnet’s *Conjectures Concerning the Nature of Future Happiness* in *Responsible Grace*, 253.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Watson, *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary*, 438-9; William Burt Pope, *Christian Compendium*, III: 384; John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, II: 430-40, 473-5; Thomas Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, 532-43; A.M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, II: 376-85, 411-14; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, III: 237-40, 375-86; Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 249-50, 252-3. Among these Wesleyan theologians, only William Burt Pope fails to discuss the dynamic nature of the “new creation.” While he sees growth in the intermediate state of heaven, his focus in the ultimate state of heaven is the beatific vision of God, drifting in the direction of a “theocentric” view of heaven (452-4).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

set at death by their placement in the intermediate state for the righteous or unrighteous.<sup>40</sup> This is no second “probationary” period. As addressed previously, the saints in paradise will be “continually ripening for heaven...perpetually holier and happier,” while the unrighteous carry on in their recalcitrant spirit.<sup>41</sup>

However, a Wesleyan eschatology places emphasis on final judgment when Christ returns in glory and the dead are bodily resurrected. Humanity will stand individually before Christ and give an account of their lives: outward actions and words; and inward thoughts, desires, inclinations, and intentions.<sup>42</sup> They will be judged according to their stewardship of gifts and receptivity to the measure of light and truth given to them. Those who never heard the Gospel will be evaluated according to “the law of their own nature, their conscience guided by their reason, and the law written in their hearts;” Jews will be assessed by the Law of Moses; and Christians will be judged by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>43</sup> Final pronouncement will be based on their responsiveness to God’s grace in faith.<sup>44</sup>

The righteous will be rewarded in the new creation in proportion to their active response to grace, in their faith becoming active in love through works of mercy. Therefore the saints will reflect the divine goodness in the “life everlasting” in a different and individuated way.<sup>45</sup> “Though each individual shares in the same salvation, the refracted glory will not be monotone, but varied.”<sup>46</sup> The unrighteous will receive their due punishment in Hell based on their sin in present life. Just as there are different rewards in glory for the saints, there are different punishments in hell for the unrighteous.<sup>47</sup>

A Wesleyan eschatology has historically rejected any form of universalism, annihilationism and predestination to damnation. While the exact nature of Hell is unclear, it is a spiritual state and physical place existing in alienation from God. It is for those who freely have chosen to resist and reject God’s overtures of grace, whether through conscience, Mosaic Law or the Gospel. God ultimately respects and honors humanity’s refusal to cooperate with divine grace. “While this possibility is truly grievous, the alternative would ultimately involve either irresistible or indiscriminate salvation, both of which are contradictory to a God of responsible grace.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 51, “The Good Steward,” §III.1, *Works*, 2:292-3; William Burt Pope, *Christian Compendium*, III: 376; John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, II: 430-1; A. M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, II: 376-8; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, III: 234-42; Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 782-6.

<sup>41</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 132, “On Faith,” § 5, *Works*, 4:191.

<sup>42</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 15, “The Great Assize,” § II: 2-6, *Works*, 1:360-63; William Burt Pope, *Christian Compendium*, III: 418-9; John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, II: A. M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, II: 402-3; Kenneth Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*, 320-1; Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 816-9.

<sup>43</sup> William B. Pope, *Christian Compendium*, III: 416-8; John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, II: 436-7; Thomas Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, 515; A. M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, II: 403-4; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, III: 345-8; Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 818.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Richard Watson, *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary*, 554-6; Thomas Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, 515; A. M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, II: 404; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, III: 351; Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, 548; Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 838.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 838.

<sup>47</sup> Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, 545-6.

<sup>48</sup> Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 251.

## F. Optimism for “God Fearers and Workers of Righteousness”

A Wesleyan eschatological view expresses hope that there will be people in heaven who never professed faith in Christ in the present life. In contrast to the exclusive “restrictivist” understanding as seen in the Augustinian-Tridentine Catholic tradition, there is a strong sense of optimism that all who “fear God and work righteousness” according to the grace given them will be “accepted of Him” through Jesus Christ.<sup>49</sup> In contrast to Reformed doctrines of predestination and common grace, a Wesleyan eschatology believes that God’s prevenient grace given to all, made available through Jesus Christ’s atoning work, makes salvation possible for all.<sup>50</sup> Undergirding Wesleyan hope is belief in the unlimited atonement of Christ, confidence that “God wills that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth,” and judgment according to the light given.

This optimism originates in John Wesley, who increasingly expressed such hope as he aged.<sup>51</sup> First, Wesley refused to make judgments about the eternal destinies of people from other religions. Regarding Jews, he stated that Christians should “leave their fate in the hands of God;” about Muslims, he believed some had come to “true religion” through prevenient grace; and he praised the response other religions had made to the “light” given them.<sup>52</sup> Second, Wesley began to see the possibility that people who were not Christians might have “saving faith” in an “infant state,” enabling “everyone that possesses it to ‘fear God and work righteousness.’”<sup>53</sup> Finally, Wesley believed God will be “rich in mercy” to the “heathen” who “call upon him ‘according to the light they have,’” and they will be “accepted” by God in final judgment if they walk in that grace.<sup>54</sup>

Wesley’s theological heirs generally followed him on this point in varying degrees. John Fletcher recognized that humanity in every age and place has been given varying “dispensations” of divine grace by which they can be saved.<sup>55</sup> Through prevenient grace every person can “cease to do evil, learn to do well, and use the means which will infallibly end in the repentance and faith peculiar to the dispensation they are under, whether it be that of Heathens, Jews, or Christians.”<sup>56</sup> William Burt Pope repeatedly affirmed the necessity of refraining from judgment on the eternal destinies of people from other religions and of people who have never heard the Gospel. Judgment must be reserved to God alone.<sup>57</sup> However, he articulates the nature by which all will be judged: “as there is none other Name under heaven given among men, whereby we

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas A. Noble, “Only Exclusivism Will Do: Gavin D’Costa’s Change of Mind,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 48:1 (2013), 71.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> It should be noted that not all Wesleyans or contemporary interpreters of Wesley read Wesley in as inclusive light as I do here. See Donald Thorsen’s interpretation of Wesley on this issue in “Jesus, Ecumenism, and Interfaith Relations: A Wesleyan Perspective,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 47:1 (Spring, 2012): 69, and Stan Rodes, “Was John Wesley Arguing for Prevenient Grace as Regenerative,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 48:1 (2013), 73-85, particularly 83-5.

<sup>52</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 130, “On Living Without God,” §14, *Works*, 4:174.

<sup>53</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 106, “On Faith,” §10, *Works*, 3:497.

<sup>54</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 91, “On Charity,” §I.3, *Works*, 3:295-6. For more detailed discussion of Wesley’s views, see See Randy L. Maddox, “Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation through Other Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 7-29, and Philip R. Meadows, “Candidates for Heaven: Wesleyan Resources for a Theology of Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35:1 (2000): 99-129.

<sup>55</sup> John Fletcher, *Third Check to Antinomianism*, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Fletcher*, I: 80-5.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., I: 80.

<sup>57</sup> William B. Pope, *Christian Compendium*, III: 385-6.

must be saved, all who are not saved must reject that Name in some way revealed to them.”<sup>58</sup> Richard Ralston taught that everyone has a dispensation of divine grace and even those without the Gospel can live by the Holy Spirit according to the light given them and be saved from “inevitable destruction.”<sup>59</sup> Thomas Oden has argued that everyone has been given grace to “enable each to respond rightly to whatever opportunities are made possible,” and to develop at least “nascent faith” such as “the Letter to the Hebrews ascribes to Abel” and be saved in the end.<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps, Kenneth Collins has stated the Wesleyan belief here concisely, “That is, in each instance, in the past as in a future reign, the children of Adam and Eve, at any step along the way of salvation history, are given sufficient, even if differing, grace for their needs.”<sup>61</sup> Even without the Gospel and the Church, humanity has available grace capable of leading to salvation.<sup>62</sup> There is a strong optimism in the Wesleyan tradition that there will be “some” people in heaven who never formally professed Christ in the present life.

## II. IMPLICATIONS OF A WESLEYAN ESCHATOLOGY FOR THE CHURCH’S ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

In 2005 the World Council of Churches released a paper on *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement* that expresses well an ecclesiology resonating with much of the Wesleyan tradition. The Church is a sign of the eschaton, “pointing beyond itself to the purpose of all creation, the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God;” it is also an instrument through which “God’s reconciliation, healing and transformation of creation is already taking place;” as it participates presently in the life and love of God in anticipation of the “glory to come.”<sup>63</sup> Given this nature of the Church, what are the possibilities of a Wesleyan vision of the eschaton for the Church’s engagement with other religions? There are at least three broad implications.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 386.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Ralston, *Elements of Divinity*, 336, 515.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 737-8, 826.

<sup>61</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*, 315.

<sup>62</sup> The real issue is whether people truly cooperate with the grace made available to them.

<sup>63</sup> *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper 198 (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2005), 11.

<sup>64</sup> Wesleyan reflection on Christianity’s relationship with other religions most influential in my paper include John B Cobb, Jr., *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today*, 145-54; Floyd T. Cunningham, “Interreligious Dialogue: A Wesleyan Holiness Perspective,” in S. Mark Heim, *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 188-207; Joe Gorman, “Grace Abounds: The Missiological Implications of John Wesley’s Inclusive Theology of Other Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 48:1 (2013), 38-53; Randy L. Maddox, “Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation through Other Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 7-29; Eric Manchester, “Why is Evangelism Important if One Can Be Saved without the Gospel?,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37:1 (2002): 158-70; Philip R. Meadows, “Candidates for Heaven: Wesleyan Resources for a Theology of Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35:1 (2000): 99-129; Donald Thorsen, “Jesus, Ecumenism, and Interfaith Relations: A Wesleyan Perspective,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 47:1 (Spring, 2012): 59-71; Frank Whaling, “Wesley’s Premonitions of Inter-Faith Discourse,” in *Pure Universal Love: Reflections on the Wesleys and Interfaith Dialogue*, ed. Tim Macquiban (Westminster Wesley Series No. 3, Summer 1995), 17; and Amos Yong, “A Heart Strangely Warmed on the Middle Way? The Wesleyan Witness in a Pluralistic World,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 48:1 (2013), 7-27.

## A. Openness to People of Other Religions

A Wesleyan eschatological vision opens the Church to relationships with people of other religions in three primary ways. First, it predisposes Wesleyans to openness. Because of sin and evil, every human being needs redemption and requires God's saving grace to enter into "life everlasting." Unlike other forms of Christianity which see the eschaton determined by a divine decision or decree prior to creation, or strictly limited to people who formally profess Christian faith in the present life, a Wesleyan view of the "new creation" takes seriously that Christ died for all, is actively at work in the world drawing people to salvation through the Spirit, and makes grace available so that all are truly "candidates for heaven," even apart from adequate exposure to the Gospel.<sup>65</sup> God's future "kingdom of glory" is truly open to all in the present.

Amos Yong has described this orientation as the natural tendency for Wesleyans to respond to other religions in a "much less 'us' versus 'them' manner," and approach people of other faiths "less as representatives of religious labels than as people made in the image of God and existing within the realm of preventer grace."<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Douglas Mills has asserted that Wesleyans bring a unique theological emphasis in inter-religious relationships: recognition that God is "very much active" in the world and that people in other religions "have already experienced the love of God in good measure through the activity of the Holy Spirit."<sup>67</sup>

Some Wesleyans have pressed this truth to the point of universalism; however, the consistent view has been to see all who are responding fully to "the light" given by the Holy Spirit as "fellow travelers" on the way paved by the work of Jesus Christ.<sup>68</sup> Other religions can be a means of God's preparatory grace that leads to salvation.<sup>69</sup> As such, this understanding of the eschaton opens the Church to the possibility that in the engagement with sincere people of other religions, the Church develops relationships with "anonymous" Christians and provisionally mirrors the "communion of saints" in the eschaton.<sup>70</sup>

Second, this Wesleyan perspective opens the Church to the grace, beauty and truth found in other religions and cultures through the Holy Spirit. As Christians develop relationships with people of other faiths, there is the recognition of mutual understanding and experiences of the created order, human interaction, and the divine.<sup>71</sup> However, a Wesleyan approach goes beyond simply acknowledging "common ground" with gratitude.

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<sup>65</sup> "Candidates for heaven" is a phrase taken from Philip R. Meadows, "Candidates for Heaven: Wesleyan Resources for a Theology of Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 99.

<sup>66</sup> Amos Yong, "A Heart Strangely Warmed on the Middle Way? The Wesleyan Witness in a Pluralistic World," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 9, 11.

<sup>67</sup> Douglas Mills, "A Very Short Theological Basis for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation," paper, Commission on Interfaith Relations, New York, 21 February 2009.

<sup>68</sup> An example of a Wesleyan who holds to universalism is David Lowes Watson, *God Does Not Foreclose: The Universal Promise of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 101ff. Some representative Wesleyans who express this type of understanding include Lycurgus Starkey, *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 43; Ole Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments: A Theological Study* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 126; Michael Hurley, "Salvation Today and Wesley Today," in *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition*, 94-116.

<sup>69</sup> Philip R. Meadows, "Candidates for Heaven: Wesleyan Resources for a Theology of Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 126.

<sup>70</sup> See Joe Gorman's discussion of Karl Rahner and the use of the term "anonymous Christian" from a Wesleyan perspective in "John Wesley's Inclusive Theology of Other Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 41-4.

<sup>71</sup> Amos Yong describes this type of relationship Christians can have with Buddhists in "A Heart Strangely Warmed on the Middle Way?," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 11-3.

Growth in all areas of knowledge characterizes humanity's present and future lives. There is thirst to know and understand. Christians are not and never will be omniscient. Through the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit at work in other religions and cultures, as the Church engages other faiths, Christians can learn from their discoveries and with their assistance plumb reality more deeply with greater appreciation and gratitude to God.

Christians also stand in need of greater understanding, wisdom and judgment. While Wesleyans believe the moral image of God can be fully restored in the present age, the natural and political remain marred until glorification after death. Even with the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, Christians see "through a glass darkly" standing in need of greater light in all areas of life.

Because God is at work through prevenient grace, preparing and leading responsive people from other religions to the eschatological Kingdom, the Church can rejoice in the discovery of common grace shared, have "blind spots" to their experience of the Christian faith exposed, and gain new insights about its faith. The Church hereby participates in some way in the mutual learning and edification of the eschaton.

Third, a Wesleyan eschatology provides a vision of mutual relationships of self-giving love. Wesleyans believe God's holiness and love will govern and inform all relationships in the "new creation." Still, through grace infused renewal of the moral image, Christians can participate already in the perfected love of God and neighbor. Obedience to God and the active love of neighbor become the normal orientation of heart and life. Christians no longer have to "force themselves" to reach out in self-giving love to their neighbor in other religions. Spirit infused love compels and empowers this life of holy giving, even in the most difficult of circumstances. While knowledge and understanding may be lacking, motivation and intention should not. Christians are enabled to work toward reconciliation and fellowship, overcoming obstacles the fallen world thrusts in the way.

However, perfected love is not one-sided. Holy love opens Christians to giving and serving their neighbor in other faiths, but it also opens them to the reception of love as well. Holy love makes Christians vulnerable to their neighbor, not just to the possibility of rejection or misunderstanding, but to their neighbor's actions of self-giving love and service. Perfect love opens Christians to receive in gratitude the love initiated or returned by their neighbor in other religions, reflecting in varying ways the dynamic, mutually reciprocating relationships of love in the eschatological family of God.

## B. Dialogue with and Witness to People of Other Religions

Inter-religious dialogue and witness flow from the Church's openness to relationships. While there is fear that sincere dialogue may side-track some Christians down another religious path, it also opens people from other faiths to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>72</sup> "True Dialogue emphasizes deep differences and invites honest engagement" that involve the changing of minds and hearts."<sup>73</sup> A Wesleyan understanding of eschatology helps provide a theological framework for these relationships.

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<sup>72</sup> Amos Yong, "A Heart Strangely Warmed on the Middle Way? The Wesleyan Witness in a Pluralistic World," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 16.

<sup>73</sup> Terry Muck, "John Wesley's Eighteenth-Century Contributions to Twenty-First Century Theology of Religions," eds. Darrell L. Whiteman and Gerald Anderson, *World Mission in The Wesleyan Spirit* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2009), 100.

First, while the Church “appreciates, learns from, and receives something of value” from their inter-religious relationships, true openness naturally leads Christians to share about the person and work of Jesus Christ, the end to which all prevenient grace leads and the key to the present and eschatological Kingdom of God.<sup>74</sup> In the historic Wesleyan tradition, Christ is an inescapable “scandal of particularity,” a *sine qua non* in Christian dialogue with and witness to people of other faiths.<sup>75</sup> Christ truly is Lord and Savior.

Second, the prospects of salvation are strengthened through sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>76</sup> While Wesleyans believe people will be judged by the grace afforded them and are optimistic about seeing people from other religions in eternity, this does not mean members of other faiths have “lived up to the light” given them, even the most knowledgeable among them. The gravity of original sin, the brokenness of the moral image, burdens human cooperation with divine grace. Many resist the full measure of God’s prevenient grace required to create a “fear God and work righteousness” faith, what is minimally necessary to make people “accepted of Him.”<sup>77</sup>

Because of the threat of hell and an eternity of separation from the “communion of saints” Christians share the Gospel in love. The grace of Jesus Christ as found in the Gospel can be the means by which spiritual sloth and the recalcitrance of human hearts are broken, leading to “fruits worthy of repentance,” faith, and good works. While the hope is that the Gospel results in Christian faith, it may lead some to a deeper devotion to their native religion. In either case a fuller embrace of divine grace has occurred.

Also, the Gospel of Jesus Christ makes available a greater potential of recovering holiness of heart and life than those given only the light of prevenient grace. “The Gospel does not add extra content to the task of obedience, but it brings a “renewing power for the life of obedience” enabling the manifestation of the personal and social character of the eschaton in deeper and fuller ways here on earth.<sup>78</sup>

A similar idea exists in Roman Catholicism. In the most recent edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* there is recognition that other religions, particularly monotheistic ones, have elements of truth and salvation in them. However, only in the Catholic Church are “all the means of salvation” found, capable of establishing a person in the fullness of God’s revelation, of relationship with the Triune God, of the “communion of saints,” and of holiness possible in present life.<sup>79</sup> The Gospel as mediated through the Church opens people up to a fuller “dispensation” of holy living.

Fourth and closely related, a Wesleyan eschatology recognizes the dynamic nature of heaven. There will be degrees of glory, based on a person’s realization of holy love in the present life. Speaking of those who serve God in “low degree,” Wesley states, “they will not have so

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<sup>74</sup> Quote taken from Amos Yong, “A Heart Strangely Warmed on the Middle Way? The Wesleyan Witness in a Pluralistic World,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 13.

<sup>75</sup> Ben Witherington III, “*Praeparatio Evangelii*: The Theological Roots of Wesley’s View of Evangelism,” ed. James C. Logan, *Theology and Evangelism in the Wesleyan Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 77-8.

<sup>76</sup> Eric Manchester, “Why is Evangelism Important if One Can Be Saved without the Gospel?,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 162.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God: Wesleyan Theology and Biblical Narrative* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994), 232.

<sup>78</sup> Randy L. Maddox, “Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation through Other Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 18.

<sup>79</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1995), ¶¶ 819,837.

high a place in heaven as they would have had if they had chosen the better part.”<sup>80</sup> Wesley indicates they will have some sense of sorrow, at least as much as sorrow is possible in the joys of heaven. This understanding permeates Wesley’s theological successors, who see spiritual progress in the present life having implications for the saints in glory. As Wesleyans engage in dialog and witness, it is to aide in spiritual progress in this life, as well as set the foundation for development in the life to come.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, Wesleyans also recognize that this dialogue is not just about “right belief” or right information, but the renewal of affections, habits, and desires in the lives of Christians. One of the strongest, most powerful witnesses to the truth of Christ is the holy life lived out. When holiness is embodied in life, Wesley believed unbelievers will “look upon” Christians “with other eyes and begin to give attention to their words...and the holy lives of Christians will be an argument they will not know how to resist.”<sup>82</sup>

### C. Collaboration

A Wesleyan eschatology eschews any Gnostic tendencies in Christianity. Genesis clearly establishes the value of the entire created order with God’s declaration of its goodness. Humanity formed as a physical being in the divine image flourishes in its relationship with God, with creation, and with each other. A Wesleyan eschatology reiterates God’s assessment through a vision of the world’s redemption and consummation in the future eschaton where humanity with creation flourishes even more. Even now, the Holy Spirit is at work enabling the world to participate in the “new creation” to some degree through preventient, saving and sanctifying grace.

This Wesleyan eschatological vision informs and empowers the Church as it works with other faiths to further the expression of creation’s renewal and human flourishing, as well as address threats arising from the fallen nature of the present order. Collaboration here happens on two levels. First, in regard to the created order, as God restores the full divine image in humanity, particularly in the natural and political, the work of reconciliation between humanity and creation deepens. The “curse” existing between humanity and the physical world is being lifted thorough the deepening experience of preventient and sanctifying grace. Because of the riches of God’s grace in salvation, and deepening understanding of God’s revelation, the Church and other religions are able to realize the importance of the created order to God and collaborate in the wise care of it.<sup>83</sup> The Church has a vested role in collaborating with other faith communities in addressing global warming, renewable energy, ecosystem sustainability, and animal care, not simply for the benefits to humanity, but for the goodness of creation itself.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>80</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 89, “The More Excellent Way,” §I.8, *Works*, 3:266.

<sup>81</sup> See Philip R. Meadows’ “Candidates for Heaven: Wesleyan Resources for a Theology of Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 119-20 and Randy Maddox’ *Responsible Grace*, 251.

<sup>82</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 63, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” §22, *Works*, 2:496. See Joe Gorman, “Grace Abounds: The Missiological Implications of John Wesley’s Inclusive Theology of Other Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 48:1 (2013), 46-8.

<sup>83</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr., *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology Today*, 52-3; Randy Maddox, “Nurturing the New Creation: Reflections on a Wesleyan Trajectory,” in *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation*, 43-9; Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today*, 200-7.

<sup>84</sup> For greater discussion, see John Harrod, “Wesleyan Reflections on Ecology,” in *Windows on Wesley*, ed. Philip Meadows (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1997), 129-52; Michael Lodahl, “The Whole Creation Groans: Is There a Distinctively Wesleyan Contribution to the Environmental Ethic?” *CTNS Bulletin* 18:2 (1998): 10-19.

Second, in regard to human flourishing in creation, there are particular elements of a Wesleyan eschatological view relevant to collaboration: physical, social, and intellectual. Humanity is an embodied soul. While a Wesleyan eschatology recognizes a conscious existence in an intermediate state, the doctrine of bodily resurrection and “new creation” show that humanity is not fully human apart from the body. Furthermore, emphasis is given to humanity’s present body because it is what is resurrected and made incorruptible. There is no human flourishing in present or future life without a healthy body. This understanding of the necessity of the body helps set the foundation for inter-religious collaboration in meeting humanity’s physical needs: adequate food, water, shelter, clothing, water, and medicine.<sup>85</sup>

A Wesleyan view of the eschaton affirms the social nature of humanity. Humanity’s interpersonal relationships do not fade in a beatific vision of God, but grow and deepen more fully in final union with God. Humanity is made for relationship with other human beings and within these relationships holiness and love intensify. Humanity is incomplete and cannot flourish without other people. The impinging “new creation” provides grace to overcome what divides, to empower reconciliation, and to support stable social conditions necessary for human flourishing. This perspective undergirds collaboration with other faiths to establish healthy, stable human relationships and social structures in today’s world.<sup>86</sup>

Finally, a Wesleyan eschatology recognizes the intellectual nature of humanity, the thirst to grow in knowledge, wisdom and understanding. In eternity with the perfected natural image, humanity will ever be fathoming the depths of God, exploring the created order, appreciating the beautiful and exercising creativity. Developing the life of the mind and heart is essential to being human. This helps solidify the natural impulses of historic Christianity in the formation of educational institutions, not only as a means to the end of a particular vocation, but as an end unto itself, reflecting in part a Wesleyan vision of the new creation. Therefore, it is natural for the Church to partner with other religions in the formation of educational institutions where skills necessary for learning and exploration of reality are developed and the acquisition of wisdom takes place.

## CONCLUSION

With the “communion of saints, Wesleyans pray the Lord’s Prayer, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Eschatology has implications for present life; Wesleyans believe the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated and is made manifest in varying degrees in the present age through the Church. With this theological framework as my underlying assumption, I have attempted to identify distinctive Wesleyan eschatological themes running consistently through the history of Methodism relevant to inter-religious relationships: the centrality of Christ, the renewal of the created order, the renewal of the full image of God in humanity, the dynamic nature of the eschaton, and an optimism for “God fearers and workers of righteousness” in other religions. I have then tried to explore how these themes impinge in a Wesleyan engagement with other religions: through genuine openness to relationships of mutual love and learning, through giving witness to the saving and sanctifying grace of our Lord Jesus

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<sup>85</sup> See Joe Gorman, “John Wesley’s Inclusive Theology of Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 50-1; Don Thorson, “Jesus Ecumenism, and Interfaith Relations,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 63.

<sup>86</sup> An excellent discussion of this issue from a larger Christian perspective is Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011).

Christ in word and personal life, and through working together in the stewardship of the created order and human flourishing.