

## Wesley and Macarius on the Life of Prayer

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### Wesley's view of the True Church

In order to serve the present age and fulfill our calling, our Christian community needs to be clear about its identity. If it lacks genuine Christians practicing true religion, the life of the church will be easily oriented towards distractions. Wesley was very interested in reforming the church. Foundational to this concern was his conviction that the true church is of divine origin, called into being and mission by God. It is not a merely human production. Even though the church exists where two or three believers are met together, what makes it truly church is the presence of Christ, in whose name they are gathered. As Runyon rightly stresses, in Wesley's ecclesiology trinitarian spiritual energy not only constitutes the church, it is its continuing dynamic.<sup>1</sup> God is the source of the church, which is why Wesley calls it "the Church of God." Humans are participants in this divine creation, as they respond to God's inviting call.

Who are those humans that are properly "the church of God?" Wesley raises this question in his sermon "Of the Church."<sup>2</sup> He answers the question in the language of St. Paul. They are "the saints, the holy persons" (Eph. 1:1); they assemble themselves together to worship God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. The life of holiness in her members is the genuine mark of the true church. So Wesley's emphasis is on the life of those saints. He believes that those that are "properly" the church of God are holy people who live up to their holy vocation: they "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called."<sup>3</sup> They partake of the holiness of their Lord who called them into the church, and are being transformed by this holiness. The church is holy in so far as they are holy, reflecting in their own lives and actions the holiness of their divine Maker and Redeemer.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 103. Here I have been helped by his balanced interpretation.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 74, "Of the Church," I.7. *Works* (Bicentennial Ed.) 3:48.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Runyon, *The New Creation*, 104.

Against the objective view of the church which insists solely on the holiness of Christ the head of God's ordinances, Wesley insists that the holiness of the church cannot be separated from the holiness of her believers. As God who called them is holy, so every member of the church is holy.

How clear is this! If the church, as to the very essence of it, is a body of believers, no man that is not a Christian believer can be a member of it. If this whole body be animated by one spirit, and endued with one faith and one hope of their calling; then he who has not that spirit, and faith, and hope, is no member of this body.<sup>5</sup>

Here we see Wesley affirming the divine origin of the church as well as the believers' holiness through the working of the Holy Spirit. According to Runyon, Wesley is not so extreme as to confine these members strictly to "the perfect" but those who are on the way to perfection and being sanctified by the Spirit. So his view of the church is very dynamic and open to the renewing and transforming power and work of the Holy Spirit. His concern was first of all to renew the church. Methodists are people who were called to fulfill their mission to leaven the whole church and quicken her members to life divine. I believe that this work of the Spirit is the main point of Wesley's ecclesiology. There is one Spirit who animates all the living members of the church of God. They receive the Holy Spirit himself who is "the fountain of all spiritual life."<sup>6</sup> Through the workings of this Spirit they nurture holy dispositions and discover their spiritual gifts. God the Father gives them his Spirit who cries in their hearts, "Abba, Father," and witnesses continually with their spirit that they are the children of God. So the presence and power of the Divine Spirit is the real mark of the true church.

Runyon points out that the church also exists to meet human need.<sup>7</sup> It provides human community in God. If the church is called to form a unified body of God's children who have been given new life by the Son through the Spirit, then living out that new life in community through mutual help and support is a mandatory vocation. It should be knit together and strengthened in the Spirit of love. The grace given from God should be communicated to other people in love. The church also is called to carry out God's ordinances on earth. This calling can be accomplished when her members are committed to works of mercy as well as works of piety. Wesley's deep concern was that

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<sup>5</sup> Sermon 74, "Of the Church," III.28, *Works* 3:56.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, I.9, *Works* 3:49.

<sup>7</sup> Runyon, *The New Creation*, 105-6.

these two dimensions of Christian life should not be separated but joined together. In this way we follow the example of our Lord, who is the head of the church. As Runyon puts it, the role and calling of the Methodist movement is to renew this unity of piety and good works within the whole church.

But if the church is to fulfill this calling, her members must live the virtuous sanctified life that is worthy of their calling. This is Wesley's second point in his sermon on the true church. We easily forget and omit this most important expectation nowadays. What does it mean to live the life worthy of our calling, or in Wesley's own words, "to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called?"<sup>8</sup> It means for believers to live a life of holiness grounded in *holiness of heart*. Wesley recognized that the essence of Christ-like character consisting in the union of inward and outward motions—i.e., in movements of the whole person. "It takes in not only everything we do, but everything we either speak or think."

The description that Wesley gives of this way of life in his sermon on the church is in full accordance with his understanding of Christian perfection. He frames his description in the terms of St. Paul's saying in Ephesians 4:1-6. As Christ walked in his life on earth, true believers should walk with all lowliness and meekness.

Focusing first on the spirit of *lowliness or humility*, Wesley connects it to having in us that mind which was also in Christ Jesus. This includes the heartfelt awareness and knowledge of our unworthiness and depravity which still works even after we have been born anew.

And suppose this is done, suppose he has now quickened us, infusing life into our dead souls; yet how much of the carnal mind remains! How prone is our heart still to depart from the living God! What a tendency to sin remains in our hearts, although we know our past sins are forgiven!<sup>9</sup>

Like Luther, Wesley affirms in some sense the paradox of justified believers who live in grace and sin. Saints are people who know that they are sinners in their humility. But they are going on their way to perfection.

Humility also means believers' thorough dependence on God. Even if we are entirely purified and sanctified from sin and become perfect, Wesley insists that we should be humble.

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<sup>8</sup> Sermon 74, "Of the Church," II.20, *Works* 3:53.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, II.21.

Yea, suppose God has now thoroughly cleansed our heart, and scattered the last remains of sin; yet how can we be sensible enough of our helplessness, our utter inability to all good, unless we are every hour, yea, every moment, endued with power from on high!<sup>10</sup>

For Wesley the spiritual life of genuine members of the church is not possible without participating in the power of God the Spirit on a continuing basis.<sup>11</sup> The recognition of this constitutes what humility is all about. We should be marked by humility both within and without. “Let all our actions spring from this fountain; let all our words breathe this spirit; that all men may know we have been with Jesus, and have learned of him to be lowly in heart.”<sup>12</sup>

We shall then be able to live with all *meekness*. While humility is derived from the relationship of believers to God, Wesley defines meekness in terms of a character freed from inordinate, unruly passions.

This implies not only a power over anger, but over all violent and turbulent passions. It implies the having all our passions in due proportion; none of them either too strong or too weak, but all duly balanced with each other, all subordinate to reason; and reason directed by the Spirit of God. Let this equanimity govern your whole souls, that your thoughts may all flow in even stream, and the uniform tenor of your words and actions be suitable thereto.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, this explanation of Christian meekness is similar to the understanding of the life of Christian perfection in Eastern Christian spirituality.<sup>14</sup> After long struggles with destructive passions and final conquest over them, St. Antony the founder of monasticism was described as stable and perfect—in the state of *apatheia*.

The state of his soul was one of purity, for it was not constricted by grief, nor relaxed by pleasure, nor affected by either laughter or dejection....He maintained utter equilibrium, like one guided by reason and steadfast in that

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., II.22.

<sup>11</sup> cf. Runyon, *The New Creation*, 103.

<sup>12</sup> Sermon 74, “Of the Church,” II.23, *Works* 3:54.

<sup>13</sup> Sermon 74, “Of the Church,” II.24, *Works* 3:54

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Tomas Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, tr. A.P. Gythiel (Kalamazoo, Michigan, Cistercian Publications Inc, 1986); John Chryssavgis, *Light through Darkness: The Orthodox Tradition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004)

which accords with nature.<sup>15</sup>

When St. Athanasius describes the sanctified character of St. Antony, it is in terms quite similar to what Wesley has used. Antony was distinguished from other people by the stability of his character and the purity of his soul.

His soul being free of confusion, he held his outer senses also undisturbed, so that from the soul's joy his face was cheerful as well, and from the movement of the body it was possible to sense and perceive the stable condition of the soul.... He was never troubled, his soul being calm, and he never looked gloomy, his mind being joyous.<sup>16</sup>

Although Antony's character is emphasized here mainly in terms of his cheerfulness and joy, I believe that the characteristics of Wesleyan Methodist spirituality shine through as well—holiness and happiness.

Wesley sums up the character of true believers in the holy tempers or the fruit of the Spirit that comprise the likeness of Christ.

Lastly: the true members of the church of Christ 'endeavour', with all possible diligence, with all care and pains, with unwearied patience (and all will be little enough), 'to keep the unity of the Spirit in bond of peace'; to preserve inviolate the same spirit of lowliness and meekness, of long-suffering, mutual forbearance and love; and all these cemented and knit together by that sacred tie, the peace of God filling the heart<sup>17</sup>

Without this virtuous character of Christian perfection practiced every day in the life of her holy members, the church cannot fulfill her calling in the present age.

Wesley's exposition is stirring, but it also sparks our question: How can we acquire this Christian character? How are the victory and mastery over the turbulent passions gained; and the quiet, unmoved disposition of believers cultivated? How can we attain true self-possession? Here Wesley would introduce the *means of grace*, strenuous spiritual discipline and ever-present endeavor and pursuit for holiness on the part of the

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<sup>15</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, tr. R.C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>17</sup> Sermon 74 "Of the Church," III.27, *Works* 3:55.

believers. I am afraid that this aspect is easily neglected by modern followers of Wesley.

I would particularly highlight the life of prayer in this context. As a Korean Methodist, my continuous concern has been to encourage recovery of genuine Wesleyan spirituality among contemporary Methodists. In our Oriental context, spiritual discipline and character/virtue cultivation is essential to religious life. While Western Christians have often read Wesley through the lens of the revival movement, or with a focus on doctrine or social concerns, I have found consideration of resonances with Eastern patristic spirituality the most helpful approach to appreciating Wesley's spirituality.<sup>18</sup> Thus I turn next to a consideration of Wesley on the life of prayer, enlightened by a comparison with Macarius—an Eastern monastic father whose profound spirituality influenced Wesley in some respects.

### **Wesley on the life of prayer**

It is unfortunate that there have been few detailed studies of the theme of prayer in Wesley, since consideration of his spiritual life and religious pursuit are essential for proper appreciation of his overall theology.<sup>19</sup> I cannot deal with every aspect of Wesley's teachings on the life of prayer in this essay. My focus will be on the role of prayer in his understanding of the journey of sanctification and Christian perfection. In particular, I want to demonstrate the impact Wesley's dialogue with the *Macarian Homilies* upon his understanding of prayer.

There have been a series of dialogues recently between Methodist and Eastern Orthodox theologians.<sup>20</sup> In the published papers arising from these dialogues Alexander Golitzin and Frances Young deal with the spirituality of Macarius seriously. This is an area that I began considering in my doctoral research.<sup>21</sup> As Young notes in her essay on the theme of inner struggle in the writings of Wesley and Macarius, the Macarian homilies are a product of the monastic tradition and their influence upon both Eastern

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<sup>18</sup> Hoo-Jung Lee, *The Way of Sanctification: Wesleyan Spirituality for Today* (Seoul, Korea: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 2001). This Korean edition discusses Wesleyan spirituality with special attention to these aspects.

<sup>19</sup> Thorough study of the theme of prayer in Wesley is very rare. I have found Marjorie Suchocki's article very interesting and stimulating. Marjorie Suchocki, "The Perfection of Prayer," Ch. 4, in Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998). But her insight there is mainly guided by her process thought.

<sup>20</sup> See ST Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> See the article arising from this research: Hoo-Jung Lee, "Experiencing the Spirit in Wesley and Macarius," Ch. 13, in Randy L. Maddox, *Rethinking Wesley's Theology*.

Orthodox spirituality and upon John Wesley is incontestable.<sup>22</sup> As such, it is fully appropriate to consider impact of Macarius upon Wesley's understanding of the life of prayer.

Wesley never provides an exhaustive treatment of the life of prayer. Perhaps his longest treatment is his exposition of the Lord's Prayer. In his sermon on "The Means of Grace," Wesley limits himself to reiterating scriptural language. He lists prayer as the first means to receive the grace of God on the way of sanctification. "And first, all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of *prayer*. This is the express direction of our Lord himself."<sup>23</sup> According to Jesus' direction, we should ask, seek, and knock, in order to enter into his Kingdom. And in prayer, we should have trust or faith in God that He will fulfill the desire of our heart. This is the way of prayer for true believers.

In his "Sermon on the Mount, VI," Wesley expounds the teaching of Jesus Christ on prayer. There he defines the nature and purpose of prayer. According to him, prayer as the foremost work of piety should be freed from and guarded against hypocrisy or insincerity. Prayer is the inward, hidden life of believers in God.

Prayer is the lifting up of the heart to God: all words of prayer without this are mere hypocrisy. Whenever therefore thou attemptest to pray, see that it be thy one design to commune with God, to lift up thy heart to him, to pour out thy soul before him.<sup>24</sup>

Wesley places particular emphasis in this sermon on the purity of intention which should characterize prayer—being concerned not with this temporal world but with the glory of God in eternity. We should enter into God's presence to commune with God in closeness and intimacy, "in immediate presence of the Lord." For Wesley the end of prayer is not to move or inform God but to realize what is already certain before God if we have tasted of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. It is "to fix the sense of those wants more deeply in your hearts, and the sense of your continual dependence on him who only is able to supply all your wants."<sup>25</sup> Therefore, it is important that we have to open our hearts and bring our desires to God. Prayer is continual attention to and centering

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<sup>22</sup> Frances Young, "Inner Struggle; Some Parallels between John Wesley and Greek Fathers," in Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, 160. We have known that Macarius is considered not a Greek but Syriac monastic father with the help of recent scholarship.

<sup>23</sup> Sermon 16, "The Means of Grace," III.1, *Works* 1:384.

<sup>24</sup> Sermon 26, "Sermon on the Mount, VI," II.1, *Works* 1:575.

<sup>25</sup> Sermon 26, "Sermon on the Mount, VI," II.5, *Works* 1:577.

upon God's will.

In Wesley's further exposition of the Lord's Prayer, we can see the divine form of prayer that serves as the model and standard of all our prayers. Wesley uses this standard of prayer to assess our human need and what desires are acceptable to God. It also contains a summary of our duty acceptable in God's sight. In the preface, "Our Father which art in heaven," Wesley finds a general foundation for prayer, "comprising what we must first know of God before we can pray in confidence of being heard." He suggests that it points out "all those tempers with which we are to approach to God, which are most essentially requisite if we desire either our prayers or our lives should find acceptance with him."<sup>26</sup> In the petitions and final doxology, Wesley sees the movement of prayer in harmony with the gracious work of the triune God towards us. Prayer is after all the wondrous work of God in our communion with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Its purpose is to fulfill the perfect love of God, entire sanctification in the life of true believers.

The connection of prayer to sanctification and Christian perfection is expressed in sublime fashion in Wesley's mature expressions of prayer. In his treatise *The Character of a Methodist*, excerpted in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley describes a perfect Christian, who is "happy in God; yea, always happy; as having in Him a well springing up into everlasting life, and overflowing his soul with peace and joy." This perfect Christian is all prayer.

For indeed he "prays without ceasing"; at all times the language of his heart is this; "Unto Thee is my mouth, though without a voice; and my silence speaketh unto Thee." His heart is lifted up to God at all times, and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In retirement or company, in leisure, business, or conversation, his heart is ever with the Lord. Whether he lie down or rise up, God is in all his thoughts; he walks with God continually; having the loving eye of his soul fixed on Him, and everywhere "seeing Him that is invisible."<sup>27</sup>

In this view, the true Christian prays always in God's presence, his heart being ever with the Lord. Since the true Christian loves God and neighbor, even enemies, this unceasing prayer will include even the enemies of God. Love has purified the heart of the true Christian from envy, malice, wrath, pride, and every unkind temper. So he has now put

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<sup>26</sup> Sermon 26, "Sermon on the Mount, VI," III.4, *Works* 1:578.

<sup>27</sup> John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth Press, 1976), 12.

on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and a long-suffering spirit.<sup>28</sup>

My point here is that Wesley views the whole life of true Christians as involved in continuous prayer. Prayer is not confined to action, but is the whole life of believers in God's presence. It is more like a "prayer of the heart" developed in the spirituality of Eastern Fathers. For Wesley this prayer is the language of the heart including silence, always lifted up and directed to God. It is, so to speak, the language of love. In the wondrous presence of God, true Christian enjoys loving communion with Him in invisible depth. In another section of *A Plain Account*, Wesley describes the perfect prayer.

God's command to "pray without ceasing" is founded on the necessity we have of His grace to preserve the life of God in the soul, which can no more subsist one moment without it, than the body can without air.

Whether we think of or speak to God, whether we act or suffer for Him, all is prayer, when we have no other object than His love, and the desire of pleasing Him.

All that a Christian does, even in eating and sleeping, is prayer, when it is done in simplicity, according to the order of God, without either adding to or diminishing from it by his own choice.<sup>29</sup>

This description is very much in parallel with the understanding of "unceasing prayer" in the Church Fathers.<sup>30</sup> When Wesley says that "in the greatest temptations, a single look to Christ, and the barely pronouncing His name, suffices to overcome the wicked, so it be done with confidence and calmness of spirit," there is strong resonance with the way of prayer known as the "Jesus Prayer" in the Eastern Church.<sup>31</sup>

For Wesley, prayer is none other than our heart's desire continually in communion with God. In God's presence, the heart filled with love, the desire to please God is a continual prayer. Pure love of God and the desires and wishes flowing from it consist of true and perfect prayer.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 12-3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), ch. 9, Prayer, 164f. Especially, St. Augustine's view of unceasing prayer is similar to Wesley's.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. George A. Maloney, SJ, *Prayer of the Heart* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1981), ch. 6, "The Jesus Prayer," 128f.

God only requires of His adult children that their hearts be truly purified, and that they offer Him continually the wishes and vows that naturally spring from perfect love. For these desires, being the genuine fruits of love, are the most perfect prayers that can spring from it.<sup>32</sup>

This emphasis on the life of prayer in Wesley is also in consonance with the Eastern Fathers. I will return to this point in my subsequent discussion of Macarius. For now, an Orthodox spiritual writer summing up on patristic spirituality helps us to understand Wesley's vision of prayer more closely.

True prayer is not only of the mouth, it is of the heart, that is, of the whole being. It is a cry *de profundis* out of the deep. There is a correspondence between the depths of the heart and the heights of heaven, understood not in a physical sense but in the sense of a 'beyond' in relation to the centre.<sup>33</sup>

There is a quote from St. John Chrysostom; "By prayer I mean not that which is only in the mouth, but that which springs up from the bottom of the heart." As in Wesley, true prayer upholds the virtues and ultimately becomes a *state* for the Fathers. It is more of a being than an act. Prayer never deserts the true Christian, but the praying person "becomes" a prayer. The beautiful saying of John Cassian should be Wesley's good company.

The utter love with which 'God first loved us' (1 John 4.10) enters our heart through the fulfillment of this prayer of the Lord...God will be our love and our longing, our study and our thinking. He will be our life...And in the same way God loves us completely, we shall be united with him by a love that will never grow less, to the point that we shall be breathing, thinking, and speaking in him.<sup>34</sup>

For Cassian as well as Wesley, the goal of perfection is "that the whole of our life and all the motions of our heart may become one single uninterrupted prayer."

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<sup>32</sup> *A Plain Account*, 101.

<sup>33</sup> Olivier Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts from the Patristic Era with Commentary* (New York: New City Press, 1993) 182.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-11. Quoted from John Cassian, *Conferences*, X.7 (SC 54, p.81)

## Macarius on the Life of Prayer

When we enter into the spiritual world of Macarius, we discover a rather different landscape from that of Wesley.<sup>35</sup> So what attracted Wesley's attention to this 4th century monastic figure whose background has been regarded as Syrian? I will not take the time to trace the complicated critical questions concerning authorship of the Macarian homilies. It suffices to note Frances Young's succinct comments: "Wesley and 'Macarius' have a common practical theology, a common drive towards perfection as the goal of Christian life, a common emphasis on the Incarnation and the Holy Spirit as the generators of perfection, a common stress on the love of God."<sup>36</sup> More than these, I find a lot of spiritual concerns are shared in depth by these two writers.

Even though Wesley could not reflect the rich mystical ideas of his admired Orthodox ascetic fully in his own practical divinity, it is certain that Wesley felt special sympathy with his experienced, profound spirituality. He respectfully says about Macarius' spiritual character: "There is visibly to be distinguished in our author, a rich, sublime, and noble vein of piety, but that perfectly serious, sober, and unaffected; natural and lively, but sedate and deep withal."<sup>37</sup> We should admit that this kind of high appreciation can hardly be found for others in Wesley's writings in general. And I am convinced that Wesley discovered in Macarius exactly what he endeavored to revitalize for his church.

That he continually labours to cultivate in himself and others is, the real life of God in the heart and soul, that kingdom of God, which consists in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. He is ever quickening and stirring up his audience, endeavouring to kindle in them a steady zeal, an earnest desire, and inflamed ambition, to recover the Divine image we were made in; to be made conformable to Christ our Head; to be daily sensible more and more of our living union with him as such; and discovering it, as occasion requires, in all the

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<sup>35</sup> Hieromonk Alexander Golitzin wrote a comprehensive article which is very helpful to understand the Macarian spirituality in the above mentioned dialogue between Orthodox and Methodist theologians. "A Testimony to Christianity as Transfiguration: The Macarian Homilies and Orthodox Spirituality," in Kimbrough, *op. cit.*, 129f.

<sup>36</sup> Young, *op. cit.*, 164.

<sup>37</sup> John Wesley, *A Christian Library: Consisting of Extracts from and Abridgments of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity in the English Tongue*, 50 vols. (Bristol: F. Farley, 1749-1755; reprinted in 30 vols., London: T. Cordeux, 181-27) vol. 1; hereafter, cited as *Christian Library*. The English translation that is close to this Wesley's edition can be found in A.J.Mason, tr. *Fifty Spiritual Homilies St Macarius the Great* (Willits, CA: Eastern Orthodox Books, 1974); hereafter cited as *Homilies*. We can also confer the contemporary translation by George A. Maloney, SJ, Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992) which has an excellent introduction.

genuine fruits of an holy life and conversation, in such a victorious faith as overcomes the world, and working by love, is ever fulfilling the whole law of God. He seems indeed never to be easy, but either in the height, or breadth, or length of Divine love, or at least in the depths of humility.<sup>38</sup>

As with our discussion of Wesley, we will limit our consideration of Macarius to his view of prayer. Macarius was engaged in the thorny situation caused by Syrian-originated heresy of Messalianism. This Syriac term denoted the “praying people” (*metsalyane*) who were only interested in prayer, neglecting other dimensions of Christian life—sacraments, institution, hierarchy, and so on. Macarius agreed that prayer is most important for Christian community and its life of sanctification. But he tried to strike a better balance, embracing the dimensions of Spirit and structure, personal experience and community life together. The primacy of prayer is emphasized, but its exclusive validity was not favored.

Macarius considers that all virtues are inter-connected like in a holy spiritual chain. But the first link, foundational to all others in spiritual life, is unceasing prayer. “Prayer is attached to love, joy to meekness, meekness to humility, humility to service, service to righteousness, righteousness to hope, hope to faith, faith to obedience, obedience to generous simplicity.”<sup>39</sup> Virtues are fruits of true prayer. At the head of all pursuits and practices is perseverance in prayer. We have to cry out to the Lord and demand the help of his grace every day, which is the foundation of prayer. Then the Spirit responds in mysterious *koinonia* and visitation, and empowers us to accomplish the virtues.

Prayer produces among those who are worthy of it a certain mystical communion (*koinonia*) of holiness with God, thanks to the action of the Spirit. It brings about a certain union with the Lord that fills the human spirit with an inexpressible love. And each day he who is moved to continue in prayer is drawn by the love of the Spirit to a love and a desire that is full of fire for God. Each one receives the grace from the Spirit of the perfection of a free will. It is God who gives this gift.<sup>40</sup>

In the Homily V edited by Wesley in his *Christian Library*, Macarius goes deeper

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<sup>38</sup> *Christian Library*, 71.

<sup>39</sup> Vincent Desprez, OSB, “Pseudo-Macarius, 1: Perfection, Community and Prayer in the Great Letter,” *The American Benedictine Review* 46:1 (March, 1995), 78. This is from a translated quotation of *Great Letter*—which is another important work of Macarius--by Desprez.

<sup>40</sup> Maloney, *Pseudo-Macarius*, 18.

into the mystical experience of prayer and relates it to the degrees of perfection.<sup>41</sup> Since Wesley included only 22 of the 50 original homilies in his edited collection, it is noteworthy that this one was among those included. Whether Wesley agreed with all the mystical contents of this sermon or not, it is full of significant descriptions concerning mystical prayer.

A man goes in to bow the knee, and his heart is filled with a Divine power, and his soul rejoiceth with the Lord, as the bride with her bridegroom. The inward man is snatched away to yet further devotion, into the unfathomable depth of that world in much sweetness, insomuch that his whole mind is estranged, being raised and carried off thither.<sup>42</sup>

In this rapture, thoughts are led captive towards the Divine and heavenly realm, that is, infinite, incomprehensible, wonderful, and unutterable things.

Macarius goes on to explain the degrees of intensity concerning this rapturous prayer which are changed according to the workings of grace—Divine love as fire and light.

Sometimes the love flames out and kindles with greater strength; but at other times more slow and gentle. As the same fire at certain seasons burns with a stronger heat and flame, but at others abate and burns dim, so this lamp (of grace) sometimes burns and shines out, when it is more strongly enkindled by an extraordinary infusion of the love of God; but again it is imparted in measure, and then the light is comparatively dull.<sup>43</sup>

For Macarius, this mystical experience of the inward fire and light can be accompanied by the appearance of the sign of the cross or a shining garment in a trance. Through this wondrous and amazing experience the praying person attains to the degrees of perfection. It is said that there are twelve steps to pass before entering the highest degree.

At the time when the light shining in the heart disclosed a yet more profound light and the whole man was absorbed in the sweetness and contemplation, he in his perfect measure became “master of himself no longer, but was to this world as a mere fool and barbarian, by reason of the superabundant love and sweetness of the hidden

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<sup>41</sup> *Christian Library*, 87f.

<sup>42</sup> *Christian Library*, 87-8.

<sup>43</sup> *Christian Library*, 88.

mysteries.”<sup>44</sup> Macarius sees here the man arrived to the perfect measure, finally at liberty, pure and free from sin. But after all this, grace withdraws itself and he came down to a lower degree of perfection. Even if Macarius admits that there is one rich in grace, who continues in perfect state, free and pure, ever captivated with love, this perfect degree of all has not been given. The reason for that is to enable him to attend to the care of the brethren and the ministry of the word—ordinary things have their appropriate place for this kind of mystic.

Macarius is very experienced and spiritually sensitive in the work of grace by the Spirit. But he is candid and ambivalent with regard to the perfect measure, despite his sayings about that possibility in a mystical experience.

A perfect Christian man, one completely free, I have not yet seen. Although one and another is at rest in grace, and enters into mysteries and revelations and into much sweetness of grace, still sin is yet present within. By reason of the exceeding grace and of the light that is in them, men consider themselves free and perfect; but inexperience deceives them.<sup>45</sup>

Here he admits of human frailty and limitedness. Macarius says that at times he himself in part comes to that perfect measure—free and pure—but he humbly confesses that it does not constitute a perfect man.<sup>46</sup> Perfection is inevitably a paradox—imperfect perfection—because of our creatureliness.

Finally, Macarius explains the measure of perfection which he found realized in himself. Even in this present life there can be a lofty degree of perfection possible with the gracious help of the Spirit. This perfection is none other than universal, disinterested love for all. Love is the perfection and goal for this mystical spiritual master.

Grace, even in this life, operates thus: it calms all the members an the heart, so that the soul, out of the abundance of joy, seems like a little child, conscious of no ill; and the man no longer condemns the Gentile, or the Jew, or the man of the world. But the inward man looks upon all with an eye of purity, and rejoices over the whole world, and desires to respect and love all, the Gentiles as the Jews.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> *Homilies*, 68.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

So much inflamed with love, this man prays for the whole world that all of humanity (all of Adam) may be saved.<sup>48</sup>

I believe that this account of Macarius corresponds to what Wesley tries to portray in *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity* regarding the vision of the Christian ideal, the perfect Christian. As Outler indicates, Wesley here really cared to make the point that “actual Christian faith and life reflects the supernatural power of God and the miraculous presence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>49</sup> In this view, a true Christian is one who “knows that the most acceptable worship of God is to imitate him he worships, so he is continually labouring to transcribe into himself all his imitable perfections.” The perfect Christian, remembering that God is love, “is conformed to the same likeness. He is full of love to his neighbour.” But this universal, disinterested love is not confined to any bounds, it must be extended to all, “embracing neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies; yea, not only the good and gentle but also the froward, the evil and unthankful.”<sup>50</sup> So it is love of every soul God has made, every child of man. Further Wesley describes this perfect Christian as free and pure, his character consisting of all right affections, virtues, and actions. He is happy and holy in God.<sup>51</sup>

Although it is with much emphasis on the mystical experience of prayer, Macarius makes clear that the goal and consummation of Christian life is perfect love. Until Christians are filled with the Divine nature (*theosis*) or come to the perfect love of Christ, there still is progress: trials, labors, and spiritual struggle. Having attained to perfect love, however, they are for ever after bound and captivated by grace.<sup>52</sup> Prayer life is in accordance with this progress of sanctification in degrees.

To be sure, the true Christian for Macarius, as well as for Wesley, is a person who prays without ceasing. The Christian ought at all times to have God in remembrance, for it is written,

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart; that he may love the Lord not only when he goes into the place of prayer, but that in walking, and talking, and eating, he may have the remembrance of God, and love and dutiful affection for Him.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Vincent Desprez, OSB, “Pseudo-Macarius, II: Spiritual Combat, Prayer and Experience” *The American Benedictine Review* 46:2 (June 1995) 219.

<sup>49</sup> Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 194) 184.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-87.

<sup>52</sup> *Homilies*, 111.

<sup>53</sup> *Homilies*, 270.

Macarius further observes that the mind and heart of the Christian should always be tied to God. Like Wesley, Macarius views prayer as especially related to heart's desire. "If the heart at all times desires God, He is the Lord of his heart."<sup>54</sup> And in the innermost heart of hearts, the true Christian is praying unceasingly. The Spirit penetrates that person, always praying in him. For Macarius this is the final degree of perfection. But of course it should be pursued by every faithful Christian.

### **Concluding Remarks**

We began with the present demand to fulfill the calling for the true church. It has not been my main concern to see which callings we have to fulfill, or how to carry out our mission as a true church. But I have emphasized the foundation on which our calling can be fulfilled properly—Wesley's view of true church and the character of her believers. In a sense, our calling as Methodists is primarily to become the true living church of the triune God, reflecting his image and likeness in our heart and life of holiness.

The discussion regarding the life of prayer for Wesley and Macarius followed. Though different in nuances and tenor, the life of prayer for these respective spiritual masters constitutes the very essence of their spiritual teaching. Prayer is not just a specific act but frames the whole life of the believer whose communion with God should be unceasing like the breath of life. The work of the Life-giving Spirit is most important in this regard. And prayer is above all necessary if we should become the holy temple of God in which God dwells in perfect love. For Wesley and Macarius true prayer is made possible only by this ever-present love of God which is the source, dynamic and goal of spiritual life. It is the desire and language of love in the heart fixed upon God that should transform and renew our being into the image and likeness of God. Christ-like virtues or the holy tempers are closely linked to prayer as to a fountain.<sup>55</sup> Only prayer can empower us to become sanctified virtuous Christians who are made worthy to fulfill the calling for the present age.

I find Macarius' view of prayer much more experiential and mystical. As an ascetic/monastic spiritual master, he was necessarily more indulged in the life of inwardness

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ted A. Campbell pointedly suggests that it was the model of spirituality embodied in their actually living out of a virtuous life of Christ-like holiness that Wesley primarily valued in Macarius and other ancient monastics. Ted A. Campbell, "Wesley's Use of the Church Fathers," *Asbury Theological Journal* 50:12 (1995-6) 63-66.

and mystical ventures. But I also see in him a moderate view regarding contemplative and active life. Mysticism for him was never ontological but seems to be guided by his main emphasis on pneumatological transfiguration/sanctification. What might be Macarius' strengths for contemporary Methodism? Especially for Asian Methodists, Macarius' Oriental spirituality means a lot. What is desperately needed in today's ecumenical context is not just a logical, discursive version of a Western Christianity, but a character-centered, metaphorical, or poetic/visionary Christianity.

Michael J. Christensen has argued that Charles Wesley provides a richer resource in this regard than does his brother John. I agree that Charles' version of perfection and sanctification in his lyrical, poetic vision expresses more vividly the life of prayer and praise.<sup>56</sup> Maybe he stands closer than John to Macarius's mystical vision of true Christianity. According to A.M. Allchin, in his poetic theology Charles Wesley intends "to simply point in song to what cannot be categorized in discursive doctrine."<sup>57</sup> He could be termed a mystic speaking ecstatically, caught up in the rapture of cosmic vision and praise.<sup>58</sup> Of course, Macarius is also poetic and full of imageries, stories and visions in his experiential description of spiritual life. We have to admit that in our spiritually sensitive age Macarius is a good partner in enriching our Methodist heritage more and further.

Allchin identified the finest hymn—sung prayer—by Charles Wesley which points to the mystery of *theosis* as "Seeking for Full Redemption," which to my judgment is not much different from Macarius' Eastern spirituality.<sup>59</sup>

Heavenly Adam, life divine,  
Change my nature into Thine;  
Move and spread throughout my soul,  
Actuate and fill the whole;  
Be it I no longer now  
Living in the flesh, but Thou.

Holy Ghost, no more delay;

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<sup>56</sup> Michael J. Christensen, "Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley's Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 31:2(Fall, 1996) 71f.

<sup>57</sup> A.M. Allchin, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition* (Conn: Morehouse-Barlow, 1988) 25. Quoted in Christensen, 89. For more related discussion, confer another book by the same author: H.A. Hodges & A.M. Allchin, *A Rapture of Praise: Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London: Hoder and Stoughton, 1966).

<sup>58</sup> Christensen, *Theosis and Sanctification*, 89.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* This is Hymn #379, in *Works*, 7:552

Come, and in thy temple stay;  
Now thine inward witness bear,  
Strong, and permanent and clear;  
Spring of life, thyself impart,  
Rise eternal in my heart.

So Charles Wesley's poetic, aesthetic spirituality is a significant witness to the place of mystical vision in Methodist spirituality.<sup>60</sup> We might suggest with Christensen that we would rather go "back to Charles and beyond John,"<sup>61</sup> in order to construct a more biblical, global, Wesleyan spirituality for the Third Millennium. John without Charles has a hermeneutical limit for global spirituality. But his interest in spiritual figures like Macarius means a lot to us. We should not be reluctant to open our Methodist spirituality in a welcoming way towards Macarius and Eastern spirituality. Their life of prayer can become rich sources for deepening our spiritual life. And Asian Christians will be more drawn to Wesley if his heritage is not confined to Western readings but is re-read in an ecumenical backdrop that includes Eastern Christian spirituality.

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<sup>60</sup> Gordon S. Wakefield, *Methodist Devotion: Spiritual Life in the Methodist Tradition 1791-1945* (London: Epworth Press, 1966) 34. Also see the recent work by the same author, *Methodist Spirituality* (London: Epworth Press, 1999).

<sup>61</sup> Christensen, *Theosis and Sanctification*, 92.