CHAPTER 4

PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF WESLEY'S ESCHATOLOGY

Although not the major focus of this dissertation, the fundamentally practical nature of Wesley's ministry demands that some consideration be made of the relationship between his praxis and his eschatology. Curiously, and perhaps quite correctly, Wesley believed that issues of eschatology were

almost as little thought or understood [in comparison to the total ignorance of non-Christians] by the generality of Christians: I mean, not barely those that are nominally such, that have the form of godliness without the power; but even those that in a measure fear God and study to work righteousness.[[1]](#footnote-0)

Given his pragmatic orientation he sought to correct the situation and put eschatological material to considerable use in the promotion of the Kingdom on earth. The present chapter treats both the uses to which he put eschatological preaching, teaching, and exhortation and also his reflection upon those uses.

*The Application of Eschatology*

An examination of Wesley's practical application of eschatology suggests several categories or themes: reaching unbelievers, encouraging believers, the holy dying motif, prayers for the dead, and apologetics. These themes are treated below.

Eschatology and Unbelievers

Wesley made much use of eschatological themes when preaching to unbelievers.[[2]](#footnote-1) True to the popular conception, much of his preaching was of the hell-fire and brimstone variety. There were urgent appeals to those who spiritually slept: "Awake, thou everlasting spirit, out of thy dream of worldly happiness. . . . Make haste; eternity is at hand. Eternity depends on this moment: an eternity of happiness, or an eternity of misery."[[3]](#footnote-2) There were also psychological depictions of the "tormenting uncertainty" brought on by incomplete awareness of the terrors of "countless ages to come."[[4]](#footnote-3) He hammered home the eternal consequences of sin: "You, with those round about you, deserved long ago to have 'drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling;' yea, to have been 'punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.'"[[5]](#footnote-4)

Wesley's audiences were also treated to dramatic descriptions of the horrors of the world beyond as in the overwhelming description of the judgment in "Advice to a Soldier."[[6]](#footnote-5) The classic images were all present: "You are on the brink of the pit, ready to be plunged into everlasting perdition."[[7]](#footnote-6)

For you will all drop into the pit together, into the nethermost hell. You will all lie together in the lake of fire, "the lake of fire burning with brimstone." Then at length you will see (but God grant you may see it before!) the necessity of holiness in order to glory-and consequently of the new birth, since none can be holy except he be born again.[[8]](#footnote-7)

Or again:

And he not only sees, but feels in himself, by an emotion of souls which he cannot describe, that for the sins of his heart, were his life without blame (which yet it is not, and cannot be; seeing "an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit"), he deserves to be cast into "the fire that never shall be quenched." He feels that "the wages," the just reward, "of sin," of his sin above all, "is death;" even the second death, the death which dieth not, the destruction of the body and soul in hell.[[9]](#footnote-8)

Perhaps the pinnacle of his narrative powers were revealed in "The Great Assize:" "Should you not bear it in your minds all day long, that a more awful day is coming?" "See! See! He cometh! . . . See!"[[10]](#footnote-9) The drama could also be of a tragic kind as when he recounted the death of a backslidden man who at the moment of his passing "shrieked out with a piercing cry, 'A fiend! a fiend' and died."[[11]](#footnote-10) Stories of backsliders with happier endings just prior to death were also used effectively.[[12]](#footnote-11)

Not all of Wesley's calls to salvation were cries of warning and fear, however. In a letter to Thomas Davenport, Wesley described a condemned prisoner who was certain he was going to damnation after his death and yet experienced "no fear, no sorrow, no concern." Upon inquiry the prisoner informed Wesley of Mr. Pope's teaching that the day of grace may pass for a person before the day of life, and when that is so there is no fear left. Wesley then went on to emphasize: "But it is not so with *you*," suggesting the very positive use of the doctrine of damnation.[[13]](#footnote-12) One can even find appeals to salvation in the *Expository Notes* which combine the element of fear above with the most rational of tone![[14]](#footnote-13) Wesley's letter to Sir James Lowther is a poignant example of practical eschatology encroaching upon two old men:

The substance of what I took the liberty to mention to you this morning was: You are on the borders of the grave, as well as I; shortly we must both appear before God. When it seemed to me, some months since, that my life was near an end, I was troubled that I had not dealt plainly with you. This you will permit me to do now, without any reserve, in the fear and in the presence of God. . . .

Upon the whole, I must once more earnestly entreat you to consider yourself and God and eternity. As to yourself, you are not the proprietor of anything-no, not of one shilling in the world. You are only a steward of what another entrusts you with, to be laid out not according to your will, but His. And what would you think of your steward if he laid out what is called your money according to his own will and pleasure? (2) Is not God the sole proprietor of all things? And are you not to give account to Him for every part of His goods? And on how dreadful an account, if you have expended any part of them not according to His will, but your own! (3) Is not death at hand? And are not you and I just stepping into eternity? Are we not just going to appear in the presence of God, and that naked of all worldly goods? Will you then rejoice in the money you have left behind you? Or in that you have given to support a family, as it is called-that is, in truth, to support the pride and vanity and luxury which you have yourselves despised all your life long? O sir, I beseech you, for the sake of God, for the sake of your own immortal soul, examine yourself whether you do not love money. If so, you cannot love God. And if we die without the fear of God, what remains? Only to be banished from Him for ever and ever![[15]](#footnote-14)

Here was no hysteria, but the calm passion of one deeply concerned for the well-being of another. Even in polemical interchange Wesley could be rational in the application of heaven and hell.

For (to say the truth) I desire to have both heaven and hell ever in my eye while I stand on this isthmus of life, between these two boundless oceans. And I verily think the daily consideration of both highly becomes all men of reason and religion.[[16]](#footnote-15)

Perhaps the most touching of all his soul winning adventures involving eschatology was to "a young Negro" girl in America. Without religious training but "more sensible than the rest" Wesley inquired about her knowledge of the differences between the body that "will turn to dust" and the soul that "will not." At death, he explained "it will go out of your body, and go up there, above the sky, and live always. God lives there." There "no one will beat or hurt you there. You will never be sick. You will never be sorry any more, nor afraid of anything. I can't tell you, I don't know, how happy you will be; for you will be with God." The extent to which Wesley was moved is obvious: "The attention with which this poor creature listened to instruction is inexpressible. The next day she remembered all, readily answered every question, and said she would ask him that made her to show her how to be good."[[17]](#footnote-16)

Eschatology and Believers

Wesley also used eschatology to encourage believers[[18]](#footnote-17). In the most severe cases the danger of apostasy with its inevitable and irremediable culmination in "'a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation'" was used to spur wandering believers back into focus.[[19]](#footnote-18) When encouraging believers who were not in danger of backsliding into their former lives the approach was usually more positive. The terrors of hell were replaced with the glories of heaven. Wesley bolstered those in the midst of struggle and trial by reminding them that "all things considered, it is better to have *Canaan* in promise than mount *Seir* in possession."[[20]](#footnote-19) The clear implication being that it is the hope of the future and not the shadow of the present to which Christians should hold. Thus, even in the shadow and fear of death Wesley saw Moses gazing upon the promised land as a metaphor for the believers looking forward to the other side and conclude that such a view is "the earnest of that *better country*, which is only seen with the eye of faith. What is death to him who has a believing prospect and a steadfast hope of eternal life?"[[21]](#footnote-20) In fact, the study of the resurrection should "especially, fortify us against the fear of death."[[22]](#footnote-21)

Death paled to insignificance in comparison to heaven. "It ought to be the great concern of every one of us to secure a happy lot in the *end of days*."[[23]](#footnote-22) Such an approach to living also had practical benefit in the present, for in so doing the believer "then . . . may well be content with our present lot, welcoming the will of God.[[24]](#footnote-23) In this context it is easy to see why Wesley could describe the controversial and much debated details of the Millennium as "that comfortable doctrine."[[25]](#footnote-24)

Holy living could be induced not only by the fear and promise of the next life but also facilitated by information on the future and spiritual forces. It was important to know about "Satan's devices" so as not to be seduced or stricken by them.[[26]](#footnote-25) Even data about the timing and the nature of the end was significant.[[27]](#footnote-26) Believers were encouraged to apply themselves to spiritual things by Wesley because both death and some sort of eschatological climax were immanent. The "day of life" is short and uncertain and nothing is indifferent. In light of this, the believer should be "walking suitably to his charter" which requires "full commitment."[[28]](#footnote-27) Not only this but, "we know it cannot be long before the Lord will descend with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God." "'Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for these things,' seeing ye know He will come, and will not tarry, 'be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.'"[[29]](#footnote-28) Believers were to take the eternal prize "by force."[[30]](#footnote-29)

Because of his vision of the third heaven, Paul "could call to mind the very joy that was prepared for him" and so be fortified in his "trials."[[31]](#footnote-30) In a similar fashion, holy living (as well as the impetus to salvation itself) could flow from the very, awe inspiring descriptions of the glory of future state.[[32]](#footnote-31)

What glory must this be! Ye sinners, be afraid cleanse your hands: purifying your hearts. Ye saints, be humble prepare: rejoice. But rejoice unto him with reverence[,] an increase of reverence towards this awful majesty can be no prejudice to your faith. Let all petulancy, with all vain curiosity, be far away, while you are thinking or reading these things.[[33]](#footnote-32)

Such description "inspires the attentive and intelligent reader with such a magnanimity, that he accounts nothing in this world great; no, not the whole frame of visible nature, compared to the immense greatness of what he is here called to behold, yea, and in part to inherit."[[34]](#footnote-33)

Beyond this that had the promise of the Lord Jesus Himself, a "strong reason to hope," that he would see them through to their eschatological conclusion.[[35]](#footnote-34)

Preparation for heaven also served as a powerful motivator for the believer.[[36]](#footnote-35) The soul should be prepared in the present life so that it would not be "uneasy" in the resurrection body of the next.[[37]](#footnote-36) To this end, experiencing the presence of God" was fit preparation for those mansions above wherein they shall see him as he is."[[38]](#footnote-37) Perhaps the ultimate eschatological inducement, beyond salvation itself, for holy living was Wesley's belief that "there must needs be an everlasting difference between those who when on earth excelled in virtue, and those comparatively slothful and unprofitable servants, who were just saved as by fire."[[39]](#footnote-38)

Eschatology could minister to the believer not only through the image of the future but also through the reality of the present.[[40]](#footnote-39) Salvation and holiness resulted in "a participation of the divine nature, the life of God in the soul of man: 'Christ formed in the heart,' 'Christ in thee, the hope of glory;' happiness and holiness; heaven begun upon earth; 'a kingdom within thee.'"[[41]](#footnote-40) This was "the way of pleasantness; the path to calm joyous peace, to heaven below and heaven above.[[42]](#footnote-41)

While preaching and teaching on eschatological themes contributed to holy living, the reverse was also true. Thus, the believer was to

Endeavor, by cultivating holiness in all its branches, to maintain this hope in its full energy; longing for that glorious day, when, in the utmost extent of the expression, *death shall be swallowed up* for ever, and millions of voices, after the long silence of the grave, shall burst out at once into that triumphant song, *O death, where is thy sting? O hades, where is thy victory?*[[43]](#footnote-42)

Praxis, then, had come full circle, facilitating eschatological thought. This data indicates that Wesley valued and exercised eschatological themes in his ministry to the saints. It seems, in general, that the more positive aspects of eschatology were emphasized when his ministry was to believers.

Eschatology and Holy Dying

Wesley's concern for the *ars morendi* was an early and consistent part of his own life and teaching.[[44]](#footnote-43) Bishop Taylor's *Rules for Holy Living and Holy Dying* had been a closely studied companion from his Oxford days.[[45]](#footnote-44) It was the happy courage of the Germans against death's threatening which so pierced his heart and self-perception on board the Simmonds.[[46]](#footnote-45) His journal of August 1738 contains the touching account of a bereaving Moravian father's sure belief in the resurrection on the occasion of his son's burial.[[47]](#footnote-46) Thus, it is not surprising that early Methodism is replete with descriptions of glorious dying which must have been a substantial encouragement in a century even more plagued by illness and at least the ugliness of death than even our own.[[48]](#footnote-47)

These accounts can be homey and prosaic, as when Catherine Whitaker said: "Swelled legs! For a little time: There will be no swelled legs in heaven."[[49]](#footnote-48) They can also be dramatic:

I again visited many that were sick, but I found no fear either of pain or death among them. One (Mary Whittle) said, "I shall go to my Lord tomorrow; but before I go, He will finish His work." The next day she lay quiet for about two hours, and then, opening her eyes, cried out, "It is done, it is done! Christ liveth in me! He liveth in me!;" and died in a moment.[[50]](#footnote-49)

Or again:

I called on another who was believed to be near death, and greatly triumphing over it. "I know" said she, "that my Redeemer liveth, and will stand at the latter day upon the earth. I fear not death; it hath no sting for me. I shall live for evermore."[[51]](#footnote-50)

With Nancy Morris' in her final hours he inquired:

"Do you expect to die now?" She said, "It is not shown me that I shall. But life or death is all one to me. I shall not change my company. Yet I shall more abundantly rejoice when we stand before the Lord; you and I, and all the other children which He hath given you."

In the evening I called upon her again, and found her weaker, and her speech much altered. I asked her, "Do you now believe? Do not you find your soul in temptation?" She answered, smiling and looking up, "There is the Lamb; and where He is, what is temptation? I have no darkness, no cloud. The enemy may come; but he hath no part in me." I said, "But does not your sickness hinder you?" She replied, "Nothing hindered me. It is the Spirit of my Father that worketh in me; and nothing hinders that Spirit. My body indeed is weak and in pain; but my soul is all joy and praises."[[52]](#footnote-51)

Even his tragic sister Hetty gave testimony to the ideal of happy death, especially among Wesley's followers: "I have ardently wished for death, because, you know, we Methodists always die in a transport of joy." Through much pain and suffering she did.[[53]](#footnote-52) In his journal he recorded her further thoughts on the subject: "Taking a solitary walk in the churchyard, I felt the truth of 'One generation goeth and another cometh.' See how the earth drops its inhabitants as the tree drops its leaves!"[[54]](#footnote-53) Wesley's own experience of death was recorded by the faithful Elizabeth Ritchie who nursed him at the last.

During the two months I passed under his roof, which proved to be the last he spent on earth, I derived much pleasure from his conversation. His spirit seemed all love; he breathed the air of paradise, adverting often to the state of separate spirits. "Can we suppose" he would observe "that this active mind which animates and moves the dull matter with which it is clogged, will be less active when set free? Surely no; it will be all activity. But what will be its employment? Who can tell?[[55]](#footnote-54)

Accounts of death and articles and poems on dying were regular occurrences in the pages of the *Arminian Magazine*.[[56]](#footnote-55) Accounts of glorious dying were even woven into the sermons: "In the close of my sermon I read them the account of Thomas Hitchen's death, and the hearts of many burned within them, so that they could not conceal their desire to go to him, and to be with Christ."[[57]](#footnote-56)

As might be expected, funerals also figured in his thought. There was a communal aspect. Believers were to make preparation for the death of other Christians.[[58]](#footnote-57) While there was joy for the departed one gone to paradise, the parting was admittedly a sad thing which Wesley described as the "tearing asunder of these sacred bonds."[[59]](#footnote-58) He also displayed great respect for the funeral event itself. He protested against the wordless burials then current in Scotland which he believed dishonored that which was once the temple of the Holy Spirit.[[60]](#footnote-59)## He also deplored "that exquisite instance of human folly, that senseless, cruel mockery of a poor putrefying carcase, what we term lying in state."[[61]](#footnote-60) On the positive side, his tone is remarkably tender as he noted giving the "last office of love to Mrs. Perronet."[[62]](#footnote-61)

Prayers for the dead

Wesley distinguished and defended his praying for the faithful dead in opposition to the Roman practice of interceding for those who died in their sins: "That we, with all those who are departed in thy faith and fear, may have our perfect consummation of bliss, both in body and soul"[[63]](#footnote-62) He gave three reasons for his position: the practice of "earliest antiquity," the tradition of Church of England, and the "'Thy Kingdom Come'" of the Lord's prayer.[[64]](#footnote-63) In relation to praying to dead saints as opposed to praying for them, His comment on Luke 16:24 (Lazarus and Dives) is particularly sarcastic and enlightening: "It cannot be denied, but here is one precedent in Scripture of praying to departed saints: but who is it that prays and with what success? Will any, who considers this, be fond of copying after them?[[65]](#footnote-64) Wesley's approval of these matters probably reflects not only his epistemological appreciation of tradition but also sense of the unity of the Body of Christ.

Eschatology and Apologetics

Wesley used eschatologically based arguments in his apologetic. He saw the translation of Elijah as giving "that dark and denigrated age, a very sensible proof of another life."[[66]](#footnote-65) In his "A Thought upon Necessity," he rejected a curious collection of philosophical positions with eschatological overtones. To Dr. Hartley's universe of "vibrations" Wesley replied that God can "stop, alter, annihilate . . . in whatever moment he pleases."[[67]](#footnote-66) To the "minute philosophers" who speak of traces in the brain, he responded: "He can alter or efface all these traces in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."[[68]](#footnote-67) To Mr. Edwards and "the outward appearances of things . . . giving rise to sensation" and the like, he countered "Let your chain be wrought ever so firm; He nods, and it flies in pieces; He touches it, and all the links fall asunder, as unconnected as the sand."[[69]](#footnote-68) To Lord Kames' faith in "the grand machine of the universe," Wesley pronounced: "He that made it can unmake it; can vary every wheel, every spring, every movement, at his own good pleasure." To the infidels he warned that they were in danger of "Fear, and death, and hell!"[[70]](#footnote-69) Lastly he dealt with the Calvinist:

Ah, poor predestinarian! If you are true to your doctrine, this is no comfort to you! For perhaps you are not of the elect number: If so, you are in the whirlpool too. For what is your hope? Where is your help? There is no help for you in your God. *Your* God! No; he is not yours; he never was; he never will be. He that made you, He that called you into being, has no pity upon you! He made you for this very end,-to damn you; to cast you headlong into a lake of fire burning with brimstone! This was prepared for you, or ever the world began! And of this you are now reserved in chains of darkness, till the decree brings forth; till, according to his eternal, unchangeable, irresistible will,

You groan, you howl, you writhe in waves of fire,

And pour forth blasphemies at his desire!

O God, how long shall this doctrine stand![[71]](#footnote-70)

*Wesley's Reflection on the Practical Uses of Eschatology*

Wesley reflected from time to time on the practical uses of eschatology. While Wesley would deny that any kind of phenomenon can turn the heart of a sinner without God "applying his word,"[[72]](#footnote-71) he clearly argued in favor of preaching in which people "'saw damnation,'" "'beheld with the eye of their mind the horror of hell,'" and in which they would "'tremble and shake.'"[[73]](#footnote-72) He seemed to have been convinced of the general efficacy of sermons warning of impending death and judgment.

Resolving not to shoot over their heads, as I had done the day before, I spoke strongly of death and judgment, heaven and hell. This they seemed to comprehend and there was no more laughing among them, or talking with each other; but all were quietly and deeply attentive.[[74]](#footnote-73)

This positive assessment of the value of direct talk on the negative aspects of eschatology is quite evident in his journal. "At Alnwick" he "exhorted a numerous congregation to 'be always ready for death,' for *death*, for *judgment*, for *heaven*." He went on to say that " [I] *felt* what I spoke, as I believe did most that were present, both then and in the morning, while I besought them to present themselves, 'a living, holy sacrifice acceptable to God.'"[[75]](#footnote-74) A brief sermon series "on Death in the evening and Hell in the morning" proved a powerful and positive influence on what had been "careless people."[[76]](#footnote-75) He also noted approvingly of warning audiences "of Satan's devices."[[77]](#footnote-76) Thus, in Wesley's own thought, preaching the threatening side of eschatological expectation was generally a salutary event. A similar sentiment was expressed in the 1746 "Minutes:"

Q. 3. Did we not then purposely throw them into convictions; into strong sorrow and fear? Nay, did we not strive to make them inconsolable, refusing to be comforted?

A. We did. And so we should do still. For the stronger the conviction, the speedier is the deliverance. And none so soon receive the peace of God, as those who steadily refuse all other comfort.[[78]](#footnote-77)

In addition to empirical evidence he found support for such preaching in the Church's *Homilies*, "Of Fasting," Part I.[[79]](#footnote-78) Most fundamentally, however, it seems his orations on death and hell came from a moral imperative to warn the sinner. Wesley rejected any salutary benefit in death at all for the unbeliever. It "is not properly a benefit but a punishment." It was in fact "the king of terrors . . . the burden of . . . . and the bane of . . . pleasures."[[80]](#footnote-79) This idea combined with the unspeakable effects of damnation apparently led to the conclusion that

May not love itself constrain us to lay before men 'the terrors of the Lord'? And is it not better that sinners 'should be terrified now than that they should sleep on, and awake in hell'? I have known exceeding happy effects of this, even upon men of strong understanding.

The quote continues, however, bringing the other side of Wesley's thoughts upon the matter: "Yet I agree with you that there is little good to be done by 'the profuse throwing about of hell and damnation;' and the best way of deciding the points in question is cool and friendly *argumentation*."[[81]](#footnote-80) Wesley's experience also seemed to bare this out. His inability to take advantage of the distress of his fellow English passengers on the Simmonds apparently drove home a significant lesson concerning the use of fear: "I could not have believed that so little good would have been done by the terror they were in before. But for the future I will never believe them to obey from fear who are dead to the motive of love."[[82]](#footnote-81) The same idea is present in the "Conversations" of 1745:

Q. 17. Do not some of our assistants preach too much of the wrath, and too little of the love, of God?

A. We fear they have leaned to that extreme; and hence some of their hearers may have lost the joy of faith.

Q. 18. Need we ever preach the terrors of the Lord to those who know they are accepted of him?

A. No: It is folly so to do; for love is to them the strongest of all motives.[[83]](#footnote-82)

These conclusions resemble closely those of 1747 in which the harsh preaching of perfection was thought to have brought "believers into a kind of bondage, or slavish fear" which was counterproductive.[[84]](#footnote-83)

In terms of ministry at funerals, Wesley, reported that "many burials and some deaths I have been present at, but I never yet knew a soul converted by the sight of either."[[85]](#footnote-84) Yet he also noted several occasions in which the effect of funeral services on the saved were most positive:

The last scene of life in dying believers is of great use to those who are about them. Here we see the reality of religion and of things eternal; and nothing has a greater tendency to solemnize the soul and make and keep it dead to all below."[[86]](#footnote-85)

And again: "Right precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints; and much good is usually done at their funerals. You do well to improve all those opportunities."[[87]](#footnote-86) This balanced approach is visible even in the midst of Wesley's funeral oration for his friend in which he wished to "immediately recur to the bright side."[[88]](#footnote-87)

He also endorsed preaching the positive side of eschatology. After combining the text of Philippians 1:21 with an account of the death of a Methodist he found that "the hearts of many burned within them, so that they could not conceal their desire to go to him, and to be with Christ."[[89]](#footnote-88) Nonetheless, he expressed concern that believers could become too other worldly and neglect spiritual improvement in the present.

There have not been wanting instances of those who have greatly suffered hereby. They were so taken up with what they were to receive hereafter, as utterly to neglect what they had already received. In expectation of having five talents more, they buried their one talent in the earth. At least they did not improve it as they might have done to the glory of God, and the good of their own souls.[[90]](#footnote-89)

Two final concepts concerning Wesley's reflection on the practical uses of eschatology are of import. Wesley believed that a benchmark test of a person's spiritual condition was their attitude toward the final judgment.[[91]](#footnote-90) This is a striking assessment for one who was so concerned about evidences of salvation. But it really flows from another idea which is not so surprising at all: that the "*hope of eternal life*" is "the grand motive and encouragement of every apostle and every servant of God."[[92]](#footnote-91)

*Discussion*

Clearly Wesley employed eschatology in his preaching, teaching, and personal interaction with both unbelievers and believers. As Downes said: "Wesley's eschatology is the ground of his urgency."[[93]](#footnote-92) His use of these materials was self-conscious and based on both the empirical evidence of its efficacy and the theoretical understanding of its necessity. His ability to create vibrant images, "words . . . as hammer and flame,"[[94]](#footnote-93) which could terrify or enthrall, is unquestioned.[[95]](#footnote-94)

While his ability in these techniques may go essentially unchallenged, the appropriateness of using them has not. Perhaps the strongest critic of Wesley's of the application of negative eschatological themes was Marjorie Bowen who spoke of Wesley as one who "drugged and stunned the illiterate poor with this preaching of Hell fire, a sentimental 'love of God,' and his doctrine of a life lived according to rigid rules as the only mens of salvation." She further characterized him as "fastening the clamps of a terrible superstition on the minds of ignorant and impressionable people," and as having an "emphasis on self-denial, on austerity, on gloom, on absorption in the idea of a vengeful God."[[96]](#footnote-95) While she reserved judgment on whether such tactics ultimately resulted in good or ill for the people who were subject to them she was quite clear that these were in fact his tactics: "John Wesley took advantage of that religious emotion he was able to rouse in the wretched and ignorant, to implant some terrible falsehoods in their shivering hearts, the most dreadful of these was Hell."[[97]](#footnote-96) Such condemnation seems unwarranted, however.[[98]](#footnote-97) To begin, Bowen herself stated that Wesley "did not often use eternal punishment as his central theme."[[99]](#footnote-98) A position defended by Williams and others who argued that Wesley "made small use of the threat of hell" in his preaching.[[100]](#footnote-99) Further, her characterization of the social character of his audience as cattle-like oppressed easily led anywhere is not an accurate description.[[101]](#footnote-100) Finally, given the epistemology of the time, and especially Wesley's own understanding of the universe in which he and his hearers lived, it is altogether reasonable that he should employ images of and warnings about hell in the fashion in which he did. In fact, he would have been inconsistent and immoral had he done otherwise. Tyerman's words ring true in this regard: "It may be unreasonable to think of frightening a man to heaven; but it is not unreasonable to endeavor to frighten him away from hell."[[102]](#footnote-101) Wesley's self-assessment seems correct: "I am not conscious of . . . 'profusely flinging about everlasting fire.'"[[103]](#footnote-102)

Downes observed that "there are times when the Wesleys long passionately, morbidly, for death" 8because of the "trouble and misery of life" with its "doubts and griefs and fears."[[104]](#footnote-103) Schmidt spoke of the "recurring theme" of death in Wesley's "spiritual development."[[105]](#footnote-104) And Outler has noted that the aged Wesley kept returning to eschatological themes.[[106]](#footnote-105) Perhaps the perceived increase in the more dramatic aspects of eschatology in the later years of the revival may be correlated with Knight's assessment that, after 1770, Wesley feared the Methodist revival was slowing.[[107]](#footnote-106) But there are undoubtedly other reasons for the presence and apparent increased emphasis on eschatology. Personal issues such as Wesley's own serious illnesses and impending death, failed marriage, ongoing self-doubt, and lack of experience must heightened his interest in eschatology.

One final comment is essential when discussing the importance of Wesley's eschatology. Timothy Smith quite perceptively observes that "Revivalism and perfectionism became socially volatile only when combined with the doctrine of Christ's imminent conquest of the earth."[[108]](#footnote-107) It is quite arguable that the immanence of eschatology, particularly personal eschatology, although not central to Wesley's theological system, provided its practical application in the sanctuaries and fields of England with an energizing force, a force which the notably pragmatic Wesley did not overlook. His praxis is illustrated by his emphasis on the theme of the parable of the ten virgins, to be ever watchful, to be every ready, so that "even when he sleepeth, his heart waketh. He is quiet, but not secure."[[109]](#footnote-108)

1. Ser. 64, "The New Creation," 1 (*WJW* 2:501). [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Note for instance his abridgment of Joseph Allein's "An Alarm to Unconverted Sinners," (*CL*, 14:47-172). In many applications see also "Extract from Dr. Goodman's Winter Evening Converence," II, III concerning the judgment (*CL*, 20:87-232); "An Extract from the Country Parson's Advice to His Parishoners," especially: "*Chap. III.-Containing a third argument to a holy Life, from the Consideraiton of a future Judgment*," "*Chap. IV.-Containing a fourth argument to a holy life, from the Consideration of the future Punishments of wicked Men*," "*Chap. V.-Containing a fifth argument to a holy Life, from the consideration of those great Rewards God hath prepared for good Men in the other World*," "*Chap. VI.-Containing a sixth argument to a holy life, from considering that these Rewards and Punishments are not so far off, as some People vainly imagine*" (*CL*, 26:433-454). Note also his abridgment of Bonnet's (also featured in *SWG*) "Conjectures Concerning the Nature of Future Happiness" (*CL*, 70-90). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Ser. 3, "Awake, Thou that Sleepest," II.5 (*WJW* 1:148). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part II," III.19-20 (*WJW* 11:267-268). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. "A Farther Appeal," IV.2 (*WJW* 11:317). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. "Advice to a Soldier" 1 (*WW* XI.198, 201). The unusual extent of this quote seems warranted by the power of preaching damnation which it exemplifies. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," 49 (*WJW* 11:63). See also: "A Farther Appeal, I," VII.13 (*WJW* 11:197); "A Farther Appeal, II," II.4 (*WJW* 11:216-218). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Ser. 45 "The New Birth," III.2 (*WJW* 2;195). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Ser. 9 "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption," II.4 (*WJW* 1:256). See also section 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. Ser. 15, "The Great Assize," IV.4 (*WJW* 1:372-373). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. Ser. 84, "The Important Question," II.3 (*WJW* 3:186). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. *Jrn,*, Dec. 31, 1749; cf. Dec. 24, 1749 (*WJW* 20:317, 316). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. "To Thomas Davenport," Jan. 19, 1782 (*LJW* 7:101). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. *NNT*, Rev. 12:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. "To Sir James Lowther," Oct. 28, 1754 (*WJW* 26:543, 545). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. "To John Smith," Jul. 10, 1747; 1 (*WJW* 22:244-245). There is a strikingly similar phrase in Pope:

    Plac'd in this isthmus of a middle state,

    A being darkly wise and rudely great . . .

    Here the idea is used of humanity's middle position on the great chain of being. (Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, Ep. II, II.3-4 in Arthur L. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being, The History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. *Jrn.*, Apr. 23, 1737 (*WJW* 18:180). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. See also *CL*, "Extracts from the Works of Mr. Isaac Ambrose," "Looking unto Jesus: or, The Soul's Eyeing of Jesus, as Carrying on the Great Work of Man's Salvation," "The Ninth Book:" "Looking unto Jesus, In His Second Coming" (9:89-132); *CL*, Samuel Shaw's "Immanuel; or, A Discourse of True Religion," "Chap. VII.-*The End of religion, Eternal Life, considered in a double notion: I. As it signifies the essential happiness of the soul; II. As it takes in many glorious appendages. The former more fully described; the latter more briefly. The noble and genuine breathings of the godly soul after, and springing up into, the former. In what sense the godly would may be said to desire the latter.*" (14:285-296). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. Ser. 24, "Sermon on the Mount, IV" I.9 (*WJW* 1:538). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. *NOT*, Gen. 36:43. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. *NOT*, Deut. 32:52. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. Ser. 137, "On the Resurrection of the Dead," III.3 (*WW* 7:485). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. *NOT*, Dan. 12:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. *NOT*, Dan. 12:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. "To Thomas Hartley," Mar. 27, 1764 (*LJW* 4:234). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. See: Ser. 42, "Satan's Devices," (*WJW* 2:139-151); cf. *Jrn.*, Jul. 21, 1753 (*JJW* IV.76). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. *NNT*, Rev. 13:1; 20:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
28. Ser. 51, "The Good Steward," IV.1, 2, 3, 4 (*WJW* 2:296-298). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
29. Ser. 15, "The Great Assize," IV.5 (*WJW* 1:374). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
30. *NNT*, Rev. 22:4. *NNT*, Matt. 11:12, however, does not have such a specific application. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
31. *NNT*, 2 Cor. 12:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. No doubt one of the motivations behind Wesley's abridgement of John Worthington's "The Great Duty of Self-Resignation to the Divine Will," "Part II.-Diretions for the Attainment of Self Resignation," "Chap. XII.-That the frequent consideratin of the great Recompence of Reward, is a mighty help to the attianing of SELF-RESIGNATION" (*CL* 13:325-330). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. *NTT*, Rev. 1:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. *NNT*, Rev. 5:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
35. Ser. 63, "The Good Steward," 27 (*WJW* 2:499). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
36. This theme is not onllllly found in Wesley himself, but also in his sources: *CL*, Homilies of Macarius, VII, "*This Homily teaches us how the soul ought to demean herself in holiness and purity, towards her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ*" (1:92-93). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
37. Ser. 137," "On the Resurrection of the Dead," III.1 (*WW* 7:483-484). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
38. Ser. 23, "Sermon on the Mount, III," I.8 (*WJW* 1:514). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
39. *NNT*, Rev. 22.4-5; see also 1:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
40. See the previous chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
41. Ser. 3, "Awake, Thou that Sleepest," II.10 (*WJW* 1:149-150). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
42. Ser. 21 "Sermon on the Mount, I," 8 (*WJW* 1:474). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
43. *NNT*, 1 Cor. 15:58. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
44. Albert C. Outler "John Wesley as Theologian-Then and Now," in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, ed. by Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 55-74, 74. *Ars Morendi*: Latin for: "the art of dying." [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
45. Cited in *Jrn*, the Preface, 1 (*WJW* 18:121). Really two works: *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* and *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* by Bishop "Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667) one of the classic writers of the Anglican Church." Robert G. Tuttle, *John Wesley, His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1978), 65, n. 8. Wesley abridged or "collected" both of Taylor's works in *CL*, "Extracts from the Works of Jer. Taylor, D.D;" "The Rules and Exercises of Holy Living" (9:137-260); "The Rules and Exercises of Holy Dying" (9:231-297). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
46. *Jrn*, Jan. 25, 1736 (*WJW* 18:142-143). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
47. *Jrn.*, Aug. 8, 1738 (*WJW* 18:269). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
48. *CL* even has at least one entire volume dedicated to "Acts and Monuments of the Christian Martyrs" (vol. 2). Note also Wesley's abridgment of Pascal's "*Thoughts upon Death: being an Extract from a Letter of M. Pascal, occasioned by the Death of his Father*" (*CL*, 13:180-187). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
49. *Jrn*, May 15, 1752 (*WJW* 20:423). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
50. *Jrn.*, Jan. 21, 1742 (*WJW* 19:246). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
51. *Jrn.*, Jan. 23, 1742 (Cur II.522). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
52. *Jrn*, May, 15, 1741 (*JJW* 2:455). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
53. Maldwyn Edwards, *Family Circle, A Study of the Epworth Household in Relation to John and Charles Wesley* (London, England: Epworth, 1949), 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
54. *Jrn.*, Jul. 10, 1779 (*JJW* 6:243). The idea seems to be taken from the apocryphal Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach 14:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
55. "Elizabeth Ritchie's Account of Wesley's Last Days" (*JJW* 8:132). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
56. *AM*: The following is a summary of pieces related to death from 1784 to 1786 by category. These dates were chosen as a sample of the magazine at maturity.

    1784, 7: accounts of death: 24, 25, 81, "The Epitaph of Pope Adrian" 499, 530, "The Dying Speech of Andrees Zekerman" 554, 643; poems "On the Death of A. Harford" 59, "To T. H. Esq; On the Death of his Daughter" 115, "Translation of a Latin Epitaph on a foreign Bishop" 116.

    1785, 8: accounts of death: 19, 144, 145, 197, 199, 240, 522, 574; articles: "A Memorial" 48, "Of the Immortality of the Soul" 485, poems: "An Epitaph on an Infant found dead in a Field, who was denied Christian Burial" 398, "An Elegy on the Death of Mrs. Margaret Johnson" 439, "To the Memory of Lady Littleton" 492, "A Remarkable Epitaph in Latin" 663, "An Elegy written by a Father on the Death of his Child" 665,

    1786, 9: accounts of the death: 18, 79, 136, 137, 198, 249, 454, 540, 564, poems "Death: an Epigram" 120, "A Thought on Life and Death" 343.

    1787, 10: accounts of the death: 14, 18, 22, 70, 75, 77, 189, 301, 432, 462; articles: "On Despising Death" 652; poems "On the Death of Alexander the Great 112, poem "On the Shortness of Human Life" 615, "On Death and Eternity" 671.

    Many other instances of holy dying are listed in L[uke]. *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872), 1:294, 355-356, 395; 3:218-219. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
57. *Jrn.*, Sep. 14, 1746 (*WJW* 20:141-142). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
58. *NOT*, 2 Kings 2:2; by interpolation. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
59. Ser. 136, "On Mourning for the Dead," [17] (*WJW* 4:242). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
60. *Jrn*, May 20, 1774 (*WW* 22:408) cf. *NOT*, Isa. 24:19-20 and Ser. 135, "On Mourning for the Dead." See also Tyerman, *Life and Times*, 3:167. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
61. Ser. 115, "Dives and Lazarus," I.4 (*WJW* 4:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
62. *Jrn*, Jan. 10, 1763 (*WJW* 21:402-403). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
63. See "A Second Letter to the Author of 'The Enthusiasm of the Methodists, etc.'" II.42 (*WJW* 11:423, n. 2). This prayer is taken from "A Collection of Forms of Prayers for Every Day of the Week, 1773, 5th edition, 1740. It contains a Saturday evening prayer from St. Mark's Liturgy, the traditional eucharistic liturgy of the Alexandrian Church, cf. "Prayers Private and Public." He defends the same practice in his second letter to Bishop Livingston, 1751, 44 (*WJW* 11:423), where he credits it to "an ancient liturgy." [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
64. "A Second Letter to the Author of 'The Enthusiasm of the Methodists, etc.'" II.42 (*WJW* 11:423). *NNT* does not address this in Matt. 6:10 and Luke 11:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
65. *NNT*, Luke 16:24. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
66. *NOT*, 2 Kings 2:1. The apparent lack of a preposition in the last phrase is reproduced as it appears in my copy. See also 2:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
67. "A Thought upon Necessity," n.d; VI.1 (*WW* 10:478). The original is phrased as a rhetorical question, but the sense is preserved. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
68. "A Thought upon Necessity," n.d; VI.2 (*WW* 10:478-479). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
69. "A Thought upon Necessity," n.d; VI.3 (*WW* 10:479). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
70. "A Thought upon Necessity," n.d; VI.4 (*WW* 10:479-480). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
71. "A Thought upon Necessity," n.d; VI.4 (*WW* 10:480). [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
72. *NNT*, Luke 16:31. See also Ser. 112, "The Rich Man and Lazarus," III.3 (*WW* 7:254), for similar sentiments. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
73. Ser 60, "On the General Deliverance," III.8-10 (*WJW* 2:448-449). It is noteworthy that he describes those people who reject God's love as the beasts in his conclusion; III.11 (*WJW* 2:450). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
74. *Jrn.*, Apr. 22, 1772 (*JJW*). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
75. *Jrn.* Sep. 6, 1749 (*JWJ* 20:297-298). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
76. *Jrn.*, Oct. 8, 1770 (*WJW* 22:255); see also *Jrn*: Jan. 26, 1764 (*WJW* 21:442); Sep. 29, 1774 (*WJW* 22:429). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
77. *Jrn.*, Jul. 21, 1753 (*WJW* 20:468). [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
78. "Minutes of Some Late Conversations, III," May 13, 1746; que. 3 (*WW* 8:287). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
79. Or, in summary, "What could strengthen our hands in all that is good, and deter as from all evil, like a strong conviction of this,, 'The Judge standeth at the door;' and we are shortly to stand before him;" Ser. 15, "The Great Assize," I.3 (*WJW* 1:356). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
80. *The Doctrine of Original Sin* II.I.18.(2.) (*WW* 9:258-259). In context Wesley is responding to the idea that death is a beneficence or "'original benefit'" of God designed to emphasize "the vanity of all earthly things to abate their force to delude." Rather, Wesley observed that covetousness was "the peculiar vice of old age" which was a time when "men have more and more regard for the things of a transitory world." [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
81. "To John Smith," Jun. 25, 1746; 2 (*WJW* 25:197). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
82. *Jrn.*, Jan. 18, 1736 (*WJW* 18:141). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
83. "Minutes of Some Late Conversations, II" Aug. 1-2, 1745; que. 16 (*WW* 8:284). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
84. "Minutes of Some Late Conversations, V," Jun. 16, 1747; que. 16 (*WW* 8:297). [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
85. *Jrn.*, Feb. 9, 1736 (*JJW* 1:152). [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
86. "To Miss March," Jul. 5, 178 (*LJW* 5:96). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
87. "To Christopher Hopper," Mar. 16, 1777 (*LJW* 6:259). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
88. Ser. 105, "On Mourning for the Dead," 19 (*WJW* 4:243). The entire sermon is quite instructive and worth reading with respect to the present endeavor. Its occasion has been misidentified since its printing in *AM* in 1797. The real subject was probably his young friend from Oxford, Robin Griffiths, who Tyerman (1:48-49) identifies as Wesley's "first convert." See Outler's introduction (*WJW* 4:236). [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
89. *Jrn.*, Sep. 14, 1746 (*JJW* 3:263). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
90. Ser. 42, "Satan's Devices," I.11 (*WJW* 2:146). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
91. *NNT*, John 19:37 (cf. Rev. 1:7); 1 Cor. 1:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
92. *NNT*, Titus 1:3; cf. Ser. "Preface," 5 (*WJW* 1:104-105); *Jrn.*, Jan. 18, 1736 (*WJW* 18:141). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
93. J. Cyril Downes, "Eschatological Doctrines in the Writings of John and Charles Wesley" (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1960), 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
94. *Jrn*, Oct. 25, 1741 (*WJW* 19:235). This is Wesley's self-description of "the words God enabled me to speak." [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
95. See for instance the comments on the "Great Assize:" "It was next to impossible for any auditor not to forget himself and his surroundings, while Wesley preached, and he was made to feel he was actually before the Supreme Judge of the universe" (George Croft Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1935], 58). Even the not always complementary Sugden calls this "One of Wesley's finest and most impassioned preorations##" (Edward H. Sugden, ed. *Wesley's Standard Sermons: Consisting of Forty-Four Discourses, Published in Four Volumes; in 1746, 1748, 1750, and 1760 (Fourth Edition, 1787); To Which Are Added Nine Additional Sermons, Published in Vols. 1 and IV of Wesleys Collected Works, 1771*, 2 vols. [London: Epworth Press, 1921]. 2:418.

    Nor may one overlook the power of his voice: *Jrn*, May. 27, 1753 (*WJW* 20:459). [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
96. Marjorie Bowen, *Wrestling Jacob* (London: The Religious Book Club, 1938), viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
97. Bowen, *Wrestling Jacob*, 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
98. Downes also takes exception to her but in a more limited fashion ("Eschatological Doctrines," 180-181). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
99. Bowen, *Wrestling with Jacob*, 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
100. Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 196. He makes reference to the 1746 Minutes discussed above. On this see also: Curnock (*JJW*, 1:139, n.), Outler (*WJW* 2:151, n.) where he refers to the Second Annual Conference, Aug. 2, 1745 and the Third Annual Conference, May 13, 1746. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
101. See for instance the summary of data in Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast, John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 437-449. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
102. Tyerman, *Life and Times*, 1:468. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
103. "To John Smith," Jul. 10, 1747 (*WJW* 22:244-245). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
104. Downes, "Eschatological Doctrines," 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
105. Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography*, 3 vol., Trans. Norman Goldhawk (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1:217. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
106. Outler (*WJW*, 2:500). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
107. J. A. Knight, "Aspects of Wesley's Theology after 1770." *Methodist History*, 6 (April 1968): 33-42, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
108. Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform, American Protestantism of the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
109. *NNT*, Matt. 25:3-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)