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***Christ Creating All Things New:  
The New Creation in Charles Wesley's Theology***

Burst we then the Bands of Death,  
Rais'd by His all-quickning Breath;  
Long we to be loos'd from Earth,  
Struggling into second Birth.  
Spent at length is Nature's Night;  
Christ attends to give us Light,  
Christ attends Himself to give;  
God we now may see, and live.  
Tho' the Outward Man decay;  
Form'd within us Day by Day  
Still the Inner Man we view,  
Christ creating all things New.<sup>1</sup>

In this verse from the 1739 poem, “A Morning Hymn,” we garner a first glimpse at Charles Wesley’s theology of the New Creation. Here we find intimations of the salvific work of Christ, the distinction between nature and grace, the regeneration of the individual, and perhaps, the eventual renewal of all things. In Charles’s theology, much as in his brother John’s, the faith journey unfolds in what we have come to know as the way of salvation. So, too, does his understanding of the New Creation unfold in this movement from sinful nature to graceful glorification – what has been termed, “processive eschatology.”<sup>2</sup> For Charles Wesley, the New Creation is begun in justifying faith, continued in the hope that seeks God alone, and completed in perfect love. In this grace-full movement from “Nature’s Night” to Christ’s perfect light, we find that Charles emphasizes, above all, the individual as a new creation, but he also points toward the New Creation in its communal and universal expressions. To examine Charles Wesley’s textured understanding more fully, I will begin with his concern for human nature

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Wesley, “A Morning Hymn,” Verse 2, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: 1739), pp. 178-179.

<sup>2</sup> Randy Maddox credits Clarence Bence with having coined this usage. See *Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), p. 235 and fn 27, p. 363.

which is opposed to grace in its fallen state, then examine, sequentially, his sense of what I will categorize as: 1) heaven begun, 2) heaven leavened, and 3) heaven gained – all of which include communal dimensions. Finally, with these pieces in place, we can turn to his vision of the New Creation fully realized.

At the outset, it is prudent to offer two provisos. First, what follows is a theological interpretation of Charles Wesley's sacred poems. It is not my intention to focus on the historical and contextual features of an individual poem, and most likely, Charles recognized that the readers and singers of his poems, in general, would not focus on these features, but appropriate the verses much as one does a sermon. In addition, Charles's expression of the New Creation presents speculative imagery at best and potentially conflicting accounts at worst. Indeed, his eschatology leaves us with an ambiguous or cloudy vision of the future of the human body, the physical earth, and the location of heaven. For Charles, heaven is up, hell is down, and earth lies in between. But what will become of the earth after the *parousia*? The relationship between heaven and the New Creation thus remains especially vague. Of course, it is not surprising that such ambiguity surrounds his eschatology, for Charles is the consummate "man of one book," and the scriptural accounts vary in their interpretations of this mystery of the last things.

Secondly, it should be noted that there is little in Charles Wesley's theology that is particularly original in its formulation, though a theologian need not write originative theology to be theologically creative. Charles tends to follow either his Anglican theological roots or John's theological understanding – which we would expect to be the case in the pre-1749 hymn-books that were edited by John. Even so, three central characteristics make his theological expression so significant and worthy of our attention: 1) his ability to translate abstract theological concepts into concrete and imaginative images; 2) the heart-felt and affective dimension of his theological

expression which complements, even completes, his brother's more cerebral writings; and 3) the catechetical dimension of singing and reading his sacred poems in community. As we trace out Charles Wesley's conception of the New Creation, the imaginative and affective attributes of his work will prove particularly illuminating.

#### Fallen Nature Opposed to Grace

As noted at the outset, Charles Wesley holds a traditional, rather Augustinian view of human nature: apart from God, we are totally depraved or entirely sinful. We might say, with Charles, that "Without the Spirit of Thy Son/ We nothing good can do,"<sup>3</sup> and:

4 My strong propensity to ill  
My carnal mind and crooked will  
To only evil prone,  
My downward appetite I find,  
My spirit, soul, and flesh inclined  
To earth, and earth alone.<sup>4</sup>

In these images Charles conveys a sense of the human condition as one prone to sin and evil. Our whole being is inclined by nature to the things of the earth and not to God. Here the metaphor is of downward movement; our human appetites pull us down to earthly, creaturely pleasures. Although weaving together the full tapestry of Charles Wesley's theological anthropology is beyond the scope of this essay, we should note that he adeptly conveys the corruption of human nature through a wide range of metaphors, including images related to disease, guilty prisoners, heavy burdens, darkness, weakness, exile, and the presence of hell on earth. One cannot read Charles Wesley's sacred verse without being confronted with the depraved state of human nature. This condition, then, is the problem for which the New Creation might be viewed, in a broader sense, as the answer, i.e., as the promised end to this problematic existence.

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<sup>3</sup> "Hymn 1: Philippians 2:13," *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, collected and arranged by G. Osborn (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office), V:375.

<sup>4</sup> PW, "Waiting for Redemption – Hymn 4," HSP 1749, IV:381.

But how can such depraved creatures even begin to find their way toward this New Creation, let alone inhabit it? We cannot of our own efforts overcome our sinful ways. Certainly, the grace that produces faith is located in Jesus Christ's atonement and his power to save. We hear this theologically in the following verses, which can be seen as a prayer for the gift of saving faith:

- 1      Jesus, my Lord attend  
Thy fallen creature's cry,  
And shew thyself the sinner's friend,  
    And set me up on high:  
    From hell's oppressive power,  
    From earth and sin release,  
And to thy father's grace restore,  
    And to thy perfect peace.
  
- 2      For this, alas! I mourn  
In helpless unbelief,  
But thou my wretched heart canst turn,  
    And heal my sin and grief;  
    Salvation in thy name  
    To dying souls is given,  
And all may, through thy merit, claim  
    A right to life and heaven.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, as Charles insists, the overture to the journey is God's gift of grace. Just as nature opposes grace, grace is opposed to deformed nature:

- 2      Long have you heard and known  
The wars that rage within,  
And nature still fights on,  
    And grace opposes sin:  
Lift up your heads, the signs appear,  
Look up, and see your Saviour near!<sup>6</sup>

In this tug-of-war, we might say that grace has the advantage. It is entirely God's will and choice to provide us with the grace that produces faith – despite our incredulity and our awareness of how little we merit such favor. As Wesley suggests,

- 2      If, drawn by thine alluring grace,

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<sup>5</sup> "Hymn I," *Hymns for Those that Seek and Those that Have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: 1776), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> "Hymn VIII," *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*, p. 11.1

My want of living faith I feel,  
Shew me in Christ thy smiling face;  
What flesh and blood can ne'er reveal,  
Thy co-eternal Son display,  
and call my darkness into day.

3 The gift unspeakable impart,  
Command the light of faith to shine,  
To shine in my dark drooping heart,  
And fill me with the life divine:  
Now bid the new creation be;  
O God, let there be faith in me!<sup>7</sup>

With this entrée into justifying faith, the believer moves from darkness into light, from night into day, from nature into grace. Even so, this movement is far from complete, for the person of faith has only begun the journey toward the New Creation, though we might say the journey begins at home. This point of justification by faith and regeneration is what I am calling, “heaven begun.”

### Heaven Begun

At the point of regeneration or the new birth, the individual believer is opened to the reality of heaven and to the promise of the New Creation. The location of this foretaste or “antepast” of heaven is within the individual. Here we find a Pauline eschatology in which the kingdom of God is begun, but not fully realized. A few brief examples will serve to illustrate this point. In his 1739 “Hymn to the Holy Ghost” Wesley exults that the triune God resides in the new creature:

Thee I exult to Feel,  
Thou in my Heart dost dwell:  
There Thou bear’st thy Witness true,  
Shed’st the Love of God abroad;  
I in Christ a Creature New,  
I, ev’n I am Born of God!<sup>8</sup>

In this next example, Wesley speaks of regeneration in the therapeutic imagery of the Eastern church and indicates that justification implants heaven in our hearts:

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<sup>7</sup> “Hymn XIV,” *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> “Hymn to the Holy Ghost,” v. 3, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: 1737), p. 111.

Invited and urg'd to draw nigh,  
We trust in a merciful God,  
To Thee the Physician apply,  
And wait for a drop of thy blood:  
Thy blood can all sicknesses heal;  
Its virtue, O Jesus, impart,  
Our pardon infallibly seal,  
And heaven implant in our heart.<sup>9</sup>

Although the words are not used by Charles, we might venture to assert that this heaven within is, in fact, the assurance of faith that gives us a certain sense of peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

One final example of heaven begun within the believer is based upon Matthew 4:16. Here we find that the onset of faith, which moves us out of the darkness of nature's night and leads to justification and regeneration, also produces the condition of hope. He writes,

In our unregenerate state,  
Strangers to ourselves and God,  
We in grossest darkness sat,  
In the shades of dark abode,  
Confines of that hellish night;  
When we saw the gospel-grace,  
Saw the great eternal light  
Beaming from Immanuel's face.

Suddenly the Light sprung up,  
Rose the Day-star in our hearts:  
Earnest of our heavenly hope,  
Jesus still himself imparts;  
Grows the pure, celestial ray  
More & more with faith's increase,  
Makes at last the perfect day,  
Opens into endless bliss.<sup>10</sup>

This last sacred poem leads us into the next stage of the movement toward the New Creation, the hope that propels the new creature toward that endless bliss or distant shore; this we might call, "heaven leavened." Before continuing the journey, however, it should be noted that this rather brief exposition of heaven begun is in no way representative of the attention given to justification

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<sup>9</sup> *Hymns for the Use of Families and on Various Occasions* (Bristol: 1767), p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Wesley, "Mt. 4:16, *The people which sat in darkness saw great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up,*" in *The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, Volume II, edited by ST Kimbrough, Jr. and Oliver A. Beckerlegge (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), p. 19.

by faith in the hymns of Charles Wesley. In fact, for Wesley, the notion of becoming a new creature in Christ is a major theme echoed frequently and loudly in his hymns.

### Heaven Leavened

I use the phrase, “heaven leavened,” to indicate Charles Wesley’s sense that as we continue the difficult process of sanctification, being perfected in love and having the image of God within us fully restored, our hope propels us closer to our destination and overflows to encourage others toward that end. It is a time of growth in which our hope is located firmly in Christ and God’s promise of complete redemption. Hope in Christ keeps us headed toward the fullness of love:

20 My heart Thou wilt anew create,  
The fulness of Thy Spirit give:  
In steadfast Hope for this I wait,  
And confident in Christ believe.<sup>11</sup>

Hope is thus the leavening and the momentum toward the full realization of God’s New Creation. We see this hopeful sense of being in-between times, no longer imprisoned in the old nature, yet still seeking the full realization of the new, in the following hymn from the collection of *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*:

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

O cut short the work in me,  
Make a speedy end of sin,  
Set my heart at liberty,  
Bring the heavenly nature in,  
Seal me to redemption’s day,  
Bear my new-born soul away.

For this only thing I wait,

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<sup>11</sup> “Written in Stress of Temptation,” v. XX, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: 1740), p. 88.

This for which I here was born,  
Raise me to my first estate,  
Bid me to thy arms return,  
Let me to thine image rise,  
Give me back my paradise,

For thine only love I pant,  
God of love thyself reveal,  
Love, Thou know'st, is all I want,  
Now my only want fulfil,  
Answer now thy Spirit's cry,  
Let me love my God and die.<sup>12</sup>

This poem presents us with several significant dimensions of heaven leavened. First, in the opening question and expectation, we take note of being in-between our old nature and the end of the fallen creation: *Weary world, when will it end,/ Destin'd to the purging fire!* Second, there is the prayer to be entirely free from sin and filled with the fullness of God's love. Charles speaks of the "heavenly nature" growing within us until the day when the image of God is restored and we return to "paradise" lost and see God face to face. There is also the sense of the Holy Spirit within us that urges the soul to cry out to God in prayer for this continued movement toward heaven. Finally, we should notice that Charles conveys a sense of one and only one hope, the destination of Love.

This destination of divine love brings us to the point of considering the communal dimension of heaven leavened or the hopeful momentum toward perfect love, for this journey toward the New Creation is located within and among the community of believers. The communal dimension can be seen from an ecclesial perspective, in that we become members of the one body of Christ and this fellowship unites us in the shared journey. In the verses below from "The Communion of Saints," Charles echoes Ephesians 4:1-16.

2 If we now begin to be  
Partners with Thy Saints and Thee;  
If we have our Sins forgiven,  
Fellow-Citizens of Heaven,

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<sup>12</sup> "Hymn XXX," *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*, p. 40.

Still the Fellowship increase,  
Knit us in the Bond of Peace;  
Join, our new-born Spirits join  
Each to each, and All to Thine.

- 3 Build us in One Body up,  
Call'd in one high Calling's Hope;  
One the Spirit whom we claim,  
One the pure Baptismal Flame,  
  
One the Faith, and Common Lord;  
One the Father lives, ador'd  
Over, thro', and in us all,  
God Incomprehensible.
- 7 Daily growth the Members find,  
Fitly each with Other join'd;  
Closely all compacted rise;  
Every Joint its Strength supplies,  
  
Life to every Part conveys,  
Till the whole receive Increase,  
All compleat the Body prove,  
Perfectly built up in Love.<sup>13</sup>

In this Pauline expression, every part and member is deemed to contribute to the “increase” of the whole body. Similarly, in this hymn from Charles’s 1776 collection, the mutuality and unity in Christ and the shared peace and joy in the Holy Spirit are evident:

All praise to our redeeming Lord,  
Who joins us by his grace,  
And bids us, each to each restor'd,  
Together seek his face,  
He bids us build each other up,  
And gather'd into one,  
To our high calling's glorious hope  
We hand in hand go on.

The gift which he on one bestows,  
We all delight to prove,  
The grace thro' every vessel flows  
In purest streams of love.  
Ev'n now we speak, and think the same,  
And cordially agree,  
Concentrated all thro' Jesu's name  
In perfect harmony.

We all partake the joy of one,

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<sup>13</sup> “The Communion of Saints,” *HSP*, 1740, pp. 188-190.

The common peace we feel,  
A peace to sensual minds unknown,  
A joy unspeakable,  
And it our fellowship below,  
In Jesus be so sweet,  
What height of rapture shall we know  
When round his throne we meet!<sup>14</sup>

Second, it is also worth highlighting that in the communal singing of a hymn and in worshipping together, the oneness of the body and the heaven within each of us, united by the common hope of Christ's return and the fullness of love divine, become physically manifested, as is evidenced by this well-known Wesley hymn:

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of heaven to earth come down,  
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
All thy faithful mercies crown:  
Jesus, Thou are all compassion,  
Pure, unbounded, love, Thou art,  
Visit us with thy salvation,  
Enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit  
Into every troubled breast  
Let us all in Thee inherit,  
Let us find that second rest:  
Take away our *power* of sinning,  
Alpha and Omega be,  
End of faith as its beginning,  
Set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty to deliver,  
Let us all thy life receive,  
Suddenly return, and never,  
Never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
Serve Thee as thy host above,  
Pray, and praise thee without ceasing,  
Glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,  
Pure and sinless let us be,  
Let us see thy great salvation,  
Perfectly restor'd in Thee;  
Chang'd from glory into glory  
'Till in heaven we take our place,  
'Till we cast our crowns before Thee,

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<sup>14</sup> "Hymn XXXII," *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*, p. 42.

Lost in wonder, love and praise!<sup>15</sup>

Before leaving this point of heaven leavened, or the hope that provides momentum to sustain the journey toward the New Creation, we must also recognize, thirdly, that when heaven is begun within the believer and nurtured by this hope in Christ, it overflows to love and serve others. Although in his writings, John Wesley emphasizes this dimension of outward holiness more than Charles does in his hymns, the imperative to love and serve others is present in Charles's theology. A brief verse or two will serve to illustrate this point. The first example is taken from Charles's poem entitled, "The Musician's," which, we might suggest, is particularly close to his own heart, though the hymn can also be understood as an extended metaphor for anyone who draws others to Christ. Verses 2, 5, and 6 give us the gist of this sense of sharing, or even demand to share, God's love and mercy with others:

2 If well I know the tuneful art  
To captivate an human heart,  
The glory, Lord, be Thine:  
A servant of thy blessed will,  
I here devote my utmost skill  
To sound the praise divine.

5 Thine own musician, Lord, inspire,  
And let my consecrated lyre  
Repeat the Psalmist's part:  
His son and thine reveal in me,  
And fill with sacred melody  
The fibres of my heart.

6 So shall I charm the list'ning throng,  
And draw the living stones along,  
By Jesu's tuneful name;  
The living stones shall dance, shall rise,  
And form a city in the skies  
The *New Jerusalem!*<sup>16</sup>

The second example of "heaven leavened" through the believer's witness and service to others comes from Wesley's *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love*, verses 8 and 10:

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<sup>15</sup> "Hymn IX," *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> "Hymn XXV, The Musician's," *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*, pp. 34-35.

8 For This alone I breathe  
To spread the Gospel-sound,  
Glad Tidings of Thy Death  
To all the Nations round;  
Who All *may* feel Thy Blood applied,  
Since All are freely Justified.

10 To serve Thy Blessed Will,  
Thy Dying Love to praise,  
Thy Counsel to fulfil,  
And minister Thy Grace,  
Freely what I receive to give,  
The Life of Heaven on Earth I live.<sup>17</sup>

For Charles Wesley, the leavening of hope during the sanctification process includes this important and unmitigated idea of living now, on earth, the life we expect to live in heaven. Through grace we are enabled to participate in the heavenly life, which further encourages our hope toward that end. One final expression of service to others which is integral to heaven leavened is found in Wesley's "The Servant's Hymn" in *Hymns for the Use of Families*:

3 Whate'er for man I do,  
I do as to the Lord,  
From God the merciful and true  
Expecting my reward:  
And wither bond or free,  
I know, Thou wilt approve,  
And crown our services to Thee  
With thy eternal love.<sup>18</sup>

This hope which is generated in and by the community of faith during the sanctification process continues the movement toward the singular goal of heaven gained or the point of glorification.

#### The Images of Heaven Gained

The final part of the process which began with the state of deformed nature, and moved through justification by faith, regeneration, and the sanctification process edified by hope is the point of entire sanctification or "heaven gained." Heaven gained is, of course, the point at which the believer has no sin remaining and is entirely filled with God's own love. The images Charles

<sup>17</sup> "Hymn XI," *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* (London: 1742), pp. 32-33.

<sup>18</sup> "Hymn CXXXIX, The Servant's Hymn," *Hymns for the Use of Families*, p. 147.

Wesley uses to indicate heaven gained tend to remain fairly consistent throughout his hymns and sacred poems. The first is the scriptural metaphor of vision or seeing God face to face. In the following example, we also find the idea that our hope for leaving the earth behind is due only to God having first deigned to become incarnate below. The movement depicted is of God coming down so that we might rise up:

- 5 He deigns In Flesh t' appear,  
    Widest Extremes to join,  
    To bring our Vileness near,  
        And make us All divine;  
    And we the Life of GOD shall know,  
    Our GOD is manifest below.
  
- 6 Made perfect first in love,  
    And sanctified by Grace,  
    We shall from Earth remove,  
        And see His glorious Face;  
    His love shall then be fully shew'd,  
    And Man shall all be lost in GOD.<sup>19</sup>

Once sanctified, we are taken up from earth to heaven above and there lost in God whose very face shines upon us. We can almost trace the contours of this spatial metaphor as a child whose arms reach upward for a parent to lift her up, out of the dangers below, to the embrace of pure love. The metaphor of seeing God face to face in heaven is expressed again in this poem of longing for completion:

- 3 To take a poor fugitive in,  
    The arms of thy mercy display,  
    And give me to rest from all sin,  
        And bear me triumphant away:  
    Away from a world of distress,  
        Away to the mansions above,  
    The heaven of seeing thy face,  
        The heaven of feeling thy love.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Hymn V," *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord* (1745), p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> "Hymn XLVI," *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*, pp. 57-58.

Charles also refers to heaven as “the New Jerusalem,” as in the citation above (page 11) from “The Musicians,” and in the following hymn which utilizes an extended metaphor of a traveler on a journey:

- 4 Patient th' appointed race to run,
- 5 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*.<sup>21</sup>

In this process of heaven leavened, hope generates increasing strength toward the destination, here imaged as the *New Jerusalem*, the city of God. Another common image relates to our return to paradise or, in explicitly scriptural terms, the Garden of Eden:

- 11 The Sabbath of my soul I see,  
The day of gospel liberty,  
No more enthrall'd, oppress'd;  
And lo! In holiness I rise,  
To claim the ~~rest~~ of paradise,  
And heaven's eternal rest!<sup>22</sup>

Thus, when Charles Wesley depicts the state of glorification or heaven gained, he tends to draw on the biblical imagery that is commonly and readily understood as eschatological in nature: returning to what we lost in the beginning (the image of God, the Garden of Eden, our spotless nature) and being in proximity to God (visually and spiritually present). This means leaving behind the earth and rising up to the heavens above. It is at this point when faith and hope become obsolete and only the fullness of love remains. But does Charles Wesley consider this state of heaven gained to be synonymous with the New Creation? What becomes of the earth below once we ascend into those arms of divine love? We now turn to this question in order to draw some provisional conclusions about the New Creation in Charles's hymnody.

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<sup>21</sup> “Hymn XLI, The Traveller,” *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*, p. 50.

<sup>22</sup> *Poetical Works*, “Waiting for Redemption – Hymn 4,” HSP 1749, V:382.

### Drawing out the New Creation

As we arrive at the central question of the relationship between glorification, that is, the point of gaining heaven, and the New Creation, which we understand to be the consummation of God's promised restoration of all things, we must begin with a brief, but relevant consideration: The theological context out of which John and Charles Wesley's eschatological thought emerged. As Randy Maddox has noted with regard to John's view, the Anglican eschatology of the 18<sup>th</sup> century would have been largely amillennial, though Puritan views on postmillennialism and early church/Anabaptist premillennial views were emerging to compete for a hearing.<sup>23</sup> Thus, recognizing that Charles remained indebted to his Anglican roots, we would expect to find little in his sacred poems with regard to millennialism, and this tends to be the case. The evidence for reconstructing his position on millennialism is sketchy, any attempt to do so would be highly speculative, and pursuing this line of thought would bear little, if any, fruit. As stated previously in this essay, Charles's eschatology was processive, such that he viewed hope – which arises during the time between the onset of faith and the fulfillment of love – as expanding or furthering the reign of God on earth, which is Charles Wesley's primary concern.

Perhaps this overriding concern is tied to Wesley's belief that the New Creation will not be fulfilled until Christ's promised return and there is yet time to share the Gospel and "save souls" for inclusion in the New Creation. The following verse from his 1740 *Hymns and Sacred Poems* illustrates the awaited return of Christ, in this case, providing hope and encouragement, "leavening," to those who mourn:

11 Meekly then persist to mourn;  
Soon He will, He must return:  
Call on Him; He hears thy cry,  
Soon He will, He must draw nigh;  
This the Hope, which naught can move,

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<sup>23</sup> *Responsible Grace*, p. 236.

God is Truth, and God is Love!<sup>24</sup>

Two more telling examples of his position regarding the expected *parousia*, are found in the *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*. In Hymn XLIV, the last three stanzas are particularly illuminating. In these verses, the metaphor of Christ's descent which enables our ascent is present, and it is clear that the death of physical death remains part of our hope for the future. This hymn also indicates how the last judgment is understood by Wesley to be a calamitous time which literally shakes the earth to its core. Finally, we should note that proclaiming the Gospel to others continues until the very last breath of the present world:

6     Jesus shall soon descend,  
          Our Saviour and our King,  
And bring the joys that never end,  
          And full redemption bring:  
          Redemption from the grave,  
          We know and feel it nigh,  
Jesus shall soon descend and save  
          Us up above the sky.

7     Earth to her center quakes,  
          And owns her judge is near;  
Bowing the heavens, their powers He shakes,  
          And he shall soon appear:  
          Him shall all survey  
          High on a glorious cloud,  
Whose tokens cry, Prepare his way!  
          Prepare to meet your God!

8     Jesus thy word we own,  
          And wait th'appointed hour,  
Come in thy glorious kingdom down,  
          With majesty and power:  
          Thy heavenly bliss reveal,  
          And bid us take our flight,  
Caught up to meet Thee on the hill  
          With all thy saints in light.<sup>25</sup>

The second important hymn from this collection is Hymn XIII, "Te Deum," to which is added the subtitle or dedication, *Sinners, rejoice, your peace is made*. In it, once again, wrath and

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<sup>24</sup> "The Just Shall Live by Faith," *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1740, p. 160.

<sup>25</sup> "Hymn XLIV," *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*, p. 55.

judgment are associated with the second coming, as well as a communal dimension in which the living saints join those who have already ascended to heaven:

9 Seated at God's right hand again,  
Thou dost in all his glory reign,  
Thou dost, thy Father's image, shine  
In all the attributes divine,  
And Thou in vengeance clad shalt come  
To seal our everlasting doom.

11 Hallow, and make thy servants meet,  
And with thy saints in glory seat,  
Sustain, and bless us by thy sway,  
And keep to that tremendous day,  
When all thy church shall chaunt above  
The new eternal song of love.<sup>26</sup>

What seems clear in these hymns and others is that, for Charles Wesley, Christ's return, (which is future event, even though we do receive a foretaste by faith in Christ), will complete what has been inaugurated on an individual-by-individual basis and has gathered momentum and expansion within the community of the faithful. Confident in hope, we await the completion of the new, but no timeline or particulars have been provided. The only "evidence" we have is the assurance of faith that resides within our hearts and is found in the witnesses of the scriptures. Perhaps, then, the language of poetry is the most appropriate means to speak of this great mystery.

Although the full realization of the New Creation, beyond the notion of heaven gained, is a far less frequent theme in Wesley's hymnody, the images he does provide of fallen creation's last gasps can be quite breathtaking:

5 O happy, happy day,  
That calls thy exiles home!  
The heavens shall pass away,  
The earth receive its doom,  
Earth we shall view, and heaven destoy'd,  
And shout above the fiery void,

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<sup>26</sup> "Hymn XIII, Te Deum," *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*, pp. 18-19.

6 These eyes shall see them fall,  
Mountains, and stars, and skies,  
These eyes shall see them all  
Out of their ashes rise:  
These lips his praises shall rehearse,  
Whose nod restores the universe.

7 According to his word,  
His oath to sinners given,  
We look to see restor'd  
The ruin'd earth and heaven,  
In a new world his truth to prove,  
A world of righteousness and love.<sup>27</sup>

A second example is based upon Isaiah 51:

13 Lift up your eyes, the heavens survey,  
And look upon the earth below;  
The heavens like smoke shall pass away,  
The earth its final period know.

14 Vanishes hence whate'er is seen,  
The breath of life shall all expire,  
The earth, and all that dwell therein  
Shall perish in that fatal fire.<sup>28</sup>

The above verses intimate the end of both heaven and earth, the destruction of above and below, the recreation of the whole of creation, which thus suggests a distinction exists between heaven gained and the New Creation. [It should here be noted that hell, or the depths below the earth, is not directly included in these scenarios.] A radical overcoming of this existence, both spatially and temporally, is indicated. But once this destruction occurs, then what will remain? Perhaps the following hymns – again based on Isaiah's vision – provide an idea of Wesley's theological understanding:

3 Hark! The wastes have found a voice,  
Lonely deserts now rejoice,  
Gladsome hallelujahs sing,  
All around with praises ring.

4 Lo! Abundantly they bloom,  
*Lebanon* is hither come,  
*Carmel's* stores the heavens dispense,

<sup>27</sup> "Hymn XLVII," *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*, pp. 59-602

<sup>28</sup> *Poetical Works*, "The Fifty-First Chapter of Isaiah," HSP 1749, IV:301.

*Sharon's fertile excellence.*

5 See these barren souls of ours  
Bloom, and put forth fruits and flowers, --  
Flowers of *Eden*, fruits of grace,  
Peace, and joy, and righteousness.<sup>29</sup>

And in a second interpretation of Isaiah, this time from the poem on chapter 51, Charles Wesley describes the New Creation thusly:

4 Shall soon His fallen *Sion* raise,  
Her waste and desolate places build,  
Pour out the Spirit of His grace,  
And make her wilds a fruitful field.

5 The barren souls shall be restored,  
The desert all renew'd shall rise,  
Bloom as the garden of the Lord,  
A fair terrestrial paradise.

6 Gladness and joy shall there be found,  
Thanksgiving and the voice of praise,  
The voice of melody shall sound,  
And every heart be fill'd with grace.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, even as we engage and enter into these images of the New Creation, the question of the relationship between heaven and the New Creation remains uncertain. The theological understanding of heaven begun in the present time suggests that the essence of the New Creation can be experienced now. Indeed, the verses above, from the sacred poem based on Isaiah 51, are followed by verse 7, which points to the New Creation in all its glory here and now. Of course, we could identify this as perfect love and not relate it directly to the New Creation; however, it is best considered to be a both/and situation:

7 Hearken to Me, My chosen race,  
My own peculiar people, hear,  
Whoe'er the gospel word embrace,  
Look to be pure and perfect *here*.

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<sup>29</sup> "Isaiah XXXV," *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1740, p.107.

<sup>30</sup> *Poetical Works*, "The Fifty-First Chapter of Isaiah," HSP 1749, IV:300.

Finally, in the expectation of Christ's spectacular return to earth, in this case, utilizing Isaiah's imagery of dead bones coming to life again, Wesley is concerned with the formation of the new creature, restoring the individual, rather than completing the New Creation.

- 7 Crown the agonizing Strife,  
Principle, and Lord of Life;  
Life Divine in us renew,  
Thou the Gift and Giver too!
- 8 Now descend and shake the Earth,  
Wake us into Second Birth;  
Now Thy quick'ning Influence give,  
Blow – and these dry Bones shall live!<sup>31</sup>

Once again, it is best not to view this as an either/or situation: either he points toward the New Creation or toward the justification and sanctification of the individual. Rather, the meaning should be construed in a both/and form. Charles's is not a realized eschatology, but a processive one; we might say, it is a middle way. The key to resolving or at least embracing this ambiguity lies, here, in Wesley's processive eschatology, the irreducible sense of movement from deformed nature to glorification. Thus, we come full circle to where we began, with the fundamental importance of this upward journey:

- 7 Kindle the flame of love within,  
Which may to heaven ascend,  
And now the work of grace begin,  
Which shall in glory end.<sup>32</sup>

For Charles Wesley, the shape and physical nature of the New Creation is of secondary concern to this journey toward glorification and heaven gained. His concern is with renewal in the present moment, with the process of growing in love, with the reality of what Christ has already accomplished if we will only claim this gift. In other words, if we continue by faith, hope, and love toward heaven, then we will inherit and inhabit the New Creation, for we will be

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<sup>31</sup> "Hymn for Whitsunday," *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: 1739), p. 214.

<sup>32</sup> "Hymn XXXIX," *Hymns for Those that Seek . . . Redemption*, p. 48.

new creatures re-created in the image of God, restored to the fullness of life which God has promised in Christ and through the scriptural witnesses. Christology thus emerges as the center of Wesley's New Creation: In the faith in Christ that inaugurates the New Creation within the individual, in the hope that enables it to expand in and through the body of Christ, and, ultimately, in the fullness of love when Christ returns in glory to bring it to completion. Perhaps the best way to express this final point is with one line from the hymn "Against Hope, Believing in Hope," which simply claims, "Jesus is all the World to me."<sup>33</sup> Trusting in Christ alone, the gifts of faith, hope, and love can be ours and, thus, in the *kairos* time, heaven and the New Creation will be realized. For Charles Wesley, Christ is, indeed, creating all things new.

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<sup>33</sup> "Against Hope, Believing in Hope," *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1740, p. 158.

