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A Single, Steady Aim
Images of Hope in Wesleyan Hymnody
Elaine A. Robinson

May 21, 1738, stands as a watershed event in the life of Charles Wesley: It is the day when he first experienced the assurance for which he longed, the day in which the "Spirit of God . . . chased away the darkness of [his] unbelief."\(^1\) Then, writes Wesley, "I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ."\(^2\) In this watershed event, Wesley names, specifically, the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love: He believed and rejoiced in the hope of loving Christ. Often we think of Wesley's hymns and sacred poems as particularly centered on faith and justification and on love and sanctification, but for Wesley hope was also a recurrent theme in his hymns and sacred poems and plays a key role in both justification by faith and being perfected in love. In this article, I intend to examine Charles Wesley as a purveyor of hope and to suggest the possibility of understanding him as an ecclesial theologian. I approach my analysis as a constructive theologian who seeks to draw upon and enhance the theological contributions of the Wesleys and thus illuminate how their theological contributions are particularly relevant to our contemporary era. Before exploring Wesley's hymnody, I begin by establishing a framework which defines the nature and task of an ecclesial theologian and indicates the integral function of hope in theology.

**Ecclesial Theology and Christian Hope**

In my doctoral dissertation I argued for a redefinition of academic theology in terms of "ecclesial" theology as distinguished from "secular" theology.\(^3\) While both are legitimate and necessary enterprises, an ecclesial theologian maintains a personal commitment to the life of faith and writes academic theology on behalf of the church. Ecclesial theology begins and ends in the worshiping community and should thus be understood as a practice of the community of faith. In no way do I intend to discredit the secular theologian who studies but does not practice the faith; rather, I suggest that an ecclesial theologian begins his or her work from within the church as a member of the body of Christ, as an active participant in the practices of the faith.

Modern theology has often operated on the assumption that credible theology requires a certain ability to stand apart from the community in order to judge the appropriateness and fittingness of the Christian witness, which subscribes to the

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\(^2\)Tyson, p. 99.

post-Enlightenment distinction between first-order and second-order discourse. The theological task is taken to be that of reflection on the primary discourse of the Christian community, rather like an anthropologist observing rites of passage in Papua New Guinea. This assumption suggests that to understand oneself as a full participant would bias one's objectivity and cloud one's judgment. This same dichotomy is at work in Teresa Berger's valuable study, *Theology in Hymns?*, in which she distinguishes theological language from doxology, as she asserts the reflective nature of theological language. Of course, neither John nor Charles Wesley was operating on this assumption of primary and secondary discourse; indeed, sermons were a chief source of doctrinal expression in the Anglican tradition. This distinction is a post-Enlightenment development which need not be so narrowly construed and rigidly ordered, if we understand theology as, fundamentally and legitimately, a practice of the Christian community. The first point, then, regarding ecclesial theology, is that, by nature and task, it consists of doing theology from within the church as a practice of the church on behalf of the church.

Ecclesial theology involves, secondly, what I refer to as “embodied experience.” If a theologian considers himself or herself an ecclesial theologian, then two dimensions of experience must be successfully negotiated: First, the experience of the structures of our lives or the situation and context in which we live. This is a common claim, for if theology is to be relevant, it must consider and account for the immediate context and situation. Yet, at the same time, the ecclesial theologian also negotiates the experience of God, and, for the Wesleys, the experience of God is a fundamental dimension of the authentic Christian life and was wholly lacking in their Church of England. The experience of God allows us or invites us to participate in and respond to the divine life in the world. The experience of God enables us to approach our lives through the eyes of faith, and such participation in the divine life is possible by means of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Hope has the particular quality or role of helping us navigate through the structures of existence as they are experienced at any given time and place, in any given cultural form, while participating in the divine life.

In John Wesley’s sermon, “The Marks of the New Birth” (1748), he suggests that being born of the Spirit is marked by the three scriptural qualities of faith, hope, and love. These are the three virtues which increasingly enable us to participate in God. Faith is “a disposition which God hath wrought in [our hearts]; ‘a sure trust and confidence in God that through the merits of Christ [our] sins are

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5“Culture” is best understood as an ordering principle; it reflects the forms and substances of our lives and projects the practices and values we prefer. One might say that any particular cultural expression instills or inculcates certain beliefs and practices in those who participate in and belong to it.
forgiven, and [we are] reconciled to the favour of God." Hope is the mark of the witness of the Spirit, as it implies “first, the testimony of our own spirit or conscience that we walk ‘in simplicity and godly sincerity’; but secondly and chiefly, the testimony of the Spirit of God, ‘bearing witness with’, or to, ‘our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; . . .’”7 Last but not least, Christian love is the mark of reconciliation to God, delight in God, and joy and peace. The fruit of this love of God is the love of neighbor and obedience to God. Thus, as a starting point, in Wesleyan theology the virtues of faith, hope, and love, which result from or grow out of the event of regeneration, are central to our participation in the divine life and our growth in holiness. In contrast to “The Marks of the New Birth” and John Wesley’s understanding of hope as the quality that bears witness to our relationship to God, in Charles Wesley’s hymns, hope will appear in a slightly different light. For Charles, legitimate or living hope can be seen to take shape in, perhaps, two different states or stages: one prior to justification and one prior to entire sanctification.

To speak of faith, hope, or love becomes a complex but essential task for the ecclesial theologian. How does one speak of and make meaningful that which is unseen? Expressing hope in the unseen requires concrete images or symbols which relate to and make sense within the context and structures of particular human experiences. The experience of God meets us in and through the structures of our experience, and if theology is to be meaningful, relevant, and coherent, it must reflect and give shape to our experience of the situation in which we live. At any given time, in any given place and culture, meaningful theology corresponds to the structures of our lives, yet remains uniquely directed by faith, hope, and love as the primary marks of the Christian culture. Our experience of God and our experience of the world in which we live are both embodied experiences, and for theology, the body of Christ performs a constitutive and regulative function. Embodied as a member of the body of Christ, the theologian provides an imaginative, structural bridge which can bring to light the manifestation of the human condition under the given factors of time, space, and culture; that is, within the actuality of our historical existence, but always from within the reality of participation in God. The community of faith, the body of Christ, serves as the basis for and corrective to individual experience. Theological proposals and beliefs are thus adjudicated within and through the practices of Christian life together. These notions of embodiment within the body of Christ and of embodied experience are certainly characteristic of Charles Wesley the hymn-writer,


preacher, and purveyor of hope. Thus, my second point regarding ecclesial theology is that it bridges the experience of God and the experience of existence and through the constitutive and regulative functions of the body of Christ, the church.

My third point about ecclesial theology relates specifically to the characteristic of Christian hope. To make real the encounter between the structures of existence and the reality of God, theology must cultivate genuine hope, for it is hope that enables us to navigate the world in which we live while participating in the divine life. As a working definition of hope, let me suggest that hope is a practice, a way of existing in the world which is better narrated, experienced, and entered into as a story than it is described and analyzed like a laboratory experiment. Hope is an empowering source of the Christian life; it is a way of living and participating in God and the promises of God, which is practiced and embodied by the Christian community. Without hope, we lose our direction or our way in the world. Without hope, we either become hopelessly trapped in the conditions of the created world, mired in the present with no sense of the past which frees us and the future which leads us; or we become no earthly good whatsoever as we cling to the past and await the promised future, but fail to navigate our way in and through the concreteness of life. Hope, as a theological virtue, enables us to participate in the world by means of our participation in God. Thus, hope is not strictly a matter of the last things, of eschatology, though it certainly does relate to eschatological concerns, but hope is more properly related to regeneration or the opening to a distinctive way of living as followers of Christ and the ongoing process of growing in relationship to the divine life; what Wesley would understand as inward and outward holiness.

In my doctoral dissertation, I examined the writings of Saint Augustine (354-430) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) at some length to demonstrate that the ecclesial theologian expresses hope in terms of the love of God and the love of neighbor, works of piety and of mercy. In addition to the expression of hope, hope provides the Christian with a direction for the journey of faith; hope serves as a compass for navigating through this world while participating in the divine life. Ecclesial theologians structure or organize their theological works in ways that offer both the expression and direction of hope to others. Thus, Christian hope manifests a certain narrative quality or a sense of our journey through life from the onset of faith to the fullness of love. Hope is a quality that becomes real in our movement through life, but it is about moving in particular ways and in a different direction from what the assumptions of the surrounding cultures would have us accept. The destination for which we hope does not arise out of the existing reality, but enters into the structures of existence to transform them. In hope, we participate in that transformation process as members of the body of Christ, bearing witness to God's transforming power and grace.
The Christian story, the symbolic system in which Christians live and by which we are formed, displays certain continuities or particular themes that are rehearsed, retold, and re-embodied over time and place in worship and service. This cultural system enables the purposeful or guided movement of our Christian journey. Hope must be located in a communal context and not in an individual sense only. We journey together toward the destination, sharing our common story of faith, hope, and love. In other words, hope is not an abstract concept, but it is a practice of the Christian community that provides direction to our lives in the world and finds expression in our love of God and neighbor. To reiterate, then, this third conclusion about ecclesial theology: It expresses hope as it points toward and participates in the practices of the love of God and the love of neighbor, and it figures hope as a narrative which forms us and gives direction to our lives before and with God and others. As we explore Wesley's hymns, I will focus on the direction hope provides for the Christian life and demonstrate that Wesley's hymns provide such direction. This narrowing is done in the interest of time, thus leaving the task of delineating the expression of hope for a more comprehensive study in the future.

The fourth point about ecclesial theology relates to its imaginative dimension. Because Christian hope is always hope in and for that which is unseen and, yet, it enables us to participate in that unseen, hoped-for thing from within the body of Christ, the imaginative task of theology becomes clear: The structure of theology with its metaphors and images both draws upon biblical imagery or the scriptural imagination and also takes that biblical imagination as a model or guide for its own imaginative practice. Ecclesial theologians find new and powerful ways of bringing to light the divine reality, ways that are relevant to the configuration of time, space, and culture as experienced, but also consistent with the biblical witnesses and the beliefs and practices of the body of Christ. This imaginative work, I believe, is a hallmark of Wesley's hymnody.

Let me define imagination in terms offered by Paul Ricoeur, who understands the imagination as, first, Kantian rule-governed invention or what we might describe as the structuring of the text—in this case the hymn or poem—in imaginative ways that invite the reader, singer, or hearer into the narrative; and second, imagination as a power of redescription which opens up possibilities for being in the world in front of the text. In essence, Ricoeur is suggesting that when we understand differently as a result of entering into the text, then the world does change, the word does transform the world because we travel in a different way or with different eyes before engaging that text. Both aspects of the imagination are central to the task of theology. In other words, whereas most of the contemporary literature is about the imagination in theology, ecclesial theology

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demands imaginative engagement. Ecclesial theology seeks to facilitate the Christian journey, to bring to light the divine reality, to enable believers to see and participate in the unseen while traveling in the world. Wesley’s hymns invite the singer and hearer into the text and the music in order to experience imaginatively the reality of God and engage the world differently and in particular ways as a result of that experience. The ecclesial theologian uses the imagination, as Ricoeur would say, to name the unnamable, to name God more fully and poetically, albeit always incompletely, for the sake of others.

My fourth and final point, then, is that ecclesial theology is imaginative as it functions both to structure the theological text in ways that draw in the reader and to create powerful images to convey the reality of life together, as the body of Christ, within the structures of existence, thereby cultivating and nourishing Christian hope. In examining Charles Wesley as a theologian, this fourth point is of particular significance because it suggests that a theologian may be creative, not in an originative sense, but in a re-creative manner, and the latter is a valid and necessary dimension of theological engagement. Thomas Langford has claimed that “it seems safe to attribute to John the primary role as theologian of the Methodist movement. Charles served a supportive, encouraging, and propagandizing role to and for John.”9 Although Langford does illuminate the importance of Charles’ hymns as practical theology, I am suggesting that enduring and meaningful theology not only engages in originative thought—which Charles does to some extent—but that it also engages in re-creative thought, which is modeled to us in and by the evolving scriptural witnesses. Imaginatively recreating biblical images and theological expressions in powerful ways is one of the characteristics of ecclesial theology at its best—and, I would go so far as to venture, often leads to lasting and enduring works (e.g., Augustine’s Confessions or Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Discipleship). While we might all agree that John’s contributions were more essential to the evolution of Methodist theology itself; apart from the question of who is the “real” theologian of early Methodism, we might simply suggest that Charles is a valid and valuable ecclesial theologian in his own right. As we turn, momentarily, to some of Charles Wesley’s hymns, I offer this overview of ecclesial theology to suggest that he might fit well the model of an ecclesial theologian: he is imaginative in his adaptation of biblical and other images; he is embodied within the church and the experience of life in God; and he is hopeful in that he offers his hymns as a compass by which we might navigate our lives in the world, and he expresses that hope as the love of God and neighbor.

Finally, while I do not intend to dwell on methodological concerns, they cannot be ignored entirely, especially in the case of Wesley’s hymns. The need for

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critical editions and complete, published works continues to complicate any attempt to make a comprehensive and comparative study of theological themes in Wesleyan hymnody. I particularly wish to avoid falling into the trap which Heitzenrater has critiqued, that is, the method of proof-texting or portraying Charles as holding some specific idea and then simply finding a verse which substantiates the claim.\(^{10}\) My first intention is to establish some theological patterns and consistent themes or insights regarding hope in various hymns, which, insofar as possible, may be sustained over time. Secondly, as possible, I will support the theological patterns and themes by drawing on journal entries, letters, and sermons. In a more comprehensive study in the future, I hope to apply this method more fully than I have accomplished in this initial study of Charles Wesley’s understanding of hope.

**The Direction of Hope in Wesleyan Hymnody**

In light of the above framework, I want to explore, specifically, the direction of hope evidenced by Wesley’s hymns. If hope is seen as the momentum for the Christian journey or the compass by which believers navigate through the world from the onset of faith to the goal of love, then how does Wesley express, image, and understand the virtue of hope? To set the framework for this discussion, I begin with his hymn, “For Believers Praying,” from which I have drawn the title for this article.

1. Jesu, my Strength, my Hope,  
   On Thee I cast my Care,  
   With humble Confidence look up,  
   And know Thou hear’st my Prayer.  
   Give me on Thee to wait,  
   ’Till I can all Things do,  
   On Thee Almighty to create,  
   Almighty to renew.

2. I rest upon Thy Word,  
   The Promise is for Me,  
   My Succor, and Salvation, Lord,  
   Shall surely come from Thee.  
   But let me still abide,  
   Nor from my Hope remove,  
   ’Till Thou my patient Spirit guide  
   Into Thy perfect Love.

3. I want a sober Mind,  
   A Self-renouncing Will

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That tramples down and casts behind
The Baits of pleasing ill;
A Soul enur’d to Pain,
To Hardship, Grief, and Loss,
Bold to take up, firm to sustain
The Consecrated Cross.

4. I want a Godly Fear,
A quick discerning Eye,
That looks to Thee, when Sin is near,
And sees the Tempter fly;
A Spirit still prepar’d
And arm’d with jealous Care,
Forever standing on its Guard,
And watching unto Prayer.

5. I want an Heart to pray,
To pray and never cease,
Never to murmur at thy Stay,
Or wish my Sufferings less,
This Blessing above All,
Always to pray I want,
Out of the Deep on Thee to call,
And never, never faint.

6. I want a true Regard,
A single steady Aim,
(Unmov’d by Threat’ning or Reward)
To Thee and thy great Name;
A jealous, just Concern
For Thy immortal Praise,
A pure Desire that All may learn,
And glorify Thy Grace.  

This lovely hymn sets the stage for Wesley’s understanding of hope. First, it offers the image of hoping as a single, steady aim: singular in its source and goal, steady in its pursuit, and headed toward a clear telos of perfect love. It is the image of an arrow released from the bow and headed toward the bull’s eye on the target. It is the movement toward a desired and certain destination with a sure trajectory and guided by a steady, unwavering hand which points it in the right direction and does not allow it to be misdirected by any threat or reward. Second, it points to Jesu, my strength, my hope; namely, Jesus as the source, center, and power of Christian hope. Third, it points to a sense of waiting and expectation for the future, but also of having and knowing in the present. To reframe these three points, then, let me suggest that “For Believers Praying” introduces us to

11Hymns and Sacred Poems (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1742), 146–148.
hope as a singular and steady movement, soaring toward perfect love by means of a christological body supported by two wings of waiting and expectation: one wing prior to justification by faith and the other following justification but prior to entire sanctification.

First, echoes of this theme of a single, steady aim are found in other hymns, but the "aim" or destination is imaged in different ways. One image Wesley uses liberally for that singular aim is "home"—an image that echoes Saint Augustine's restless heart yearning for home. Wesley also, like Augustine, refers to the journey toward the distant shore. It is important to recognize that Wesley's images frequently bring out themes which are not only biblical, but also might well be associated with the theology of Saint Augustine; indeed, Wesley's incomplete autobiographical poem is written in the genre of the Confessions. The journey toward home or the distant shore are two such examples. Furthermore, contrary to John Tyson's assertion that four basic images reflect the concept of redemption in classical Christian theology; namely, purchase language, legal or courtroom language, cleansing notions, and allusions to armed conflict;¹² there is also the Eastern therapeutic tradition or the language of healing (for example, the Great Physician and the sin-sick soul), and Charles Wesley frequently uses therapeutic images as well.¹³

In his hymn on "Christ's Kingdom," a hymn of hope, the image of home as that toward which we aim comes to the forefront. Wesley offers in stanzas 3 and 4:

3. Come, Lord, the Glorious Spirit cries,  
   And Souls beneath the Altar groan,  
   Come, Lord, the Bride on Earth replies,  
   And perfect all our Souls in One.

4. Pour out the Promised Gift on All,  
   Answer the Universal Come,  
   The Fulness of the Gentiles call,  
   And take thine Ancient People home.

This theme closes the poem in stanzas 7 and 8:

7. Thee, Lord, let every Tongue confess,  
   Let every Knee to Jesus bow:  
   O! All-redeeming Prince of Peace,  
   We long to see thy Kingdom now.

8. Hasten that Kingdom of thy Grace,  
   And take us to our heavenly home,  
   And let us Now behold thy Face:  
   Come, glorious God, to Judgment come!¹⁴

¹²Tyson, p. 36.
¹³In Responsible Grace, Randy Maddox highlights the therapeutic motif in the theology of John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).
Not only is the destination of the journey clearly portrayed as "home" or our "heavenly home," but in this hymn Wesley also emphasizes the universal nature of that invitation to travel toward home.

In discussing hope as providing direction for the faith journey, I would be remiss if I failed to mention that "Wrestling Jacob" or "Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown" is a narrative of the Christian's struggle toward the destination of perfect love and of steadfastness toward that destination, having accepted the universal love of the Savior. Along with the imagery of the destination, we should also note both the sense of movement and the therapeutic imagery throughout, beginning at stanza 11:

11. I know Thee, Saviour, who Thou art,
   Jesus, the feeble Sinner's Friend;
   Nor wilt Thou with the Night depart,
   But stay, and love me to the End;
   Thy Mercies never shall remove;
   Thy Nature, and Thy Name is Love.

12. The Sun of Righteousness on Me
    Hath rose with Healing in his Wings;
    Wither'd my Nature's Strength; from Thee
    My Soul its Life and Succour brings;
    My Help is all laid up above;
    Thy Nature, and Thy Name is Love.

13. Contended now upon my Thigh
    I halt, till Life's short Journey end;
    All Helplessness, all Weakness I,
    On Thee alone for Strength depend,
    Nor have I Power, from Thee, to move;
    Thy Nature, and Thy Name is Love.

14. Lame as I am, I take the Prey,
    Hell, Earth, and Sin with Ease o' ercome;
    I leap for Joy, pursue my Way,
    And as a bounding Hart fly home,
    Thro' all Eternity to prove
    Thy Nature, and Thy Name is Love.\(^{15}\)

Staying with this motif of the traveler on a journey, Hymn II from "MS Deliberate" provides the image of traveling through life's storms to arrive on the "Happy Shore" or "thy holy Hill":

1. Heavenly Counsellor Divine,
   Waiting for thy Will I stand,

\(^{15}\text{Hymns and Sacred Poems (1742), 117–118. Changed to "Hart" in errata of first edition.}\)
Both mine Eyes, Thou know'st are Thine, 
Reach me out an Helping Hand: 
Thou my faithful Pilot be 
While these threat'ning Billows roar 
Guide thro' Life's tempestuous Sea, 
Land me on the Happy Shore.

2. In this howling Wilderness, 
Lo! I trust on Thee alone, 
Thee in all my Ways confess, 
Sole Disposer of Thine own: 
Sure to err without thy Light, 
Sure to contradict thy Will, 
Guide my wandering Footsteps right, 
Bring me to thy holy Hill.

Finally, let me round out the images of hope's aim or destination with a common one used by Wesley; namely, the throne. I begin with the well-known hymn on Christ's birth:

1. Come, thou long-expected Jesus, 
   Born to set thy People free, 
   From our Fears and Sins release us, 
   Let us find our Rest in Thee: 
   Israel's Strength and Consolation, 
   Hope of all the Earth Thou art, 
   Dear Desire of every Nation, 
   Joy of every longing Heart.

2. Born thy People to deliver, 
   Born a Child and yet a King, 
   Born to reign in Us forever, 
   Now thy gracious Kingdom bring; 
   By thine own eternal Spirit 
   Rule in all our Hearts alone, 
   By thine all-sufficient Merit 
   Raise us to thy glorious Throne.

Also in this hymn we find the notions of yearning to rest in God, of the strength and steadfastness provided by God's grace, and of the universality of the invitation to the journey. Another striking example of the "throne" imagery as the destination of hope is found in the hymn for New Year's Day, which contains the metaphor of life as a journey and the direction traveled by the believer who follows Christ and does his work on earth:


1. Come, let us anew
Our Journey pursue,
Roll round with the year,
And never stand still, 'till the Master appear;
His adorable Will
Let us gladly fulfil,
And our Talents improve
By the patience of hope, and the labour of love.

2. Our Life is a Dream,
Our Time as a stream
Glides swiftly away,
And the fugitive Moment refuses to stay,
The Arrow is flown,
The moment is gone,
The millennial Year
Rushes on to our view, and Eternity's here!

3. O that each in the day
Of His coming might say,
'I have fought my Way thro',
'I have finish'd the work thou didst give me to do!'
O that each from his Lord
May receive the glad word,
'Well and faithfully done,
'Enter into my joy, and sit down on my throne!'

To summarize this first point, hope directs the Christian toward a singular destination which may be imaged as home, the happy shore, perfect love, or the throne, among others. With this pattern of images related to the single, steady aim in place, we can now turn to the christological body or center of Wesley's hope. Jesus is frequently depicted as the source of and the empowerment for this hopeful journey. At the outset of this article I pointed toward the words found in Wesley's journal on May 21, 1738, "I ... rejoiced in hope of loving Christ;" though, admittedly, his entry is a bit ambiguous because we cannot be sure whether he rejoiced in the hope of being enabled to love Christ or if he rejoiced in the hope flowing from the love of Christ in whom he now believed or, perhaps, both. Nevertheless, the centrality of Christ remains constant in his hymns to his dying day, when he dictated,

In age & feebleness extream,
Who shall a helpless worm Redeem?
Jesus! my only Hope thou art,
Strength of my failing flesh and Heart;

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18Hymns for New Year's Day 1750 (Bristol: n.p., 1749), No. 5; text here from the first edition as published by Frank Baker, Representative Verse of Charles Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 126.
Oh! could I catch a smile from Thee,  
And drop into Eternity!  

The consistency of Christ as the source or center of Christian hope can be more narrowly attributed to Wesley’s understanding of the atonement. For example, Charles’ hymn on “Free Grace,” which first appeared with John’s sermon by the same name, offers images of the atonement as the ground of hope and fountain of good. Stanzas 1–4 serve to illustrate this emphasis:

1. And can it be, that I should gain  
   An Int’rest in the Saviour’s Blood!  
   Dy’d He for Me?—who caus’d his Pain!  
   For Me?—who Him to Death pursu’d.  
   Amazing Love! how can it be  
   That Thou, my God, shouldst die for Me?

2. ’Tis Myst’ry all! th’Immortal dies!  
   Who can explore his strange Design?  
   In vain the first-born Seraph tries  
   To sound the Depths of Love Divine.  
   ’Tis Mercy all! Let Earth adore;  
   Let Angel Minds enquire no more.

3. He left his Father’s Throne above,  
   (So free, so infinite his Grace!)  
   Empty’d Himself of All but Love,  
   And bled for Adam’s helpless Race:  
   ’Tis Mercy all, immense and free!  
   For O my God! it found out Me!

4. Long my imprison’d Spirit lay,  
   Fast bound in Sin and Nature’s Night:  
   Thine Eye diffus’d a quick’ning Ray;  
   I woke; the Dungeon flam’d with Light;  
   My Chains fell off, my Heart was free,  
   I rose, went forth, and follow’d Thee.

This same theme comes through in a number of Wesley’s eucharistic hymns. For example, two different “Hymns for Those That Wait for Full Redemption,” convey the notion of Christian hope as stemming from the atonement and, in particular, imparted righteousness. Wesley’s view of the possibility—with the accompanying theological dangers—of instantaneous perfection can also be noted.  


20Hymns and Sacred Poems (London, 1739), 117–118; stanzas 1–4 of original 6 stanzas.

21It is clear that by 1762 (Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures) he was strongly opposed to this possibility.
Stanza 1 points to imparted righteousness, then stanza 3 illuminates the imputed righteousness of the atonement:

1. Jesus, in thine All-saving Name
   We stedfastly believe,
   And lo! the promis’d Power we claim,
   Which Thou art bound to give:
   Power to become the Sons of God,
   An all-sufficient Power,
   We look to have on Us bestow’d
   A Power to sin no more.

3. On both thy Natures we rely,
   Neither can save alone;
   The God could not for Sinners die,
   The Man could not atone.
   The Merit of a Suffering God
   Hath bought our perfect Peace,
   It stamp’d the Value on that Blood
   Which sign’d our Souls Release.\(^{22}\)

In another hymn entitled, “Waiting for Full Redemption,” stanzas 1 and 8 suggest that through the atonement the promises of God and the hope of the believer are secure:

1. And shall we then abide in Sin,
   Nor hope on Earth to be set free?
   Hath Jesus bled to wash us clean
   To save from all Iniquity,
   And can He not His Blood apply,
   And cleanse, and save us—’till we die?

8. Lord, we believe, and rest secure,
   Thine utmost Promises to prove,
   To rise restor’d, and throughly pure,
   In all the Image of thy Love,
   Fill’d with the glorious Life unknown,
   For ever sanctified in One.\(^{23}\)

Finally, in his “Short Hymn on Rom. 8:24,” Wesley illuminates that the ground of hope is faith in the atonement of Christ and that hope is the momentum that keeps us moving toward the destination of Christian perfection:

1. Sav’d by faith we once have been
   From the guilt and power of sin,

\(^{22}\)Hymns and Sacred Poems (1749), 2:181.
But while the dire root remains,  
Hope our fainting soul sustains:  
Tempted to give up our shield,  
Sav’rd by hope we cannot yield,  
Sav’rd by hope, we wait to prove  
All the holiness of love.\(^{24}\)

This hymn or sacred poem leads to a second, more narrow consideration about the christological center of hope; namely, that the goal of our hope, while always leading us to the happy destination of God or universal Love, is also to be understood as perfect love within the individual.

Turning now to a few representative hymns which illustrate the narrow goal of perfection, I want to begin with the well-known Christmas hymn, “Hark How All the Welkin Rings,” as originally penned (or “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” as amended by Whitefield), and point in particular to the last four stanzas (7–10), which are little known:

7. Come, Desire of Nations come,  
Fix in Us thy humble Home,  
Rise, the Woman’s conqu’ring Seed,  
Bruise in Us the Serpent’s Head.

8. Now display Thy saving Pow’r,  
Ruin’d Nature now restore,  
Now in Mystic Union join  
Thine to Ours, and Ours to Thine.

9. Adam’s Likeness, Lord, efface,  
Stamp thy Image in its Place,  
Second Adam from above,  
Reinstate us in thy Love.

10. Let us thee, tho’ lost, regain,  
Thee, the Life, the Inner Man:  
O! to All Thyself impart,  
Form’d in each Believing Heart.\(^{25}\)

Wesley’s “Hymns for Christian Friends: 16” offers another clear example of the imagery of the divine image stamped upon the believer’s heart:

1. Author of the Peace Unknown,  
Lover of my Friend and me,  
Who of Twain hast made us One,  
One preserve us still in Thee,


\(^{25}\)Hymns and Sacred Poems (1739), 207–208.
All our heighten'd Blessings bless,
Crown our Hopes with full Success.

2. Center of our Hopes Thou art,
   End of our enlarg'd Desires:
Stamp thine Image on our Heart,
   Fill us now with holy Fires,
Cemented by Love Divine,
Seal our souls for ever Thine.

3. All our Works in Thee be wrought,
   Level'd at one common Aim,
Every Word, and every Thought
   Purge in the refining Flame,
Lead us thro' the Paths of Peace
On to perfect Holiness.

4. Let us both together rise,
To Thy glorious Life restor'd,
Here regain our Paradise,
Here prepare to meet our Lord.
Here enjoy the Earnest given,
Travel hand in hand to Heaven.26

I chose this particular hymn, written for his wife, to illustrate the stamped-image metaphor because it brings to light several other important theological considerations. In this hymn of hope, which expresses hope for perfection, we see that the restoration of the \textit{imago Dei} is not construed by Wesley as a purely individual matter—though so many of his hymns are set in a more personal context. Here we see that the aim of Christian hope is \textit{one common aim} and that together Christians rise to life, regain paradise, prepare to meet the Lord, enjoy the promises of God, and \textit{travel hand in hand to heaven}. This communal aspect is of considerable importance, and the hymn points us toward two senses of the communal dimension of perfection: first, his Arminian view of the universality of the invitation to the journey, and second, his understanding of the journey toward perfection as one that takes place as a community, as one body in Christ.

Wesley's hymn "Catholick Love," written to accompany John's sermon, "Catholic Spirit," brings out this twofold communal sense of Christian perfection. Stanzas 5–7 are particularly insightful, as they demonstrate the narrow aim of individual perfection but also suggest that all believers are bonded together in perfect love within the body of Christ:

5. My Brethren, Friends, and Kinsmen these,
   Who do my heavenly Father's Will,

\footnote{\textit{Hymns and Sacred Poems} (1749), 2:282–283.}
Who aim at perfect Holiness,
   And all thy Counsels to fulfil,
A thirst to be whate'er Thou art,
   And love their God with all their Heart.

6. For these, howe'er in Flesh disjoin'd,
   Where'er dispers'd o'er Earth abroad,
Unfeign'd, unbounded Love I find,
   And constant as the Life of God:
Fountain of Life, from thence it sprung,
   As pure, as even, and as strong,

7. Join'd to the hidden Church unknown,
   In this sure Bond of Perfectness,
Obscurely safe, I dwell alone,
   And glory in th'uniting Grace,
To me, to each Believer giv'n,
   To all thy Saints in Earth and Heav'n.27

A number of similar examples could be offered, but let me briefly note two complementary stanzas, the first from the hymn, “For the Society, Praying,” stanza 3, and then, “Fellowship,” stanza 1, which suggest the journey motif of traveling together in hope toward the destination of perfect love:

3. Didst Thou not make us One,
   That Both might One remain,
Together travel on,
   And bear each other's pain,
'Till Both Thine utmost Goodness prove,
   And rise renew'd in perfect Love.28

And the second hymn:

1. All Praise to our Redeeming Lord,
   Who joins us by his Grace,
And bids us, Each to Each restor'd,
   Together seek his Face.
He bids us build each other up,
   And, gather'd into One,
To our high Calling's glorious Hope
   We Hand in Hand go on.29

27Baker, 204; stanzas 5–7 of a poem of 7 stanzas first published at the conclusion of John Wesley's sermon on 2 Kings 10:15 in 1755.
28Hymns and Sacred Poems (1749), 2:279.
29Hymns for those that seek and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Christ (London, 1747), No. 32.
Thus, to conclude this section which has examined Wesley's more narrow understanding of the aim of the Christian journey as entire sanctification or perfection, it is important to note that the restoration of the image of God, that image stamped upon the believer's heart, is always, in theological terms, set in a communal context. The hope of the Christian community thus serves to build up and increase the personal hope of arriving at the desired destination. Throughout these hymns and poems, the center of Christian hope—that which enables both our justification and sanctification—is depicted unmistakably in christological terms.  

The last point I want to explore with regard to the direction which hope provides for the Christian journey is the idea of waiting and expectation. Based upon scriptural witnesses, Wesley knows well that hope is always hope in that which remains unseen and not yet fully realized. Thus, how the Christian waits and how that waiting is described and imaged makes an important theological statement. For Charles Wesley, as I noted at the outset of this article, his hopeful expectation seems to point toward two separate stages or states of hoping: first, the hope that awaits justification (a more passive state) and, second, the hope that awaits entire sanctification (a more active state). Of course, the processive or progressive nature of Wesleyan theology leads me to suggest that these are not exclusive, discrete states, but indeed, overlap and complement one another.

First, Wesley's hymn based on John 5:2ff., "The Pool of Bethesda," illustrates the sense of hoping to be justified, of being in a state of helplessness which requires the imputed righteousness of Christ. The water imagery suggests the state of awaiting baptism. The first four stanzas convey the gist of this form of hope:

1. Jesu, take my Sins away,  
   And make me know Thy Name,  
   Thou art now, as Yesterday,  
   And evermore the same:  
   Thou my True Bethesda be;  
   I know within Thy Arms is Room,  
   All the World may unto Thee,  
   Their House of Mercy, come.

2. See the Porches open wide!  
   Thy Mercy All may prove,  
   All the World is justified  
   By Universal Love.  
   Halt, and wither'd when they lie,  
   And sick, and impotent, and blind,  
   Sinners may in Thee espy  
   The Saviour of Mankind.

It would be appropriate at this stage, in a more comprehensive study, to discuss the importance of expressing hope in terms of the love of God and the love of neighbor and partaking in the inward and outward means of grace.
3. See me lying at the Pool,
    And waiting for thy Grace
O come down into my Soul,
    Disclose Thy Angel-Face,
If to me thy Bowels move:
If now Thou dost my Sickness feel,
    Let the Spirit of thy Love
Thy helpless Sinner heal.

4. Sick of Anger, Pride, and Lust,
    And Unbelief I am;
Yet in Thee for Health I trust,
    In Jesu's Sovereign Name.
Were I taken into Thee,
Could I but step into the Pool,
I from every Malady
    Should be at once made whole.  

The hymn continues in this vein, extending the therapeutic metaphor of helplessness to heal oneself and the expectation of receiving Jesus' healing power. Significantly, in stanzas 6 and 7 he expresses the helplessness again but now also indicates that there is an additional dimension at work; namely, the ability to resist the universal offer of grace:

6. Mercy then there is for Me
    (Away my Doubts and Fears)
Plagu'd with an Infirmiti
    For more than Thirty Years.
Jesu, cast a pitying Eye;
Thou long hast known my desperate Case,
Poor, and helpless here I lie,
And wait the Healing Grace.

7. Long hath Thy Good Spirit strove
    With my distemper'd Soul,
But I still refus'd Thy Love
    And would not be made whole:
Hardly now at last I yield,
I yield with all my Sins to part;
Let my Soul be fully heal'd,
    And throughly cleans'd my Heart.  

This sense of waiting and hoping for the forgiveness of sins, the cleansing that casts out sin, is seen in one of his hymns. The sense of justification as an ongoing process of cleansing becomes evident. In this poem, the believer waits for

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31 *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), 98–99, stanzas 1–7 of eleven stanzas.
grace upon grace to provide the faith upon faith which casts out more and more sin.

9. What is our Calling's Glorious Hope
   But Inward Holiness?
   For This to Jesus I look up,
   I calmly wait for this.

10. I wait, 'till He shall touch me clean,
    Shall Life and Power impart:
    Gives me the Faith that roots out Sin,
    And purifies the Heart.

11. This the dear redeeming Grace,
    For every Sinner free:
    Surely it shall on me take Place,
    The Chief of sinners me.

12. From all Iniquity, from All
    He shall my soul redeem:
    In Jesus I believe, and shall
    Believe myself to Him.

At this point in the hymn, Wesley shifts to the state of hoping for complete perfection:

13. When Jesus makes my Soul his Home,
    My Sin shall all depart:
    And lo! He saith, "I quickly come,
    To cleanse and fill thy heart."

14. Be it according to thy Word,
    Redeem me from All Sin;
    My Heart would now receive Thee, Lord:
    Come in, my Lord, come in!\(^3\)

The movement from the hope of being justified by faith to the hope of being perfected in love is also evident, though in a more abbreviated form, in the poem on Matthew 4:16, "the people which sat in darkness saw great light." By extending the metaphor of light, Wesley expresses the movement from night to day through the dawning of hope in that first illumination of the heart, followed by the rising of the Day-star, and then the increasing luminosity which increases the believer's hope of heaven:

1. In our unregenerate state,
   Strangers to ourselves and God,

\(^3\) *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), 244; stanzas 9–14 of 14 stanzas.
We in grossest darkness sat,
   In the shades of death abode,
Confines of that hellish night;
   When we saw the gospel-grace,
Saw the great eternal Light
   Beaming from Immanuel's face.

2. Suddenly the Light sprung up,
   Rose the Day-star in our hearts:
Earnest of our heavenly hope,
   Jesus still himself imparts;
Grows the pure, celestial ray
   More & more with faith's increase,
Makes at last the perfect day,
   Opens into endless bliss.33

Finally, as one last example of the movement from the hope for justification to the hope for entire sanctification, Wesley's poem on Jeremiah 31:17, "There is hope in thine end," tells the story of a sinner waiting in despair, accepting his wretchedness and unworthiness, living as an aimless wanderer lacking direction. Yet, oddly enough, he hopes for the Redeemer to appear and end his sin and pain. The speaker appears as a Wesleyan "backslider" who has fallen from grace but can convey to others that waiting for justification is unnecessary, the invitation is extended to all, and once accepted, the hope for perfect holiness may ensue.

1. Hope in my end, my latest hour!
   Indulg'd with this, I ask no more,
   But hug my misery,
   But suffer out my evil days,
   Nor see the Saviour's smiling face
   Till I in glory see.

2. Dark as I am, bereav'd of sight,
   In the full blaze of gospel-light,
   No longer I complain,
   With death if my Redeemer come,
   To dissipate th'infernal gloom,
   And end my sin and pain.

3. Till then my punishment I bear,
   Shut up in temporal despair,
   Wretched, and unforgiven;
   A sinner against light and love,
   Far from the banks of peace I rove,
   As far as hell from heaven.

33 Unpub. Poet., 2:19.
4. But let not those in darkness dwell,
The dreary neighbourhood of hell,
Till life's extremity,
Who know not yet the Saviour's ways,
But never forfeited his grace,
Or quench'd his Spirit, like me.

5. They need not wait their Lord to know,
But freely to the Fountain go:
This is the gracious day,
This is the accepted time for Them:
They now may plunge into the stream
And wash their sin away.

6. They now may savingly believe,
And walk in Him whom they receive
And in his love abide,
Till Jesus crowns with perfect peace,
Fills up their faith and holiness,
And takes them to his side. 34

The helplessness of hope or waiting for the faith that leads to justification is
thus seen as a passive state in which the unregenerate person is alone and cannot
act to move toward the desired destination. Indeed, Wesley almost goes so far as
to intimate that despair is a form of hoping, in that it leads to the recognition of
our helplessness in the absence of the grace of God through the atoning power of
Christ. Once saving faith is a present condition, then the hope of the believer
takes on the form of active hoping, and brings to light the theological under­
standing of imparted righteousness. Active hoping is possible by and through the
Holy Spirit and leads increasingly to the elimination of sin as the image of God
is gradually restored and love grows to fullness. Let me offer a few examples—
from among a vast number of illustrative possibilities—before concluding this
article.

In the second part of his early hymn on "Primitive Christianity," Wesley
demonstrates the Spirit at work in the midst of life's ongoing difficulties for indi­
vidual believers, as well as the community:

1. Jesus, from whom all Blessings flow,
Great Builder of thy Church below,
If now, thy Spirit moves my Breast,
Hear, and fulfil thine own Request!

2. The Few that truly call Thee Lord,
And wait thy sanctifying Word,
And Thee their utmost Saviour own, 
Unite, and perfect them in one.

3. Gather them in on every Side, 
And in thy Tabernacle hide; 
Give them a Resting-place to find, 
A Covert from the Storm, and Wind.

Then skipping down to stanza 5:

5. Thither collect thy little Flock, 
Under the Shadow of their Rock: 
The holy Seed, the royal Race, 
The standing Mon'ments of thy Grace.

6. O let them all thy Mind express, 
Stand forth thy Chosen Witnesses! 
Thy Power unto Salvation shew, 
And perfect Holiness below:

7. The Fulness of thy Grace receive, 
And simply to thy Glory live; 
Strongly reflect the Light Divine, 
And in a Land of Darkness shine.

8. In Them let all Mankind behold 
How Christians liv’d in Days of old; 
(Mighty their envious Foes to move, 
A Proverb of Reproach—and Love.)

9. O make them of one Soul and Heart, 
The All-conforming Mind impart; 
Spirit of Peace, and Unity, 
The sinless Mind that was in Thee.

10. Call them into thy wondrous Light, 
Worthy to walk with Thee in white; 
Make up thy Jewels, Lord, and show 
The Glorious Spotless Church below.

11. From every sinful Wrinkle free, 
Redeem’d from All Iniquity; 
The Fellowship of Saints made known; 
And, Oh! my God, might I be one!

12. O might my Lot be cast with These; 
The least of Jesu’s Witnesses! 
O that my Lord would count me meet 
To wash his dear Disciples’ Feet! 35

The poem continues through several more stanzas, but the sense is clear at this point: Wesley looks to the ancient Christians and the invisible church, the body of Christ, as models and guides who increase his hope to participate in the perfect love of Christ. He hopes in the past promises, bears witness to the future glory, and seeks to act in the present, through the power of the Spirit, in the way that leads in that direction. This is active hoping toward entire sanctification. Yet, this poem also hints at the possibility of instantaneous perfection, which he, perhaps, indicates was the state of primitive Christians who hoped unto fulfillment in this life.

Another early example of this active state of hoping is found in the hymn, "For Those That Wait for Full Redemption," cited previously. In it, he waits for future perfection while experiencing present forgiveness and love. This understanding thus provides the sense of the ongoing nature of the sanctification process, though it continues to hold open the possibility of instantaneous perfection. In stanza 1, the believers receive the promise of the power to become sinless children of God; namely, imparted righteousness:

1. Jesus, in Thine All-saving Name  
   We stedfastly believe,  
   And lo! the promised Power we claim,  
   Which Thou art bound to give:  
   Power to become the Sons of God,  
   An all-sufficient Power,  
   We look to have on Us bestow’d  
   A Power to sin no more.

At the end of this hymn, stanzas 10 through 13 demonstrate the sanctification process and the active hoping that accompanies it:

10. Our Jesus Thou from future Woe,  
    From present Wrath Divine,  
    Shalt save us from our Sins below,  
    And make our Souls like Thine.  
    Jesus from all the Power of sin,  
    From all the Being too,  
    Thy Grace shall make us throughly clean,  
    And perfectly renew.

11. Jesus from Pride, from Wrath, from Lust,  
    Our Inward Jesus be,  
    From every evil Thought we trust  
    To be redeem’d by Thee.  
    When Thou dost in our Flesh appear,  
    We shall the Promise prove,  
    Sav’d into all Perfection here,  
    Renew’d in sinless Love.
12. Come, O Thou Prophet, Priest, and King,
   Thou Son of God, and Man,
   Into our Souls thy Fulness bring,
   Instruct, Atone, and Reign.
   Holy, and Pure, as Just, and Wise,
   We would be in thy Right,
   Less than thine All cannot suffice,
   We grasp the Infinite.

13. Our Jesus Thee, Entire, and Whole
   With willing Heart we take;
   Fill ours, and every faithful Soul
   For Thy own Mercy's sake:
   We wait to know thine Utmost Name,
   Thy Nature's heavenly Powers,
   One undivided Christ we claim,
   And All Thou art is Ours.36

A third example of the active hope of entire sanctification, from a hymn which is, presumably, of a later date since it is found in MS. Luke, focuses on the waiting far more than the reception of perfect love, even suggesting that perfection Doth never in a moment rise. It is based upon Luke 8:15, “They ... bring forth fruit with patience.”

1. The word, the seed of righteousness,
   Sown in our hearts we gladly feel.
   With joy our proffer'd Lord embrace,
   With rapturous joy unspeakable
   Receive the news of sin forgiven,
   And taste in love our present heaven.

2. Yet the incorruptible seed
   Doth never in a moment rise,
   But buried deep, as lost and dead,
   Long in our earthy hearts it lies,
   Water'd, before the fruit appears,
   With showers of grace, and floods of tears.

3. Howe'er our hasty nature fret,
   Or instantaneous growth require,
   We must, we must, with patience wait,
   With humble languishing desire,
   And when ten thousand storms are pass'd,
   Bring forth the perfect fruit—at last.

4. Patience we need the word to keep,
   Patience in persevering prayer;
   Patience to urge our way, and weep,
   And wait the proper time to bear,
   The season due which God ordains,
   The end of all our griefs and pains.

5. Patience in doing good we need,
   Patience in meekly bearing ill,
   Patience till the immortal seed
   Victorious o’re our sins we feel,
   Patience to toil, and strive, and pray,
   And fight, and suffer—to that day.37

In light of the active hopeful waiting of toiling, striving, praying, fighting, suffering in and through the sanctification process which is expressed by that poem, this article now comes full circle and returns to the single, steady aim. The sanctification process is depicted by Wesley as manifesting an increasingly singular aim over time and continued response to God’s grace. In other words, the hope for the final destination narrows into a confident, steadfast movement toward a single point. First, returning to a previously considered hymn, “Hymns for Christian Friends: 16,” the third stanza now appears in greater clarity, for all works aim at the one single thing, that destination of perfect love:

3. All our Works in Thee be wrought,
   Level’d at one common Aim,
   Every Word, and every Thought
   Purge in the refining Flame,
   Lead us thro’ the Paths of Peace
   On to perfect Holiness.

In one of Wesley’s later hymns from MS John, on John 21:18, the narrator suggests that the enthusiasm and unrestrained movement of his younger hopeful days have matured into a far more deliberate sense of movement, or a more narrow all-encompassing focal point. Of course, this should not be taken to mean biological years necessarily, but rather, a maturing in the Christian life and faith. The first and last stanzas bring this to light:

1. When young & full of sanguine hope
   And warm in my first love,
   My spirit’s loins I girded up,
   And sought the things above;
   Swift on the wings of active zeal
   With Jesus’ message flew,

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37 Unpub. Poet., 2:104.
O'rejoy’d with all my heart & will
My Master’s work to do.

6. Wholly at thy dispose I am,
   No longer at my own,
   All self-activity disclaim,
   And move in God alone;
   Transport, do what Thou wilt with me,
   A few more evil days,
   But bear me safe thro’ all to see
   My dear Redeemer’s face.  

This movement in God alone is echoed in his hymn on Luke 18:28 (MS Luke), which suggests leaving all and following Christ only, as that single, steady direction which leads toward perfection:

1. It matters not how small
   The sacrifice we make,
   For Christ we then forsake our all,
   When we our hopes forsake,
   Our every vain desire,
   Our every creature-love,
   And nought on earth but Christ require,
   And nought but Christ above.

Thus having feasted on but a sampling of Wesley’s hymnody, we arrive again at the single, steady aim of Charles Wesley’s hope. Yet, I have barely scratched the surface of the images and theological understandings of the hope he expresses; a much more systematic and in-depth study remains to be done. I have offered only a glimpse of the hymns which reflect the direction of hope or the momentum for the journey from the onset of faith to the fullness of love. But, perhaps, in the incompleteness of this journey and in the lingering sense that there is more yet to be revealed, we are left with a sense of hope, with the anticipation of more to come, even while, for now, we see and know only in part. Perhaps this sense of expectation sheds one final light on the poet, preacher, ecclesial theologian, Charles Wesley, for we grasp in a deeper way that he undoubtedly continued to write and rewrite his prodigious hymnody over the course of his lifetime as an expression of his own hopeful, active waiting to reach that final destination of Love. On this final note, then, we see that Wesley lived in and out of that single, steady aim and offered it to others as an enduring, imaginative gift of hope.

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38 Unpub. Poet., 2:281-282.