

CHAPTER 6

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION AND CONFUCIAN SAGE LEARNING: AN INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN THE CRISIS OF LIFE

Jong Chun Park

As an East Asian Christian, or—speaking more proudly without losing Christian humility and Confucian propriety—as a Korean Methodist, I am overwhelmed by joy over an unusually hybrid plenary session on Mr. Wesley and Confucianism at the Eleventh Oxford Institute. My topic may sound odd and irksome for some, and it may seem even stranger if I confess to you that this juxtaposition is my dream come true ever since I first participated in the Oxford Institute in 1992. I do not mind being called an Oriental enthusiast, for I will begin with a daydream I had a couple of years ago, and I hope this will turn out to be my version of “An Earnest Appeal to the Men and Women of Reason and Religion”! The dream occurred sometime in August 2000 when the president of my seminary died suddenly and I was appointed by the board of trustees as acting president. Being unprepared for this emergency at the seminary, which had barely emerged from a long tunnel of discord with the denomination, I was extremely nervous. I fell into sleep on a hot summer afternoon and had a mysterious dream. In the dream I saw a long and narrow path

stretched out endlessly. It was pitch dark all around. To my surprise, I realized that the thin path stretched across a dark, surging sea. It appeared in a moment yet disappeared in the next. I felt urged by a certain sense of destiny to walk through that horrible road into the stormy sea. I looked across the sea to find a long range of blue mountains. But I had no courage to risk my life. I knew I had to go through it, yet I was scared to death because I might be swallowed up by the immense, angry waves.

I was still groping for the interpretation of the dream a month later. Right after I awoke, frightened and fascinated by the powerful dream, a verse from the story of the calling of Joshua after the death of Moses came to my mind: "Do not turn from the law to the right or to the left" (Josh 1:7). I preached on this verse before the whole community of the seminary. At the end of my sermon I quoted a passage from John Wesley's sermon on "Catholic Spirit":

Thou, O man of God, think on these things! If thou art already in this way, go on. If thou hast heretofore mistook the path, bless God who hath brought thee back! And now run the race, which is set before thee, in the royal way of universal love. Take heed, lest thou be either wavering in thy judgement, or straitened in thy bowels; but keep an even pace, rooted in the faith once delivered to the saints, and grounded in love, in true catholic love, till thou art swallowed up in love for ever and ever!¹

Wesley's empowering message, however, did not penetrate my heart; and my witness, I am afraid, might have sounded like the empty words of a bad tree bearing no fruit.

The interpretation of the dream came to me as I conferred with one of my colleagues who was advanced in age and well versed in the Confucian classics. He reminded me of the famous passage in *The Book of the Documents* quoted in Chu Hsi's introduction to *The Doctrine of the Mean*: "The human mind is insecure, the mind of the *Tao* is subtle; be discerning, be undivided [One]. Hold fast the Mean!"² The apprehensiveness of the human mind signified for me my existential predicament of being swallowed up by the surging sea; the subtlety of the mind of the *Tao* referred to the slender, risky path into the stormy sea. This became clearer when I read Chu Hsi's words in his introduction to *The Doctrine of the Mean*:

These two (the human mind and the mind of the *Tao*) are mixed together within the mind-and-heart, and if one does not know how to control them,

1. Sermon 39, "Catholic Spirit," §III.6, *Works* 2:95.

2. See Michael C. Kalton, *To Become A Sage: The Ten Diagrams on Sage Learning by Yi T'oeqye* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 166.

the perilous will become even more perilous and the subtle will become even more subtle and in the end the impartiality of the principle of Heaven will not be able to overcome the selfishness of human desire. If one is discerning he will discriminate between these two and not let them get mixed. If one is undivided he will maintain the rectitude of the original mind and not become separated from it.³

I was not sure whether I held fast the Mean. But I felt my troubled heart was surely illuminated by the Confucian wisdom.

After my “short happy life” (Ernest Hemingway) as interim president (it lasted for about 60 long days!), I concentrated on the Confucian-Christian dialogue in my research. My experience of the dream had led me to understand the essential core as well as the wider context of my academic and practical life as “scholar official.” First of all, I discovered that I had lived in “the effects of history” of both Christianity and Confucianism.⁴ The challenge of religious pluralism has become a matter of fact in our postmodern and postcolonial age. Two systematic theologians of the Methodist Theological Seminary in Seoul who advocated religious pluralism and postmodern theology were excommunicated by the Korean Methodist Church in 1992. One of them was my former teacher and the other was my close colleague. In this context I know I am playing a dangerous game with an explosive topic indeed! Interreligious dialogue is a bit different for me than it is for Western theologians. It is not merely interreligious, it is also “intrareligious” in the sense that Confucianism is not the faith of other people but my own heritage as an East Asian Christian.⁵ I believe that evangelical fundamentalism within Korean Christianity in general and the Korean Methodist Church in particular is no longer a viable option for the future as long as they continue to reject the people of other faiths and to deny the necessity of interreligious and intrareligious dialogue.

Furthermore, it has been my great gain to reflect upon my life shared with many others as the living document for my theological reflection. I consider the style of my theology to be a constructive, practical narrative theology. Having taken the responsibility of academic dean during the turmoil of the unstable theological institution, I needed to make sense out of my life in the seminary so that my wounded soul might be cured and my colleagues, as well as my students, might be encouraged by my self-healing “all around” theological reflection. Such theological work might

3. *Ibid.*, 167.

4. See Hans-Georg Gadamer’s description of the reality of living within a “history of effects” in *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised edition (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 300-307.

5. Cf. Raimundo Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1978).

have already started since I dared to pick up a story related to a mere dream to make my and my colleagues' saddened hearts sing.

Appropriating Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy, Charles V. Gerkin, former professor of pastoral theology at the Candler School of Theology, well described the wider context of doing theology: "The possibility is presented that the horizon of understanding consciously brought by the person seeking help to the therapeutic encounter contains, to use Ricoeur's terms, both a language of force and a language of meaning."⁶ The moods and atmosphere of my perilous mind overwhelmed by the enormous waves of the wild sea are suited to the "language of force" which is "the economic, hydraulic, dynamic metaphor that is built upon a presupposition that all human behavior is determined by a confluence of forces."⁷ These forces, coming from a "life of experience with both the givens of the person's existential situation and the givens formed by unconscious remnants of early and later childhood experience," provide a "certain 'hard' contour to the horizon possible for the person."⁸

The fascinating mystery of the subtle way of the *Tao* is fitting to the "language of meaning" which is the language of "interpretation of symbols and symbolic acts that relate human desire and intention to culture."⁹ The language of both Christian and Confucian images, metaphors, and myths or narratives provides a "softer, more malleable and permeable conscious and preconscious formulation" of my horizon of understanding of the situation.¹⁰ It is significant for me to understand the wider context of my Christian-Confucian dialogue in terms of the language of forces that is connected with the language of meaning in complex ways.

Appropriating Gerkin's "dialectics of the self's hermeneutics,"¹¹ I am going to construct a "trialogical" or "trilogical" structure of the Christian-Confucian dialogue in the crisis of life.¹²

The Christian-Confucian dialogue ought to be carried out in terms of all three sets of the triological dialectic. The Christian paradigm of triologue has focused on the "theanthropic" dimension (between pole 1 and pole 2) so that the cosmic pole (3) is usually reduced to anthropocentrism. The Confucian paradigm of triologue has concentrated on the "anthro-

6. Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 50.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

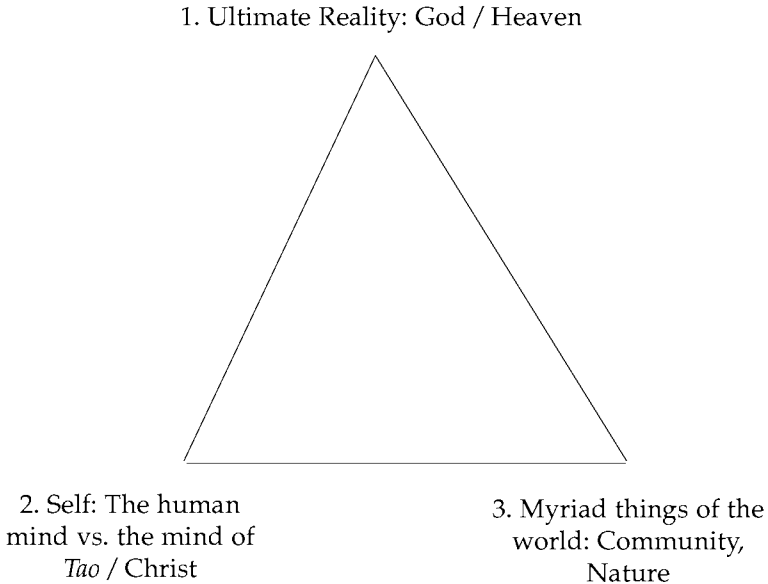
10. *Ibid.*, 50-51.

11. *Ibid.*, 102.

12. See the argument for structuring religious dialogue as a "trialogue" in Jung Young Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 217.

Figure 1

The Trialogical Dialectic of Christian-Confucian Dialogue



pocosmic” dimension (between pole 2 and pole 3) so that the transcendent pole (1) is often collapsed into the continuum of heaven and earth. The Christian-Confucian dialogue aims at mutual transformation. Christians can learn from Confucians the greater salvific vision on anthropocosmism. Confucians may benefit from the Christian critical distinction between God and the world. The Christian-Confucian dialogue modeling of trialogical dialectic may also contribute to the postmodern and post-colonial construction of a “*theanthropocosmic*” theology and spirituality in East Asia.¹³

It has to be remembered that this dialogue takes place in the crisis of life I share with my neighbors and my fellow creatures in East Asia. I have to be aware of my most privileged position as an East Asian male Christian professor. In the East Asian Confucian cultural sphere it is important to note who talks about the Christian-Confucian dialogue, for what purpose, and from what perspective.¹⁴ As an interpreter of two traditions (i.e.,

13. Raimundo Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993).

14. Heisook Kim, “Asian Values and Women: Tradition and Counter-Tradition,” paper delivered on the Occasion of the UNESCO International Conference on Universal *Ethics and Asian Values* (Seoul, October 4-6, 1999).

Christianity and Confucianism), both of which have been suspected of male chauvinism, I must perceive the groans and moans of the most oppressed and marginalized in East Asia, such as women, migrant workers, children, and the so-called lesser in society, as well as all suffering, sentient beings in one of the most polluted regions of the world. The legitimacy of the Christian-Confucian dialogue is to be explored only on the grounds that no group of people is isolated and trivialized under the name of tradition.

MOTIFS OF CONVERSION: YULGOK AND WESLEY

First, make the will great; take sagehood for the goal; if every single blade of hair on my body does not reach towards sagehood, then my work is not finished (Yi Yulgok at the age of twenty, 1555).¹⁵

In the year 1725, being in the twenty-third year of my age, I met with Bishop Taylor's *Rule 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. (John Wesley)¹⁶

In the spring semester of 2002, for the first time in my teaching career, I held a seminar on Wesley and Yulgok. The seminar focused on the two classical works of Christian spirituality and Confucian spirituality: Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* and Yulgok's *Compendium of Sage Learning*. It was not possible to do a detailed study of the two texts. Appropriating Neville's model of motif analysis, I tried to concentrate on a few motifs enshrined in the core texts. The advantage of motif analysis is to keep the past traditions alive for contemporary thought. Thus, in this essay I will analyze the motifs of conversion in both Yulgok and Wesley. I will draw on current studies of the theology of Wesley and on some contemporary scholars engaging Confucianism (particularly a group in Boston) in order to locate my motif analysis in our time. Through this motif analysis of conversion I hope to offer a subversive genealogy¹⁷ that

15. Young-Chan Ro, *The Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi Yulgok* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 103.

16. "Plain Account of Christian Perfection," §2, *Works* (Jackson) 11:366.

17. Cf. David Gross, *The Past in Ruins: Traditions and the Critique of Modernity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); and Sang-jin Han, "On the Prospects of Confucian Values Contributing to a Global Shared Ethic: The Case for the Postcolonial Appropriation

can deconstruct the “myth” of Aldersgate conversion prevalent in Korean evangelical Methodism on the one hand and reconstruct the profound meaning of “Oxford conversion”¹⁸ in light of my study of Yulgok’s Confucian conversion—namely, his establishing of the will to become a sage—on the other.

Yulgok’s Establishing of the Will

The beginning of self-cultivation in Confucian sage learning is the establishing of the will. In the preface to *A Compendium of Sage Learning*, Yulgok wrote:

Nothing comes prior to the establishment of the will in learning. No one is able to achieve anything without first establishing his will. Therefore the establishment of the will was put first among the articles regarding self-cultivation in this compendium.¹⁹

Yi Yulgok (1536–1584) wrote the book quoted above in 1575 at age forty. This means that his resolution to establish the will to become a sage twenty years earlier in 1555 had never changed. Yulgok was an active statesman and educator as well as one of the foremost Neo-Confucian scholars in Korea. He has been the most popular Confucian “scholar-official” (public intellectual in our time) in the history of Korea. He was born into a family of Confucian scholar-officials. His mother, Sin Saimdang, was famous for her intellectual and artistic brilliance as well as for her moral integrity as a faithful daughter to her mother and a wise mother to her son. She has been considered the Confucian model of “wise mother, good wife” for Korean women until today. She took Yulgok’s education personally in hand and became his first teacher. Yulgok, an extraordinary prodigy, began learning Chinese at the age of three; by age seven

of an East Asian Tradition” (paper delivered at UNESCO International Conference on Universal Ethics and Asian Values, October 4-6, 1999).

I adopt Gross’s “subversive genealogy” as a specific postcolonial approach to tradition. This method consists of deconstructing the mainstreams of tradition deeply associated with maintaining the status quo on the one hand, and of reconstructing an alternative way of reading traditions on the other. Deconstruction is necessary because tradition could have been misused to legitimize the relationship with power or the ideology of the ruling class. It is also inescapable in the Confucian cultural sphere of East Asia where modernization and globalization have brought up the universal issues of democracy, human rights, and ecological justice. Therefore, I wish to seek a reconstructed postcolonial Confucianism drawing on the best elements of the Enlightenment project as well as certain viable traditional currents.

18. Cf. Albert Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 6-7.

19. Ro, *Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi Yulgok*, 104.

he had read a number of the Confucian classics, including the Four Books. In 1552, when Yulgok was only sixteen, his mother died. After the traditional three-year mourning period, the nineteen-year-old Yulgok went into retreat at a Buddhist temple in the Diamond Mountain. Excessive grief at his mother's death caused the precocious genius to delve into the heterodox religion, Buddhism. He was not ignorant of the fact that his digression from Confucianism could become a fatal blow to his career as a Confucian scholar-official. Yulgok dared to study a large number of the Hua-yen and Zen texts for a full year.

Then, however, Yulgok suddenly went down from the mountain and wrote his famous "Statement on Self-discipline" in which the establishment of the will appears in the first line. What was the motivation of his sudden change—almost a conversion—from his digression into the ideal of sage learning? One may only guess the answer from his poem written during his Buddhist period and his brief evaluation of Buddhism in *A Compendium of Sage Learning*:

A fish jumping and a kite flying, same from above and below,
It is neither being nor nothingness.
Smiling effortlessly and watching my lot,
I stand alone at sunset among the ten thousand trees.²⁰

Besides manifesting Yulgok's fascinating grasp of the Buddhist worldview, the first two lines of the poem lie in stark contrast with the last two lines that imply his serious readiness for a turning point in life. This poem indeed functioned as the manifestation of a proposed world he might inhabit and wherein he could project his deepest possibilities. It is of course the Confucian world of sage learning. The poetic expressions "watching my lot" and "I stand alone" are derived from his deep-seated grammar of Confucianism; they reflect "self-watchfulness when alone" (*shen-tu*) in *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Self-watchfulness as a recommended spiritual discipline is not subjectivist but personal. Through being perceptive of the subtle manifestations of his inner feelings, he is sensitive to the world out there. The last line of the poem brilliantly demonstrates this truth: "I stand alone at sunset among the ten thousand trees." The Confucian self is constituted by both affirming centrality endowed from Heaven and, as a temporal existence, responding to the common affairs related to the myriad things of the world.

In *A Compendium of Sage Learning* Yulgok describes the way of Buddhist enlightenment in terms of "non-intention": "Trying to attain the *Tao* through

20. Yulgok Lee, *The Collective Works of Yulgok* (in Korean) (Seoul: Minjok Munwha Mungo Ganhaenghoe, 1985), 1:19.

'non-intention,' Buddhists do not argue on the matter of good and evil. They consider the attainment of the *Tao* through intention a false option. Instead, they claim that the spontaneous way of non-intention is the only truth."²¹ The young Yulgok must have noticed this problem of Buddhist doctrine. The lists of his "Statement of Self-discipline" powerfully affirm the intentional self-cultivation:

1. Establish the will to become a sage; 2. Save talking, quiet the mind;
3. Discipline the distracted mind; 4. Observe oneself; 5. Put your studies in practice; 6. Do not distract the mind with selfish thoughts; 7. Carry out good works with a sincere heart; 8. Make deep self-reflection necessary in times of crisis; 9. Reform a violent person with moral persuasion;
10. Be diligent, do not sleep too much; 11. Practice self-cultivation as a continuing process without end.²²

Yulgok's establishment of the will was a deliberate act of commitment to the way of a sage, that is, a conscious existential act of committing himself to the process toward perfection. Tu Weiming, one of the "Boston Confucians" who are exploring points of contact between Confucianism and present Western culture, describes the establishment of the will as "a conscious attempt to change oneself from being in a state of mere psychophysiological growth to that of ethicoreligious existence."²³ Tu, however, sharply distinguishes it from Christian experience:

Since Confucianism is not a revealed religion, the "establishment of the will" is not so much a mystic experience of the transcendent Absolute as it is an enlightening experience of the immanent Self. Therefore the never-ending process it entails does not take the form of a dialogical relationship with the "wholly other"; rather, it takes the form of a dialectical development of the Self. . . . Thus the establishment of the will is both a single act and a continuous process. As a single act, it so shakes the foundation of one's temporal existence as to enable one to arrive at a deeper dimension of self-awareness. As a continuous process it reaffirms the bedrock of one's being in an unending effort of self-realization.²⁴

Robert Neville, another "Boston Confucian," criticizes Tu's Barthian tendency for "emphasizing God as the Wholly Other and downplaying the importance for salvation of the continuous pursuit of holiness."²⁵ Neville

21. Yulgok Lee, *Collective Works*, 2:101.

22. Ro, *Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi Yulgok*, 5-6.

23. Quoted in Robert C. Neville, *Boston Confucianism: Portable Tradition in the Late-Modern World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 88.

24. *Ibid.*, 89.

25. *Ibid.*

proposes the Tillichian (and Wesleyan) alternative of the conception of God as the interior ground of one's being and the image of God in human beings. Commenting on Augustine's conversion, Neville claims that "conversion was not a single act of God, nor a single act of himself, but a complex interweaving of prevenient grace and human response."²⁶

Wesley's Oxford Conversion Revisited

Every year in May a number of Korean Methodist local churches, districts, and annual conferences hold "Wesley revival meetings" in commemoration of Mr. Wesley's Aldersgate conversion. During the month of John Wesley, as one might guess, the most frequently used (actually over-used) phrase from the Wesley corpus is, of course, "I felt my heart strangely warmed." As a professor teaching Methodist theology, I sometimes feel my heart strangely ache for the overdosed enthusiasm within Korean Methodism.

In some contrast to such present emphasis, Wesley does not mention the Aldersgate experience in *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. This does not mean that his greater emphasis on the doctrine of justification by faith and his experience of assurance around the year of 1738 are not significant in Wesley's unique theology of Christian perfection. He is quick to insist that "[The holiest of men] still need Christ as their Priest, to make atonement for their holy things. Even perfect holiness is acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ."²⁷ What it does mean is that not mere forgiveness but entire sanctification or perfection was the *telos* of Christian life for Wesley from his Oxford conversion to the end of his life.

When we read Wesley's Oxford conversion in light of Yulgok's doctrine of establishing the will, we may come up with a wider and deeper vision of Christian perfection. In Confucian self-cultivation the establishment of the will sets up the goal to become a sage: "First, make the will great; take sagehood for the goal; if every single blade of hair on my body does not reach towards sagehood, then my work is not finished."²⁸ What is the ideal of sagehood? According to *The Doctrine of the Mean*, a sage is the absolutely sincere (*ch'eng*) person who not only fulfills himself or herself but also fulfills others and myriad things of the world to form a triad with heaven and earth:

Only those who are absolutely sincere (*ch'eng*) can fully develop their nature. If they can fully develop their nature, they can fully develop the nature of others. If they can fully develop the nature of others, they can

26. *Ibid.*, 91.

27. *Plain Account*, §25, Q. 9, *Works* (Jackson) 11:417.

28. Ro, *Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi Yulgok*, 103.

then fully develop the nature of things. If they can fully develop the nature of things, they can then assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can thus form a triad with Heaven and Earth.²⁹

It is no wonder that the “Boston Confucians” are drawn to the ecological spirituality of Confucianism. Criticizing the Enlightenment mentality that focuses on the axis of self and community at the expense of nature and heaven, Tu Weiming introduces the anthropocosmic vision of Confucian sagehood:

Human beings are not merely creatures but partners of the cosmic process. Through active participation in the great transformation, we are co-creators and thus responsible for the well-being of not only the human community but of heaven, earth and the myriad things (*tianti wanwu*).³⁰

The dynamic triad of the self, heaven, and earth, which I have designated the theanthropocosmic dialectic, acts as an overriding goal of Confucian self-cultivation. The theanthropocosmic vision was intensified and appropriated by the amazing development of eco-theological consciousness in Chang Tsa’s *Western Inscription* in the eleventh century; here the relationship of heaven, earth, and the human becomes expressed as a parental one, and central to this metaphor is the notion of humans as children of the universe and responsible for its care.³¹

It is therefore very significant to note that, in dialogue with contemporary Confucian scholarship, Wesley’s doctrine of perfection needs to be located in the wider framework of his theology, that is, in his stress on the New Creation. Theodore Runyon has pointed out the inadequacy of individualistic interpretation of Christian perfection and tried to locate Wesleyan theology in the larger framework of the New Creation. Despite the fact that Wesley’s Oxford conversion provided Wesley with his life long telos of Christian life, the young Wesley’s language of “purity of intention” does not suffice as an adequate rendering of the mature Wesley’s understanding of the trans-individual and social nature of sanctification. Furthermore, Runyon agrees with Albert Outler in playing down the Oxford conversion by pointing out that “in this period Wesley was committed to perfection in its Western form, to achieving a saintly status, pure and unblemished in his singular devotion to God.”³²

29. *Doctrine of the Mean*, chap. XXII.

30. Tu Weiming, “Confucian Humanism as a Spiritual Resource for Global Ethics,” *Tasan Lecture Two* (Seoul, November 3, 2001).

31. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthrong, *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), xxxviii.

32. Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 96.

Most of the hitherto Western interpretations of the Oxford conversion have been grounded on the fundamental and formidable assumption that a new foundation of divine grace, around the year of 1738, had replaced the young Wesley's strenuous efforts to be a saint. My thesis, however, is that the solid foundation of divine grace was there even in the young Wesley's Oxford conversion. A year after the Oxford conversion Wesley wrote that the reading of Mr. Law's *Christian Perfection and Serious Call* "convinced me, more than ever, of the absolute impossibility of being half a Christian; I determined, through his grace, (the absolute necessity of which I was deeply sensible of), to be all-devoted to God, to give him all my soul, my body, and my substance."³³ This well demonstrates that Wesley's Oxford conversion is a complex interweaving of prevenient grace and human response. Therefore, the foundation of divine grace found in the later year was not new, but divine grace was there with the young Wesley, and he knew it.

From his Oxford years to the beginning of the year 1738 before his Aldersgate experience, Wesley had never gone astray from affirming that the love of God had been the sole and solid foundation of his salvation. In 1738, as he returned from America, his heart cried out:

O grant that nothing in my soul
 May dwell, but thy pure love alone!
 O may thy love possess me whole,
 My joy, my treasure, and my crown!
 Strange fires far from my heart remove;
 My every act, word, thought, be love!³⁴

Commenting on these lines, Wesley was self-confident in claiming "I never heard that any one objected to this. And indeed who can object? Is not this the language, not only of every believer, but of every one, that is truly awakened? But what have I wrote, to this day, which is either stronger or plainer?"³⁵

Notice that Wesley includes "every one, that is truly awakened" in the divine love! I believe Wesley's subtle distinction between "believer" and "the awakened" could be a crucial key opening up our Christian-Confucian dialogue. The meaning of this is plain: the love of God is the sole foundation of salvation for true believers (Christians) as well as for the truly awakened among the people of other faiths. Then an intriguing question follows: Is the role of justification as well as the meaning of

33. *Plain Account*, §4, *Works* (Jackson) 11:367.

34. *Ibid.*, §7, 11:369.

35. *Ibid.*

assurance in soteriology minimized or reduced? Surely not. The all-embracing love of God, which alone constitutes the universal possibility of salvation for each and every human being, is decisively manifested or “re-presented” through Jesus Christ.³⁶ In other words, Wesley’s Oxford conversion was the breakthrough in his faith journey to affirm the primordial and everlasting love of God as the sole primal source and the sole final end of all things. His Aldersgate experience was his precious experience of the assurance that, through Jesus Christ, the divine love of God was manifested or “re-presented” to him personally.

Though Wesley does not mention the specific experience at Aldersgate, his new amazing discovery of the meaning of assurance in 1738 was clearly recorded in *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*:

“Repose in the blood of Christ; a firm confidence in God, and persuasion of his favour; the highest tranquility, serenity, and peace of mind, with a deliverance from every fleshly desire, and a cessation of all, even inward sin.” This was the first account I ever heard from any living man, of what I had before learned myself from the oracles of God, and had been praying for, (with the little company of my friends,) and expecting, for several years.³⁷

We must not forget, however, that Wesley did change his understanding of assurance. In a 1789 comment to a friend Wesley noted that Methodist “preach assurance as we always did, as a common privilege of the children of God; but we do not enforce it, under the pain of damnation, denounced on all who enjoy it not.”³⁸ The mature Wesley realized that the source of assurance is not within the self, it is rather the divine promise declared in Jesus Christ that remains faithful and constant, therefore more sure and more dependable than human feelings.

Furthermore, the fullness of faith and the *telos* of Christian life go beyond justification and assurance. Wesley’s term “the great salvation” includes justification as Christ’s work for us, and sanctification as the Spirit’s work in us. This, as with the sole foundation of salvation in the love of God, the first person in the Trinity, makes the great salvation genuinely trinitarian. Runyon’s trinitarian reformulation of the great salvation is what we need in our age of total crisis of life:

[Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification] is an important corrective to the evangelical Protestant tendency to equate salvation with justification or

36. Cf. Shubert M. Ogden, *Doing Theology Today* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 169-84.

37. *Plain Account*, §8, *Works* (Jackson) 11:369-70. Wesley is quoting here Arvid Gradin, a German Moravian, then commenting on the quote.

38. Quoted in Runyon, *New Creation*, 66.

conversion, for it points to the divine goal not just of reconciliation and a new status in the eyes of God, but the gracious re-creation of both individuals and the social world through the renewal of the image of God in humanity. It holds out the promise that through the transforming energy of divine love reflected into the world the future can indeed surpass the present.³⁹

I believe that Wesley's envisioning of the great salvation as the New Creation began during his Oxford period, just as Yulgok's envisioning of the great transformation as the participation in the nurturing process of heaven and earth started with his establishing of the will. If this is the case, it challenges and throws light on our present situation of Christian education in general and theological education in particular. Wesley and Yulgok were both pressured by their families to seek professional work as young adults. It was ordination for Wesley and public examination for Yulgok. But calling and vocation proved more important for both of them than job hunting and career management. And their sense of calling and vocation went beyond the selfish dream of self-actualization. They dreamed instead of becoming a sage or a perfect Christian who participates in the great transformation or great salvation of heaven or God.

TEACH US, LORD, HOW TO DANCE: BECOMING A CHRISTIAN SAGE AND BECOMING A PERFECT CONFUCIAN

Imagine with me the dynamics of relationship between God and the world. Think of it as a dance, whereby in every moment of existence God touches the world with guidance toward its communal good in that time and space, and just as the world receives energy from God it also returns its own energy to God. God gives to the world and receives from the world, the world receives from God and gives to God, ever in interdependent exchange. Imagine this dance to be initiated by the everlasting God acting out of divine freedom, and therefore out of everlasting faithfulness—for if God is free, then God is free to act in consistency with God's own character. Thus every touch of God is a giftedness reflecting to some degree God's own character. But only to some degree. For if this dancing God truly relates to the manyness of the world, then God relates to the particularities of the world. God relates not to some ideal world, but to the reality of this world.⁴⁰

39. *Ibid.*, 231.

40. Marjorie Suchocki, *In God's Presence: Theological Reflections on Prayer* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1996), 24.

Let me share with you my experience of providential care during a week I taught thirty Korean Doctor of Ministry students at the Methodist Theological Seminary in Seoul in collaboration with Professor Marjorie Suchocki of the Claremont School of Theology. The title of the class was "Wesleyan Theology and Ministry." Dr. Suchocki's interpretation of *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* in light of process theology was superb in its creative scholarship and very moving in its down-to-earth relevance.⁴¹ I had always been suspicious of process theology because of its metaphysical speculation and its unconventional style. However, my collaborative teaching with her as well as my reading of her books completely changed my attitude toward process theology. It is indeed fascinating for me because it guides me to face the hitherto threatening challenges in my personal and professional life with dynamic courage and in calm equilibrium. Professor Suchocki's interpretation deepened my understanding of Wesley's teaching on Christian perfection in relation to the theanthropocosmic dialectic of divine love.

Vere Deus for Wesley

When I read and meditated on the pages describing the fullness of God in terms of the metaphor of the sea in *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, I was extremely affected by its power and meaning:

The sea is an excellent figure of the fulness of God, and that of the blessed Spirit. For as the rivers all return into the sea; so the bodies, the souls, and the good works of the righteous, return into God, to live there in his eternal repose. Although all the graces of God depend on his mere bounty, yet is He pleased generally to attach them to the prayers, the instructions, and the holiness of those with whom we are. By strong though invisible attractions He draws some souls through their intercourse with others. The sympathies formed by grace far surpass those formed by nature. The truly devout show that passions as naturally flow from true as from false love; so deeply sensible are they of the goods and evils of those whom they love for God's sake. But this can only be comprehended by those who understand the language of love. The bottom of the soul may be in repose, even while we are in many outward troubles; just as the bottom of the sea is calm, while the surface is strongly agitated.⁴²

41. For a sample, see Marjorie Suchocki, "The Perfection of Prayer," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, edited by R. L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 49-63. See also her fine introduction to process theology: *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

42. *Plain Account*, §25, Q. 38, *Works* (Jackson) 11:435-36.

As I meditated on these words, I could not help remembering my dream of the wild sea. I felt uneasy because Wesley's metaphor seemed to me a kind of nature mysticism. How could I, using Wesley's expression, become familiar with and be "attracted" by the threatening image of the sea? It seemed to me that Wesley thought of the sea metaphor in a way contrary to the way I was used to thinking of it. I had by instinct the insurmountable and unconquered fear of the abyss-like depth of the sea. But Wesley found his place of spiritual repose in the bottom of the sea. I was most reluctant to walk the narrow path in the middle of the sea. But Wesley was most willing to be the rivers flowing into the sea! And lastly, but most significantly, I did not know what to do as I faced the stormy environment of my life. But Wesley, facing many troubles, was confident about not only the effects of the means of grace but also the providential meaning of the afflictions caused by others.

Wesley tells us that those who understand the language of love can comprehend the deep meaning of this sea metaphor. He clearly mentions the important distinction (not separation) between nature and grace in our sympathies and passions toward others. True love is love for God's sake. His expression "strong though invisible attractions" by which God draws us to love others for God's sake, is a transpersonal (not impersonal) metaphor. He is talking about God's love in terms of an energy exchange between God and the human. As the rivers cannot but flow into the sea, our human works of piety and mercy are attracted by and emptied into the fullness of divine being and divine love. Wesley does not reject the worth of natural sympathy; he only points out, "The sympathies formed by grace far surpass those formed by nature." His claim, however, remains to be tested in the Christian-Confucian dialogue within the crisis of life. Furthermore, we need to inquire whether Wesley's transpersonal metaphor of divine love and divine being can be developed to envision an authentically theanthropocosmic theology for our time.

Vere Homo for Yulgok

According to Yulgok's Neo-Confucian anthropology the human mind, which is contrasted with the mind of the *Tao*, consists of human nature and human feelings. Human nature is the substance of the human mind and human feelings are the function of the human mind. Human nature is the principle (*li*) of the human mind and the human feelings are the material force (*ch'i*) of the human mind. This distinction between the substance/principle of the mind and the function/material force of the mind got complicated when Korean Neo-Confucians were entangled with the so-called "four-seven debate." This was a debate on the relation of the

four beginnings of human virtue to the seven feelings of the human being. The four beginnings of human virtue first appeared in *The Mencius*. They include the feelings of commiseration, that are the beginnings of humanity (*jen*); shame and dislike, that are the beginnings of righteousness (*i*); respect and reverence, that are the beginnings of propriety (*li*); and right and wrong, that are the beginnings of wisdom (*chih*). The seven feelings of the human being were first recorded in *The Book of Ritual*: they are pleasure, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hate, and desire.

T'oegye, following Chu Tsi, related the four beginnings to the "issuance" (*fa*) of the principle (*li*) and the seven feelings, to the issuance of the material force (*ch'i*). But Yulgok argued that while the four beginnings do not contain the seven feelings, the seven feelings do contain the four beginnings: "The distinction between the four beginnings and the seven feelings arises from the difference between when we speak of only the *li* aspect and when we speak of the *li* and *ch'i* aspects together."⁴³ Avoiding a moral dichotomy in which the four beginnings are good and the seven feelings are bad, Yulgok writes: "[The] four beginnings are not as complete as the seven feelings while the seven feelings are not as pure as the four beginnings."⁴⁴ In other words, the four beginnings refer to only the good side of human feelings; and the seven feelings, to the totality of human feelings, both good and bad. Thus Yulgok related not only the seven feelings to the four beginnings but also the four beginnings to the seven feelings.

Let us see, first, how he related the seven feelings to the four beginnings. According to Yulgok, such human feelings as joy, sorrow in mourning, love of dear ones, desire to seek the truth, or to become a sage are, by nature, positive. They are the beginnings of humanity. Anger and hate, which are the feelings of being indignant about something that is wrong, are the beginnings of righteousness. Being awed upon seeing a respected person, the feeling of fear, is the beginnings of propriety. Putting all the seven feelings together to know what is right and what is wrong is the beginnings of wisdom. On the other hand, Yulgok also related the four beginnings to the seven feelings:

The feeling of commiseration belongs to love. The feelings of shame and dislike belong to hate. The feelings of respect and reverence belong to fear, and the feelings of right and wrong stem from the knowledge of legitimacy and the illegitimacy among the feelings of joy and anger. Besides the seven feelings, there are no other four beginnings. Thus the four beginnings form only the *tao-hsin* (the mind of the *Tao*), whereas the seven feelings form both the *tao-hsin* and the *jen-hsin* (the human mind)

43. Ro, *Korean Neo-Confucianism of Yi Yulgok*, 47.

44. *Ibid.*, 51.

together. These, the four beginnings and the seven feelings, are not like *tao-hsin* and *jen-hsin*, which are distinct sides of the mind. How can they be the same?⁴⁵

It seems to me that Yulgok, through his four-seven debate, achieved some very significant understanding of the human being in sage learning. Along with Chu Tsi and T'oegye, Yulgok recognized the critical distinction between the human mind and the mind of the *Tao*. But when it comes to the human feelings of both the four beginnings and the seven feelings, Yulgok parted company with them. T'oegye dichotomized the four beginnings derived from the mind of the *Tao* and the seven feelings derived from the human mind. Thus he fell into moral rigor.

Yulgok suggested an inclusive and holistic understanding according to which the four beginnings that form the mind of the *Tao* belong to the seven feelings that form both the human mind and the mind of the *Tao*. Thus the four beginnings are not as complete as the seven feelings. But the seven feelings, which are good and bad, are not as pure as the four beginnings that are only good. If one recognizes that the four beginnings—that is, the mind of the *Tao*—are present in the midst of the seven feelings—that is, both the human mind and the mind of the *Tao*—one can establish one's will in the process of self-cultivation to become a sage: "The will without *ch'eng* (*sincerity*) cannot be established."⁴⁶ Such self-cultivation definitely requires the purification, rectification, and sanctification of all human feelings. In this regard, Yulgok's thought has to be further studied in comparison with Wesley's important distinction between "Christ for me" in the doctrine of justification as the relative change of status, and "Christ in me" in the doctrine of sanctification as the real change of the whole person—including one's feelings and affections.

Now we can illustrate how Yulgok's neo-Confucian anthropology deals with the ordinary, natural human desires such as hunger, thirst, and the sexual drive. According to Yulgok, there can be two kinds of the issuance of the seven feelings: they can issue for the morality of the mind of the *Tao* and they can issue for the "mouth and body" of the human mind. For instance, the issuance of the human mind can be the desire to eat when hungry, the desire to clothe when cold, the desire to rest when tired, and the desire to make love with one's wife when sexual energies are strong. These desires are natural and human, and they should never be considered immoral. Rather sexuality is holy and marriage is sacred. Sexual desire is a gift as long as it does not fall into the evil of egocentric human desire. The ordinary sexual relationship between husband and wife is an

45. *Ibid.*, 62.

46. Yulgok, *Collective Works*, 102.

important channel of the sacred/the mind of the *Tao* under the conditions of the secular/the human mind. However, the danger of excessive indulgence between two sex partners in marriage is a cause for concern. Conjugal intimacy may breed nepotism, which in turn may lead to social irresponsibility, if the interests of the nuclear family supersede concerns for other family members and the larger community. Therefore, Yulgok suggests: "Husband and wife respect each other as if she or he were a guest."⁴⁷

The difference of Yulgok's holistic anthropology from T'oegye's moral rigor is philosophically derived from his holistic cosmology combining *li* (principle) and *ch'i* (material force), in comparison with T'oegye's more or less dualistic cosmology of *li* versus *chi*. This has made Yulgok's line of Neo-Confucianism more progressive than T'oegye's school in the long history of the Korean *minjung's* struggle for the reform of the nation and the liberation of the oppressed. Appropriating the postmodern discourse of communicative rationality, we can characterize T'oegye's thought in terms of its concentration on the subjective condition of the Mean; that is, the heaven-endowed principle (*li*) in each person that is the transcendental center for every moral judgment. This is why he emphasized the importance of *ching* (mindfulness) in his sage learning. But Yulgok went further than T'oegye by claiming that the proper doctrine of the Mean requires also the objective condition of human communication; namely, "public discourse." Not only the transcendental principle of centrality but the sincere (*ch'eng*) and realistic implementation of centrality in the commonality of myriad things is crucial for both personal and social transformation. In this regard we may consider Yulgok a genuine model of a Confucian public intellectual. Unlike T'oegye who withdrew from "dirty politics" in order to concentrate on study and teaching, Yulgok persistently participated in the government of the Confucian dynasty in order to reform the nation. Yulgok tried to live according to his ideal of a Confucian sage who not only cultivates himself but also governs the state to bring peace in the world.

This example reminds us of Wesley who held both the centrality of heart religion and the commonality of social religion together in balance. Despite his historical limitations, Wesley faithfully got involved with such socio-political issues as poverty, slavery, and human rights. As Theodore Weber perceptively points out, we need to reconstruct a Wesleyan political ethics for our contemporary world. Weber suggests specifically that we draw politics into the order of salvation in order to deepen the socioethical dimension of Christian perfection and prevent its falling victim to individualistic moralism.⁴⁸

47. *Ibid.*, 2:223.

48. See Theodore R. Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation: Transforming Wesleyan Political Ethics* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001).

Though limited in terms of participants, the public sphere in Yulgok's times functioned effectively both inside and outside the dynastic regimes. It functioned inside with censors acting to check imperial misrule and outside with Confucian intellectuals remonstrating against the corruption and abuses of the ruling elite. Yulgok has been well known among the Korean *minjung* as a sage-like public intellectual who could even prophetically foretell the destiny of the nation. Both Yulgok's and Wesley's theory and practice of public discourse need to be further investigated in light of the postmodern theory of communicative rationality. This will be crucial for East Asian Christians on the one hand to challenge the authoritarian regimes deviating from Confucian norms and on the other hand to reform fundamentalist evangelical Christianity that has been co-opted by authoritarian rule and forgets its prophetic tradition.

Becoming a Perfect Confucian

Presupposing the preceding brief summary of Yulgok's anthropology, let us move on to see how Yulgok applied his holistic anthropology to his sage learning in general and his self-cultivation in particular. Referring to human nature as endowed from heaven in terms of the four beginnings, Yulgok writes on its implication for self-cultivation:

If I amplify the four beginnings, knowing that the four beginnings are with myself, then the result would be like burning fire and gushing fountain. If I can amplify it to its utmost, I may keep the four seas: If I can't amplify it to its utmost, I can't serve even my parents.⁴⁹

There is a striking similarity between Yulgok's metaphors of fountain/sea and Wesley's metaphors of river/sea. As Wesley refers these metaphors to the fullness of God, especially of the Spirit, Yulgok's metaphors have something to do with the fullness of *ch'i*, especially what Mencius expressed as "the flood-like *chi*." Neo-Confucians spoke of the cosmos in terms of *li* (principle) and *ch'i* (material force). Wing-tsi Chan has translated *ch'i* as "material force," something which consists of both material and energy. The Confucian tradition has conceived *ch'i* as vital, fit to be not only the stuff of life, but the life force of both body and mind. Seeking a creative confluence of Confucianism and postmodern science, Michael Kalton impressively puts the relation of *ch'i* to *li* as the following:

49. Yulgok, *Collective Works*, 2:81.

“The emergence and evolution of life is an energetic (*ch’i*) thrust toward systemic complexity (*li*).”⁵⁰ Whether one is looking at physics, biology, economics, or political science, every kind of energy (*ch’i*) process is also patterned (*li*). Mencius noted that *ch’i* as vital force fills one’s body that is directed by the will. For self-cultivation it is important not to abuse or block one’s *ch’i* but to allow it to flow with appropriate direction so that it will fill the space between Heaven and Earth. Mencius called such *ch’i* a “flood-like *ch’i*.” He insists upon the importance of nourishing this “flood-like *ch’i*,” for it is

in the highest degree, vast and unyielding. Nourish it with integrity and place no obstacle in its path and it will fill the space between Heaven and Earth. It is a *ch’i* that unites rightness and the Way. Deprive it of these and it will collapse. It is born of accumulated rightness and cannot be appropriated by anyone through a sporadic show of rightness. Whenever one acts in a way that falls below the standard set in one’s heart, it will collapse.⁵¹

Heaven consists of the flood-like *ch’i* as well as of the real principle (that is, *ch’eng*). Thus heaven, the real principle (*ch’eng*), and the flood-like *ch’i* form a Confucian Trinity. Heaven is the primordial origin of both the real principle (*ch’eng*) and the flood-like *ch’i*, just as the Logos and the Spirit are united in God. One has to amplify the real heart of *ch’eng* and to nourish one’s *ch’i* to their utmost; then one can be a sage to form a triad with heaven and earth. Yulgok writes:

Since there is the real principle of *ch’eng* (sincerity) in Heaven, change by *ch’i* is ceaseless and constant; since there is the real heart of *ch’eng* in the human being, learning becomes clear and broad without fault. Without the heart of *ch’eng* the human being stops short of the principle of Heaven.⁵²

Unlike heaven, which is the primordial origin of both the real principle of *ch’eng* and the flood-like *ch’i*, the human being has to amplify the real heart of *ch’eng* and to nourish his portion of *ch’i* in order to become a sage. Heaven has and is *ch’eng*, thus heaven can change everything with the flood-like *ch’i*. In other words, *ch’eng* as the Way of Heaven is intrinsically united with the flood-like *ch’i*. But the human being is not *ch’eng* itself, we

50. Michael Kalton, “Extending the Neo-Confucian Tradition,” in *Confucianism and Ecology*, eds. Tucker and Berthrong, 77-100; here, 89.

51. Quoted in Mary Evelyn Tucker, “The Philosophy of *Ch’i* as an Ecological Cosmology,” in *Confucianism and Ecology*, eds. Tucker and Berthrong, 187-207; here, 191.

52. Yulgok, *Collective Works*, 2:111.

are those who strenuously seek to be *ch'eng*. Therefore, the *ch'i* of the human being is very limited compared to the flood-like *ch'i*. To become a sage who is the most sincere (*ch'eng*) means to be connected with the flood-like *ch'i* that fills the space between heaven and earth. Wang Yangming regarded the way to be connected with the flood-like *ch'i* as an extension of one's *ch'i* body to embrace the whole universe and the myriad things in it:

The great man regards Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person. . . . That the great man can regard Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body is not because he deliberately wants to do so, but because it is natural to the human nature of his mind that he does so. Forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things is not only true of the great man. Even the mind of the small man is no different. Only he himself makes it small.⁵³

The concrete expression of such extension of one's *ch'i* body is found in one's universal sympathy and compassion for the myriad beings in the world:

Therefore when he sees a child about to fall into a well, he cannot help a feeling of alarm and commiseration. This shows that his humanity (*jen*) forms one body with the child. It may be objected that the child belongs to the same species. Again, when he observes the pitiful cries and frightened appearance of birds and animals about to be slaughtered, he cannot help feeling an "inability to bear" their suffering. This shows that his humanity forms one body with birds and animals. It may be objected that birds and animals are sentient beings as he is. But when he sees plants broken and destroyed, he cannot help . . . feeling . . . pity. This shows that his humanity forms one body with plants. It may be said that plants are living things as he is. Yet even when he sees tiles and stones shattered and crushed, he cannot help . . . feeling . . . regret. This shows that his humanity forms one body with tiles and stones. This means that even the mind of the small man necessarily has the humanity that forms one body with all. Such a mind is rooted in his Heaven-endowed nature, and is naturally intelligent, clear and not beclouded. For this reason it is called "clear character."⁵⁴

Becoming a Christian Sage

Confucians call such a state of mind, which feels sympathy and compassion for the myriad (both sentient and insentient) beings in the suffer-

53. Quoted by Tu Weiming in "Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality," in *Confucianism and Ecology*, eds. Tucker and Berthrong, 3-21; here, 18.

54. *Ibid.*

ing situation, human nature endowed from heaven. The *ch'eng* of heaven is offered to every human being so that even a small man is able to seek to be a sage. It might be identified with prevenient grace, which is universally present and subtly operating among human beings. Wesley's statement that "the sympathies formed by grace far surpass those formed by nature" should not be overemphasized to contradict Wesley's more fundamental conviction of prevenient grace. I believe that Wesley would have welcomed Confucians' anthropocosmic sensitivity if he had by chance become acquainted with it. Being attracted by the strong but invisible force of the ocean-like Spirit, Wesley manifested his own sensitivity toward all living beings in this suffering world. In his sermon "The General Deliverance," written in his old age, Wesley not only expressed his sympathy and compassion for all sentient beings but also criticized the sins of human rebellion which cause such pain and suffering in the world on the one hand and perceived the divine providence for the New Creation which will far surpass the Original Creation on the other:

As all the blessings of God in paradise flowed through man to the inferior creatures; as man was the great channel of communication between the Creator and the whole brute creation; so when man made himself incapable of transmitting those blessings, that communication was necessarily cut off. The intercourse between God and the inferior creatures being stopped, those blessings could no longer flow in upon them. And then it was that "the creature," every creature, "was subject to vanity," to sorrow, to pain of every kind, to all manner of evils. "Not" indeed "willingly"; not by its own choice, not by any act or deed of its own; "but by reason of him that subjected it," by the wise permission of God, determining to draw eternal good out of this temporal evil.⁵⁵

Wesley uses the term perfection as he describes the fall of the human being and its chain reaction in the animal kingdom: "As man is deprived of his perfection, his loving obedience to God, so brutes are deprived of their perfection, their loving obedience to man."⁵⁶ Wesley's sympathy and compassion for the whole groaning creation, fallen into vanity because of human sin, shows an ecotheological sensitivity ahead of his time. He is concerned not only for "the harmless fly, the laborious ant, the painted butterfly" mercilessly treated by "the innocent songsters of the grove" but also for all the creatures, whether feeble or strong, which are exposed to the violence and cruelty of "the human shark" who is incomparably more merciless and evil than the lion, the tiger, or the shark. He writes:

55. Sermon 60, "The General Deliverance," §II.1, *Works* 2:442.

56. *Ibid.*, §II.2, 2:443.

The lion, the tiger, or the shark, give them pain from mere necessity, in order to prolong their own life; and put them out of their pain at once. But the human shark, without any such necessity, torments them of his free choice; and perhaps continues their lingering pain till after months of years death signs their release.⁵⁷

In the sermon “The General Deliverance” the remedy for the vanity and misery of the whole creation is depicted as a matter of the earnest expectation for the New Creation. Wesley was firmly convinced of the final manifestation of the children of God, in which the whole animated creation also shall be delivered from the present bondage of corruption into a measure of the glorious liberty of the children of God. But he did not consign this appearance strictly to the end of time. As we await its fullness, he encouraged Christians “to imitate him [God] whose mercy is over all his works.”⁵⁸ He went on to express his hope that readers of this sermon would soften our hearts toward the meaner creatures, knowing that God cares for them; that we would enlarge our hearts toward those poor creatures to reflect that not one of them is forgotten in the sight of our heavenly Father. In other words, he called for a sanctification of our feelings and affections toward our fellow creatures.

The aged Wesley actually issued a series of sermons focusing on the New Creation. In addition to “The General Deliverance” (1781), there was “The General Spread of the Gospel” (1783), and “The New Creation” (1785). We need to interpret Wesley’s understanding of the New Creation presented in these sermons in relation to his doctrine of Christian perfection, according to which perfection is realizable in one’s own life time in history—just as Yulgok firmly believed in the historical possibility of becoming a sage in this secular world.

The last part of the sermon “The General Spread of the Gospel” clearly affirms that the New Creation has already begun:

All unprejudiced persons may see with their eyes that he is already renewing the face of the earth. And we have strong reason to hope that the work he hath begun will carry on unto the days of his Lord Jesus; that he will never intermit this blessed work of his Spirit until he has fulfilled all his promises; until he hath put a period to sin and misery, and infirmity, and death; and re-established universal holiness and happiness, and caused all the inhabitants of the earth to sing together, “Hallelujah! The Lord God omnipotent reigneth! Blessing, and glory,

57. *Ibid.*, §II.6, 2:445.

58. *Ibid.*, §III.10, 2:449.

and wisdom, and honour, and power, and might be unto our God for ever and ever!"⁵⁹

Theodore Runyon comments on the above passage: "The cosmic drama of the renewing of creation begins, therefore, with the renewal of the *imago dei* in humankind. This is the indispensable key to Wesley's whole soteriology."⁶⁰ As the image of God we are called not just to receive but to reflect the perfect love of God into the world, to share it with our fellow creatures. This is why our sanctification is linked to the sanctifying of the world, and our perfection is directed toward cosmic perfection. This is why Wesley claims: "So deeply sensible are they of the goods and evils of those whom they love for God's sake. But this can only be comprehended by those who understand the language of love."⁶¹

What makes possible this love for the myriad of beings in the world for God's sake? In Wesley's terms, it is "faith *energoumene di agapes*—[faith] filled with the energy of love."⁶² How complete can this filling with the energy of love be? Wesley's response was to talk of "Christian perfection." Runyon expresses some caution about this term, lest it be confused with the so-called "substantialist" view of the second blessing or sinless perfection. To protect against this misunderstanding, he contrasts Macarius's position with that of Wesley and tries to revise the latter by the former:

Wesley assumed that entire sanctification would have the power to attract only if it is fully attainable in this life. Only if they "expect deliverance from sin every moment, they will grow in grace." Yet, this assumption does not appear to have been shared by the Eastern Fathers, who saw deification, "the renewal of the image and likeness of God," as a constant attraction, whether it is fully realized in this life or not. By emphasizing his positive doctrine of the increase of love Wesley could have followed this Eastern model and made a strong case for Christian perfection as the goal of the life of faith without setting the stage for the popular interpretation of perfection as an instantaneous eradication of a substance—an evil root—from the soul, which took over as the dominant interpretation of entire sanctification in at least part of Methodism in succeeding generations.⁶³

I recognize Runyon's valuable caution against the substantialist reading of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection. But I think the attainability of Christian perfection in this life, whether it be gradual or instantaneous, is important and absolutely necessary for every true Christian

59. Sermon 63, "General Spread of the Gospel," §27, *Works* 2:499.

60. Runyon, *New Creation*, 12.

61. *Plain Account*, §25, Q. 38, *Works* (Jackson) 11:435.

62. Sermon 39, "Catholic Spirit," §1.14, *Works* 2:88.

63. Runyon, *New Creation*, 229-30.

who faces all kinds of affliction and persecution. Right after commenting on the metaphor of the sea in *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley begins to talk about the providential means of perfecting grace, namely, afflictions in conformity to Christ:

If we suffer persecution and affliction in a right manner, we attain a larger measure of conformity to Christ, by a due improvement of one of these occasions, than we could have done merely by imitating his mercy, in abundance of good works. One of the greatest evidences of God's love to those that love him is to send them afflictions, with grace to bear them. . . . To abandon all, to strip one's self of all, in order to seek and to follow Jesus Christ naked to Bethlehem, where he was born, naked to the hall where he was scourged; and naked to Calvary, where he died on the cross, is so great a mercy, that neither the thing, nor the knowledge of it, is given to any, but through faith in the Son of God.⁶⁴

It is no wonder that Wesley calls the doctrine of Christian perfection "the doctrine of Jesus Christ" because Jesus said, "Ye shall therefore be perfect, as your Father who is in heaven is perfect."⁶⁵ Wesley loved to point out that a perfect Christian is the one who has the mind that was in Christ and who walks as Christ walked. In the last few pages of *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* Wesley appeals to his readers by telling in straightforward manner how he and his Methodist preachers and believers had suffered many afflictions from their fellow Christians who "exploded and abhorred, as if it [the doctrine of Christian perfection] contained the most pernicious heresy."⁶⁶ I believe Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection was considered scandalous by his opponents because Wesley's version of becoming a perfect Christian required a completely new story (such as the story of Jane Cooper's beautiful experience and serious confession of her perfection on her death bed that Wesley inserted in the *Plain Account*⁶⁷), a new sensitivity (such as Wesley himself well demonstrated by his sympathies toward all suffering lives in the world), and a new style of life (such as Wesley emphasized over and over again in terms of having the mind of Christ, enabling Christians to walk in the footsteps of Christ).

Triological Dance Attuned to Theanthropocosmic Rhythm

My suggestion for the Christian-Confucian dialogue is no less scandalous than Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection. It may be a lot worse

64. *Plain Account*, §25, Q. 38, *Works* (Jackson) 11:436-37.

65. *Ibid.*, §27, 11:444.

66. *Ibid.*, 443.

67. *Ibid.*, §24, 11:409-14.

than Wesley's "pernicious heresy," for such dialogue challenges so-called evangelical Christianity to risk a paradigm change from a mere speculative theology to a truly practical divinity in our time of religious pluralism and ecological crisis. Having dialogue with our Confucian neighbors, we may learn from their strenuous effort to become a sage who participates in the nourishing process of heaven and earth. More important, we should learn from them that such Confucian vision of sage learning is not a vain attempt to get pie-in-the sky, but it is a realizable dream in this world as Yulgok tried to appeal to the stubborn and nominal Confucians in his time:

The virtue of a sage is so mysterious that it is united with Heaven and Earth. It apparently looks impossible to get to such state. But if one is able to build up one's learning, one can get to it. You may worry that you cannot do it. But do not worry that you cannot do it. . . . You only see Chung Myung-do's enjoying of the profound cultivation of heaven-endowed nature, but you close your eyes on how he had strenuously learnt till his death. You only see Hoe Ahm's sea-like broadness and heaven-like highness, but you fail to understand how he got there inch by inch from the first step of his learning. This is why you, having followed them in their footsteps, still cannot go through the gate to reach the porch and to the deeper place of the room behind the porch. . . . If you, as a profound person, constantly keep going forward without ceasing, there is no reason why you cannot arrive at the stage of sage. You may begin with a simple intention to do the good, but you will end up with the stage of becoming a triad with Heaven and Earth to participate in the nourishment of the universe.⁶⁸

Becoming a Christian sage or becoming a perfect Confucian is not merely an eschatological possibility, it is a historical possibility here and now. Of course, Wesley knew that we are "saved by hope" (Rom 8:24). This is why he enthusiastically preached on the hope of the New Creation: "There will be a greater deliverance than all this; for there will be no more sin. And to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him."⁶⁹

This is Wesley's eschatological vision of theanthropocosmic fellowship! This vision is the *telos* that still lies ahead, yet turns the Christian life into being on the way so that Christians who have the mind that was in Christ can and should walk as Christ walked. But this is not a solitary walk. It is

68. Yulgok, *Collective Works*, 2:199.

69. Sermon 64, "New Creation," §18, *Works* 2:510.

a walk with our fellow human beings! We are walking with our Confucian brothers and sisters as well as with the rest of the people of other faiths. Despite all misunderstandings and confusions, pains and afflictions, fears and tremblings, it is a dynamic walk full of joy and happiness. Thus it is fundamentally grounded in our faithful God who turns our wailing into dancing in this world! "Yea, we do believe, that he will in this world so 'cleans the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, that we shall perfectly love him, and worthily magnify his holy name.'"⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

The preceding has suggested the potential fruitfulness of Christian-Confucian dialogue within the current crisis of life. There are three areas in particular that I would suggest should be at the forefront of this dialogue as it proceeds:

- (1) The proper theology of *ch'eng* ought to be constructed in relation to the triological dialectic of heaven, the real principle of *ch'eng*, and the flood-like *ch'i* in comparison with the Christian Trinity.
- (2) Wesley's, as well as the Eastern Fathers', metaphor of *imago dei* as a mirror rather than a faculty needs to be thoroughly related to the Confucian notion of human heart/mind which is also metaphorically referred to as a mirror of Heaven and Earth.
- (3) Wesley's social thought and Yulgok's social thought should be revised in light of the modern/postmodern critical social theory of communicative rationality. Theodore Weber's contribution to a critical reformulation of Wesley's notion of the political image of God is a helpful guide for such revision even for Confucian Christians seeking to overcome patriarchal authoritarianism in both churches and societies of East Asia.⁷¹

As this investigation proceeds, the possible contribution of Christian-Confucian dialogue to practical divinity should be sought in liturgy, spirituality, and education, as well as for mission and evangelism in our postmodern/postcolonial time. Let me suggest a few examples.

First of all, through dialogue with Confucians we may contribute on the one hand to the deepening of their personal encounter with God, which

70. *Plain Account*, §28, *Works* (Jackson) 11:446.

71. Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*.

has remained merely a transpersonal spirituality of Heaven. On the other hand, we may also enlarge the scope of Christian worship of God through incorporating the Confucian anthropocosmic vision into a properly theanthropocosmic spirituality that can address our age of ecological crisis.

Second, through a creative synthesis of Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* and Yulgok's *Compendium of Sage Learning* we may produce a concrete guide of practical divinity for East Asian Christians. It might be called *A Compendium of Christian Sage Learning* or *A Plain Account of Confucian-Christian Perfection*. Christianizing Confucianism and indigenizing Christianity, the compendium may consist of three parts: (1) Christian cultivation of the self, (2) Christian regulation of the family, and (3) Christian participation in the *polis*.

Third, the importance of the establishment of the will for Christian perfection has to be emphasized in Christian education for youths as well as young adults. But we really need more than just a new form of catechism for a new mode of confirmation. We need to introduce a paradigmatic transformation of theological *paideia* in the mode of character-building.

Finally, a Wesleyan alternative in mission and evangelism for religious pluralism needs to be developed in light of "responsible pluralism."⁷² That is, we need an ecumenical evangelical theology that responsibly recognizes the religious plurality of Asia as well as the urgency of evangelization in Asia where four-fifths of the world's population is living.

It is vital that the Christian-Confucian dialogue within the crisis of life not remain an intellectual game played by a few scholars. It should and can contribute to the creation of space for a humane, plural, and transparent world where Christians and people of other faiths may dwell. As the September 11 tragedy well manifested to us, the specter of cultural imperialism in the form of globalization/Americanization has fostered the process of polarization domestically and internationally. Radical responses such as racial and ethnic violence, or terrorism and war on terrorism are likely to intensify. In both East and West, we find little of the most basic human propriety or civility toward others in our world. The Christian-Confucian dialogue may contribute to the recovery of such civility, by helping create "a complicated social dance form in which all can participate (democracy) and yet can play roles that recognize their vast differences (pluralism)."⁷³ We need to develop the Christian-Confucian

72. J. C. Park, "Responsible Pluralism: A Wesleyan Alternative in Asian Plurality of Religion," Paper delivered on the Occasion of the *First Asian Methodist Convention*, Session 1: *Identity and Missional Role of Christianity in Multi-Religious Societies*, Kwang Lim Seminar House, Korea, June 14-18, 2002.

73. Neville, *Boston Confucianism*, 80.

dialogue as a new form of ritual and liturgy in the crisis of life at home, in the church, in school, in civil society, and in the many other social sectors of our postmodern and postcolonial time. We need to learn, on the one hand, how to deconstruct the social habits which are involved with global injustices and that constitute an unjust dance of “inter-killing.” We need to learn, on the other hand, how to set the rhythms and to choreograph the dance for reconstructing a new style of life for “interliving” among heaven, earth, and humans.⁷⁴ It is after all a triological dance attuned to the theanthropocosmic rhythm.

As a closing sample of the patterns of this dance, let me introduce a song called “New Encounter” which has been sung among Korean Christians who, despite living in the divided and inter-killing world, are obliged to be open to a new dialogue, a new encounter for peace, justice, and interliving brought by the power of the triune God.

Like a seed grows into new bud by meeting with the Earth,
You and I’ll become new people by meeting each other.
Like the Heaven creates a new day by meeting with the Earth,
You and I’ll become a new creation by meeting each other.⁷⁵

74. Cf. Jong Chun Park, “Interliving Theology as a Wesleyan *Minjung* Theology,” in *Methodist and Radical: Impulses for the Future of the Methodist Traditions from the Margins*, edited by Joerg Rieger and John Vincent (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003).

75. Jong Chun Park, *Crawl with God, Dance in the Spirit! A Creative Formation of Korean Theology of the Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 135.