

THEOSIS AND SANCTIFICATION-JOHN WESLEY'S REFORMULATION OF A PATRISTIC

by Michael J. Christensen

Christensen's scholarly study examining John Wesley's reformulation of the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of theosis (deification) within his own framework of sanctification, tracing how Wesley drew on patristic sources to articulate his distinctive theology of Christian perfection.

8 Chapters

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00. Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley's Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine

00. Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley's Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine Michael J. Christensen I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High..." (Ps. 82:6) Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?" (Jn. 10:34)

Entire Sanctification (holiness, perfection), as understood in the Wesleyan tradition, refers to John Wesley's doctrine of spiritual transformation. It is understood as an experience of grace, subsequent to salvation, with the effect that the Holy Spirit takes full possession of the soul, sanctifies the heart, and empowers the will so that one can love God and others blamelessly in this life. One is justified and then sanctified-understood as communing with God with the result that the holiness of God is actually imparted, not just imputed on the basis of what Christ accomplished on the cross. The power of sin in the believer's life is either eradicated or rendered inoperative as one participates in the higher life of the divine. [1]

Theosis (lit. "ingodded," "becoming god," deification) in the Eastern Orthodox tradition is a vision of human potential for perfection, anticipated in ancient Greece, witnessed to in both the Old and New Testaments, and developed by Patristic Christian theologians of the first five centuries after Christ. This vision survived the fourth-century purges of heresy and persists yet today in Eastern Christianity as a challenge to Western theology. According to Vladimir Lossky, we are nothing less than "creatures called to gods" (The Vision of God). In the words of Irenaeus (120-202): "If the Word was made man, it is that men might become gods" (Against Heresies, Bk. V. Pref. col. 1035). Or as Athanasius (293-373) said of the Incarnation of Christ: "God became man so that man might become God" (On the Incarnation of the Word, Bk. IV. par 65). [2] The idea of theosis is that God and humanity progressively achieve a union in Christ which in the end both blurs and preserves the distinction between Creator and creation, as in a mirror perfectly reflecting the source of its image. [3]

01. Parallel With Eastern Orthodoxy

01. Parallel With Eastern Orthodoxy Are the two conceptions-sanctification and theosis-theologically distinct or similar in thought? Historically, is sanctification as a doctrine derived from the older idea of theosis? Spiritually, are they independent visions in the quest for human wholeness or do they point to the same spiritual process and religious reality? If theologically distinct, how do they compare? If historically dependent, how is the one derived from the other? In posing these questions of similarity and derivation, I invoke the scholarly company of Albert Outler (John Wesley), Ted Campbell (John Wesley and Christian Antiquity) and Randy Maddox (Responsible Grace), intending to apply the problem of theosis as a test case for their assertions regarding Wesley's use of patristic sources.

Thirty years ago Albert Outler first alerted Wesleyan scholars to the influence of the Church Fathers on Wesley, especially the Eastern, Greek Patristic writers. It was his suspicion that Wesley's doctrine of sanctification was directly influenced by his exposure to the Spiritual Homilies attributed to Macarius of Egypt but actually written by a fifth-century Syrian monk under the theological influence of Gregory of Nyssa (John Wesley, 9). Syriac scholar David Bundy reportedly has spent much of his career exploring Outler's assertion on this point, as well as the influence of Ephrem of Syria on Wesley.

Orthodox theologian Charles Ashanin has pointed out that the classical Methodist doctrine of sanctification "is probably Wesley's adaptation of the Patristic doctrine of Theosis..." (90). Wesleyan theologian Randy Maddox agrees. Understanding the doctrine of sanctification in its therapeutic, soteriological context, he says, "has significant parallels with the Eastern Orthodox theme of deification (theosis)..." (Responsible Grace, 122). Building primarily on the insights of Outler and Maddox, and attempting to apply Campbell's thesis of how Wesley appropriated his patristic sources, this essay explores the theological parallels between theosis and sanctification and probable historical derivations. In his 1756 "Address to Clergy," Wesley commends the Church Fathers, "chiefly those who wrote before the Council of Nicea," as being "the most authentic commentators on Scripture, ...nearest the fountain, and eminently endued with that Spirit by whom all Scripture was given." Among the ante-Nicene theologians he commends as particularly worthy guardians of "the religion of the primitive church" are Tertullian, Cyprian, Clement and Origen. He also insists that his preachers have "some acquaintance" with such post-Nicene writers as Chrysostom, Basil, Jerome, Augustine "and above all, the man of a broken heart, Ephraem Syrus." In other references to his favorite authors, Wesley added "Makarios the Egyptian." [4] The issue of Patristic influences, however, is not simply a matter of Wesley appreciating and importing or at least paralleling theological concepts from the 2nd to the 5th centuries Orthodox East and applying them in the 18th century Protestant West. As Ted Campbell documents in his John Wesley and Christian Antiquity, Wesley's use of Patristic sources was "programmatic"-by which he means that Wesley revised and edited his sources rather than preserving their original meaning, and did so with a pastoral motivation and agenda of church reform. Wesley was not an historian but a practical theologian whose mission was to reform a

nation. His particular "vision" of Christian antiquity, more than the historical accuracy of his conceptualization, formed his sense of the Tradition. Thus, Wesley's "programmatic" (pastoral and polemical) use of Patristic sources can be distinguished from what his sources historically meant or taught (Campbell, 20). I suggest that Wesleyan scholars today accept Campbell's historical critique and follow Outler's theological lead by reading Wesley with his sources, and not simply reading back into his ancient sources Wesley's distinctive 18th-century vision of perfection or programmatic agenda for reform. [5]

What primary Patristic writers did John Wesley read and benefit from in his personal quest for holiness of heart and life? What did his sources actually teach about theosis, perfection, and related issues? Wesley learned from his father to appreciate the ancient pastoral theologians: Chrysostom, Basil, Athanasius and Cyprian (*Advice to a Young Clergyman*). At Oxford Wesley participated in the Patristic renaissance and idealized the Apostolic Age which he regarded as a time of authentic Christianity. Citing ancient authorities, he criticized then current ecclesiastical practices and longed for the Church of England to return to its liturgical roots, spiritual disciplines, and primitive purity. [6] Through the formative influence of John Clayton—a Non-Juror from Manchester and a Patristic scholar—Wesley was drawn to the ancient traditions as preserved in the *Apostolic Constitutions* and *Apostolic Canons*: "Fit books for you and every Christian priest," Clayton wrote to Wesley, "are all the Fathers of the first three centuries, whereby you may be enabled both to know and profess the faith once delivered to the saints, and to steer your course in the due medium between the monkish mysticism of the fourth century and the lukewarm indifference of the present age" (Campbell, 30).

Wesley's celebrated secondary source on Patristic thought was William Law who mentored John and Charles in the mystical path of total devotion to God. Wesley later rejected Law's theosophic mysticism and publicly challenged him. He also dismissed as "foxes" some of the Roman Catholic mystics he read. However, in many homilies Wesley assimilated Eastern soteriology with its therapeutic concern for healing the sin-sick soul and its synergistic, responsible grace. [7] Wesley's primary sourcebook for Patristic spirituality was William Cave's *Primitive Christianity*—a copy of which he took to Georgia. R. Flew notes the particular influence of the Christian Platonists (including Clement, Origen, Evagrius, and Nyssa) on Wesley (*The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology*). It was probably in Cave's anthologies that Wesley also discovered some of the ascetic writings of Syrian Christianity—particularly "Macarius the Egyptian" and "Ephraem Syrus."

After returning to England following his troubled mission in Georgia, Wesley was weary of trying to climb the ladder of perfection by spiritual discipline alone. Spiritually bankrupt, without peace and joy or the assurance of salvation, he embraced the Moravian approach to "faith alone" and "full salvation." Aldersgate became his benchmark for interpreting the biblical promise of perfection in light of the best insights of the early Fathers combined with his heart-felt Reformation faith of salvation by grace through faith. [8] "Thus it was," according to Outler, "that the ancient and Eastern tradition of holiness as disciplined love became fused in Wesley's mind with his own Anglican tradition of holiness as aspiring love, and thereafter was developed in what he regarded to the end as his own most distinctive doctrinal contribution" (Outler, *John Wesley*, 10). Although Wesley later rejected the ascetic emphasis on solitude, dark night of the soul, and spiritual mortification, he nonetheless remained in dialogue with these early mentors, edited and "corrected" them, and recommended them throughout his life. In considering Wesley's use of

Patristic sources for his doctrine of sanctification, I offer four sections of historical-theological background and analysis, and then a conclusion.

02. I. Theosis in the Alexandrian Tradition

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Behind John Wesley's Anglican piety and Moravian *sola fide* were Patristic sources, principally the insights of Clement and Origen and their vision of theosis.

A. Clement the "Christian Gnostic." Wesley learned from Clement that there are three kinds of persons: the unconverted, the converted but immature, and the mature or perfect Christian. Each required spiritual instruction appropriate to their state. Clement's three principal works (Protreptikos, Paidagogos, and Stromateis) addressed these three classes of persons. [9] In Stromateis, which Wesley cites and adapts, Clement repeats a Hermetic [10] (Clement would say gnostic) vision of theosis in which the soul ascends to God by means of contemplative knowledge and wisdom. [11] In John and Charles Wesley's Hymns and Sacred Poems (1739), a remarkable poem is included entitled "On Clemens Alexandrinus's Description of a Perfect Christian." It describes the vision of holiness as seen from a distance, and how the "mystic powers of love" can perfect the soul's intent to cross over into the "simple life Divine" (The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley, 35). Likewise, in response to queries about the meaning of the term "Methodist," Wesley in 1742 published a tract entitled "On the Character of a Methodist" based on Clement's description of the "true gnostic" in Book Seven of his Stromateis. Wesley's "entirely sanctified Methodist" and Clement's "perfect Christian gnostic" share common elements, according to Campbell: "Both stress prayer without ceasing, love of neighbor, obedience to God's commandments, freedom from worldly desires and hope of immortality as characteristics of the ideal Christian" (42).

There also are dissimilarities. For Clement, we pass from paganism to Christianity through faith. From faith we rise to God through gnosis. From gnosis we see God face to face, and we are deified: "Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons (i.e., children or heirs); being made ... (heirs), we are made perfect; being made perfect, we are made immortal, as the Scripture says 'Ye are gods...'" (Stromateis, ch. 6). [12] For Wesley, we are justified and sanctified by "faith filled with the energy of love" (not by works nor by gnosis). We enjoy communion with God as creatures, but not union with God as equals. We may become like God, Wesley hopes and prays, but we do not become divine! Such esoteric ideas for Wesley are "too mystical." Those who interpret the Scriptures in this way: find hidden meanings in every thing, which God never taught, nor the ancient children of God ever knew. They seek mysteries in the plainest truths, and make them such by their explications. Whereas the Christian Religion, according to the Scriptural account, is the plainest, clearest thing in the world: nothing stranger, or harder to be understood than this, "We love him, because he first loved us" (Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles, A Christian Library, Vol. I, vii-viii).

Thus, when Wesley appropriates Clement's gnostic vision, he "corrects" the assertion of gnosis as the means to perfection. [13] As Outler concludes: "It is almost as if Wesley had read 'agape' in the place of the Clementine 'gnosis'..." (Outler, John Wesley, 31).

B. Origen the "Christian Platonist." What Origen taught, and which eventually got him branded as heretical, was his doctrine of pre-existent souls on a cosmic transmigration from sin to perfection in successive lives and ages. His complex doctrine of theosis, found primarily in *On First Principles*, may be outlined as follows: God creates, without reference to time, rational beings/souls (nouses), which are incorporeal, equal and eternal. The Logos, the firstborn of all creation, is the exact image of God, and by God all things were made. Rational beings are reflections of the Image. As such, they participate in the divine nature through the Logos, as sparks of a greater Fire. The Father of Lights is the archetype of the Logos, who in turn is the archetype of rational beings. All souls, except the soul of Jesus, turned their attention away from God and suffered a cosmic fall. Redemption is made possible through the Incarnation of the Logos, which restores the image of God and awakens souls to joyfully participate in the divine nature, and ascend to their native land of Divinity. The universe, Origen imagines, is moving toward a restored and perfected state of integration and completion. After the final age, at the end of time, all souls (in human beings, angels, animals, stars and planets) are finally saved, sanctified, glorified, and unified in God.

Transcending Hellenistic cosmology, Wesley heard in Origen a compelling Christian message of the promise and possibility of perfection: "I beseech you, therefore, be transformed. Resolve to know that in you there is a capacity to be transformed." [14] The goal of the Christian life, according to Origen, is to see God face to face, and in so doing, to be deified. The means to deification is by participation in divinity: that is, by contemplation of God in the mirror of the soul which increasingly appropriates divine being. Thus "...nourished by God the Word, who was in the beginning with God (cf. Jn. 1:1), we may be made divine" (Origen, *Treatise on Prayer*, xxvii.13).

Human deification is possible, according to Origen, because of God's humanization in Christ. In the descent of divinity into the body of humanity, an historic mutation occurred - "human and divine began to be woven together, so that by prolonged fellowship with divinity, human nature might become divine" (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 3.28). As the human soul partakes of divinity, the soul ascends to God in stages, purified in wisdom and perfected in love. Eventually the soul passes through the "flaming sword" of the cherubim guarding access to the Tree of Life, and returns to the Paradise of God. [15] Origen's platonic vision is one of gradual unification with God - the soul possessed and progressively perfected in time until all is reconciled, time is no more, and "God is all in all" (*On First Principles*, XXXVI).

Wesley is selective in his approval of Origen. [16] As with Clement's, Origen's gnosticism is easily dismissed, his vision of theosis easily "corrected." For Wesley, the sanctified believer does not become divine in nature, but rather perfected in love and goodwill. Theosis in Wesley is a less esoteric experience and more practical, programmatically focused on what he deemed possible in this life. In substituting the 18th-century concept of "Christian perfection" for that of Alexandrian theosis, Wesley reconstructed his ancient sources.

03. II. The Syrian Ascetic Vision

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According to Ted Campbell, Wesley "understood true Christianity after the age of Constantine to lie principally in isolated pockets of Eastern Christendom," particularly among the ascetics, of which Ephrem and Pseudo-Macarius of Syria are prime examples (Campbell, 50). Syrian spirituality emerged with strong biblical grounding, Hebraic connections, and poetic imagery. This illumination-driven and Holy Spirit-centered tradition represents a radical form of ancient Christianity with many interesting features, including: perpetual virgins (women and men) living together in Christian households; hermits perched high on meditation columns, transcending normal human life and spiritual boundaries; holy fools and vagabonds roaming the earth, begging for food, challenging social structures; and a diverse company of charismatic characters with supernatural charm and power, all informed by the wild card of Platonism or what Peter Brown calls "angelic freedom"-a capacity for transformation and readiness "to step out of the category of the human by making visible, among one's fellow-humans, the awesome freedom of angels" (Brown, p. 331). In this theological context, we meet Ephrem and Macarius.

A. Ephrem and the Luminous Eye. Ephrem, a fourth-century Syrian hermit, biblical exegete, and spiritual poet, consistently made Wesley's essential reading list. According to Outler, Wesley regarded Ephrem as "the most awakened writer, I think, of all the ancients" (Outler, John Wesley, Journal, October 12, 1736). Peter Brown cites approvingly a commendation of Ephrem as "the greatest poet of the patristic age, and, perhaps, the only theologian-poet to rank beside Dante," whose extra-ordinary poetic power is preserved in Armenian hymns (Brown, 329). Behind the legends, not much is known about the life of Ephrem. He lived in Nisibis, near the border of southeast Turkey and Syria, and served as a deacon and catechetical teacher in a local church under four bishops. During a famine he organized relief for the poor. He spent considerable time in the desert, believing that mystical union with God through practicing asceticism brought divine perspective on suffering and other temporal realities. Granted a relatively long life, Ephrem died in 373 at about the age of 70.

During their Oxford days and beyond, Charles and John Wesley were inspired by Ephrem's teachings on the purgative value of suffering, the original nature of humanity as a perfect being clothed in a "garment of light," spiritual illumination as a faculty for knowing, union with God as the fruit of contemplation, and how past and future realities are simultaneously and eternally present in God. Wesley called Ephrem "the man with a broken heart" and considered him an inspired teacher. Ephrem's model of theosis, according to Sebastian Brock (on whom I rely for this section), is one of eschatological return to Paradise where humanity's original, angelic nature is restored and perfected (Brock, 1992). Theosis in Ephrem is suggested poetically in successive images:

1. The Chasm or Great Divide: Aware of the sharp distinction between the uncreated One and the created many, Ephrem refers to this ontological gap as a great "chasm" or "divide." Citing Jesus

parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, he says it is impossible for humanity to cross over the divide and access pure divine being without divinity first crossing over into the mortal sphere, putting on human nature, and showing us the way to Paradise.

2. The Ladder of Divine Descent (kenosis). How can God restore humanity to Paradise-the state of perfection? "God wears himself by every means so as to gain us" (Faith 31:4). The whole aim of the divine descent is to draw humanity up into God. According to Brock, the concept of divine condescension and descent is basic to Ephrem's theology, and essential for understanding his concept of theosis (Brock, 62-66).

3. The Ladder of Human Ascent (theosis). By what means can humanity be drawn up the ladder to God? How is progress made? Ephrem likens the divine ascent to that of a baby bird hatching from the egg, learning to sing, and then to fly: A bird grows up in three stages, from womb to egg, then to the nest where it sings; and once it is fully grown it flies in the air, opening its wings in the symbol of the Cross. (Faith 18:2)

Similarly, the soul grows in stages into divinity: from human birth to spiritual birth (baptism); from milk at mother's breast to the meat of the gospel. The maturing child of God learns to sing (praise) and to feed on divinity (Eucharist); finally it soars in the air, opens its wings and flies to God-becoming in the process a Christ-figure in the form of the Cross.

4. Garments of Light. Adam and Eve (humanity) were created in an intermediary blessed state-neither mortal nor immortal, but with the potential of becoming divine. Had they obeyed the divine instruction, God would have rewarded them not only with the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, but also with the fruit of the Tree of Life. They would have grown up to be immortal. "Ye shall be gods" would have been a promise realized. As it happened, they disobeyed, shed their "garments of light, and were prevented from eating of the Tree of Life. Naked and ashamed, they found fig leaves to cover up their nakedness, their loss of light" (Gen. 3:7). [17]

5. The Flaming Sword. Once banned from the Garden, a Cherub with a sacred sword was assigned to guard the gate to the Tree of Paradise. Christ has now overcome the sword with the lance at his cross. By passing through the flaming sword with Christ and his lance, humanity can return to Paradise. Baptism anticipates this re-entry into eschatological Paradise-a state which is more glorious than the primordial one. Ephrem's poems are preserved as Armenian hymns, many of which are cited and translated by Brock as illustrative of Ephrem's eschatological vision of theosis. For example: With the blade of the sword of the cherub was the path to the Tree of Life shut off, but to the Peoples of the Lord of that Tree has given Himself as food... Whereas we had left that Garden along with Adam when he left it behind, now that the sword has been removed by the lance we may return there. (49:9-11, Brock, 100)

6. The Robe of Glory. The purpose of the Incarnation is to reclothe Adam (humanity) in primordial clothing lost in the fall:

Christ came to find Adam who had gone astray, He came to return him to Eden in the garment of light. (Virginité 16:9, Brock, 87) By "putting on humanity" in the Incarnation, God not only restores persons in "garments of light" but transforms them into perfect beings adorned in "robes of glory." This state of primordial and eschatological Paradise belongs to sacred time and space, ever present through faith and connected to the pattern of salvation (Brock, 32ff).

Blessed be He who had pity on Adam's leaves and sent a robe of glory to cover his naked state.
(Fast 3:2)

7. The Medicine of Life. Full salvation, as Ephrem envisions God's gift to fallen humanity, is spiritual restoration to the primordial state requiring radical healing by Christ-"the Medicine of Life." Christ in the Eucharist is the elixir of life eternal-the immortal drink of Fire and Spirit! In his compassionate descent, the whole of Him has been co-mingled with the whole of us, resulting in a new creation: When the Lord came down to earth to mortal beings He created them again, a new creation, like the angels, mingling within them Fire and Spirit, so that in a hidden manner they too might be of Fire and Spirit. (Faith 10:9)

Divinity descends to humanity in the image of Fire (the Holy Spirit). Perfection is putting on the "garments of light." Theosis, for Ephrem, is crossing over the chasm that divides the Creator from the creation by means of "inter-penetration"-the mixing of fire and water and the human participation in the life divine. The Divine Liturgy (Communion) for Ephrem is a deifying sacrament. Partaking daily is a key to the achievement of theosis. This conviction parallels Wesley's "Duty of Constant Communion." One receives the life of Christ in the Eucharist, according to Ephrem:

Christ's Body has newly been mingled with our bodies, His blood too has been poured out into our veins, His voice is in our ears, His brightness in our eyes. In His compassion the whole of Him has been mingled in with the whole of us. (Virginity 37:2)

Literally, physically, spiritually, mystically-Christ is being formed in us. In partaking of the Sacrament, one should realize:

We hold God in our hands... Once He has entered, He takes up residence with us...." (Armenian Eucharistic Hymn 47) [18]

8. The Luminous Eye. The prerequisite for theological inquiry, according to Ephrem, is divine illumination. Although universal revelation is available to all, the human cultivation of spiritual senses is required to access knowledge of divine things. Similar to the doctrine of gnosis in Clement and Origen, the inner "luminous eye" of Ephrem is a spiritual capacity to "see all things, even the hidden things of God," as his poetry on faith makes clear:

Whenever I have meditated upon You I have acquired a veritable treasure from You; Whatever aspect of You I have contemplated, a stream has flowed from You. There is no way I can contain it: Your fountain [of truth], Lord, is hidden from the person who does not thirst for You. (Faith 32:2-3)

Ephrem's "luminous eye" is similar to if not the source of Wesley's doctrine of "spiritual senses." [19] In reading Ephrem's theological poetry, it is easy to see why Wesley was so attracted to "the man with a broken heart," and why he shared Ephrem's poetry with Sophy in Georgia.

B. Pseudo-Macarius and the Holy Spirit. Macarius of Egypt (301-391)-who Wesley assumed (incorrectly) he was reading in the Spiritual Homilies-is one of the most revered of the desert fathers in Eastern Orthodoxy. Pseudo-Macarius, according to some scholars, was a Messalian monk (part of a sect condemned as heretical by a synod in 383). [20] Outler advanced Jaeger's notion that the author of the Fifty Spiritual Homilies was a fifth-century Syrian monk "whose conception of Christian spirituality was derived almost exclusively from Gregory [of Nyssa]." [21] If

this be the case, says Outler, it means that Wesley was actually in touch with "the greatest of all the Eastern Christian teachers of the quest for perfection. Thus, in his early days, he drank deep of this Byzantine tradition of spirituality at its source and assimilated its conceptions of devotion...." [22] On board the Simmonds, Wesley read Macarius and learned about the stages of divine ascent, holiness of heart, progressive perfection, and the affective manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

Orthodox writer David Ford critically compares Macarius' vision of theosis with Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection and finds that in significant areas "Wesley departed from the spirit and the specific teachings of Makarios." Ford identifies six instances in which Wesley departs from an accurate interpretation of Macarius: (1) Wesley's tendency to regard both justification and sanctification as specific, identifiable experiences or works of grace to be sought for and definitely attained; (2) his emphasis on the "instantaneous" impartation of the state of entire sanctification/perfection/holiness; (3) his emphasis on one's own role of faith in gaining the experience; (4) his stress on the inward "witness of the Spirit" as assurance of salvation and perfection; (5) his encouragement of followers to testify of their own perfection to others; and (6) his conception of entire sanctification and its attainment as the highest goal of the Christian life, "rather than simply the seeking of God himself, and of participation in his life, which cannot be categorized." [23]

Concludes Ford, perfection according to Macarian is not a specific, identifiable experience, but rather a yearning after God and progressive participation in the divine nature which in the end presents itself as deification. The purpose of the Lord's coming, according to Macarius, was to alter and create our souls anew, and make them, as it is written, "partakers of the divine nature," and to give into our soul a heavenly soul, that is the Spirit of the Godhead leading us to all virtue, that we might be enabled to live eternal life. (Homily 44.9)

Macarius' reference to the gift of a "heavenly soul" or the "Spirit of Godhead," according to Ford, is an affirmation of Ireneaus' concept of the Holy Spirit as originally a constitutive part of Adam's nature which was lost in the Fall. [24] Before original sin there was original blessing. Since God became human in Christ, says Macarius, our original human nature can be restored and surpassed, our potential divine nature realized, in the dynamic process of theosis in which "...sin is rooted out and one recovers the original configuration of pure Adam. Humankind, however, thanks to the Spirit's power and to spiritual regeneration, not only measures up to the first Adam, but is made greater than he. Man is deified." (Homily XXVI) For Wesley, perfection is not the return to the original angelic nature of Adam in the garden (as in Ephrem). It is the removal of the power of sin and the perfection of the will to love God and others, not in any absolute sense, but in perfect love, without blame. For Macarius, perfection is nothing less than the surpassing of human nature and becoming in some sense divine (the creature perfectly reflecting the Creator). For Wesley, a distinct work of grace is required for the attainment of entire sanctification. For Macarius, water baptism, regular Eucharist, and on-going in-fillings of the Holy Spirit are the means to, but never the end of, perfection.

Wesley urged his followers to testify to having received the gift of "full salvation" - the experience and assurance of love made perfect in the soul. According to Ford, Macarius did not urge Christians to seek or claim a specific state or experience, but to seek simply God. He did not teach

any doctrine of "assurance" nor identify any single moment of perfection, but "warned repeatedly against ever making such a claim." [25] Wesley himself apparently followed Macarius' wisdom and humility in never claiming to have actually attained perfection or entire sanctification in his lifetime (Preface to "A Collection of Forms of Prayer for Every Day of the Week" (1735), Works, 14, p. 72).

Despite these differences, Wesley commended Macarius as an excellent model of Christian perfection and stated in his preface to the Homilies: "Whatever he insists upon is essential, is durable, is necessary" (A Christian Library). Yet, according to Campbell, Wesley edited Macarius and "omitted references to ascetic life and to the notion of theosis - 'divinization' or 'deification' - perhaps the most distinctively Eastern note in the Macarian literature" (Campbell, p. x).

04. III. Reformulation of Theosis: John and Charles Wesley

04. III. Reformulation of Theosis: John and Charles Wesley By whose authority, and by what criterion, did Wesley amend his sources, correct previous visions, and reformulate Patristic conceptions of theosis? It is clear that he both learned from his sources and altered his sources on points he believed did not conform to the teachings of Scripture and the revealed order of salvation as he understood them. Wesley, in appropriating the idea of theosis and constructing his doctrine of Christian perfection, found that the Church Fathers required editing. Even ecumenical councils merited selective approval. The Tradition, for Wesley, was open to improvement and required amendment according to the tests of scripture, reason, and experience. [26] As Outler suggests, the effect of Wesley's reconstruction of theosis was the turning of the Patristic ladder of divine ascent on its side to make perfection "into a genetic scale of development within historical existence" (Outler, John Wesley, 31). By dismissing the Platonic notion of "becoming gods according to grace" in favor of the less ambitious notion of becoming like God, by grace through faith, "Christian perfection" suddenly emerged as an attainable goal. As a volitional state, Wesleyan perfection is difficult enough to attain. Even so, compared to the high and lofty Greek and Syrian visions of theosis, Wesleyan sanctification appears almost a domesticated (or democratized) version of the more ancient doctrine. Did Charles share brother John Wesley's vision of perfection, or did he retain the older Eastern view of theosis? According to A. M. Allchin's insightful study, Charles Wesley was committed to an earlier model of Patristic theosis. As a poet-theologian in the tradition of St. Ephrem, Charles expressed in hymns what is difficult to state in doctrine:

He deigns in flesh to appear, Widest extremes to join, To bring our vileness near, And make us all divine; And we the life of God shall know, For God is manifest below.

Made perfect first in love, And sanctified by grace, We shall from earth remove, And see his glorious face; His love shall then be fully showed, And man shall all be lost in God.

(Hymn #5, Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord [1745]) In the Advent hymn above, the truth embodied in the doctrines of incarnation, sanctification, glorification, and deification are all brought together in one cosmic vision which must be sung to be appreciated. Admittedly, such language may be read as virtually pantheistic, involving the objectionable notion of ontological absorption of humanity into God. However, says Allchin, Charles Wesley's intention "is to simply point in song to what cannot be categorized in discursive doctrine" (Allchin, 25). Charles is a mystic speaking "ec-statically" (in the original meaning of "standing outside oneself"). Caught up in the rapture of cosmic vision and praise, the poet seeks only to use language worthy of the experience. Charles' poetic vision is of a mystical union in which the soul of the Christian becomes divinized and "lost in God." At journey's end, Charles wrote in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), the sanctified soul will be:

Plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea, And lost in thine immensity! The finest hymn by Charles Wesley hymn which points to the mystery of theosis, according to Allchin, is found in the 1750

Hymn Book under the section "Seeking for Full Redemption" (Hymn #379, Vol. 7, W. Works, Bicentennial Edition, 552):

Heavenly Adam, life divine, Change my nature into Thine;

Move and spread throughout my soul, Actuate and fill the whole; Be it I no longer now Living in the flesh, but Thou.

Holy Ghost, no more delay;

Come, and in thy temple stay;

Now thine inward witness bear, Strong, and permanent and clear;

Spring of life, thyself impart, Rise eternal in my heart. Not all of Charles' theosis hymns, expressing his yearning for full redemption made it into John's published collections. Characteristically, John edited, revised or deleted Charles' hymns according to his own standards and sensibilities for Methodist audiences. This reflects, among other differences between the two brothers, the possibility of John and Charles at variance on the nature and extent of perfection in this life. According to John Tyson's study, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, John expected to go on to perfection in this life, Charles at the threshold of death or in the next life. John affirmed a perfection of the will, a cleansing of the heart, and a divine possession of the soul in this life. Charles would settle for nothing less than sinless perfection, the full recovery of the imago dei, the achievement of divine likeness, and humanity's restoration to the angelic nature and beyond-the same vision of perfection John and Charles both shared during their Oxford years. [27] This same theological tension is evident in the letters of John Wesley to his brother Charles as represented in Tyson's study. For example:

June 27, 1766. Concerning setting perfection too high. That perfection which I believe, I can boldly preach; because I think I see five hundred witnesses of it. Of that perfection which you preach, you think you do not see any witnesses at all... I verily believe there are none upon the earth; none dwelling in the body... Therefore I still think, to set perfection so high is effectively to renounce it. (131)

February 12, 1767. The whole comes to one point: Is there, or is there not, any instantaneous sanctification between justification and death? I say, Yes. You (often seem to) say, No. What arguments brought you to think so? Perhaps they may convince me too. (132)

June 14, 1768. I think it is high time that you and I, at least, should come to a point. Shall we go on asserting perfection against all the world? Or shall we quietly let it drop? We really must do one or the other... What shall we jointly and explicitly maintain, (and recommend to all our Preachers) concerning the nature, the time, (now or by and by?), and the manner of it? instantaneous, or not? I am weary of intestine war; of Preachers quoting one of us against the other. At length, let us fix something for good and all... (136)

05. IV. Conclusion: Back To Charles and Beyond John

05. IV. Conclusion: Back To Charles and Beyond John In this study, we have examined the Eastern doctrine of theosis in the primary Patristic sources Wesley relied on for his own doctrinal construction of "entire sanctification." Building on the insights of Outler and Maddox, and attempting to apply Campbell's thesis, my own evaluation supports the notion that what Wesley envisioned as Christian perfection, holiness, or entire sanctification is based in part on his personal vision of what his sources taught about theosis. We have examined how Wesley selectively accessed the Patristic tradition (principally in the writings of Clement, Origen, Ephrem, and Macarius), and how he reformulated the doctrine of theosis "programmatically" according to his own vision of antiquity and contemporary concerns of what was practical and attainable by grace through faith in this life. We have also considered how Charles Wesley held more tenaciously to the native strand of theosis within the Anglican tradition.

Since the time of the Wesleys, a distinctively Wesleyan-Holiness pietism and theology (with both positive and negative psychological consequences) has emerged in the Western Christian tradition. It now may be in need of refinement or reformulation. Reclaiming a Wesleyan heritage today requires not only understanding Wesley's developed doctrine of Christian perfection, but knowing and appreciating his acknowledged theological sources. As Outler suggested, "Wesley must be read in light of his sources - and therefore within the larger ecumenical perspectives of historic Christianity." [28] Applying this method, I find him in continuity with the Patristic tradition, yet distinctive and limited in his willingness to appropriate fully either the promise or the process of what the Patristic writers meant by becoming "partakers of the divine nature."

Therefore, I find it fruitful to go behind and beyond John Wesley, affirming his ancient sources and appreciating his positive contributions to the tradition, invoking the early Wesley (as well as his steadfast brother Charles) to correct the middle Wesley, and then standing with the mature Wesley in his openness to new light of revelation. When John Wesley is read in tandem with Charles, and both brothers in conjunction with their sources, Charles' poetic vision of perfection can be reconsidered and re-incorporated into the tradition. Wesleyans can then go back to Charles and beyond John (and back to the Scriptures to exegete anew the theosis passages [29]) in order to construct a more biblical, global, Wesleyan spirituality for the Third Millennium. Such a re-formulation would incorporate the best of John Wesley's theological refinements of the ancient doctrine of theosis (i.e., appropriation by faith not by works, inward assurance over perpetual seeking, accessibility in this earthly life), while fully appreciating the Eastern emphasis on therapeutic soteriology with its biblical affirmation of original humanity and original blessing. In so doing, we may arrive at a progressive Wesleyan-Orthodox vision of theosis as part of the essential quest for human wholeness.

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07. Endnotes

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[1] The doctrine of entire sanctification admits to at least two models of interpretation: (1) instantaneous and (2) progressive perfection, involving (a) eradication of sin or (b) a blameless walk with God. See "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" and "Farther Thoughts on Entire Sanctification" for Wesley's most mature conception of the doctrine.

[2] Plato had already defined theosis as "likeness to God so far as possible" (Theaetetus). How far is possible is what was debated in the Platonic tradition. The Greek idea of theosis was incorporated into Patristic theology as theosis kata charin (ingodded according to gift or grace). As a gift of God, according to capacity, a person can become a "partaker of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Just as God, as Creator, crossed over from the divine realm and became a human, so human beings (through progressive participation in the divine nature) may cross over from creaturehood into the uncreated realm--a grace which restores the image and appropriates the likeness of God, as far as possible in this life and the next.

[3] The Eastern Orthodox doctrine of theosis is understood to be grounded in Scriptures (Psalms 82:6, John 10:34-35, 2 Peter 1:4, 1 John 3:1-2) and in the Apostolic Tradition according to its principal proponents (Origen, Clement, Ephrem, Macarius, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor). After the Orthodox acceptance of the views of Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) on the distinctions between divine energies and divine essence, the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of theosis became defined as a "union (of energies) without confusion (of essence)" in which the essential distinction between Creator and creature eternally remains. As Orthodox Bishop Kalistos Ware writes: "In the Age to come, God is 'all in all,' but Peter is Peter and Paul is Paul." Each retains his or her own nature and personal identity. Yet all are filled with God's Spirit and perfected as creature (The Orthodox Way, 168).

Two distinct interpretations of theosis--one a union and the other a communion model--can be identified in Patristic theology: (1) The union model envisions humanity literally becoming divine (i.e. gods and goddesses, perfected sons and daughters in the family of God); (2) The communion model metaphorically imagines humanity becoming like God while remaining creature (i.e., perfected humanity may assume some qualities of divinity but never be divine in nature, always creature in relation to Creator). Variations on these two models of theosis include the ideas that one may spiritually evolve beyond human nature to become an angel, or become like an angel (i.e., restored angelic nature=perfected human nature). Theosis is a compelling mystical notion not easily grasped and clearly subject to various interpretations.

[4] "Address to Clergy," Works (Jackson), Vol. 10, 484-492; see also Campbell, pp. 49-50).

[5] Much "holiness" doctrine today has elements of theological eisegesis--the uncritical and unhistorical reading back into both the biblical texts and the Patristic tradition of 18th or 19th-century Wesleyan conceptions of sanctification and then presenting this vision of holiness as

scriptural and patristic (see Bassett, pp. 50-67).

[6] Wesley became convinced of the necessity for ancient liturgical integrity (wine mixed with water, prayer for the descent of the Holy Spirit on the elements, exorcisms, abstaining from blood and things strangled [meat], prayers for the dead, stations of the cross, Saturday evening nightwatch services, turning East in reciting the Creed, full immersion and triple dipping at baptisms!) as well as for moral purity (through spiritual discipline) as taught by the ancient pastoral theologians in the Apostolic Constitutions and Canons.

[7] Randy Maddox makes the case that "Wesley is best read as a theologian who was fundamentally committed to the therapeutic view of Christian life, (and) who struggled to express this (Eastern) view in terms of the dominant stream of his Western Christian setting..." (Maddox, "Reading Wesley as a Theologian," Wesleyan Theological Journal (Spring, 1995).

[8] See Wesley's sermon "The Almost Christian" as well as Campbell's interpretation of Wesley's personal assessment of his new experience (pp. 37ff).

[9] 1. Protreptikos (Exhortation to the Greeks)--addresses the unconverted and unenlightened pagan; 2. Paidagogos (Instructor)--addresses catechumens and simple-minded believers in need of recovery, moral instruction, and the milk of Christ; and 3. Stromateis (Miscellanies) addresses the true gnostic in need of the meat of esoteric initiation into the Christian mysteries and ancient (possibly Hermetic) wisdom.

[10] The Hermetic tradition, originating in ancient Egypt, was part of the eclectic theological mix of Hellenistic Judaism and Paganism which in turn helped shape the Greek understanding of Christianity in the Patristic period. The Egyptian god Thoth is the Greek god Hermes, who delivered a "revelation" which many Patristic theologians (e.g., Justin) understood as prophetic and which was fulfilled in the coming of Christ.

[11] Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky compares Clement's gnostic content to certain passages in Poimandres--the collection of hermetic texts originating in Egypt "in which contemplative knowledge is presented as a deifying formula by which one is raised to the sphere of the fixed stars" (Corpus Hermeticum, Bude's collection, Vol. 1, Treatise X, p. 112f). Lossky says that "Clement mentions the writings of Hermes Trismegistus (see Strom. IV, 4, p. 9, col. 253), but he never quotes them." (Lossky, p. 54)

[12] Clement's exhortation in chapter 12 of Paidagogos is representative of the Alexandrian vision of theosis: "But let us, O children of the good Father--nurslings of the good Instructor--fulfill the Father's will, listen to the Word, and take on the impress of the truly saving life of the Savior; and meditating on the heavenly mode of life according to which we have been deified, let us anoint ourselves with the perennial immortal bloom of gladness..."

[13] In interpreting Wesley's appropriation of Clement, Bassett admits that Clement "does speak of man's becoming God...in the language of the mystery of the Incarnation, of God having become man, not in the philosophical or everyday languages of metaphysics, logic, or sense-experience." But Bassett seems unwilling to call Clement a gnostic or to say that Wesley either misunderstood Clement's intended meaning or simply corrected his source on the doctrine of theosis (Bassett, p. 57).

[14] Origen, Dialogue with Heraclides, 150 (in Chadwick's translation, *Alexandrian Christianity*, 446).

[15] Origen imagines the soul returning to God on eagle's wings. In its flight, the purified soul is allowed to pass the flaming swords of the cherubim guarding access to the tree of life: "And He (Christ) is with you to show you the way to paradise of God and how you may pass through the cherubim and the flaming sword that turns every way and guards the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24) ...But the cherubim will receive [only] those who by nature cannot be held by the flaming sword, because they have built with nothing that can catch fire; and they [cherubim] will escort them [deified souls] to the tree of life and to all the trees God planted in the east and made to grow out of the ground (Gen. 2:8-9) ("An Exhortation to Martyrdom," XVI, 52, XXXVI, 67-68).

[16] See Campbell (132) for Wesley's specific references to Origen.

[17] The image of the "robe of glory," also called "garment of light" in Rabbinic Judaism and semitic Christianity, is based on interpretations of Genesis 3:21 made near the beginning of the Christian era. There is only a single letter's difference in Hebrew between "garments of skin" and "garments of light." The Syrian tradition by Ephrem's time had identified the "wedding garment" of Matthew 22:1-14 as the "robe of glory" and connected it to the original "garment of light" of Genesis (Brock, 86-88).

[18] Brock, p. 113. A fruitful study could be made of the relationship between Ephrem's Eucharistic poetry and John and Charles Wesley's Hymns for the Lord's Super and Hymns for Advent (1745).

[19] Wesley's epistemological assumptions, according to Randy Maddox, were based on the Patristic notion "spiritual senses" (Ephrem's "luminous eye") as a faculty of inward knowing. These awakened senses could provide "immediate perceptual access to such spiritual realities as the existence of our soul, angels, and the afterlife." Wesley also extended this sense of universal revelation to include assurance of salvation and perfection (Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 28-30). The person of mature faith, Wesley believed, sees with the eyes of the heart and knows in the soul the truth of God.

[20] See Peter Brown on the Messalian "heresy," *The Body and Society*, p. 333.

[21] See W. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*.

[22] Outler, John Wesley, footnote # 25, p. 9. After testing this hypothesis of his mentor, Ted Campbell found that "Wesley was attracted to the doctrine of sanctification expressed in the Spiritual Homilies attributed to Macarius," but that "Wesley consistently omitted references to ascetic life and to the notion of theosis" in his publication of twenty-two of the Homilies in *A Christian Library* (Campbell, x).

[23] David C. Ford, "Saint Makarios of Egypt and John Wesley: Variations on the Theme of Sanctification," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 1988, pp. 288-89).

[24] Ford, footnote #84, p. 309. Cf. Ephrem's vision of humanity's original "garment of light."

[25] Ford, p. 311-312. "I have not yet seen any perfect Christian or one perfectly free... (Pseudo-Macarius, 83). Cf. Basset's alternate interpretation: "So, entire sanctification is, for

Macarius, a distinct work of grace, necessarily subsequent to conversion, but it is also totally dependent on it" (75).

[26] However justified this view may be theologically, from a historical viewpoint, Campbell concludes, "Wesley's notions of early Christianity were frequently incorrect both in detail...and in general..." and his programmatic use of his sources required selective adaptation of the early texts (Campbell, 4). For specific examples of how Wesley altered the Church Fathers, see Campbell, 39-40, 64.

[27] Tyson, p. 360. See also Wesley's sermon "The One Thing Needful" (1734) which he never published, perhaps because it did not reflect his mature views on the subject, but which was preserved by Charles (who retained this earlier view of perfection).

[28] Outler, "A New Future for Wesley Studies: An Agenda for 'Phase III'" in The Wesleyan Theological Heritage, p. 138.

[29] See Psalm 82:6, John 10:34-35, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 2 Peter 1:4, and 1 John 3:1-2.

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