

HOLY MISSION: THE “ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION” OF THE TRIUNE GOD’S CREATION

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Introduction

How a Church conceives of the future (i.e., their eschatology) usually correlates with how they understand their mission. We say “usually” because it is clear that the Church of the Nazarene has often carried out missional activities in ways that have implied a commitment to a larger eschatological vision than is codified in Articles 15 and 16 and/or articulated in the unofficial eschatological speculations that are held by many in the church. The proposal we intend to make here is that the Church of the Nazarene ought to conceive of the future in terms of the Triune God “entirely sanctifying” the created order and that the way we conceive and carry out our mission should reflect this eschatological conviction.

What many Nazarenes in North America believe with regard to eschatological matters is only tenuously connected to Articles 15 and 16. Many North American Nazarenes tend to affirm that the Christian faith is primarily about “going to heaven when you die” or about being whisked away to heaven in a “secret rapture.”¹ However, our assigned articles affirm neither of these things² (nor do we), but rather focus on Christ’s coming, a future resurrection, and a judgment with an everlasting impact for every *individual*. Arguably, this eschatological vision, particularly as expressed in Article 16, is under girded by an atomistic view of persons as individuals rather than by a more holistic understanding of persons as “broken,” embedded within social systems and a created order that are “broken” as well. Such a view ignores the corporate nature of Original Sin. This type of eschatological vision has shaped how we have often *articulated* our mission, i.e., as directed largely to saving souls from being eternally punished for their individual sinful acts.

While we would indeed continue to affirm a final judgment that impacts every individual,³ in light of the theme of the conference, “Holy God, Holy People,” we want to enlarge this eschatological vision by stressing: (1) the corporate nature of humanity’s plight and the corresponding corporate nature of our future in God’s coming kingdom/reign and (2) the redemption/renewal of God’s created order as a corollary of that coming kingdom/reign. To encapsulate this in a phrase, we understand *the ultimate future as the “entire*

¹The notion of a “secret rapture” is a particular feature of Premillennial Dispensationalism, a comprehensive interpretive framework forced onto the Bible that results in a theological stance that is at best un-Wesleyan and at worst heretical.

²At most, the articles *allow* Nazarenes to hold such views. For example, one might take the words “to meet the Lord in the air” in Article 15 as a reference to a “secret rapture.” However, the language of 1 Thess 4:13-17 in its historical/political context more likely depicts those who meet the Lord in the air escorting him back to [a renewed/redeemed] earth. In Article 16 the phrase, “and united with their spirits,” could be taken to imply that one’s “spirit” has been “in heaven” since death. However, while there is biblical warrant for affirming that death cannot separate us from God’s love/Christ’s presence (Rom 8:38-39; 2 Cor 5:6-10; Phil 1:21-24), the *detailed speculation* that often accompanies such an affirmation has little biblical warrant. In addition, in the view of some Nazarenes, such speculation often assumes a questionable anthropology that is biblically *underdetermined* at best. (It is certainly interesting that neither the Thirty-Nine Articles of Anglicanism nor John Wesley’s Twenty-Five Articles contain such language whereas the Westminster Confession clearly does [Chapter 33, II and III]!) In any case, given the overwhelming prevalence of speculation about its character in our church, the lack of *explicit* affirmation of a *conscious* intermediate state by our Articles of Faith is striking.

³Roberto Hodgson underscores the importance of this conceptuality in his response to this paper, available on-line at Nazarene Theological Seminary <http://www.nts.edu/>.

sanctification” of the Triune God’s creation. To warrant this eschatological vision the bulk of this paper will highlight: (1) a trajectory of biblical texts that moves in this general theological direction;⁴ (2) the resonance of this with John Wesley’s more mature understanding of the Kingdom of God and New Creation. We will conclude by suggesting how such an understanding of the future might shape the way we conceive of and carry out our “Holy Mission.”

A Theological Trajectory of Biblical Texts

A dominant image of Jesus proffered by the (synoptic) gospels is that of one in whom the power of the Spirit is embodied to enable him to be the vehicle through whom God sets out to reclaim the entire creation from the powers of chaos/sickness/death, i.e., “whatever is destructive of persons, or society, or the good earth.”⁵ In short, he is portrayed as one who announces and embodies/executes the coming Kingdom of God. At his death and resurrection, Matthew, Luke and John all portray both continuity and discontinuity between the crucified and risen Jesus.⁶ Their portrayals of the empty tomb clearly imply that the very body that was buried was raised, and yet it was just as clearly transformed. Their depictions of the risen Lord move beyond any ready made categories of first century or contemporary audiences attempting to articulate something new and totally unexpected. That is, the Jesus who had announced and embodied the coming Kingdom of God had already experienced one of its constitutive events (resurrection from the dead) before its final arrival. Hence, the Kingdom of God which Jesus, through the Spirit, initiated prior to his death was not snuffed out on the cross. Rather God decisively confirmed and continued it by completely reclaiming and redeeming for God’s lordship one specific part of the old order of death and decay, i.e., the body of the crucified Messiah. Such an act therefore confirms God’s own lordship/reign and provides a glimpse⁷ of God’s ultimate future when God’s reign comes in its fullness (i.e., when God manifests lordship publicly and completely).

Such reflections overlap with Paul’s argument for the future resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15.⁸ Using agricultural imagery (first fruits, seeds) he attempts to persuade his

⁴In what follows, we are under no illusions that the biblical texts can be read *only* in this fashion. We recognize the dialectical relationship that exists between a Christian reading of scripture and theological claims made by a Christian community. As will become evident from our reading of Revelation 21-22, this process not only includes warranting particular theological claims on the basis of justifiable readings of specific biblical texts, but also warranting specific readings of biblical texts (at least partly) on the basis of particular theological claims.

⁵This last phrase is from Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 227.

⁶For more sustained argument for the basic direction of this paragraph focusing on Luke’s portrayal, see Andy Johnson, “Our God Reigns: The Body of the Risen Lord in Luke 24,” *Word & World*, 22 (2002), 133-43 and Idem, “Ripples of the Resurrection in the Triune Life of God: Reading Luke 24 with Eschatological and Trinitarian Eyes,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 24 (2002), 87-110.

⁷The word “glimpse” attempts to convey our acknowledgment that the nature of eschatological language is too complex to be understood in a strictly literal way. On the other hand it will not do to take such imagery as a kind of veiled reference to the present having nothing to do with the future and refuse to speak about the future altogether. We understand eschatological imagery to be divinely inspired attempts to imagine and articulate the future by drawing on available language in ways that break its bounds by imaginatively refusing to be constrained by the limits of present conditions. While it does *not* provide us with a *photograph* of the future, it does provide an *orientation and direction* for imagining that future and compels any Christian rendering of it to include at least some version of certain elements (e.g., parousia, resurrection, judgment, the full and complete Reign of God). See the nuanced discussion in Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 72-108.

⁸For the exegetical details of this paragraph, see the series of articles on 1 Corinthians 15: Andy Johnson, “Firstfruits and Death’s Defeat: Metaphor in Paul’s Rhetorical Strategy in 1 Corinthians 15:20-

Corinthian audience to imagine that Christ's story is analogous to their own (i.e., a story including death, burial, and resurrection). In 15:20-28, it is only after all enemies, including Death, are defeated that the Son will "hand over the reign/kingdom to the Father and God "will be all in all" (15:28), i.e., that the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. In Paul's telling, Death is defeated *by means of the future resurrection concurrent with Christ's coming* (15:23). Hence, believers experience their final redemption *corporately* when they are raised with "spiritual bodies," "glorious" bodies no longer subject to "decay" (15:42-49; cf. Phil 3:20-21). His description does not mean that believers are raised with bodies *composed of spirit* but rather that they are raised with bodies totally permeated by the "making-alive" Spirit and as such, fit for the New Creation. Such bodies are therefore, bodies "entirely sanctified" by the Holy Spirit, reclaimed for the universal Reign of God, embodied displays of God being "all in all," bodies analogous to the body of the risen *Lord*.⁹ Indeed, in Pauline terms, this is the final result of God's intent to conform us to the image of his Son (e.g., Rom 8:29; Phil 3:21; 2 Cor 4:4), himself the "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15). Hence the complete restoration of the *imago Dei* (image of God) in humanity happens corporately at the future resurrection of the dead and is a key part of the New Creation that God has initiated and will complete in the future.

If in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul has argued that Christ's story is our story, in Romans 8 he ties our story inseparably to the whole creation's story. There he argues that the whole creation awaits its deliverance from the "bondage of corruption" until "the revealing of the children of God" (8:19), a deliverance that will be analogous to the "glory" of the children of God (8:21). Here Paul underscores what Genesis 2:7 had unambiguously affirmed, namely, that we are in solidarity with the rest of the created order. Hence, the redemption of our bodies from their own "bondage to decay" (i.e., the "sowing" of our bodies in *phthora*/decay in 1 Cor 15:42) is inseparable from the redemption of all the created order from its "bondage to decay (*phthora*/decay, Rom. 8:21)." Indeed, the same life-giving Spirit will be at work in all of creation in order to reclaim it for God's lordship by redeeming it from sin, death and decay. In that action, the Spirit will "entirely sanctify" God's created order and God will indeed be "all in all." Therefore, when read together, the eschatological point towards which the resurrection narratives of the gospels, 1 Corinthians 15, and Romans 8 all move can be summed up in the statement: What God has done for the body of Jesus in microcosm, God will do for the cosmos in macrocosm.¹⁰

28," *Word and World*, 16 (1996), 456-64; Idem, "Turning the World Upside Down in 1 Corinthians 15: Apocalyptic Epistemology, the Resurrected Body, and the New Creation," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 75 (2003), 291-309; Idem, "On Removing a Trump Card: Flesh and Blood and the Reign of God," *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 13 (2003), 175-92.

⁹With this use of language, we are not denying the doctrine of entire sanctification articulated in Article 10, but rather reappropriating and extending the meaning of a biblical phrase (1 Thess 5:23). Within Wesleyan theology, what we are describing here has been more commonly referred to as "final salvation" as opposed to "full salvation."

¹⁰Although Rom 1:4 comes very close, nowhere does Paul *explicitly* say the Spirit is the agent of Jesus' resurrection. Even so, given the analogy Paul is consistently making in 1 Corinthians 15, it would be appropriate to argue that for him, Christ also had been raised with a "spiritual body," i.e., a body that was acted upon, transformed, and totally permeated by the life-giving Spirit making it appropriate for the New Creation. Through this Spirit the risen Christ exercises his life-giving power and lordship in his Corinthian audience and will continue to do so at the consummation of the New Creation when he grants them resurrection life in a "spiritual body." It is, then, in the realm/body of the crucified and risen Christ, that "all will be made alive" (*zōopoiēthēsontai*, 15:22) because *the* life-giving Spirit is at work there so much so that Paul can identify the risen Christ himself as a "making-alive spirit" (*pneuma zōopoion*, 15:45). One might even go further to argue that if Rom 1:4 represents a widespread *pre-Pauline* tradition as many think, it would be plausible that late first century Christian audiences would have heard the gospel resurrection narratives in terms of the Spirit raising Jesus from the dead (cf. 1 Peter 3:18; 1 Tim 3:16).

From a canonical standpoint, it is appropriate to use this theological summary statement as a “clarifying” lens through which to interpret the imagery of Revelation 21-22.¹¹ Doing so inclines us to view John’s rhetoric as implying a *transformation* of the current cosmos into a new one rather than its replacement with another *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).¹² In Revelation 21-22 John portrays God’s reign coming in its fullness¹³ with the image of a renewed creation and the descent of the New Jerusalem. The image is that of a Holy God “pitching a tent” among God’s people(s) and with that divine presence healing and transforming both God’s people as well as God’s created order (i.e., “making all things new” 21:5).¹⁴ Like the interior of the inner sanctuary of the most holy place in the first temple (1 Kgs 6:19-20), John portrays the New Jerusalem as a perfect cube (21:16). The implication is that the New Creation/New Jerusalem is depicted as being permeated with the immediate presence of the Holy God. Hence, unlike Ezekiel’s restored Jerusalem dominated by a restored temple, there is no need for a temple in this New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22-23), no need to mark off “sacred” from “profane” space because the city/people as a whole is/are permeated by the presence of God and the Lamb and reflect that glory back to them as well as reflecting it to each other.¹⁵ It is only then that the entire created order reaches its goal,¹⁶ when it is perfected by reflecting the glory/image of the Triune God.¹⁷ It is then, when redeemed humanity is restored into the image of God reflecting in all relationships the holy love that

¹¹As we said in note 3 above, we are aware that this amounts to warranting a specific reading of a biblical text (at least partly) on the basis of a particular theological claim derived from other texts. The argument could be made, however, that 2 Peter 3:1-13 calls this particular theological claim into question. Exegetically, 2 Peter 3:1-13 is too complex to discuss here in detail, but we do admit that the imagery there may be in some tension with what we are suggesting. However, in our view, on analogy with the Genesis flood story which it explicitly invokes (3:5-7), even this passage is best read as depicting God bringing a New Creation out of the ruins of the current one, not as New Creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).

¹²There remains legitimate exegetical ambiguity as to whether Rev 21:1f implies transformation or replacement of the cosmos. For a convenient summary of the debate from one who argues, rightly in our view, that the exegetical arguments favor understanding the passage in renewal terms, see Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21-22 in the Light of its Background in Jewish Tradition*, WUNT 129 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 267-69.

¹³At various points in Revelation’s non-linear unfolding, John proclaims that the Kingdom of God has come in fullness (11:15, 19:6). In 22:1-5 he recapitulates that claim by using the imagery of the “throne of God and of the Lamb” and that of his servants properly worshipping and “reigning” with God.

¹⁴Hence, we take the imaginative language of “New Jerusalem” as referring both to people and place (see Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* [Cambridge: University Press, 1993], 132-40).

¹⁵The imagery of 22:3b-5 is that of a people who both reign and perform priestly service, images that have described a redeemed people throughout Revelation (1:6; 3:21; 5:10; 7:15, compare Isa 61:6 from which John draws). With no non-priests on behalf of whom “priestly” service might be conducted in worship of God, such “priests” might be conceived as reflecting the glory/image of the Triune God to each other.

¹⁶Hence, this is *not* a restoration of the original creation to its original state but “the unrealized promise of the first creation finally achieved” (Bauckham and Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, 149).

¹⁷While there is no reference to the Spirit in this context, the rhetorical patterns in Revelation suggest that when the Risen Christ/Lamb is referred to, the Spirit is also present. For example, what the risen Christ says to the seven churches is what the Spirit is saying (2:7, 11, 17, etc.). In addition, in his first appearance, the Lamb is described as having seven horns and eyes that “are the seven spirits of God” (5:6). Given the symbolic function of the number seven in Revelation (i.e., denoting perfection/wholeness), one could argue that this imagery has the rhetorical function of sewing together the identities of the Son and the Holy Spirit without ultimately confusing them. Hence, *from a Christian perspective*, one can argue that John’s reference to God and the Lamb here also implies a reference to the Spirit, and hence, a reference to the Triune God.

characterizes the nature of the Triune God, that the whole created order becomes “entirely sanctified.” At that time, the song of heaven becomes the song of the whole creation, i.e., “Our God reigns.” God, then, will have done for the cosmos in macrocosm what God did for the body of Jesus in microcosm, i.e., demonstrated love/faithfulness toward the created order by redeeming and filling it with the life-giving Spirit, the energy of holy love.

John Wesley: The Kingdom of God and the New Creation

The Wesleyan genius is in the continuity which John Wesley established between personal salvation and social transformation. The Kingdom of God appears in Wesley as a way of balancing both inward and outward responses to the grace of God. It is “heaven already opened in the soul, the first springing up of those rivers of pleasure which flow at God’s right hand forevermore.”¹⁸

In other words the Kingdom of God “is an invisible corporate reality, not bound by space and time, which we experience now in anticipation of a fuller reality to come.”¹⁹ This is indeed the way in which Wesley interprets the Sermon on the Mount. The teachings of the Christ become the concrete expressions of the way into this corporate reality. These teachings serve as a representation of the actual transformation of human existence according to the peace of God, a peace which Wesley affirms will finally encompass all of God’s creation.

Increasingly, John Wesley’s eschatological vision moved in a similar direction as that of the trajectory of biblical texts mentioned earlier in this paper. In his later years, Wesley began to be strongly drawn toward the language of the New Creation and away from the focus on a transcendent Heaven.²⁰ For him, all that God has made will find a new and perfected state in the New Creation. This New Creation will affect the air, water, and earth. God will bring peace to the inanimate and animate alike. Just as the prophet predicted, Wesley argued, nothing will be left out of the coming kingdom.²¹

This growing emphasis on the New Creation also demonstrated Wesley’s commitment (one which he held throughout much of his ministry life) that salvation and its benefits were progressive in nature and kind. That is, God was actually working toward something in human history, namely, the eschatological fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. This coming future could be glimpsed in what Wesley termed “providential increases” in the present Reign of God.²² As the primary agent of transformation, the Spirit works on the hearts and minds of the citizens of a new society (i.e., the church) enabling them to embody the Sermon on the Mount and participate in the providential increases of the kingdom God is bringing about. With its stress on the inward and outward qualities of life in the kingdom, the Sermon reminds

¹⁸John Wesley, “The Sermon on the Mount, I,” *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, (34 vols., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984) 1:481.

¹⁹Howard Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom: Gospel, Culture and Mission in Biblical and Historical Perspective* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 56.

²⁰Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 253.

²¹“The horrid state of things which at present obtains will soon be at an end. On the new earth no creature will kill or hurt or give pain to any other. The scorpion will have no poisonous sting, the adder no venomous teeth. The lion will have no claws to tear the lamb; no teeth to grind his flesh and bones. Nay, no creature, no beast, bird, or fish, will have any inclination to hurt any other. For cruelty will be far away, and savageness and fierceness be forgotten. So that violence shall be heard no more, neither wasting or destruction seen on the face of the earth. ‘The wolf shall dwell with the lamb’ (the words may be literally as well as figuratively understood) and the leopard shall lie down with the kid.’ ‘They shall not hurt or destroy,’ from the rising up of the sun to the going down of the same” (John Wesley, “The New Creation,” *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, [34 vols., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985] 2:509).

²²Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom*, 240. Examples of such “providential increases” included the movement to end slavery as well as political movements which aided in the restoration of human dignity (affirmed by Wesley even if the methods of achieving such restoration were less than ideal).

the people of God that they are co-laborers with the one who both proclaimed and embodied the Kingdom of God.

In this eschatological expression of the Kingdom of God, John Wesley demonstrated his characteristic optimism of grace. At times, he was quite hopeful about the providential, grace-empowered spread of the kingdom even being willing to speculate on the way in which it would occur.²³ After two world wars, Hiroshima, Auschwitz, Cambodia's killing fields, and Rwanda, we might be justifiably hesitant to imagine a kind of slow spread of the kingdom, much less willing to speculate on the way in which it will occur.²⁴ However, as Wesley's theological heirs, we continue to affirm the faithfulness of the Triune God to move creation toward its intended purpose even when circumstances might appear to indicate otherwise. That is to say, we continue to confirm that God's prevenient grace is at work throughout the entire created order. And, like Wesley, we affirm that our mission ought to be shaped by this eschatological vision.

Holy Mission in Light of Creation's "Entire Sanctification"

In this final section, we turn to suggest how this eschatological vision might shape the way we conceive of and carry out our "Holy Mission." Especially in its urban centers, North America seems to be moving into a "Post-Christian" era. In such a context, the concepts of individual sin and guilt may not be immediately understood. However, embodied incarnations of chaotic forces threatening to plunge God's cosmos into disorder and death, what Paul calls "principalities and powers," are all too familiar (e.g., violence, poverty, racism, family breakdown, sexual irresponsibility, widespread disease and lack of adequate health care, various forms of addictions, materialistic consumerism). In such a context, an atomistic view of persons as individuals whose sinful acts are the sole, or even primary, cause for their predicament/bondage is simply not adequate.

Certainly, an individual's sinful acts do contribute to their bondage and they do have to be addressed. However, it is often difficult to say whether their bondage is the direct result of their own sins, the effect of the sins of their parents (e.g., an abusive childhood), the product of unjust social structures and economic forces (e.g., the racism, poverty and injustice in our cities), or even the overall brokenness of creation with its adverse effect on persons (e.g., Borderline Personality Disorder). In fact, many times, enslavement to such death-dealing forces results from a complex interaction of some or all of these. Hence, given the complexity of our context, our mission strategies ought to do more than focus on conceptions of individual sin and guilt as though "holy mission" could be conceived primarily as that of saving souls from being eternally punished for their individual sinful acts. How, then, does the eschatological vision of the "entire sanctification" of the created order contribute to the task of clarifying what it might mean to engage in a mission that is indeed holy?

In Theodore Runyon's words, "The renewal of the creation and the creatures through the renewal in humanity of the *image of God* is what Wesley identifies as the very heart of Christianity."²⁵ This resonates with what we have seen in the trajectory of biblical texts above where a restoration of the *imago Dei* is a key part of the New Creation that God has initiated and will complete in the future. The good news is that in the life, death, and resurrection of the Son, the Triune God has begun that restoration by providing freedom from bondage and a remedy for the death-dealing chaotic forces amassed against God's ultimate purposes for the created order. To engage in "holy mission," would therefore entail crafting mission strategies

²³Wesley saw the opportunity for the spread of the Gospel in the new areas of North America. He also speculated on the spread through Europe by way of England to Holland, then to all the Protestants in France, Germany, and Sweden. Finally this ever growing kingdom would encapsulate Sweden, Denmark, and Russia, among others (see "The General Spread of the Gospel," 493-4).

²⁴Wesley himself was more balanced here than some who were later called "postmillennialists." As late as 1783, the same date as the sermon cited above, Wesley could explicitly recognize both signs of God's in-breaking Kingdom as well as the deplorable wickedness of iniquity throughout the whole creation (see, for example, the excerpt quoted at the end of this paper from his sermon, "The Mystery of Iniquity").

²⁵*The New Creation*, 8.

that facilitate our cooperating with God's redeeming and re-creating activities, strategies that proclaim and embody our conviction that the healing of creation has begun in the very face of the forces of chaos and death.

What concrete form this might take would depend on the nature of the chaotic forces at work in the local setting. At times, we have done well in discerning the nature of such forces and in crafting and carrying out mission strategies that have far exceeded the implied commitments of our stated doctrinal positions. For example, even though it is outside North America, one might mention the movement within the Ukraine to develop drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers. There the church has provided the means for addicts who have been freed from the chaos and bondage of their addictions to plant new rehab centers in their home villages. The impact of this emphasis has been to reclaim whole families for the lordship of God. In addition, these redeemed persons have begun the process of transforming the very social and economic structures that leave far too many people under the weight of their addictions.²⁶ What God is doing in and through the Church of the Nazarene in the Ukraine provides a glimpse/anticipation of God's universal reign for those with eyes to see.

If our mission in North America is to be the "holy mission" of the Triune God, we would do well to move in similar directions. Our major urban centers should not be caricatured as being dangerous places of unrelieved darkness and evil (as is often done implicitly by the media). But clearly the chaotic forces of violence, economic injustice, racism, and drug/alcohol addiction weave a complex web that traps many in a spiraling cycle that perpetuates itself generation after generation wreaking havoc with the lives of the urban poor.²⁷ It is a web of death and disorder that both engenders, and depends on, the sinful acts of individuals.

It will not do, however, to imagine that suburban and rural areas don't have their own version of such chaotic forces. While the violence may not be as publicly observable, the cycle of domestic violence continues to bring pain and suffering to many women and children in these areas. Addictions to drugs, alcohol, and pornography continue to destroy whole families. And materialistic consumerism is perhaps the most prevalent and insidious chaotic force (a force we often deny has any "real" hold on us) that destroys our lives in subtle and not so subtle ways. While this web may look a bit different, it is still a web of death and disorder that both engenders, and depends on, the sinful acts of individuals. If our mission is to be a holy one, we must not ignore either such sinful acts and their resulting guilt or the webs of death and disorder on which these sinful acts depend. That is to say, our mission strategies cannot ignore either the brokenness of individual persons or the brokenness of the social systems in which they are embedded.

One cannot address the brokenness of such social systems without speaking prophetically to the political structures of our current day.²⁸ As citizens of God's kingdom, our highest priority must not be to politicians or their agendas no matter how promising they might seem to be. When the church gives itself over to such structures it is failing to capture the fullest vision of God making all things new. Instead, it must itself become a visible social

²⁶In a recent trip to the Ukraine, Phil Hamner observed several recovering addicts in their home villages. These believers were busy with the work of setting up rehab centers, assisting village leadership to understand the cycle of addiction in the village, and providing tangible means for formerly addicted people to make a meaningful living. Most of these means involved careful stewardship of the land through proper agriculture, improved healthcare and enhanced sanitation.

²⁷One can point to many urban projects in the Church of the Nazarene that bring light to the urban poor through ministries which bear witness to the New Creation. As only one example, one might mention the KC Urban Youth Center which has recently been launched in the Kansas City area as a response to the destructive forces of sin. Such projects give further evidence that our mission strategies have often gone beyond the implied commitments of our stated doctrinal positions.

²⁸By the end of his life Wesley was even capable of critiquing the monarchy in how it supported or denied the basic human rights that flow from humanity's creation in the image of God (Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom*, 240).

body that offers an alternative to the politics of violence that often under girds cherished positions of both the left and the right. To be completely aligned with political parties or with inherently secular structures will only lead us to betray the truest calling of the New Creation: All created order, including those who govern Canada and the US, must bow to the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ.

Finally, our mission strategies can no longer ignore the brokenness of the created order. Given Paul's contention in Romans 8 that we are in solidarity with the created order, it is no longer possible to see matters of ecology and conservation as devoid of any spiritual meaning. The restoration of the *imago Dei* implies a restoration of humanity's careful stewardship of God's creation. As God ushers in the New Creation, the body of Christ will undoubtedly be active in the work of healing God's creation. The cosmos is not ours to exploit. In the coming Kingdom the cosmos is ours to steward with the very wisdom and power of God's Spirit.

As Wesley argued, the processive nature of transformation will leave us with the impression at times that God is doing nothing either with us or with the rest of the created order. We will be tempted to become cynical, to despair in the midst of suffering, and to trust the voices that declare all hope is lost. But this is nothing new and Wesley's counsel along these lines is worth our hearing:

Let us praise him that he hath given us to see the deplorable state of all that are round about us; to see the wickedness which overflows the earth, and yet not be borne away by the torrent! We see the general, the almost universal contagion; and yet it cannot approach to hurt us! . . . God will arise and maintain his own cause. And the whole creation shall then be delivered both from moral and natural corruption. Sin, and its consequence, pain, shall be no more; holiness and happiness will cover the earth. Then shall all the ends of the world see the salvation of our God. And the whole race of mankind shall know and love and serve God, and reign with him for ever and ever!²⁹

We conclude then with the affirmation that, for those with eyes to see, there are glimpses/anticipations of God's universal reign calling the Church forth to participate in them by engaging in the "Holy Mission" of the Triune God, i.e., the "entire sanctification" of the whole creation.

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²⁹“The Mystery of Iniquity,” *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, (34 vols., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 2:469-70.