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, "John Wesley's 'Way of Salvation':
 Reassessment

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Preliminary remarks:

The audience is those who understand Wesley's "Scriptural Way of Salvation" impressionistically by the frame of the Western Monastic spiritual initiation pattern, which I would name as "ascending type". I like to advance its corrective understanding by means of a method developed by 'comparative theology.'¹ A tacit assumption is that one leaves one's own spiritual home², having known of its heritage, passes over in openness Spirit the world of others, and comes home, much enriched, renewed, and even transformed with greater appreciation of one's own treasure.³

I. Human Nature and Condition: "Rupture"

¹ Comparative Theology as a discipline develops a methodology that examines two different faith traditions, practices, and their attendant paradigms, going beyond the conventional way of compartmentalizing and paralleling them, by putting them in a parallax relationship where one may discover *similarities within differences* and at the same time *differences within similarities*. See Lee H. Yearly, Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 1-4; 17-204; Francis X. Clooney, Theology after Vedanta: an Exercise in Comparative Theology (State University of New York Press, 1993); and Sa-Soon Yun, Toe Gyo Chul Hak Yeon-Ku (in Korean) ["The Research of the Philosophy of Toe-Gyo"] (Seoul: Korea University Press, 1980), pp. 35-37.

² Yahweh asks Abraham to leave his land, his country, and the house of his father (Gen. 12:1). To depart from his own land, his own secure space, requires that the person be detached from himself/herself, from his tradition, from the present personality. The experience of God/Truth is risky; it overthrows our categories and we do not know where it is leading us or where it will end up. But it opens up a greater opportunity to meet God in a less distorted and less domesticated way.

³ John S. Dunne, The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion (University of Notre Dame Press, 1978) analyzes, characterizes and describes best this phenomenological pattern for the inter-religious dialogue.

This evening (July 31, 2007) one of the Kansas City television stations reports breaking news: two teenage girls, sixteen and nineteen years of age, abducted a nine-month pregnant young woman, and confined her to a sleazy motel room in apparent attempt to take an unborn baby out of the mother's womb. One of the girls had a second thought and called 911. The pregnant lady was rescued by the police.

A group of twenty-three Koreans in Afghanistan have been taken hostage by the Taliban, who threaten to kill one by one until the Korean troops withdraw from the country. They have already murdered two of the hostages. At the same time, countless civilians—women, men, and children in Iraq are being killed and maimed as the focus of the “war against the terrorism gets blurred.”

In the refugee camps of Darfur in Africa, hundreds and thousands of innocent people are raped, butchered, and starved with the rest of the world looking on even with the best technologies to battle against the human miseries. Racial discrimination and ethnic hatred, prejudice and human subjugation, politico-economic-cultural colonialism that beget exclusion, oppression, marginalization, exile continuously reign on this globe. Due to our boundless appetite for power, consumption, and pleasure, the earth writhes in pain. The wretched world obscures the goodness of the creation. It is in need of rescue.

How did we get the world the way it is?

In this paper I will look at distinctive responses to this from two religious traditions and their alternative visions of salvation. The paper hopes to discover a consonance as well as a dissonance in them. The *focus* is, however, on a recovery of an appropriate understanding of John Wesley's “way of salvation” with aids of the Franciscan spiritual tradition. First we will deal with John Wesley's view of *ordo salutis*, and then both with the Monastic and the Franciscan traditions. Second, we will look at the spiritual/philosophical insights discovered in the Daoism and Confucianism.

- A. While the scientists may have their own theories about it, Christianity offers a shared vision of the world in response to this question. The scripture tells us ‘why’ there is something rather than nothing. “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good”⁴ Our world is God's idea. All life is here for a reason. We human beings also exist for a good reason. The world is not meant to be what it is today. God said, “Let us make humankind in our image.”⁵ While theologians refer *imago dei* variously to ‘reason,’ ‘spirit,’ ‘moral capacity,’ ‘physical stature,’ ‘relationship,’ ‘openness to future,’ or ‘destiny,’ William H. Willimon, a bishop of the United Methodist Church clearly echoes

⁴ Genesis 1:1, 31.

⁵ Genesis 1:26.

the United Methodist theological position stating the “purpose [of the image of God] is ‘dwelling in covenant with God.’”⁶

How did we get the world the way it is?

A Christian response to this question is that we have broken this covenant. Consequently, we are *estranged* from God. Paul Tillich interprets that the state of estrangement implies its prior essential relationship. If the relationship between the human being and God were that of strangers, then the broken relationship between two strangers cannot be diagnosed as in a state of estrangement. If the relationship is essential to humanity, then the brokenness corresponds to the estrangement of humanity from God. Since man is created “in the image and likeness of God,”⁷ “man discovers *himself* when he discovers God; he discovers something that is identical with himself although it transcends him infinitely, something from which he is estranged, but from which he never has been and never can be separated.”⁸

John Wesley elaborates the character of the image of God in his sermon, God created humanity “not barely in his *natural image*, a picture of his own immortality, a spiritual being endued with understanding, freedom of will, and various affections, nor merely in his *political image*, the governor of this lower world, having ‘dominion over the fishes of the sea...; but chiefly in his *moral image*, which, according to the Apostle, is ‘righteousness and true holiness.’”⁹ But this image of God is considered defaced, wounded, distorted, and even lost due to the “fall”. .¹⁰ Hence the disposition and inclination to sin has been released in its actualization through this “original act of disobedience”, and subsequently human beings lost their original capacity to govern justly themselves and their environment.

⁶ William H. Willimon, United Methodist Beliefs: A Brief Introduction (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 14. See also The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2000. (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000), p.43. Abbreviated as Discipline.

⁷ Genesis 1:26.

⁸ Paul Tillich, “The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion,” in Theology of Culture (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 10.

⁹ Sermons 45: “The New Birth,” #i.1, Works 2: 188-189.[The Fifty-three “standard sermons” of John Wesley. They are numbers 1-53 in volumes 1 and 2 of Works, edited by Albert Outler.] Abbreviated as Works. For discussion of these three senses of the image of God in John Wesley’s thought, see Randy L. Maddox, Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology. Kingswood Books (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 165-93; Ted Runyon, The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), pp. 13-19.

¹⁰ Genesis 3.

The one question, however, must be considered is: *what is it that is lost by the sin of Adam and Eve?* A Roman Catholic theologian Monika K. Hellwig identifies two levels of loss¹¹: (a) “the loss of the relationship to God as source, meaning and destiny of human life” and (b) “the loss of the integrity that rightly belongs to human existence. Though created good by God, the human nature at its deepest levels is corrupted. Destitute of holiness, humanity is now inclined to evil. Humanity lost the life of God.”¹² This amounts to a spiritual death.¹³ This spiritual death diminishes our ability to secure the clarity with which a true discernment of situation, relationship and options in human life. It further diminishes our capacity of the appropriate operative hierarchy of values by which choices and commitments are properly directed. It leads to the loss of freedom from unnecessary and unprofitable kinds of suffering as well as to the loss of the quality of life which is not threatened and/or defeated by death.

- B. We stand in need of redemption. Every human being stands *in need* of God’s grace. We cannot possibly save ourselves. John Wesley (1703-1791) made a distinctive contribution to understanding of salvation with his methodical way, the way in which God’s intention for salvation becomes real through the life of a woman or a man. John Wesley referred to this process as the “way of salvation,” as in the title of one of his sermons, “The Scriptural Way of Salvation.”

II. The “Way of Salvation”: The Distinctive Wesleyan Spiritual Inheritance

John Wesley organized his understanding of the “way of salvation” under the three headings of “prevenient grace”¹⁴, “justifying grace” and “sanctifying grace.” Many Wesleyan theologians treat these in the seeming linear order of “prevenient grace,” “justifying grace,” and “sanctifying grace” with frequently adding “perfecting grace.”

- A. First of all, what is grace? In his comment on 2 Corinthians 8:9, John Wesley points out: “The grace [is] the most sincere, most free, and most abundant

¹¹ Monika K. Hellwig, “Forward,” in Original Selfishness: Original Sin and Evil in the Light of Evolution by Daryl P. Domning (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2006), pp. 11-16.

¹² *Op. cit.*

¹³ Genesis 2:17.

¹⁴ The eighth Article of Religion and the writings of John Wesley refer to God’s “preventing” grace. In his time, the term “preventing” meant simply “coming before” (Latin, *preveniens*). The Methodists today tend to speak of God’s “prevenient “grace, which means God’s grace “coming before” our believing in Christ. But both terms refer to the same thing. Ted Campbell suggests “preparatory” or “assisting” grace for its greater intelligibility. See, “prevent,” in Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary. I, 4, 2:2294

love.”¹⁵ Grace is thus defined as being rooted in God’s nature as love. It is unmitigated favor given to the sinner despite sin. It is a gift. It is “free in all” and “free for all.”¹⁶ It restores the capacity to discern appropriately right from wrong, convinces of one’s sinfulness, assures of pardon and gives power over sin, thereby healing infirmity of the soul.

What is prevenient grace? The Article VIII clearly states, humanity is incapable of doing good works “without the grace of God by Christ preventing us.”¹⁷ To affirm prevenient grace is to admit the necessity of the spiritual fertilization of the human beings. It makes it clear that God *is* actively loving all of humanity. It implies two things: firstly, every good gift in humanity’s process of salvation comes from God. Secondly, humanity is given the ability, by grace, to respond. It is God who saves us, but humans must respond to the divine promptings. The prevenient grace is this divine prompting. It is God’s grace given to every human being. It prevents us from judging the character of anyone before hand. We can be open to each other as we are essentially open to God. It also says that God is persistently searching to be to with, in and for, us. It is also characterized as God working with human beings *before* they believe in Christ.

Prevenient grace *leads* to *justifying grace*, the grace of God by which, through faith in Christ, our sins are forgiven. Wesley insisted that our justification is by grace through faith.¹⁸ Without assurance of pardon, there is no true justifying faith. Prevenient grace leads us to repentance (sorrow over sin and the realization that we are unable to save ourselves). In order of time and human experience, the justification and sanctification are simultaneous, yet they are logically distinct and of a totally different nature. Wesley states, “[Justification] does not denote a sinner being actually made just. It is imputed. Sanctification is a process of being actually made just. It is indeed in some degree the immediate *fruit* of justification, but remains a distinct gift.”¹⁹

Sanctification does not come *before* justification. “Justification implies only a relative, the new birth, a real change.”²⁰ Justification refers to what God does through Christ *for us*, while sanctification to what God does by the Spirit *in us*. “Exactly as we are justified by faith,” Wesley asserts, “so are we

¹⁵ John Wesley, Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament. (London: William Bowyer, 1755), 2 Cor. 8:9. See also Galatians 1:15 and Ephesians 1:6.

¹⁶ Sermon, “Free Grace,” in John Wesley’s Sermon: An Anthology, eds. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), p. 50.

¹⁷ Discipline, p. 61.

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:8-10. On this Wesley firmly stands with John Calvin and Martin Luther.

¹⁹ Sermon 5, “Justification by Faith,” #II.1, Works 1:187.

²⁰ Sermon 19, “The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God.”

sanctified by faith, but not entirely sanctified.”²¹ When someone is justified, he or she is at the same time sanctified. Jurgen Moltmann distinguishes: “Justification takes place in the vertical before God *sub specie aeternitatis*. Sanctification is accomplished in the horizontal that is aligned towards God *sub specie temporis futurae*.”²² Justification is an instantaneous change in status, while sanctification is a process that goes on for the rest of the person’s life. Sanctification is a process of “renewal of our fallen nature by the Holy Spirit.”²³

In the process of sanctification, the new birth is the first step. In “The Marks of the New Birth” Wesley identifies as marks of the new birth, faith, peace, hope, and the love of God and neighbor, the greatest mark of all.²⁴ The goal of sanctification is entire sanctification or Christian perfection. What perfection should human beings aspire? The ultimate goal is the restoration of the image of God. The process of sanctifying grace leads believers to grow *toward* the point where they become fully righteous. That state of holiness has been variously described as maturity, perfection and entire sanctification.

What is ‘perfection’? Randy Maddox points out that Wesley’s understanding of perfection is not a static concept, but a dynamic one. He distinguishes between “(1) a dynamic conception of perfection as ever-increasing maturity (like the goal of *teleiotes* in early Greek writers), and (2) a static conception of perfection as unsurpassable attainment (epitomized in the Latin model of Adam as *perfectus est*).”²⁵ For Wesley there is no end to the process of growth, and there is no attainable perfection without mistakes, ignorance and temptation. “Entire sanctification is a gift that will come to persons who continue to grow in the Christian life. It should be *earnestly desired*.”²⁶ One should seek it as what *may be* to lead to heaven. In this pattern, what is important to remember is that the quest for sanctification is to be taken in company with the whole system of Methodist class meetings, societies, bands. It is to be undertaken with the aid of the means of grace, such as devotional reading, Bible study, prayer, fasting, and the Lord’s Supper.

This means that sanctification is not limited to the holiness of individual persons. It is a process in which faithful believers *desire* the sanctification of social conditions around them. There is no personal holiness that is not also

²¹ Sermon 43, “Scripture Way of Salvation,” #III.3, Works 2:163-64.

²² Jurgen Moltmann, The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), p. 163.

²³ Discipline., 66.

²⁴ Sermon 18, “The Marks of the New Birth,” #1.4, Works 1: 419-424.

²⁵ Randy L. Maddox, Responsible Grace., p. 180.

²⁶ John Wesley, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” in The Standard Sermons of John Wesley, p. 60.

social holiness. Geoffrey Wainwright aptly observes, “[The] love towards God is constantly accompanied by love towards neighbor.”²⁷ When we desire our sanctification, we also should *seek* to improve conditions for workers, to secure human rights of women and children, to combat racism and ethnic discrimination, to end the hatred against the others, to address poverty of many “little people,” and to feed the hungry, to set at liberty those who are unjustly bounded to unfreedom, and to give life to the non-persons.²⁸ God desires salvation for all and in all. This salvation is “a present salvation,”²⁹

III. Why has it been often framed with the Neoplatonic and Western monastic path?

The description of this pattern of “Way of Salvation” is the Methodism’s spiritual treasure. When in spiritual and devotional practice, one often think of ‘journey’ to God. Growth in spirituality is often viewed as the measure of our mature journey to God. The notion of journey, as it arose in the monastic tradition, corresponded to Neoplatonism, which was a specific understanding of the God-world relationship inherited from the Greek philosophers. It is my contention that many “Methodists” interpret and understand this Wesleyan “Way of Salvation” with the Neoplatonic and the Western Monastic frame of spiritual journey and growth, thereby leading to its distortion and misunderstanding. What is then issue with the Neoplatonic and western monastic notion of spiritual journey?

- A. The Neoplatonic “ladder of ascent” presented a movement away from the world, rising above natural, sensible things as if they were inferior and in some sense, not truly real.³⁰ The emphasis of spirit over matter, according to a hierarchy of being, meant an intellectualizing of mystical experience. Neoplatonists believed that the created world should motivate one to turn inward in the search for God. In order to know true reality, one had to transcend this earthly world and contemplate the spiritual world above. The Neoplatonists, therefore, turned quickly from the material world and its

²⁷ Geoffrey Wainwright, “Ora et Labora: Benedictines and Wesleyans at Prayer and at Work,” in The Asbury Theological Journal: Sanctification in thee Benedictine and Methodist Traditions. Proceedings from A World Ecumenical Conference held July 4-10, 1994, in Rome, Italy. Vol. 50, no. 2 (Fall, 1995) and Vol. 51, no. 1 (Spring, 1996), p. 102.

²⁸ Jose Miguez Bonino, “Sanctification and Liberation,” in The Asbury Theological Journal, pp. 141-150. Jurgen Moltmann, “Sanctification Today,” in his The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), pp.171-177: he identifies sanctification today should include ‘sanctity of life,’ ‘ reverence for life,’ ‘ the renunciation of violence,’ and harmonies of life,’ etc.

²⁹ Sermon, “Salvation by Faith,” in John Wesley Sermons: An Anthology, p. 42.

³⁰ According to Plato’s ‘allegory of the cave’, which was very influential on the structure of Neoplatonism, sensible reality is comprised of ersatz forms, while the true forms like in a transcendent, spiritual world.

individual creatures to scale the metaphysical ladder to the spiritual and divine realms by means of universal concepts.

Early Christian monastic writers and their basic outline of the monastic ascent were influenced by the Neoplatonic worldview. They often spoke of prayer and spiritual practice as the basis of the perfect life and the path to the kingdom of heaven. Evagrius Ponticus, a disciple of Origen of Alexandria, said that one must strive for solitude of spirit so that one may be wholly attentive to God.³¹ The writings of Evagrius were influential on the monk John Cassian. For him strict asceticism and discipline made possible by a *flight* from the world (*fuga mundi*) were necessary to arrive at contemplation, an unceasing prayer that culminates in eternal life.³²

The writings of Evagrius and Cassian were influential on the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, which was the most influential rule of monastic life in the Middle Ages as well as to many today. The purpose of the monastic life, according to it, is to flee the world to *seek* God (*quaerere Deum*), since the world poses obstacles in the search for God. Monks seek to live the “life of the angels” through the work of continuous prayer that anticipates life in the heavenly kingdom. The theme of angelic life corresponds to the eschatological direction of monastic life, that is, desire for heaven and union with God.

I often hear United Methodist clergy persons talk of “going on to perfection,” as though they are moving up the ladder starting from the prevenient grace, through justifying grace, presently in sanctifying grace onto perfection. One can easily obtain a mental picture from this a progressive journey or path upward the higher stage of spiritual maturity. It likens to an ascending spiritual journey to the other world, that is, the heavenly *Jerusalem*. Wesley’s “way of salvation” does not, however, direct us to withdraw from the present world, but rather nudges us to engage actively in this world. Nevertheless many take a clue of “ascending” spiritual journey from his “way of salvation” towards ‘entire sanctification’ or ‘perfection.’

The expression found in such phrases as “prevenient grace *leads*...,” “sanctification is a *fruit* of justification,” “entire sanctification or perfection as the goal of sanctification,” “a dynamic progressive nature of perfection,”

³¹ Andrew Louth, The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), p. 111.

³² John Cassian, *Conferences* 1.5-1.7 (Migne PL 49.487, 489). Engl. Trans. Colm Luibheid, Conferences (New York: Paulist, 1985), pp. 40-1. Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos* 61. Engl. trans. John Eudes Bamberger: Evagrius Ponticus, The Praktikos: Chapters on Prayer. Cistercian Studies Series: Number Four (Spencer: Cistercian, 1970), p. 65. Plotinus, *Enneads* 1. 6. 7. Engl. Trans. Bernard McGinn, Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century. Vol. 1, The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism (New York: Crossroad, 1994), p. 47.

easily lend themselves to a misleading interpretive judgment that this *ordo salutis* is of an ascending linear hierarchy of value. Such view belongs to a cultic initiation. Initiation is established in traditional societies that are conscious of the interdependent and hierarchical character of reality. They consider that the human path to perfection calls for a series of step for “progress” on the ladder of being. It may be important aspect of a religious experience. At issue here is that it often leads to an escapist mode in spiritual life to a great detriment of a healthy religious life.

- B. Perhaps Wesley’s “way of salvation” may gain sharper profile with regard to his emphatic social holiness, when more intentionally coupled with the Franciscan perspective. Unlike the Neoplatonists who withdrew from the sensual world in order to contemplate God, Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) attained the heights of spiritual life through a penetrating vision of creation. Francis came from a base of popular and lay experience. His family was part of the rising merchant class in Assisi. His father was a cloth merchant and owned a shop in Assisi where Francis apparently worked for some time. He came into contact with many different types of people—farmers, craftsmen, artists, bakers, beggars—people who worked with their hands and valued the material things of the earth. The idea of transcending this world to attain true reality would have been foreign to his thinking. Rather, he regarded earthly life as possessing ideal, positive potential as God’s creation. Some regard him as “the first materialist” in the best sense of the word.³³

The Franciscan journey differs from the Neoplatonic ascent because the journey to God is not linear but a journey inwards toward a new relationship with God in which God takes on flesh anew in one’s life. The Good News of Jesus Christ is that we do not “go to God” as if God sat in a remote place awaiting our arrival; Rather, God has “come to us” in the Incarnation. A Franciscan Bonaventure wrote, “The eternal God has humbly bent down and lifted the dust of our nature into unity with his own person.”³⁴ We move toward God because God has first moved toward us—this is the Franciscan ‘descent’ into all dimensions of this worldly life..

The Franciscan descent “to God” is an inversion of monastic ascent. Rather than fleeing the world to find God, God is to be found in the world. The idea that “the world is our cloister” finds its root in Francis of Assisi. Disillusioned and wounded in battle, Francis, one day, wandered into the broken-down church of San Damiano, where he encountered face to face with the wounded and glorified Christ on the cross, and where he met the God of compassionate

³³ Paul M. Allen and Joan deRis Allen, Francis of Assisi’s Cantic of the Creatures: A Modern Spiritual Path (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 45.

³⁴ Bonaventure, “Sermon II on the nativity of the Lord,” in What Manner of Man? Sermons on Christ by Saint Bonaventure, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), p. 57.

love, a God “bent over” in love in the wounds of the crucified Christ.³⁵ This encounter with the other, crucified God, changed Francis in the very core of his being. He tried to become transparent in his life to the compassionate love of God in Christ. Franciscans do not leave the world to find God, but rather they find God in the midst of the world. The world presents itself as impregnated with God.

Thomas Merton points out that salvation means rescuing the person from the individual, perhaps, even to say, bringing the individual into personhood through an experience of love.³⁶ The word “person” is related to the Latin “*per-sonare*”, which means “to sound through.” To be a human person is to be in relationship with another by which the other sounds through one’s life. Francis became a person because his response to grace meant God could sound through his life and through the lives of others he met along the way. This is a point of convergence between Francis and Wesley: to be human is to be on the way to salvation, that is, to be brought into relationships of wholeness and healing in union with God. This union with God is not to be identified with union with God by excluding the shadow side of the reality, but rather embracing the very dark side of the world. Jesus identified himself, in Francis’s vision, with the excluded, the ostracized, the scapegoated, the non-person. When Francis embraced the leper with a kiss³⁷, he met the Christ.

The Franciscan descent here presents a corrective perspective to the often vulnerable Wesleyan “way of salvation” which may easily be co-opted into

³⁵ See Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis” in Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol. 1, *The Saint*, edited by Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), p. 210-11. Abbreviated as FAED. The critical edition of Francis’ Writings is *Francois d’Assise: Ecrits*, intro., trans., and notes, Theophile Desbonnets, Thaddee Matura, Jean-Francois Godet, Damien Vorreux, *Source Cretiennes*, number 285 (Paris: les Editions du Cerf, 1981). See also Bonaventure, *Legenda maior* 1.6. Engl. Trans. FAED II, 534. The critical edition of this is Bonaventure *Legenda maior S. Francisci Assiseinsis* [edition minor], Firenze-Quarrachi 1941. English translation is Bonaventure, “The Major Legend of Saint Francis.” Engl. Trans. FAED II.

³⁶ Thomas Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 38.

³⁷ According to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the kiss symbolizes the Incarnation. See his “Sermon 2,” in Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works, trans. G.R. Evans (New York: Paulist, 1987), pp. 215-17. His comment states: “The mouth which kisses signifies the Word who assumes human nature; the flesh which is assumed is the recipient of the kiss; the kiss, which is of both giver and receiver, is the person which is both, the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). . . .” Bonaventure follows Bernard in interpreting “Christ as the kiss [of God] . . . since the kiss is the medium between the one kissing and the one kissed.” See Bonaventure, “Sermon II on the Nativity of the Lord,” trans. Zachary Hayes in What Manner of Man? Sermons on Christ by Saint Bonaventure, 2nd. Ed. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), p. 71.

the Neo-platonic and Western Monastic pattern of “ascending spirituality” that would steer away from the transformative engagement in this world. Wesley states, “True Christianity cannot exist without both the inward experience and outward practice of justice, mercy, and truth.”³⁸

Can this wholistic (convergence of the ascending and descending paths of Wesley’s *ordo salutis*) be presented in Asian context without passing over the Neo-platonic and Monastic path to the Franciscan pattern? That is, can it be made intelligible with the aid of Asian religious and philosophical resources, as the Greek Christians earlier did with their philosophical resources? Can Daoism offer another angle of response to the same question: how has the world come to be what it is? It is my contention that this may be done with greater benefit both to Asians who have been silently encoded with the influence (*qi*) of *Dao* and to the Wesleyans who may, if not already, engage in theological dialogue with their sisters and brothers in Christ in (from) Asia.

IV. “Way of Salvation” and works of *Dao*³⁹, *Teh*, and *Qi*⁴⁰

Early Confucianism was drawn more to problems of politics and human relations than to metaphysical or cosmological speculation. The Daoist ‘yin-yang’ schools,

³⁸ Vol. 4, p. 174.

³⁹ Victor H. Mair, a translator of *Tao Te Ching* (New York and London: Bantam Book, 1990) presents an etymological root of the word ‘Dao’ as follows: its earliest record sound of the term is *drog*. This was derived initially from the Indo-European root related to *dsrogh* meaning, “running after something” and again related to *dhorg*, meaning ‘way,’ or ‘motion.’ These roots may have given rise to some of the present European terms such as the Russian ‘*doroga*,’ the Polish ‘*droga*,’ the Croatian ‘*draga*,’ (a path in the valley), the Norwegian, ‘*drog*,’ (an animal passage). In Sanskrit, *dhrajas* comes close to Dao as it denotes a fixed course, a passage (*dhraj*). A Hebraic root *d-r-g*, which is related to the Aramaic *t-r-g* as the latter carries a sense of “a route by which things move,” or “a path.” A notion of a path also plays a significant role in the Islamic philosophy. See. P. 132. But this word has been translated to mean in English as Spirit, Way, Path, God, Wisdom, Ideal and more.

⁴⁰ This Chinese word, *ch’i* () is also scripted by the Pinyin system preferred by the Chinese scholars as *qi*. The Chinese word carries multiple meanings such as ‘energy,’ ‘vital force,’ ‘breath,’ ‘spirit,’ ‘essence of life,’ ‘influence,’ ‘heavenly ruler,’ even a void embracing everything,’ etc. *qi* comes from the philosophical concept of *qi*: the energy or essence of life. It was originally depicted with a drawing of the Sun () along with the symbol of fire () making curly vapors () rise from the earth (). The more recent character now depicts steam () rising from boiling rice (), the principal food in the Chinese diet. It denotes the psychophysiological power in a human being as well as creative vital force that permeates in the universe. See Deng Ming-Dao, *The Living I Ching: Using Ancient Chinese Wisdom to Shape your life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

however, had been interested in questions and explanations of the creation and working of the universe, which exercised a great influence in Han Dynasty.⁴¹

The *Dao* has conventionally been translated as ‘the way’. The Chinese script is composed of a word for ‘head’ and a word for ‘running.’⁴² *Dao* signifies a route in and through which everything moves, or in which the Universe courses. In both religious and philosophical thought, *Dao* is that from which everything comes out and to which it returns as the source, and at the same time permeates in everything that is. It is *sui generis*, and it eternally nurtures and unifies all things. *Dao* is the ground of Being to all beings.

For Lao-Tzu, *Dao* stands for the source of all existence. It is the beginning of all change in the universe, as it begets all change within the cosmos. It is real. It is the “home” to which everything should return. As such it is ubiquitous in all. It exists from eternity to eternity. It is present before the world came into being. According to Wang Pi, *Dao* as the foundation of the existence may be explained in terms of ‘non-being’ and ‘principle’.⁴³ Wang Pi’s two expressions, i.e., ‘negation’ (non-being) and ‘affirmation’ (‘Li,’ =principle), of the *Dao* may be considered to correspond to the *yin* and *yang* relationship. The relationality of *yin* and *yang* is the relationality between the dimension of non-being of the *Dao* and the dimension of *Li* of the *Dao*. But the *Dao* transcends the two interpretive realms of *yin* and *yang*.

Now what is the Dao? The chapter 21 of the Tao Teh Ching says:

It lies in the nature of Grand Virtue
To follow the Tao and the Tao alone.
Now what is the Tao?
It is something elusive and evasive.
Evasive and elusive!
And yet It contains within itself a Form.
Elusive and evasive!
And yet It contains within itself a Substance.
Shadowy and dim!
And yet It contains within itself a Core of Vitality.
The Core of Vitality is very real,....⁴⁴

⁴¹ Former Han Dynasty ruled in 202 BCE -9 A.D. and latter Han Dynasty ruled 25-220.

⁴² Lao Tzu, The Way of Lao Tzu, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1963), p. 6.

⁴³ Wang Pi (226-246), a pioneer of the Neo-Daoism, explains the nature of *Dao* with two concepts of non-being and principle. See Alan K.L. Chan, Two Visions of the Way (Albany: SUNY, 1991), pp. 47-52.

⁴⁴ Lao Tzu, Tao The Ching, trans. John C.H. Wu (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2005), p. 43.

This chapter introduces the four stages: Form, Substance, Core, and Vitality. *Dao* which is elusive and evasive begets through these stages that which is increasingly concrete and tangible. It is suggestive of an idea that there is something within the *Dao* that is pregnant for becoming. It is similar to what Alfred North Whitehead calls ‘creativity’⁴⁵ may be. The chapter 14 depicts:

Its name is *formless...Soundless...Incorporeal...*

....

These three attributes are unfathomable;
Therefore they fuse into one.

Continually the Unnameable moves on
Until it returns beyond the realm of things.
We call it the formless Form, the imageless Image.
We call it the indefinable and unimaginable.

Confront it and you do not see its face!
Follow it and you do not see its back!
Yet, equipped with this timeless Tao,
You can harness present realities. ,⁴⁶

Though nameless, and formless, *Dao* can be, nevertheless described through its vital effects. These effects may be expressed through *Teh*⁴⁷ The chapter 51 depicts,

Tao gives them life,
Virtue nurtures them,
Matter shapes them,
Environment perfects them...

It is Tao that gives them life:
It is Virtue that nurses them, grow them, fosters them,
Shelters them, comforts them, nourishes them, and
Covers them under her wings.
To give life but to claim nothing,
To do your work but to set no store by it,
To be a leader, not a butcher,
This is called hidden Virtue.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978). Pp. 21-31.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴⁷ *The* is often interpreted as *Virtue* of the Western ethics. Wang Pi regards this *Teh* to be identical with *Li*, a principle of things that are.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

These passages permit us to glimpse an emergence of order in the creative process. *Dao* is not confined to the realm of non-being. It is connected to the realm of *Li*. The *Li* evidences the movement and works of the formless and incorporeal *Dao* that are beneficial to all. *Li* phenomenally manifests *Dao*, and thereby makes it intelligible. This process is also depicted in the chapter 42:

“Tao gave birth to One,
One gave birth to Two,
Two gave birth to Three,
Three gave birth to all myriad things.

All the myriad things carry the Yin on their backs and
Hold the Yang in their embrace,
Deriving their vital harmony from the proper blending
of the two vital Breath.

Truly, one may gain by losing;
And one may lose by gaining....⁴⁹

One gives birth to Two. These Two is the duality of *Yin* and *Yang*. The nature of the *Dao*, according to Lao Tzu, lies in the reciprocity of these two extreme opposites, that stand in conflict against each other, yet more importantly, work in a reciprocal and complementary manner with each other. This is clearly expressed in chapter 2, where stated:

“the hidden and the manifest give birth to each other.
Difficult and easy complement each other....
Back and front follow each other...
Therefore, the Sage manages his affairs with ado,
And spreads his teaching without talking....”⁵⁰

Duality does not signify the dualistic reality within the *Dao*. Rather it diagnostically surfaces the dualistic elements that segment and attenuate the conflictual condition in life that plagues the world. *Dao* exposes the dualistic elements of the world in a way they are being harmonized in the power of the *qi* that permeates everything as vibrating energy. The reciprocal interaction of *yin* and *yang* gives rise to *qi* that does not know the higher and the low, the bright and the dark, the far and the near, because it equally vivifies all. Things are equidistant to it in its effect. This happens in terms of creativity and receptivity: it goes forth and returns in a spiral fashion. In like manner it goes inward and goes outward. It embraces all. Its movement is not linear, but spiral. It vitalizes and revitalizes everything. *Dao* visits, as it were, the “Hell” by descending into it, thereby negating its power.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5

The Book of *I Ching*, a Confucian classic, teaches that the *Dao* is that which unifies existence and vitality. It also indicates the *Dao* is that which connects non-being and vitality. The Chinese ‘*I*’ () is composed of two character, the Sun standing, as it were, upon the Moon. “*I*” depicts the relationship and the movement between the Sun and the Moon. The Sun is *Yang*, while the Moon is *Yin*. As the Sun sets, the Moon rises up. As the Moon wanes, the Sun smiles at the world. One follows after the other. They are reciprocal so much so that one exists with the other. Likewise, “*Yang*” stands for the light of the Sun, while “*Yin*” for the cloud that drapes the Sun. Both Chinese words contain a common letter, meaning a “hill” () or “bank” of the river. The sunny side of the hill is contiguous with the shadowy side of the hill. It is in their nature for them to seek a harmony. This harmony is not a static one. In it there is a differentiation and at the same time determination, because it constantly seeks *Dao*.

One obtains a clue from the nature and work of the *Dao* concerning the nature of the good and the evil. Good and evil may be viewed from the *Dao* as opposites but complementary to each other. Each participates in the other through the interaction of *yin* and *yang*. Hence the concepts of good and evil are not absolute in themselves. They are relative to each other. Lao-Tzu considered their relationship as circular (cyclical): Good moves toward evil, and evil toward good. The highest good is the beginning of the evil; the termination of the evil marks a beginning of the good. He said that we learn evil through the knowledge of good; we know the good through experience of evil. Therefore, the problem of evil cannot be solved through the encouragement for, and education of, the good. The true solution of the problem of evil is through the avoidance of the discernment of good and evil. This is the very *return* to the *Dao*, according to the Daoist metaphysics.⁵¹ This can be termed as *union* with the *Dao*.

All things are of the relative nature, including humanity.⁵² Hence one cannot and must not attach what is absolute to the relative. When what is relative is made, or elevated to, the absolute, the demonic evil may arise. What is desirable is to have a harmonious relationship with the *Dao*. That is the *summum bonum*. How does one go about this? It takes a discipleship (following) of the *Teh*. *Dao* represents the universal principle of unification, while *Teh* signifies individual and personal character. *Teh* manifests its own nature and realization only within the matrix of *Dao*. In this sense it denotes a relationship between a person and the divine. It is the practical principle of life as the “incarnation” within the universe of the *Dao*. The praxis of this manifestation is best expressed in the chapter 7:

Heaven lasts long, and Earth abides.
What is the secret of their durability?

⁵¹ Jung Young Lee, *The Theology of Change* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 61.

⁵² Martin Luther caught this precarious character of human condition, even under the grace when he said, humanity before the justifying grace is “*simul Justus et peccator*.”

Is it not because they do not live for themselves⁵³
That they can live so long?

Therefore, the Sage wants to remain behind,
But finds himself at the head of others;
Reckons himself out,
But finds himself safe and secure.
Is it not because he is selfless
That his Self is realized?⁵⁴

Lao-Tzu diagnosed that the problem of suffering and strife in the human world arise precisely because human beings understand their “Self” as something permanent and absolute. One has to be “kenotic” (selfless) in relationship with himself/herself so as to be receptive of the truth of oneself.⁵⁵ St. Francis emptied himself of all once he encountered the Christ on the Cross where Christ “bent over” in love (in giving himself) for all. This corresponds to the *Teh*. By means of *Teh* Dao is ‘emmanuelized’ in all things. Of these all existing things, human being is the only being that is aware of his/her own existence. In other words, they are the only beings that are conscious of the *Dao* present in their own inner world. Humanity can intuit the *Dao*. *Dao* is nearer to human beings than they are to themselves.

Loa-Tzu advises: close the mouth, the ear, the nose, the eyes, other sensory organs. Shut the “door”, then you will never have to exert yourself in vain. By shutting all the windows that face outward, man and woman can delve into the depth of their mind to the extent that they may be in touch with the core of their being. There one attains the realm of *Teh*. God can be met in a person’s depth in the sense that God is nearer to man or woman than man or woman is to himself/herself.⁵⁶ The true spirituality directs the believer *inwards* and then the

⁵³ This passage evokes the word *kenosis*, which means to empty oneself as Paul writes in Philippians 2:7, “he emptied himself.” This word often inspires interpreters to think of God’s poverty and condescending love. For background on the word *kenosis*, see Sarah Coakley, “Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations,” in The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 193-97.

⁵⁴ Tao The Ching, p.15.

⁵⁵ “I” arrives at God if “I” do not stop at “myself.” That is, if my deep “I” transported, as it were, into a Thou, God. Otherwise “I” can fall into a destructive spiritual narcissism. This is why spiritual life is ambivalent and constantly ambiguous. “It is not I who lives, but Christ who lives in me.” (Gal. 2:20) If one is sure of what is deepest in him is Christ, then one needs not fear of negation of oneself. One is truly free, free of fear of losing oneself, but rather free to be receptive of the true Self.

⁵⁶ Saint Augustine, Confessions, trans. and intro. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Reading and Kakenham, 1961), 3.6 (62): “[You, God, were] deeper than my inmost understanding and higher than the topmost height that I could reach.” The Latin text reads: “tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo.”

divine that he or she encounters there drives the believer *outwards* in service and love for the others [God and the God's children] without opinion and valuation; without naming and claiming.

That is the life of the Sage, and the life of the Saint, the person whose image of God is restored by the power of the Spirit⁵⁷ and in whose life God's "voice" sounds through to all things. Following the *Dao* is embodying it. *The embodied Dao* spontaneously manifests itself in the triune expression of *Dao, Teh, and qi* in daily harmonious living with all. The *embodiment* of Love of God in Christ spontaneously manifests itself in daily living for all. The *qi* (power or energy) of *yin* and *yang* of the *Dao* ushers us in all directions erasing all fragmenting boundaries by going down to the dark and beyond separation. The tri-unity of *Dao, Teh and Qi* directs the faithful and the practitioner of *Dao* to be the way to perfection, so to speak. The love of Christ accomplishes the divine universal salvific intention by "descending into Hell"⁵⁸ in the power of the Spirit.

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⁵⁷ Jurgen Moltmann identifies the "Spirit" with *ruach* and *ch'i* as "Friends of Life." In his *Wissenschaft und Weisheit: zum Gesprach zwischen Naturwissenschaft und Theologie* (Gutersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gutersloher Verlagshaus, 2002), pp. 219-222.

⁵⁸ In 1784 John Wesley sent to American Methodists the 24 Articles of Religion, reduced from the 39 Articles of Religion of the Church of England. Of the 15 Articles that were deleted by John Wesley, the Article III dealt with "Of the going down of Christ into Hell." I find this intriguing and significant in that some of the Methodist Hymnody omits the phrase, "descend into Hell" of Jesus Christ of the Apostles' Creed. The Korean Methodists recite the Apostles' Creed without this phrase. Have we critically reflected upon this omission? I often ask our students to identify, "where is a hell in your town?" "Have you ever descend into the place?" "What would you say if the Christ has gone to the place?" "Are you willing to go there as his disciple, i.e., the follower of Christ?" "What does it have to do with 'going onto perfection'?" "Are we going on to Heaven by 'going on to perfection'?" See *Works*, vol. 1, p. 533. for Wesley's notion of "social religion."