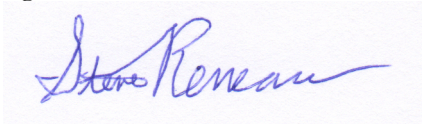


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Drinking from the Byzantine Tradition: John Wesley's Synthetic Understanding of  
Anthropology, Soteriology, and Teleology.

By

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Master of Divinity, 2011

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## **Abstract**

Drinking from the Byzantine Tradition: John Wesley's Synthetic Understanding of Anthropology, Soteriology, and Teleology.

By Robert Steven Reneau

During his life and the centuries after his death, many scholars see the theology of John Wesley as attempting to bridge a gap between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. However, since Albert C. Outler mentioned in a footnote of the bottom his book titled *John Wesley* in 1964 that Wesley also pulled from the early Byzantine tradition, scholars are now attempting to place Wesley's work in a new light that attempts to bridge the paradigms of the Western church and Eastern church. This work shows how Wesley forged a synthetic understanding of anthropology, soteriology, and teleology that is heavily based in Western notions, but also drawing from multiple early Greek voices like Clement of Alexandria, Macarius/Gregory of Nyssa, and Chrysostom.

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## I. Introduction

In 1964, Albert C. Outler, noted Wesleyan historian and theologian, published his book titled simply *John Wesley*<sup>1</sup>. In his work, Outler presents selections from the writings of John Wesley ranging from his sermons to his correspondence in order to display his theological foundations and understandings. The book itself is a theological marvel, but what Outler writes in a note in his introduction sparked interest and stimulated the beginning of a conversation over the past few decades between two branches of Christianity. Outler writes,

Thus, in his [Wesley's] early days, he drank deep of this Byzantine tradition of spirituality at its source and assimilated its conception of devotion as the *way* and perfection as the *goal* of the Christian life. Once this somewhat curious and roundabout linkage with the theological fountainhead of Orthodox monasticism is recognized, it is illuminating to read Wesley and Gregory [of Nyssa] in dialogue with each other.<sup>2</sup>

Outler's statement has paved the way for numerous writings, mostly from the Wesleyan side, that attempt to find points of contact between the Wesleyan movement and Eastern Orthodoxy.

Noted scholar and musician S.T. Kimbrough has edited three works looking at Wesley and Orthodoxy including *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*<sup>3</sup>, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*<sup>4</sup>, and *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice*.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, there are numerous articles attempting to solidify a connection between the Methodism and Orthodoxy, such as Howard Snyder, "John Wesley and

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<sup>1</sup> Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, note 26 (*emphasis original*).

<sup>3</sup> S. T. Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> S. T. Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> S. T. Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005).

Macarius the Egyptian”<sup>6</sup>; Randy Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences and Differences”<sup>7</sup>; and one of the few from the Eastern Orthodox perspective by David C. Ford, “Saint Makarios of Egypt and John Wesley: Variations on the Theme of Sanctification”<sup>8</sup>

This work will demonstrate that John Wesley, who is heavily influenced by the theological traditions of Western Christianity, is also heavily influenced by early church writers from the East, and uses multiple voices from the early church, such as Macarius of Egypt/Gregory of Nyssa, Clement of Alexandria, and John Chrysostom, to forge his distinctive theological perspective on anthropology, soteriology, and teleology.

### ***Wesley’s connection to Eastern Orthodoxy***

Randy L. Maddox, notes that John Wesley’s theological orientation is difficult to classify, and was even questioned in his own day. Maddox notes that some voices argue that John Wesley is distinctively Protestant, but disagree on the specifics. Maddox writes,

Some argued strongly that he [Wesley] was best construed in term of the Lutheran tradition. Others advocated a more Reformed Wesley. Most assumed that such general designations must be further refined. Thus, there were readings of Wesley in terms of Lutheran Pietism or Moravianism, English (Reformed) Puritanism, and the Arminian revision of the Reformed tradition<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, Maddox notes that there are several writings on John Wesley from the Roman Catholic perspective, so much so that it has led some Wesleyan scholars to speak of a Protestant/Catholic synergy in Wesley’s theology. This synthesis should not come as

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<sup>6</sup> Howard A. Snyder, "John Wesley and Macarius the Egyptian," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (1990).

<sup>7</sup> Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences, and Differences,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (1990).

<sup>8</sup> David C. Ford, “Saint Makarios of Egypt and John Wesley: Variations on the Theme of Sanctification,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 33, no. 3 (1988).

<sup>9</sup> Maddox, "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy", 29.



a surprise, Maddox suggests, because of the Anglican upbringing and education of John Wesley, and “Anglicanism’s self-professed goal of being a *via media*.”<sup>10</sup> Finally, Maddox notes the interesting wrinkle that early Anglican theologians were not concerned with necessarily bridging the gap between the contemporary Protestant church and the contemporary Roman Catholic Church, but instead were attempting to bridge Anglicanism with the first four centuries of the Christian church to further solidify the authenticity of the Anglican Church.

### ***The Rise of Augustan England***

The study of ancient Greek was introduced to English universities in the early sixteenth century. In so doing, the universities shifted their medieval, scholastic curriculum to one filled with classical literature. Ted A. Campbell, writes in his book *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity* that, “The appreciation of classical languages and literature had come to be shared by nearly all educated persons in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, conservatives and progressives alike.”<sup>11</sup> As this shift occurred in the university, British theologians began to be more and more concerned with the early church of the first three centuries. Campbell notes the massive amount of material being published, mostly coming from presses in London or Oxford, especially after the English Revolution.

The more conservative Christians, those who defended the Anglican Church, employed Christian antiquity to give credence to the Anglican Church’s polity and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>11</sup> Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1991), 8

structure. This appeal to antiquity for authenticity can best be seen in Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594-1597), John Pearson's *Exposition of the Creed* (1659), William Reeves' "Prefatory Dissertation about the Right Use of the Fathers" (1709), and Robert Nelson's *Companion to the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England* (1704). In describing conservative Anglicans from this era Campbell writes,

There was, the, from the seventeenth-century a well-defined, conservative Anglican use of the ancient Christian sources. Identified in general with the 'Caroline' Anglicanism that had defined itself against Puritanism on one side, and Roman Catholicism on the other, this use of Christian antiquity held up the vision of the ancient church as a test of ecclesiastical polity and doctrine; a test which, as the Caroline divines saw it, the Church of England passed with honors.<sup>12</sup>

Notwithstanding the conservative Anglican usage of Christian antiquity, progressive Anglicans employed the ancient church as well. Progressive Anglicans differed from the conservative Anglicans in believing that the Church of England was the best possible location to express the ethos of the ancient church, but that it had yet achieved this ethos (as the conservative Anglicans were arguing.) An example of the progressive movement is the Latitudinarians who attempted to bring together the conservative Anglicans and the dissenting movement. This is seen in both Bishop Stillingfleet's attempt in the *Irenicum* (1659) to show how episcopalian and presbyterian polity differences could be satisfied, and Peter King's *Enquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship of the Primitive Church* (1712), in which he argues that bishops are simply elders with administrative responsibilities yielding only two orders of clergy in the early church: deacon and elder.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Peter King's *Enquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship of the Primitive Church* (1712) is a seminal work on which Wesley based his claim to be able to ordain elders even though he was a priest in the Church of England.

The search for either confirmation or reformation in the Anglican Church brought early Greek theologians into heightened awareness in the eighteenth century England. This heightened awareness even came to a point that some in the Anglican Church, especially John Wesley's father Samuel, even preferred the early Greek theologians like Basil, Chrysostom, Clement of Alexandria, Clement of Rome, Origen, Justin Martyr, Macarius, and etc. over later, Latin theologians such as Cyprian and Augustine.<sup>14</sup> Campbell speaks of Samuel Wesley passing this preference to his son John: "Samuel Wesley functioned as a sort of funnel through which the Anglican culture of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries flowed into the rectory at Epworth and saturated its inhabitants."<sup>15</sup> In Samuel Wesley's work *Advice to a Young Clergyman* (1735) he instructs reading of (to name a few) the Apostolic Fathers, Eusebius, Athanasius, Basil, Chrysostom, as well as contemporary writings by conservative Anglicans like Pearson. He further instructs, "if you have a mind to step a little lower", to study Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and progressive Anglicans like Bishop Stillingfleet (though he points to numerous errors). On January 26, 1725, Samuel Wesley promised to send his *Advice* to John Wesley who recently had decided to seek ordination as an Anglican priest. Samuel also sent two additional letters urging his son John to "master" and "digest" Chrysostom's work *De Sacerdotio*. As we can see, Samuel continued to "funnel" to John Wesley conservative Anglican theologians who had great appreciation of the early Greek theologians of the ancient church.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Maddox, "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy", 30.

<sup>15</sup> Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

### *Early Church influence upon John Wesley*

In attempts to understand John Wesley's connection to the Eastern Orthodox paradigm of anthropology, soteriology, and teleology we must understand how John Wesley derived his theology through his life experience. When John Wesley reached Oxford University in 1720 he found a world already inundated with the ancient church and its theologians. In speaking of John Wesley's arrival at Oxford, Campbell writes,

By the time [John] Wesley arrived in Oxford in 1720, the University's libraries were replete with scholarly editions of ancient Christian works, learned histories of the early Christian centuries, and a host of tracts and books claiming 'Christian antiquity' and 'the Church Fathers' to be on their sides in the many-faceted inter-Christian polemics of that age.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the fact that Oxford University, even at John Wesley's time, was a stronghold for the conservative Anglican position, John Wesley did not, strictly speaking, heed his father's advice between 1725 and 1730. In his diaries he records that he only read a few of the patristic writers, mostly Augustine, and made a translation of Justin Martyr's *Apology*. Additionally, K. Steve McCormick shows that during this time John Wesley read John Chrysostom.<sup>18</sup> In 1729 John Wesley returned to Oxford University full-time after serving as his father's assistant in Epworth and Wroot for two years. When John Wesley returned to Oxford, he joined a society started by his brother Charles Wesley that other Oxford students nicknamed "The Holy Club". Outler describes the society as "a small semimonastic group [that] had been gathered by his [John Wesley's] brother Charles for systematic Bible study, mutual discipline in devotion and frequent Communion. This group had developed a keen interest in the ancient liturgies and the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>18</sup> K. Steve McCormick, "Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm of Faith and Love," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 26, no. 1 (Spring 1991), 57.

monastic piety of the fourth-century ‘desert fathers’.”<sup>19</sup> John Wesley’s involvement in the Holy Club led him into intense study of the ancient church and its theologians. In spring of 1732 the Holy Club began to observe fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays, which occurred only months after John Wesley read Robert Nelson’s *Companion to the Festivals of Fast of the Church of England* (1704). This extreme asceticism led the *Fog’s Weekly Journal* to, as Campbell writes, “accuse the group of taking Origen as their pattern in an attempt to rise to the contemplation of spiritual things and to divest their sense of attachments to earthly objects...”<sup>20</sup> John Wesley delved further into patristic writings between June and December of 1732 reading the Apostolic Constitutions, the Apostolic Canons, William Cave’s *Primitive Christianity*, and the writings of Ephraem Syrus.

However, what is extremely important to note is that in 1732 the Holy Club admitted John Clayton, whom Outler describes as “a competent patristics scholar,”<sup>21</sup> into the society. In fact, from Wesley’s diaries we learn that the Holy Club began its weekly fasts at Clayton’s suggestion. Furthermore, Wesley writes that he studied the Apostolic Constitutions and Canons with Clayton. Indeed, John Clayton can possibly be seen as a prime catalyst for John Wesley’s growing interest in early Greek writers. John Clayton was also a Non-Juror, who were members of the Church of England but refused to take Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy to William and Mary due to their oaths previously made to James II. Both Christian antiquity and a more progressive form of Anglicanism heavily influenced Non-Jurors. Dr. Thomas Deacon, a noted Non-Juror of the time who

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<sup>19</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 9.

headed John Clayton's particular circle of Non-Jurors, used the 1549 Prayer Book, which retained the co-mixture, prayers for the dead, an epiclesis in the Eucharistic prayer, and an oblatory prayer in the Eucharist. Thomas Deacon also proposed thrice immersion Baptism, for Baptism to occur only between Easter and Pentecost, administration of Baptism by one's own sex (i.e., the reintroduction of the ancient order of deaconess), and exorcisms at Baptism.<sup>22</sup>

In 1733, John Wesley met Thomas Deacon through John Clayton, and Deacon was impressed with Wesley. In fact, John Wesley later submitted to Thomas Deacon an "Essay upon the Stationary Fasts", which Deacon published with his own works. Additionally, from around the same period dates a loose-leaf sheet of paper, found along with Wesley's notes on the Apostolic Constitutions and Canons, in which Wesley writes that he will only practice Baptism by immersion, that he will mix water with wine at the Eucharist, that he will pray an epiclesis in the Eucharist, and that he will pray for the faithfully departed, to name a few practices derived from that text.<sup>23</sup>

Outler describes this period in John Wesley's life as lacking of joy and serenity, though he was questing for the perfection as he read in the early Greek theologians. He found this quest to be so important the he even considered moving the Holy Club away from Oxford to a more remote locale where they may be less distracted.<sup>24</sup> In September of 1735, John Wesley accepted an invitation to move the Holy Club to Georgia to be missionaries to the Native Americans and the colonists. There is much speculation as to why John Wesley would so readily accept this missionary post. In his doctorate thesis

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<sup>22</sup> Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 28-29.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>24</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 10.

titled "Restoring Primitive Christianity: John Wesley and Georgia, 1735-1737"<sup>25</sup>

Geordan Hammond remarks that many scholars offer simplistic reasons for Wesley's decision. Some attribute Wesley's decision to the death of his father or to his interest in Georgia as a prison colony. Hammond offers a multi-faceted rationale emphasizing John Wesley's desire to minister to the Native Americans:

This was to be the means by which he [John Wesley] could revive primitive Christianity through learning the meaning of the true primitive gospel by preaching to Indians. Wesley envisioned primitive Christianity would be modeled in Georgia by transferring there not only some of the members but the practices of the Oxford Holy Club. While it is somewhat misleading to whittle down his motivation to a single reason, there is substantial truth in the statement that Wesley went to Georgia to revive primitive Christianity amongst the Indians.<sup>26</sup>

Though only a few members of the Holy Club could accompany John Wesley on his voyage, he was undeterred in his desire to minister to the Native Americans and colonists in a unique manner. John Wesley was determined to restore the primitive church in this new land with the ancient church's discipline and liturgical practices.

Outler notes that Wesley had an immense stipend for books while in Georgia, and during that time amassed an impressive library that included William Beveridge's *Pandectae*, which is a two-volume work filled with ancient, Eastern liturgical texts and inundated with works of John Chrysostom.<sup>27</sup> John Wesley, heavily influenced by Beveridge's work and the teachings of the Non-Jurors, decided to experiment with the liturgy. These liturgical experiments were seen by many colonists as being strange and peculiar to the point that the magistrate of Frederica said to Wesley, "The people...say *they* are Protestant. But as for *you*, they cannot tell what religion you are of. They never

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<sup>25</sup> Geordan Hammond, "Restoring Primitive Christianity: John Wesley and Georgia, 1735-1737" (doctoral thesis submitted to The University of Manchester, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> McCormick, "Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley", 51.

heard of such religion before. They do not know what to make of it.”<sup>28</sup> John Wesley’s experiments were so unpopular that eight of the grand jury charges brought against him in 1737 were over liturgical or ecclesiastical matters.

### ***Wesley and the Moravians***

During John Wesley’s mission to Georgia he also came into contact with German pietism through his encounters with the Moravians. Like John Wesley, the Moravians also strove to be guided by the early church. They descended from and were heavily identified with the Hussites, which were the followers of John Hus, who attempted to purify the Catholic Church by restoring primitive Christianity. A subtle but significant difference between the Moravians and John Wesley is that the Moravians placed a heavy emphasis on New Testament Christianity in the time of the Apostles, as opposed to John Wesley’s emphasis on primitive Christianity as found in the Ante-Nicene church.

In his work Hammond notes that John Wesley had a great affinity towards the Moravians immediately when he set foot on the *Simmonds* en route to Georgia. In fact, Wesley devoted an extraordinary amount of time on the *Simmonds* in worship with the Moravians and learning German to better communicate with them. In some ways, John Wesley saw something of that for which he strove in the Moravians.<sup>29</sup> The relationship between the Moravians and Wesley was one of respect, but tension. Wesley attempted to use Moravian women to be deaconesses in baptizing the Native Americans, and suggested the Moravians adopt more primitive practices like weekly communion. In reading the diaries of certain Moravian leaders of this time, like Spangenberg, it seems

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<sup>28</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 12-13.

<sup>29</sup> Hammond, “Restoring Primitive Christianity”, 121-125.



that Wesley's suggestions were either adopted or at least considered. However, especially early in the Georgia mission, Wesley remained heavily influenced by the Non-Jurors. In fact, in a letter penned by Spangenberg, it seems that Wesley believed that any ordination occurring outside of the apostolic succession was invalid, and thus all Lutheran and Calvin ministers, as well as the sacraments they perform, to also be invalid. However, later Wesley did experience the ordination of the Moravian Anton Seiffert, and spoke of how the ceremony was in harmony with the spirit of the primitive church. Yet, Hammond speaks to the fact that a few weeks before Seiffert's ordination, Johan Töltzschig convinced John Wesley and Benjamin Ingham, another member of the Holy Club, that the Moravian episcopacy did fall under apostolic succession through the Waldensian Bishop Stephen.<sup>30</sup>

Although doctrinal issues would later emerge between Wesley and the Moravians of the Fetter Lane Society, Wesley remained close to the Moravians in Georgia, especially after Benjamin Ingham and Charles Wesley returned to England. Indeed, Wesley saw the Moravians as the incarnation of the early church in their episcopacy, discipline, and holy living. His contact with the Moravians began the shift from Wesley attempting to reach the primitive church through liturgical precision to living a holy life through faith in Christ.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the failure of the Georgia mission, Outler is correct in asserting that Georgia had a positive impact upon Wesley's theology for two reasons. First, in Georgia, Wesley's doctrinal ideas became more concrete. Secondly, he came into contact with the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 133-135.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 142.

Moravians and their own understanding of the patristic writings.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, Campbell states that while in Georgia, Wesley moderated many of his hard-line Non-Juror beliefs.<sup>33</sup> Finally, David C. Ford notes that during Wesley's excursion in Georgia he encountered the writings of Macarius.<sup>34</sup> Outler says that in this moment John Wesley was on the threshold of being the great revivalist, evangelist, and practical genius with an impressive repertoire of life experience behind him:

The unique mixture of theological notions thus far accumulated was now to be smelted and forged into an integral and dynamic theology in which Eastern notions of *synelthesis* (dynamic interaction between God's will and man's) were fused with the classical Protestant *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura*, and with the Moravian stress upon "inner feeling."<sup>35</sup>

Campbell also remarks that during the Georgia Mission, Wesley became critical of the Apostolic Constitutions and Canons, and seeing error in his previous interpretation. Wesley practically jettisoned these works, which were seminal to John Clayton's and Thomas Deacon's understanding, from his library. This led him to hold a different view than he had before of disciplinary and liturgical practices. On John Wesley's patristic shift Campbell writes, "Having recognized the eccentricity of his earlier uses of Christian antiquity, he would try in the future to see antiquity as a supplement to the authority of scripture..."<sup>36</sup> This of course is not an abandonment of the ideals of the early church, but instead a shift of use in sources.

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<sup>32</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 12-13.

<sup>33</sup> Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 37.

<sup>34</sup> David C. Ford, "Saint Makarios of Egypt and John Wesley", 285.

<sup>35</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 40.

### *Wesley after Georgia*

In the years after the Georgia experience John Wesley continues to employ ancient church writings and theologians, save the Apostolic Constitutions and Canons, as wellsprings of his own theology. A poem inspired by Clement of Alexandria appears in John and Charles Wesley's *Hymns and Sacred Poems* in 1739. John Wesley also relied on the writing of Clement of Alexandria when first laying out his tract titled "The Character of a Methodist", which he published in 1742. In speaking of this tract, Wesley later writes in his journal, "Five or six and thirty years ago, I much admired the character of a perfect Christian drawn up by Clemens Alexandrinus. Five or six and twenty years ago, a thought came to my mind, of drawing such a character myself, only in a more scriptural manner, and mostly in the very words of Scripture."<sup>37</sup> Also, it is during this time that Wesley dove into Stillingfleet's *Irenicum* and King's *Enquiry*. Additionally, starting in 1749, John Wesley began his *Christian Library*, which included the Roman Catholic Fleury's *Meours des Chrétien*s (translations of second-century church fathers), an abridgement of St. Macarius' *Spiritual Homilies*, and an abridgement of William Cave's *Primitive Christianity*. Finally, when Wesley described the structure of the early Methodist society, he spoke of how it was a parallel to early church structure.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, we can see that neither did Wesley abandon his love of early Greek theologians nor did he change his paradigm of using patristic writings in a progressive, Anglican way.

In this snapshot into a portion of Wesley's life we can see how he both valued and implemented his understanding of early Greek. We can see that different writings held

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<sup>37</sup> John Wesley, *Journal*, 5 March 1767, Vol. 3, in *Works*, ed. Jackson, 272-274.

<sup>38</sup> Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 41-46.

different places of prominence at different times in his understanding and development of both the Methodist movement and his own theology. Yet, though Wesley's whole life and the totality of his contact to early theologians has not been fully covered in this writing, we can see a picture forming of a man and a culture who are deeply indebted to this specific period of time in church history. Even more, we see in John Wesley one who attempts to practically implement the learning from his ancient forerunners into his contemporary time.

### ***Introduction into Eastern Orthodoxy***

The development of Wesley's *via salutis*, especially in his understanding of perfection, is learnedly derived from sources that are common to the modern-day Eastern Orthodox Church. In attempts to see these commonalities it is important to lay side by side the Eastern, Western, and Wesleyan notions of anthropology, soteriology, and teleology.

The traditions and understandings of the Eastern Orthodox Church are very deep and historic. There is not one theologian that has definitively set the paradigm of thinking for Orthodoxy, but instead the ancient church fathers, who sometimes have points of divergence, form together a foundation for the church. On the other hand, the Methodist movement, while reaching to the same sources, has the interpretation of John Wesley of these sources in attempts to form a more unified understanding. This discussion of Orthodoxy below is in no way an attempt to systematize the anthropology, soteriology, and teleology, but rather loosely show the beliefs of the church through the writings of

the early church fathers in hopes to see both points of agreement and dissimilarity with the Wesleyan understanding.

## II. Anthropology

In his anthropological understandings, John Wesley draws from early church writers, who also influence Eastern Orthodoxy, to address his concerns of the Western paradigm of anthropology, especially on the matters of free will and optimism. Both Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic/Protestant anthropologies begin with God creating humanity in innocence. However, Eastern Orthodoxy sees humanity as not being complete at the point of creation. Noted Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky writes, “Man was created perfect. That, however, does not mean that his first state is identical with his last, or that he was united with God from the moment of his creation. Before the fall, Adam was neither a ‘pure nature’ nor a deified man.”<sup>39</sup> Instead, God created humanity with a desire to progress from our pre-fallen state to a higher state. In our attempt to better understand this notion of pre-fallen progression we must understand the difference between the Eastern Orthodox notions of the “image of God” and the “likeness of God”.<sup>40</sup>

In Eastern Orthodoxy when one speaks of the “image of God” they speak of Godlike characteristics that humanity has. Examples of these characteristics are rationality, freedom of the will, and morality. In the beginning as God created all that is seen by proclaiming it into existence, i.e. “Let there be”. However, in the case of humans,

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<sup>39</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. LTD, 1968), 126.

<sup>40</sup> Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy”, 34.

God fashioned us in the very image of God or, as some Eastern Orthodox theologians state, humanity is imprinted with the divine nature, a reflection of the divine, or that humanity is mirrored to the divine. Thus, that which gives humanity its uniqueness in creation are the very qualities that humanity has mirrored from the divine.<sup>41</sup> The freedom of humanity's will is a common example used by Orthodox theologians. God did not simply create humans with a free will. Instead, humanity has a free will in that we mirror the divine, free will.<sup>42</sup>

On the other side of the coin to the "image of God" is the "likeness of God". The likeness of God is the actualization and realization of the image of God. As Randy Maddox states, "The 'likeness of God' was the *realization* of that potentiality [the image of God]."<sup>43</sup> For instance, the freedom of the will is part of the natural human for Eastern Orthodox anthropology. Therefore, all persons have a free will for humanity received the capacity for a free will when God created us in the divine image. However, we do not always use our free will to be in total communion with the divine will. After the Fall, humanity has employed our free will in corrupt ways, since the image of God, that which makes humanity unique, was not eradicated. The likeness of God is the realization of the powerful image of God that we as humans have. Being in the likeness of God is using our nature in a divine manner. The image of God is that static quality that belongs to all of humanity, but the likeness of God is that dynamic progression into using our power in communion with God.

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<sup>41</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, "The Human Person as Image and Likeness of God.," in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 78.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 81

<sup>43</sup> Maddox, "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy", 34.

### *Western Anthropology*

The notion of Western anthropology roughly begins with the same understanding that is found in Eastern Orthodoxy. Humanity is created by God in complete and total innocence, and is endowed with the gift of autonomy. In this pre-Fallen state, humanity is not only innocent, but also is perfect in the understanding that all creation of God, like God, is perfect. However, pride befell humanity, and the first sin entered the human race. In this instant, the image of God, the God-like characteristics humanity received in creation, are lost, and humanity has fallen from its original righteousness and perfection.<sup>44</sup> In this post-Fallen state, humanity lives in the perpetual sin of Adam, which is also called original sin. In his work on the fall of creation, Ian A. McFarland speaks to the rise of the doctrine of original sin in the writings of Augustine. On Augustine's notion of the doctrine he writes,

...Adam and Eve's violation of God's primordial commandment against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:6) caused a fundamental deformation in humanity's relationship to God, each other, and the rest of creation; and...this 'fall' includes among its consequences that all human beings thereafter are born into a state of estrangement from God—an "original" sin that condemns all individuals prior and apart from their committing any 'actual' sins in time and space.<sup>45</sup>

McFarland continues in his work to show that in pre-Augustine thinking the notion of original sin spoke to the first sin of Adam and Eve, and therefore had more of a historic understanding. Yet, in the writings of Augustine, the notion that the original sin of Adam and Eve placed all subsequent humanity under the captivity of sin later emerges, especially due to his attacks against the Pelagians. Therefore, we can see how Western

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<sup>44</sup> A. O. Dyson, "Anthropology," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983).

<sup>45</sup> Ian A. McFarland, *In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 29.

thought, especially on the notion of Original Sin, evolves under the influence of Augustine.<sup>46</sup>

Of course, as with Eastern Orthodoxy, the theology of the Western church is not monolithic, but has its own nuances. The Roman Catholic Church affirms the freedom of the will in humanity, but sees original sin playing an ongoing role in humanity. In Roman Catholicism, original sin deprives humanity of all supernatural gifts of God, which makes personal sin unavoidable for each human. As stated above, the Roman Catholic Church believes in the freedom of the will, but devoid of the grace of God humanity is destined to sin. On the other hand, the Reformers adopted what they believed to be a more ancient notion of the loss of the image of God and original sin by reaching to Augustine.<sup>47</sup> In the Reformers' understanding, through the Fall the natural of humanity is completely corrupt, and thus we have lost our free will. John Calvin articulates this understanding best in his notion of total depravity, in which all faculties, both natural and supernatural, are completely and totally corrupted. In this understanding, original sin corrupts humanity to the state in which humanity can do no other than sin. Thus, in the Fall, all of humanity through the offense of Adam lost perfection and innocence—lost the image of God.<sup>48</sup>

The understanding between the image and likeness of God in Eastern Orthodoxy shows an understanding of the Fall that is different from the Western understanding. In the Eastern Orthodox paradigm, Adam is innocent but incomplete, being in the full image

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>47</sup> Bruce Vawter, "Original Sin," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983).

<sup>48</sup> Eamon Duffy, "Total Depravity," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983).



of God but not in the full likeness. Adam could have grown into the likeness of God by choosing to obey God, but instead he became disobedient. Now Adam, who still retains the image of God, is no longer innocent; instead he begins using the image of God for self-guided ends—losing the desire to be like God. Therefore, in Orthodoxy we can see the loss of the original innocence, but the retaining of the image of God.

It is also important to note that the sin of Adam is only the sin of Adam; there is no notion of original sin as it would be developed in the Western tradition. However, this does not mean that all of humanity in the beginning of our lives are as Adam was before the Fall, i.e. innocent. Indeed we are now born into a weakened state of humanity full of death and disease. Maddox writes, “while Orthodoxy clearly believes that the death and disease thus introduced have so weakened the human intellect and will that we can no longer hope to attain the likeness of God, they do not hold that the Fall deprived us of all grace, or the responsibility for responding to God...”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, for Orthodoxy much more than for Western understandings, the Fall is more of a relational shift between God and humanity instead of an ontological shift.

### ***Wesleyan Anthropology***

In the Wesleyan understanding God created humanity in the image of God as an incorruptible, sinless, and holy creature. John Wesley writes, “By the free, unmerited love of God he [humanity] was holy and happy; he [humanity] knew, loved, enjoyed God, which is (in substance) life everlasting.”<sup>50</sup> Our lives were in harmony with God,

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<sup>49</sup> Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy”, 34.

<sup>50</sup> John Wesley, "Justification By Faith," in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Oulter and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §I.1

with one another, and with nature. Charles Yrigoyen, states, “Their [humanity] life was organized around love.”<sup>51</sup> In his sermon on the image of God, John Wesley writes, “And in several properties of it, as well as in the faculty of itself, man a first resembled God. His understanding was just; everything appeared to him according to its real nature. It never was betrayed into any mistake; whatever he perceived, he perceived as it was.”<sup>52</sup> Yet, something went horribly wrong; our obedience faltered, and our love failed. In that moment of disobedience, we separated ourselves from God and embraced the corruptible and mortal. Wesley writes, “Thus ‘through the offence of one’ all are dead, dead to God, dead in sin, dwelling in a corruptible, mortal body, shortly to be dissolved, and under the sentence of death eternal.”<sup>53</sup>

Not only is the sentence of death placed upon humanity, but also the image of God has become distorted and corrupted. Theodore Runyon puts it this way: “As a result, our reason, will, and freedom now serve distorted human ends. They are employed to rationalize our self-seeking goals, defend ourselves against our self-induced insecurities, and idealize our bondage.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, the natural dimension of the image of God that gives us the ability to have a conscious relationship with God is now used to rationalize our sin. Our political dimension of the image of God given to us to have responsibility over the world has become the source of our power to dominate and exploit creation. The moral dimension of the image of God through which God breathed into our lives love, justice,

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<sup>51</sup> Charles Yrigoyen Jr., *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 29.

<sup>52</sup> John Wesley, "The Image of God," in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §I.1

<sup>53</sup> Wesley, "Justification By Faith", §I.6.

<sup>54</sup> Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 20.

mercy, and truth has now contorted to meet our manufactured morality. On the Fall, John Wesley writes,

How much the will suffered when its guide was thus blinded we may easily comprehend. Instead of the glorious one that possessed it whole *before*, it was *now* seized by legions of vile affections. Grief and anger and hatred and fear and shame, at once rushed in upon it; the whole train of earthly, sensual, and devilish passions fastened on and tore it to pieces. Nay, love itself, that ray of the Godhead, that balm of life, now became a torment...<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, we see that the situation of humanity is grave for God created us with such immense power, which we did not lose when we initially disobeyed God, but instead we distorted our power to serve our own destructive nature.<sup>56</sup>

Yet, what makes the state of humanity all the more precarious is the fact that we are blinded to the very gravity of our situation. In his sermon “Awake, Thou That Sleepest” Charles Wesley preaches,

Now ‘they that sleep, sleep in the night.’ The state of nature is a state of utter darkness, a state wherein ‘darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people.’ The poor unawakened sinner, how much knowledge soever he may have as to other things, has no knowledge of himself. In this respect ‘he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.’ He knows not that he is a fallen spirit, whose only business in the present world is to recover from his fall, to regain that image of God wherein he was created. He sees *no necessity* for ‘the one thing needful’...<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, the natural state of humanity is a perpetual dreamscape in which we do not fully understand both God and ourselves. We are unconscious to reality in which we truly live, and thus lack both the will and the sense of urgency to repent and turn to God.

John Wesley inherits this understanding of anthropology from the Western church in which he was raised. In the beginning humanity is both innocent and perfect, and thus

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<sup>55</sup> Wesley, “The Image of God”, §II.3.

<sup>56</sup> John Wesley, “New Birth,” in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §I.1.

<sup>57</sup> Charles Wesley, “Awake, Thou That Sleepest,” in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §I.2.

meaning no room for progress. Being made in the image of God, humanity is able to choose to disobey God, causing the Fall. The effects of the Fall are a universally corrupted state in which our free will is unable to choose anything but sin—total depravity (though Wesley never uses this term). Therefore, all of humanity is guilty, unaware of this guilt, and unable to have the power to even choose a Godly life.<sup>58</sup> John Wesley employs the same language as his brother, Charles, that this state of humanity is as though being in a deep sleep: “By sleep is signified the natural state of man: that deep sleep of the soul into which the sin of Adam hath cast all who spring from his loins; that supineness, indolence, and stupidity, that insensibility of his real condition, wherein every man comes into the world, and continues till the voice of God awakes him.”<sup>59</sup>

In comparing the understandings of Orthodoxy and Wesley we can see some similarities between them, as well as some basic stark differences. As shown, there is no question that John Wesley was influenced by early Greek church fathers who also are influential to Eastern Orthodoxy. Yet, when we place the Eastern Orthodox understandings next to Wesley’s we can see an extremely deep connection, one that may even be deeper than Wesley’s connection to Protestantism or Roman Catholicism.

There are significant differences between Wesley and Orthodoxy on the question of anthropology. As outlined above, Orthodoxy sees humanity as created by God totally innocent, but not yet complete. On the other hand, John Wesley, drawing from his Western paradigm, sees humanity as being perfect and innocent at creation. Of course having a different starting point yields different trajectories, and yet at the same time there is an amazing amount of optimism for humanity in both Orthodoxy and John

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<sup>58</sup> Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy”, 34.

<sup>59</sup> Wesley, "Awake, Thou That Sleepest", §I.1.

Wesley. K. Steve McCormick in his work looking in the comparisons between Wesley and John Chrysostom remarks,

Wesley's anthropology is rooted in grace, and that nuances his doctrine of original sin (its meaning and function), linked to the idea of prevenient grace as it is. The prior presence and work of grace is accented in Wesley's doctrine of original sin and this helps him create his 'third alternative': a doctrine of the fall which speaks clearly of total depravity but which avoids the ontological degradation of humanity and opens the way for an optimistic view of humanity under grace.<sup>60</sup>

While it is true that John Wesley did not simply copy the Eastern Orthodox notion of anthropology, it is also true that he did not simply copy the Western notion of anthropology. McCormick is correct in asserting that Wesley forged a new way, a third way, which one could say forms a synergy between the two. Wesley retained the Western notions of total depravity and original sin, and at the same time John Wesley introduces more Eastern Orthodox notions of optimism and responsibility of the one's predicament. Wesley accomplishes this new understanding through his notion of the prevenient grace of God, which, he argues, is universal and calls all to repent of their depraved state.

This prevenient grace of God is not only a call from God to repent, but also requires a human response for Wesley. While the Western churches all have some sort notion of primary divine action in the salvation of humanity (which is prevenient grace for John Wesley), it is Wesley who sees that divine action occurring universally and necessitating a response. Randy Maddox speaks of this tension in Wesley between the Divine Initiative and Divine Empowerment saying, "Wesley was firmly convinced of the primacy of Divine *grace* in the work of salvation. At the same time, he frequently found it important in his practical-theological activity to clarify the role of the *responsible*

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<sup>60</sup> McCormick, "Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley", 62.

human participation in this gracious work.”<sup>61</sup> It is this notion of co-operation or responsibility that John Wesley draws from the early Eastern theologians who see in salvation not only a relational change (the perception between humanity and God), but also a real change (an ontological change) that empowers humanity to be able to respond to the call of God.<sup>62</sup>

The image of God is of great importance in both Orthodox and Wesleyan understanding in that the image of God is that which gives humanity its uniqueness in creation. Additionally, being created in the image of God has connotations for both Orthodoxy and Wesley. Both John Wesley and Orthodoxy assert that the image of God is not eradicated in the Fall. Instead, Orthodoxy and Wesley see the image of God as being something necessary to the definition of humanity. Yet, in both Orthodoxy and Wesleyan understandings the image of God is corrupted in a way in that it cannot direct itself back toward God.

Manichaeism was perhaps the most dangerous heresy of John Chrysostom’s era. The Manicheans espoused the belief that humanity was so frail from the Fall that Christians could not participate in the divine will, which means that Christians would shirk their social and moral responsibilities. Chrysostom rebuffed the Manichaeans by stating that in creation humanity, in the image of God, received a conscience, which gave us the knowledge of the good. Even though in Orthodoxy there is a sense that the image of God is unable to now attain a life with God without the aid of God, there is a sense that

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<sup>61</sup> Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 141.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-143.

humanity naturally knows that which is good. McCormick cites a sermon of Wesley's titled "On Conscience" in which he says,

Conscience, then, is the faculty whereby we are at once conscious of our own thoughts, words, and actions, and of their merit or demerit, or their being good or bad, and consequently deserving either praise or censure...For though in one sense it may be termed 'natural', because it is found in all men, yet properly speaking it is not natural; but a supernatural gift of God above all the endowments.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, in John Wesley's sermon "On Working Out Your Own Salvation" he states, "No man living is destitute of what is vulgarly called *natural conscience*. But this is not natural: It is more properly termed, *preventing grace*."<sup>64</sup> In this quotation from John Wesley, we can see his agreement with Chrysostom that conscience, or what John Wesley renames "preventing grace" is a gift that humanity receives from God. However, the means by which this gift comes into the hands of humanity differs between the two theologians. On the one hand, Chrysostom sees conscience as universal to humanity for conscience is a characteristic humanity receives from God when we were created in the image of God. On the other hand, Wesley sees the prevenient grace of God as a supernatural gift of God given universally to humanity in the face of the Fall. Therefore, humanity is able to respond to God either through the Orthodox notion of conscience or the Wesleyan notion of prevenient grace, both of which come from God through different means.

The notion of the freedom of the will is emphasized both Wesley's theology and the Orthodox understanding. Gregory of Nyssa spoke of humanity's power to choose and change. In fact, for Gregory of Nyssa, the freedom to choose the good is the primary

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<sup>63</sup> McCormick, "Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley", 58.

<sup>64</sup> John Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §3 (*emphasis original*).

characteristic humanity receives in the image of God at creation. Thus, humanity has the ability or capacity to choose and move toward God in perfection. Macarius also places tremendous emphasis on the freedom of the will even to the point that he speaks of being able to choose to leave the divine life.

As early as 1725, we can see John Wesley's detestation of the notion of predestination in his correspondence with his mother Susanna. In one letter, Wesley writes,

What, then, shall I say of Predestination? An everlasting purpose of God to deliver some from damnation does, I suppose, exclude all from that deliverance who are not chosen. And if it was inevitably decreed from eternity that such a determinate part of mankind should be saved, and none beside them, a vast majority of the world were only born to eternal death, without so much as a possibility of avoiding it. How is this consistent with either the Divine Justice or Mercy? Is it merciful to ordain a creature to everlasting misery? Is it just to punish man for crimes which he could not but commit? How is man, if necessarily determined to one way of acting, a free agent? To lie under either a physical or a moral necessity is entirely repugnant to human liberty. But that God should be the author of sin and injustice (which must, I think, be the consequence of maintaining this opinion) is a contradiction to the clearest ideas we have of the divine nature and perfections.<sup>65</sup>

Later in his life, Wesley, still in conflict with Calvinism, wrote an essay titled "Thoughts upon Necessity" in which he attempts to tear down the deterministic predestination of his opponents. In this work we can see that though Wesley's theology may have evolved over his life, his stalwart opposition to predestination remained. Wesley argues, "If all the passions, the tempers, the actions, of men are whole independent on their own choice, are governed by a principle exterior to themselves, then there can be no moral good or evil."<sup>66</sup> Wesley continues this line of thought to the arena of rewards and punishment. Indeed, for Wesley determinism not only makes humanity innocent of their sinfulness,

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<sup>65</sup> Frank Baker, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker, Vol. 25 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 175.

<sup>66</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 480-481.



but also puts the authorship of sin in the hands of God. On judgment, Wesley writes that on the final day one could say,

Lord, why am I doomed to dwell with everlasting burnings? For not doing good? Was it ever in my power to do any good action? Could I ever do any but by that grace which thou hadst determined not to give me? For doing evil? Lord, did I ever do any which I was not bound to do by thy own decree...was there ever one hour, from my cradle to my grace, wherein I could act otherwise than I did?<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, the freedom of the will is of paramount importance in John Wesley's understanding of anthropology, morality, and even soteriology. On this point his thought shares the conviction of Eastern Orthodoxy of the importance of being able to hold humanity accountable for actual sins that are committed. In Orthodoxy this is accomplished through seeing the original sin of Adam as not being translatable to his descendants. However, John Wesley, who retains a Western notion of Original sin, sees the need for freedom of the will in the same light, but in a different way. The freedom of the will places the responsibility of sin solely on humanity, and not by the hand of God for John Wesley. Yet, that which places responsibility upon us, through the prevenient grace of God, can also allow us to choose a Godly life. However, John Wesley placed such emphasis on the freedom of the will that he even believed, as Macarius, that one could move away from this Godly life. In fact, John Wesley even quotes Macarius on this notion saying, "And if the mind but a little give way to unclean thoughts; lo, the spirits of error have entered in, and overturned all the beauties that were there, and laid the soul to waste."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 483-484.

<sup>68</sup> Snyder, "John Wesley and Macarius the Egyptian", 56.

### III. Soteriology

The Western and Eastern churches have deep and diverse histories on the matter of soteriology, but in the churches themselves differ in their understanding of specific teaching of salvation. John Wesley's soteriology is heavily influenced by the Western churches in language and understanding. Yet, as with anthropology, when John Wesley is met with a conflicting doctrine in the Western understanding he reaches into the Eastern Orthodox understanding through the early, Greek writers of the primitive church; this yields for Wesley a synthesized soteriology that draws from Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Orthodox traditions.

#### *Eastern Orthodox Mystical Stages*

In Eastern Orthodox soteriology, salvation is seen as the final deification of humanity through the work of Christ in his Incarnation and Resurrection. In mystical Eastern Orthodoxy understanding there is a path of deification that Vladimir Lossky attempts to show in his work *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*<sup>69</sup>. This mystical path is not a strict *ordo salutis* as in the Western churches, and it is not believed to be a path for all Christians. Instead this mystical path is only a few truly devout, which has monastic and ascetic undertones.

The first stage of this mystical journey is *katharsis*, which literally means “purging”. The notion underlying the understanding of *katharsis* can almost be seen as weight, in that one cannot begin the journey to deification if they are tethered or weighted down. In explaining the first stage, Vladimir Lossky writes, “a purification, a

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<sup>69</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. LTD, 1968).

*katharsis*, is necessary. One must abandon all that is impure and even all that is pure. One must then scale the most sublime heights of sanctity leaving behind one all the divine luminaries, all the heavenly sounds and words. It is only thus that one may penetrate to the darkness wherein He is who beyond all created things makes his dwelling.”<sup>70</sup> It is interesting that *katharsis* is from those things which are both impure and pure. In this understanding, *katharsis* is an ascetic divorcing of oneself from the world.

In attempts to answer any confusion, Lossky uses the example of Moses at Sinai as an illustration. When God commands Moses to come up to meet God on the mountain, Moses must first purify himself. Lossky writes, “Moses begins by purifying himself. Then he separates himself from all that is unclean.”<sup>71</sup> In a way, for humanity to rise to God they must, in some ways, mimic Christ who emptied himself, but instead of *kenosis* one must undergo *katharsis*.

The second stage on the path to deification in the Eastern Orthodox understanding is *theoria*, which is sometimes called “illumination” or “contemplation”. Some prefer not using the term “contemplation” in English for it connotes a sort of passivity or quietism. It is however, a more active undertaking. Illumination also does not convey an appropriate meaning, because with mysticism it could sound more like the receiving some hidden knowledge. Instead, it should be understood as “beholding” or “gazing”.

A New Testament example of this second stage of *theoria* is the Transfiguration of Christ, in which a small band of Apostles beheld the transfigured Lord before them. Returning to the illustration of Moses, St. Gregory Nazianzen says, “I was running to lay hold on God, and thus I went up into the mount, and drew aside the curtain of the cloud,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 27

and entered away from matter and from material things, and as far as I could I withdrew within myself. And then when I looked up, I scarce saw the back parts of God...”<sup>72</sup> In the stage of *theoria* one moves closer to God, and in moving closer to God one, through the aid of God, comes to see the true nature of the divine. It is important to note that in this step the vision of God is not hidden, but instead made available to those who have worthily purged themselves in preparation. Therefore, one can see the divine nature and their own potentiality to be in the likeness of God.<sup>73</sup> In the stage of *theoria*, one can truly see the Lord, and in seeing the Lord one is able to see the image and likeness of God in which they are created. In the stage of *theoria*, we not only see God, but we also see our potentiality.

*Theosis* is the goal of the Christian life in the Eastern Orthodox understanding, and the final stage of the mystical path. Recalling the brief outline of anthropology it is not a returning to the state of Adam pre-Fall in Eden. *Theosis* is also not the restoring of the lost “image of God”, for the image of God is not lost in Orthodox understanding. As Peter Bouteneff writes in his article on the Orthodox understanding of Christ and salvation, “When the Fathers describe salvation as ‘restoration’ they do not mean a return to some historic, perfect, deified original state but the restoration of the essential will of God for humanity united to him in perfect freedom and love.”<sup>74</sup> Therefore, in the final stage of theosis the likeness of God is restored in humanity. *Theosis* is being in both the full image and likeness of God, which is being in communion with the divine will. In

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<sup>72</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 35-36.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-36.

<sup>74</sup> Peter Bouteneff, “Christ and Salvation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 94

*theoria*, one experiences the glory of God as the Apostles did from afar at the Transfiguration. However, in *theosis* we intimately experience the divine will of God in harmony.

St. Irenaeus writes, “God made Himself man, that man might become God.”<sup>75</sup>

This view is found in many early church writers, including Athanasius, and serves as a good basis for understanding both the anthropology of humanity and salvation in Eastern Orthodoxy. The Incarnation becomes more of a focal point of the story of salvation. Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky writes, “The descent of the divine person of Christ makes human person capable of an ascent in the Holy Spirit. It was necessary that the voluntary humiliation, the redemptive *kenosis*, of the Son of God should take place, so that fallen men might accomplish their vocation of *theosis*.”<sup>76</sup> It is in the Incarnation that the divine initiative is shown to bring humanity into God. God, who acts first for our salvation, comes down to humanity and lives in the full image and likeness of God in our midst; redemption therefore occurs in the *kenosis*—the emptying out. In understanding the Eastern Orthodox notion of anthropology we can also see that the Incarnation would be necessary even if Adam had not fallen. However, the fall of Adam heightened the need for the Incarnation.<sup>77</sup>

### ***Western Understandings of Salvation***

As in anthropology, the Western church has varying views of salvation, but each view places heavy emphasis on justification and forgiveness. Thus, both models of

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<sup>75</sup> Irenneaus, *Against Heresies*, V

<sup>76</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 97-98

<sup>77</sup> Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy”, 36.

salvation employ a similar judicial vocabulary of guilt, forgiveness, and mercy. In Roman Catholicism there is an *ordo salutis* (an order of salvation) through which one becomes justified. This order begins with following the law of God and coming in line with the meritorious acts of Christ through the church, until one is enabled to perform their own real merit. In this understanding, one becomes righteousness in following the law of God and meritorious acts, and that which is lacking in an individual God forgives.<sup>78</sup>

However, the Reformation championed justification by faith alone, deeming the *ordo salutis* of the Roman Catholic church as works-righteousness. In speaking of justification Martin Luther writes, “When you have learned this, you will know that you need Christ, Who suffered and rose again for you, that, believing in Him, you may through this faith become a new man, in that all your sins are forgiven, and you are justified by the merits of another, namely, of Christ alone.”<sup>79</sup> Thus, Luther places sole emphasis on the merits of Christ, as opposed to Roman Catholic views that place emphasis on the merits of Christ as allowing the merits of the individual. Thus justification for Luther is a double moment in which in an instant one is forgiven by God, and has the righteousness of Christ imputed upon them. On this Luther writes, “Faith, which is a brief and perfect fulfillment of the law, shall fill believers with so great righteousness that they shall need nothing more for their righteousness.”<sup>80</sup> Therefore, in

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<sup>78</sup> B. A. Gerrish, "Justification," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983).

<sup>79</sup> Martin Luther, *A Treatise on Christian Liberty* (Philadelphia, PA: A. J. Holman Company, 1916), 315.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

an instant one becomes sinner wrapped in the righteousness of Christ, which Luther calls *simul justus et peccator*—righteous and sinner at the same time.<sup>81</sup>

### ***Wesley's Via Salutis***

John Wesley develops his own *via salutis*—way of salvation, in response to both the Roman Catholic and Lutheran notions of salvation. Wesley sees the process of salvation of Roman Catholicism, but does not see the goal as justification. Additionally, Wesley agrees with the divine initiative of Lutheranism and Protestantism more broadly, but does not agree that the righteousness of the saints is alien to them. Instead, Wesley forges his *via salutis* by drawing from Eastern Orthodox notions through early, Greek theologians.

As Charles Wesley proclaimed, “Wherefore, ‘Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the death.’ God calleth thee by my mouth; and bids thee know thyself, thou fallen spirit, thy true state...”<sup>82</sup> Yrigoyen writes, “The answer to the desperate condition of sinners is divine grace, God’s unmerited, unearned, undeserved love at work in the world.”<sup>83</sup> In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ John Wesley sees God moving toward humanity offering divine grace. This is the “prevenient” grace of God, the grace that comes before we are able or even aware of the need to respond to God.

The salvation of humanity begins with God breaking into our unconscious reality and calling to us in the darkness of our sinful state. By God’s calling we are awakened

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<sup>81</sup> B. A. Gerrish, "Justification," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983).

<sup>82</sup> Wesley, “Awake, Thou That Sleepest”, §II.1.

<sup>83</sup> Charles Yrigoyen Jr., *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 30.

our sinful condition and its severity; we see the light of God, which sheds light upon our weakened condition. The prevenient grace of God liberates us from our corrupted capacity and gives us the ability to respond to this calling of God. In the face of our guilty reality humanity cries out to God in repentance for mercy and forgiveness.

In these initial stages of salvation we begin to see Wesley's notion of a "responsive" theology in which he sees humanity not as a passive entity in our salvation story, but as a cooperating partner with God. In his sermon "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God" Wesley says, "The life of God in the soul of a believer... immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration God's Holy Spirit... a continual action of God upon the soul, the re-action of the soul upon God."<sup>84</sup> Here John Wesley conjures an amazing image of God continually inspiring, literally breathing, into us as the Creator breathing into humanity in the beginning, and we the creation respiring—breathing back to God. Though Wesley sees God is the author of salvation, he also sees the call of God requiring a response by humanity. Thus, in God calling us from our sinful state we respond by crying out in repentance. The light of the dawning of our salvation makes us aware of our sinful condition and we pray for the forgiveness and pardoning of God. In preaching upon repentance, Wesley says, "For he that cometh unto God by this faith must fix his eye singly on his own wickedness, on his guilt and helplessness, without having the least regard to any supposed good in himself, to any virtue or righteousness whatsoever."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> John Wesley, "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God," in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §III.2.

<sup>85</sup> Wesley, "Justification By Faith", §IV.8.



It is important to note here that God offers this divine grace to all of humanity. John Wesley famously preaches, “salvation, is free in all, and free for all.”<sup>86</sup> This simple statement very powerfully rebuffs both Pelagians and Predestinarians, who believe either salvation through works or limited atonement. The salvation of God is free in all to whom it is given in that God’s granting of salvation is not based upon any power or merit of the individual. In speaking against salvation through works, Wesley says,

It does not in any wise depend either on the good works or righteousness of the receiver; not on anything he has done, or anything he is. It does not depend on his endeavours. It does not depend on his good tempers, or good desires, or good purposes and intentions; for all these flow from the free grace of God.<sup>87</sup>

Additionally, salvation is also free for all in that God graciously offers to all of humanity. Prevenient grace for Wesley is universal in that God beckons all of humanity from our natural state. John Wesley could not fathom that God would only choose some:

...the greater part of mankind God hath ordained to death, and it is not free for them. Them God hateth, and therefore before they were born decreed they should die eternally. And this he absolutely decreed; they are born for this: to be destroyed body and soul in hell. And they grow up under the irrevocable curse of God, without any possibility of redemption.<sup>88</sup>

Indeed, Wesley spends the rest of this sermon in a tirade against the notion of a limited atonement of God. Though John Wesley is opposed to the notion of limited atonement on multiple levels. He sees it contrary to the nature of God to create humanity and foreordain them to eternal death. While Wesley would agree that all are born under the curse of original sin, he sees the prevenient grace of God allowing all to have the capacity to respond to God’s redemptive work.

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<sup>86</sup> John Wesley, "Free Grace," in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §2

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, §3

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, §4

The justifying grace of God is the saving grace that cancels the guilt of our sin.<sup>89</sup> It is through the work of Jesus Christ that God forgives or pardons our sins.<sup>90</sup> Thus, for John Wesley, justification is a “relative” change in that it is God transforms our relationship with God. Hence, the once enemies of God now become in an instant the children of God. As Charles Wesley so eloquently penned in the hymn “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” writing, “God and sinners reconciled!”<sup>91</sup> Additionally, we are not only reconciled with God, but we also are granted freedom from the guilt of our sin, but not our sin in and of itself, which will come later in John Wesley’s *via salutis*.

The twin moment of justification is regeneration or new birth. Whereas, justification sparks a “relative” change, regeneration is the “real” transformation of our human nature. In explaining the nuanced difference of the twin moment of justification and regeneration, which is also called ‘new birth’, John Wesley writes,

But thought it be allowed that justification and the new birth are in point of time inseparable from each other, yet are they easily distinguished as being not the same, but things of a widely different nature. Justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real, change. God in justifying us does something *for* us: in begetting us again he does the work *in* us...the one restores us to the favour, the other to the image. The one is the taking away the guilt, the other taking away the power, of sin.<sup>92</sup>

In further explaining this twin moment in another sermon titled “On Sin in Believers”, Wesley writes, “In doing this I use indifferently the words ‘regenerate’ [and] ‘justified’ ...since, though they have not precisely the same meaning (the first implying an inward, *actual* change [regeneration]; the second a relative one [justification]...) yet they

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<sup>89</sup> John Wesley, “Salvation by Faith,” in *John Wesley’s Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §III.3.

<sup>90</sup> Wesley, “Justification By Faith”, §II.5.

<sup>91</sup> Charles Wesley, “Hark! the Heral Angels Sing,” in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), #240, verse 1 (*emphasis added*)

<sup>92</sup> Wesley, “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God”, 2.

come to one and the same thing.”<sup>93</sup> It is in this twin moment that the image of God that was totally corrupted is completely reborn.<sup>94</sup>

Yet, this is not the end of the process of salvation and our need for divine grace. Although regeneration breaks the power of sin, it still remains in the life of the believer. In speaking of how sin remains in the life of the believer, John Wesley writes, “The usurper is dethroned. He *remains* indeed where he once reigned; but remains *in chains*. So that he does in some sense ‘prosecute the war’, yet he grows weaker and weaker, while the believer goes on from strength to strength, conquering and to conquer.”<sup>95</sup> For Wesley, believers receive freedom from the guilt of their sin in justification, but in regeneration believers begin to have freedom from the outward sin that they actually commit. Regeneration is the beginning of the process that John Wesley calls sanctification—the believer being made holy, and sin being conquered in the life of the believer.<sup>96</sup>

Sanctification is the continuing and gradual work of salvation by God within us. In a sermon titled “On Working Out Our Own Salvation”, John Wesley provides his clear understanding of the distinguishing marks between justification and sanctification:

Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation...consisting of those two grand branches, justification and sanctification. By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored in the favour of God: by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God. All

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<sup>93</sup> John Wesley, "On Sin in Believers," in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §II.1 (*parenthesis and emphasis original*)

<sup>94</sup> John Wesley, "New Birth," in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §II.5

<sup>95</sup> Wesley, "On Sin in Believers", §IV.11 (*emphasis original*).

<sup>96</sup> John Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §I.4

experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual.<sup>97</sup>

In this quotation we can see John Wesley separating the moment of justification and the process of sanctification into the “two grand branches” of salvation. Wesley continues by giving a succinct definition of justification as that moment when we are saved from the guilt of our sin and restored to the favor of God—a relational change. On the other hand, in the process of sanctification is that continuing process of God acting in the life of the believer in saving us from the power and root of sin and restoring the image of God. This action is through the work of the Holy Spirit, who inspires our co-operative work with God in being made holy. Recalling this image mention above in the anthropology section, we can see in John Wesley’s sermon “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God” this continual work of God in the life of the believer, “The life of God in the soul of a believer... immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration God’s Holy Spirit... a continual action of God upon the soul, the re-action of the soul upon God.”<sup>98</sup> Wesley did not shirk the command I Peter 1:15-16 makes to be holy as God is holy, since for Wesley God does not command us to do that which we are unable. Instead, we are enlisted to work alongside God as we work out our own salvation. It is important to note that even through this process of being made holy the believer’s inward sin still remains, though weakened by this process. The image of God is being restored in the believer, but the new creation is not yet finished by God.

Salvation is a common theme in all forms of Christianity. Yet, in the East and in the West there is a different understanding between the two. In the West salvation is

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<sup>97</sup> John Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §II.1.

<sup>98</sup> Wesley, "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God", §III.2.

primarily equated with the notion of forgiveness of humanity by God, which means that humanity is guilty of something against God. Therefore, the language of Western notions of salvation is judicial or forensic in that God is the Judge and we are those under a sentence of death pleading for pardon from our sin. On the other hand, in Eastern Orthodoxy, which lacks the notion of original sin and total depravity, salvation is not only the forgiveness of humanity by God, but instead salvation is the healing of humanity by God; this lends to more medical and therapeutic language. Therefore, in the Western paradigm, the most important moment in the narrative of salvation is justification, which is being forgiven or pardoned by God. However, in the Eastern Orthodox model, the most important part of salvation is *theosis*, being mended back into the life of God.

John Wesley bridges these two paradigms by placing emphasis on both the relative change between God and humanity in justification and the real change occurring in the life of the believer in sanctification. As we see above, there is not an ontological change in humanity in justification, but simply a relational one. However, Wesley also stresses the notion of real change in believers through sanctification. Wesley writes,

By salvation, I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.<sup>99</sup>

As mentioned before in the understanding of anthropology there seems to more of a synthesis occurring in Wesleyan understanding. We see John Wesley both asserting justification and sanctification as two distinct but important parts of his *via salutis*. Wesley also employs the language found in both the Western churches and Eastern churches to describe his understanding. In speaking of justification, John Wesley

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<sup>99</sup> Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy”, 39.

employs the judicial language of guilt, transgression, mercy, and forgiveness. Yet, in speaking of sanctification, as we can see in the quotation above, Wesley uses therapeutic language in speaking of the disease of sin and the restoration to “primitive health”. Once again, while it is true that Wesley is not simply espousing the Eastern Orthodox notion of salvation, he is also not simply restating the Western notion of salvation. Instead, Wesley is synthesizing the instantaneous moment of forgiveness in the Western thought through the action of Christ with the gradual process of holiness through the work of the Holy Spirit in the Eastern Orthodox understanding.

John Wesley is distinct in his separating of justification and sanctification into completely different stages in his *via salutis*. The Western paradigm and the Eastern paradigm both have justification and sanctification, but both traditions see justification and sanctification occurring at the same time. In the Western paradigm justification and sanctification occur in a distinct and singular moment in which God forgives and imputes holiness to the believer. Whereas for Macarius, justification and sanctification too are together:

From this initial point of baptism, when God’s life enters the soul, the new birth *begins*; henceforward, each Christian is called to grow in that grace, to be continually re-dedicating himself to God, constantly repenting of sins and receiving forgiveness, and continually being cleansed from actual sins and being freed from the power of sin in general.<sup>100</sup>

Therefore, we can see that both the Eastern and Western notions contain similar ideas, but place them differently in their soteriology. In drawing from both paradigms John Wesley separates these two gracious events, one which is instantaneous and the other which is gradual, to place a balanced emphasis upon both justification and sanctification in the life of the Christian.

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<sup>100</sup> Ford, “Saint Makarios of Egypt and John Wesley”, 292.

In both Wesleyan and the Orthodox understanding the Holy Spirit plays a key role in the life of the believer who is striving for perfection. In both understandings the Spirit interacts with humanity in the similar way of breathing. The Spirit is seen as one breathes into—inspires—the believer holiness. Yet, this is not a passive process for the believer, but the believer is to respire—react or respond—to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In this image we receive a very intimate image of the life of God and the believer participating together in a way that harkens to creation. God breathes into our souls, and we respond to this breath in our lives. It is a beautiful image of the ongoing process of creation in the world and in the life of the believer.

There are however major points of divergence that cannot be reconciled between Orthodox and Wesleyan understanding. The first and foremost is that John Wesley strips his *via salutis* of any mysticism as he understands it. In so doing John Wesley moves Macarius' and Gregory's notion of *theosis* from the realm of the ascetic to the life of an everyday Christian. Snyder writes, "A major point of difference, however, is that Wesley's stress on love and perfection, while still somewhat mystical and ascetic, was much more strongly ethical than was Gregory's and also was preached as an available experience—as the norm—for every Christian, not just for the spiritual elite."<sup>101</sup> This has radical implications in that Wesley in a way strips his *via salutis* of the mystical stages of *katharsis* and *theoria* to replace them with the universal notions of "repentance" and "justification". In repentance, one now becomes dismayed of their life and sin and thus purges themselves in utter horror of their previous life. In the darkness of repentance the

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<sup>101</sup> Snyder, "John Wesley and Macarius the Egyptian", 58.

light of justification comes and God no longer is shown as one who judges our sins, but instead God is the one who forgives and beckons us into a new life.

Another issue in which Wesley comes into conflict with Macarius is over the notion of faith. In numerous sermons, especially “The Scripture Way of Salvation”, John Wesley declares that faith is the only condition of justification: “I answer, faith is the condition, and the only condition, of justification. It is the condition: none is justified but he that believes; without faith no man is justified. And it is the only condition: this alone is sufficient for justification.”<sup>102</sup> Wesley defines faith as both assent to the truths of God and the trust in God’s forgiveness. He writes, “that faith which is not only an unshaken assent to all that God hath revealed in Scripture...but likewise the revelation of Christ in our hearts...a sure confidence in his pardoning mercy.”<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, Macarius sees faith only in the sense that one trusts that God is now cleansing them of their sin. Thus, faith is not a pre-condition of justification, but is a part of trusting that God is currently forgiving us. Additionally, faith for Macarius has a more ascetic and mystical tone as David Ford describes, “[For Macarius] faith involves trusting God in everything, and implies having no anxiety for earthly things, a detachment from all things of this world, and a total desire for eternal things, for God himself.”<sup>104</sup> Therefore, faith for Macarius sounds more like the notion of *katharsis*, which is the purging of oneself of earthly matters.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation”, §III.1.

<sup>103</sup> John Wesley, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §I.7

<sup>104</sup> Ford, “Saint Makarios of Egypt and John Wesley”, 298.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 297-298.



Finally, there is a divergence over what Wesley would call the “Witness of the Spirit” or more succinctly, assurance. This is the certainty that God gives to believers through the power of the Holy Spirit that they have indeed been both justified and sanctified. In fact, Wesley even warns some not to believe these events have occurred until they receive confirmation from the Spirit, although Wesley also speaks of the ability of the devil to trick some into believing these actions have occurred. However, for Macarius justification and sanctification are folded into each other and thus once cannot receive confirmation that they have occurred for they will always be occurring. Additionally, Macarius lends so much to the freedom of the will that he thinks it to be dangerous to have a sense that one has achieved eternal participation with God, but in fact, one may slip from that participation tomorrow. Furthermore, Macarius fears that anyone who may claim such a sensation runs the risk of pride. This continues Macarius’ argument in witnessing to the assurance. On the other hand, Wesley encourages those who have assurance to bear witness to the work that God is doing in their lives for the edification of others.<sup>106</sup>

#### **IV. Teleology**

If anthropology is the theological language concerned with what human beings are, then teleology can be understood as being concerned with the hope of what we as humans will be—our goal. Soteriology is the way in which we achieve our goal, which as we can see there are different understandings of this notion as well. As with anthropology and soteriology, John Wesley has a unique view of the *telos* or goal of the human life that

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 300-306.

is heavily influenced by Western notions of anthropology, but also derives heavily from Eastern notions of soteriology.

### ***Eastern Teleology***

In Eastern Orthodox understanding *theosis* is not achieved through some elaborate schema or *ordo*, and one could even admit that the mystical path shown above is not extremely intricate. There is a process of *theosis* in Orthodoxy, but the aim of this process is not to appease God, as it is in Western understanding. In the Eastern notion salvation is not receiving forgiveness of a wrongdoing, but instead the healing of humanity into harmony with the divine will. The judicial language of sin and forgiveness is not as pronounced as it is in the Western churches. In speaking on the simplicity of the Orthodox *theosis*, Maddox writes,

The East's answer to the question of how God could accept fallen humanity is simple—by condescending love. They have not felt it necessary to elaborate this point. Rather, they have dealt with the question of how fallen humanity can recover their spiritual health and the likeness of God. Their answer has centered on the need for responsible human participation in the divine life, through the means that God has graciously provided.<sup>107</sup>

Therefore, the focus of Eastern thought centers upon how humanity can recover its spiritual health, as opposed to Western concern of how God could accept humanity in our sinful condition.

It is important to see that in Orthodoxy *theosis* is a state that humanity reaches, but only through the means that God provides. Humanity cannot become part of the divine life without the grace of the divine. This is even true of Adam before he fell. Instead of Adam desiring to become part of the divine life, being of the image and

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<sup>107</sup> Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy”, 38.

likeness of God, through the grace of God. Adam fell because of his desire to become divine outside of the grace of God. Therefore, humanity does not become divine part of the divine substance, but instead joins in the divine life.<sup>108</sup> In the Western understanding, *theosis* has long been misunderstood as being *apotheosis*. The notion of *apotheosis* comes from the Greco-Roman pagan religions, which divinized their rulers either before or after death.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, *theosis* is not the divinization of the substance of humanity, but instead in the attributes. Later Orthodox theologians, like St. Gregory Palamas, gave greater distinction between *theosis* and *apotheosis* showing that the former is being unity with the “energies” of God, and the latter as being in unity with the “essence” of God.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, the notion of *apotheosis* is the first sin of humanity—the desire to be gods in essence as opposed to being in unity with the divine energy.

Eastern Orthodoxy draws heavily from its ancient roots in defining its notion of *theosis*. In the early third century, Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons in attacking heresy in the church, especially from Gnostics, denounced those who denied that divinity could assume human flesh, because the flesh or material world is evil. For Irenaeus, if there is not Incarnation then there is no salvation, for salvation comes through the divine becoming human. Irenaeus continues in stating that since the divine became human that the human can become divine. In their great work that tracks the history of the emergence of Christianity’s understanding of holiness, Paul M. Bassett and William M. Greathouse say, “By a process of maturation-education—the Greeks called it *paideia*—the believer is

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 39

<sup>109</sup> "Apotheosis," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>110</sup> "Deification," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

actually transformed to deity in his essential character, though not in his physical, intellectual, or affective capacities. This deity is that which is seen inherent in Jesus Christ.”<sup>111</sup> Irenaeus calls this work “perfection” and sees the primary agent of this work of process to be the Holy Spirit. Irenaeus sees the way the Holy Spirit carries out this task in humanity is parallel to God breathing into humanity at Creation—the Holy Spirit inspires us. Irenaeus also is ardent that this work of the Spirit is in process, is not completed but begun at our baptism, and this holiness is not imputed but inspired into believers. As Irenaeus says in *Against Heresies*, “He [the Holy Spirit] will make us perfect according to the will of the Father. He [the Holy Spirit] will make man in the image and likeness of God.”<sup>112</sup>

Clement of Alexandria, writing in the late second and early third century, complements Irenaeus’ understanding of the body and perfection:

Those who deprecate the material creation and who disparage the body do so in error. They do not see that man was created upright in stature so that he could contemplate heaven...This is why this earthy house comes to be able to take in the soul...It is considered to be worthy of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies both soul and body once the body has been perfected by that restoration which is the work of the Savior.<sup>113</sup>

In this quotation we see first that Clement of Alexandria is refuting any Gnostic notion that the material world is something to be depreciated. Instead, the body, as part of God’s creation, is worthy for the Holy Spirit and the work of Christ. Perfection is the restoration of the body and soul by Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Origen, a slightly younger contemporary of Clement, who also wrote from Alexandria, is in harmony with Clement in seeing perfection as being a restoration to the

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<sup>111</sup> Paul M. Bassett and William M. Greathouse, *Exploring Christian Holiness*, Vol. 2, 3 vols. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1985), 45

<sup>112</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, v.8.1

<sup>113</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, iv.26.136

“freedom and rationality that identifies us with the freedom and rationality of God himself...”<sup>114</sup> Once again, we can see that restoration speaks not to the image of God, which is not lost, but instead to the likeness of God. Origen also sees sanctification as the process leading one to perfection—the Spirit sanctifies us that we may become perfect as God is perfect, i.e. in the likeness of God. Origen also is in concert with Irenaeus in stating that the Holy Spirit is the primary agent in the perfection of one’s life, and Origen saw that as one can squander the purity of baptism one can forfeit their sanctification.<sup>115</sup>

There is great debate over who influenced whom when it comes to Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius of Egypt. Bassett however does point out that the seminal writings of Macarius in *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian* were not written by a single person, but instead a collection of people writing in Egypt in the fourth century.<sup>116</sup> However, this collection is still, for convenience, spoken of as the writings of Macarius. The question of whether or not Gregory of Nyssa influenced Macarius or vice versa is a moot point in this discussion on two points. First, both writings are key to the Orthodox understanding of teleology. Secondly, though there is no direct contact between John Wesley and the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, it is true that the writings of Macarius were influential. No matter which is the case, Macarius is important to view as well as Gregory, in that they both form the Orthodox understanding. Therefore, either both Gregory of Nyssa and John Wesley independently pull from Macarius, or John Wesley pulls from Macarius who bases his understanding from Gregory of Nyssa; either way Wesley is indirectly linked to Gregory of Nyssa through the writings of Macarius.

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<sup>114</sup> Bassett and Greathouse, *Exploring Christian Holiness*, 63.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 63

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 69

However, it is important to note that one of the wellsprings to which Wesley directly turned to during his life was not Gregory of Nyssa.

Like Origen, Macarius holds sanctification and perfection together, but places them in a process. Sanctification for Macarius is the filling of one of the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit making one holy. The Holy Spirit making one holy as to be empowered to become perfected in God. Macarius makes two shifts though that are of extreme importance. First, Macarius places the possibility of perfection within the life of the believer. Second, Macarius places strong emphasis on the individual’s journey and process of perfection, as opposed to a communal understanding of the church being perfect as Christ is perfect, which is a belief somewhat espoused by Augustine.<sup>117</sup> On perfection Macarius writes, “...man [could be made] perfect in the span of an hour...[but instead] only in part...in order to test the man’s resolve—whether he keep full-fledged his love toward God, not submitting in anything to the evil one, but yielding himself up entirely and integrally to grace...”<sup>118</sup> Additionally, Macarius speaks of three factors to which a believer should see in the depth of the sinful character of humanity, the promise that God will cleanse us from all sin through the Holy Spirit, and that all this can be reached in our own lifetimes.<sup>119</sup>

Like Macarius, Gregory of Nyssa took the command to be perfect as God is perfect as a divine command that must be followed. However, Gregory of Nyssa does not see it possible for humanity to cross the threshold of perfection within our lifespan. He writes,

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

<sup>118</sup> Macarius of Egypt, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, Homily XLI, 1-3.

<sup>119</sup> Bassett and Greathouse, *Exploring Christian Holiness*, 74-75.

Because God is infinite virtue, the soul pursuing virtue actually participates in God himself. Since the desire of those who come to know the highest good is to share in it completely—share in this limitless good—their desire must extend as far as the goodness extends. So, their desire and the goodness they desire are limitless. That is why it is utterly impossible to attain perfection. As I’ve said, the only ‘limitation’ to virtue is that it has no limits. How can one reach a boundary that doesn’t exist?<sup>120</sup>

To Gregory of Nyssa it is illogical to speak of crossing the boundary into perfection, because perfection itself is limitless. Yet, as believers, we are called to constantly strive toward perfection. Gregory of Nyssa continues saying, “So, we bend every effort to come as close as we can to the perfection possible for us, to possess as much as of it as we can, to avoid falling utterly short. After all, it may be that human perfection lies precisely in this—constant growth in the good.”<sup>121</sup> Thus, Gregory of Nyssa sees perfection and righteousness as being folded upon each other, as opposed to one leading into the other. Therefore, for Gregory of Nyssa there is not a point of perfection that one attains at some period of time, but rather perfection is in fact participating with God. Recalling the words aforementioned from Gregory of Nyssa in that “the soul pursuing virtue *actually* participates in God himself.” The striving for Gregory of Nyssa is the goal—perfection for Gregory of Nyssa is the process of sanctification.<sup>122</sup> This understanding is quite novel in Gregory’s time in that his notion of being able to change in humanity is good saying,

So, we should not be distraught we think about this proclivity that is in our very nature. Rather, let us change in such a way that we continually develop in the direction of that which is better, as those being ‘transformed from glory to glory.’ Let us always be improving, ever becoming more perfect through daily maturation, but never coming to any boundary to perfection...<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Moysis*, i.3-10.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, i.3-10.

<sup>122</sup> Bassett and Greathouse, *Exploring Christian Holiness*, 81.

<sup>123</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Perfectione*, XLVI.285.

Thus, it is in the process of perfection that we find our glory and salvation. In growing toward God and the divine will, according to Gregory of Nyssa, we fulfill the image and likeness of God.

There are of course countless other church fathers who wrestled with the notion of perfection of whom are not mentioned in this work. The fathers who are mentioned are those who bear some weight with John Wesley, and have made an impact on Eastern Orthodox understandings of teleology. As we can see, there are points of divergence even among the church fathers, but we can see a clear image of who humanity is and how humanity becomes both restored and part of the divine will through the work of God in their lives through the Holy Spirit.

### ***Western Teleology***

Unlike anthropology and soteriology, the Western church is quite consistent in term of its goal or *telos*. Recalling the basic anthropology of the Western church, we see that God created humanity in total innocence and perfection in the image of God. A term that can be used for this pre-Fall state of humanity is “original righteousness” in that humanity was complete and whole before the Fall.<sup>124</sup> The differing notion of anthropology in the West occurred in the effects of the Fall itself. Additionally, there are differing notions to how to achieve this goal. However, the goal of humanity in the Western church is to regain the image of God lost at the Fall. Therefore, the goal of the Western church is perfection in the reclamation of the original righteousness of humanity.

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<sup>124</sup> William Hordern, "Original Righteousness," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Thought* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983).



This goal though, is not seen as part of this life, but something that occurs for the believer at their death.<sup>125</sup>

### *The Teleology of John Wesley*

In Wesleyan understanding the goal of salvation is not to simply change our relationship with God, but to change our very nature—to restore the image of God. Sanctification is a process of being made holy. Perfection, which is entire sanctification, is the instantaneous moment where, by God’s grace, total freedom is achieved from both inward and outward sin. This is the full holiness in one’s heart and life. On perfection, John Wesley states,

It is thus that we wait for entire sanctification, for a full salvation from all our sins, from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief, or as the Apostle expresses it, ‘go on to perfection.’ But what is perfection? The word has various senses: here it means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul.<sup>126</sup>

This freedom from both inward and outward sin gives the believer the ability to be holy both inwardly and outwardly—to perfectly love God, self, and the totality of God’s creation. It is important to point out that perfection does not mean a rigid confession to the right beliefs or freedom from ignorance, error, and temptation for John Wesley. Instead is that moment when the love of God bursts unencumbered from the believer. As Yrigoyen writes, “He [Wesley] meant that with God’s help the Christian could possess purity of heart, the Spirit’s greatest gift, by which love becomes the controlling affection of our life, we have the mind of Christ, and we walk as he walked.”<sup>127</sup> This quotation

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<sup>125</sup> E. G. Rupp, "Perfection," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Thought* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983).

<sup>126</sup> Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation", §1.9.

<sup>127</sup> Yrigoyen, *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life*, 38.

from Yrigoyen is immensely rich in understanding Wesley's notion of perfection. First, that perfection can only be attained "with God's help". Second, that perfection is the "purity of heart", which allows one's life to be in harmony with the divine will through love. Finally, in perfection we have both the "mind of Christ" and "walk as he walked", which yields a somewhat two-sided understanding of human nature in the image of God, and human action in the likeness of God.

Interestingly, this notion of perfection became a point of contention for John and Charles Wesley. It became such an issue that in January of 1767, John Wesley felt impelled to write a letter to his brother in attempts to find common ground on what perfection is, and the timing of perfection in the life of the believer. On the notion of perfection John Wesley writes, "By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling all the tempers, words, and actions, the whole heart by the whole life. I do not include an impossibility of falling from it, either in part or in whole."<sup>128</sup> In the quotation we can see the restoration of humanity to its pre-Fallen state in that no longer is the image of God in humanity corrupted toward sinful aims, but is totally free to be in perfect love in God. It is this love of God and humanity that now steers our desires. Additionally, we can see in this quotation the once again strong sense of the freedom of the will in that the believer can fall from this state.

In his biography of the life and work of Charles Wesley, John R. Tyson looks at this disagreement between the Wesley brothers from Charles' perspective. On perfection Tyson notes, "Charles often considered [entire] sanctification or Christian perfection to be the recovery of the image of God, in which all humans had been created... Charles

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<sup>128</sup> John Wesley, *A Letter to Charles Wesley on Perfection* (1767).

considered this recovery of the ‘image of God’ to be the ‘one thing needful’: ‘To recover our first estate, from which we are thus fallen, is the one thing now needful...’<sup>129</sup> Thus we can see that on the notion that perfection is the recovery of the pre-Fallen state is a point of agreement between John and Charles Wesley.

The major point of disagreement between John and Charles Wesley is over the manner and timing of perfection in the life of the believer. In his letter to his brother Charles, John Wesley writes, “I believe this perfection is...in an instant. But I believe in a gradual work both preceding and following that instant.”<sup>130</sup> In the life of Charles Wesley, Tyson points to a pivotal moment that occurs on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1741 when Charles Wesley was at the deathbed of Mrs. Hooper. In witnessing her suffering and death, Charles Wesley forged a concept of perfection that comes to the believer gradually until the point of death, and has suffering undertones.<sup>131</sup> John Wesley agreed in the gradual process before and after perfection, but found it to be an instantaneous gift of God saying further in his letter, “I believe this instant generally is the instant of death...But I believe it may be ten, twenty, or forty years before.”<sup>132</sup> John Wesley agrees that the instant of perfection can come at death, but it could also come some time before.

Perfection is being completely restored in the image of God, and this is the goal or *telos* in Wesleyan understanding. Although John and Charles disagree in how this moment of perfection could occur in the life of the believer, they both agreed that perfection is the goal. As Charles Wesley writes,

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<sup>129</sup> John R. Tyson, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 233

<sup>130</sup> Wesley, *A Letter to Charles Wesley on Perfection*.

<sup>131</sup> Tyson, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley*, 237-238.

<sup>132</sup> Wesley, *A Letter to Charles Wesley on Perfection*.

Finish, then, thy new creation;  
 pure and spotless let us be.  
 Let us see thy great salvation  
 perfectly restored in thee;  
 changed from glory into glory,  
 till in heaven we take our place,  
 till we cast our crowns before thee,  
 lost in wonder, love and praise.<sup>133</sup>

We can see that the Western understanding of anthropology still heavily influencing Wesley. It is at the point that Wesley seems to be in most agreement in the notion of the goal of the Christian life. As we have seen, Wesley sees humanity as being created by God in total innocence and perfection. Although Wesley sees the image of God as not being lost, instead corrupted, he sees the goal of the Christian life to be the restoration of the image of God to its perfectly innocent state before the Fall. In speaking of the restoration of the image of God, John Wesley writes, “It is our one concern to shake off this servile yoke and to regain our native freedom; to throw off every chain, every passion and desire that does not suit an angelical nature. The one work we have to do is to return from the gates of death to perfect soundness; to have our diseases cured, our wounds healed, and our uncleanness done away.”<sup>134</sup> The restoration of the image of God is the “one thing needful”, the one goal of the Christian life. Perfection is the “regaining our native freedom” and returning to “perfect soundness”. While it is true, as we have seen with both Clement of Alexandria and Origen, that early, Greek writers also spoke of “restoration” as the goal of the Christian life, the restoration in this case is not of the image of God, but instead of the likeness of God.

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<sup>133</sup> Charles Wesley, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), #384.

<sup>134</sup> John Wesley, "The One Thing Needful," in *John Wesley's Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), §I.5.

However, even though John Wesley has a basic, Western understanding of teleology, he interestingly pulls from the Eastern notion that Macarius holds in that humanity can achieve this perfection while alive. On the other hand, the Western understanding only sees the potentiality to achieve this goal after death. Yet, it is important to note that Gregory of Nyssa thought that perfection was also unattainable in this lifetime, but understood this more in terms of the limitlessness of perfection itself, which means the goal of Gregory really seems to be more centered on the striving for perfection itself. Interestingly, Charles Wesley seems to hold more of a Western view of perfection in the realm of timing, in that Charles sees perfection as a gradual process that occurs only at the death of the believer. Yet, John Wesley clearly synergizes the two notions of having the same goal of Western understanding, but seeing it achievable through Eastern lenses.

As in the process of sanctification, John Wesley sees the instant gift of perfection to be the work of the Holy Spirit. We can see that John Wesley is in agreement with the Eastern Orthodox understanding on this point, especially through the work of Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria. As we see above, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Macarius also see the work of perfection occurring by the Holy Spirit. Additionally, both Irenaeus and John Wesley speak of the Holy Spirit interacting with humanity in the same fashion, which is inspiration or breathing into humanity.

Finally, as we have seen in anthropology and soteriology, John Wesley sees humanity as having a very real notion of freedom of the will. This freedom not only gives humanity the ability to answer the calling of God, with God's grace, but it also allows for the ability to fall once more from the state of perfection. Both Origen and Macarius saw

this ability as a risk of which Christians must be aware. John Wesley also warns of this risk of backsliding, even from the state of perfection. In fact, Wesley even quotes Macarius as a proof text to the ability to fall from grace.

## **V. Conclusion**

In conclusion, we can see that John Wesley is heavily influenced by Western thought of anthropology, soteriology, and teleology. Yet, early church writers, such as Macarius of Egypt/Gregory of Nyssa, Clement of Alexandria, and John Chrysostom, who form the foundation of Eastern Orthodox thought, also heavily influence John Wesley. Therefore, we can see that John Wesley is able to develop synthesized notions of anthropology, soteriology, and teleology.

Anthropologically, John Wesley squarely fits with Western notions of the state of humanity before the Fall, and the notion of original sin effecting the generations that come after Adam. However, John Wesley shifts to a more Eastern stance regarding the state of humanity after the Fall with a corrupted image of God, and his optimistic view of humanity due to his emphasis on the grace of God. Wesley comes to this understanding by drawing upon multiple early church writers such as Chrysostom. This unique understanding of anthropology sets the basis for Wesley's unique notion of soteriology.

John Wesley develops his *via salutis* also by synthesizing certain Western and Eastern aspects of salvation. Wesley speaks of the need of repentance and forgiveness by God, which draws from the Western notion of the relative change in humanity in salvation. Yet, this is not the end of salvation, but a way that leads to a process of growth in holiness, which draws from the Eastern notion of the real change in humanity in

*theosis*. To achieve this synthesis, John Wesley relies on the multiple voices of Macarius/Gregory of Nyssa, and Clement of Alexandria.

Finally, Wesley draws from both traditions to form his teleology. John Wesley's Western influenced anthropology greatly effects his teleological goal of being restored to the perfect state of Adam before the Fall. However, despite being deeply rooted in this Western notion, Wesley continues to pull from multiple, early church voices like Irenaus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Macarius/Gregory of Nyssa in a way that yields a synthesized understanding of the goal of the Christian life. Thus, perfection for Wesley is a state that humanity can achieve in an instant in this lifetime, and a state from which one can even fall.

In Wesley's own time people were puzzled by his beliefs, and today many still try to see where Wesley fits into the broad spectra of Christianity. He is unique in that he is heavily influenced from the Western church tradition, but he also draws from deep sources of the early church that are heavily influential in Eastern Orthodox thought. John Wesley has done something remarkable in laying out an anthropology, soteriology, and teleology that is both familiar in its substance but novel in its structure and emphasis. In so doing, Wesley gives us a synergism of many facets of Christianity, one of which being between the Eastern and Western churches.

This synthesis not only has historical impact, but also contemporary today. The bridge of Wesley can strengthen the dialogue between Eastern and Western churches, between Anglicans and Methodists, between Anglicans and Orthodox, between Methodists and Orthodox, and between all those traditions from which he drew. In this knowledge, one can read Wesley not in a vacuum or not simply in his contemporary

English setting, but instead as one who continually returns to the ancient well of the church to drink from her sources. Outler is correct in his assertion that once one understands this one must always read Wesley with the fathers in mind.<sup>135</sup> Therefore, we see that in reading Wesley with Orthodoxy we open not only a door for dialogue between two facets of Christianity that until recently have had no contact, but we also sharpen our own understanding of who Wesley was and what he believed.

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<sup>135</sup> Outler, *John Wesley*, 9-10.



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