

Creation Renewed: Heaven-Earth-Humanity. A Journey in Wesleyan-Orthodox-Confucian Theological Interculturation

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The title, “Creation Renewed: Heaven-Heaven-Earth,” has an obviously Christian overtone—based on scriptural sources, in fact (Revelations 21:1 ff; Isaiah 65:17-25), with reverberations from John Wesley’s preaching (sermons, “The New Creation,” “The New Birth,” etc.). Interestingly, the 18th century Anglican clergyman found in certain ancient Eastern Orthodox (‘Orthodox’ in the following) fathers’ teachings congenial to his thinking on his favorite subjects like holiness and perfection. The Orthodox view of *imago Dei* (image of God), for one, gives the clue to the rebinding of the Divine and the human, as is affirmed in the doctrine of *Deification (Theosis)*. That divinity and humanity (on earth as in heaven) would be bound up in some way, Wesley would resonate to that. As to Confucianism, the Englishman John Wesley in those days could not have known anything about it, but by 21st century if by chance his spiritual descendants known as Methodists, now spread all over the global village, hear that the heaven-earth-humanity configuration has a Confucian orientation (and Neo-Confucianism and even New Neo-Confucianism), some of them might pick up their ears and listen. The same compounded motif, on the surface of the wording, may not strike a chord in the Orthodox theologians’ heart at first, yet if they are open-minded enough to be engaged in conversation with Protestant Christians, in this case Methodist thinkers, on subjects of common concern, the occasion might arise that these partners in dialogue will open themselves up to hear more about the Confucians’ cosmology and anthropology, with echoes of certain beliefs from their respective traditions.

We are here anticipating the prospect of a three-way dialogue, interreligious dialogue or faith-culture dialogue; nay, what is projected is more than interreligious dialogue (which is common in this age of acknowledged religious pluralism), or faith-culture intellectual dialogue (as is fashionable in some academia circles). The subtitle calls it ‘a journey in theological interculturation’ (which is less-known). But have no fear, this is no academic shibboleth;¹ the proposed project indeed presupposes certain

¹ An explanation is given here to relieve your anxiety, in case of the fear because of the unfamiliar cumbersome terminology. “*Interculturation* suggests theological and anthropological interaction that desires greater inclusivity and interdependency among different religious perspectives and secular cultural viewpoints for human well-being everywhere in the world. There is a dialogical dialectic between faith and culture within a paradigm of authentic interculturation. The concept of interculturation envisions that we view ‘truth’ as a shared reality in the midst of pluralism and diversity.” See Thomas G. Grenham, “Interculturation: Exploring Changing Religious, Cultural, and Faith Identities in an African Context,” contained in *PACIFICA* 14 (June 2001), p.193. Without being an expert, you who are in the audience or are the readers, are equipped to comprehend it as you go along. The word ‘theological’ is added on the subtitle

disciplined and agile thinking and communication ability, but that is all within reach of those who are gathered here. Those who embark on the journey will walk through terrains of religious beliefs and philosophical thoughts and cultural patterns for sure; but they will walk on well-trodden paths--and find new vistas as well. There will be boundaries to cross, gulfs to leap over, and hurdles to overcome; they will walk it through all right, because they are well-prepared.² One is not alone in the journey; there are old companions and new acquaintances traveling along. Wait! Rather than calling this a journey already taken, it would be truer to say that the following pages are the logging of a trek tried out by the writer. Or, to shift the metaphor a little, he, holding a map in hand, at first serves as a guide to others who might be interested to join in the journey (some of them might become guides, too, at certain points, depending on their experience and expertise) .

Before the journey begins, allow me to disclose my identity (from here on using the first-personal pronoun). When addressing an audience or the readers, the second-personal pronoun will be used. For, of significance is the personal identity of the participants of a conversation or dialogue or what I call a theological intercultural undertaking .

Of Chinese parentage, I was born and raised in Hong Kong, where as a third-generation Christian I was baptized as an infant in the Anglican Church. I went to the U.S. to pursue my higher education; and after college I stumbled into a Methodist Church which made me feel at home at a time when I was in a quandary as to life's direction. I began to be warmed up to John and Charles Wesley's thought and religious ethos. Subsequently I entered a Methodist theological seminary (Claremont). Following that I was ordained in the United Methodist Church, and served in two brief pastoral appointments before going to graduate studies (at Yale and Boston). So my Methodist pedigree is hardly questionable (more on the 'liberal' side), while my mind is stretched out broadly, to embrace an ecumenical outlook. Back in Hong Kong, I again received pastoral appointments before taking up academic posts, first as a college chaplain-lecturer, then as the director of an ecumenical study center (where the dialectics of faith and culture, and interreligious dialogue were on the daily menu), further on as a professor in a Lutheran theological seminary. I am now retired, both in my capacity as a

to show that the intercultural process allows for a theological frame of reference, and to indicate that it is not merely interested in comparative study of religions or falling into religious relativism.

² Well-equipped in what way? If you are experienced in computerizing, you know what 'interface' means or what it involves even if you do not know the technical term. The term *interface* is common enough, though, thanks to computer communication, that it is now found in an English dictionary. *Interface* refers to an electric circuit, connection, or program that joins one device or system to another (*Oxford Advanced Learners' English-Chinese Dictionary*, 8th edition, 2010.) As interface equips you to operate a computer to join or connect devices and programs so as to effectuate communication, as in the internet, so you are equipped to interface religio-cultural traditions and philosophical systems through certain connecting links or joints, so would you be well-prepared to take on a journey such as the present one, given your level of general knowledge and basic intellectual skill, not to speak of your Methodist background and expertise in your own respective areas .

minister and that as a professor, yet I still avail myself to be useful to both the church and academic circles, while I keep on learning.

I. A Basketful of Gifts of Grace.

As I said, very early on I was warmed up by John and Charles Wesley's thought and religious ethos, and I have taken the Methodist ministry seriously. Off and on, I thought of writing a booklet or manual, in Chinese, for Methodist ministers and parish workers as well as lay leaders. Realizing that grace is the center-piece of Wesleyan theology, I thought of using such titles as "Steps in Growth toward Grace," "Signposts on the Road of Grace," etc. I have files of materials on grace, but I have never gotten around to actually writing a manuscript. Why? Part of the answer is, even though for the sake of analysis and explanation it may be necessary to categorize grace (giving the various categories of grace, like justification through grace, the grace of sanctification, prevenient grace, etc.), yet grace is a quality, a supple quality, malleable, changing form and shape from one stage to another. You categorize grace, and its integrity is splintered and its appealing character lost. The titles I thought up reflect the tendency to categorize grace, and the manuscript to be written is likely to present grace as substance in categorical terms. There are already plenty of books in such a mode, a number of them having been translated into Chinese. I am sure these books serve a useful instructive purpose. But I myself have no strong incentive to write another book in that vein. By the way, the usual explanation of grace given by Chinese pastors is that it is something offered to you 'plainly, plainly' (白白) without your meriting it. That is not incorrect, except that the double 'plainly, plainly' makes grace too plain, too plain, falling short of its appealing, gracious / graceful quality. No, I am not persuaded to write a book on grace using discursive language, and theologizing and sermonizing language in Chinese is mostly discursive, taking away the appealing quality of grace.

Nevertheless I am still enamored by grace in the Wesleyan perspective. I then have conjured up another title, something like "A basketful of graces . . . like grapes . . .but, no, English grammar would not favor 'graces' in the plural . . . why not "A Basketful of the Gifts of Grace"? The word 'gifts' attached to grace would not only allow for nuanced manifestations of grace or gradations of grace, but it is also explicit about grace being gifted by God.

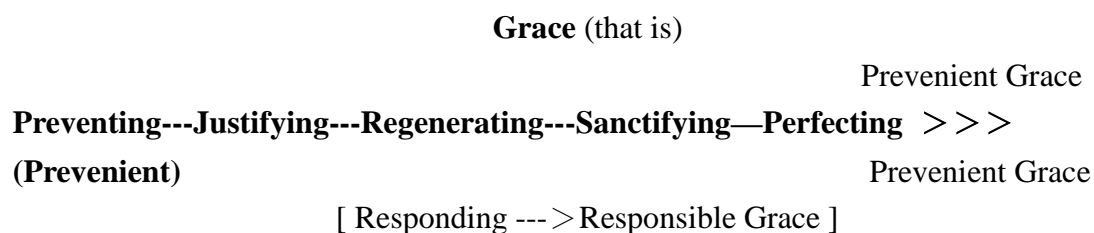
I really have not prepared a manuscript under the imagined title, "A Basketful of Gifts of Grace." But may I make use of the wording now to reaffirm, in the presence of the good company of Methodist people (and non-Methodists too) like you, my appreciation of Wesley's wonderful sense of the working of God's gifted grace to the remaking of human life.

My own initial appropriation of the Wesley brothers' understanding of grace by

amazing coincidence paralleled their experience, in sequence, of the stages of grace gifted by God through Christ. First, the depressing days shortly following their return from their unhappy mission in Georgia. Next, Charles' gentle confrontation by the Moravian preacher Peter Bohler that his best endeavors to serve God would not earn his salvation. Then, Charles' awakening to the futility of his self-efforts, whereby he confessed and turned around to trust, in the power of God's grace through Christ, resulting in unprecedented peace and joy. Three days afterwards, his elder brother John's heart-strangely-warm story at Aldersgate unfolded. In theological language, it was God's grace that 'justified' his sin, that is, declaring him free, a wonderful gift which he could thenceforth accept by faith alone. The story did not end there. Both John and Charles found themselves starting on the road to 'sanctification,' that is, to live a holy life, no longer relying on their own efforts but by God's grace, going onto 'perfection', in fact. The words in quotation marks are time-honored and have been kept in reverence in Methodism to this day. Retain those words, we might as well; but let us keep their meaning afresh if we can.

In my own case, as I said, I followed the Wesleys' experiences in an amazingly parallel manner. But I will not rehearse my story except to say that because my own experiences matched their's in their spiritual pilgrimage, the theological language they used is ever fresh for me—that is, as long as I am spiritually alive, as I was, when I began my spiritual journey following their lead. My experiences were not as dramatic as theirs and were more low-keyed, yet they were real nonetheless. Indeed, grace, for me, is an ever appealing experience, as its derivatives, 'gracefulness' and 'graciousness', suggest, but it must be supernatural grace, not just human grace.

Retaining John Wesley's grace-language, let me present the prototype Wesleyan grace-spectrum in simple diagrammatic form, as follows:



The diagram is meant to show:

1. Grace is a continuous process, a progression, as suggested by the continuous tense of the infinitives (-ing ending), as qualifiers of grace. The bold-type words are intended to reflect the prototype Wesleyan experience and language of grace as a process (although they used the abstract nouns more than the infinitives in the continuous tense).

2. *Preventing* is an English word in older form meaning ‘come before’ (*pre*=before, *viens*=*come*). The old word is displayed on the diagram to keep to the continuous tense. The modern form of the word is *prevenient*, the meaning of which is self-explanatory: ‘coming before’. At one time prevenient grace was not given much attention because it is ‘pre-faith’, that is, pre-justification by faith. But it is increasingly re-recognized by Wesleyan scholars nowadays to be an important step, the initial step, of the whole grace-progression. The Wesley brothers’ moments of their quickened conscience and of awakening to their unrighteousness, were actually prerequisites to their faith-experience and re-birth.³ Furthermore, prevenient grace is a relevant factor, in considering the Christian faith in relation to non-Christian faiths.⁴ That is why on the diagram prevenient grace (non-bold type) appears again at the end. The end, on my diagram, is open-ended, not closed or finalized in an explicit way.
3. Regenerating grace is inserted between justifying and sanctifying grace to indicate that regeneration involves both justification and sanctification, even if Wesley may not have always made that kind of placement explicitly. But in his mind, regeneration is equivalent to new birth, and new birth overlaps both justification and sanctification. Justification frees us from bondage to sin, while sanctification frees us to grow in grace. Wesley’s sermon “The Scriptural Way of Salvation”: “At the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins. In that moment we are ‘born again’, born from above’, ‘born of the Spirit’.”
4. Perfecting grace as a concluding part of a continuous process would save us from the trouble that ‘perfection’ (implying a completed state of affairs), that got John Wesley himself into, no matter how hard he tried to get out of it (albeit his famous tract, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection”). There is an ingenious Confucian way to characterize the ‘going-onto-perfecting’ process, borrowing an expression from the opening sentence of the Confucian classic *The Great Learning (Da-xieuh)*: “stop not until you reach the highest good.” Here is an ‘interface’ for Confucian thought to come in. I shall come back to that later on.
5. ‘Responding grace’ naturally leads into ‘responsible grace’ (though not bold-typed because it was not in Wesley’s erstwhile vocabulary, yet it is given a place of prominence here (between brackets in the diagram), as notable Methodist theologians (like John B. Cobb, Jr.⁵ and Randy Maddox⁶) do, considering it to be a promising contemporary expression of the extended Wesleyan ethos. ‘Responsible grace’ implies

³ For discussions on prevenient grace, see Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 83-90; 226-9; 245-6. Also Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 27-41.

⁴ Runyon, *ibid.*, 218-20.

⁵ John B. Cobb, Jr., *Grace & Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

⁶ Maddox, *op.cit.*

human beings' ability to respond to God, and that naturally leads to responsibility under God. That would resolve some of the traditional issues involving human freedom and God's sovereignty. Also that has important implications for mission and social ethics, but I cannot go on talking about that now.

Assurance, Holiness, Christian Perfection, Entire Sanctification are important traditional Wesleyan theological categories, all related to grace, but they will not be dealt with in this paper. Speaking in metaphorical language, in my imaginary 'basketful of gifts of grace' they are not part of the bundle of gift-items (like a bunch of vine-fruits such as grapes), but are nice articles placed beside the basket, like stone carvings or sheaves of leaf, to enhance the appealing qualities of the gifts to be presented.

I. *Deification: By Way of Restoring the Image Dei in the Human Person.*

I owe it to Albert Outler for calling attention to the wide interest of John Wesley in early the Eastern Orthodox fathers in a lecture given by him in the early 1960s at a Methodist scholars' meeting which I sat in as a young graduate student.⁷ Certainly, several generations of Methodist scholars are indebted to the venerable professor for such a reminder. Consequent to Professor Outler's prompting, I got interested in reading Orthodox theology. Later on I even tried out teaching an introductory course in Eastern Orthodox Theology.

There is no point in flaunting my knowledge, which is at best rudimentary, of Eastern Orthodox thought except for the need to identify certain key ideas. Deification / theosis is certainly a prominent Orthodox doctrine. A standard statement is that of St. Athanasius: "God became man so that men might become gods." (Please excuse the masculine-gender language, in this context as well as in the following.) God became man, no problem: that is the Incarnation. Men become gods? That can be perplexing. It sounds like Hinduism, with its numerous divinized gods and goddesses. Then a woman student in the class remarked, could it mean that men and women have a spark of the divine in them? I responded approvingly, "something like that"; "but a spark re-ignited", I added. The point is, Eastern Orthodoxy is a rich vineyard, and leeway should be allowed for nuanced interpretation. In this instance, the spark has been becoming dimmer and dimmer because of human degradation, as I read it; but the spark, the dimmed original *imago Dei*, can be re-ignited by the divine fire. It is this kind of imaginative interpretation, tempered by reason, that makes the reading of Orthodox literature more rewarding (as in my teaching of the course). But more on interpreting Eastern Orthodoxy later on. Another notable Orthodox quotation, from Cyril of Alexandria: "We are all

⁷ The lecture is presumably the same or rewritten piece, "John Wesley's interests in the early Fathers of the Church," contained in *Essay of Albert C. Outler: The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, ed. By Thomas C. Oden & Leicester R. Longdon (Grand Rapids: Zonderwan Publishing House, 1991).

called to take part in divinity, becoming the likeness of Christ and the image of the Father, by participation.” ‘The likeness of Christ’ and ‘the image of the Father’ can be resolved in the Trinity, bringing along the Spirit, who will restore the damaged image to the likeness of Christ. Orthodox fathers like to speak of participation in, or to take part in, or to be participants of, the divine nature, with reference to deification (in line with the word *imago Dei*, we might as well preferably use the word ‘deification’ rather than ‘theosis’). ‘To take part in divinity’, ‘participation in it’, and ‘to be participants of divine nature’, these expressions are, as I found out, in different English translations of the same notion at the end of the scriptural passage, II Peter 1:3-4, which is often used by Orthodox theologians to explain deification. Depending on the different English versions, the human side (having escaped from corruption), will become part of the divine (which is incorruptible) again. In what sense? In terms of being? Action? Relationship? Spiritual communion? Mystical union? The sharing of God’s energies? All rich possibilities! But none by itself all-sufficient!

For sure, in the course in Orthodox Theology we went onto the theme of *imago Dei*. Having pored over many a page of Orthodox writings, I came to the consensus understanding that the image of God originally given to the human person in Creation, is marred or defaced, consequent to the fall of Adam, human beings’ ancestor. The image can be restored or repaired by the working of the Holy Spirit, by renewing man/woman, to be like Christ (or Christ-like), or to the likeness of Christ. Some Orthodox fathers speak of ‘likeness of God’ rather than ‘likeness of Christ’. Or, are the two expressions interchangeable or complementary? There is room for discussion. So is the subtle distinction, or approximation, between ‘image of God’ and ‘likeness of God’. At any rate, the Eastern Orthodoxy conception about the image of God is different from that in those Western theological traditions (like Augustinianism and Calvinism) which regard human nature as totally depraved, so that the originally bestowed divine image is shattered or destroyed. In that respect John Wesley was more on the side of Eastern Orthodoxy than the Western orthodoxies (but he himself sometimes wavered). I do not hesitate to state my preference.

In Wesley’s case, the preference is shown, implicitly or explicitly, in his preaching. Way back in 1730, eight years before his Aldersgate episode of 1738, Wesley preached a sermon entitled “The Image of God.” The sermon is straightforward enough about the Genesis declaration on God creating man in His own image. The sermon is interesting in a number of ways. First, Wesley fills rich contents into the metaphor of the image: intelligence, will, virtue, righteousness, immortality, etc. in creation. Second, come the tragic fall of Adam, and moral corruption befalls men and women henceforth; and the image of God in them is said to be ‘disordered,’ ‘diseased,’ and ‘disposed?’ [meaning not altogether clear], but apparently not totally destroyed. Third, the seed of immortality in

the divine image is not lost forever, and the goodness of the original image can be recovered or restored, by the death of Christ conquering the death brought about by Adam, whereby 'glorious change' is brought about, as is shown in humility, new understanding, reformed will, and refined virtues, etc. We can see that there are more than a few traces of resemblance between John Wesley and Orthodoxy.

In another sermon, "The New Birth" (preached in 1760), Wesley connects the new birth with the image of God motif. The sermon begins with an enriched conception of the image of God by looking at the image in three aspects, the natural image, the political image, and the moral image. The natural image is the originally endowed image including immortality, understanding, freedom of will, and various affections. The political image refers to human beings as the governor of the earth, having dominion over the fishes of the sea, the fowl of the air, the cattle of the field. The moral image includes righteousness, holiness, and love (Ephesians); justice, mercy, and truth. Next, the human person, though endowed with the image of God, is not immutable, and indeed humankind persistently goes afoul as a result of their ancestor Adam's fall. Thus human nature is corrupted, and humankind is separated from the Creator, who is immortal and the source of immortality.. For all practical intents and purposes, fallen men and women are spiritually dead. They must be born again. The scriptural episode of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus about 'being born again' is introduced. Rebirth or new birth is a new birth of the spirit. Now the enlightening part of Wesley's sermon comes, for me, in the analogy of the new-born baby having ears, eyes, and other organs, at birth, hearing, seeing, and sensing, for the first time, the brand new objects of the world into which it is born. Most tellingly as an analogy, just as the new-born baby breathes the air of the world for the first time, the newly born person lets the Spirit of God breathe into him to give him new life.

Theodore Runyon, picking up from the sermons, "The New Birth" and "The New Birth", elaborates on the threefold images (natural, political and moral) to be included in the new creation, in a book entitled *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*.⁸ I read the book with great interest, which enhances my understanding of the image of God in John Wesley's thinking, in relation to the new creation. At first-reading of Runyon's book I thought that new creation refers to mainly current ecological concern and leans toward a liberation ethics orientation, which is fine; but on further reading I have noted the spiritual dimension there too, and spiritual renewal at that, both personal and the whole creation, from a Wesleyan perspective brought up-to-date.

To continue with the subject of Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy, Ted A. Campbell has rendered the valuable service of careful research into John Wesley's involvement in the

⁸ Published by Abingdon Press, 1998.

study of Christian antiquity.⁹ The sweep of ancient Christian resources with which Wesley came into contact is indeed impressive, showing how broad-minded he was in his quest for broader theological understanding. Appendix 2 of Campbell’s book lists the wide range of Greek and Syrian fathers’ resources to which Wesley made references. For the limited scope of this paper, let me pick up three names at this point: Gregory of Nyssa, Macarius, and Ephrean Syrusff.

Gregory of Nyssa. His name is not on Campbell’s book, Appendix 2 list; however, his name actually figures prominently in association with the name Macarius. Macarius’s name is put on a high plane in the list of John Wesley’s ancient heroes. He wrote in his journal (for July 30, 1736), “I read Macarius and sang.” Wesley even edited an abridged volume of Macarius’ homilies. The real authorship of the homilies ascribed to Macarius, an Eastern Orthodox monk, first from Egypt, then in the Syrian region, has been questioned. One Greek classics scholar, Werner Jaeger argued that the real author was Gregory of Nyssa, one of the Cappadocian fathers of the 4th century.¹⁰ The scholarly dispute has not been definitively settled, but the name Pseudo-Macarius has been given to the Macarius assumed by John Wesley and students of ancient literature of his days. Regardless of the resolution of the authorship question, Gregory of Nyssa’s influence on Macarius, pseudo or otherwise, is undeniable.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.394) was one of the three great Cappadocian Fathers (the other two being Basil the Great, his elder brother, and Gregory of Nazianzen, a close friend). All three were men of profound faith and great learning as well as dedicated churchmen rendering distinguished service. Wesley mentioned two of the names but, curiously, not Gregory of Nyssa. This last name, however, surfaced in connection with Wesley’s favored ancient Orthodox writer, the supposed Macarius.

Gregory of Nyssa was a voluminous writer, covering a wide range of subjects. In connection with this paper, what interests me most is his view on the *imago Dei*, which forms the foundation of the great corpus of his teachings, according to an extensive summary entered into an anthology in Patrology.¹¹ As the crowning achievement of the work of creation, man as a microcosm, displays the same order and harmony of the macrocosm, the universe. However, this ancient philosophical idea is surpassed by the Christian doctrine of the image of God in man. “Man is the faithful image of his Maker principally by reason of his soul, and more precisely because this soul possesses reason, freedom of the will, and supernatural grace. Gregory uses the term ‘image’ as the comprehensive expression for man’s entire endowment of divine gifts, his

⁹ Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville: Kingwood Books, 1991)

¹⁰ Werner Jaeger’s article

¹¹ Johannes Questen, *Patrology*, Vol.III, “The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature, From the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon (Westminister, Md.: Christian Classic, Inc., Sixth Paperback Printing, 1992), section on “Gregory of Nyssa, 254-96.

original state of perfection.”¹² As I read the summary statement, I detect the notion of progression from separating from evil; to purifying of, and freeing from, passion; to achieving blessedness and attaining attributes of the kind that form in man the likeness of God. Here again is the movement from being like God to perfecting the image of God, thereby magnifying the glory of God forever more.

Gregory betrays a notable mystical strain in his writings. Though a great intellect, he did not want to be constrained by rational knowledge, which cannot reach the divine. There are the avenues of transcendent Wisdom, the vision of Beauty, and the virtuous life lived in Goodness. This is a trace of Neo-Platonism? Likely. But more than that, the Beatific Vision is indicated.

Before leaving Gregory of Nyssa, there is an intriguing reference which I must note. He uses the Greek word *epectasis* to describe the movement of perpetual ascent and infinite growth. He writes: “Let us change in such a way that we may constantly evolve towards what is better, being transformed from glory to glory, and thus always improving and ever becoming more perfect by daily growth, and never arriving at any limit of perfection.”¹³ For Gregory, every ending is a beginning, and every arrival is a new departure. Well! Two Confucian notions immediately come to mind. One, the expression from the first sentence of the Confucian classic *The Great Learning* quoted previously, about ‘stopping not until the highest good is reached.’ Two, In the *I-Jing* (Book of Change), between the last two hexagram (a hexagram is a six-line symbolic presentation of a thematic idea, “Already Completed” and “To be Completed”, respectively) is a parable about an end opening up to a new beginning. Here are two instances of ‘interface’ opening the way for Chinese Confucian thought to converse with Eastern Orthodoxy. I shall come back to those instances later.

Pseudo-Macarius. Meanwhile, let us turn to the supposed author of the homilies attributed to Macarius, now given the name, Pseudo-Macarius. It is generally agreed among scholars that, whoever he was, he was a monk, who lived in the northeast region Syria during the middle of the 4th century.¹⁴ From the writings, which consist of fifty homilies and a “Great letter”, the author was evidently the head of a monastic community, for the homilies, and the letter, were addressed to members of the community by their superior. The linguistic characteristics, the geographical and cultural environment implied in the writings, and the historical references, all point to that particular region of a certain historical period.

There are several collections of the Macarian materials. So are there different translations

¹² Ibid., 292.

¹³ Cited by Charles J. Healey, S.J., *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction to the Heritage*” (Staten Island: Alba House, 1990), 44-5.

¹⁴ See “Introduction,” in *Pseudo-Macarius: The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, translated, edited and with an Introduction, by George J. Maloney, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1992)

in several languages. As is known in Methodist circles, John Wesley made an abridgement of an English translation of the Macarian homilies (known as “Macarius the Egyptian” at that time).¹⁵ The authorship question and research on the manuscripts are beyond my ken. It is sufficient for me as long as the manuscripts originated from the hands of a person or persons of flesh and blood, and the ideas and literary style flowing from those hands have life and spirit and a ring of truth.

Indeed what interest me are the main ideas and the linguistic-literary style of the homilies and the so-called Great Letter. I have read the whole corpus of materials, in translation made by Fr. George Maloney. I have done so because they are highly readable. Firstly, the writings have a spirituality quality, called ‘spirituality of the heart’ by the translator. Secondly, the literary style, which is joined up with the spirituality of the heart just mentioned, has much appeal to me. Thirdly, the ideas, which are expressed in a language congenial to them and which are inseparable from the spirituality quality, sound familiar enough, given the Methodist background, and, coincidentally, the perspective of a Confucian heart-school of thought (explained later on).

First of all, with respect to the ideas. I can only make a few samplings here.

Grace. Strewn all over the places. What is interesting is that grace is not discussed in categorical terms; rather, as a quality, malleable and elusive. For example:

Grace, indeed, is unceasingly present and is rooted in us and mingled with our nature from our earliest years. It is as something natural and real which adheres to a person as though it formed one substance. Still, it operates in a person in various way, depending on one’s cooperation as far as this is given. At times the fire flares out and burns with more vehement flames. At other times it burns more gently and slowly. The light that it gives off flames up at times and shines more brightly. At other times it goes down and barely gives off any light. So it is with the lamp of grace. It is always burning and giving off light, but when it is especially trimmed, it burns more brilliantly as though intoxicated by the love of God. But again, by a certain dispensation of God, the light is still there but barely shines. (Homily 8)

Justification and Sancitification.

Christians from one aspect are similar to lamps with oil in them, that is, all the fruits of justification. But if the lamp be not enkindled from that of the Godhead within them, they are nothing. The Lord was “the burning lamp” (Jn 5:35) by means of the Spirit of the Godhead which abided substantially in him and set on fire his heartr according to the

¹⁵ Campbell, op.cit., 45

humanity. Take the example of a dirty old pouch filled with pearls. So too Christians in the exterior man they possess the “pearl of great price” (Mt 13:46).

As many lights and burning lamps are lighted from fire, but the lamps and lights are lighted and shine from one nature, so also Christians are enkindled and shine from one nature, the divine fire, the Son of God, and they have their lamps burning in their hearts and they shine before him while living on earth, just as he did. For it says, “Therefore your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness” (Ps 45:7). For this reason he was called Christ in order that we also, being anointed with the same substance and one body. Again it says: “Both he that sanctifies and those that are sanctified are all of one” (Heb 2:11).

Spirit. Invariably Spirit is tied to prayer, purity, perfection.

Everyone should push himself to beg the Lord to make him worthy to receive and find the heavenly treasure of the Spirit in order to be able easily and promptly to fulfill all the commandments of the Lord, without blame and with perfection. . . .The person who has found the Lord, the true treasure, by seeking the Spirit, by faith and great patience, brings forth the fruits of the Spirit. . . .all righteousness and the command of the Lord which the Spirit orders he does by himself, purely and perfectly and without blame. (Homily 18)

Image and Likeness of God.

See how great are the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon. But the Lord was not pleased to find his rest in them, but in humanity alone. Man, therefore, is of greater value than all other creatures, and perhaps I will not hesitate to say, not only visible creatures, but also those invisible, namely, “the ministering spirits” (Heb 1:14). For it was not of Michael or Gabriel, the archangels, that God said: “let us make men to our image and likeness” (Gn 1:26), but he said it concerning the spiritual make-up of the human, I mean, the immortal soul.” (Homily 15)

All these are familiar Wesleyan terminologies and ideas, but they are also part of the Eastern Orthodox vocabulary from antiquity on. From the hands of a Syrian monk, who lived more than fourteen centuries prior to Wesley’s time (or whoever it was that wrote the spiritual homilies credited to the name Macarius) the words and descriptions come alive again even to the ears and hearts of men and women of this day, among them Methodists of Far East Asia.¹⁶

¹⁶ The name Hoo-Jung Lee, of the Methodist Theological Seminary, Seoul, S. Korea, immediately comes

[Note the nodal points for trans-continental and cross-cultural theological communication.] I need not comment more on this score except to say that the language-style expressed in the language of the Macarian homilies is that of a language of the heart, coming out of, and speaking to, a spirituality of the heart.¹⁷

Ephraem Syrus. The name Ephraem Syrus is frequently mentioned by Wesleyan scholars side by side with Macarius as two early Eastern fathers who made deep impressions on him in spirituality. John Wesley's connection with Macarius is better known, explicitly, in that he edited an abridgement of Macarius' homilies. In the previous section of this paper I indicated my own comprehension of Macarius' impact on him as on myself through my first-hand reading of the primary source materials. Wesley's connection with Ephraem Syrus is less pronounced. I have diligently searched for further hints possibly from the Wesleyan scholars' research work, not to much avail except for a scant notation in Albert C. Outler's article, "John Wesley's Interests in the Early Fathers of the Church", with vague reference to subjects like love, perfection, etc.¹⁸ Happily in my personal library is a volume of Ephrem the Syrian's hymns translated by Kathleen E. McVey. Professor McVey was my neighbor at Princeton Theological Seminary when I spent a year (1996-7) as a visiting professor there. I have treasured the book not only because it was a gift from the author but also because I have enjoyed reading the hymns from time to time. My apology for these personal references, but it is meant to suggest that what connection I might discover between Wesley and Ephrem Syrus (from here on I shall use this spelling of the name Ephrem instead of Ephraem, to be in line with the spelling adopted by the book which I am reading directly) is a personal venture, and, furthermore, what appropriation I might have of the hymns is a personal experience.

Ephrem Syrus' life is better documented than Macarius'.¹⁹ He was born c.306 in Nisibis, a major commercial and political center in northeast Mesopotamia, a region of which Syria was a part. The population of Nisibis was multi-racial. A thriving Christian community was established there, and the community members were Syriac-speaking. This Syriac-speaking Christian community was surrounded by other Christian groups, including Gnostic

to mind. See his article published as "Experiencing the Spirit in Wesley and Macarius", contained in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology: For Contemporary Methodism*, ed. By Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998).

¹⁷ George A. Maloney, translator-editor of the Pseudo-Macarius Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter, has a section on 'Spirituality of the Heart' in the Introduction of the book, op.cit, pp.3-4.

¹⁸ Contained in *The Wesleyan Theology Heritage* book edited by Oden & Longdon, op.cit, 106-7.

¹⁹ Brief information of Ephrem's life and time is distilled from the Preface and Introduction of *Ephrem the Syrian*, translated and introduced by Kathleen E. McVey (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

Christians and Jewish Christians, and there were other religio-cultural groups as well. Syriac, we should know, was a dialect of Aramean, the language spoken by Jesus and his immediate disciples, and by the 3rd and 4th centuries it became the third international language of the Christian Church. Ephrem, growing up and living in Nisibis, spoke and wrote in Syriac. If his spoken and written works (mostly hymns, for which he was best known) have something important to communicate, whether to Christian groups or non-Christian people, Syriac served as a powerful medium of communication, in his vicinity as well as when he moved from place to place. By virtue of that, Ephrem's influence in the literate world of his dates was increasingly recognized by his contemporaries. He finally settled in Edessa, an important Christian center, where he was in the service of the church, as deacon, choir-master, teacher and above all, an acclaimed hymn writer. Ephrem's influence in the literate world of his days was widely recognized, even among his Latin- and Greek-speaking Christian contemporaries. He died in 373 in Edessa. In recognition of the sanctity of his life and of his blessed legacy to posterity, he was canonized a saint.

What strikes one most as soon as one opens the pages of the collection of Ephrem's hymns is the profusion of imageries jumping out from sentence after sentence to meet one's eyes. The imageries are from varied sources: the Scriptures, the soils of Middle East culture, everyday life, whether rustic or urbane, and so forth. Just a few quick samplings:

The name of oil is indeed His symbol
and the shadow of the name, the Anointed.
The shadow of His name indeed fell upon their sick,
And they were cured.
In sleep oil stole the fatigue of sleeping bodies,
And while it anointed, in baptism it stole sin,
The weariness of sleeping bodies it stole, the sins of
waking bodies it stole. (Hymns on Virginity, No. 4)

Who has ever seen two harps,
One silent and one endowed with speech?
But the silence of that one, its preaching,
was not heard by rational creatures.
For the silent one persuaded by deed,
but the one endowed with speech persuaded by sound,
By words and by deeds both,

They proclaimed the Lord of all.
(Hymns on Virginity, No. 29)

It may be just common sense instruction, yet it is in poetic form.
In translation it may not be easy to have the rhymes in place, but the
rhythmic flow is there and the imageries are evident.

If you desire theological themes, there are plenty (although the
academic terms may not be apparent). For example:

[Incarnation]

Glory to Him who became earthly
Although heavenly by His nature!
By His love he became first-born to Mary
Although He is first-born of Divinity.
He became in name the child of Joseph
Although He is Child of the Heavenly One.
He became by His will a human
Although He is God by His nature.
Glorious is Your will and Your nature!
Blessed is Your glory that put on our image!
(Hymns on Nativity, No.23)

[Deification]

Glorious is the Wise One who allied and joined
Divinity with humanity,
One from the height and the other from the depth.
He mingled the natures like pigments
And an image came into being: the God-man.
(Hymns on Nativity, No.8)

[Resurrection]

His body was newly mixed with our bodies
And His pure blood has been poured into our veins.
And His voice into our ears, and his brightness
into our eyes.
All of Him has been mixed into all of us
by His compassion.

[Creation Renewed]

He renewed the sky since fools worshipped
All the luminaries. He renewed the earth
That had grown old because of Adam.

A new creation came to be by His spittle,
And the All-sufficient set straight bodies and minds.
(Hymns on Nativity, No. 17)

Professor Runyon, noted Wesleyan scholar, author of *New Creation*, would appreciate (or would have appreciated) this. So do I, a Wesleyan spiritual descendent from East Asia, who is putting 'Creation Renewed' on the title of this paper. Let us go on with more of Ephrem's 'symbolic theology'.

Ephrem has written three hymns with the symbolism of three harps. In one hymn (No.28 of the Hymns on Virginity) the three harps represent Old Testament, New Testament and nature. A second hymn (No. 29) carries on with further figures from the Old and the New Testaments (Moses and the resurrected Lazarus) and creation (of which the human person is the crown). The third hymn (No.30) has Christ playing the harps producing music pleasing to the ears of the healthy (cured people) and unpleasant to the unhealthy (like the jealous Saul disliking David's music on the harp), But eventually all the music sounds blend into harmony, as even the cursing on the fig tree and the howling of the roaring sea in the end come to a gloriously harmonious ending.

Last but not least, a hymn (No. 26 of the Hymns on Virginity) singing of a list of women in the New Testament who are characterized as the brides of Christ, each teaching valuable lesson: Martha and Mary (sisters of Lazarus) remembered for having fed Jesus and receiving instructions from him, the former praised especially for her outspokenness and service; the sinful woman who anointed Jesus; the woman healed from her hemorrhage as a sign of cure from hidden anger; the poor widow giving two mites as a model of generous offering; the woman by the well who broke the racial boundary limiting God's love. Finally, of course, Mary, the mother of Jesus, to whom was praised:

Blessed are you, woman, who while
our Lord was on earth, saw Him on high.
Your love was exalted and broke through heaven
and saw the Son on the right hand.

One would have thought that Charles Wesley, who wrote so many hymns on holiness and sanctification and so forth, would had been drawn to Ephrem's poetic genius. Again I have tried hard to look for evidence

but found none.

According to Katherine E. McVey, who translated into English a large bulk of Ephrem the Syrian's hymns, he has left a great legacy in hymnology to not only Eastern Christianity but Christianity in the West as well. I am not a hymnologist, but, for a Far Eastern Asian Methodist who is interested in the cross-fertilization of cultures and religions, or theological interculturalism as I call it, the Middle Eastern hymn-writer of over fifteen centuries ago has left a trail for me, and perhaps a few others too, to walk further on. In what direction next?

III. *Heaven-Earth-Humanity Renewed: in Dynamic Harmony or as a Way of Salvation.*

There are really many signs for us to follow. For one, what about the hint given by Ephrem in one of his hymns (No.17, Hymn of Nativity) where he refers "restoring the whole creation" with the sky renewed and the earth renewed (strophe 11 & 12), following the renewing of old Adam's body and mind ("setting straight the bodies and minds" [of wearied])? Fine! That points to the heaven-earth-humanity harmony leitmotif of Confucianism. [This is not an unimaginable 'interface' communication nodal point, despite the wide cross-continental gulf and the long time span.]

So, enter Confucianism! 'Heaven-humanity in harmony', 'Heaven-humanity in harmony' – that is a slogan echoing in the corridors of Chinese history through the centuries. Chinese culture and Confucianism are not synonymous, but Confucianism is main-stream Chinese culture. All Chinese (*Han*²⁰ or otherwise) have streaks of Confucian culture in their consciousness (or collective unconscious). Amazingly, Confucianism has been a notable cultural factor in Korean history, as it is in some neighboring countries of China where Chinese have emigrated. But, have no fear you are getting into 'yellow imperialism' or a complicated philosophical system. All of us here can get a taste, a good taste of Confucianism right away – through a few epigrammatic sayings from the Confucian classics which you can readily grasp.

I think it is by now a saying familiar even to people in the West, that "Within the four seas we are brothers [and sisters]". That is from the Confucian classic *The Analects* (The Book of Sayings), compiled by the disciples of Confucius, forefather of Confucianism, who lived twenty-five centuries ago (five centuries before Christ). But most people do not know the paragraph before that saying,

²⁰ *Han* is the largest ethnic group of the Chinese peoples and has played a dominant role in Chinese history. The written Chinese language is *Han* language.

which consists of a question asked by one of the disciples of Confucius, “What is *ren* (仁, benenolence or kindness or humaneness, the foremost virtue)?” and the answer, “When you go abroad, treat everyone as a great guest, and employ people as though they will assist you in a great sacrificial ceremony.” I think that, without going into a learned exegesis, you already have an idea of what *ren* is. And you can understand why within the four seas all are brothers and sisters.

Now *ren* (仁) is the premier virtue, and actually in classical Confucian thought, *ren* is the first in a list of four primary principles, or ‘the four beginnings of humanness’ (人之四端). Here we get into Mencius, the so-called ‘second sage’ of Confucianism. What are the four principles or beginnings? They are *ren* (仁), *yi* (義), *li* (禮), *zhi* (智). *ren* is benevolence, the feeling of commiseration or compassion. *yi* is righteousness, dislike of what is evil or righteous indignation. *li* is propriety, proper behaving (outward behavior as well as inner attitude) in relating to others. *zhi* is wisdom, knowing what is right and what is wrong. Later on Confucian scholars and moralists wrote elaborate commentaries on these primary principles, but Mencius himself thought that most people have an innate sense in this regard, and only minimal words were used in the introductory sections of *Book of Mencius* (notes taken by his disciples). Let us be content with these scanty, pristine strokes of classical Confucian instructions for our purpose here. Many more valuable Confucian moral teachings can be cited (including more famous passages from Mencius and Confucius), but there is no need for further reference now. Suffice it to say that Confucianism has evolved into a highly developed ethical-cultural system, a worthy legacy to world civilization.

But, coming back to only those ‘four principles or beginnings’ just mentioned, Christian people of our days, including spiritual descendants of Wesley, from the West or East (Far East and Eastern Orthodoxy), who are but slightly cultured, would not find those just-mentioned Confucian words and concepts strange, I am sure, given possible nuanced differences in meaning, as is true in all cross-cultural situations. To go on just a little further, you may have heard of the references to “Heaven-Earth in Harmony” (天人合一), or the popularized notions such as, human beings (on earth) must be abiding to *tian* (天, the sky or heavens) or something like that. Anyway, it is the idea of humans (on earth) and heavens (up high) in accord, the reverse being humans and heavens in discord. If ‘heavens’ (plural) mean the natural sky above us, not the spiritualized ‘Heaven’ (capitalized), that is closer to Chinese naturalist-humanist thinking than spiritualized thinking, whether in philosophical thought or in the thinking of men and women on the streets. What I am getting at is the idea of ‘Heaven-Earth-Humanity in Harmony’. The capitalized letters of the alphabet are to indicate the dignity of the idea. Indeed

the idea is highly dignified in Chinese classical thinking. Heaven, Earth, and Humanity are traditionally called the “Trio Capabilities” (三才). Let us not go into that except to establish the idea of Heaven-Earth-Humanity in union (as indicated in the title of this paper), as having roots in Chinese culture.

But how has the idea of hyphenated Heaven-Earth-Humanity enfolded in history? That is an age-old ideal of the Chinese people. It is the Archetype of the classic, *I-Jing* (The Book of Ching). Again, leave that for the moment. Instead, let me turn to an actual historical incident that took place on June 4th, 1998 in Tiananman Square, Beijing.

That is the incident of mass-demonstration staged by thousands and thousands of Chinese youth in Tiananman Square (*Tiananman* means ‘the gate of heavenly peace’), Beijing, demonstrating against corruption in the Chinese heirarchy and calling for democracy and clean government. The demonstration had been going on for more than a month. Then on June 4 before dawn a parade of tanks equipped with machine-guns rolled out to the streets and killed or injured hundreds of unarmed students and scholars. Thus a peaceful demonstration ended in a blood bath.

The news was broadcast and televised in Hong Kong, a British colony to be returned to China in 1998. The news was received as shocking in public. Almost instantly people staged rallies to express their grief over the tragedy and their condolences for the victims. There were huge placards reading 天怨人怒 (‘lament from the heavens and anger from humans’), 神人共哀 (‘gods and humans grieving together’), etc. Expressed in those placards are the sentiments of god and humanity grieving in empathy. By implication, the heaven-humanity accord is broken. For all intents and purposes it is the heaven-earth-humanity in harmony ideal (considering the fact that human beings lived on earth) that is shattered.

And that is a shattering experience for me personally! For days afterwards, I sighed in front of my students and friends that the Heaven-Earth-Humanity in Harmony is a wonderful ideal in the books and the heads of scholars, but it has never been realized in the history of China.

Then came the televised view of one of the persecuted June 4th scholars now in exile in the U.S., who was just converted to the Christian faith as he wept under the cross hanging on a Catholic hospital’s hallway over a stature of Mary. He testified that for the first time in his life (thereto as a non-believer) he wept under a cross, and he was converted, and thenceforth, after a period of theological education he began a career of evangelization among Chinese scholars in exile. I do not mean to dramatize this highly personalized religious experience (though it has had far-ranging public consequences). But it is a fact in my thinking from that

time on, that the cross is the permanent sign of the beginning of Heaven-Earth-Humanity in reconciliation, leading to harmony and unification and all the rest.

I need not ramble on, and I hope you sense that I have a point in taking Heaven-Earth-Humanity in harmony as an axis, around which the wheels, so to speak, of a Wesleyan-Orthodox-Confucian interaction (or theological interculturalism as I call it), turn and roll on.

Indeed the Heaven-Earth-Humanity harmony ideal is too good to be true. There must be some breaks somewhere. The great ‘fault’ (in common language, fortified by geological language) is in the ‘fall’ of humanity (in biblical language). There is no need to sermonize or theologize further except to say that the fall has never been taken seriously by the Chinese, Confucian scholars in particular. The Chinese, Confucian scholars not excepted, had better do that. Huge masses of Chinese in Communist China are apparently taking the cross to heart, or else there are not unprecedented awakenings as evidenced by huge growth in the Christian Church. I am not evoking the topics of church growth and revivals, but it is the subject of renewed humanity that I want to bring up.

Not surprisingly, if Confucians speak of Heaven-Earth-Humanity in harmony, they mention the renewal of humanity. The beginning sentence of the *Great Learning*, which reads, “The Way of Great Learning, is in the brightening up of the bright virtues, in a renewed people, not resting till the highest excellence is reached.” (My own translation, an improvement, pardon me, over the old translation by James Legge.). My translation or otherwise, it is the idea of renewing the people (‘renovating’ in the old translation) that I wish to underline. The Commentary for that line adds the reference to words inscribed on the bath tub of a king, “If you can renew yourself one day, then do so from day to day, again everyday.” So there is the idea of human renewal, brought out in Confucian teachings from the beginning. How is that to be carried out? In Confucian terms, characteristically, by human cultivation, that is, the cultivation of human virtues. I let history show whether and how that is true.

As I have already indicated, by way of the June 4th incident, fallen humanity, in spite of the Confucian optimistic view of human nature, won’t let that happen by virtue of human self-effort. John and Charles Wesley have testified to that; so have the Eastern Orthodoxy fathers said. The Orthodox theologians consistently, and John Wesley intermittently, even though the originally good image of God implanted in the human person, is marred or defaced, but not to the extent of being shattered or broken up. The damaged image can be restored or mended. Not by self-cultivation, but by divine grace or, what is the same, by the gracious working

of the Holy Spirit.

Confucians would not understand that kind of language, not yet; but they would echo the idea of renovating or restoring the image in the human person. In fact, they like to speak of ‘brightening up the bright human virtues’. Ah! That is where Confucianism brightens up again. For brightening up, polishing up, excellent virtues, and renovating human nature, are their forte.

Wesleyans would say to the Confucians, would they not? “Welcome aboard! We do believe that sinners can be justified, by faith, and immediately following that, sanctification begins, hereafter moving on to perfection, until the excellent good is reached, as you would say.”

As to virtues, Wesleyans along with all Christians, have plenty to gain from learning more from the Confucians, and, vice-versa; mutually, too, Confucians and Christians alike have much to share, in the way of building up the virtuous life on the road toward perfection or the supremely good. Incidentally, few Chinese would consider human nature is hopelessly depraved. I look at the Hong Kong people, noted for their materialism and self-centeredness, yet in their annual peaceful mass demonstration for well over a score of years, against injustice done on the victims of the June 4th blood bath, and for the rehabilitation of that incidence as a milestone of progress on the road toward democracy and freedom. There is residual goodness in human nature after all.

Thus two more ‘interface’ mechanisms present themselves. One, synergism, widely known in Orthodoxy and acceptable to Wesley, bridges the gap between divine initiative and human self-sufficiency.²¹ The Confucians — and the pre-justification Wesleys! ---take self-effort too seriously, whereas the predestination die-hards (like some ‘orthodox’ Calvinists) allow no room for human freedom for those who are destined to be damned, comes in to build a bridge. Two, prevenient grace slips in at points where Christians, (like Methodists and Eastern Orthodox people), in dialogue with non-Christians (like Confucians), find converging issues (like the virtuous life and relentless search for excellence). The prevenient grace comes in when grace connects up with innate good conscience and receptiveness to goodness even in non-Christian people. Prevenient grace may not be nicely defined, but then so is it unpredictable outside Christian boundaries.

The ‘all Christians’ alluded to include Eastern Orthodox people. There is no need to rehearse their story with respect to *imago Dei* and holiness. But *Deification* we can say a little more.

²¹ Albert Outler is helpful in explaining synergism as a handy means to bridge those gaps. See *Essays of Albert C. Outler*, ed. By Oden & Longdon, op.cit., especially 199-201, 206-8.

For *Deification / Theosis* is a very rich doctrine. It has a great deal to offer to Western Christianity. And to Confucians, too, on the leitmotif of Heaven-Earth-Humanity in Harmony. They would not be shy in speaking of ‘Heaven-Earth-Humanity in Communion’ or some such ‘grand-narrative’ terms. It is not just a matter of intellectual understanding; it involves spiritual communion as well. This is where Orthodoxy has a good deal to offer. Wesley took it to heart quite a lot. So are a few Asian Methodist theologians doing that, bit by bit, if not a whole lot yet.²²

However, spirituality, in the Christian sense, is where Confucianism falls short. When Confucianism talks about renewal or renovation it is in the humanist and naturalist sense. Scriptural ‘New Birth’, ‘New Creation’, ‘New Man’, etc. as so convincingly preached by Wesley, refer to spiritual renewal. So do the Eastern Orthodox fathers, in speaking of restoring or repairing the impaired image of God in humankind, leading to deification, or spiritual reunion of the divine and the human. How will that help the Confucians or those Chinese or Asians with a Confucian cultural background? Besides letting them read Wesley’s sermons and Orthodox writings, to which they can scarcely have access, exposure to the New Testament is a key. I do not mean to sound glib, like an evangelist (which I am not), but for all I hear, when millions of Chinese people are beginning to be awakened to the pervasive moral degradation that their nation has fallen into, their ‘poor in spirit’ will lead them to open to the pages of the Bible, as millions of them indeed are. Then the Heaven-Earth-Humanity in harmony is not just book-talk harmony but dynamic, spiritual communion, something like what the Orthodox fathers say; not just theoretical harmony, but a Way of salvation as Wesley would say.

All these are beginnings. Let me end with a parable about a little fox, tugged away in the small prints of a paragraph from the Chinese classic *I-Jing* (The Book of Change). The paragraph appears between the last hexagram (Hexagram 64, “To Be Completed”), and the next to the last hexagram (Hexagram 63, “Already Completed”). That paragraph contains the parable, that a little fox, having completed his trail, dips into a shallow pond of water, and then comes away from the pond, only to find his tail wetted by the muddy water. The fox gets onto to a new trail, and to begin all over again---with a muddy water-wetted tail. The point of the parable is, I think, that in walking through life one completes a trail and, just when one thinks everything is in completion, ones begins all over again, but, for

²² Besides Hon-Jung Lee already mentioned, Jung-Chun Park, also of Methodist Theological Seminary in Seoul, who has written a piece, “Christian Perfection and Confucian Sage Learning: An Interreligious Dialogue in the Crisis of Life”, contained in M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2004). Another Asian Methodist scholar, Justin Tan, a Malaysian Chinese now teaching in Melbourne, who wrote his doctoral thesis on Eastern Orthodox spirituality.

better or for worse, with the experiences of the last trail attached even to a new beginning.

Lest this be thought of as only an incidental crumb of wisdom dropping off from a piece of old Chinese literature, I refer, once more, to the great Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nyssa, who said, with reference to perpetual growth in holiness, that “Every ending has a beginning and every arrival is a new departure” (page 10 above). This is a gem of spirituality I will always treasure.