

# A Study of John Wesley's 'The Way of Salvation'- a dialogue with contemporary theologians

Keith YW LEE (MDiv2)

## I. Introduction

*“In the year 1725, being in the twenty-third year of my age, I met with Bishop Taylor’s ‘Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying’. In reading several parts of this book, I was exceedingly affected : that part in particular which relates to purity of intention. Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God; all my thoughts, and words, and actions; being thoroughly convinced there was no medium, but that every part of my life ( not some only) must either be sacrifice to God, or myself; that is, in effect to the devil.*

*Can any serious person doubt of this, or find a medium between serving God, and serving the devil ?” – John Wesley <sup>1</sup>*

“When John Wesley was born in 1703 some of the most significant turning-points in English and European history had just been passed,” writes the historian Herbert Butterfield.<sup>2</sup>

J. C. Ryle wrote a century ago, ‘If ever a good protestant has been practically canonized, it has been John Wesley’.<sup>3</sup> His wide-ranging influence is reflected in the comments of public figures, secular historians, and Christian leaders of all denominations.<sup>4</sup> In a sense Wesley has become the property of the whole church. It is not difficult to find Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists expressing gratitude and admiration.<sup>5</sup>

Wesley was paradox. A devoted son of the Church of England, he fathered a breakaway church. An Oxforddon, he became a preacher to the illiterate masses. An unbending Tory, he was a friend of the poor and enemy of slavery. Saintly and calm in a crisis, he could be irritable and dictatorial. Extravagant claims have been made for him, but, these apart, Stanley Ayling seems justified in regarding him as ‘the single most influential Protestant leader of the English speaking world since the Reformation.’<sup>6</sup>

There are three preliminary matters to note before we should start our talk about John

---

<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* ( London : The Epworth Press, 1979), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Barrie Tabraham, *Exploring Methodism : The Making of Methodism* (London : The Epworth Press, 1995), 1, quoting Herbert Butterfield, “England in the Eighteenth Century” in Ruppert Davies and Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 1, Epworth Press 1965, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification : English Evangelical Theology 1640 – 1790 : An Evaluation*, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1990), 51, quoting J.C Ryle, “Christian Leaders of the Last Century”, 1978, 64. ???

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, quoting Stanley Ayling, “John Wesley”, 1979, 318.

Wesley's thought.<sup>7</sup>

First, the context in which John Wesley was writing. Sometimes he was addressing a national scene in which Roman Catholic, Anglican and Calvinist traditions were firmly established and well-defined. At others, he was writing to individuals about specific issues, it is important not to take his words out of context, especially in those areas where he modified his views over the passage of time.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, the absence of a single, all-embracing theological statement from Wesley. Although he remained an active and serious theologian throughout his life, he produced no systematic theology in the way that Karl Barth or Paul Tillich were to do. He was an exceedingly busy and much-travelled man. Thousands of words poured from his pen on countless issues. Wesley was primarily interested in meeting people's practical needs, and therefore his theology had a dynamic quality which evolved over the years.<sup>9</sup>

Thirdly, Wesley's concentration on particular doctrines. He was not concerned to cover every single aspect of belief. There is little in his works, for example, about the Trinity, or specific teaching concerning the Holy Spirit – though his writings contained much teaching about the Spirit's work. Being a practical man, he did not spend time in going over ground that had been well trodden by others. Rather, he brought new insights into the way in which the individual could experience God's salvation.<sup>10</sup>

## II. General Character of Wesley's Understanding of Salvation

*“What is salvation ? The salvation which is here spoken of is not what is frequently understood by the word, the going to heaven, eternal happiness. ....It is not a blessing which lies on the other side of death....it is a present thing....[it] might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory”<sup>11</sup>*

Albert C. Outler noted that this sermon has the most extensive history of oral preaching behind it of any of the written sermons;<sup>12</sup> thus he recommended it as the best single essay by which to judge Wesley's soteriology.<sup>13</sup>

1. The Nature of Human Salvation
- i. The Three Dimensions of Salvation

---

<sup>7</sup> Tabraham, *Exploring Methodism*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace : John Wesley's practical theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994 ), 143, quoting John Wesley, Sermons 43, “The Scripture way of Salvation”(1765), §I.1, Works 2:156.

<sup>12</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 323, quoting Albert C. Outler, Introductions and notes throughout : Works, Vol. 2, 155.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Wesley denied here that human salvation is only a future hope, Wesley was also denying that it is solely juridical in nature. Salvation involves much more than a momentary legal transaction that guarantees eventual eternal blessedness ( as a simplistic form of the juridical emphasis would suggest ).<sup>14</sup>

Also, evident is a distinction between three dimensions of human salvation. Wesley's most explicit delineation of these three dimensions was pardon – salvation begun, holiness – salvation continued, and heaven – salvation finished.<sup>15</sup> Some other common threefold formulations were justification, sanctification, and consummation; or pardon, grace, and glory.<sup>16</sup> To suggest alliteration, Wesley understood human salvation in its fullest sense to include deliverance (1) immediately from the *penalty* of sin, (2) progressively from the *plague* of sin, and (3) eschatologically from the very *presence* of sin and its effects.<sup>17</sup>

## ii. The Therapeutic Focus of Salvation

Throughout Wesley's various considerations of human salvation, his focal interest remained on the middle dimension of deliverance from the plague of sin, albeit always in integral relation with the other two dimensions.<sup>18</sup>

However, the juridical dimension of deliverance from penalty of sin was also integrated by Wesley into his focal interest of deliverance from the plague of sin. Wesley's famous description of the Aldersgate event culminates in the claim that then he sensed that Christ had "taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."<sup>19</sup> It is sometimes assumed that Wesley was making here only a juridical claim that he was aware of God's pardon of the penalty of his sin.<sup>20</sup> However, in view of the driving passion of Wesley's life prior to 1738 had been to conquer the plague of sin and be conformed to the model of Christ.<sup>21</sup> Wesley was expecting more at Aldersgate - the full salvation from both the penalty and the plague of sin !<sup>22</sup>

As evident in Wesley's claim, he was disappointed soon after the initial experience at Aldersgate, "my wound was not fully healed."<sup>23</sup> Eventually, he distinguished carefully between the instantaneous restoration of our responsive participation in God ( the New Birth ) and the resulting gradual therapeutic transformation of our lives ( sanctification proper ).<sup>24</sup>

It was a natural corollary of Wesley's understanding of the human problem. If the crucial problem of sin is not just guilt but the spiritual debilitation and affliction of the human person, then salvation must involve more than pardon; it must also bring healing.<sup>25</sup> This need accounts for

---

<sup>14</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 143.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, quoting, Minutes (13 May 1746), Q. 3, John Wesley, 159.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, quoting Journal ( 24 May 1738), 14, Works, 18:250.

<sup>20</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 144.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 145, quoting Journal (6 June 1738), Works, 18:254.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 145.

the prominence of therapeutic language in Wesley's various comments on human salvation.<sup>26</sup>

### iii. The Holistic Scope of Salvation

Yet Wesley insisted throughout his life that salvation must involve not only inner holiness but also the recovery of actual moral righteousness in our outward lives. Below is another classic excerpt:<sup>27</sup>

*“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 the righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, truth. This implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and by consequence all holiness of conversation.”*<sup>28</sup>

Wesley was using “conversation” in this quotation in the common 18<sup>th</sup> Century sense of all types of human conduct.<sup>29</sup> Inner holiness of our tempers is balanced with outer holiness in our relationships; and renewed relationships with our various “others” nurtures healed relationship with our “selves”.<sup>30</sup>

Albert Outler has captured this balanced nicely in his characterization of Wesley's understanding of salvation as a journey from the barely human, to the truly human, to the fully human.<sup>31</sup>

### iv. The Co-Operant of Salvation

Actually, with the transition of 1738, Wesley became a vigorous champion of “justification by faith alone”.<sup>32</sup> In order to accentuate our absolute dependence upon God's grace, he now sharply rejected any suggestion of requisite good works or holiness prior to justification, characterizing all human efforts prior to saving acceptance by God as sin.<sup>33</sup> However, it was not long before he became uncomfortable with implications that some drew from this theme of faith alone.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, quoting just three examples from the different periods of his theological work : Sermon 101 (1735), “The Trouble and Rest of Good Men,” Proem, Works, 3:533; Plain Account of Genuine Christianity (1749), §III.10, John Wesley, 195; and Sermon 69 (1784), “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge,” §II.8, Works 2:581.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., quoting “A Father Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” §Pt. I,3, Works 11:106.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 146, quoting Oxford English Dictionary ( 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1989 ), 3:868.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, quoting Albert C. Outler, “Pastoral Care in the Wesleyan Spirit,” PSTJ 25:4-11; reprint : 1991, 10.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, quoting Journal ( 13 Sept. 1739 ), Works, 19:96; The Principles of a Methodist, §2, Works, 9:50-1; Sermon 5 “Justification by Faith,” §III.2, Works, 1:191; Sermon 110, “Free Grace,” §3, Works, 3:545; and Sermon 150, “Hypocrisy in Oxford,” §I.7, Works, 4:396-7.

<sup>34</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 149.

Wesley's writing abound with affirmations of the prevenience and indispensability of God's pardoning / empowering grace for human salvation, particularly after 1738.<sup>35</sup> However, such affirmations were tied to a recognition that humans may (regrettably) resist God's gracious salvific overtures, for God's restoring grace is co-operant.<sup>36</sup>

The co-operant nature of grace entails that we must "put it to work," as Wesley phrased it in his classic articulation of the co-operant nature of salvation : the 1785 sermon on Philippians 2:12-13, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation."<sup>37</sup> The reason for our requisite participation in the process of salvation is not a deficiency in God's grace, but a quality of God's character : the God we know in Christ is a God of love who respects our integrity and will not force salvation upon us.<sup>38</sup>

One of the major implications of the co-operant nature of grace is Wesley's concession of the possibility of Christians becoming apostate, which is in direct contrast to predestination opponents.<sup>39</sup> Just as God's empowering grace does not work irresistibly in initiating our Christian life, so we may resist or slight God's gracious work within the Christian life, gradually weakening and ultimately dissolving our responsive relationship with God.<sup>40</sup>

Maddox commented that the sermon referenced to epitomize Wesley's commitment to the co-operant nature of salvation is from the late Wesley. This is no accident that his views on this issue underwent some temporal development.<sup>41</sup> It is his further consideration of Scripture and the lives of his people convinced him that God's saving grace is co-operant and resistible in every degree of its transforming effect.<sup>42</sup>

#### v. The Gradual Process of Salvation

In Wesley's opinion, God's typical manner of working in all areas of providence and grace was gradual.<sup>43</sup> The centrality of gradual process to Wesley's understanding of salvation is most evident in his ascription of it even to those who have attained "perfect love," insisting that this

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 147, quoting Sermon 1, "Salvation by Faith," §1-3, Works, 1:117-8; and A Father Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Pt. I, §I.6, Works, 11:107-8; Wesley's interchange with William Law over whether Law recognized the necessity of grace to enable obedient living ( series of letters in Works, 25:540-50 ).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., quoting Wesley's strong statement of resistable grace in Sermon 110, "Free Grace" ( §22, Works, 3:554 ) written in 1739.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 147, quoting Works, 3:199-209.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 148, quoting Sermon 127, "On the Wedding Garment," §19, Works, 4:148.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 151, quoting Predestination Calmly Considered, §68-79, John Wesley, 458-68; and his frequent comments to this effect on biblical passages in NT Notes ( e.g. Matt. 18:34, John 6:70, and 1 Cor. 9:27 ).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 151, quoting Wesley's suggestions of the possibility of an irremissible state, see Journal ( 24 Aug. 1743 ), Works, 19:333; and Letter to Thomas Olivers ( 24 Mar. 1757 ). Letters ( Telford ), 3:213. For later rejections of such a state, see Letter to Elizabeth Hardy ( 26 Dec. 1761 ), Letters ( Telford ), 4:167; Father Thoughts Upon Christian Perfection ( 1763 ), Q. 30, Works ( Jackson ), 11:426; and Letter to Charles Wesley ( 27 Jan. 1767 ), Letters ( Telford ), 5:38.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 152.

perfection too remains open to continual increase.<sup>44</sup>

Although, at the same time, Wesley was influenced by the Western understandings of salvation focused on the legal act of pardon, which can be a momentary transaction, as evidence of this is, his use of the term 'conversion' which he used immediately following Aldersgate identifying the moment of justification.<sup>45</sup> However, not for long he increasingly avoided the word 'conversion', and when he did use it he was careful to define it in a way synonymous with sanctification : " a thorough change of heart and life from sin to holiness."<sup>46</sup> Because Wesley became more and more uncomfortable with this usage, as it implied that justification provided all the transformation that a person needed, obscuring the importance of further growth in holiness.<sup>47</sup>

Obvious that the early Wesley was encouraged by the English Moravians to consider conversion an instantaneous and complete deliverance from all sin, fear, and doubt. However, his own experience, and consultation with other theological sources, soon persuaded him that full spiritual transformation was not instantaneously provided. However, he remained convinced of the importance of an instantaneous beginning of the Christian life.<sup>48</sup>

Wesley was facing the theological issues in these two contexts. A good indicator is his differentiation of repentance and faith from justification on the grounds that the former are co-operant ( and gradual ) while the latter is god's "mere gift" ( and instantaneous ).<sup>49</sup> Even clearer is his claim that "perfection is received by simple faith in God's gift, consequently in an instant."<sup>50</sup> Wesley stressed the instantaneous nature of these two aspects of salvation as assumed implications of God's gracious prevenience in human salvation.<sup>51</sup> However strong his stress on God's gracious prevenience in justification and Christian perfection, Wesley was quick to affirm an integral place for our responsive growth following these initiatory events, since we are dealing with a God of responsible grace.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the second reason that he frequently invoked for stressing the instantaneous nature of entire sanctification in particular related to its impact on gradual responsive growth prior to this event. He assumed an analogue benefit from encouraging those with only the "faith of a servant" to expect the witness of assurance at any moment.<sup>53</sup>

## vi. The Individual Variability of Salvation

---

<sup>44</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 152, quoting Sermon 40, "Christian Perfection," §I.9, Works, 2:105; Letter to Joseph Benson ( 16 March 1771 ), Letters ( Telford ), 5:229; and Journal ( 5 June 1772 ), Works, 22:337.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 152, quoting The Principles of a Methodist, §18 & §25, works, 9:57, 60.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., quoting Wesley's Dictionary definition and NT Notes, Matt 18:3, Acts 3:19.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., quoting A Letter to the Author of 'The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papist Compared' ( 1750 ), §19, Works, 11368-9.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 154, quoting Wesley's added the distinction to his NT Notes comment on Act 5:31 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition ( 1760-2).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., quoting Wesley's Letter to Charles Wesley ( 27 Jan. 1767 ), Letters ( Telford ), 5:39; and Letter to Ann Loxdale ( 12 July 1782 ), Letters ( Telford ), 7:129. The emphasis is in the original.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., quoting Hymns and Sacred Poems ( 1740 ) Preface, §9, Works ( Jackson ), 14:326; and Letter to 'John Smith' ( 30 Dec. 1745 ), §12, Works, 26:180.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., quoting Sermon 106, "On Faith," §I.12, Works 3:497-8.

Wesley began his revival movement shortly after Aldersgate, still strongly influenced by the model of conversion that had been recommended to him by Peter Böhler and the English Moravians. This was a classic “twin-born” model.<sup>54</sup> By conjoining justification with immediate deliverance from sin and doubt it implied that conversion would be a dramatic experience. This model made such an experience normative for all cases – “real” Christian must be able to identify the specific time when one experienced conversion.<sup>55</sup>

However, the practical-theological engagement with his revival movement eventually led to the kind of pastoral sensitivity evident in the late Wesley’s advice to Mary Cooke :<sup>56</sup>

*“There is an irreconcilable variability in the operations of the Holy Spirit on [human] souls, more especially as to the manner of justification. Many find Him rushing in upon them like a torrent, while they experience “The o’erwhelming power of saving grace.” .....But in others He works in a very different way : “He deigns His influence to infuse; Sweet, refreshing, as the silent dews.” It has pleased Him to work the latter way in you from the beginning...in a gentle and almost insensible manner. Let Him take His own way : He is wiser than you; He will do the things well.”<sup>57</sup>*

Nevertheless, Wesley still favored the “twin-born” model – as most expressive of the common Christian privilege of assurance, but no longer consider it exclusively normative. However, the clarifying footnotes that he added in 1774 to his original account of Aldersgate suggest that Wesley had gravitated towards such a gradualist reading of his own spiritual journey. He now viewed the transitions in his spiritual life as more incremental in nature, and God’s justifying acceptance as present prior to Aldersgate ( he was already a “servant of God”).<sup>58</sup>

## 2. Order or Way of Salvation ?

Concerning the constituent elements of John Wesley’s understanding of salvation, previous studies have usually surveyed these elements under the rubric of *ordo salutis* ( Order of Salvation ). This organization of soteriology, and the eventual designation itself, developed in Protestant Scholasticism and was particularly attractive to English Puritans. Its dominant feature is a depiction of salvation as a standard progressive sequence of God’s works in the soul.<sup>59</sup>

Arguments arose recently that the label “ordo salutis” and its implied soteriology emphases are inappropriate for dealing with Wesley. Designation “via salutis” is advocated that the word

---

<sup>54</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 155.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 156, quoting Letter to Mary Cooke ( 30 Oct. 1785 ), Letters ( Telford ), 7:298. This advice is particularly striking in light of the controversy of John Fletcher with Walter Shirley and Howell Harris over whether the Spirit’s work was in effusions ( baptisms ) of power or “imperceptible dews”.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 157.

“way” better conveys the gradual dynamics of Wesley’s understanding of salvation.<sup>60</sup> Actually, Wesley used “way” to name the Christian life in the titles of of his several important sermons, “The Way to the Kingdom” (1746), “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765), and “The More Excellent Way” (1738).<sup>61</sup>

Maddox concurred that Wesley soteriology is more appropriately described under the rubric of the way of salvation than the order of salvation. He reached this conclusion from the three connotations of the Reformed version of the *ordo salutis*.<sup>62</sup>

Firstly, the Reformed scholastics’ juridical focus inclined them to construe the *ordo salutis* as a series of discrete states. Although Maddox saw that in the middle period of Wesley, he did issue some accounts of Christian salvation that suggest such a series of standard transitions.<sup>63</sup> Wesley’s later writings laid much emphasis on the gradual nature of salvation and the interrelationship of its different facets.<sup>64</sup> He saw Christian life as a continuing journey into increasing depths of “grace upon grace”.<sup>65</sup>

Secondly, the Reformed version of the *ordo salutis* limited the appropriateness of this term for expressing Wesley’s soteriology results from the doctrine of perseverance : the possibility of regression is played down. Maddox saw Wesley’s contrary conviction comes through clearly in the practical-theological context of the 1770 conference with his preachers :<sup>66</sup>

*“Does not talking, without proper caution, of justified or sanctified state, tend to mislead [people]; almost naturally leading them to trust in what was done in one moment ? Whereas we are every moment pleasing or displeasing to Tabraham, Exploring Methodism : The Making of Methodism, 33 God, according to our works; according to the whole of our present inward tempers and outward behaviour.”<sup>67</sup>*

Thirdly, using “order of salvation” for denoting Wesley’s soteriology is precisely its scholastic overtones. Maddox stated that Wesley did argue for several fairly specific distinctions regarding human salvation, most of his considerations of these issues were sparked by, and sought to address, the pastoral needs of his revival movement, not the expectations of scholastic method.<sup>68</sup>

Maddox commented that, for Wesley the different aspects of human salvation were not an

---

<sup>60</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace : John Wesley’s practical theology* , 157.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 158, quoting Wesley’s Preface to An Abstract of the Life and Death of the Reverend Learned and Pious Mr. Thomas Halyburton (1739), §2, Works ( Jackson ), 14:212. Note also, the tight structure of the borrowed typology of the natural, legal, and evangelical states in Sermon 9 ( 1746 ), “The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption,” Works, 1:249-66.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., quoting Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” §II.1, Works, 3:203-4.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., quoting Sermon 1, “Salvation by Faith,” §3, Works, 1:118; and Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” §I.8, Works, 2:160.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, quoting 1770 Minutes, Q. 28, Minutes (Mason), 96.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

ordered series of discrete states, they are intertwined facets of an overarching purpose – our gradual recovery of the holiness that God has always intended for us.

### 3. Way of Salvation – Grace Upon Grace

*“Salvation begins with what is usually termed ( and very properly ) Preventing Grace; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency towards life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God. Salvation is carried on by Convincing grace, usually in Scripture termed Repentance; which brings a larger measure of self-knowledge, and farther deliverance from the heart of stone. Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation; whereby, through grace, we are saved by faith; consisting of these two grand branches, Justification and Sanctification. By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favour of God; by Sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God. All experience, as well as scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment, as a grain of mustard-seed, which at first is the least of all seeds, but, afterwards puts forth large branches, and becomes a great tree; till, in another instant, the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled with the pure love to God and man. But even that love increases more and more, till we ‘grow up in all things to Him that is our Head’; till we all attained ‘the measure of stature of the fullness of Christ’. – “On Working Out Your Own Salvation”<sup>69</sup>*

#### i. The Preventive Grace

Wesley’s teaching on this subject was one of his most important contributions to the Protestant theology.<sup>70</sup> He modified the accepted notion of Original Sin and The Fall by the prominence he gave to the preventive grace of God. It was unreasonable to saddle the whole of humanity with Adam’s guilt. No one was finally damned unless he or she elected to do so.<sup>71</sup> The Swedish theologian, Harold Lindström, has summed up Wesley’s stress on preventive grace by saying that he ‘is trying to combine the idea of personal responsibility and personal co-operation, where man’s eternal destiny is at stake, with a conception of the situation of natural man which

---

<sup>69</sup> John Wesley, *John Wesley’s Sermons : An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater ( Nashville : Abingdon Press, 1991 ), 488.

<sup>70</sup> Tabraham, *Exploring Methodism*, 33.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., quoting John Wesley, Works, Vol. IX, 332.

emphasizes the idea of saving grace.’<sup>72</sup>

Wesley was very much aware of the dangers that the two extreme positions of ‘Augustinian pessimism’ and ‘Pelagian optimism’ might create<sup>73</sup>, and instead offered a third option – prevenient grace. In his sermon “What is Man?”, Wesley insisted that we have ‘not only a house of clay, but an immortal spirit; a spirit made in the image of God’. <sup>74</sup> In such a spirit God has implanted prevenient grace’. No person is totally depraved, he asserted, because God bestows grace to every human being at birth – hence the word ‘prevenient’ which, like ‘preventing’, literally means ‘going before’.<sup>75</sup> In his sermon ‘On Working Out Our own Salvation’ he affirmed that ‘no man living is entirely destitute of ..... Preventing Grace’, and added that ‘every man has a greater or less measure of this’.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, Wesley showed that we are able to co-operate with God responsively. The individual shares responsively in his or her own salvation, but the response is in the form of non-resistance to the working of prevenient grace initiated by God.<sup>77</sup>

However, towards the fact that many people have never had heard the gospel preached to them, we can see some points how Wesley could reconcile this free offer of salvation in his letter to Thomas Whitehead in Feb. 1748 : -<sup>78</sup>

*“The benefit of the death of Christ is not only extended to such as have the distinct knowledge of his death and sufferings, but even unto those who are inevitably excluded from this knowledge. Even these may be partakers of the benefit of his death...”<sup>79</sup>*

Wesley thus implied that those in this position will be judged by the their response to the grace with which God works within them in a hidden and mysterious way.<sup>80</sup>

## ii. Justification

It is the next major stage in Wesley’s ‘Way of Salvation’, is in some ways the doctrine that he expounded with greatest clarity.<sup>81</sup> Having accomplished the ‘death of our working’ which God has initiated by his prevenient grace, the climax is reach with our justification.<sup>82</sup>

In his sermon ‘Justification by Faith’, Wesley summed this up in a nutshell as ‘pardon, the forgiveness of sins’,<sup>83</sup> and in another sermon, ‘Salvation by Faith’, he described it as ‘a deliverance from guilt and punishment, by the atonement of Christ ... And a deliverance from the

---

<sup>72</sup> Tabraham, *Exploring Methodism*, 33, quoting H. Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification : A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation*, ( Epworth Press 1946 ), 35.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., quoting John Wesley, *Sermons*, London 1805, Vol. 6, 9.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., quoting John Wesley, *Sermons*, London 1805, Vol. 5, 110.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., quoting John Wesley, *Letters*, Vol. 2, 118.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., quoting John Wesley, *Sermons*, Vol. 1, 74.

power of sin, through Christ formed in his heart'.<sup>84</sup>

Whether the conversion was instantaneous or gradual, we have already had thorough discussion above on Wesley's views developed in the different stages of his life. Nevertheless, this 'sure trust and confidence that Christ died for my sins, that he loved me, and gave himself for me' was Wesley's own joyful testimony to the prelude to what he termed his instantaneous 'New Birth' in 1738.<sup>85</sup>

### iii. The New Birth

Whereas justification can be seen as the action of God through Christ on our behalf, the 'New Birth' is the beginning of the individual's new life in Christ. As we have seen, Wesley believed that in the Fall, sin has broken our relationship with God and distorted his image within us. Therefore salvation must involve the restoration of both relationship and image. Justification brings about a relative change in us because God treats us as though we were righteous and so restores our relationship with him. The 'New Birth' sees the beginning of a real change in the believer.<sup>86</sup>

In one of his sermons that is not often quoted, 'The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God', Wesley wrote that :<sup>87</sup>

*"Justification implies only a relative, the new birth with a real, change. God in justifying us does something for us; in the begetting us again, He does the work in us !"*<sup>88</sup>

In other words, the 'faith of a servant' has been replaced by the 'faith of a son', as Wesley himself described in his sermon on 'The new Birth'<sup>89</sup> In this experience of new birth, Wesley believed, the image of God which was lost in the Fall, now began to be restored. The process was lost in the Fall, now began to be restored. The process of this restoration is essentially a mystery, but its decisive beginning is important in two respects : it is necessary for growth in holiness and the key to present happiness. Inward renewal leads to spiritual peace and fulfillment. Furthermore, Wesley saw three characteristic marks of the new birth : faith, hope and love. Having being freed from the power of sin by faith, the Christian is given hope for the future and displays an ever-increasing love for both God and neighbour.<sup>90</sup>

### iv. Sanctification

In a Christian's pilgrimage of faith, Wesley saw that 'it is by slow degrees that he ..... grows

---

<sup>84</sup> Tabraham, *Exploring Methodism*, 35, quoting John Wesley, *Sermons*, Vol. 1, 14.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., quoting John Wesley, *Sermons*, Vol. 1, 297.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 37.

to the full measure of the stature of Christ'.<sup>91</sup> This came to be expressed in his doctrine of 'sanctification', which depicted a real change in the life of convert – not merely a relative one – and a continual growth in grace.<sup>92</sup>

Wesley was taking the teaching of Martin Luther further. Luther had reacted to the old attitudes, which seemed to suggest that salvation was obtainable by 'works', by laying an inordinate stress upon justification, almost making it an end in itself. Wesley, on the other hand saw that justification was only part of a longer process in which God's image in the individual could be restored.<sup>93</sup>

For Wesley, faith was indeed the key to unlock the door to salvation. It produces a new relationship with God – a relative change – within which a growth in grace – a real change – could occur. Sanctification was thus part of a true pilgrimage, the goal being Christian perfection, which Wesley sometimes termed 'entire sanctification', or 'perfect love'.<sup>94</sup>

#### v. Christian Perfection

Perfection was the 'goal' of Wesley's 'way of salvation', but it was easily misunderstood.<sup>95</sup> When Wesley was writing, difficulties generally arose from the confusion over definitions, which he strove to clarify. An individual cannot be free from sin in its absolute sense, yet can be free from sin if it is defined as 'conscious separation from God'. Similarly, Christian perfection in terms of perfect conformity to the will of God is clearly inconceivable, but it is within the bounds of possibility for a person to live in a perfect relationship with God – or, as St. Paul's so frequently put it, to be 'in Christ'. Wesley never said that anyone can reach a state of 'sinless perfection'. 'Perfection', in the sense in which Wesley used it, meant 'an unbroken relationship with God'.<sup>96</sup>

*"Have you not another objection nearly allied to this, namely, that we preach perfection? True, but what perfection? The Term you cannot object to, because it is scriptural. All the difficulty is to fix the meaning of it according to the Word of God. And this we have done again and again, declaring to all the world that Christian perfection does not imply an exemption from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations, but it does imply the being so crucified with Christ as to be able to testify, 'I live not, but Christ liveth in me,' and 'hath purified my heart by faith'. It does imply 'the casting down of every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ'. It does imply 'the being holy as he that hath called us is holy, in all manner of conversation', and, in a word, 'the loving the Lord our God with all our heart and serving him with all our*

---

<sup>91</sup> Tabraham, *Exploring Methodism*, 37, quoting John Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, 74.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 38, quoting Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, ( Epworth Press, 1960 ), 175.

*strength*'.

*Now, is it possible for any who believe the Scripture to deny one title of this ? You cannot. You dare not. You would not for the world. You know it is the pure Word of God. And this is the whole of what we preach. This is the height and depth of what we (with St. Paul) call perfection : a state of soul devoutly to be wished by all who have tasted of the love of God....”- An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion <sup>97</sup>*

What Wesley was doing was removing an over-emphasis upon justification alone, and putting it into the context of the whole process of salvation. It means the perfect conformity to God's will and fellowship with him. The fact the Wesley produced no less than three treatises on the subject of perfection bears witness both to its importance in his thinking, and to the many misunderstanding that it caused.<sup>98</sup>

Wesley admitted that a person could fall in grace, but he also asserted that this blissful state could be recovered. In this, he parted from company with Luther and even more with Calvin, who saw justification as a 'once and for all' event. Wesley took great care to make this point clear in his sermon on 'Christian Perfection'

*“In the first place, I shall endeavour to show, in what sense Christians are not perfect. And both from experience and Scripture it appears, first, that they are not perfect in knowledge : they are not so perfect in this life as to be free from ignorance..... Nor, secondly, from mistake; which indeed is almost an unavoidable consequence of it, seeing those who 'know but in part' are ever liable to err touching the things which they know not....Hence, even the children of God are not agreed as to the interpretation of many places in holy writ, nor is their difference of opinion any proof that they are not the children of God ... we may, thirdly, add, nor from infirmities.... I mean hereby, not only those which are properly termed bodily infirmities, but all those inward or outward imperfections which are not of a moral nature....Nor can we expect till then to be wholly free from temptation. Such perfection belongeth not to this life.....*

*Christian perfection, therefore does not imply... an exemption either from ignorance , or mistake, or infirmities, or temptation. Indeed, it is only another term for holiness .....*

*In what sense, then, are Christians perfect ? .....The very least which can be*

---

<sup>97</sup> Tabraham, *Exploring Methodism*, 38.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

*implied in these words, is, that the persons spoken of therein, namely real Christians, or believers in Christ, are made free from outward sin.... Indeed it is said, this means only, He sinneth not willfully; or he doth not commit sin habitually... secondly, to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers.....*

*Every one of these can say with St. Paul, 'I am crucified with Christ : nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me', - words that manifestly describe a deliverance from inward as well as outward sin ... It remains, then, that Christians are saved in this world from all sin, from all unrighteousness; that they are now in such a sense perfect, as not commit sin, and to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers....' <sup>99</sup>*

To summarize, Christian perfection can be experienced in this life, in a Christian's relationship with God and with other people. It was necessarily a 'limited' perfection, as we have noted above. Wesley never gave up the ideal of sinlessness, though he never used the term 'sinless perfection'. He never claimed it for himself, but did cite for others – for instance, John Fletcher – as examples. I could be lost, but equally it could be regained. It could be both instantaneous and gradual, in that the initial experience of a perfect relationship with God always had to be sustained and built upon as part of a continual process. The essence of Christian Perfection, for Wesley, was perfect love. Holiness of heart must necessarily be accompanied by holiness of life.<sup>100</sup>

In this respect, Wesley was guarding against spiritual introspection. He never wavered from his belief that inward holiness is inextricably bound up with service to others.<sup>101</sup>

#### vi. Assurance

Doctrine of Assurance forms a natural conclusion to Wesley's 'Way of Salvation'. It brings together three basic themes : God's word to us; Christ's work for us on the cross; the Spirit's witness within us. Wesley saw the first two as objective, gifts of God which do not depend on our response. The third, however, depends on our experience – on our response to the first two.<sup>102</sup>

Wesley firmly believed that a Christian could have as assurance of present salvation. This was something very different from the Calvinist conviction of 'once saved, always saved'. It was rather a continual awareness of our present spiritual condition, and avoided the dangers of 'quietism' into which he felt many of the Moravians had slipped.<sup>103</sup>

The origins of Wesley's emphasis upon assurance are not, as we might imagine, to be found in the Aldersgate Street experience. He was aware of the question of assurance long before. We find him writing on the subject, for example, in an early letter to his mother, in which he was very

---

<sup>99</sup> Tabraham, *Exploring Methodism*, 39, quoting John Wesley, *Sermons*, Vol. 3, 4-27.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

critical of the view with Dr. Jeremy Taylor had put forward in his book 'Of Living and Dying'. Taylor was trying to guard against any form of 'easy' salvation, but Wesley thought that he had gone too far in his argument.<sup>104</sup>

Wesley was steering a careful course between the two extremes of constant doubt and complacency. He also showed that it was possible for a Christian to have a present assurance and a future hope. 'The holiest man still need Christ', he argued,<sup>105</sup> since perfection invariably was a gradual process, and it 'is along time, even many years, before sin is destroyed'.<sup>106</sup> This future hope will always be present by virtue of the dynamic way in which Wesley saw the Christian faith. In other word, we may be assured of true forgiveness in this life, yet hope that our growth in grace will be consummated in heaven. Wesley, therefore, was being quite consistent when he wrote that the believer could share in 'not barely a future happy state in heaven, but a state to be enjoyed on earth'.<sup>107</sup>

### III. Rethinking the Way of Salvation

Salvation as the core theme of the Christian faith, it would be inspiring to have dialogue between Wesley's thoughts and others, which would bring us more insights to our contemporary situations. Depending on one's particular theological perspective, then, Wesley's doctrine of salvation ( and its practical application ) can be read in a number of ways. Wesley can appear as a Protestant, a Pietist, a Catholic, a High Church cleric or a Low Church evangelist, but any one of the perspectives by itself remains largely unsatisfactory.<sup>108</sup>

Thus it is best perhaps to consider Wesley's doctrine of salvation on its own terms, not as a faithful reflection of any one theological tradition, no matter how important that tradition may be, but as a well-crafted and intentional synthesis of the diverse elements that appear in Scripture ( which is ultimately normative for Wesley ) and which are, therefore and not surprisingly, reflected in several different traditions. This means, of course, that many theological schools of thought will find their reflection in the Wesleyan *via salutis*, which can, therefore form a suitable basis for dialogue, but none, not even Anglicanism, will find it there exclusively.<sup>109</sup>

#### 1 Dialogue with Asian Theology and Liberation Theology

Two contemporary theologians, CS Song<sup>110</sup> and Jon Sobrino<sup>111</sup>, are picked to have dialogue with Wesley on the way of salvation in a contextual perspective. The two theologians represent two schools of theological thought, the Asian Theology and Liberation Theology respectively,

---

<sup>104</sup> Tabraham, *Exploring Methodism*, 40, quoting John Wesley, Letters, Vol. 1, 19-20, 18 June 1725.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., quoting John Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, 417.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, quoting John Wesley, Works, Vol. XI, 423.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, quoting John Wesley, Notes on the New Testament, Matthew 3:2.

<sup>108</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation : The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* ( Nashville : Abingdon Press, 1997 ), 206.

<sup>109</sup> Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 207.

<sup>110</sup> 宋泉盛：〈十字架與蓮花〉，《第三眼神學》（台南：人光出版社），1989。

<sup>111</sup> Jon, Sobrino, "Systematic Christology : Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator of the Reign of God." In *Systematic Theology : Perspectives from Liberation Theology*. Jon Sobrino and Ignacil Ellacuria, eds. ( London : SCM, 1996 ).

which emerge after the ‘baptism’ of Christian theology by all the critical approaches throughout these over 200 years since the time of Wesley. Also, they are the flowering and fruits of the Christianity originated from the Western civilization in the Asian and Latin American world context.

#### i. Response – to – Context

These three schools of thought on salvation share a common characteristic is, they are the Christian Gospel evolved in response to the special context of its existence.

Following the main stream of the Protestant faith after the Reformation, it is clear that Wesley’s concern on the salvation was on the personal level, and sticking to the doctrine of justification by faith. However, Wesley’s personal and pastoral experience in response to the Arminianism, Anglicanism, Moravianism, and Calvinism in the English society, caused him to stress the co-operant nature of human response in salvation, and the practice of the holiness in our daily life.

For Song in Vietnam he saw, Christian faith meets with Buddhism, which is not just an encounter of two religion or ideologies, it is the encounter of two cultures, the West meets East. He was facing the serious challenge of particularism, inclusivism, and pluralism<sup>112</sup> in the Asian cultural context. But through the cross examination of the cross of Christianity and the lotus of Buddhism in the liturgical perspective<sup>113</sup>, historical development of the two religions in their cultures<sup>114</sup>, and the transcendent elements in the Buddhist traditions<sup>115</sup> and the life testimonies of the believers<sup>116</sup>, he tries to synchronize them with a new paradigm, which lead him to consider the possibility of salvation of mankind outside Christianity.<sup>117</sup>

And for Sobrino, a Catholic who faced the extremely poorness of the Latin American countries, which are mostly Catholic ( Christian ) or Catholic-influenced nations<sup>118</sup>, but where the influence of Marxism championed,<sup>119</sup> this pushed him to see the core ministry of Jesus is to liberate, and the liberation of the poor, setting up of the Reign of God, and Christian theology is a praxis is the core of the gospel.<sup>120</sup>

#### ii. Way to Universalism ?

Secondly, there is a strong tendency toward universalism in their doctrines.

As Wesley emphasized the working of the universal grace in his ‘way of salvation’, this

---

<sup>112</sup> 麥格夫 ( Alister E. McGrath ) : 《歷史神學》, 趙崇明譯 ( 香港 : 天道 , 2002 ) , 頁 409 。

<sup>113</sup> 宋泉盛 : <十架與蓮花> , 頁 179 。

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 193 。

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 207 。

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 210 。

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 204 。

<sup>118</sup> 葛倫斯 [ Stanley J. Grenz ] 、奧爾森 [ Roger E. Olson ] : 《二十世紀神學評論》, 劉良淑、任孝琦譯 ( 台北 : 校園 , 1998 ) , 頁 258 。

<sup>119</sup> 麥格夫 : 《歷史神學》, 頁 423 。

<sup>120</sup> Jon, Sobrino, “Systematic Christology : Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator of the Reign of God,” 124.

explicitly implied that there was a possibility of universalism in the salvation. And he admitted that salvation is ultimately a mystery, and God has his own way to handle those people who had never been reached by the gospel.

Song affirmed the possibility of God's working through the means in the world outside Christianity to proceed the work of salvation. And he believed that Christian theology should be open to the factors of salvation and salvation events which may be contained in other historical and cultural backgrounds, and it is our task to build up their real connection with Jesus Christ.<sup>121</sup> He even claimed that Christian church, as a religious organization, do not have enough power to save the whole world, because Christian church have always been a minority, and it is necessary to cooperate with other religious bodies (non-Christian) to develop the spirituality of the Asian world in its own cultural soil, in which all Asians can appreciate the love and compassion of Jesus Christ.<sup>122</sup>

For Sobrino, although the tendency in his thought is not obvious in compared with Wesley and Song, however, his understanding of the theology of liberation : the reality of a dehumanizing poverty and of the hope of its eradication, has an universalistic implication.<sup>123</sup>

### iii. A kind of Social Gospel ?

Thirdly, their emphasis on the experience of salvation at present and the reign of God project an image of a social gospel.<sup>124</sup>

Wesley had clearly stressed that salvation is not just a kind of hope in the heaven and after death, but is a thing to be realized at present.<sup>125</sup>

Song advocated that Asian Christians have to work with other religious and ideological bodies in the transformation of the Asian societies with the freedom, equality and justices. The basis of cooperation is no in argument of the theologies and doctrines, but in the lives and death, suffering and hope of the people.<sup>126</sup>

Sobrino's idea of the reign of God is the clearest expression of the nature of the social gospel. He stressed that the Reign and its proximity are presented by Jesus Christ as the actual ultimate,<sup>127</sup> hence, the completion of salvation. And also, he saw Christology responds with Jesus Christ the Liberator, the absolute mediator of the Reign of God to the poor here and now in the world.<sup>128</sup>

## 2. Dialogue with Methodological Theology

---

<sup>121</sup> 宋泉盛：〈十架與蓮花〉，頁 203。

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 209。

<sup>123</sup> Jon, Sobrino, "Systematic Christology : Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator of the Reign of God," 144.

<sup>124</sup> 葛倫斯、奧爾森：《二十世紀神學評論》，頁 71。

<sup>125</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 143, quoting John Wesley, Sermons 43, "The Scripture way of Salvation"(1765), §I.1, Works 2:156.

<sup>126</sup> 宋泉盛：〈十架與蓮花〉，頁 210。

<sup>127</sup> Jon, Sobrino, "Systematic Christology : Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator of the Reign of God," 125.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 144.

As mentioned in the beginning, Wesley was never be a systematic theologian, nor interested to be, he was at most a pastoral theologian. His way of doing his theological reflection was in diverse way of the systematic theologian, T. F. Torrance, whose main thinking has been in the area of theological method, and in the relationship between theology and science.<sup>129</sup>

Torrance's theology, deeply influenced by the Greek fathers (especially Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria), by Calvin, and by Barth, is strongly Christocentric and Trinitarian. He focuses particularly on the 'vicarious humanity' of Christ, who assumed our fallen humanity precisely in order to redeem and sanctify it. Incarnation and atonement are thus inseparable. Salvation pivots on Christ and not on our faith or decision or piety. In Christ, God has acted in 'unconditional grace' objectively completing salvation for all mankind. Yet, for Torrance, this does not imply universalism.<sup>130</sup>

The focus of the dialogue between them is the Wesley's co-operant character of salvation, which is one of the most controversial views of his thought and obviously with temporal changes.<sup>131</sup>

Firstly, the fundamental difference is their presuppositions of the human condition. The whole history of the human race has, in Wesley's eyes, been characterized by self-will and sin. We have been created in God's image, but are all fallen creatures, and therefore, as Paul wrote, we are all 'in Adam'. Wesley wrote of the 'total depravity' of man's nature before God, but he saw that, taken literally, such a view created two difficulties. First, it conflicted with the evidence of his own eyes and his experience of people. Secondly, it denied human freedom and made God responsible for both salvation and damnation. Wesley, in his search for a more convincing formula, dealt with both problems.<sup>132</sup>

In the first case, Wesley took great care to define what is meant to be 'fallen'. In our natural state we may socially responsible and even 'moral', judged by the world's standards. It is only in relation to God that we are 'totally depraved'. Before him, even our best actions are sinful, because they are not, in Wesley's words, 'done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done'.<sup>133</sup>

The second problem, the apparent denial of human freedom reflected in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, was dealt with by Wesley's appeal to reason, experience, and what he called "the clearest ideas we have of the divine nature and perfection".<sup>134</sup>

Wesley's accepted the biblical view of the Fall, in that though humanity is created in the image of God, the image has become distorted by our self-will. The image has not been shattered beyond repair, however, and no one is damned because of Adam's sin alone. Rather, the image of God in humanity has been distorted, and the Fall has damaged our relationship with God. Wesley held that salvation had to restore both the image and the relationship, and be a process in which we can take

---

<sup>129</sup> New Dictionary of Theology (1988), s.v. "Torrance, Thomas F.."

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 148.

<sup>132</sup> Tabraham, *Exploring Methodism*, 32.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., quoting J. Wesley, Works, Vol. VIII, 283.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 39, quoting J. Wesley, Letters, Vol. I, 22-23, 29 July 1725.

active part. He believed neither that the Fall is completely the result of Adam's sin nor that original sin is completely our responsibility.<sup>135</sup>

In this issue, Torrance's presupposition is on the other extreme end. With his strong Calvinistic background and Christocentric approach, the 'total depravity' of humanity means the total disability of man in responding to God's action. That means it is a complete passiveness of humanity in the whole course. It is the ground for his advocate of the need of the 'vicarious humanity' of Christ which exercise the two-fold ministry, manward and Godward ministry.<sup>136</sup>

According to his view, it is the Godward ministry of Christ, the mediation of Christ in our human response, that humans can 'appear' to be responding to the initiating action of God. He illustrated this by the example of the set up of the covenant partnership between God and Israel in Old Testament,<sup>137</sup> while in the New Testament, Jesus Christ was recognized and presented both as the Servant of the Lord and as the divine redeemer who had come to bear away the iniquities, transgressions, guilt of his people of the whole world.<sup>138</sup> He clearly pointed out that 'Jesus Christ constitutes in his own self-consecrated humanity the *fulfillment of the vicarious way of human response to God* promised under the old covenant, but now on the ground of his atoning self-sacrifice once for all offered this a *vicarious of response* which is available for all mankind.'<sup>139</sup>

Torrance explained the radical nature of Jesus' mediation of our human response to God can be apparent by bringing together and thinking into each other the concepts of representation and substitution.<sup>140</sup> He stressed that a merely representative or a merely substitutionary concept of vicarious mediation is bereft of any actual saving significance. Unless they are combined and allowed to interpenetrate each other within the incarnational union of the son of God with us in which he actually taken our sin and guilt upon his own being, then we may have a profounder and truer grasp of the vicarious humanity in the mediatorship of Christ, as one in which he acts in our place, in our stead, on our behalf but out of the ontological depths of our actual human being.<sup>141</sup>

Furthermore, Torrance listed out the various things of what the vicarious humanity of Jesus means in the mediation of our human response to God in response to God in respect of what we do in faith, conversion, and worship, in the celebration of the sacraments, and in evangelism.<sup>142</sup>

In Faith, he thought it is misconstruing that if we thought of faith or belief as an autonomous, independent act which we do from a base in ourselves.<sup>143</sup> It is Jesus steps into the actual situation where we are summoned to have faith in God, to believe and trust in him, and he acts in our place and in our stead from within the depths of our unfaithfulness and provides us freely with a faithfulness in which we may share. Christ does that as Mediator between God and man, yet

---

<sup>135</sup> Tabraham, *Exploring Methodism*, 33.

<sup>136</sup> T. F., Torrance, *The Meditation of Christ* (Edinburgh : T&T Clark, 1992 ), 73.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>143</sup> Torrance, *The Meditation of Christ*, 82.

precisely as man united to us and taking our place at every point where we human beings act as human beings and are called to have faith in the Father, to believe in him and trust him.<sup>144</sup>

In Conversion, Torrance pointed out that as fallen human beings, we are quite unable through our own free-will to escape from our self-will for our free-will is our self-will. Likewise sin has been so ingrained into our minds that we are unable to repent and have to repent even of the kind of repentance we bring before God. But Jesus Christ laid hold of us even there in our sinful repentance and turned everything round through his vicarious repentance, where he bore not just upon his body but upon his human mind and soul the righteous judgments of God and resurrected our human nature in the integrity of his body, mind and soul from the grave.<sup>145</sup>

In Worship and Prayer, it is Jesus Christ acts in our place and on our behalf in both a representative and a substitutionary way so that what he does in our stead is nevertheless effected as our very own, issuing freely and spontaneously out of ourselves. And it is through his incarnational and atoning union Jesus Christ has united himself with us in such a reconciling and sanctifying way that he interpenetrates and gathers up all our faltering, unclean worship and prayer into himself, assimilates them to his one self-oblation to God, so that when he presents himself as the worship and prayer of all creation, our worship and prayer are presented there also.<sup>146</sup>

In the Sacraments, Baptism and Eucharist, Torrance stated that though they are acts of human response to the proclamation of the Gospel, they are above all divinely provided, dominically appointed ways of response and obedience of a radically vicarious kind.<sup>147</sup> He stressed that they are sacraments of the vicarious human response to God effected by Jesus Christ in his representative and substitutionary capacity in our place and on our behalf. They are the finished work of Christ to which we can add nothing, sacraments which have as their substance and content none other than Jesus Christ clothed with his Gospel of atoning meditation and reconciliation, and thus sacraments which in their unique way represent the indivisible oneness of Christ's Word and Act and Person as Mediator between God and man. So they are responses which we are commanded to make in our worship of God, they are nevertheless not sacraments of what we do but of what Christ Jesus has done in our place and on our behalf.<sup>148</sup>

In Evangelism, Torrance claimed that the Gospel to be preached is not in a genuinely evangelical way unless surely in such a way that full and central place is given to the vicarious humanity of Jesus as the all-sufficient human response to the saving love of God which he has freely and unconditionally provided for us. Torrance further pointed out that from the beginning to end what Jesus Christ has done for us he has done not as God but as man. He has acted in our place in the whole range of our human life and activity, including our personal decisions, and our response to God's love, and even our acts of faith.<sup>149</sup> And Torrance pushed a step even further that it is Jesus Christ in us believes in our place and at the same time takes up our poor faltering and

---

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>149</sup> Torrance, *The Meditation of Christ*, 94.

stumbling faith into his – embracing, upholding and undergirding it through his invariant faithfulness. Hence, this kind of faith which will never fail. This applies to the whole of my life in Christ and too all our human responses to God, for in Jesus Christ they are laid hold of, sanctified and informed by his vicarious life of obedience and response to the Father.

To conclude, in a nutshell, Torrance rejects any kind of co-operant character of salvation and he believes that humanity has no ontological autonomy in response to God's actions. All 'apparent' humans' responses are actually, in substance and content, the actions of the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ on our behalf in our place. So it is the opposite way of salvation of what Wesley proposed, and actually Torrance's theory brings the similar paradoxical problems that Wesley's 'Way of Salvation' aimed to explain in his time. It is obvious that from Wesley to Torrance, though apart by 200 years, with countless breakthroughs in scientific world from the previous foundations, theologians' theories for the core issue of humanity, are still running in very diverse ways due to the very different presuppositions with limited knowledge of humanity. May be, it will be the 'eternal' tension not to be solved until the day determined by God.

#### **IV. Steering Ahead**

Wesley's "Way of Salvation" was the understanding of the reality of the relationship of humanity and the Creator God, through his unceasing efforts and struggles in all the years of the pastoral work among the sinners. His work still offer contemporary debates concerning the nature and practice of theology. It is Wesley's valuable contribution that he provided a sense of the dynamic connection between theological reflection and Christian life in the world in Wesley's practical-theological activities.<sup>150</sup>

It is obvious that the most serious question concerning Wesley's model of practical-theological activity is whether it sacrifices any appreciable consistency to the demands of the context.<sup>151</sup> However, with Wesley's spirit of steering a 'voyage in the stormy sea', in responsible dialogue with the Gospel of grace, the broad Christian community, and the wisdom of experience, his insight into and articulation of the dynamic orienting concern will always be one of the most instructive contributions that he has to offer to present theological debate.<sup>152</sup>

---

<sup>150</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 254.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 255.