

RESPONSE TO DR SCOTT DANIELS AND DR IVELISSE VALENTIN-VERA
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Introduction

Dr Daniel starts from a narrative approach, considering both the development of the creation and the story of God himself.¹ Hence the eschaton becomes the end of this story, as much in pessimistic as in optimistic versions. Then he proposes to overcome those antithetical positions by employing the category of hope, moving towards an eschatology of the new creation: However, in connection with the optimism of grace in the Wesleyan tradition, he emphasises the participation of humankind in God's redemptive plan for all creation.

Dr Valentin-Vera points out that the discussion needs to consider the broken nature of creation.² Far from a defeatist view, she also emphasises the theme of eschatological hope, with a view to the restoration of the relationship and harmony with the Creator at the return of Christ. This fullness is anticipated in the experience of the Risen One and tends towards it. Humankind also perceives the signs of the Kingdom's radical inclusiveness, since Pentecost, whereby the new creation will mark a collective and plenary redemption. In that sense, the activity of the Spirit is a pledge of the Kingdom, working in and through the “Mystical Body of Christ” on Earth.

Building on the insights of the two papers summarised above, this response article aims to deepen the three fundamental concepts of the session: the work of the Spirit, the hope, and the new creation. From the broad field of pneumatology and eschatology, an attempt will be made to recapitulate those elements in which (new) creation is the focus.

The work of the Spirit

From the beginning of time, the Spirit is closely linked to creation: In Genesis, it is quivering over the still formless mass of the first substance, giving meaning and order to the life that was about to blossom in the cosmos. Wesley refers to this intervention of the Spirit in creation as the “*prime Mover*”, acting like a hen that “*gathereth her chicken under her wings, and hovers over them, to warm and cherish them*”³. It is no coincidence that the Psalmist celebrates God's presence in his creation and invokes the Spirit to renew it (Psa. 104:30). So, if the Father still works (John 5:17), it can be deduced that so does the Spirit in his work of bringing order, harmony, and beauty.

For Basil⁴, the Holy Spirit is the perfecting cause in the Trinitarian act of creation; he emphasises the will of the Father, enacted through the Son and perfected through the Spirit. To that, Ambrose⁵ adds that the Spirit is the cause of the beauty that was missing before he hovered over the cosmos. With inspiration, the Fathers in Constantinople added the life-giving aspect of

¹ Daniel, T. Scott. “Finish then thy new Creation”. *Didache: Faithful Teaching*, 22:1 (Spring 2022), <<http://didache.nazarene.org>>, (Oct. 27, 2022).

² Valentin-Vera, Ivelisse. “Hope of a new Creation”. *Didache: Faithful Teaching*, 22:1 (Spring 2022), <<http://didache.nazarene.org>>, (Oct. 27, 2022).

³ Wesley, John. *Wesley Center Online. John Wesley's Notes on the Bible*. <<http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/>>, (Oct. 27, 2022). Gen. 1:3-5

⁴ Basilio. *Lo Spirito Santo*. Roma: Città Nuova, 1993. XVI, 38.

⁵ Ambrogio. *Lo Spirito Santo; Il mistero dell'incarnazione del Signore*. Roma: Città Nuova, 1979. II, 32.

the Spirit, "who is Lord and gives life ..." to the creed. In the same vein, Wesley's commentary on the assertion in Psalm 104:30 refers to the "*quickenning power of God, by which he produces life in the creatures from time to time. For he speaks not here of the first creation, but of the continued production of living creatures.*"⁶

It is, therefore, a matter of considering the pervasive and ongoing activity of the Spirit in creation. In addition to its fundamental role in the act of creation, it is necessary to emphasise that the Spirit's presence gives stability, life, and dynamism to the whole cosmos, guaranteeing its existence. In this way, the divine immanence is re-evaluated, without confusing the Creator with the creature, inducing humanity to assume the responsibility to collaborate in God's work for the good of other co-creatures.

Hope as a source for praxis

In the Old Testament, hope finds its foundation in God's revelation to humanity, and the trust placed by it: It is situated between the promise and the fulfilment, because God proves himself faithful. In the New Testament, hope rests on God's merciful action on behalf of humanity, concentrating on Christ: on all his work, life, death, and resurrection, for the redemption of the whole of creation. Moreover, the eschatological expectation widens its gaze to the entire cosmos that "groans and is in travail" (Rom. 8:22). Indeed, in the apocalyptic revelation we discover that "who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new'" (Rev. 21: 5).

In the reflection of the Church Fathers, hope is profoundly linked to Christ and his work: His resurrection is the premise of what is expected for all humanity, and it is projected into the future.⁷ However, a tension emerges in contemporary human existence, between "the already and the not yet", in which hope becomes the germinal force. Any concept of hope that combines revelation and divine promises stands on a solid biblical background. In particular, we can evince the Pauline lesson that binds perseverance, patience, and endurance to hope, constituting ethic in an eschatological perspective.

Wesley expresses the same sentiment when he stated:

*"He is already renewing the face of the earth: And we have strong reason to hope that the work he hath begun, he will carry on unto the day of the Lord Jesus; that he will never intermit this blessed work of his Spirit, until he has fulfilled all his promises, until he hath put a period to sin, and misery, and infirmity, and death; and re-established universal holiness and happiness..."*⁸

Christian hope, then, is not constituted as a utopia that tears us away from history and ideally projects us into an unknown future. Rather, it is the virtue that enables us to face the present with firm expectation of the coming of the Kingdom. Again, the call to be God's co-

⁶ Wesley, John. *Wesley Center Online. John Wesley's Notes on the Bible*. <<http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/>>, (Oct. 27, 2022). Psa. 104:30.

⁷ Panimolle, Salvatore; Zincone, Sergio. *La Speranza nei Padri della Chiesa*. Roma: Borla, 2014.

⁸ Wesley, John. Sermon 63 "The General Spread of the Gospel". *Wesley Center Online. The Sermons of John Wesley*. <<http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-63-the-general-spread-of-the-gospel/>>, (Oct. 27, 2022).

workers emphasises our responsibility⁹ to be his image here and now, and to make a commitment to care for the creation He is renewing.

New creation as cosmological redemption

Considering the eschatological novelty that will involve the whole of creation, it is worth highlighting at least three biblical passages: I Corinthians 15:28, Ephesians 1:10 and Revelation 21:1-4. In these passages, it is evident that the expectation of the biblical writers is for a qualitatively new condition of communion with the divine: not a return to the initial state in Eden, but a reality redeemed and glorified by the vital and eternal presence of God. Thus, not only various Old Testament prophecies refer to the renewal of the earth, but the very reality of Christ's resurrection is a premise for the work to which the whole of creation will be subjected.

Alongside the biblical reflection, we find Irenaeus' considerations, best known for his "Theory of recapitulation."¹⁰ He, in fact, argues the redemptive aspect of the incarnation of the Son, as a cosmic event, in fulfilment of the trajectory towards the divine (*theosis*): From the first to the new creation, the incarnate Christ subjects the entire creation to his lordship. Although the discussions of the Fathers concerned the progress of believers, it is reasonable to infer that the work attributed to the incarnate Son extends its benefits to the whole of creation. Therefore, far from a cyclical vision, the new creation bears a teleological orientation towards a condition of unexpected divine communion.¹¹

When Wesley reflects on the above biblical passages, he concludes with the absolute lordship of Christ over the entire created order, according to a new and eternal state of all things¹². Like the Church Fathers, Wesley focuses primarily on the renewal of the *imago dei* in humanity. Moreover, several scholars have pointed out how his reinterpretation of the concept of *theosis* flows into his doctrine of Christian perfection¹³. In the development of his eschatology¹⁴, however, the concept of renewal takes on a broader scope. Commenting on Romans 8:21 he states that "destruction is not deliverance: therefore whatsoever is destroyed, or ceases to be, is not delivered at all."¹⁵

Affirming God's constant and full presence in his creation is not the same as conforming their respective natures. Rather, it means recognising the initial intent of the Creator who, after

⁹ See also: Runyon, Theodore. "Environmental Stewardship". In: _____. *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998. p. 200-207.

¹⁰ Ireneo di Lione. *Contro le eresie e altri scritti*. Milano: Jaca Book, 1997. III/2.

¹¹ See also: Vail, Eric. M. "Making All Things New". In: _____. *Eschatology*. Kansas City: The Foundry Publishing, 2020. p. 55-78.

¹² Wesley, John. *Wesley Center Online. John Wesley's Notes on the Bible*. <<http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/>>, (Oct. 27, 2022). 1 Cor. 15:28, Eph. 1:10, Rev. 21:1-4.

¹³ Christensen, Michael J. "Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley's Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine". *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 31:2 (Fall 1996). Maddox, Randy L. "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences, and Differences". *Asbury Theological Journal*, 45:2 (1990). Runyon, Theodore. *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998. p. 80-81.

¹⁴ Pedlar, James E. "His Mercy is Over All His Works: John Wesley's Mature Vision of New Creation". *Canadian Theological Review*, 2:2 (2013).

¹⁵ Wesley, John. *Wesley Center Online. John Wesley's Notes on the Bible*. <<http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/>>, (Oct. 27, 2022). Rom. 8:21.

the creative effort, rests, contemplates and pervades his work. While it is not possible to define the quality of the “new” of the eschatological creation, we can affirm its redemptive character. Not a second *creatio ex-nihilo*, but a redeemed cosmos, renewed and fully inhabited by its creator; a cosmos that will enjoy divine eternity for a new and final communion.

Conclusion

The eschatological hope is the common element of the two main papers. From that stems humanity's responsibility to collaborate in God's redemptive plan for all creation. We can therefore recognise that understanding the work of the Spirit enables us to grasp its power, extension, and present actuation. In this way it is possible to ground hope in the light of the witness of the Risen One, who presents the "new" for all creation, and upon whom the entire redemptive process rests. By extending the implications of the believers' perfecting to the whole order of creation, we are placed back into a network of creatural relationships moving forward to the plenary communion of the eschaton in the new creation.