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The Doctrine of Christian Perfection for Today: Reading Wesley's Theology Through the Lens of Process Thought

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THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION FOR TODAY
Reading Wesley's Theology through the Lens of Process Thought

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

My thesis is: A process-theological reading of Wesley’s doctrine of perfection, by constructing an adequate concept of God in process, gives renewed importance and vitality to Wesley’s doctrine of perfection, a doctrine that has been confused and virtually ignored even by Methodists themselves, despite the central importance Wesley himself assigns it. Why, then, has Wesley’s doctrine of perfection been so often misunderstood, confused or even ignored from his time until today? The clue to the answer lies in the failure clearly to heed the distinction between the two senses of divine perfection: perfected perfection (a static state of perfection) and perfecting perfection (a never ending aspiration for all of loves perfecting fullness).

I suggest that the notion of perfected perfection in God’s essence is not theologically adequate, given the Christian belief in God as love. What should be rejected is the idea of perfection as perfected, influenced by the Greeks, in which love in its essence as relation is impossible. The problem of this doctrine of perfection as perfected will not be solved without first constructing an adequate concept of God in perfecting perfection, that is, God in process. The primary method that I will use is, thus, “theological construction.” By constructing God in process, I want to recapture the doctrine of perfection as perfecting in Wesley’s theology. For Wesley, Christian perfection, that is, perfecting perfection, is a life of love that is interchangeably love of God and love of creatures. I believe that a process interpretation of Christian perfection

clarifies the relational love for God and the world at the heart of Wesley's doctrine of perfection. Process metaphysics can provide a theological foundation to construct an adequate concept of God in perfecting perfection, in which God and the world can enjoy perfect love that is ever growing.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction	1
1. The Scope of Dissertation and Thesis	1
2. Statement of Method and Delimitation	6
3. Previous Research and Contribution of this Dissertation	9
II. Challenges to Classical Theism	14
1. Challenges to Classical Theism in Process Thought	17
1) God as Controlling Power?	17
2) God as Cosmic Moralist?	26
3) God as the Impassible Absolute?	36
4) God as Perfected Perfect?	45
2. The Challenge to Classical Theism in Wesley's theology	53
1) God as Controlling Power?	53
2) God as Absolute Other?	65
3) God as Perfected Perfect?	72
III. Reforming the Concept of God	85
1. God as Relational	85
2. God as Sovereign	91
3. God as Love	100
4. God as Perfecting Perfect	108
IV. Constructing the Doctrine of Perfection	119
1. Real relations in God	119
2. A Strength of Process view of divine perfection	127
3. Perfection as "a never ending aspiration of all love's perfecting fullness"	137
V. Conclusion	145
VI. Bibliography	154

I. Introduction

1. The Scope of the Dissertation and Thesis

A prominent process Wesleyan theologian, John Cobb writes, “Most controversial in his own time, and largely abandoned by United Methodism, was [Wesley’s] doctrine that the process of growth could attain fulfillment in this life in entire sanctification [i.e. perfection].”¹ He goes on to claim that “We can say that in the United Methodist churches today it would be very valuable to renew the goal of perfect love [i.e. perfection], recognizing with Wesley that it is the work of grace in those who believe.”² With a similar sentiment, Steve Harper maintains that “unfortunately today, there is no element in Wesley’s theology that causes more trouble than [the doctrine of perfection]. On one extreme are those who virtually ignore the doctrine. On the other extreme are those who would make Christian perfection the all-important element in Christian experience In between are the vast majority of mainline Methodists who either have not heard the doctrine, or who have been confused by what they have heard. Either case is unfortunate, for it leaves Wesley’s doctrine in a position he never intended.”³

It is important to remember that for Wesley, Christian perfection was not just one doctrine among many but a central theme for all doctrines and one by which Wesleyan

¹ John Cobb, *Grace & Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 10.

² *Ibid.*, 112.

³ Steve Harper, *John Wesley’s Message for Today* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1983), 91.

thought was distinguished from other major traditions, particularly those of the continental Reformation.⁴ Given the fact that the doctrine of perfection is one of Wesley's essential doctrines, why has his doctrine been so poorly understood and virtually ignored by the United Methodists?

Interestingly enough, this confusion is not just an issue for today. The doctrine of perfection was also misunderstood not only by Wesley's contemporary opponents but also by his contemporary colleagues. According to Albert Outler, both sets of contemporaries read the language of perfection from the Western Latin tradition as *perfectio* (perfected perfection – a static state of perfection), rather than the Eastern tradition as *teleiotes* (perfecting perfection – “a never ending aspiration for all of love's perfecting fullness”).⁵ Outler's apologetics clearly portray Wesley's idea of perfection being founded in an everlasting process. For Wesley, “attaining of Christian perfection did not mean that there is no further growth possible.”⁶ Perfect love is a gradual growth in grace. Why, then, has Wesley's doctrine of perfection been so often misunderstood, confused or even ignored from his time until today?

The clue to the answer lies in the failure clearly to heed the distinction between the two senses of divine perfection: perfected perfection and perfecting perfection. It is important to remember that “almost from the start the church's theology was significantly influenced by Plato's notion that God's perfection must mean that he is in every respect

⁴ Carl Bangs, “The Idea of Perfection In a Future Christian Theology,” in Theodore Rnuyon, ed., *Wesleyan Theology Today: A Bicentennial Theological Consultation* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), 88.

⁵ Albert Outler's Introduction to Sermon 40, “Christian Perfection,” *The Works of John Wesley* “Bicentennial Edition” vol.2, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 98-99. “Aa never ending aspiration for all of love's perfecting fullness” is Albert Outlet's phrase.

⁶ John Cobb, 112.

unchanging – including in his knowledge and experience.”⁷ The Greek thinker “had argued in the *Republic* that deity, being perfect, cannot change or be changed because any change in a perfect being could only be change for the worse.”⁸ In Hellenistic thinking, God is essentially what the world is not. Divine reality begins where the world leaves off and is defined in terms of opposition. According to Aristotle, God is the Unmoved Mover which moves other things without moving itself; God is completely sufficient unto Godself. God cannot change or be changed for any possibility of change would entail that God is not pure actuality. Greek thinkers provided a one-sided transcendent divine. They kept God’s otherness at the expense of divine relation with God’s creatures. Given the concept of the absolute unchangeableness of God, they provided a concept of static perfection [i.e. perfected perfection] rather than perfection in growth [i.e. perfecting perfection].

The Christian doctrine of God was shaped in an atmosphere influenced by Greek thought in which perfection entailed complete immutability or lack of change. It is well known that classical theists such as Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas participated in a Hellenic tradition of philosophical theology which determined God to be perfect and immutable.⁹ Given the concept of immutability, God has been understood and believed as the Unchanging and Passionless Absolute.¹⁰ It was a natural result that perfection has

⁷ Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 115.

⁸ Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2001), 68.

⁹ Charles J. Kelly, “Classical Theism and the Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Religious Studies* 30, no.2 (March 1994): 67.

¹⁰ John B. Cobb, Jr. & David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976), 8-9.

been considered a static state rather than as “a never ending aspiration for all of love’s perfecting fullness.”

The danger in the notion of divine perfection as perfected, thus, includes that the perfected God, that is, the Unchanging and Passionless Absolute, is not really related to the world. Perfected perfection means that God must be pure actuality, meaning that the deity must be completely unaffected - indeed, *unaffected* - by any other reality (which itself becomes only “real” at all only in a derivative sense, the primary sense of the term being reserved for God alone, as pure, perfected actuality) and must lack all passion or emotional response. There is, hence, no love possible between God and the world because love is *essentially relational*.¹¹ I suggest that this notion of perfected perfection in God’s essence is not theologically adequate, given the Christian belief in God as love.

The problem of this doctrine of perfection as perfected will not be solved without first constructing an adequate concept of God in perfecting perfection, that is, God in process. Process thought is definitely helpful in this theological construction because process theism champions defeating the classical view of God as the Unchanging and Passionless Absolute. By constructing God in process, I want to recapture the doctrine of perfection as perfecting in Wesley’s theology. For Wesley, Christian perfection, that is, perfecting perfection, is a life of love that is interchangeably love of God and love of creatures. It is no carrot on a stick, “end-of-the-line” reward at death’s door, but an ever-present empowerment by the grace of the ever-present God.¹² I believe that a process

¹¹ Refer to the chapter of “Real Relations in God” in this dissertation for further information.

¹² Marjorie Suchocki, “Christian Perfection: A Methodist Perspective on Ecclesiology” lectured at the August Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, unpublished.

interpretation of Christian perfection clarifies the relational love for God and the world at the heart of Wesley's doctrine of perfection.

Such an interpretation makes room for the perfection in principle that Wesley claimed is possible in this world. Christians can enjoy perfection in this world because perfection is love's fullness that is ever growing. As is so well expressed by a line I will never forget on a card given to me by a friend long ago: "I love you more than yesterday but less than tomorrow." Love's fullness, that is, perfection, can ever be growing. So understood, perfection includes an ever increasing capacity to love. What should be rejected is the idea of perfection as perfected, influenced by the Greeks, in which love in its essence as relation is impossible.

As Christians go about the task of critical reflection on Christian witness in our world, a process metaphysics has much to offer Wesleyans. Especially, the doctrine of perfection can be given a new vitality for Methodists in our time by reading it through the lens of process thought. Process metaphysics can provide a theological foundation to construct an adequate concept of God in perfecting perfection, in which God and the world can enjoy perfect love that is ever growing.

Thus, my thesis is: A process-theological reading of Wesley's doctrine of perfection, by constructing an adequate concept of God in process, gives renewed importance and vitality to Wesley's doctrine of perfection, a doctrine that has been confused and virtually ignored even by Methodists themselves, despite the central importance Wesley himself assigns it.

2. Statement of Method and Delimitation

John Wesley's thought has generally been categorized as a model for methods of evangelization and spiritual formation. Wesley affirmed theology to be intimately related to Christian living and the proclamation of Christian faith. He had little interest in theology for its own sake. Rather, theology was for the purpose of transforming personal life and social relations. For Wesley, theology should help believers to act out their faith in daily affairs by loving God and neighbor in their ordinary lives.¹³ This was his "practical divinity." For Wesley, theology was primarily concerned with practice rather than ideas. On the other hand, Alfred North Whitehead developed a comprehensive metaphysical system which came to be known as process philosophy to frame a coherent, logical system of "the general ideas which are indispensably relevant to the analysis of everything that happens."¹⁴

The "practical divinity" of Wesley can be benefited by process thought's metaphysical foundation for theological construction. I firmly believe that highly metaphysical process thought can provide Wesleyans with a philosophical foundation for theological construction for our time. Process thought can provide a metaphysics that can more adequately give expression to our theological construction of Wesley.

I acknowledge that there has been a disagreement whether theology requires metaphysics.¹⁵ However, if the dominant Western Christian interpretation of Greek

¹³ Thomas A. Langford, "John Wesley and Theological Method," in Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Rethinking Wesley's Theology: For Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 35.

¹⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 84.

¹⁵ Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 113-6.

metaphysics played a role in getting the idea of God off track, thus resulting in a concept of static perfection, a process metaphysics can play a role in getting it back on track, hence making an idea of perfection in process possible. What Wesleyans need from process thought is a metaphysics of becoming for perfection in love; because love is always in becoming; love is not static but dynamic; love is not one-sided but relational. Given that Wesley included reason as one side of the quadrilateral,¹⁶ theology never operated without some regard to philosophy. “The question is not so much whether but how it is influenced, not whether but how philosophy plays a role.”¹⁷

Wesleyans can find in a process-relational worldview a metaphysical, philosophical, and epistemological structure that supports the theological perspective of Wesley in many ways. Especially to the point, process thought can give to Wesleyans an opportunity to construct an adequate concept of God in process so that they can recapture the doctrine of perfection not as a static state of perfection (perfected perfection) but as love’s fullness that is ever growing (perfecting perfection) for the Methodist in our time.

The primary method that I will use is “theological construction.” As understood for my purpose, constructive theology critically examines the Christian creedal and confessional positions and reframes them through interpretation in light of the emerging scientific outlooks on the world as well as cultural criticisms that open up a new horizon of meaning in a contemporary world. The mode of interaction with the past is not the attempt to conform to a supposedly adequate truth revealed in that past but an effort to

¹⁶ The “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” refers to the four sources that Wesley invoked in deliberating or defending doctrinal convictions. It includes Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. See “Sources/Criteria of Christian Doctrine,” in Randy L. Maddox. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*. Nashville, Kingswood Books, 1994.

¹⁷ Clark H. Pinnock, 114.

interact with that heritage, learning what we can but recognizing that the responsibility for our visions of reality resides within us today.

According to Gordon D. Kaufman, theology is “imaginative construction.” With regard to his method, Kaufman says, “We attempt first to locate the principal building blocks with which a religious (or ‘secular’) position – a ‘faith’ is put together. Then we assemble these step by step so that at each point anyone can see clearly just why this particular claim has been made, why that position has been taken, in preference to others.”¹⁸ The question that I pose, based upon this concept of theological method, is “Why has the doctrine of perfection been misunderstood as an ultimate static point to which all Christians are to aspire?” I find at least a major part of the answer in the influence of the Greek philosophers whose concept of Unchanging and Passionless God shaped the concept of perfection as perfected not as perfecting.

It is important to remember Kaufman’s claim that the symbol “God” signifies “ultimate mystery in which all . . . cosmic and historical processes and powers are unified . . . and held together.”¹⁹ According to Kaufman, the concept of God is the central vehicle of symbolic orientation in faith systems. Constructing an adequate concept of God is, thus, necessary in order to recapture the doctrine of perfection not as perfected perfection but as a perfecting perfection for the Methodist in our time.

I understand that my question, “Why has Wesley’s doctrine of perfection been so misunderstood and virtually ignored even by Methodists themselves?” could easily be taken to be a primarily historical one, requiring historical research to be answered.

¹⁸ Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 85.

¹⁹ Gordon D. Kaufman, 354.

However, in the proposed dissertation, I will not research historically how the doctrine of perfection has been misunderstood. Rather, my focus is to revive and reinforce Wesley's doctrine of perfection for today's Methodist by utilizing process thought. I want to recapture his doctrine of perfection as being perfection in process by constructing an adequate concept of God in process for love's fullness that is ever growing.

Therefore, applying this theological constructive method to my dissertation, I will critically examine classical theism and Wesley's doctrine of perfection, reading them through the lens of contemporary process thought. The purpose of this dissertation is a Wesleyan doctrine of perfection for our time, rather than an account of Wesley's own theology or of the history of its reception and interpretation.

3. Previous Research and Contribution of this Dissertation

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki once mentioned, "Long before I became a United Methodist I wondered at the 'coincidence' – how was it that so many prominent process theologians were United Methodist?"²⁰ The answer to this question may be found in the words of Michael Lodahl: "Wesley can be read as some kind of proto-process thinker."²¹ In a written dialogue with John B. Cobb, Jr., John Culp maintained that process thought is not only applicable to Wesleyanism, but that it is more adequate than other conceptual systems for understanding certain Wesleyan distinctive characteristics.²²

²⁰ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "Coming Home: Wesley, Whitehead, and Women," in Bryan P. Stone & Thomas Jay Oord, ed., *Thy Nature & Thy Name Is Love: Wesleyan And Process Theologies in Dialogue* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 49.

²¹ Michael Lodahl, "To Whom Belong the Covenants?: Whitehead, Wesley, and Wildly Diverse Religious Traditions," in David Ray Griffin, ed., *Deep Religious Pluralism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 199.

²² John Culp, "A Dialogue with the Process Theology of John B. Cobb, Jr.," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 15 (Fall 1980), 33-44.

It is true that there is a kinship in modes of thoughts between process thought and Wesleyan theology. For example, both process thought and Wesleyan theology understand divine sovereignty and power in such a way as to affirm God's grace as persuasive not as coercive, and human nature as free, responsible, and creative. These affinities were made clear by many Wesleyans attracted to process thought during the last half of the twentieth century. One of the prominent process theologians, John B. Cobb, Jr. is not hesitant to categorize himself as a "Wesleyan process theologian."²³

However, despite the fact that there has been a long affinity between Wesleyans and process thinkers, their dialogue has not been pursued in any explicit and systematic way until the fall of 1980 when a pair of articles was published in an edition of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*²⁴ under the titles of "A Dialogue with the Process Theology of John B. Cobb Jr." (John Culp, 1980) and of "Orthodox Christianity, Wesleyanism, and Process Theology" (Michael L. Peterson, 1980). Peterson was suspicious of process thought's usefulness for Wesleyan theology and argued that as to the fundamental doctrines of God, humanity, the kingdom of God, and Jesus Christ "process philosophy modifies or distorts an essential meaning to such a great extent that orthodoxy is lost."²⁵ He claims that "Orthodoxy denotes an expression of the faith which is fixed, stable, and normative. However, the whole impetus of process thought is away from such notions. . . . More exactly, process philosophy postulates total and continual change as the essence of reality

²³ John Cobb, 96.

²⁴ For historical resources about the dialogue between Wesleyans and process theologians, see "Introduction" in *Thy Nature and Thy Name Is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue*.

²⁵ Michael L. Peterson, "Orthodox Christianity, Wesleyanism, and Process Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 15 (Fall 1980): 45-58.

and therefore automatically excludes attempts at formulating orthodoxy.”²⁶ On the other hand Culp maintained how Cobb’s process thought might make a possible metaphysical contribution to Wesleyan assertions about human freedom and responsibility through Whitehead’s analysis of how self-determination is a basic feature of reality. Culp stood up for the dialogue between process thinkers and Wesleyans.

The dialogue has continued since then. A collection of essays pertaining to the relationship between Wesleyan theology and process thought was published in 2001 under the title *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue*. More recently the dialogue has gone further in an attempt to relate Wesleyanism, Boston Personalism, Process Theism, and Free Will Theism based upon a theological kinship: God is interactive and relational, and thereby, God’s primary volition is love.²⁷

Through his book, *Grace & Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today*, John B. Cobb, Jr. offered an important reinterpretation of John Wesley’s theology, reading it through the lens of process thought. Marjorie Suchocki also published an article “The Perfection of Prayer” in an attempt to read Wesley’s views on prayer, which pervades his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* in light of process thought.²⁸

I believe that the dialogue between Wesleyans and process theologians must continue. The metaphysics in which process thought reveals God’s relation to human

²⁶ Ibid., 56.

²⁷ See “Appendix” in *Thy Nature & Thy Name Is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue* and John B. Cobb, Jr. and Clark P. Pinnock, ed., *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000)

²⁸ See Marjorie Suchocki, “The Perfection of Prayer,” in *Rethinking Wesley’s Theology: For Contemporary Methodism*.

existence is efficient and helpful in making Wesley's theology applicable to contemporary Methodists in many ways. Yes, there are differences between the two traditions in conceptualizing theism, given that Wesley was a pastoral reformer for whom Scripture held primary authority in relation to tradition, reason, and experience. However, despite the disparity, there are many affinities shared by these two traditions; these affinities have attracted many Wesleyans to use the resources of process thought in the task of reformulating Wesleyan theology and re-thinking its basic ideas and doctrines for today.

The contribution of my dissertation is to stimulate further the ongoing dialogue between Wesleyan and process traditions and the ongoing attempt to reinterpret Wesley's theology in light of process thought. In order to do this, my dissertation will primarily be concerned with a reading of Wesley's doctrine of perfection through the lens of process thought.

I acknowledge that at least one author, Monica A. Coleman, recently began to explore the connection between process thought and the Wesleyan doctrine of perfection in her article, "The World At Its Best: A Process Construction of a Wesleyan Understanding of Entire Sanctification," published in 2002. However, her research is different from mine in important ways.

She begins with the different stance between John Wesley and his brother Charles Wesley in terms of perfection to be achieved in this world (John Wesley) or after death (Charles Wesley). Reading their difference through the lens of the idea, from process thought, of the distinction between the primordial and the consequent nature of God, she

expresses an eschatology that affirms the already-not-yet quality of the eschaton. Thus, her research focuses primarily upon eschatology.

In contrast, my own project is not one of eschatology but of constructing an adequate concept of God in perfecting perfection, that is, God in process. My dissertation explores how we can recapture the doctrine of perfection as perfecting in Wesley's theology by constructing God in process. In this dissertation, I offer a process Wesleyan doctrine of perfection that is vital for our Christian lives in our time.

II. Challenges to Classical Theism

Classical theism is a complex doctrine of God that has been worked out over centuries in the Western church by such preeminent Christian thinkers as Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus, Luther, Calvin, and their followers to the present. Classical theism has been the position of Western Christian orthodoxy.²⁹ The doctrine of God of classical theism has been the standard mainstream doctrine of God in the Christian tradition from earliest times until the twentieth century. Classical theism asserts that God in Godself is maximal Being so that God is absolutely self-sufficient, transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient, and immutable in relation to God's creation, the world; thus God does not change and is not affected by God's relation to God's creatures.³⁰

The classical doctrine of God has borrowed philosophical and theological ideas from Greek philosophers, especially Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists, to state clearly what it understands Scripture to teach about God. Plato argues that the Forms define the nature, characteristics, and order of the world and everything in it. The intelligible Forms in the ideal realm are hence accessible by the mind. However, it is important to notice that the Forms or Ideas are independent of the physical cosmos; they are eternal and immutable. Plato asserts that Ideas or Forms are real, universal, changeless, and independent of the material cosmos, yet are somehow responsible for the

²⁹ John W. Cooper, *Panentheism - The Other God of the Philosophers From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

order of the cosmos.³¹ Platonic categories have been crucial in the formulation of classical theism, the view that God is Perfect Being – simple, absolute, infinite, eternal, immutable, omnipotent, omniscient and essentially independent of the world.

It is widely known that from the time of Aristotle, Western metaphysics has had a significant bias in favor of things or substances. For example, the God of Western scholastic Christian theology is an immaterial individual, meaning entirely external to the realm of change and process. It is undeniable that although the Bible is its source and standard, traditional Western Christian theology such as classical theism has been shaped significantly by the legacy of Greek metaphysics.³²

However, an increasing number of thinkers rose to challenge classical theism; among them Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne are distinguished philosophers by whom process philosophy has been developed. Whitehead and Hartshorne believe that the philosophical Absolute is based upon an inadequate philosophy. It arises from the substantialist thinking that Christian theologians derived from the Greeks. They make the metaphysical shift from substances to events.³³ They understand the Absolute not as static and immutable but as dynamic and relational. Process thought begins with the conviction that process is constitutive of all reality. Reality is not made up of static, discrete entities but is dynamic, organic, and social.

It is important, writes Cobb, to notice that “neither Whitehead nor Hartshorne makes the metaphysical shift from substances to events for the sake of a more Biblical

³¹ Ibid., 33-34.

³² Ibid. 31-32.

³³ John Cobb, “Process Theology,” from www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1489, 4.

theism.”³⁴ However, “attributing primacy instead to events, occurrences, happenings, or processes, they arrive at different conclusions, conclusions that turn out to be more congenial to the Bible.”³⁵

Robert Mesle defines process theology with biblical language: “Process theology is the name for an effort to make sense, in the modern world, of the basic Christian faith that God is love [1 John 4:16].”³⁶ With a similar sentiment, Charles Hartshorne explains in his book, *Man’s Vision of God*: “The ground . . . for this book is the conviction that a magnificent intellectual content. . . is implicit in the religious faith most briefly expressed in three words, God is love, which words I sincerely believe are contradicted as truly as they are embodied in the best known of the older theologies [i.e. classical theism] . . .”³⁷

It is well known that process theology champions defeating classical theism. Thus we will study more deeply how process theology challenges the concept of classical theism in order to make sense of the basic Christian faith that “God is love.” In this chapter, we also study whether Wesley can be read as a challenge to classical theism too. It is important to notice that Wesley himself never criticizes classical theism explicitly. Indeed, “classical theism” is a modern term. Wesley’s interest was never metaphysical but was, rather, practical. However we will see that Wesley shares some important modes of thought with process thinkers. This will give us a reasonable ground to claim that Wesley can be also be used to oppose classical theism. We will conclude that for Wesley, Christian perfection is not static state but love’s fullness that is ever growing.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ C. Robert Mesle, *Process Theology: A Basic Introduction* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 1.

³⁷ Charles Hartshorne, *Man’s Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Company, 1941), ix.

1. Challenges to Classical Theism in Process Thought

1) God as Controlling Power?

In her article “Power Lines,” process theologian Catherin Keller confesses that she once asked “Why power and might? Why not power and love?” when “God of Power and Might” rang out at a key movement in the weekly communion liturgy of her tradition.³⁸ Quoting Michel Foucault, she continues to say that “Western discourse commonly reifies power, imagining it as a kind of commodity that one might have more or less of, distribute, or monopolize. Simply put, power is a matter of winning or losing. Presumably, God could also have this power limitlessly, to preserve in omnipotence.”³⁹ She claims that “Christians, in or out of power, have found it irresistible to load the metaphor of divine power with every sort of hope for paternalistic intervention.”⁴⁰

The first sentence of the Nicene Creed - “We believe in God the Father Almighty” - is one of the examples of how much the Western church has valued God’s power and might. However it is important to notice that both the Johannine insistence that “God is love” (1 John 4:7) and the Pauline claim that nothing is able to separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:39) compel us to link divine power and love, not divine power and might. If the former link is reflective of God’s relational power, that is, the ability both to affect and to be affected, which process metaphysics valorizes, the latter connection represents God’s controlling or unilateral power, which is what has traditionally been most highly valued.

³⁸ Catherin Keller, “Power Lines,” *Theology Today* 52, no. 2 (July 1995): 188.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Classical theism typically holds that God is almighty or all powerful, that, in some sense, God is able to do anything without limitation. Traditional theism portrays God as the Controlling Power. Power, in this sense, is the ability to affect others without being affected by them. The doctrine of divine omnipotence finally means that God controls every detail of the world process without being affected by it.

In Western philosophy, this idea of God as controlling power has been reflected in the idea of a “substance.” The substances in a given philosophical system are those things which, according to that system, are the foundational or fundamental entities or realities. Substance is that which remains unchanged through change. Substances are also unique in being independent things. It is that which exists independently, requiring nothing but itself in order to exist. “Two prime cases of substances are God and the (divinely created) human soul. Strictly speaking, of course, God was declared the only true substance.”⁴¹ God is the “Unmoved Mover” that causes the world to move, but God is totally unmoved by the world. In other words, God affects others without being affected by them. Only God is perfectly absolute and able to control everything without being affected by anything. God is almighty, having all the power there is. The notion of divine omnipotence thus includes perfectly unilateral and controlling power.

It is important to notice that “the Greek philosophical models were art and math.”⁴² The point is that a beautiful statue or other pieces of art can affect the viewers without being affected by them at all. A statue or piece of art may impress the viewers, but it can not get angry with them or love them. A concept of unilateral relation becomes that of unilateral power when applied to the idea of God. The crucial problem lies in the fact

⁴¹ C. Robert Mesle, 27.

⁴² Ibid., 28

that in unilateral relation one party can not be in a position to be affected by the other party, meaning love in its essence as interaction is not possible.

According to the Greek philosophers, “God could order the world both in structure and morals without ever being affected by it. So they envisioned the ultimate reality as eternal, unchangeable, passionless.”⁴³ If God cannot be affected by the world, including by us, the crucial problem is that God and world are not in a relation to love each other. To love is both to affect and to be affected. Without either, love is not possible. “To love is to feel all the passions of joy, sorrow, grief, fear, hope, and triumph that bind us to each other, that make life so dynamic and changeable.”⁴⁴ The problem is that in classical theism God becomes the Passionless Absolute with whom the world cannot be in any relation of love.

When repudiating classical theism, process theists point out this problem of love and lament that “For nearly two thousand years Christian theologians have been trying to merge the Greek and biblical ideas of God.”⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas defines omnipotence as power to determine absolutely what happens.⁴⁶ It must be the power to determine every detail of what happens in the world. Hartshorne laments that “the founders of the theological tradition were accepting and applying to deity the *tyrant* ideal of power.”⁴⁷ With a similar sentiment Whitehead argues that “The Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar.”⁴⁸ He continues to say that “The worship of glory

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 11.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, eds. David Ray Griffine and W. Sheburne (New

arising from power is not only dangerous: it arises from a barbaric conception of God. I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the bones of those slaughtered because of men intoxicated by its attraction.”⁴⁹ He rejects the idolatry of fashioning God in the image of imperial rulers.

Process theists such as Cobb and Griffin thus stand against this particular input of Gentile philosophy to Christianity. They criticize that “Although traditional theism said that God was essentially love, the divine love was subordinated to the divine power. . . Power, in the sense of controlling domination, remained the essential definition of deity.”⁵⁰ If God has all the power in the world, then all the evil in the world, they argue, must necessarily come from God alone. They point the essential problem of evil that necessarily comes from this God with controlling power. If God has all the power there is and thus can do anything that can be done, this would in turn result in a problem of causality. If God is in total control, the problem is whatever happens in the world is either directly caused or indirectly allowed to happen by God’s will. Even the misery and injustice of the world must be considered as part of God’s eternal plan. The crucial problem in God’s controlling power is that God can then never be free of responsibility for evil.

Furthermore, process theists suggest another important problem: the problem of freedom. If God is in total control, a criticism becomes apparent that “God has a sheer monopoly of power or decision-making, that he makes our decisions in their full detail

York: The Free Press, 1978), 342.

⁴⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 55.

⁵⁰ John B. Cobb, Jr. & David Ray Griffin, 53.

and concreteness and thus that the only genuine decisions are God's."⁵¹ The problem is that the controlling power that is capable of monopolizing decision-making, of fully determining the details of the world, leaves no matters open for decision by the individuals constituting the world. It is important to notice that to regard non-divine entities as having no power of their own is to jeopardize their existence as others in relation of love with God.

Hartshorne argues that "to be" is "to create,"⁵² meaning to be is to have some power because it is the actualization of some potentiality; actualization is to some extent self-creation. "The creatures must determine something of their own actions, and to this extent the supreme capacity to influence others cannot be a power unilaterally to determine the details of reality. Realities other than God must have their appropriate, non-eminent forms of creativity."⁵³ In other words, there is a variety of powers. The variety of powers means that every concrete effect has various real causes, among which God is the supreme but not sole cause. God is an efficient cause of creatures but not the only causative agent.⁵⁴

According to Whitehead, "The many become one, and are increased by one."⁵⁵ That means that reality is the process in which the one relates, via creativity, to the many. Whitehead says, "Creativity is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact. It is that ultimate metaphysical principle by which the many, which are the

⁵¹ Santiago Sia, *God in Process Thought: A Study in Charles Hartshorne's Concept of God* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), 77.

⁵² Charles Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (La Salle, III: Open Court Pub. Co., 1970), 1.

⁵³ Santiago Sia, 78.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively. It lies in the nature of things that the many enter into complex unity. Creativity is the principle of novelty. An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the many which it unifies.”⁵⁶

By creativity Whitehead means that it is the ultimate metaphysical principle that the past actual entities are creatively unified into a new actual entity. Creativity is not a metaphysical agency that produces anything. Rather it is the character of every concrete fact; in other words it is the nature of things to relate to one another in such a way as to produce novelty in the form of entities or occasions which have never before existed and which shall never exist in just the same way again. Each occasion of experience is a new instance of the many becoming one and being increased by one via creativity.

It is important to remember that for Whitehead “‘Actual entities’ - also termed ‘actual occasions’ - are the final real things of which the world is made up.”⁵⁷ According to Whitehead, “Everything in the actual world is referable to some actual entity. It is either transmitted from an actual entity in the past, or belongs to the subjective aim of the actual entity to whose concrescence it belongs.”⁵⁸ Whitehead describes ‘concrescence’ as the becoming of an actual entity, the becoming in which various aspects of experience merge into a unity. Creative process, for Whitehead, includes the becoming of new subject as well as the appearance of new patterns among things.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 18.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 244. Giving an explanation on the concept of concrescence, Whitehead says “In a process of concrescence, there is a succession of phases in which new prehensions [or feelings] arise by integration of prehensions in antecedent phases. In these integrations ‘feeling’ contribute their ‘subjective forms’ and their ‘data’ to the formation of novel integral prehensions . . . The process continues till all prehensions are components in the one determinate integral satisfaction.”

Whitehead hence argues that the world is a creative advance into novelty. The world is indeed creation; it is creative, meaning the constituents of the world enjoy freedom. Each occasion of experience begins as a reception of a multitude of influences from the past. This relatedness to the past belongs to the essence of the present subject. The present individual takes account of its past, and this past sets boundaries determining what is possible for the present individual. However, how the present individual responds to its past, how it incorporates the past feeling, how it integrates the multiplicity of feelings into a unified experience, is not determined by the past.⁵⁹ The past does not dictate how it must be unified. This is brought about by each present actuality. From this it follows that each individual is partially self-creative; it finally creates itself out of the material that is given to it; in other words each occasion of experience, that is, each individual enjoys the freedom, in varying degrees, to take control of its own existence.

Furthermore according to Whitehead, the process requires an everlasting actual entity, God. For Whitehead, “The order of the world is no accident.”⁶⁰ In arguing for the existence of God, Whitehead states that “the order of the world, the depth of reality of the world, the value of the world in its whole and in its parts, the beauty of the world, the zest of life, the peace of life, and the mastery of evil, are all bound together – not accidentally.”⁶¹ Whitehead continues to argue saying “the universe exhibits a creativity with infinite freedom, and a realm of forms with infinite possibilities; but this creativity and these forms are together impotent to achieve actuality apart from the completed ideal

⁵⁹ John B. Cobb, Jr. & David Ray Griffin, 25.

⁶⁰ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 119.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

harmony, which is God.”⁶² According to Whitehead, without God, the cosmic process cannot be an orderly, creative process, but only a chaos. God functions as the “principle of limitation,” “source of novelty,” and “source of order” enabling the universe to become by aiming at certain values within divinely given limits of freedom. Thus he states: “The notion of supreme being must apply to an actuality in process.”⁶³

This means that an actuality in process is not wholly dependent upon derivation from the past occasion of experience. God, for Whitehead, functions as the One who persuades each present individual beyond what it has become to what it might be. God functions to sustain the aim in God’s primordial nature at vivid experience. God as “the reservoir of potentiality and the coordination of achievement”⁶⁴ provides each worldly actuality with an “initial aim.” The crucial point is that God’s initial aim does not dictate how the experience of occasions is unified. God’s initial aim is an impulse, initially felt by every experiencing subject to actualize the best possibility open to it, given its concrete situation. God is not a despot with controlling power but “the ground for concrete actuality.” God exists as the source of cosmic order.

For Whitehead, each individual subject which enjoys an experience creates itself in the very process of experience. Actual entities or experiencing subjects (i.e. the creatures) actively participate in the process of their own self-formation. The creature mustprehend God’s initial subjective aim proposed to it but final subjective aim is the creature’s fully particular decision. The ultimate freedom is not in behavior but in

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 94.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

experience, just how that particular experience prehends its past, including in that past God's decision, already made, for the particular occasion.⁶⁵

The point to be noticed is, according to Whitehead, that the actual entity, in a state of process during which it is not fully definite, determines its own ultimate definiteness even if it is persuaded by God's initial aim to fulfill its best potentiality and influenced by the occasions of the past to use them as datum. This is the whole point of freedom and moral responsibility. Whitehead describes an actual entity (e.g. a human being) as a free and moral agent who can actively participate in, and is to be responsible for, the process of its own self-formation.

In conclusion, process theism rejects God as Controlling Power because by this classical concept, God is never free from the responsibility for evil, nor is there any room for an actual entity such as a human being to be itself a free and responsible agent. The crucial problem in this classical concept of God as Controlling Power is that this classical God cannot enter into relation with God's creatures in love, for love does not rule. Love is not possible when the relation is unilateral, in which one party must be ruled or controlled absolutely by other party's almighty power. Love is possible when the subjects involved are free and responsible agents. Even if classical theists claimed God as Controlling Power for the sake of a more Biblical theism, process theists argue that it fails to understand God as love.

⁶⁵ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes*, 22.

2) God as Cosmic Moralist?

In traditional theology, God has referred to One Supreme or Holy Being, the unity of ultimate reality and ultimate goodness. God is believed to have created the entire universe out of nothing and to rule over it. God is believed to be the supreme ruler, the ruler of all.

It is important to remember that the Greek philosopher Plato dreamed of a harmonious social order in which each individual element was given the justice of its own appropriate merit. Traditionally, morality is a matter of judging the individual or his/her actions in behalf of a social order. Morality is often thought as a matter of rules or principles to keep the social order. In classical theism, God is Cosmic Moralist whose primary concern is the development of moral attitudes for the cosmic social order. God, as the source of the law, is quick to punish those who defy the law. God is the ruler of the entire cosmos and the ruler of all events. The Western Christian tendency is to seek absolute rules or principles of morality.

Process thinkers strongly oppose this God as Cosmic Moralist whose primary concern is the development of moral attitudes. Cobb and Griffin criticize this conceptualization of God, saying “At its worst this notion takes the form of the image of God as divine lawgiver and judge, who has proclaimed an arbitrary set of moral rules, who keeps records of offenses, and who will punish offenders.”⁶⁶ The problem they suggest is that God is primarily understood as a judge, not love. So conceived, God is primarily concerned with the development of moral behavior. This means that “the promotion of creaturely enjoyment is not God’s first concern. In fact, in most Christian

⁶⁶ John B. Cobb, Jr. & David Ray Griffin, 8.

circles enjoyment has been understood as something that God at best tolerated, and often as something that he opposed.”⁶⁷ This traditional view of God as Cosmic Moralists thus includes a crucial problem, the problem that moral behavior and enjoyment stand in tension. For example, “the pleasure of sexual relation is tolerated, as long as it is only a concomitant of the primary function of sex, which is the morally sound intention to have children. The use of contraceptives has been frowned upon, since their use would mean the explicit admission that sexual intercourse was being engaged in solely for the enjoyment it brings.”⁶⁸

To the contrary, “Process theology sees God’s fundamental aim to be the promotion of the creatures’ own enjoyment. God’s creative influence upon them is loving, because it aims at promoting that which the creatures experience as intrinsically good.”⁶⁹ It is important to remember that for Whitehead, “the actuality is the enjoyment, and this enjoyment is the experiencing of value.”⁷⁰ According to Whitehead, reality is both processive and value-laden. Whitehead says, “The purpose of God is the attainment of value in the temporal world. . . . Value is inherent in actuality itself. To be an actual entity is to have a self-interest. This self-interest is a feeling of self valuation. . . . This self-interest is the interest of what one’s existence comes to. It is the ultimate enjoyment of being actual.”⁷¹ To be actual is, for Whitehead, to be a value in oneself and for oneself as well as for others. For Whitehead, value is thus central metaphysically as well as morally and aesthetically.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 100.

Process thinkers, hence, maintain that at the root of Whitehead's metaphysics is a moral philosophy and this moral philosophy is an aestheticism, for it is Whitehead's belief that the metaphysical order is constituted by value. Whitehead writes "Value is the name I use for the intrinsic reality of an event."⁷² For Whitehead, aesthetic experience, or aesthetic enjoyment contains the dominant value of life. Aesthetics is about the art of life and the beauty of experience. According to Whitehead, his metaphysical doctrine "finds the foundations of the world in the aesthetic experience; All order is aesthetic order."⁷³

Whitehead acknowledges that "The ordering entity is a necessary element in the metaphysical situation presented by the actual world. . . . There is an actual world because there is an order in nature."⁷⁴ He sees "the necessity for God in the moral order." In this sense, Whitehead and classical theists may shake hands. God is a necessary being for the cosmic moral order. However, opposing classical theists' concept of God as Cosmic Moralist whose primary concern is the development of moral behavior for cosmic social order, he writes that "the purpose of God" is "in the attainment of value." For Whitehead, "The actual world is the outcome of the aesthetic order, and the aesthetic order is derived from the immanence of God."⁷⁵ According to Whitehead, "The moral order is merely certain aspects of aesthetic order."⁷⁶ Morality cannot be an end in itself.

It follows from this line of thinking that process theologians maintain that God's primary concern is not the development of moral behavior in which God is depicted as lawgiver and a judge but the promotion of aesthetic enjoyment in which value is

⁷² Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Mentor Books, 1959), 89.

⁷³ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 104-5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

experienced and attained. “In traditional Christianity, morality and enjoyment were often seen as in fundamental opposition” but in process thought, “morality stands in the service of enjoyment.”⁷⁷

It is important to notice that the metaphysical concept of God’s primary concern as aesthetic enjoyment is not in conflict with an emphasis on morality. “God wants us to enjoy, true. But he wants us all to enjoy. . . . He wants our enjoyment to be such as to increase the enjoyment of others.”⁷⁸ For Whitehead, “To be moral is to actualize oneself in such a way as to maximize the enjoyments of future actualities, insofar as these future enjoyments can be conditioned by one’s present decision.”⁷⁹ In order to understand this statement argued by Whitehead, we must understand both the intrinsic value and the instrumental value.

According to the teaching of Whitehead’s metaphysics, the fundamental units of reality are “actual entities,” “actual occasions,” or “occasions of experience” that attain some value and pass out of existence in the process of being succeeded by other entities. For Whitehead, one actual entity is one occasion of experience and contributes to other entities by participating in their constitution. Each occasion of experience is an instant event of the many becoming one and being increased by one. Actual entities are experiencing subjects, meaning that the real constitution of the fundamental things that make up the universe is their experience. Cobb and Griffin explain that “what we call individuals, the sorts of things that endure through time” are “societies,” the societies of momentary experiences. For example, “Personal human existence is a serially ordered

⁷⁷ John B. Cobb, Jr. & David Ray Griffin, 56-57.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

society of occasions of experience.”⁸⁰ The real individuals or the experiencing subjects “are simply the processes of their own momentary becoming.” Occasions of experience or actual entities are thus, for Whitehead, “the final real things of which the world is made up.”⁸¹ Thus Whitehead writes, “The actual world is a process, and that the process is the becoming of actual entities.”⁸² Whitehead names this becoming of actual entity “aesthetic synthesis” or “concrescence” which means “becoming concrete,” in other words, “the merging of various aspects of experience into a unity.”

It is important to remember that each experience begins with data from previous experiences as well as from God’s initial aim or the divine persuasion. Remember that God is not sole cause of all happenings; God is, for Whitehead, one supreme datum among many. God acts always in relation to all occasions of experience that have their own measure of causal self-determination in their interaction with other actual entities.⁸³ For example, an occasion of human experience receives influences from both the past experiences and from God. The process by which an occasion of experience grasps other experiences as objects or data of its own past experiences is coined “prehension” or “feeling.”⁸⁴

Prehension has positive and negative sides. Positive prehension is the act by which an occasion of experience absorbs data from other experiences while negative prehension

⁸⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁸¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

⁸² Ibid., 22.

⁸³ For Whitehead, God is an actual entity among many but as God is non-temporal, he excludes God from the usual usage of actual entity or actual occasion. He writes, “Actual entity will be taken to mean a conditioned actual entity of the temporal world, unless God is expressly included in the discussion. The term actual occasion will always exclude God from its scope.” Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.

⁸⁴ For Whitehead, “feeling” is “the term used for the basic generic operation of passing from the objectivity of the data to the subjectivity of the actual entity in question.” Feeling is the generic operation of effecting a transition into subjectivity. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 40.

is the act by which an actual entity excludes data from its own feeling. Every prehension involves three factors: “(a) the ‘subject’ which is prehending, namely, the actual entity in which that prehension is a concrete element; (b) the ‘datum’ which is prehended; (c) the ‘subjective form’ which is *how* that subject prehends that datum.”⁸⁵ The data that are prehended by an actual entity consist of “eternal objects” and other actual entities.

According to Whitehead, “An eternal object is always a potentiality for actual entities.”⁸⁶ Eternal objects are variously called to as “transcendent entities,” “ideal forms,” “pure potentials,” or “abstract forms.” Specifically, for Whitehead, eternal objects are the real potentialities, patterns, structures, and grades of relevance and value which are revealed in our world such as colors, sounds, scents, and geometrical figures. Eternal objects transcend particular concrete occasions of actual happening but are such that they are exemplified in everything that is actual. The fact that eternal objects transcend particular concrete occasions of actual happening points to their “eternal” nature. Also, the fact that eternal objects are such that they are exemplified in everything that is actual points to their function as “objects.” It is important to remember that, for Whitehead, “objects” are those entities which are given antecedently as the data from which an emergent actual occasion draws for its formation.⁸⁷ Furthermore, given that eternal objects are pure potentials, they are “devoid of intrinsic value.” However, they are “valuable as elements in purpose.” For example, the color of greenness, in and of itself, possesses no value, but is valuable to the grass which seeks to actualize itself as green.

⁸⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas* (New York: New American Library, 1955), 178-9.

According to Whitehead prehensions of “eternal objects” are termed “conceptual prehensions” and prehensions of “actual entities” are termed “physical prehension.” The instance when the prehension is experienced is the moment of concrescence. What we call a human being is, for Whitehead, composed of a myriad of individual occasions of experience that are dynamic acts of “concrescence” or “aesthetic synthesis.” Conversely, the concrescence of an actual entity is an aesthetic unity of what Whitehead refers to as “prehension.” Whitehead says that an emergent actual occasion prehends “for the foundation of its own existence, the various elements of the universe out of which it arises.”⁸⁸ Whitehead also writes, “Each actual entity is an arrangement of the whole universe, actual and ideal, whereby there is constituted that self-value which is the entity itself.”⁸⁹ Each actual entity is “conceived as an act of experience arising out of data. It is a process of ‘feeling’ the many data, so as to absorb them into the unity of one individual ‘satisfaction.’”⁹⁰ The satisfaction, or completion of an actual entity “embodies what the actual entity is beyond itself” for subsequent occasions.⁹¹ The important point here is a selection, the selection of previous data for “inclusion for” and “exclusion from” the final satisfaction. This is why Whitehead says, “Actualization is a selection among possibilities.”⁹²

The internal constitution of the emergent entity is comprised by the prehensions, either positive or negative, of the data. The data are determined, meaning they constitute the conditions and limitations under which the emergent entity actualizes itself through a

⁸⁸ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 219.

⁸⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 98.

⁹⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 40.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁹² Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 159.

selection among possibilities. In this sense, an entity is “internally determined” for the data from which an emergent entity draws are determined by entities other than the emergent occasion. Whiteheads says, “The concrescence of each individual actual entity is internally determined and is externally free.”⁹³

However, even if the data are determined, “there is always a remainder for the decision” of the occasion as to how these data are felt.⁹⁴ Whitehead says, “the *how* of feeling, though it is germane to the data, is not fully determined by the data.”⁹⁵ In so far as an experiencing subject makes a decision as to how the data enter into its constitution, the entity is “externally free.”

According to Whitehead, “The point to be noticed is that the actual entity, in a state of process during which it is not fully definite, determines its own ultimate definiteness. This is the whole point of moral responsibility. Such responsibility is conditioned by the limits of the data, and by the categorical conditions of concrescence.”⁹⁶ In this sense, for Whitehead, it is the actual entity, the experiencing subject that is intrinsically valuable. Only the actual entity or the experiencing subject can be something in and for itself. This is the point of “the intrinsic value.” To be actual means to be a value in itself and for itself. In and of itself each actual entity has intrinsic value.

However, it is important to remember that for Whitehead the process includes a “transition” from one actual entity to another. Actual entities are momentary events, meaning a present experience is essentially related to the previous experiences of the past as well as the following experiences of the future. Remember that many become one and

⁹³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 27.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27-8.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

be increased by one. The present entity “prehends” or “feels” the previous occasions and comes into being immediately followed by being perished. The perishing marks the “transition” to the following events. In the process of transition, each actual entity loses its subjective immediacy, in other words, “perishes” however gains objectivity as a form. The completed actual entity as a form functions as an object or a data for the prehensions of the following actual occasions. Whitehead says that the completion, or satisfaction, of an actual entity “embodies what the actual entity is beyond itself” for subsequent occasions.⁹⁷ From this it follows that, for Whitehead, one entity, or one occasion of experience contributes for others by participating in their constitution. This is the point of “the instrumental value”; to be actual means to be a value for others. Each actual entity has instrumental value for others.

This is why Whitehead states that morality is an aesthetic one: “To be moral is to actualize oneself in such a way as to maximize the enjoyments of future actualities, insofar as these future enjoyments can be conditioned by one’s present decision.”⁹⁸ It is experiencing subjects that enjoy inherent intrinsic value in and for themselves as well as inherent instrumental value for others. The important point that we are to remember is that the idea of subjectivity includes both receptivity and activity. One occasion of experience is affected by the occasions of experience of the past and affects the occasions of experience of the future. There is no single subject that is not acted on, and there is no single subject that does not act.⁹⁹ Experiencing subjects are, thus, committed to moral continuity. They are aimed at keeping promises made in the past and lured in the present

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ John B. Cobb, Jr. “Whitehead’s Theory of Value,” from www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2232, 1-2.

to plan the future so as to be able to be responsible for their actions. The process of enjoyment arises out of their feelings or prehensions of past occasions of experience and then contributes some of their feelings to future occasions of experience.

It is important to remember that, for Whitehead, “Experience is good in itself to the extent that it is characterized by beauty. Hence, the criteria are aesthetic criteria.”¹⁰⁰

Remember that, for Whitehead, “All experience is enjoyment. To be actual is to be an occasion of experience and hence an occasion of enjoyment.”¹⁰¹ To be moral is, thus, to maximize the enjoyments of future actualities as well as to maximize the beauty of an intrinsic goodness of its own experiences. Therefore, both the intrinsic value and instrumental value are necessary metaphysical concepts for the argument of Whitehead: morality is ultimately in that sense a matter of “aesthetics.” To be actual is to be a value in and for oneself as well as for others; morality stands in the service of enjoyment. “To be moral is to actualize oneself in such a way as to maximize the enjoyments of future actualities, insofar as these future enjoyments can be conditioned by one’s present decision.”¹⁰²

It is important to remember that Whitehead keeps turning his eye to a supreme being for this maximum of beauty as a possible reality. According to Whitehead, an actuality in process is not wholly dependent upon derivation from the past occasions of experience. There is God in the process of actuality. God, for Whitehead, functions as the One who persuades each experiencing subject to fulfill its maximum satisfaction, or enjoyment. God persuades every actual entity to actualize its best possibility, in other

¹⁰⁰ David Ray Griffin, *God, Power and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1976), 282.

¹⁰¹ John B. Cobb, Jr. & David Ray Griffin, 17.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

words, to maximize its enjoyment available to itself, given its concrete situation. For Whitehead, the divine providential activity, therefore, is “instrumental in the evolution of our world.”¹⁰³ Aesthetic order of the world is, for Whitehead, derived from the immanence of God. The purpose of God is not in putting absolute rules or principles of morality as an end in itself as classic theists claimed through the concept of God as Cosmic Moralist. According to Whitehead, “The actuality is the enjoyment, and this enjoyment of the experiencing of value” and God’s purpose is to lure each actual entity to realize the maximum of its potentiality. Each experiencing subject is called by God to feel its maximum self valuation in and for itself and to attain maximum satisfaction for the succeeding subjects. For Whitehead, God is not Cosmic Moralist; God is “the divine Eros” to call each actuality to enjoy its maximum satisfaction.

3) God as the Impassible Absolute?

It is well known that during the history of Western Christian reflection, the biblical notion of the mighty acts of God was expressed and elaborated in the classical doctrine of the divine sovereignty. The mighty God was perceived as governing the universe in accordance with almighty power. The divine King was understood as controlling all events either directly (primary causality: directly causing them to happen) or indirectly (secondary causality: permitting them to happen). The doctrine of divine sovereignty combined with divine immutability led to the conception of an exclusively self-sufficient, omniscient, and all-powerful deity, that is, the totally Other. God’s relation toward the world became oversimplified.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

According to the simplified logic of the Absolute as the totally Other, the difference between God and the world is understood exclusively in terms of opposition: God is eternal while the world is temporal; God is not changing at all but the world is in flux; God is perfectly self-sufficient whereas the world is only dependent.¹⁰⁴ Thus God as the Other was conceived as “the Unmoved Mover,” in other words, “the Impassible Absolute” who is unaffected by any otherness while his created world is dependent on him. God as the Impassible Absolute creates, sustains, governs, and controls the world. The universe depends on God both for its being and for its values. However, nothing acts on God or causally affects God because God is perfectly self-sufficient and absolute. While the world is affected by God, God is not affected by the universe. Everything other than God depends upon God for both its existence and values. God depends upon nothing but Godself.

If this concept of classical theism is right, the crucial question arises: “Can a maximally perfect Being be touched by the suffering of God’s creatures?” In other words, Is God in love with us, given the essence of love is mutual relationship in which each party must affect and be affected by the other party? Can God be responsive to the joys and sorrows of God’s creatures and grieve with all who grieve? Is God passionate to our joy, sorrow, or despair?

Disputing one of the doctrines of classical theism, “God as the Unchanging and Passionless Absolute” Cobb and Griffin say that the notion of “impassibility” stresses that “deity must be completely unaffected by any other reality” and thus “must lack all passion or emotional response.” They also maintain that the notion of deity as the

¹⁰⁴ Nancy Frankenberry, “Classical Theism, Panentheism, and Pantheism: On the Relation between God Construction and Gender Construction,” *Zygon* 28, no. 1 (March 1993): 31.

“Absolute” means that “God is not really related to the world” for God is the totally Other.¹⁰⁵ According to them, God as Impassible Absolute is nothing but God as Passionless Absolute who is not related to the world for God must lack all passion to the joy and suffering of God’s creatures.

It is important to remember that “Western metaphysics has been generally an expression of substance thinking. . . . Christian theology, a Western product, has made use mostly of substantive thinking.”¹⁰⁶ In much of Western philosophy, the world is thought to be composed of substances and their attributes. The substantive view of reality at its center maintains that there are things, entities, persons, lives that are what they are, as they are, when they are. In Aristotle, a substance is what it is and thus is ultimate when it is. It needs only itself in order to exist. Relations, hence, are essentially among substances only.¹⁰⁷ “Aristotle emphasizes that, even though it [substance] causes change and movement, it is not itself changed or moved.”¹⁰⁸ He says, “there is something in our experience which causes change or movement without being changed.”¹⁰⁹ Substances are never affected by others but themselves; in other words, they are the subjects with constancy through change. “They possess certain attributes, certain predicates, which as such in themselves can be predicated of no other subject.”¹¹⁰ Classical theism that is influenced by this Greek idea of substance, thus, asserts a corresponding concept of God, in which God “requires nothing but itself in order to exist.”

¹⁰⁵ John B. Cobb, Jr. & David Ray Griffin, 8-9.

¹⁰⁶ Nels F. S. Ferre, “Beyond Substance and Process,” *Theology Today* 24. no. 2 (July 1967): 161.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁰⁸ Gerard Watson, *Greek Philosophy and the Christian Notion of God* (Blackrock, Co Dublin: The Columba Press, 1994), 32.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹⁰ Nels F. S. Ferre, “Beyond Substance and Process,” 162.

Process thinkers deny this God as “the Unmoved Mover” or “the Impassable Absolute.” According to the process thinkers, this “classical” conceptualization of God denies God any relationship with the world, meaning love is not possible for love in its essence requires mutual interaction. It also removes God from its metaphysical exemplar because God totally controls the world, receives nothing from it, and is absolutely perfect and complete without it, in and by Godself. God is totally Other. Contrary to the classical theism, Whitehead says, “God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles. . . . He is their chief exemplification.”¹¹¹ Thus Whitehead understands God in metaphysical realm as an “actual entity” that functions with the universe. God reveals “the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire”¹¹² which “slowly and in quietness operate by love.”¹¹³ With love God guides the course of things within the universe into “the creative advance into novelty.” According to Whitehead, “the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the world.”¹¹⁴ Each continually provides novelty to the other. Their mutual immanence implies that there is relationship between them. Process thinkers understand that “God is love,” meaning “God is the unique Subject, whose love is the foundation of all reality. It is through God’s love that all things live and move and have their being. God is supremely related One, sharing the experience of every creature, and being experienced by every creature.”¹¹⁵

In order to understand more deeply the way in which God interacts with God’s universe in a way that both God and the world enjoy relationship with each other, we

¹¹¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 344.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 343.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 348.

¹¹⁵ C. Robert Mesle, 8.

must study deeper how process thinkers understand the divine metaphysically.

According to Whitehead, “the nature of God is dipolar. He has a primordial nature and a consequent nature.”¹¹⁶ The most important texts in his corpus for the conception of God follow:

“Viewed as primordial, he is the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality. . . . But, as primordial, so far is he from ‘eminent reality,’ that in this abstraction he is ‘deficiently actual’ – and this in two ways. His feelings are only conceptual and so lack the fullness of actuality. Secondly, conceptual feelings, apart from complex integration with physical feelings, are devoid of consciousness in their subjective forms. . . . His conceptual actuality at once exemplifies and establishes the categoreal conditions. The conceptual feelings, which compose his primordial nature, exemplify in their subjective forms their mutual sensitivity and their subjective unity of subjective aim. These subjective forms are valuations determining the relative relevance of eternal objects for each occasion of actuality. He is the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire. . . . But God, as well as being primordial, is also consequent. He is the beginning and the end. . . . He is the presupposed actuality of conceptual operation, in unison of becoming with every other creative act. Thus by reason of the relativity of all things there is a reaction of the world on God. The completion of God’s nature into fullness of physical feeling is derived from the objectification of the world in God. . . . One side of God’s nature is constituted by his conceptual experience. This experience is the primordial fact in the world, limited by no actuality which it presupposes. It is therefore infinite, devoid of all negative prehensions. This state of his nature is free, complete, primordial, eternal, actually deficient, and unconscious. The other side originates with physical experience derived from the temporal world, and then acquires integration with the primordial side. It is determined, incomplete, consequent, ‘everlasting,’ fully actual, and conscious. His necessary goodness expresses the determination of his consequent nature.”¹¹⁷

For Whitehead, God includes in Godself both a mental pole and a physical pole.

However this does not mean that Whitehead is a mind-body dualist as Descartes understood. Mind and body are not real substances themselves as such, but aspects of

¹¹⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 343-345.

every actual entity. For Whitehead, the two poles are distinguishable but inseparable aspects of God as an “actual but non-temporal entity”; in other words, neither can exist apart from the other and each requires the other. The two poles work in harmony in the process of God's interaction with the world. God’s mental pole is God’s primordial nature in which God envisages the eternal objects and grades their relevance for all concrescent entities, providing each with its own relevant lures for feeling. God’s physical pole is God’s consequent nature that involves God’s physical prehensions of the temporal actual entities in their objectifications.

God’s primordial nature is, as quoted above, for Whitehead, “free, eternal, complete, actually deficient and unconscious.” It is “free” for it has no past and thus it is not conditioned by any past. It is “eternal” as it consists of a timeless prehension of every eternal object. It is “complete” because in it there is final completeness which consists in the conceptual realization of all the potentialities. However, this is also the reason why it is “actually deficient,” that is, abstracted from actuality, for it only includes the conceptual prehensions of the infinite wealth of possibilities, meaning it lacks the fullness of actuality; there is no physical prehensions in God’s primordial nature.¹¹⁸ For this very reason, for Whitehead, God in his primordial nature may be understood “unmoved” by other occasions. It may be true, as traditional theists claimed, that God is self-sufficient; there is unilateral relation between God and the world if God’s nature is only primordial.

However, God is, for Whitehead, dipolar. God includes not only a mental, abstract, non-temporal pole as a primordial nature but also a physical, concrete, temporal aspect as

¹¹⁸ It is, thus, “unconscious,” in other words it is devoid of consciousness in their subjective form because consciousness can arise only by integrating the physical prehensions with conceptual prehensions.

a consequent nature. While God's primordial nature is complete, unchanged, or unaffected by reason of its final completeness or by reason of its prehension of the complete range of eternal possibilities, God's consequent nature "evolves in its relationship to the evolving world." It is the world's influence on God for "the consequent nature is the weaving of God's physical feelings upon his primordial concepts."¹¹⁹ In God's consequent nature, God experiences the actuality, meaning God is acted upon or being affected. This is why Whitehead argues that the weaving of God's physical feelings upon God's primordial concepts is also "the physical prehension by God of the actualities of the evolving universe."¹²⁰ The world is an "instrument of novelty" for God's own constitution. "The consequent nature of God is the fulfillment of his experience by his reception of the multiple freedom of actuality into the harmony of his own actualization."¹²¹ Its content flows into it from the temporal world. The completion of God's nature into a fullness of physical feeling is derived from the objectifications of the world in God.

Furthermore, it is important to notice that when the world affects the consequent nature of God, there is no loss, no obstruction; the world is felt in a unison of immediacy in God. The consequent nature is God's prehension of all the actual processes of the world. It is the record of all actualities, all achieved facts, a perfect reservoir of what has been. Whitehead calls this existence of all the past events in the present the "objective immortality" of the world in God. All the past occasions live on as objectively immortal. The whole world as felt in God's consequent nature becomes everlasting. All the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 345.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 88.

¹²¹ Ibid., 349.

experiences of actual occasions are harmonized into a perfected system in God's consequent nature. "But the principle of universal relativity is not to be stopped at the consequent nature of God. This nature itself passes into the temporal world according to its gradation of relevance to the various concrescent occasions."¹²² God in God's primordial nature works in harmony with God's consequent nature to provide "initial aim" to the temporal world for each occasion to actualize its best potentiality.

It follows from this that, for Whitehead, the two natures, primordial and consequent, work in harmony in the process of God's interaction with the world. God in God's primordial nature provides each occasion in the temporal world with its own relevant lures for its best potentiality being actualized. God in God's consequent nature receives the whole world of actual occasions into God's experience. All perishing experiences of temporal occasions achieve a kind of "objective immortality" in God. It means that God is acted upon, in other words, affected. For Whitehead "God creates the World, as that the World creates God."¹²³ It does not mean that the world brings God into existence; the activity of the world makes no difference to God's existence but only to God's experience of the world. It means that the world creates something in God, in other words, the world affects God with something for what shall become objectively immortal in God. God is acted upon; God is affected and thus God is not impassible.

Therefore, process theism is critical of the traditional theism that claims God as Impassible Absolute. This classical idea of God is based upon the terms of Aristotle, "*actus purus*" (pure act) and "unmoved mover." "To say that God is pure act is to say that anything God could be, God already is – there is no potentiality in God for any type

¹²² Ibid., 350.

¹²³ Ibid., 348.

of change. To say that God is the unmoved mover is to say that the divine moves others but is unmoved by another – this includes the idea that God is impassible, literally, without feeling or emotion.”¹²⁴

However, given God’s consequent nature, Whitehead’s God is not an “imperial ruler” who has no concern or passion for the world, but a compassionate guide who shares with the other actual entities their joys and sorrows, and preserves all their experiences alike with a “tender care” in Godself.¹²⁵ Whitehead is opposed to the traditional notion of a perfect God who makes Godself self-sufficient such that nothing could be added to Godself.¹²⁶ God’s consequent nature is conceived under the image of “tender care” and it is God’s tender care that nothing be lost.¹²⁷ According to Whitehead, like any other actual entity God has both joy and suffering in so far as God is affected by the experiences of the actual entities in the temporal world in God’s consequent nature. God can save and preserve the experiences of the temporal actual entities in the perfected system which God achieves in God’s consequent nature.¹²⁸ In this sense for Whitehead, “God is the great companion – the fellow-sufferer who understands.”¹²⁹

It is important to notice that for process theists “divine love is more than beneficence; it includes sensitivity to the joy and sorrows of the beloved.”¹³⁰ Process theism finds positive value in the idea that God’s love is passive as well as active. According to process theists it is as important that God wills the good of the temporal

¹²⁴ “Process Theism,” from [http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-theism.](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-theism/), 5/49.

¹²⁵ Gummaraju Srinivasan, *Whitehead’s Concept of God* (Bangalore: Karnatak Book Agency, 1975), 32.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

¹²⁸ Gummaraju Srinivasan, 50.

¹²⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

¹³⁰ “Process Theism,” from [http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-theism.](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-theism/), 6/49.

world as that God is affected by its joy and suffering. While classical theism claims that God as the Absolute Impassible is in all respects active and in no respect passive, process theism finds the alternative that God is active in some respects in God's primordial nature and passive in other respects in God's consequent nature. Dipolar God in process theism is the one who lures the world for its best satisfaction and feels the joy and suffering of the world with God's tender care.

4) God as Perfected Perfect?

What is perfection? Western tradition has claimed that "Perfection is the conformity of a reality to its concept. . . Perfection will occur most generally as the conformity of execution to purpose."¹³¹ What Western tradition has argued is that purpose or end is the essence of perfection, in other words, the definition of perfection is the fitness to purpose.¹³² Once the idea of perfection was understood as the conformity of a thing to its purpose, perfection has been considered as always perfect, meaning according to Western tradition, perfection is the full realization; there are no degrees because perfection is always perfect perfection, that is, *perfected* perfection.

It is important to remember that Western tradition applied the idea of perfection to the existence of God. The ideal of perfection has had its highest fulfillment in the concept of God. Western tradition claimed that God is absolute and "God himself is perfection."¹³³ It is important to notice that according to Western tradition, perfection is

¹³¹ Martin Foss, *The Idea of Perfection in the Western World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1946), 8. Refer to chapter one of this book for the historical overview of the idea of perfection.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 7.

“the circular movement of self-aim.”¹³⁴ Perfect totality means by completeness, that is, something finished and limited.¹³⁵ “Perfection was and could only be the conformity and completeness of means for the goal, or of predicates for the subject.”¹³⁶ God’s absolute perfection, thus, means nothing but a circle, a return to the start.¹³⁷ God’s perfection means “an absolute completion, a finishing in its form and boundaries, a rounding off and termination.”¹³⁸

However, Charles Hartshorne points out the problem of God as the absolute, saying “If God is purely absolute, then the being which he enjoys simply in himself is his *only* being, and if this cannot be known, then it seems we can know or think *nothing* of God, either as he is in himself or not as he is in himself.”¹³⁹ He explains what he means, posing a question, “What we know rationally is only God as cause of the world. But how can we know God as causally related to the world, if he is not related at all, if he has no relative being?”¹⁴⁰ Posing a critical question, Hartshorne delineates the problem of the classical concept of God as the absolute in God’s total exemption from relation with the world.

In a similar sentiment, Martin Foss argues that “A perfect God, a God who in a perfect way fulfills his end, is an irreligious concept. God is here transformed into a thing, into a lifeless but expedient and therefore perfect object.”¹⁴¹ Criticizing the

¹³⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 20.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 30.

¹³⁹ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 15.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Martin Foss, *The Idea of Perfection in the Western World*, 26.

Western tradition, he argues that the idea of divine absolute perfection has been bought at a high price. “To save this idea, end had to cancel itself as an aim which aims at itself; the creative movement was reduced to a static circle. Such a circle is something empty, useless and even meaningless. And empty and meaningless, therefore, is the idea of divine perfection.”¹⁴² The problem of divine absolute perfection lies in the fact that “the perfect divine order, being in itself walled up and totally self-sufficient, cannot have any relation to this world.”¹⁴³

Of course, Hartshorne understands why it is religiously significant that God be supposed absolute. The reason is that “absoluteness is requisite for complete reliability.”¹⁴⁴ The problem of relativity is that if the conditions happen to be unfavorable, what is relative to conditions may fail us. Therefore, if there is to be anything that cannot fail, it must be nonrelative, that is, absolute.¹⁴⁵ This is why the dominant theological position in the West, called classical theism, rejects all relativity for God. The core doctrine of the traditional theism has been that God, to be God, must be in all respects absolute and in no respects relative. “The religious value of the term absolute is that it connotes reliability or stability.”¹⁴⁶ Hence the concept of perfection that has been applied to God in classical theism was considered as nonrelative, changeless, static, fully actualized, that is, *perfected*. For traditional theism, there are no degrees or changes; perfection means static or *perfected* perfection.

¹⁴² Ibid., 20.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 22.

¹⁴⁴ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*, 22.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 41.

Hartshorne stands against this classical view of divine perfection as static, changeless, and *perfected*. He poses a question, “Do we then have to admit that God cannot change?” He answers, “Clearly yes, insofar as change is for the worse and capacity for it objectionable, a fault or weakness. God then cannot change for the worse. . . . But does every conceivable kind of change show a fault or weakness? Is there not change for the better?”¹⁴⁷ He points that Anselm, in his famous “ontological” argument for the existence of God sought to define God as “that than which nothing greater (or better) can be conceived.” He observes that Anselm tried to define the divine worth as strictly unsurpassable in all respects and incapable of growth at all.¹⁴⁸ According to Anselm, the concept of change when applied to God means to become worse, that is, imperfection.

Hartshorne, thus, understands that the essential problem of the idea of perfection in traditional theism centers on the concept of change. He says, “Change is not finally analyzable as destruction, but only as creation of novelty.”¹⁴⁹ Change is not necessarily all negative but positive. He argues that if the idea of perfection means absolutely no change, then “the perfect-*and*-the-imperfect is something superior to the perfect ‘alone’-or as independent of the imperfect.”¹⁵⁰ According to Hartshorne, the one-sided, sheer independence assigned to God, in ideally absolute form in classical theism, only proves God as immutable and impassive. The perfect God of absolute independence is not admirable at all; instead “this seems plainly an idealization of the tyrant-subject

¹⁴⁷ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes*, 6.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴⁹ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes*, 8.

¹⁵⁰ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*, 19.

relationship.”¹⁵¹ Process thought truly “gives primacy to interdependence as an ideal over independence.”¹⁵² It is important to notice that for process thinkers, interdependence is not just an ideal but an ontologically given characteristic. Perfection, for process thinkers, involves maximizing relatedness to others, and hence dependence upon them.¹⁵³

It follows from this that Hartshorne uses perfection and excellence synonymously. He says, “Let us define perfection as an excellence such that rivalry or superiority on the part of other individuals is impossible, but self-superiority is not impossible.”¹⁵⁴ The way in which he defines perfection as an excellence is based upon his understanding of perfection in two different types: *absolute* perfection and *relative* perfection. He says, “According to the first meaning. . . . the perfect is *unsurpassable in conception or possibility even by itself*; according to the second meaning it is *unsurpassable except by itself*. The first or absolute unsurpassability may be called *absolute perfection*; the second may be called *relative perfection*.”¹⁵⁵ For Hartshorne, perfection is not just a static completeness; it means excellence that includes a concept of a dynamic movement beyond a limit. Excellence “has a dimension of dependence as well as independence.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, for Hartshorne, the perfect in excellence is the “self-surpassing surpasser of all.”¹⁵⁷ Given this idea of perfection, he defines God as “the surpasser of all others” or “self-

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵² John B. Cobb, Jr. & David Ray Griffin, 21.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*, 20.

¹⁵⁵ Charles Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Company, 1941), 7.

¹⁵⁶ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*, 18. According to Hartshorne, it is not self-evident that independence as such is excellence, and that excellence as such is independence.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 20.

surpassing surpasser of all” who “must be a single individual enjoying as his own all the values of all other individuals, and incapable of failing to do so.”¹⁵⁸ It is important to notice that the idea that God surpasses permanently God’s own perfection means that every stage of God’s perfection is perfect in relation to God’s previous stage. God is always perfect but at the same time open to the novelty in God’s perfection.

It follows from this that Hartshorne’s logic of perfection is dipolar. The idea of perfection, for Hartshorne, includes both an *absolute* perfection that is always perfect and a *relative* perfection that is open to the novelty. He says, “While all beings have some measure of ‘absoluteness’ or independence of relationships and some measure of ‘relativity,’ God, only God, is in one aspect of his being strictly or maximally absolute, and in another aspect no less strictly or maximally relative.”¹⁵⁹ For Hartshorne, God is an absolutely independent God [wholly non-relative] as well as maximally dependent God [wholly relative]. Not only does perfection, for him, include absoluteness but also relativity.

While the classical static idea of perfection means a closed circle from start to finish, process thought provides an idea of perfection that is both closed in one sense but open in the other aspect. John Cobb describes this dipolarity beautifully, saying “The content of the divine life certainly grows ever more complex, but this does not affect the nature of God.”¹⁶⁰ For process thought, in some sense God changes, meaning God is relative, dependent, or in relation, however this change does not involve any change in the form of

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁶⁰ John B Cobb, Jr., *The Process Perspective: Frequently Asked Questions about Process Theology*, ed. Jeanyen B. Slettom (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003), 32.

God or in God's nature or character, meaning God is absolute, independent, or transcendent.

As previously discussed, for process thinkers such as Whitehead and Hartshorne, God is dipolar. "Absolute" and "relative" aspects of the perfect are fundamental dipolar attributes of God. It is important to be reminded that God is "primordial" in God's conceptual nature while God is "consequent" in God's derivative nature. In God's primordial nature God is the complete conceptual realization of the realm of ideal forms. God's primordial nature includes a final completeness that consists in the conceptual realization of all the potentialities that are possibly actualisable in the universe. It is thus actually deficient and complete. God's primordial nature proves that God is "absolute," in terms of no change, final completeness, and independence.

However God also includes derivative nature in God's being. This means that, first, "The perfection of God's subjective aim, derived from the completeness of his primordial nature, issues into the character of his consequent nature."¹⁶¹ Second, God's consequent nature involves physical experience derived from the temporal world. This is what happens in the relation between God and the world when a potentiality is actualized in an occasion in the temporal world. The consequent nature of God is the weaving of God's physical feelings upon God's primordial concepts. God is active when an occasion occurs; God lures it, but God is also passive; God experiences it. God's consequent nature includes the whole multiplicity of actualities in the temporal world; it is the physical prehension by God of the actualities of the evolving universe. It follows from this that God's consequent nature is fully actual and incomplete. God's consequent

¹⁶¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345.

nature proves that God is “relative,” in terms of incompleteness, openness, relation, and change.

In providing the process with its subjective aims, God as primordial is the lure for an actual entity to draw its process of becoming towards value, order, and fulfillment. The consequent nature describes what God is at any moment in the emergent process. The world passes into God’s consequent nature, where its values are actualized for the emergent process. Whitehead says, “The wisdom of subjective aim prehends every actuality for what it can be in such a perfected system - its suffering, its sorrow, its failures, its triumphs, its immediacies of joy – woven by rightness of feeling into the harmony of the universal feeling, which is . . . always novel advance, moving onward and never perishing.”¹⁶² Whitehead argues that “Neither God, nor the World, reaches static completion. Both are . . . the creative advance into novelty. Either of them is the instrument of novelty for the other.”¹⁶³

It follows from this that God is everlasting or absolute; God’s one side of nature is primordial. God also is temporal or relative; God’s the other side of nature is consequent. Since neither the world nor God reaches static perfection, there is a real becoming in God. “The consequent nature of God is the fulfillment of his experience by his reception of the multiple freedom of actuality into the harmony of his own actualization.”¹⁶⁴ God is thus active, dependent, relative, and constantly changing. God’s perfection, for process thought, is not static. The meaning of perfection in process thought is not “perfected” perfection but perfection in process.

¹⁶² Ibid., 346.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 349.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

2. The Challenge to Classical Theism in Wesley's Theology

1) God as Controlling Power?

As discussed above, the problems of thinking of God as Controlling Power in classical theism were that God cannot be free of responsibility for evil and that there was no room in such a concept for an actual created entity such as a human being to be free and responsible agent. Furthermore, the crucial problem in this classical concept of God as Controlling Power is that, as conceived, God cannot enter into any relation with God's creatures in love, because love is not possible when one party must be ruled or controlled absolutely by other party's unilateral power. Whitehead says, "Love neither rules, nor is it unmoved."¹⁶⁵ Love requires not controlling or unilateral relation but a persuasively caring touch that makes the relationship in freedom possible.

According to John Wesley, God's prevenient grace reflects God's persuasively caring touch that enables a human to be a free agent in relationship with God. Wesley's concept of God's prevenient grace begins with humanity as God's creation, and Original Sin. Wesley's most fundamental conviction about humanity is that we are created in the image of God and thus dependent beings to God.¹⁶⁶ Wesley says,

In the image of God was man made. God is love; accordingly man at his creation was full of love, which was the sole principle of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions. God is full of justice, mercy, and truth; so was man as he came from the hands of his Creator. God is spotless purity; and so man was in the beginning pure from every sinful blot.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

¹⁶⁶ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 67.

¹⁶⁷ John Wesley, "The Lord Our Righteousness," *The Works of John Wesley* (Bicentennial Edition), vol.1, ed., Albert C. Outler. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 459. (hereafter cited as *The Works*, with vol.)

The original state of Adam was “perfect” because he was created in the image of God. Humanity created in the image of God is recognized by the ineradicable depth of perfect values which God has placed on God’s creature. Those perfect values in our nature as the image of God represents humanity’s constituent reality. Human beings are not merely a mirror image of God, but they are godlike or perfect in their nature and essence. Wesley accentuates the perfection of human beings when they were originally created by saying: “God is full of justice, mercy, and truth: so was man as he came from the hands of his Creator.”¹⁶⁸

According to Wesley, original human beings were formed by God to bear the perfect nature of God by being created in God’s own image. Therefore, the image of God as Wesley understands it might best be described as a vocation or calling to which humanity is called, and the fulfillment of which constitutes their true destiny.¹⁶⁹ Wesley argues human beings as imaging God in three ways: “the natural image of God,” “the moral image of God,” and “the political image of God.”

First, according to Wesley, “the natural image of God” is grounded in the fact that God is Spirit. Wesley indicates that humanity is “a spirit like his Creator.”¹⁷⁰ As spirit the natural image of God in humanity is endowed with *understanding* (or reason), *will* (or affections), and *liberty* (or freedom).¹⁷¹ With regard to understanding (or reason),

¹⁶⁸ “The New Birth,” *The Works*, vol.2,188.

¹⁶⁹ Theodore Runyon, *New Creation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 13-14.

¹⁷⁰ “On the Fall of Man,” *The Works*, vol.2,400.

¹⁷¹ Wesley uses the term, “understanding”, “will”, and “liberty” to indicate the three characteristics of the moral image of God in his sermons, “On the Fall of Man,” *The Works*, vol.2,400-1, “The Image of God,” *The Works*, vol.4,293-5, or “The General Deliverance,” *The Works*, vol.2,438-9. And in his sermon, “The New Birth,” *The Works*, vol.2,188, he uses differently the term, “understanding”, “affections”, and “freedom of will” for the characteristics of it.

Wesley defines it as “a power of distinguishing truth from falsehood”¹⁷² Theodore Runyon argues that Wesley’s view of reason’s operations is based on an empirical model, and he denies to reason the direct intuitional capabilities ascribed to it by Descartes, the Cambridge Platonists, and the Deists.¹⁷³ Wesley’s distance from the intellectualist tradition would reflect his deeper appreciation for the contribution of the affections to human life and action.

Wesley was not using the term of the second characteristic of the moral image of God, namely the term “will,” to designate the human faculty of rational self-determination as is typical in current usage. He equated the will with the affections.¹⁷⁴ Wesley defined will as “exerting itself in various affections”¹⁷⁵ Reason, for Wesley, played a role in the affections. And the affections, for Wesley, are not the same as feelings, which means conscious awareness of sensations. The religious affections are not merely inner, subjective feelings, but instead are complex entities patterned by the reasoning process (the rational nature of the affections).¹⁷⁶ They are motivating dispositions of the person. Gregory Clapper maintains that the religious affections, for Wesley, act as dispositions to behave. The dispositional nature of the affections makes the affections more like virtues than feelings because the main connotation of virtue is the disposition to behave. Christian affections, hence, are dispositions from which Christian actions naturally flow.

¹⁷² “The Image of God,” *The Works*, vol.4,293.

¹⁷³ Theodore Runyon, *New Creation*, 15.

¹⁷⁴ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 69.

¹⁷⁵ “On the Fall of Man,” *The Works*, vol.2,401.

¹⁷⁶ Gregory S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1989), 28.

This understanding naturally leads us to Wesley's third characteristic of the moral image of God, "liberty" (or freedom) for human actions. He understood liberty as "a power of directing his own affections and actions, a capacity of determining himself, of choosing good or evil."¹⁷⁷ Wesley denies the liberty that is overruled because it is just "unfree freedom."¹⁷⁸ And this is one of the reasons why Wesley denies Calvinist predestination, for the doctrine of predestination only allows the liberty that is overruled. What he considered to be the Achilles heel of predestination is the lack of incentive to good works and its automatic consequence, antinomianism.¹⁷⁹ With regard to this unfree freedom, Wesley argues that insofar as one's behavior issues from such unfree freedom there can be no judgment to come, and no future rewards or punishments for there can be no moral good or evil.¹⁸⁰ His goal for liberty was to maintain the divine initiative in salvation without forfeiting human responsibility. The liberty, hence, calls us of our grace-aided response. He repeatedly argued that if humans had not been graced with liberty, they would not have been capable of either virtue or guilt, that is, they could not have been responsible.¹⁸¹

His three characteristics of the moral image of God in humanity remind us of two kinds of distinctive Wesleyan understanding: a synthetic and experiential way. Reason and affections do not stand in opposition. Reason is considered as the one which controls our affections so that it can be practiced for virtue with the assistance of grace (synthetic).

¹⁷⁷ "On the Fall of Man," *The Works*, vol.2,401.

¹⁷⁸ "The End of Christ's Coming," *The Works*, vol.2,475.

¹⁷⁹ W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of 'Love Divine'* (Nashville, Kingswood Books, 1989),241.

¹⁸⁰ John Wesley, "Thoughts upon Necessity," *The Works of John Wesley*, vol.10, ed., Thomas Jackson. Peabody, (MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), 466-7. (hereafter cited as *Works*, with vol.)

¹⁸¹ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*,70.

Since Christian affections are dispositions from which Christian actions naturally flow, liberty reminds us of the fact that we are moral beings and therefore we are responsible for our deeds (experiential). From this it follows that the natural image concept with its focus on understanding, will, and liberty offers us a highly tuned ethical construct. It calls us to be ethical in synthetic and experiential ways with the assistance of grace of God.

Second, by the “political image” Wesley has indicated that humanity was endued with “excellent faculties” to rule over the earth and the lower world and with a “high charge” to take care of them responsibly. Wesley delineates the political image of God in humanity as follows:

So that man was God’s vicegerent upon earth, the prince and governor of this lower world; and all the blessings of God flowed through him to the inferior creatures. Man was the channel of conveyance between his Creator and the whole brute creation.¹⁸²

With regard to the “excellent faculties” and “high charge” Wesley identifies the political image with “the prince and governor” in which leadership and management are stressed. However, Wesley does not limit the political image in the sense of the prince and governor. He accentuates the identity of humanity as “the channel” between Creator and all the created through which God’s blessing flows to the created. With regard to “the channel” Wesley holds that the true meaning of the prince and governor as the political image is not a dictator but a steward and caretaker. By using the term “the channel of conveyance” and “channel of communication” as the political image of God in

¹⁸² “The General Deliverance,” *The Works*, vol.2,440.

humanity, Wesley holds that the result of the fall of Adam is not limited to humanity only but reaches to all the created. Wesley explains this phenomena as follows.

As all the blessings of God in paradise flowed through man to the inferior creatures; as man was the great channel of communication between the Creator and the whole brute creation; so when man made himself incapable of transmitting those blessings, that communication was necessarily cut off. The intercourse between God and the inferior creatures being stopped, those blessings could no longer flow in upon them. And then it was that ‘the creature’, every creature, ‘was subject to vanity’, to sorrow, to pain of every kind, to all manner of evils. ‘Not’ indeed ‘willingly’; not by its own choice, not by any act or deed of its own; ‘but by reason of him that subjected it’.¹⁸³

While the doctrine of perfection for humanity, for Wesley, accords humanity’s loving obedience to God, the perfection of the created world accords its loving obedience to humanity.¹⁸⁴ This argument reflects of the privilege and responsibility of the humanity as the steward and caretaker as God is for humanity. This charge reminds us of our responsibility to give good care for the created world which continues to suffer due to the sin of the humanity since the fall of Adam. Based on this Wesley delineates the phenomena of the new creation when the new creation is actualized.

He seeth the earnest expectation wherewith the whole animated creation waiteth for that final manifestation of the sons of god: in which they themselves also shall be delivered (not by annihilation: annihilation is not deliverance) from the present bondage of corruption, into a measure of the glorious liberty of the children of God.¹⁸⁵

Wesley does expect the deliverance of both humanity and the created at the time of new creation. New creation is, hence, transformative, because in new creation “the bondage of corruption” is transformed into “the glorious liberty.” It follows from this

¹⁸³ Ibid., 442.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 443.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 441.

that for Wesley, the political image of God in humanity, as the faculties, and the charge, as the channel between God and the created, would give us a certain basis for the third element of the distinctive in Wesley's theology: the transformative way in which new creation is stressed and a better possibility is always anticipated. The transformative way, as based in the political image of God, reminds us of the importance of humanity's charge of the maintenance of the earth and the environment as the steward and channel.

Third, Wesley maintains that "the moral image of God" represents "righteousness and true holiness."¹⁸⁶ Humanity is formed by God to bear the very nature of God, that is, righteousness and true holiness. While the natural image of God focuses primarily upon "doing" as shown in its highly tuned ethical construct, the moral image of God accentuates primarily "being" in which humanity is to be truly holy and righteous ("man is capable of God"¹⁸⁷). Humanity as the moral image of God can be partakers of God's holiness.¹⁸⁸ Wesley indicates that human's special relationship to God is "the specific difference between man and brute." Wesley argues that "a loving obedience to God was the perfection of men."¹⁸⁹ Wesley identifies that the moral image, hence, reminds us of humanity's relationship to God (humanity as dependent being to the Source). Standing in total dependence upon God which is the quintessence of human liberty, Wesley holds that the paradox of human existence is found in human's perfect freedom under the perfect sovereignty of the Creator. Humanity's exercise of the moral image depends on receiving

¹⁸⁶ "On the Fall of Man," *The Works*, vol.2,411.

¹⁸⁷ "The General Deliverance," *The Works*, vol.2,445.

¹⁸⁸ "On the Fall of Man," *The Works*, vol.2,411.

¹⁸⁹ "The General Deliverance," *The Works*, vol.2,441.

from the Source what we cannot give ourselves but can only exhibit as long as we continue to receive and obey (relational anthropology).¹⁹⁰

From this we would interpret the true meaning of “man is capable of God.” This means, for Wesley, “a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!”¹⁹¹ It follows from this that the moral image of God would be the chief mark of Wesley’s anthropology and soteriology. Wesley holds that humanity lost in part the natural and the political image while humanity lost the whole moral image of God completely.¹⁹² Wesley says that “he lost the whole moral image of God, righteousness and true holiness.”¹⁹³ And he identifies the great end of religion as being to restore righteousness and true holiness, that is, the moral image of God in humanity.

Ye know that the great end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parent.¹⁹⁴

They to whom the righteousness of Christ is imputed are made righteous by the spirit of Christ, are renewed in the image of God after the likeness wherein they were created, in righteousness and true holiness.¹⁹⁵

Humanity is called to restore the moral image of God as well as the natural and the political image of God. Humanity is called to be capable of God through participating in God’s righteousness and true holiness. Based on Wesley’s perception of the moral image

¹⁹⁰ Theodore Runyon, *New Creation*, 18.

¹⁹¹ “The New Creation,” *The Works*, vol.2,510.

¹⁹² “On the Fall of Man,” *The Works*, vol.2,410.

¹⁹³ “The End of Christ’s Coming,” *The Works*, vol.2,477.

¹⁹⁴ “Original Sin,” *The Works*, vol.2,185.

¹⁹⁵ “The Lord Our Righteousness,” *The Works*, vol.1,459.

of God we should notice his relational anthropology. God has established a moral universe wherein his holiness is regulative of every relationship and humanity is the centerpiece of that universe. His relational anthropology helps us to recognize four basic human relationships: toward God, toward others, toward self, and toward the world. The proper relationship to God is knowing, loving, obeying, and enjoying God eternally (i.e., participation). The proper relationship to others is loving service and doing good works. The proper relationship to the world is loving protection and good management. When each of these relationships are properly expressed, we will also have a proper relationship to ourselves of self-acceptance.¹⁹⁶

In conclusion, Wesley's concept of humanity as imaging God in three ways represents that the original state of Adam or humanity was perfect for he was created in the image of God. Wesley holds that as "God is love, accordingly man at his creation was full of love"; "God is full of justice, mercy, and truth; so was man"; God is spotless purity and so man was in the beginning" because "in the image of God was man made."¹⁹⁷

However, according to Wesley, the Fall of Adam brought about the significant result: separation between God and humanity. It means that the life of God in the soul of human was virtually extinguished. Wesley puts it this way, "The glory departed from him."¹⁹⁸ The intimacy between God and humanity was gone. Adam's fall, for Wesley, brought about the separation between God and humanity.

¹⁹⁶ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 68.

¹⁹⁷ "The Lord Our Righteousness," *The Works*, vol.1,459.

¹⁹⁸ "The End of Christ's Coming," *The Works*, vol.2,477.

Furthermore, Wesley states that “by one man’s disobedience all men were constituted sinners; that in Adam all died, spiritually died, lost the life and the image of God; that fallen, sinful Adam then begat a son in his own likeness.”¹⁹⁹ From this, first, we acknowledge that Wesley contends it is through Original Sin that humanity inherits the guilt (Western Christianity’s impact on Wesley) and in which humans lose the Spirit’s immediate presence that results in the introduction of morality into human life (Eastern Christianity’s influence to Wesley).²⁰⁰ Second, we notice that Wesley’s doctrine of humanity as fallen exhibits an unique aspect, that is, the moral image of God alone is wholly distorted. Wesley says that “the image of God which remained after the fall, and remains in all men to this day, is the natural of God, ... not excluding the political image of God.... But the moral image of God is lost and defaced, or else it could not be said to be renewed.”²⁰¹ Indicating what sort of disvaluation occurs in the alienation of humanity from God, Wesley stresses that the fall brought about the loss of the moral image, the forfeiture of righteousness and true holiness. The fall of Adam, for Wesley, was recognized as “the entire corruption of our nature.”²⁰² (the pessimism of human nature) And the offsprings of Adam continued to be born after “the very image of the devil”, and “the image of the beasts” rather than “the image of God.”²⁰³

From this we could notice that Wesley affirms both “the entire corruption of human nature” and “Original Sin” by which “he [Adam] produced them [his offsprings] destitute

¹⁹⁹ “Original Sin,” *The Works*, vol.2,173.

²⁰⁰ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*,74.

²⁰¹ “The Doctrine of Original Sin according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience,” *Works*, vol.9,379.

²⁰² “The New Birth,” *The Works*, vol.2,190.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 190.

of the favour of God, under the same condemnation with himself.”²⁰⁴ Here we could pose a question. If there is the entire corruption of human nature and Original Sin, is there no hope for humanity?

The answer which Wesley’s thought offers us is contained in his doctrine of prevenient grace. Based upon prevenient grace, he could place his emphasis not upon the pessimism of human nature, but upon the optimism of God’s Grace in which Wesley proclaims God’s intervention in the human situation to open up the new possibility of perfecting in love. No more is Wesley sticking to the pessimism of human nature caused by Original Sin! Wesley’s intention is to hold at one and the same time the divine initiative, testified to in prevenient grace, and human responsibility.²⁰⁵ From this we notice that the prevenient grace, for Wesley, does not mean salvation accomplished. Wesley meant the prevenient grace which operates before our experience of conversion.²⁰⁶ It is his term for the grace of God that is active and persuasive before we give conscious thought to God or our need of God. To use biblical language, it is the grace that comes while we are “still sinners” (Rom. 5:8). Salvation is already started to come to all humanity by the prevenient grace in God’s initiative, and we have to participate in “working out our own salvation” (divine-human synergism).

From this it would be true that the message of prevenient grace, for Wesley, indicates a message of human existence from being in total depravity (Original Sin) to perfecting in love. For Wesley, God’s prevenient grace presupposes a process in human existence from *have become*, that is, being in total depravity to *might be*, that is,

²⁰⁴ “The Doctrine of Original Sin according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience,” *Works*, vol.9,379.

²⁰⁵ Theodore Runyon, *New Creation*, 28.

²⁰⁶ “On working Out Our Own Salvation,” *The Works*, vol.3,203-4.

perfecting in love. It is important to notice that the idea of the transition of human existence from “being in total depravity” to “perfecting in love” initiated by God’s prevenient grace in Wesley does not mean that the transition would be realized at one time. The transition requires process of *have become to might be*. It might be realized or might not in this world. It depends on how an individual responds to that grace in his/her continuing occasions of experience. Perfecting in love is the best potentiality to be actualized in human existence that God’s prevenient grace aims at. Given this concept of prevenient grace, God’s power, for Wesley, is not controlling in which God is doing alone everything and humans are doing nothing. The danger in the notion of God as Controlling Power is that there are no actual entities, or experiencing subjects that actively participate in the process of their own self-formation.

Wesley’s concept of God in God’s prevenient grace does not fit into the classical concept of God as Controlling Power. God’s prevenient grace, for Wesley, is universal in that every human is freely given this grace. God’s prevenient grace is God’s intervention into human experience for humans to be perfected anew. However, according to Wesley humans must “work out their own salvation.” God’s prevenient grace is the persuasive grace that allows humans to be free and response-able agents. Perfecting in love is the best potentiality to be actualized, depending upon how humans are working out their own salvation. Therefore, God in God’s prevenient grace, for Wesley, is an impulse for humans to be perfected anew from their own total depravity.

2) God as Absolute Other?

As discussed above, the doctrine of divine sovereignty combined with divine immutability in classical theism led to the conception of an exclusively self-sufficient, absolute, controlling, transcendent, and totally Other. God as the Absolute Other was conceived as “the Unmoved Mover” who creates, sustains, governs, and controls the world by Godself. God as the Absolute Other is totally in opposition to the created world in that the universe is dependent on God in every detail, while God is transcendent. The relation between God as the Absolute Other and God’s creatures is unilateral or one-sided. The creatures rely on God both for their being and for their value, but nothing acts on God, as God is perfectly self-sufficient Absolute Other. The crucial problem in this classical concept of God as the Absolute Other is that God is not “really related” to the world, for God is the totally transcendent. This “classical” conceptualization of God as Absolute Other denies God any “real relationship” with the world, because God is independent of the world and as such a being to whom the world contributes nothing.²⁰⁷

However, for Wesley, God is not the Absolute Other. Wesley understands humans as “partaker of God.”²⁰⁸ This means, for Wesley, that we, as God’s partakers, have to love God and others. It also means, for Wesley, that we as God’s partakers have to go on to realize our fullest potentialities so that we can grow in grace to perfection, that is, the love of God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and of our neighbors as ourselves. This means, for Wesley, that grace is co-operant; God’s grace invites humans into

²⁰⁷ Real relationship is a term used especially to accentuate the meaning of relation as involving the capacity to be affected. Of course, the meaning of relation as capacity to affect is still included in the meaning of that term. Refer to the chapter of “Real Relations in God” in this dissertation for further information.

²⁰⁸ Wesley, “On the Fall of Man,” *The Works*, vol.2,411.

partnership. For Wesley, humanity as “partaker of God” is, thus, explained in one of the distinctions of his theology: inter-connection between faith and work, or faith working through love.

It is true that Wesley is not a theologian who just speaks out about social problems in his days but one who throughout his life remains active in regard to social issues. In Wesley there is an inner connection among the principles of Wesley’s social ethics within the total context of his theology. Based upon this understanding, Manfred Marquardt explains the ethics of John Wesley as indispensable inter-connection between faith and works. According to Marquardt, Wesley is a theologian in whom there is an essential necessary connection of faith and works. Wesley emphasizes equally the doctrines of justification by faith alone and the necessity of good works. Wesley emphasizes human responsibility more clearly than does Reformed theology, but he underscores that human corruption could only be handled by divine grace.²⁰⁹

For Wesley, faith and love belong inseparably together. Wesley emphasizes love following from faith in which there can be no conflict between love for God and love for one’s neighbor because love of neighbor results from love of God. One cannot exist apart from the other. Only faith working through love is true faith and its aim is to actualize love among all people so that for Wesley, there can be no conflict between grace and law. Wesley fits the doctrine of the law entirely within the doctrine of grace, for love is the end of the law, its fulfillment and its aim. It is through this synthesis that Wesley laid the

²⁰⁹ Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*, trans. John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 90.

foundation for his social ethics.²¹⁰ For Wesley, the true praxis of faith is attached to true faith as a component of the Christian life.

This synthesis in Wesley's social ethics reminds us of Schubert M. Ogden's expression of the distinction of redemption and emancipation without separating and identifying the processes. It is interesting to see Marquardt's explanation about Wesley's rejection of atheistic humanism. Wesley takes a stand against the humanism of the Enlightenment because it is separating the love of our neighbor from the love of God. It follows from this that for Wesley, faith (grace of redemption from the bondage of death, transience, and sin) can not be separated from works (participation in liberation from structural or systematic bondage, -political, economic, cultural, racial, sexual- that keeps us from realizing our fullest potentialities). Wesley points out the essential necessary connection of faith and works, based on the universal love of God.

However, that does not mean that faith and works are identified with each other. Marquardt tells us of Wesley's understanding of the relation between faith and works: "There could be no faith without works in the normal case when time and opportunity were present. ... Faith must bring forth good works as its fruits."²¹¹ For Wesley, only faith working through love is true faith, a lively, saving principle, aiming to actualize love among all people. The basic motivation for sanctification and its essential content, therefore, becomes love, which represents the basis for social ethics as compassionate action within acknowledged responsibility for others. It follows from this that sanctification, for Wesley, may be described as a continued course of good works. Good works belongs in essence to justifying faith, and the believer needs them for growth into

²¹⁰ Ibid., 101.

²¹¹ Ibid., 135.

perfection. It follows from this that, for Wesley, faith and works are not identified with each other but are combined to preserve works from becoming a mere appendix to grace. The combination makes works a necessary element of the Christian existence. God's grace, for Wesley, is sufficient; however it does not necessarily mean that God is an Absolute Other who does not allow humans to be participating in the process of salvation through their faith working by love.

Based on the essential connection between faith and works, Wesley lays the foundation for the relationship between God and humanity. His goal was to maintain the divine initiative in salvation without forfeiting human responsibility. To accomplish this he stressed the sovereign initiative of God in Christ to save us by faith alone, but he also consistently returned to his emphasis on our grace-aided response, that is, works. Wesley's concern was a balance between the faith that justifies and the faith that works by love. Wesley says, "God works; therefore you *can* work. . . God works; therefore you *must* work."²¹² Wesley also says, "God worketh in you; therefore you must work: you must be workers together with him; otherwise he will cease working."²¹³ Wesley clearly would have us understand that God and humans are working together.

It is true that Wesley is in total agreement with one of the classical theists, John Calvin on one key point: Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. However, the role of faith is the issue that separates them. For Calvin, faith is a cause (based on the imputed righteousness of Christ as the formal cause of justification), but for Wesley, faith is a condition (based on both the active and passive righteousness of Christ as the meritorious cause of justification), divinely stipulated whereby we may gain access to the salvation

²¹² "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," *The Works*, vol.3,206.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 208.

available through Christ (no merit on human but Christ alone). Faith as condition, for Wesley, includes imparted righteousness as well as imputed righteousness (divine-human synergism through faith working by love).

This fusion of faith and works, that is, faith working by love in the life of believers, was, for Wesley, the divine reality available to every true believer. This is the divine reality that every true believer may confidently expect to experience, and by the witness of the Spirit he/she will receive an inward certainty that the very righteousness of Christ is his/hers. It is this “faith working by love” that, for Wesley, protects against the pitfall of classical theism that claims God as Absolute Other who does not give any room to humans to work with God in the process of salvation.

According to Wesley, humans are working with God. Humans are partakers of God, meaning, in other aspects, humans are free and responsible agents. “Freedom is necessary to ensure synergy the cooperative working together of the human and the divine, at every step in the process of salvation.”²¹⁴ Wesley repudiated John Calvin’s doctrine of predestination. Concerning the doctrine of predestination, Wesley claims that “If all the actions, and passions, and tempers of men are quite independent on their own choice, are governed by a principle exterior to themselves; . . . man is no longer a moral agent, nor the subject of praise or blame for what he does.”²¹⁵ What he considered to be the problem of predestination is not only the lack of incentive to good works but also the want of humans’ own responsibility.²¹⁶ Wesley continues his argument by saying: “But here lies the very ground of your mistakes; their actions are not involuntary. The actions

²¹⁴ Theodore Runyon, *New Creation*, 31.

²¹⁵ John Wesley, “Thought Upon Necessity,” *The Works of John Wesley*, vol.9, ed., Thomas Jackson. Peabody, (MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), 464-5.

²¹⁶ W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of ‘Love Divine’* (Nashville, Kingswood Books, 1989),241.

of men are quite voluntary; the fruit of their own will.”²¹⁷ Wesley clearly understands a human as a free and moral agent who is responsible for his/her own self-formation.

Humans, for Wesley, are free to reject or to fulfill God’s grace for them.

This notion of a human as a free and moral agent leads Wesley to maintain God’s power as not coercive in relation to humans. Wesley says: “You know how God wrought in *your own* soul Least of all did he take away your liberty, your power of choosing good or evil; he did not *force* you; but being *assisted* by his grace you . . . *chose* the better part.”²¹⁸ Wesley rejects God’s power as coercive. God is, for Wesley, assisting humans to choose the “better part” in their working out their own salvation. In this sense, Wesley denies God is a Controlling Power who determines every detail of the world.

On the other hand, the notion of a human as a free and moral agent leads Wesley to argue that each human is a “partaker of God.” Every human is supposed to realize his/her “better part” so that he/she can grow in grace to perfection, that is, loving God with all his/her heart, mind, soul, and strength and neighbor as themselves. Wesley’s understanding of a human as a free and moral agent, thus, as a partaker of God includes his/her active participation in the process of salvation through faith working by love. For Wesley, Calvin’s doctrine of predestination did not understand God’s relation to the world and human potential as a continuous invitation and interaction.

According to Wesley, God invites humans to participate through grace. As Wesley believed in the Original Sin, human beings by nature, for Wesley, were powerless to do anything to deliver themselves out of the situation. However, for Wesley, this would be the very beginning and fundamental point for which Wesley’s key to his theology, that is,

²¹⁷ Wesley, “Thought Upon Necessity,” 467.

²¹⁸ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 55.

grace, was applied. Wesley turned his eye from the pessimism of the human nature to the optimism of God's Grace. He looked at "preventing grace" or "prevenient grace" with which God intervened in human situation and thus began salvation.²¹⁹ According to Wesley, it was by the grace of God, that is, by prevenient grace, that God intervened in the human situation to open up the possibility of perfecting in love. They now had responsibility to complete or reject their own salvation, because there were no persons who had not received this grace which was resistible. However, it did not mean that Wesley now affirmed human natural ability. Rather, prevenient grace for Wesley, according to Randy L. Maddox, enhanced Wesley's conviction of human inherent inability.

Prevenient Grace actually *enhanced* his conviction of our inherent inability, while simultaneously allowing his strong insistence on universal responsibility. He did not base our ability to respond to God in any *inherent* strength that we possess, but in the gracious *restoration* of our faculties that God's Presence effects, by virtue of Christ.²²⁰

Wesley himself also mentioned the human's natural inability.

Though in one sense it[conscience] may be termed 'natural', because it is found in all men, yet properly speaking it is not natural; but a supernatural gift of God, above all his natural endowments. No, it is not nature but the Son of God that is 'the true light, which enlightenth every man which cometh into the world'.²²¹

According to Wesley, a "natural man" was the one who was "utterly ignorant of God" and "totally a stranger to the law of God."²²² For Wesley, human beings were naturally unable. They were wholly corrupt and incapable of any response to God apart

²¹⁹ Wesley, "On Working out our own Salvation," *The Works*, vol. 3, 203.

²²⁰ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 93.

²²¹ Wesley, "On Conscience," *The Works*, vol. 2, 184.

²²² John Wesley, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," *The Works*, vol. 1, 99.

from a new work of God's grace. Human beings, for Wesley, were creatures whose empowerment and fulfillment flowed from a relationship with God. Human beings, since God's grace was resistible, were creatures capable of responding to and welcoming God's further transforming work in our lives.²²³ Human beings should cooperatively "put to work" the grace of God. Human beings, for Wesley, even if naturally corrupted, as a responsible recipient of grace should participate in "working out our own salvation." Human beings, even though they were naturally unable, had the ability in grace, that was called by Methodists "gracious ability." Now, for Wesley, in grace "man is capable of God."²²⁴

Therefore, we may conclude that for Wesley, God is not an Absolute Other who is out there alone doing God's work alone. God is inviting humans through grace to participate in the process of salvation. As humans are free and responsible agents, God's grace is resistible. Humans are not predestined. In other words, God is not coercive. If humans are working out their own salvation through faith working by love, humans, for Wesley, are capable of God. Wesley's concern was to balance between the faith that justifies and the faith that works by love, and to that end he argued that the perfect fusion of faith and works, that is, "faith working by love" in the life of believers, was the perfection which was attainable in this life to every true believer.

3) God as Perfected Perfect?

As discussed above, the problem of perfection as perfected defined by Western tradition is that perfection is the full realization; there are no degrees, that is, "an absolute

²²³ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 92-3.

²²⁴ Wesley, "The General Deliverance," *The Works*, vol. 2, 441.

completion, a finishing in its form and boundaries, a rounding off and termination.”²²⁵

Perfected perfection is, thus, the circular movement, a return to the start. As Hartshorne points out, the problem of God as perfected perfect lies in the fact that “the being which he enjoys simply in himself is his *only* being, and if this cannot be known, then it seems we can know or think *nothing* of God, either as he is in himself or not as he is in himself.”²²⁶ From this it follows that the crucial problem with the idea of God as perfected perfect lies in the fact that “the perfect divine order, being in itself walled up and totally self-sufficient, cannot have any relation to this world.”²²⁷ God and God’s created humanity cannot be in a relation of love. Love requires relationship.

According to Wesley, perfection means nothing but love’s fullness. Wesley would not agree with God as perfected perfect whom cannot have a real relationship of love with God’s beloved created. His concept of perfection is love itself. In order to understand more deeply the idea of perfection in Wesley, we must start with his soteriology that aims at our perfection in love. Wesley likens the process of salvation to a house. Prevenient grace serves as the porch, justification as the door, and sanctification or holiness as the rooms of the house wherein we are called to dwell.²²⁸

First, based on prevenient grace, Wesley proclaims God’s intervention in the human situation for salvation. Wesley means the prevenient grace which operates before our experience of conversion. It operates before any conscious personal experience of divine grace. The grace of God is active before we give conscious thought to God. Salvation was started by the prevenient grace in God’s initiative and we are responsible beings in

²²⁵ Martin Foss, *The Idea of Perfection in the Western World*, 30.

²²⁶ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*, 15.

²²⁷ Martin Foss, *The Idea of Perfection in the Western World*, 22.

²²⁸ Theodore Runyon, *New Creation*, 27.

the process of the salvation (divine-human synergism). It follows from this that justification and sanctification, for Wesley, describe both divine action and human response. However, God's action always comes first.

Second, as to the doctrine of justification, it is necessary to study the doctrine of justification with that of new birth when we research the soteriology of John Wesley. Wesley writes: "If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental they are doubtless these two - the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth."²²⁹ And followed by this, he explains what these doctrines mean.

The former [justification] relating to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins; the latter [new birth] to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature. In order of time neither of these is before the other. In the moment we are justified by the grace of God through the redemption that is in Jesus we are also born of the Spirit; but in order of thinking, as it is termed, justification precedes the new birth. We first conceive his wrath to be turned away, and then his Spirit to work in our hearts.²³⁰

It has been frequently supposed that the being born of God was all one with the being justified; that the new birth and justification were only different expressions denoting the same thing: it being certain on the one hand that whoever is justified is also born of God, and on the other that whoever is born of God is also justified; yea, that both these gifts of God are given to every believer in one and the same moment. In one point of time his sins are blotted out and he is born of God.²³¹

Based on these excerpts, we notice the following ideas concerning the theological difference between justification and new birth for Wesley. First, while the justification is based upon the work of Jesus Christ, the new birth is based on that of Holy Spirit.

²²⁹ "The New Birth," *The Works*, vol.2,187.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God," *The Works*, vol.1,431.

Second, the justification refers to forgiving our sins, whereas the new birth refers to renewing our fallen natures.²³² Third, both justification and new birth are given to believers in one and the same moment but the justification precedes the new birth in order of thinking. These differences between two of them are supplemented by the following excerpts of Wesley.

Justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real, change. God in justifying us does something for us: in begetting us again he does the work in us. The former changes our outward relation to God, so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed, so that of sinners we become saints. The one restores us to the favour, the other to the image of God. The one is the taking away the guilt, the other the taking away the power, of sin. So that although they are jointed together in point of time, yet are they of wholly distinct natures.²³³

From this it follows that the justification for Wesley would mean relative change, or liberation in relationship with God, a liberation that God effected for us through the justifying grace of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has given us the grace of forgiveness as justified persons through his blood. We, the fallen human beings are liberated through the justifying grace as the children of God from the enemies of God. No more does the bondage of sin and death condemn us. Wesley says: “justification implies a deliverance from guilt and punishment.”²³⁴ Through justification our sins are forgiven and as a result we are accepted by God. Sins are interpreted on a legalistic basis as indicated in Wesley’s usage of the language, “guilt of sin.” Even if we were the one

²³² This understanding reminds us of the difference in interpretation of the grace between the Western theologians and Eastern theologians. Runyon indicates the difference as follows: “Western theologians generally have defined grace as divine pardon and forgiveness, whereas Eastern theologians have interpreted grace as the power of God working within to renew our nature.”(Theodore Runyon, *New Creation*, 26) From this follows that Wesley affirms and joins the two theological difference between the Western and the Eastern in synthetic way.

²³³ “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” *The Works*, vol.1,431-2.

²³⁴ “Salvation by Faith,” *The Works*, vol.1,124.

who had to be judged as “the servant of sin,” we are liberated to become the children of God through the relative change which is given by Christ. From this Wesley maintains that no longer are we afraid of the judgment. Humanity experiences through the justification the relative change in the relationship with God.

It follows from this that we, as the ones who are liberated from the servant of sin to be the children of God, could pose a question concerning what it means to be liberated from sin. Wesley indicates that the definitions of sins are divided into two categories: “inward sin” and “outward sin.”²³⁵ Wesley explains the “inward sin” as follows.

By sin I here understand inward sin: any sinful temper, passion, or affection; such as pride, self-will, love of the world, in any kind or degree; such as lust, anger, peevishness; any disposition contrary to the mind which was in Christ.²³⁶

And Wesley argues the “outward sin” as follows.

By sin I here understand outward sin, according to the plain, common acceptation of the word: an actual, voluntary transgression of the law; of the revealed, written law of God; of any commandment of God acknowledged to be such at the time that it is transgressed.²³⁷

From this Wesley maintains that “outward sins” are related to “our words and deeds”²³⁸ while “inward sins” are related to our tempers, passions and affections. He intends that from the moment we are justified, we have the power both over outward and inward sin.²³⁹

²³⁵ “On Sin in Believers,” *The Works*, vol.1,320.

²³⁶ *The Works*, vol.1,320.

²³⁷ “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” *The Works*, vol.1,436. Wesley identifies “outward sin” with “actual sin” or “voluntary sin.”

²³⁸ “The Righteousness of Faith,” *The Works*, vol.1,212.

²³⁹ “On Sin in Believers,” *The Works*, vol.1,321.

However, it does not mean that we are free from all sin. Wesley's simple answer to this question is, "I cannot believe it."²⁴⁰ The reason is based upon the fact that even in the justified and the regenerated there are two principles contrary to each other, in other words, "the flesh, evil nature, opposes the spirit even in believers."²⁴¹ Wesley delineates the conflicts between evil nature and the spirit in believers as follows: "So that they are equally assured that sin is in them and that Christ is in them, the hope of glory."²⁴² Based on this we could evaluate that Wesley affirms and follows Luther's doctrine of "*simul justus et peccator*."

From this we could summarize what it means for Wesley to be liberated from sin. First, it means liberation not from inward sin but from all other outward sin. Wesley indicates: "every babe in Christ is holy, and yet not altogether so. He is saved from sin; yet not entirely: it remains, though it does not reign."²⁴³ Second, it means liberation from "the guilt of sin" and "the power of sin."²⁴⁴ Wesley says: "That believers are delivered from the guilt and power of sin we allow; that they are delivered from the being of it we deny."²⁴⁵ Third, liberation from sin which is given by justification, for Wesley, is accomplished by the faith alone. Wesley delineates: "faith is the condition, and the only condition, of justification every man when he believes is justified."²⁴⁶

Wesley intends that justification means relative change, or liberation in relationship with God through the justifying grace of Jesus Christ. We are liberated as the enemies of

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid., 323.

²⁴³ Ibid., 327.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 328.

²⁴⁶ "The Scripture Way of Salvation," *The Works*, vol.2,162.

God to become the children of God. No more does the bondage of sin and death condemn us. It reminds us of Ogden's definition of "redemption" as "liberation from the bondage of death, transience, and sin."²⁴⁷ Redemption clearly means the relative change in relationship with God as does justification. God is represented as the One who recovers the relationship between God and humankind in love. Humans are liberated through justification from the bondage of death and sin. They are delivered from guilt and punishment. However, it does not mean that there is nothing left for their salvation. They must continue to be sanctified because they are still "*simul justus et peccator*."

Therefore, Wesley's doctrine of soteriology goes on to the next phase, the doctrine of sanctification. The starting point of the doctrine of sanctification for Wesley is the doctrine of the new birth. Wesley delineates the relation this way: "This [the new birth] is a part of sanctification, not the whole; it is the gate of it, the entrance into it."²⁴⁸ This assumption undergirds a fact that the new birth is an instant occasion with justification while sanctification is a gradual process to "the stature of the fullness of Christ." Wesley explains this as follows based upon the analogy of the birth of a child.

A child is born of a woman in a moment, or at least in a very short time. Afterward he gradually and slowly grows till he attains the stature of a man. In like manner a child is born of God in a short time, if not in a moment. But it is by slow degrees that he afterward grows up to the measure of the full stature of Christ. The same relation therefore which there is between our natural birth and our growth there is also between our new birth and our sanctification.²⁴⁹

Wesley maintains that new birth is the grace of God working in us through the Holy Spirit. Through new birth by the Holy Spirit a new life is accorded to persons who

²⁴⁷ Schubert M. Ogden, *Faith & Freedom*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 99.

²⁴⁸ "The New Birth," *The Works*, vol.2,198.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

believe in Christ. Subsequently this life does grow and develop towards “the measure of the full stature of Christ,” or “perfection.” It is important to notice that although justification and sanctification are closely associated, Wesley holds that it is necessary to distinguish between two of them. Wesley explains the difference as follows.

This is sanctification; which is indeed in some degree the immediate fruit of justification, but nevertheless is a distinct gift of God, and of a totally different nature. The one implies what God does for us through his Son; the other what he works in us by his Spirit.²⁵⁰

Justification, for Wesley, is the objective grace that God did for us through Christ (relative change), whereas new birth including sanctification is the subjective grace that God works in us by the Holy Spirit (real change). Therefore, for Wesley, sanctification is the same in nature with new birth, but totally different in nature from justification.

Wesley’s understanding of new birth as “the entrance” into sanctification draws us to the conclusion that new birth is the indwelling grace of Holy Spirit in us while sanctification is the experiential grace of Holy Spirit in us in which we could grow in this world to “the stature of the fullness of Christ,” that is, perfection. From this follows that sanctification is the grace which allows a real change so that we may participate in divine nature of “righteousness and true holiness” (i.e., the moral image of God). Wesley delineates the real change at the time of new birth, which is “the gate” of sanctification.

It [the new birth] is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when it is created anew in Christ Jesus, when it is renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, when the love of the world is changed into the love of God,²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ “Justification by Faith,” *The Works*, vol.1,187.

²⁵¹ “The New Birth,” *The Works*, vol.2,194.

Wesley maintains that new birth and sanctification aims at the renewal of the fallen moral image of God, “righteousness and true holiness.” Sanctification, hence, has the teleological disposition in which it aims at growth in grace to the stature of the fullness of Christ, or perfection. His teleological disposition in the sense of renewal of holiness follows:

They spared no pains to arrive at the summit of Christian holiness: leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, to go on to perfection; to know all that love of God which passeth knowledge, and to be filled with all the fullness of God.²⁵²

Wesley maintains in this excerpt that first, the summit of holiness is “to be filled with all the fullness of God.” Second is related to “going on,” that is, process. Wesley also states that it involves “leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ.” What does it mean to leave the first principle of the doctrine of Christ? It means that we should not remain at first status in belief, that is, justification and new birth. Salvation is not a static point beyond which nothing more is achieved. This argument of Wesley could be reinterpreted as “humanity has to go on to the perfection.” From this follows that for Wesley “holiness” is no other than to go on to the perfection. Holiness, for Wesley, is not regarded as a static status but as a process. Holiness has a teleological disposition in which it leads us to go on to not “perfected” but “perfecting” perfection.

From this we could notice that Wesley clearly correlates the doctrine of holiness to that of perfection. Furthermore, Wesley also correlates the holiness with the righteousness with the statements like, “universal holiness - inward and outward righteousness.” This relatedness between holiness and righteousness reminds us of “the

²⁵² “The More Excellent Way,” *The Works*, vol.3, 265-6.

moral image of God,” that is “righteousness and true holiness.” Wesley delineates how the moral image of God that is righteousness and true holiness, is related to perfection.

The moral image of God consists in righteousness and true holiness. By sin this is totally destroyed. And we never can recover it till we are created anew in Christ Jesus. And this is perfection.²⁵³

Wesley maintains consistently the need for renewal of the image of God, and in order to renew the image (i.e., perfection or entire sanctification), he stresses “going on” (i.e., sanctification in process). It follows from this that sanctification has the teleological disposition in which it aims at growth in grace to renew the moral image of God (i.e., righteousness and true holiness), that is, the perfection.

It is important to notice that for Wesley perfection is nothing other than love.

Wesley wrote as follows:

‘Q. What is Christian Perfection?

‘A. The loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love.²⁵⁴

‘Q. 6. What love is this?

‘A. The loving the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength; and the loving our neighbour, every man, as ourselves, as our own souls.²⁵⁵

Wesley maintains both the vertical realm of love in which he stresses the love of God and the horizontal realm of love in which he emphasizes the love of others. The importance of the love of others for Wesley is indicated in this excerpt.

²⁵³ “On Perfection,” *The Works*, vol.3,75.

²⁵⁴ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, ed. Frank H. Cumbers (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 42.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

How excellent things are spoken of the love of our neighbour! It is ‘the fulfilling of the law’, ‘the end of the commandment’. Without this all we have, all we do, all we suffer, is of no value in the sight of God. But it is that love of our neighbour which springs from the love of God; otherwise itself is nothing worth.²⁵⁶

Wesley argues that the foundation of the love of others has to be upon the love of God. For Wesley, “only faith” is the foundation in the process of sanctification.²⁵⁷ Based on this it was necessary to consider “the means of Grace” and “Good Works” in that way.

In using all means, seek God alone. In and through every outward thing look singly to the *power* of his Spirit and the *merits* of his Son. Beware you do not stick in the *work* itself; if you do, it is all lost labour.²⁵⁸

However, the emphasis upon faith alone by Wesley does not have the same meaning of the stillness intended by the Moravians. As studied above, it is true that they are on the same line in a sense that both of them preached justification by faith only. However, it is also true that they are different in the sense that the Moravians seemed to be willing to carry the logic to its conclusion and really mean absolutely alone, but when Wesley was saying faith alone, he meant primarily rather than solely.²⁵⁹ Wesley accentuates doing good works and being perfect in performing them. He says as follows:

God worketh in you; therefore you must work: you must be ‘workers together with him’ make you perfect in every good work to do his will.²⁶⁰

The main difference between the two of them lies on whether there is an active pursuit of holiness and love. Both faith and works are necessary elements to go on to

²⁵⁶ “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount III,” *The Works*, vol.1,510.

²⁵⁷ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 41. “This [Christian perfection] is received merely *by faith*.”

²⁵⁸ “The Means of Grace,” *The Works*, vol.1,396.

²⁵⁹ W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of Love Divine*, 96.

²⁶⁰ “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” *The Works*, vol.3,208-9.

perfection. Faith alone for Wesley has to be understood in a sense of “foundation” toward perfection. Wesley says: “*first believe*. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the propitiation for thy sins. Let this good foundation *first* to be laid, and then thou shalt do all things well.”

It follows from this that Wesley’s understanding of sanctification in which active pursuit of true holiness and love based upon faith alone can be summarized as follows. First, it aims at the renewal of the vertical realm of relationship between God and us in which the moral image of God, that is righteousness and true holiness, is stressed. Second, it also aims at the reconciliation of the horizontal realm of relationship between us in which we, as Christians can and should love others.

According to Wesley, sanctification is none other than active pursue of true holiness and love based upon faith alone. Wesley affirms faith alone and regards us as a “partaker of God” in the process toward perfection. Sanctification has the teleological disposition in which it aims at the renewal of the fallen moral image of God’s righteousness and true holiness. Sanctification means the process of loving God and others. We humans, for Wesley, are participants in God’s love for better future. As indicated above, sanctification is, thus, the gradual process in which it aims at growth in grace to the stature of the fullness of Christ, or perfection. Sanctification, for Wesley, means active pursuit of true holiness and love based upon faith alone. We as God’s partakers have to love God and others.

It follows from this that Wesley argues that “entire sanctification” or “perfection is that “all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love.”²⁶¹ Christian

²⁶¹ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 42.

perfection aims at in grace to the stature of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Christian perfection aims at “a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!”²⁶² Thus, for Wesley, Christian perfection is not being perfected in ourselves, that is, a static salvation given by God’s instant grace. Christian perfection has nothing to do with perfection that is perfectly free from human frailties such as slowness of understanding. According to Wesley, Christian perfection is defined not in ourselves but in the relationship of love for which we were created and to which we can be restored. For Wesley, “Christian perfection” is nothing but love’s fullness, that is, perfecting perfection.

²⁶² “The New Creation,” *The Works*, vol.2,510.

III. Reforming the Concept of God

1. God as Relational

As is well known, the classical doctrine of God is based upon the Greek metaphysical assumption that substance is an ultimate category, with substance being what requires nothing other than itself in order to exist. The fundamental problem for the concept of God generated by the metaphysics of substance is the doctrine of a totally self-sufficient God, whose inner life can in no essential way be related to anything other than God's self.²⁶³ Substance metaphysics is problematic as it is not congruent with the Christian sensitivity of "God as love." Without relationality as its own nature, no love is possible because love requires relationship. "Love neither rules, nor is it unmoved."²⁶⁴ Love includes the inter-dependence: the relationship to affect as well as to be affected or to act as well as to be acted upon.

Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne developed the "process" philosophy that re-conceptualizes in terms of relationality the structures that account for existence.²⁶⁵ According to Whitehead, existent reality reflects that to exist is to experience the energy or influences of what is other, and to integrate these feelings into a new configuration. An actual occasion is the power of this concrescence. This process of

²⁶³ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "Introduction," in *Trinity in Process*, eds. Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), vii.

²⁶⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

²⁶⁵ One of the differences between Hartshorne and Whitehead is the different way they interpret God's actuality. While Whitehead maintains that God is an actual entity, Hartshorne holds that God is a personally-ordered society of actual entities.

becoming occurs through creativity, that is, the transmission of feeling between entities, and the integration of feelings within the becoming entity.²⁶⁶ Existent reality is thoroughly relational, meaning that the relationality is the sine qua non of all existence whatsoever. Given this concept of reality as relational, with regard to God, the question is, according to Suchocki, “not how a totally self-contained and self-sufficient reality can relate to anything outside of itself, but rather, how one can reinterpret . . . providence . . . under the new relational paradigm.”²⁶⁷

It is important to notice that while classical theism affirms that God is the only absolute, and thereby explicitly denies any relativity to God, Hartshorne argues that God is both “absolute and relative” and “abstract and concrete” because, for him, God is dipolar. His dipolar view of God is as follows: “The union of supreme actuality and supreme potentiality, supreme activity and supreme passivity, supreme being and supreme becoming, the most strictly absolute and the most universally relative of all entities, actual or possible.”²⁶⁸

Given his understanding of God as dipolar, Hartshorne refers to God as the “Divine Relativity” on the premise that this relativity includes the absolute. The question, “how can God be both absolute and relative or both abstract and concrete?” is answered by the dipolar resolution through the concept of “Surrelativism.” Hartshorne says, “The main thesis, called Surrelativism, also Panentheism, is that the ‘relative’ or changeable, that which depends upon and varies with varying relationships, includes within itself and in value exceeds the nonrelative, immutable, independent, or ‘absolute,’ *as the concrete*

²⁶⁶ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, “Introduction,” in *Trinity in Process*., viii.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Charles Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process* (New York: Hafner, 1971), 14.

includes and exceeds the abstract.”²⁶⁹ He continues to say that “God, as supremely excellent and concrete, must be conceived not as wholly absolute or immutable, but rather as supremely-relative, ‘surrelative,’ although . . . he is indeed strictly absolute and immutable.”²⁷⁰ According to Hartshorne, God is, on the one hand absolute, on the other hand relative. However, it is very important to remember that the idea of God is, for Hartshorne, not premised on an ontological dualism but on a polar duality.²⁷¹ It is important to remember that according to Western Christian tradition, God has been defined in static non-relational terms. However, Hartshorne’s method is a fundamental shift to the ontological relatedness of God. God is understood, in Hartshorne’s thought, to include, ontologically, aspects such as concreteness, dependence, and relativity.

For Hartshorne, “Relativity is not only a pole within the being of God, it is also a fundamental and ontological denominator of the being of God.”²⁷² Total immutability cannot be congruent with religious teaching on God’s love for the world and our duty to serve God. God is not the only one who affects the universe [absolute side of God] but also the one who is affected by the world [concrete aspect of God]. Both sides of affection, that is, to affect and to be affected, are crucial in the conceptualization of God as relational. God is not only the one who affects the world through love but also the one who is affected through the service of our duty and lack of duty as well. As Hartshorne said, God is “supreme, yet indebted to all” or God is “absolute, yet related to all.”²⁷³

²⁶⁹ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, ix.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Douglas Pratt, *Relational Deity: Hartshorne and Macquarrie on God* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2002), 59.

²⁷² Ibid., 61.

²⁷³ Refer to Hartshorne’s book, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*.

With a similar sentiment, Whitehead also said, “the kingdom of heaven is with us today. . . What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relationship, the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world.”²⁷⁴ For Whitehead, God not only affects the world but is also affected by the universe. God is defined in terms of relationality. According to Whitehead, the danger in the classical notion of God as the Absolute Other is that each actuality in the temporal world does not have its reception into God’s nature.

However, God’s consequent nature, for Whitehead, is crucial in understanding God’s ability of reception in terms of God’s relation to human existence. God as a consequent nature, for Whitehead, feels the completed actuality of each occasion of human experience. In other words, while all occasions of human experience perish, they do furnish God with new experience for God’s prehension and incorporation into God’s consequent nature. Also, whatever God receives from human experience never fades away. All perishing human experience achieves a kind of “objective immortality” in God. In turn, God gives back to humans the data of the objectified entities God has prehended so that the world process can be enriched. “In this sense, God is the great companion - the fellow sufferer who understands.”²⁷⁵ From this we observe that Whitehead presents God as a Being who relates to humans as a companion. God is not the Absolute Other any more. God is a “companion.” God and humans are working together in the cosmic process. God and humans contribute to each other’s existence.

²⁷⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 351.

This notion of Whitehead's God as relational in God's working with humans as companion is, significantly, reminiscent of Wesley's repudiation of John Calvin's doctrine of predestination. As studied above, concerning the doctrine of predestination, what Wesley considered to be the most essential problem of the doctrine of predestination is that a human is no longer a moral agent for he/she is not a free agent who is responsible for his/her own actions. Wesley says: "The actions of men are quite voluntary; the fruit of their own will."²⁷⁶ Repudiating the doctrine of predestination, Wesley argues:

He [the Deity] formed the plan on which all things were to be governed, and put it in execution by establishing, both in the natural and moral world, certain laws that are fixed and immutable. By virtue of these, all things proceed in a regular train of causes and effects, bringing about the events contained in the original plan, and admitting the possibility of no other. This universe is a vast machine, winded up and set a-going. The several springs and wheels act unerringly one upon another. The hand advances and the clock strikes, precisely as the Artist has determined. In this plan, man, a rational creature, was to fulfill certain ends. He was to appear as an actor, and to act with consciousness and spontaneity. Consequently, it was necessary he should have some idea of liberty, some feeling of things possible and contingent, things depending on himself, that he might be led to exercise that activity for which he was designed. To have seen himself a part of that great machine would have been altogether incongruous to the ends he was to fulfill. Had he seen that nothing was contingent, there would have been no room for forethought, nor for any sort of industry or care. Reason could not have been exercised in the way it is now; that is, man could not have been man. But now, the moment he comes into the world, he acts as a free agent.²⁷⁷

According to Wesley, a human is not only a moral but a free agent. Wesley argues that God's power is not coercive in relation to humans. As quoted above, Wesley says: "You know how God wrought in *your own* soul Least of all did he take away your liberty, your power of choosing good or evil; he did not *force* you; but being *assisted* by

²⁷⁶ Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Necessity," 467.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 461-2.

his grace you . . . chose better part.”²⁷⁸ From this we could notice a kinship between Wesley and process thinkers such as Whitehead. Both reject God’s power as coercive. God is, for Wesley, assisting a human to choose the “better part,” while God is, for Whitehead, luring a human to actualize his/her best potentiality. Wesley also understands God’s power as persuasive as Whitehead argues. Wesley denies, like Whitehead, God as Controlling Power who determines every detail of world. Both understand a human as a free and moral agent who is responsible for his/her own self-formation. Both share the idea that humans are free to reject or to fulfill God’s ideal envisagement.

Thus, Wesley’s understanding of a human as “partaker of God”²⁷⁹ includes his/her active obedience to God’s prevenient grace as the only final causation to which both self and the world exist to contribute. It is important to remember that, as studied above, for Wesley, God’s prevenient grace presupposes a process in human existence from *have become*, that is, being in total depravity to *might be*, that is, perfecting in love. According to Wesley, perfecting in love is the best potentiality to be actualized in human existence that God’s prevenient grace aims at. It might be realized or might not in this world. It depends on how an individual responds to that grace in his/her continuing occasions of experience. From this we notice Wesley’s commitment to a relation-oriented anthropology with God and the world. Without human participation (humans’ active obedience), God’s ideal envisagement revealed in God’s prevenient grace would not be accomplished. Human, for Wesley, has a power of freedom either to fulfill or to reject God’s ideal envisagement in God’s prevenient grace.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 467.

²⁷⁹ Wesley, “On the Fall of Man,” *The Works*, vol.2,411.

From this we notice Wesley's kinship with Whitehead. Both Whitehead and Wesley do not see God as the Absolute Other who is "not really related to a human existence." Wesley, like Whitehead, would deny a God to whom a human contributes nothing. God needs human's active obedience or response. Human participation creates a difference, depending upon how he/she responds to God's calling. The transition of "perfecting in love" may be realized or not. From this we can conclude that Wesley's concept of human as a "partaker of God" and Whitehead's concept of God as a "great companion" to humans reveals the similar meaning that there is a real relation between God and humanity: They are inter-dependent; they contribute to each other. God is not Absolute Other for whom a human can contribute nothing. God and God's created humanity are in real relation in love. One cannot be fully related to any one entity without being related to others. Not only does God affect us in love, but also is affected by the love of God's creatures back to God in return.

2. God as Sovereign

According to Hartshorne, "The sovereignty of God is not a very biblical idea, especially if one has a low opinion of the respect of sovereigns for the freedom of their subjects."²⁸⁰ Does this mean that Hartshorne is opposed to the concept of "God as sovereign" itself? The answer is no. He said, "if by 'all-powerful' we mean that God has the highest conceivable form of power and that this power extends to all things - not as, with us, being confined to a tiny corner of the cosmos - and if this is what the word

²⁸⁰ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 80.

‘omnipotent’ can be understood to mean, then yes, God is omnipotent.” However he continues to say, “the word has been so fearfully misdefined, and has so catastrophically misled so many thinkers, that I incline to say that the word itself had better be dropped.” What he opposed was not the concepts of the sovereignty and omnipotence of God themselves but, rather, misdefining of those concepts as they pertain to God. Those concepts have been misdefined by the classical theists when used to denote God as Controlling power who determines every detail of the world from outside, so that God’s creatures are not free at all and thus never contribute to God.

It is important to notice that process thinkers do not decline all concepts of classical theism. Process thinkers accept the classical doctrine of “omnipresence,” that is, God is present with all. This is different from “pantheism,” which means that all things together are God. What process thinkers put forward is the doctrine of “panentheism,” which means that all things are in God. The meaning of “God is present to each,” for process thinkers, represents unlimited range and unparalleled closeness of God’s presence. One of the important implications of this concept is that God is present with us in our joy as well as suffering. If God is in complete control, the problem of evil becomes acute. When traditional theism portrayed God as the Controlling power, the doctrine of omnipotence finally meant that God controlled every detail of the world process.²⁸¹ If God is the Controlling power, the reason why an evil occasion happens must be either because God is the First Cause to make it happen or the Second Cause to allow it to happen. According to process thinkers, the problem lies in the fact that God, if conceived to be an all-controlling power, cannot be free of responsibility for evil. It follows from

²⁸¹ John Cobb and David Griffin, *Process Theology*, 52.

this that when we say God is sovereign, it is important that the meaning of sovereignty does not include the concept of God as Controlling power. When, in contrast, we say with the process theologian that God is sovereign, it means, “nothing could occur without God’s action of presenting possibilities.”²⁸² God is sovereign because God is omnipresent, meaning God is crucial to the world’s existence through God’s initial aim that provides and guides us to actualize our best potentialities.

According to Whitehead, God as “the reservoir of potentiality and the coordination of achievement” provides each worldly actuality with an “initial aim.”²⁸³ God’s initial aim in God’s primordial nature is an impulse, initially felt by every actuality (e.g. a human) to actualize the best possibility open to him/her, given his/her concrete situation. God, for Whitehead, persuades a human beyond all that he/she has become to what he/she might be through an “initial aim.” The provision of God’s initial aim to every human (or, every actual entity) is universal; there are no humans who do not experience the impulse of that aim. God is thus omnipresent.

Furthermore, God’s initial aim to every human involves a potentiality for the best possibility to be realized. God as “the divine Eros” lures humans to go beyond all that he/she has become to what he/she might be through God’s initial aim. God’s initial aim, thus, presupposes a process in human existence, that is, the process that goes from “has become” to “might be.” God’s initial aim for every human is, therefore, teleological. In this sense, nothing exists without God’s teleological action, meaning God is sovereign in all activities in the world. God’s omnipresent and teleological action is crucial in

²⁸² John Culp, “A Dialog with the Process Theology of John B. Cobb, Jr.” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 15 (Fall 1980), 35.

²⁸³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 94.

understanding the sovereignty of God. All of existence depends upon God, meaning nothing comes into existence apart from God's involvement with its becoming.

However, it does not mean that God is a totally determining power, as Classical theists claimed. God does not totally determine the becoming of all existence. Each event draws from the past in its self-determined response to God's presentation of possible arrangements of the past. For Whitehead, "every event is a response to the past and God provides the best possibilities to be actualized through God's initial aim. The past provides the resources, and the event itself makes the response. This means that the past is vital to what becomes, in contrast to the traditional doctrine of God as Absolute Other for whom nothing can contribute."²⁸⁴

For Whitehead, an actual occasion is a process composed of the influences of the past that are organized according to the self-determined response of an actual occasion to a potentiality presented by God. This means that at the center of every occasion is self-determination, that is, creativity. An actual occasion itself is what ultimately decides what it will become. This is why an actual occasion is free and responsible at the same time. The freedom and responsibility of a human as an actual entity is explained by the process view of creativity in which self-determination is a basic feature of reality.

However, this does not mean that God moves away from the world, leaving it to itself once created, in Deist fashion. God is active in the world through persuasive power, which allows us to explain how God can be active in the world without any loss of human freedom. God does not act as a controlling power determining the response of an actual entity to the past. Instead, God presents potentialities and calls the actual entity to

²⁸⁴ John Culp, 35.

fulfill the best possibility. “In this process-relational vision, God is always and everlastingly laboring with the world as it is, in this moment and in the next, in order to lead the world toward the better world that it might become.”²⁸⁵

For the process model of thinking, God always works with the world as it is, in any and every given moment. God always labors with this world toward greater measures of harmony and beauty. Process thinkers provide a vision of God who is inherently and everlastingly relational in every moment and everywhere with God’s creatures. “The world is not under God’s control, especially if control means tightfisted rule. Further, the nature of truth is not unilateral decree or pristine and eternal ideal unsullied by the mire and muck of the world as we know it; instead, truth does emerge as a function of the give-and-receive dynamic between God and the world.”²⁸⁶

Therefore, process thinkers give an answer to the question, “How does God labor with this world?” The answer is that God works with the world in God’s sovereignty. God’s sovereignty includes both God’s omnipresence and God’s teleological guidance of the world through God’s initial aim. God works by being present to each and every occasion of the world. However, God’s presence is not an overwhelming determinant of any occasion because the world itself with all its inherent power of creativity contributes a great deal of momentum to each occasion’s becoming. With the inherent nature of creativity each occasion exercises a measure of self-direction.

Nonetheless, God continues working, leading the world to actualize its best potentialities open to itself at every moment. God as sovereign is present as the guidance

²⁸⁵ Michael Lodahl, “To Whom Belong the Covenants?: Whitehead, Wesley, and Wildly Diverse Religious Traditions,” in David Ray Griffin, ed., *Deep Religious Pluralism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 194.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

that the occasion can go beyond all that it has become to what it might be. “God is, thus, always working with the world as it is, and is working in this way everywhere. At all times and in all places, God is present as the subtle calling onward, as the whisper of something better than what is in this moment. God has always worked in this way, is always working with the world as it is – for God receives each moment of experience, for what it is, into the incomprehensible abyss of divine knowing. God receives what the world offers – and out of the sheer facticity of that offering of the world, God weaves something new, a new vision for what could be, what might yet become.”²⁸⁷

God does have a will for the world in God’s sovereignty, but it is a will that does not overwhelm the freedom of God’s creatures. God’s sovereign will is a contribution to every creature’s becoming. Divine will in God’s sovereignty is always fitted to the particularities of each and every creature in every moment and the teleological vision of the world. Through God’s initial aim God calls the world to become better and experiences the world’s response to that calling. That response to the calling is lovingly received, judged, and cherished by God and thus helps to guide the world for better as it continues to come to being, to become. God’s teleological relationality with all of creation, everywhere, at all times, is crucial in understanding of God’s sovereignty over the world. Every creature’s own striving and struggle, its own yearning to be, its own suffering to endure and its joy to enjoy is taken seriously in God’s sovereign relation with the world. God’s sovereignty, hence, does not indicate God as a tyrant but God as “the great companion – the fellow sufferer who understands.”²⁸⁸ Hartshorne argues, “God as all-creative, all-determining Cause, effect of, influenced by nothing, is no longer an

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 195.

²⁸⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

appropriate idea. Much more appropriate is the idea of a mother, influencing, but sympathetic to and hence influenced by, her child and delighting in its growing creativity and freedom.”²⁸⁹ God’s sovereignty is not about the sovereignty of a tyrant but indicates the idea of God as a mother who cares, understands, loves, guides, and leads her children for better.

With a similar sentiment, John Wesley also believes in the loving, non-coercive, and responsive nature of God’s interactions with human beings. As studied above, Wesley repudiates the doctrine of predestination in Calvin. Wesley says, “the actions of men are quite voluntary; the fruit of their own will.”²⁹⁰ According to Wesley, Calvin did not understand human potential as an interaction in which God does not “*force*” you, but “being *assisted* by his grace you . . . chose the better part.”²⁹¹ What Calvin failed to understand was this cooperation of God and the world. It follows that Wesley and Whitehead share a similar idea that God’s power is not coercive and that humans are free agents.

However, the concept of human as a free agent, for Wesley as for the process theologian, does not mean that God is away from the world as claimed by Deism. “In Wesley’s doctrine of Original Sin, sin is so pervasive that if one is left to one’s own power and ability, the rich possibilities that God offers in salvation are simply not integrated in the unrepentant sinner’s sheer capacity to determine his or her own aim.”²⁹² Even though Wesley believes that a human is a free agent, Wesley has a pessimistic view

²⁸⁹ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes*, 58.

²⁹⁰ John Wesley, “Thought Upon Necessity,” 467.

²⁹¹ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 55.

²⁹² Paul Mickey, “Process Theology and Wesleyan Thought: An Evangelical Perspective,” in *Wesleyan Theology Today*, ed., Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), 79.

of human ability due to the doctrine of Original Sin. What he/she needs as a human is the sovereign care of God. Wesley has optimism in God's grace. God's sovereign care is shown in his doctrine of prevenient grace that floods the coming together of one's emergent moments of experience that as the sinner reaches forward for what he or she will become, the human aiming will include God's sovereign grace.

The concept of prevenient grace in Wesley, thus, indicates that God is, for Wesley, similar to concept of "God as a mother" claimed by Hartshorne -- who cares, understand, loves, guides, and leads her children for the better. God's grace is, for Wesley, assisting us to choose the better. God works cooperatively to woo, guide, and lead the emergent occasion to be responsible to the possibilities for becoming so that it will contribute to the highest harmony possible for the future.²⁹³ Wesley helps us to understand that God is sovereign. It does not mean that God as sovereign is the Controlling power. Rather God as sovereign is the caring touch that leads us to be creative for the best possibility to be realized. God's sovereignty is not irresistible but persuasive, that is, not forcing us but assisting us "to work out our own salvation."

Furthermore, God's sovereignty, for Wesley, includes the concept of omnipresence as well as teleological guidance of the world. Wesley has a kinship to process thought in that God's omnipresent and teleological action is also crucial in understanding the sovereignty of God in relation with us. It is important to notice that the notion of Whitehead's initial aim of God to every human as omnipresent and teleological presupposes a process in human existence that has a kinship with Wesley's doctrine of God's prevenient grace. As studied above, after Original Sin, human existence, for

²⁹³ Ibid.

Wesley, is now understood as being in total depravity. However, based upon God's prevenient grace, he places an emphasis not upon the pessimism of human existence, but upon the optimism of God's grace in which Wesley proclaims God's intervention into human existence to open up the possibility of perfecting in love. For Wesley, God's prevenient grace is the grace that intervenes into human existence similar to God's initial aim in process thought that influences actual entities. Wesley holds a kinship with Whitehead. As God's initial aim is omnipresent in that it beckons to every occasion of human experience, God's prevenient grace is also universal in that every human is freely given this grace. God's prevenient grace is the one that describes God's sovereignty as God's omnipresence. According to Wesley, there are no humans who do not experience God's prevenient grace. God's prevenient grace is omnipresent. God's sovereignty, for Wesley, includes God's omnipresence in the whole of actual entities in the world.

Furthermore, God's prevenient grace, similar to the concept of God's initial aim in process thought, represents God's sovereignty as teleological guidance of the world. According to process thought, God's initial aim, as studied above, presupposes a process in human existence, that is, the movement of "has become" to "might be." God's sovereignty revealed in God's initial aim to every human is teleological. Likewise, according to Wesley, God's prevenient grace also reveals God's teleological guidance of the world as God's sovereignty. As noted above, the Fall of Adam brought about significant results: a definite separation between God and humanity. That means that the life of God in the soul of humanity was totally extinguished. The fall of Adam resulted in "the entire corruption of our nature."²⁹⁴ Human existence is now understood as being in

²⁹⁴ Wesley, "The New Birth," *The Works*, vol.2,190.

total depravity. However, it is important to notice that based upon God's prevenient grace, Wesley places an emphasis not upon the pessimism of human existence, but upon the optimism of God's grace, in the insistence upon which Wesley proclaims God's intervention in the human existence to open up the possibility of perfecting in love. For Wesley, God's prevenient grace thus presupposes a process in human existence from "have become," that is, "being in total depravity," to "might be," that is, "perfecting in love." Perfecting in love is the best potentiality to be actualized in human existence that God's prevenient grace aims at. God's prevenient grace is surely teleological. It includes a continuous process of "have become" to "might be." Therefore, Wesley may shake hands with Whitehead in terms of the way they understand the concept of God's sovereignty. They both understand that God's sovereignty includes God as omnipresent and teleological, but persuasive, not coercive. God's sovereignty also includes God's caring touch in which we experience God as "fellow-sufferer," not as "Caesar."

3. God as Love

Process theologian Robert Mesle maintains that, "In our common human experience it is inescapably clear that love means being related to and affected by those we love."²⁹⁵ He continues to say, "Process theologians believe that these experiences are important guides to understanding divine love."²⁹⁶ Given that process thought clearly denotes the idea that reality is relational, through and through, God, for process thinkers, must be the "supremely related One, who shares fully the experience of every creature, who is at once

²⁹⁵ Robert Mesle, *Process Theology*, 25.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

fully steadfast and fully responsive.”²⁹⁷ This means that being-related is the very heart of what it means for God to be God. To be God is to be related. In other words, God as love must be in relation in a way to affect as well as to be affected or to be active as well as to be passive/receptive. It is important to remember that “Hartshorne’s emphasis on God’s relativity or relatedness is designed to bring to the fore the religious claim that God really loves us. To regard God as absolute in all respects is to violate this basic belief in God’s all-pervading love.”²⁹⁸

As discussed in the previous chapters, the problem of classical theism is the idea that the relations between God and the world are unilateral relations. God is not relative but absolute, meaning God is the only One who creates; the world lacks all creative power. The world cannot make even a tiny difference to God. The problem is that if God is not affected by the events of the world, then God is impassible, not moved by their suffering.

Process theists deny this static concept of God claimed by classical theists because this classical God does not enjoy “real relations” with the world. Process thinkers maintain that if God cannot suffer or cannot be affected, then God cannot love because “love neither rules, nor is it unmoved.”²⁹⁹ It is important to notice that in order to enjoy real relations there must be giving and receiving. Love requires both activity and receptivity. According to Hartshorne, “God’s love is affirmed to be the type of awareness that responds fully to what the other is. . . and this awareness of the other,

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 26.

²⁹⁸ Santiago Sia, *God in Process Thought: A Study in Charles Hartshorne’s Concept of God*, 91.

²⁹⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

which relates the lover to the loved one, provides the reason why the other or the loved one should respond to the lover.”³⁰⁰

To love is to enter into real relations with others, meaning love includes not only providing beneficence but also feeling all the passions of joy, sorrow, grief, fear, hope, and triumph that bind one to another and make life so dynamic and changeable.³⁰¹

Criticizing the idea of God’s unilateral relation toward the world, Hartshorne points out that “Anselm’s God [the God of classical theism] can give us everything, everything except the right to believe that there is one who, with infinitely subtle and appropriate sensitivity, rejoices in all our joys and sorrows in all our sorrows.”³⁰² Hartshorne continues: “To love . . . is to wish to give rather than to receive; but in loving God we are, according to Anselm and thousands of other orthodox divines, forbidden to seek to give; for God, they say, is totally impassive, non-receptive, non-relative being.”³⁰³

According to Hartshorne, God’s love is thus essentially social, for divine love is affirmed to be the type of awareness that responds fully to what the other is. This means that divine love is more than beneficence; it includes sensitivity to joys, sorrows, hopes, and sufferings. “This conception of divine love implies relativity or relatedness.”³⁰⁴ God does not simply know that we suffer. God is aware of our actual pain and misery in their concreteness, for God’s consequent nature is God’s prehension of all the actual processes of the world.

³⁰⁰ Santiago Sia, 91.

³⁰¹ Robert Mesle, *Process Theology*, 29.

³⁰² Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*, 54.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁰⁴ Santiago Sia, 91.

It is important to remember that Hartshorne compares God to a sensitive mother who participates in our feelings and thoughts and responds to them. In God's case this appreciation is perfect. As studied above, compared to a non-divine entity, God is the only One who positively prehends *all* the actual processes of the world. This means that it is only God who can appreciate us in our full worth. In this sense God's love is fully responsive to *every* one in the world. In each moment, God shares the experience of every creature and responds to that creature in a way best appropriate to it.

It follows from this that process thinkers reject classical theism when it states that God is in all respects active and in no respects passive. According to process thinkers, God is both active and passive, each in uniquely excellent ways. It is God's primordial nature that works actively in relation with the world because it is God's relevance for the world as a "lure for feeling."³⁰⁵ Also, it is God's consequent nature that works passively in relation with the world, because it is God's prehensions of all the actual processes of the world. The world indeed influences God; God's nature is called "consequent" insofar as it is dependent upon the influence of non-divine actual occasions. From this, process thinkers maintain that God is not only active but also passive; God not only affects, but can also be affected. It is thus God's dipolar nature that makes God's real relation in love with the world dynamic.

It is interesting to notice that a Wesleyan process thinker, Schubert M. Ogden argues that "Wesley is exactly like the process theologian in interpreting our authentic

³⁰⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 189. Whitehead says, "Feelings are the 'real' components of actual entities. . . The primary element in the 'lure for feeling' is the subject's prehension of the primordial nature of God."

existence as essentially involving an active as well as passive moment.”³⁰⁶ He speaks of these moments in Wesley as “love” and “faith.” According to Ogden, the Wesleyan witness and process theology express “essentially the same understanding of human authenticity: as passive acceptance of the gift of God’s love as the sole ultimate ground of all reality and meaning and, on the basis of this acceptance, active obedience to the demand of God’s love as the only final cause to which both self and the world exist to contribute.”³⁰⁷

The process-relational proposal is to conceive God’s providence in terms of God’s providing every actuality with an “initial aim.” God is providing and offering God’s will as an inducement for the moment-by-moment emergence of the actual world. Each experience and its efficacious objective existence is a gift to what the future might become. It follows from this that process theology affirms with Wesleyan theology and even with the Protestant Reformers that “we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, in the sense that it is solely by trusting in God’s love alone in all its absoluteness that we can realize our authentic existence as selves in the world.”³⁰⁸

However, this does not mean that the way in which creatures are related to God is only passive, meaning that creatures only receive God’s love in a passive way. One of Methodism’s unique contributions to Christian theology is the understanding of salvation as something that is both passive and active. Good works, for Wesley, are necessary elements to salvation. Faith, through which alone we are saved, for Wesley, is “an *active*

³⁰⁶ Schubert M. Ogden, “Process Theology and the Wesleyan Witness” in *Wesleyan Theology Today: a Bicentennial Theological Consultation*. Ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), 73.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

faith that works by love in the sense that it is only by loyally serving God's love in all its relativity that we can continue in the authentic existence that has its basis in trust."³⁰⁹

Good works are the ones in which faith working through love comes to an active expression, that is, practical expression. Ogden thus evaluates Wesley saying "Wesley is exactly like the process theologian in interpreting our authentic existence as essentially involving an active as well as a passive moment."³¹⁰

According to Wesley, humans are working with God. Humans are "partakers of God," meaning humans are free and responsible agents. In Wesley's affirming Christian perfection as "grace upon grace," he kept a balance between "works" and "faith." As studied above, Wesley's concern was a balance between the faith that justifies and the faith that works by love,³¹¹ and this perfect fusion of faith and works, that is, "faith working by love" in the life of believers, was the perfection which was attainable in this life to every true believer. Human ability and necessity of faith, for Wesley, were counterbalanced in the thought of perfection, and it could not be interpreted without the key to his theology, grace.

It follows from this that for Wesley, God's creative and sustaining activity in the world is predicated upon God's immediate presence – and yet this presence does not overwhelm or negate the creaturely integrity and energies. Wesley said, "God acts everywhere, and therefore, is everywhere. . . . God acts in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, throughout the whole compass of his creation by sustaining all things . . . by governing all, every moment superintending everything that he has made; strongly and

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of 'Love Divine': John Wesley's Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 243.

sweetly influencing all, and yet without destroying the liberty of his rational creatures.”³¹²
For Wesley, God is not coercive in interaction with rational creatures or human beings.

Wesley thus even applies the concept of “cannot” to God, in his understanding of God’s dealing with human liberty. Wesley said, “Were human liberty taken away, men would be as incapable of virtue as stones. Therefore, (with reverence be it spoken), the Almighty himself cannot do this thing.”³¹³ The justification for that “cannot” follows:

Only He [God] that can do all things else cannot deny himself: He cannot counteract himself, or oppose his own work. Were it not for this, he would destroy all sin, with its attendant pain in a moment. He would abolish wickedness out of his whole creation, and suffer no trace of it to remain. But in so doing he would counteract himself; he would altogether overturn his own work and undo all that he has done since he created man upon the earth. For he created man in his own image: A spirit like himself; a spirit endued with understanding, with will or affections, and liberty; . . . He could not be a moral agent, any more than a tree or a stone.³¹⁴

According to Wesley, the reason why God cannot take away human liberty is because “He cannot thus contradict himself, or undo what he has done. He cannot destroy out of the soul of man that image of himself wherein he made him: And without doing this, he cannot abolish sin and pain out of the world.”³¹⁵ Wesley indeed was concerned that the liberty of God’s rational creatures be upheld and sustained; God cannot take away human liberty.

It follows from this that for Wesley, God as love includes the idea that God painstakingly nurtures responsible agency in rational creatures. God’s creative power continually co-operates with God’s wisdom and goodness, laboring in a fashion

³¹² Wesley, “On the Omnipresence of God,” *Works*, vol. 7, 240.

³¹³ Wesley, “On Divine Providence,” *Works*, vol. 6, 318.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 318-9.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 319.

expressive of a love that bestows, encourages, and evokes a response of love from rational creatures.³¹⁶ “God’s work is to allow the creaturely elements room to be, to grow, to exercise creaturely freedom for the sake of the possibilities of love.”³¹⁷ The concept of God as love includes the loving, non-coercive, and responsive nature of God’s interaction with human beings.

To sum up: Wesley is similar to process thinkers in his way of understanding God’s interaction with the world. Both Wesley and process thinkers deny the unilateral relations in which God is the only One who affects and can never be affected. Both of them reject the idea of God to whom the world contributes nothing. God and the world enjoy the real relations in a way to affect and be affected in their mutual interactions. God as love affects the world in a way to guide and beckon the world persuasively to what the world becomes. God as love also can be affected by the world in a way to experience fully what the world is. Divine love is not just beneficence. It must include sensitivity to the joys, sorrows, hopes, and sufferings. God is the “the great companion who is the fellow-sufferer” who understands as well as who respects our liberty. God as love means that God is love and God acts in love, which requires, in turn, that God enjoys real relations with the world in a way not only to affect and but also to be affected by, or not only active and but also passive.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

4. God as Perfecting Perfect

It is important to notice that process theists, like classical theists, reject the idea of an imperfect deity. Both of them agree that God is perfect. However, the fundamental difference lies in the fact that for classical theists, God is monopolar, while for process theists, God is dipolar. Hartshorne points out that the classical theist Anselm “sought to define God’s perfection as ‘that than which nothing greater (or better) can be conceived.’”³¹⁸ Hartshorne understands Anselm’s definition of God’s perfection in a way that “the divine worth is in all respects strictly unsurpassable, incapable of growth as well as of rivalry by another.”³¹⁹ According to Hartshorne, the problem of classical theists is that their logic of perfection sees God as monopolar in that they chose only one element in each pair out of the dipolar attributes of God such as absolute-relative, active-passive, and static-becoming.

The problem of a monopolar God claimed by classical theists is that God is *actus purus*; God is pure actual and thus has no potentialities. God is Unmoved Mover who is affecting but can never be affected. God is perfected perfect. Process theists reject this static God, for this God cannot be actively involved in our processive reality, in which real relationship is essential. This static God cannot in any appropriate way be held to be aware of the services and values of the created. The creatures may strive to establish their achievements and realize their values and beauties but their services are ultimately pointless because they can affect nothing to the already perfected God.

³¹⁸ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes*, 7.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Rejecting this classical concept of God, Hartshorne poses a question, “Do or do not finite things contribute something to the greatness of God?”³²⁰ He goes on, “If you reply that the world contributes nothing to the greatness of God, then I ask, What are we all doing, and why talk about ‘serving God,’ who, you say, gains nothing whatever from our existence?”³²¹

Process theists argue that the classical God is monopolar. God is only active, so God’s control of the world is absolute, leaving nothing for creatures to add to the perfection of God. God is perfected perfect; God lacks potentiality to change, to participate in the activities of the world, and to be affected by the joys and sufferings of God’s creatures. Process theists claim that such a Traditional God only acts but is never acted upon, and thus can never be in real relations with the world. Even if classical theists believe that God is love, it is contradictory to maintain the concept of God as love, because love requires a real relationship rather than a unilateral relationship.

To the contrary, process thinkers argue for a dipolar conception of the perfection of God. According to Whitehead, there are two natures of God. The primordial nature is non-temporal and unchanging while consequent nature is always becoming because it depends upon the events of the world. The primordial nature of God is God’s envisagement of all possibilities. God’s primordial nature is complete and unchanged due to its complete range of eternal possibilities. In this sense, process theists may shake hands with classical theists. Both of them agree that God is complete, unchanged, permanent, independent, transcendent, active, creative, and etc.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid., 8.

However, process thinkers maintain that there is another nature, the second mentioned above, that is attributed essentially to God: consequent. The consequent nature of God is God's prehension of the actual processes of the world. It is a perfect memory of what has been in the world, given what Whitehead speaks of as the "objective immortality" of the world in God. In God's consequent nature, God experiences the world of actual occasions, meaning God is acted upon or being affected. In God's consequent nature, God is immanent, dependent, changed, temporal, passive, responsive, etc.

With its different understanding of the dipolar perfection of God, process thought sees the divine creative activity as based upon responsiveness to the world.³²² God creates the world by informing it with the best possibilities, in other words, God invites all the creatures to strive for whatever perfection of which they are capable. God is surely active, active in perfection in relation with the world. At the same time, the world also creates God, meaning God is acted upon or being affected. However, the world's creation of God does not mean that the world brings God into existence. It means that the world affects God by creating something in God, that is, the memories for what shall become objectively immortal in God's consequent nature. God is affected. In other words, God is passive in God's perfect interaction with the world. All creaturely feelings, especially feelings of joys and suffering, are included in the divine life as the immortal memories.

It follows from this that God's dipolar perfection includes the idea that God's primordial or abstract nature is everlasting and does not change, while God's consequent

³²² John Cobb and David Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, 52.

or concrete nature participates in the life of the universe and is affected by it. God enjoys, suffers, is affected, and thus changes. God affects the world and is affected by the joys and suffering of the creatures. God is, thus, both cause and effect. God is independent as primordial and involved as consequent. Process thought supports the idea that in God, “we live and move and have our being.”³²³ The relationship between God and us is real not just unilateral. Therefore, process theists reject the essential perfection of God as entailing that God is *actus purus*, meaning God has no potentialities and cannot coherently be said to change nor to be passible. According to process thinkers, the perfection of God is not static but in process. There is room for change and growth in the perfection of God. God’s perfection is not perfected but perfecting.

In order to argue the idea of perfection that includes the idea of change and growth, Hartshorne rejects Classical idea of perfection of God, saying that “If perfection is defined as that which in no respect could conceivably be greater, and hence is incapable of increase, then we face paradox on either hand.”³²⁴ He provides a solution, saying that “let us define the perfect, or supremely excellent or good, as that individual being than which no other individual being could conceivably be greater, but which itself, in another state, could become greater.”³²⁵ He continues to explain that “Otherwise expressed, let us define perfection as an excellence such that rivalry or superiority on the part of other individuals is impossible, but self-superiority is not impossible.”³²⁶ According to Hartshorne, “the perfect is the ‘self surpassing surpasser of all’” and “the surpasser of all others must be a single individual enjoying as his own all the values of all other

³²³ Acts 17:28.

³²⁴ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*, 20.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

individuals, and incapable of failing to do so.”³²⁷ The perfection of God, for Hartshorne, includes the idea of increase, growth, and thus, change.

However, Hartshorne acknowledges the danger of the idea of change that is applied to the concept of God’s perfection. He knows that the Greek philosophical thinkers were inclined to think of deity as wholly unchanging. The traditional objection to divine change was that “if a being were already perfect, meaning that nothing better was possible, then change for the better must be impossible for the being.”³²⁸ So he poses a question, “Do we have to admit that God cannot change?” His answer is “Clearly yes, insofar as change is for the worse and capacity for it objectionable, a *fault* or *weakness*. God then cannot change for the worse.”³²⁹

However, he then turns to the concept of change for the better. He argues, “Does every conceivable kind of change show a fault or weakness? Is there not change for the better? . . . All healthy growth is such change. We are delighted in growth in infants and children. Is there nothing to learn from this about how to conceive God?”³³⁰ Hartshorne provides an idea of growth as a wholly good form of change that is applicable to the divine life. According to Hartshorne, “even an infinite richness,” that is, the perfection of God “may be open to increase.”³³¹ Hartshorne provides a way to understand the concept of change for the better: “Change is not finally analyzable as destruction, but only as creation of novelty.”³³² Hartshorne claims that “the divine, to be worthy of worship, must excel any conceivable being other than itself; it must be unsurpassable by *another*,

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes*, 7.

³²⁹ Ibid., 6.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid., 7.

³³² Ibid., 8.

exalted beyond all possible rivals.”³³³ This opens a way to understand the perfection of God in growth. The perfection of God can change for the better. The perfection of God is in the process. God’s perfection rejects any comparison with the excellence of the created; God’s perfection is unsurpassable. However, it does not exclude God’s growth in the perfection of Godself for the better. God’s perfection is not static or perfected. God’s perfection is in increase for the better, in other words, perfecting not perfected. God as the perfecting perfect, for Hartshorne, is “the self-surpassing surpasser of all.”

This concept of perfection in process thought is also revealed in the theology of John Wesley. According to Theodore Runyon, one of the basic things making Wesleyan thought distinctive is the idea of new creation transforming all dimensions of human existence, both personal and social, and also cosmic in scope. The cosmic drama of the renewing of creation is that new creation begins with the renewal of the *imago Dei* in humankind. The renewal of the creation and all creatures through the renewal in humanity of the image of God is what Wesley identifies as the very heart of Christianity.³³⁴ The renewal of the image of God is the indispensable key to Wesley’s whole soteriology. Such renewal makes manifest the relation between justification, as Christ’s work for us, and sanctification, as the Spirit’s work in us. Wesley describes it as a “real” (regeneration - sanctification) as well as a “relative” (justification) change in the believer. It is true that in Protestantism justification or conversion is viewed as completing salvation. For Luther, there is no goal higher than justification. There is no process in salvation. Once a person is justified, he/she is saved. Grace is understood as

³³³ Ibid., 8-9.

³³⁴ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 8.

divine pardon and forgiveness (relative change; christocentric). This is the main point in Western tradition in which forensic metaphors predominate.

However, for the Eastern tradition, grace is understood in therapeutic metaphors in which it is considered as the power of God working within to renew our nature (real change). Grace, in Eastern thought, is not simply one generous act by a judge but a *process* involving a constant presence. Here Wesley is distinctive in his synthetic way in which he does not hesitate to employ both traditions. Wesley prays for grace that is pardon and the grace that is transforming. For Wesley, grace, when it is received, both communicates forgiveness and makes renewal of the image in humanity possible (real and relative change). Through the grace of Christ and the Spirit, the possibility of restoring and renewing the image (mirroring and reflecting the relationship between God and humanity) for which we were created is opened up again.

Wesley's understanding of grace in synthesis, hence, is consistent with God's aim, to renew the human creature in the image of God, and to activate the capacity to mirror and reflect God into the world. Wesley is, in contrast to those positions which emphasized only justification, making the case for the equal importance of God's work "in us" through the Spirit. No wonder Wesley in his controversy with Moravians had to insist that the change is more than a change in status before God, it is a transformation, a new creation, a change from the image of earthly Adam into the image of the heavenly.³³⁵ And it is the work of the Spirit which carries Christ's work toward its intended goal, the new creation. As the image of God we are called not just to receive but to reflect God's perfect love into the world.

³³⁵ Ibid., 163.

It follows from this that whereas faith is the mark of justification, love is the mark of sanctification. According to the author, for both Luther and Wesley, faith and love are not isolated from each other.³³⁶ Love is never without faith nor is faith without love. Nevertheless, there is something distinctive in Wesley's understanding. Wesley's point is to emphasize that salvation is not just being "reinstated in God's favor," but "restoring those to the image of God" who are being saved.³³⁷ And it is this *transformative process*, with the conquering of sin (negative branch in sanctification) and the increase of love (positive goal in sanctification), toward which salvation is directed. It is true that for Wesley, God is not content simply to forgive and reconcile the sinner. God's intention, for Wesley, is a new creation in which love becomes the supreme goal toward which the life of faith is directed.

From this Wesley speaks of the recovery of the image as the *telos*, the goal, of the process of sanctification. As the essential qualities of the image are to be found not within humanity but in that which humanity is called to reflect, the goal is made possible by "participation in the divine nature."³³⁸ God's goal is not merely to cloak us in a righteousness that remains external to us (justification, relative change), but to impart and implant Christ's righteousness in us (regeneration - sanctification - perfection, real change) in such a way that it grows and expands, informing every aspect of our lives. Wesley's position, hence, is undergirded by the Eastern tradition in which perfection is understood as a perfecting perfection, "a never ending aspiration for all of love's fullness," rather than by the Western tradition in which it is regarded as a perfected

³³⁶ Ibid., 86.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid., 80.

perfection, a static state of perfection.³³⁹ Christian perfection, for Wesley, is thus not to be understood as being perfect in ourselves, but in the relationship for which we were created and to which we can be restored.

When asked to summarize his doctrine of perfection, Wesley frequently quoted Galatians 5:6, “faith working by love.” Wesley reminds us that perfection is nothing greater and nothing less than “loving God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves.” And it is loving the neighbor that involves having the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked, sharing his spirit in self-giving to others. However, on the basis of human efforts, this kind of self-giving love is impossible. The source of the energy, for Wesley, comes from the love of God received through the life-giving Spirit. It means that perfection is not for our own sakes but for the fulfillment of the vocation to which we are called, to image and reflect to others that which we have received from God. There is no way to reflect and share God’s love except by participating in it. Love cannot be appropriated as an abstract idea; it must be encountered, it must be participated in. It must be allowed to work its transforming power in our hearts, at the center of our identity, where its affirmation is received and responded to.³⁴⁰

Runyon thus suggests that Wesley is distinctive in his synthetic way: “the experiential dimension of Christian faith” in which experience is the medium through which religious reality is transmitted. Believing the right things (orthodoxy), plus doing the right things (orthopraxy), according to Runyon, still does not add up to what Wesley considers essential. What’s necessary is “orthopathy,” that is, “the new sensitivity to and

³³⁹ Ibid., 91.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 226.

participation in spiritual reality that mark genuine faith.”³⁴¹ This meant that for Wesley the definition of salvation had to shift from a metaphysical status, whether guaranteed by baptism or election (orthopraxy or orthodoxy), to an experiential knowledge of God (orthopathy) that makes one a participant in what is known, a knowledge consistent with the participation in God. Grace could no longer be defined simply as a metaphysical gift independent of consciousness but now would be understood as a conscious encounter with God. Wesley advocates “perceptible inspiration” in which grace is consciously experienced rather than institutionally mediated through the correct knowledge of God and the proper sacramental benefits.³⁴² What the renewal of the creature in the image of God for the new creation requires, therefore, is participation in the energy of God, an energy that transforms and creates anew.

As God’s intention is a new creation in which salvation includes the transformation of the creature, a fundamental hope is engendered that the future can surpass the present. God’s goal is the transformation of this present age, restoring health and holiness to God’s creation; therefore God enters into the life of the world to renew the creature after the divine image and the creation after the divine will. Religion, hence, is not humanity’s means of escape to a more tolerable heavenly realm, but participation in God’s own redemptive enterprise, God’s new creation, “faith working by love,” bringing holiness and happiness to all the earth.³⁴³ God’s perfect love is therefore a critical principle. For Wesley, life lived in the fullness of the perfect love of God is something more than forensic forgiveness which was emphasized by Western thinkers. The concern for

³⁴¹ Ibid., 149.

³⁴² Ibid., 150.

³⁴³ Ibid., 169.

Christian perfection, for Wesley, includes a way of getting at the quality of Christian life, the state as well as the process.

The greatest strength of the Wesleyan doctrine of new creation lies in its ability to mobilize the believer to seek a future that surpasses the present. It turns the Christian life into a life of becoming that is constantly open to new possibilities. Perfection, for Wesley, is not perfected but perfecting. According to Wesley, salvation is not just being cloaked in a righteousness but restoring the image of God as the *telos*. Wesley goes beyond the idea of perfected perfection, that is, a static state of perfection. Christian perfection is not merely perfection in ourselves, but in the relationship for which we are created and to which we can be restored. God is calling to us to impart and implant Christ's perfect righteousness in us in such a way that we live out the life of faith through love with God and neighbors. Therefore, the idea of perfection, for Wesley, is a perfecting perfection, that is, a never ending aspiration for all of love's fullness rather than a perfected perfection, that is, a static state of perfection. Perfection requires a participation in love, relationship in love, and thus, the process of becoming better.

IV. Constructing the Doctrine of Perfection

1. Real Relations in God

As studied above, the idea of subjectivity, for process thinkers, includes both receptivity and activity. One occasion of experience is affected by the occasions of experience of the past and affects the occasions of experience of the future. There is no single subject that is not acted on, and there is no single subject that does not act.³⁴⁴ This idea of subjectivity leads us to conceptualize what process thinkers call “real relations.” The notion of “real relations” is based upon a rejection of the Classical concept of one-way relations or unilateral relations in which God creates, but the creatures lack all creative power. Process thinkers argue that “Aquinas's way of expressing this asymmetry is to say that the relation from God to the creatures is real (for it makes a difference, all the difference, to them) whereas the relation from the creatures to God is rational, or in the mind only (for the existence of the creatures makes no difference to the being of God).”³⁴⁵

Process thinkers reject this asymmetry because in one-sided relations or unilateral relations, God becomes impassible, literally, without feeling or emotion. It is important to remember that the moment of concrescence is when the prehension or feeling is experienced. According to Whitehead, feeling is essential to understand the metaphysics

³⁴⁴ John B. Cobb, Jr. “Whitehead’s Theory of Value,” 1-2.

³⁴⁵ “Process Theism,” from [http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-theism.](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-theism/), 5/49.

of process. As noted earlier, Whitehead says that an emergent actual occasion prehends “for the foundation of its own existence, the various elements of the universe out of which it arises.”³⁴⁶ The internal constitution of the emergent entity is comprised by the prehensions, either positive or negative, of the data. This means, for process thinkers, that God is affected by the creatures. Real relations, thus, mean not unilateral or one-sided relations but mutual or two-way relations in which both receptivity and activity are possible in the subjects in those relations.

Also, real relations include internal relations. It is important to remember that according to Whitehead, “The concrescence of each individual actual entity is internally determined and is externally free.”³⁴⁷ As stated above, an actual entity is “internally determined” for the data from which an emergent entity draws are determined by entities other than the emergent occasion. However, even if the data are determined, in so far as an experiencing subject makes a decision as to how the data enter into its constitution, the entity is “externally free.” This means that through the process of prehensions, actual entities are internally related to their predecessors and externally related to their successors. It follows from this that an individual is in the world and the world is in the individual. Process philosophy is, thus, called “organic” philosophy.

The essential problem of classical theism is that God as Absolute Other only means “an absence of internal relatedness between God and the world.”³⁴⁸ Remember that, as written above, for classical theists, the relation from the creatures to God is rational, or in the mind only (for the existence of the creatures makes no difference to the being of God).

³⁴⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 219.

³⁴⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 27.

³⁴⁸ “Charles Hartshorne,” from [http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hartshorne.](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hartshorne/), 8/16.

According to classical theism, the world is completely external to God. However, it is important to notice that according to Hartshorne, the God-creature relation is internal to God. Given process philosophy as organic, Hartshorne argues that “divine inclusiveness is sometimes like the inclusion of thoughts in a mind, but usually it is described as like the inclusion of cells within a living body. It is never like the inclusion of marbles in a box. The inorganic and insentient character of a box is inadequate as a model for divinity. . . Divine inclusiveness in Hartshorne is organic inclusiveness.”³⁴⁹ This means that all creaturely feelings, especially feelings of suffering and joy, are included in the divine life. God is affected by the feelings of the universe. Thus, Hartshorne maintains that “God has *internal* relations to creatures by way of knowing and acting towards them.”³⁵⁰ Internal relations reject an idea of relation in the mind only. Real relations, thus, are ones that include *internal* relations to its participants by way of feeling, knowing, and acting towards them.

This idea of real relations as both mutual and internal is crucial to understand the concept of “love.” According to process thinkers, “there is value in giving one's love to another, as for instance, bringing children into the world and loving them; there is also value in one's love being received and returned, as when the children mature and cherish relations with their parents. Yet, one cannot love another unless the other exists, or once existed. Thus, if there is a value in love, it requires *the existence of the other*, not merely *the idea of the existence of the other*.”³⁵¹ The concept of love, for process thinkers, hence,

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ “Process Theism,” 6/49.

involves real relations that include *mutual or two-way* relations as well as *internal* relations.

It follows from this that, for process thinkers, “God as love” means that God is in real relations with the universe. According to process thinkers, classical theism’s denial of real relations in God creates a God who can be compassionate towards the creatures without feeling sympathy for them. Divine love, for classical theists, is beneficence. Cobb and Griffin says, the “denial of an element of sympathetic responsiveness to the divine love meant that it was entirely creative. That is, God loves us only in the sense that he does good things for us.”³⁵² Love, for classical theists, means by “active goodwill.”³⁵³ The essential problem is that “the notion of sympathetic compassion is missing.”³⁵⁴ The pitfall of *unilateral* relations in God toward the universe is that the world prehends the loving touch of God but that God feels nothing. Remember that God as Controlling Power only means God’s one-sided relations toward the universe and God as Absolute Other includes absence of internal relatedness between God and the world. The Classical concept of God as love, thus, reveals passionless love; in other words, God affects but is not affected.

Thus, this process concept of God as love in terms of real relations provides a theologically constructive implication for Methodists when they understand the experiential dimension of the theology of Wesley in terms of the affections. According to Gregory Clapper, central to Wesley’s vision of Christianity is that a great part of “true

³⁵² Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 45.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 46.

religion lies in the affections.”³⁵⁵ According to Clapper, what makes Wesley’s vision of Christianity different from many others is something that cannot be captured by either “orthodoxy”(right belief) or “orthopraxis”(right action, including works of piety and works of mercy). This element is “orthokardia” (right heart).³⁵⁶ Taking into account the significance of religious affections in the Christian life in Wesley, Clapper holds that “the most common meaning of “the affections” is the general orientation of the person.”³⁵⁷ Affections as the general orientation of the human define “who we are.” If you want to know who a person truly is, then you have to find out what they love, what they hate, what they take joy in, what they fear, and in what they find peace.

From this it follows that there are certain connections between the heart and the affections. When explicating “heart religion,” Wesley usually speaks about the affections (or tempers: essential inter-changeability of affection and temper) as the true indicators of the nature of the heart (indicating Wesley’s heart-centered theology).³⁵⁸ If one is to be a Christian, according to Wesley’s standards, the heart must be engaged. One must have certain affections (i.e. thankfulness, gratitude, faith, trust, hope, love, joy, temperance, peace, happiness and holiness) and shun certain other affections (i.e. intemperance, envy, despair, pride, anger, hate, and levity).³⁵⁹ The presence or absence of certain affections is a test-case of Christianity for Wesley.

Clapper maintains that there are three key elements of Wesley’s understanding of the “religious affections” which contribute constructively to a vision of Christian life and

³⁵⁵ Gregory S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 8.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 51.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 38.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 86-88.

theology. First, the affections or tempers, for Wesley, are not the same as mere feelings (a conscious awareness of sensation). As studied above, the religious affections are not merely inner, subjective feelings, but instead are complex entities patterned by the reasoning process (the rational nature of the affection). They are not the random sensations which can come and go without our control but are voluntary, ordered, and reasonable. Having a Christian affection, hence, is not a purely passive experience. Reason, for Wesley, plays in the affection. Affections have a pattern, a direction and a grammar, based on the reasoning process.³⁶⁰ The religious affections, thus, for Wesley, are essentially *internal*.

Second, the religious affections, for Wesley, are transitive, that is, they take objects. That the religious affections are not totally self-contained “inner” realities is more clearly shown in that they require an object. Their generation is a result of the soul turning toward God and what God has done for us. Christianity, for Wesley, is a specific, contingent pattern of affectivity which also has logical connections outside of the self toward God and the world. From this follows that Wesley joins both the inner world and the outer world. Clapper explains in two senses the fact that the Christian affections, for Wesley, are outer as well as inner. First, the affections arise from the person being directed, focused, fixed on some object. Second, the affection has its *telos* or proper end, that to which it logically leads or points, outside of the self as well. In other words, having an affection means “being disposed to behave in certain ways.”³⁶¹ This transitive nature of affection helps us to understand appropriately Wesley’s emphasis on works. Works are to issue from the affections which come from targeting God with our attention.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 55.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 76.

As the quality of the object determines whether the affection is truly religious, so the quality of the resulting action is an indicator of the nature of affection. This understanding naturally leads us to the third element of Wesley's understanding of the "religious affections."

Third, the religious affections, for Wesley, act as dispositions to behave. The dispositional nature of the affections makes the affections more like virtues than feelings because the main connotation of virtue is the disposition to behave. From this follows that the dispositional nature of the affections, along with the rational nature and transitive nature of the affections is the ultimate check against self-deception. As noted above, Christian affections are dispositions from which Christian actions naturally flow. The affections require an outer world for both their formation and their expression. The outer world is the arena for the actions to which the affections dispose the believers. The religious affections, hence, for Wesley, are fundamentally *relational*.³⁶²

The three key elements of Wesley's understanding of the religious affections (reasonable, transitive, and dispositional nature of affections) help us to recognize that the religious affections in Wesley are not felt sensations but object-centered dispositions to behavior. Only when we are fixed on God will the religious affections flourish. The religious affections, for Wesley, are not primarily individual, but intrinsically *relational* as well as *internal*. For Wesley, the affections are not inherent and independent, but are dependent on targeting the things of God, taking the Gospel as the object of our attention, and centering our hearts and minds on what God has done for us.³⁶³ We love, not because we have some inherent and independent principle inside of us, but because God first

³⁶² Ibid., 169.

³⁶³ Ibid., 164

loved us. From this, Wesley's synergistic understanding of the religious affections follows. There are inter-plays, in other words, *internal and mutual relations* between our spirit and the Holy Spirit in the affections of the believer. God gives us these two witnesses that we are God's children. However, the witness of our own spirit is not an experience available to anyone, but only to Christians who have been formed in the Christian rule of the Gospel, found in Scripture. This testimony or assurance is the contingent result of our taking as the object of our affections God and what God has done for us.

Because, for Wesley, what God has done for us means nothing less than the renewal of our fallen nature to make us to be perfect in love, Clapper holds that, for Wesley, an affectional *telos* for the Christian life is "perfect love."³⁶⁴ Perfection for Wesley means acquiring the mind of Jesus Christ, which includes the whole disposition of his mind, all his affections, and all his tempers both toward God and humanity.³⁶⁵ Clapper describes with affection-terms the entire pattern of salvation in terms of the process of gaining and deepening the pattern of affections which manifest the saving presence of God in the human being. Clapper says, "Prevenient grace draws us to attend to the things of God. Seeing that we are justified by grace though faith brings forth trust in Christ, and we become filled with affections, such as love, joy, and peace. These affections (which are the assurance of faith) become well-springs of action, disposing us to love our neighbor in concrete ways and to attend to the means of grace which strengthen these affections. After a life of love, we become glorified into pure love, fully recovering the image of

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 119.

³⁶⁵ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 46.

God.”³⁶⁶ For Wesley, placing the entire pattern of salvation and Christian life in terms of affections puts God’s love first and last and also allows for human intention, motive and action (“faith working by love”- divine-human synergism). Christianity is not seen as the welling-up of an in-built instinct, it is a disciplined form of life distinguished by affections.

It follows from this that the relations between God and us, for Wesley, are real relations. The three key elements of religious affections (rational, transitive, and dispositional nature) provide real relations between God and us in Wesley. The relations between God and us, for Wesley, include not only mutual relations but also internal relation and these real relations aim at the life of love, that is, perfecting perfection. Thus, Wesley defines Christian perfection, saying “it is nothing higher and nothing lower than this – the pure love of God and man; the loving God with all our heart and soul, and our neighbour as ourselves. It is love governing the heart and life, running through all our tempers, words, and actions.”³⁶⁷

2. A Strength of Process View of Divine Perfection

In their book, *Process Theology*, Cobb and Griffin list five inadequacies in classical theism: “God as Cosmic Moralist,” “God as the Unchanging and1 Passionless Absolute,” “God as Controlling Power,” “God as Sanctioner of the Status Quo,” and “God as Male.”³⁶⁸ One of the fundamental problems in understanding God in classical theism is that traditional thought about God has tended to emphasize humanity’s dependency,

³⁶⁶ Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 124.

³⁶⁷ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 46.

³⁶⁸ John Cobb and David Griffin, *Process Theology*, 8-9.

impotence, and worthlessness. According to Cobb, “To believe in God [traditionally] is often to disparage man and his capacities, to resign oneself to what occurs as good despite its apparent evil, and to repress one’s spontaneity and vital feelings in obedience to an external demand.”³⁶⁹

Classical theism typically holds that God is almighty in the sense that God is able to do anything. God’s power is unilateral, meaning God has the ability to affect others without being affected by them. The doctrine of divine omnipotence means that God controls every detail of the world process without being affected by it. One of the major problems with this classical interpretation is that it does not allow for a human’s participation in the process of salvation. A human cannot be a participating agent but becomes only a recipient of grace. There is no room for a human to participate in God’s work. God works alone through God’s unilateral power in classical theism, and a human stands in a position to be only dependent on God’s grace.

However, according to process theology, God is constantly, in every moment and in every place, working by sharing with a human a vision of the good and the beautiful. God’s power lies in love, not in force. It is true that Christian tradition influenced by classical theism has idolized power rather than love, even if Christianity is a religion built around the symbol of Jesus Christ’s sacrificial love, not of the coercive power of a dictator. One of the strengths of process thought, thus, includes the concept of a human who can participate in God in love’s fulfilling.

According to Cobb, God is “the One who calls.”³⁷⁰ Cobb’s intention in describing God as “the One who calls” is not to obliterate completely the distinction between God

³⁶⁹ John B. Cobb, Jr., *God and the World*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998), 30.

³⁷⁰ Refer to Chapter 2 of John Cobb, *God and the World*.

and the world. One of his main intents is to insist on God's activity *with* the world. Cobb says, "The world does not exist outside God or apart from God, but the world is not God or simply part of God."³⁷¹ He argues not for pantheism that is understood "to be the identification of God and the world" but for panentheism; this means that "The character of the world is influenced by God, but it is not determined by him, and the world in its turn contributes novelty and richness to the divine experience."³⁷² The dynamics of interaction between God and the world in panentheism is understood in a sense that God persuades God's creation forward, instead of controlling it from behind. David Wills evaluates one of Cobb's contributions as important, "This view of God's persuasive forward call to an open future is one of the most attractive parts of Cobb's theology."³⁷³

Therefore, God's perfection in process thought is defined in relational terms. God's perfection requires relation in love; God is not coercive but persuasively calls a human to actualize the best potentiality open to him/her. God invitingly draws a human toward the actualization of the fullest possible realization of him/herself. It is important to remember that God's perfection is defined in relational terms, meaning God is not coercive but persuasive, in other words, how fully a human follows the lure of God, how fully a human respond to God's calling is his/her decision. And their becoming through that process is reserved in God as "objective immortality." Not only does God affect a human through God's gracious calling in God's "initial aim" but also God is affected by his/her response to God's calling. God is not a unilateral power in the process of becoming. According to process thought, there is no complete determination of any

³⁷¹ Ibid., 80.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ David Wills, "Contemporary Theology and Prayer," *Interpretation* 34, no. 3 (July 1980): 252.

action by one will. God's perfection in process thought is thus defined in relational terms. God's perfection is a relation in love; God's perfection includes God's gracious calling in love but God's calling also requires a human's obedient participation for a human's best potentiality to be actualized. The power of a human is creative as well as dependent as God is. A human participates in God's work. God and human are working together.

This process concept of divine perfection in relational terms includes an important practical implication for Methodists. As studied above, John Wesley's thought has generally been categorized as a model for methods of evangelization and spiritual formation. Wesley affirmed theology to be intimately related to Christian living and the proclamation of Christian faith. This was his "practical divinity." For Wesley, theology should help believers to act out their faith in daily affairs by loving God and neighbor in their ordinary lives.³⁷⁴

It is Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki who developed a connection between process metaphysics with the practical divinity of Methodists through the idea of prayer. The process concept of divine perfection in relational terms provides a constructive dimension for understanding the concept of prayer. Methodists can be benefited by process thought's metaphysical foundation for theological construction of prayer, while the Wesleyan sense of practical spirituality in prayer helps to integrate the theoretical overview of process metaphysical construct into praxis.

Then, what is prayer? If the world is predestined as claimed by prominent classical theists like John Calvin, do we as humans, through prayer, change the reality God has

³⁷⁴ Thomas A. Langford, "John Wesley and Theological Method," in Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Rethinking Wesley's Theology: For Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 35.

already predetermined? Can we become a participant in God's work through prayer? Can we be creative through participation in prayer as well as dependent through listening to God through prayer? Is God affected by our prayers? In other words, is God dependent on our prayer for God's perfection in love to be actualized?

David Basinger provides important quotes from classical theists such as Calvin, Luther, and Aquinas in order to help us to understand how classical theists understand prayer.³⁷⁵ First of all, Calvin maintained that "Prayer is not so much for his sake as for ours. . . . it is very much for our interest to be constantly supplicating him."³⁷⁶ Second, Luther argued that "God did not command prayer in order to deceive you and make a fool, a monkey of you; he wants you to pray and to be confident that you will be heard. You must present your need to God . . . in order that you may learn to know yourself, where you are lacking."³⁷⁷ Third, Aquinas insisted, "We pray not in order to change the divine disposition, but for the sake of acquiring by petitionary prayer what God has been disposed to be achieved by prayer."³⁷⁸ Out of these examples, Basinger concludes that for classical theists, divine activity, without denying the efficacy of prayer, is not dependent on human petitioning.³⁷⁹ God is only a giver, not receiver; God is only creative, not dependent; God only affects, is not affected.

Of course, process theism cannot affirm this classical understanding of prayer. These classical modes are based upon the assumption that God can unilaterally bring

³⁷⁵ Refer to David Basinger, "Process Theology and Petitionary Prayer," *Evangelical Journal* 4, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 71-72.

³⁷⁶ John Calvin, *Institute of the Christian Religion*, trans., Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1979), II, 147. Re-quoted from *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁷⁷ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed., John Dillenberger (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961), 217. Re-quoted from *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1A, q.19, a.8, r.2. Re-quoted from *Ibid.*, 72.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

about certain states of affairs without being affected by humans. God is not dependent, only humans. God has total control over everything in the world. According to Basinger, the problem of this classical concept of prayer is that if a certain activity is part of God's eternal plan, it will occur regardless of whether God has been petitioned by humans' prayer. God will accomplish all that God wants with or without human assistance. In classical theism, the reason why we pray, the need to pray, thus becomes in vain in its essence.³⁸⁰

However, according to process thought, God can never unilaterally bring about something. God works with humans. Not only is God active and creative in the world but also God is responsive and affected by every action, every feeling, every desire, and every event. At every moment God shows God's loving concern for a human by considering his/her past, envisioning his/her best possibilities in his/her given circumstances, and by offering persuasively to him/her the ideal aim for him/her to actualize in each new present context. It means that at every moment God presents persuasively and in a loving way the best possibilities open to him/her.

However, given God's grace as the persuasive calling, a human always has some power of self-determination. In other words, in Whitehead's language, in each situation, each entity to some degree fashions its own subjective, self-determining response to its past – that which has happened in the world in which it finds itself – and to God's presentation of the best future possibilities open to it.³⁸¹ In process thought, a human, at each successive moment of existence, is heir to the entire universe of the past. The prehended past provides the foundational materials upon which, in interaction with God's

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 70-71.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 73.

luring call toward best possibilities, the human makes partly-limited and partly-free decisions of one's own concrete becoming.³⁸²

Suchocki thus maintains that when we pray, “we change the reality with which God works” and “the reality of the world has a real effect upon which possibilities may efficaciously be given.”³⁸³ It is important to remember that God's perfect love is receptive and responsive, meaning we do not pray to an impassive or unmoved mover. Whitehead says, “Each actuality in the temporal world has its reception into God's nature.”³⁸⁴ Therefore, Suchocki argues that “Simply put, Prayer is our openness to God, our communion with the source of all love, our responsiveness to the omnipresent God. Prayer opens us to participation in the love of God.”³⁸⁵ For Suchocki, God is indeed affected by our prayers.

However, God being affected by our prayers does not mean that the point of prayer is to inform God of something that God doesn't know. According to process thought, “prayer is not only our turning to God, but God's approach to us and a mode through which God accomplishes God's purpose.”³⁸⁶ Prayer is opening oneself to the leading of God's luring call. It means that the purpose of prayer is less for us to act upon God than for God to act upon us. We pray not to induce God to do our will, but to open ourselves

³⁸² Nancy Campbell and Marti Steussy, “Process Theology and Contemplative Prayer: Seeking the Presence of God,” *Encounter* 63, no. 1-2 (Win-Spr 2002): 79.

³⁸³ Marjorie Suchocki, “A Process Theology of Prayer,” *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 2 (May, 1981): 39-40.

³⁸⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 350.

³⁸⁵ Marjorie Suchocki, “Christian Perfection: A Methodist Perspective on Ecclesiology” 15. unpublished.

³⁸⁶ Nancy Campbell and Marti Steussy, “Process Theology and Contemplative Prayer: Seeking the Presence of God” 79.

to God's influence upon us so that we may follow the leading of God's luring perfect call.³⁸⁷

Then why is prayer a good example of understanding the concept of perfection? Introducing Wesley's idea of Christian perfection, Suchocki says, "He [Wesley] was not intending to teach us a theology of prayer; to the contrary, he intended to teach us plainly about Christian perfection."³⁸⁸ Suchocki maintains that "When we pray, we are participating in God's creative power. What overflowing grace! Prayer, or responsiveness to God, is like a channel through which God's grace flows, so that between the call and the response something happens."³⁸⁹ According to Suchocki, in prayer, "there is a kind of cooperation between us and God, a sort of responsiveness that becomes a vehicle of grace. The source of grace is God's own character, but the operation of grace seems to be tied in some way to the creature's response."³⁹⁰ In prayer, "God calls; we respond. Prayer is a response to the ever-present calling grace of God."³⁹¹

It follows from this that it is through prayer that we can notice how God's perfection is relationally based. Divine perfection is nothing but a relational perfection. God's perfection is in relativity. The biblical word of "God is love" means that God is perfect in relativity. And it is important to notice that divine perfection in relativity represents that God requires the other with whom God enjoys a perfect relation in love.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, Steven W. Manskar, and Diana L. Hynson, *A Perfect Love: Understanding John Wesley's A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2004), 135.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 137.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 136.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 137.

Divine perfection is, thus, an invitation of “Christian perfection.”³⁹² God’s luring call is an invitation for us to be in perfection. God’s luring call is exercised in awesome grace of perfect love that is near, enabling, and empowering. But the reason why God lures us is that a response is required, in other words, the best and perfect potentiality open to us is to be actualized in our lives. It is to be a human with whom God enjoys relation in love. Divine perfection is an invitation to Christian perfection. Wesley thus quotes from Matthew 5: 48, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”³⁹³ The actualization of Christian perfection requires the acceptance of grace and participation in grace. And it is through prayer that Christian perfection can be actualized because, according to Suchocki, “Prayer is a mode of participation in the creating grace of God; it is an active openness in response to God.”³⁹⁴

Suchocki finds an important lesson that can create a dialogue between process thought and Wesley’s theology out of what Wesley wrote regarding prayer: “God does nothing but in answer to prayer.”³⁹⁵ How can it be that “God does nothing but in answer to prayer?” Suchocki poses the question that “How is prayer involved at all in God’s action?”³⁹⁶ Reading Wesley’s theology through the lens of process thought, Suchocki says, “It is life created by God and dependent upon God, but its ‘aliveness’ is wrought not by its automatic responsiveness to God, but by its free responsiveness to God.”³⁹⁷ According to Suchocki, “Prayer is the creation of a circle of activity: God creates out of

³⁹² Christian perfection, for Wesley, is an aim that Christians can achieve in this world.

³⁹³ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: The Epworth Press, 1952), 37.

³⁹⁴ Marjorie Suchocki, “The Perfection of Prayer,” in *Rethinking Wesley’s Theology: For Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 50.

³⁹⁵ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 100.

³⁹⁶ Marjorie Suchocki, “The Perfection of Prayer,” 49.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

divine love; Divine love invites us in, not as disinterested observers, but as sharers in that very love.”³⁹⁸

It is important to notice this: “to share in God’s love is to share in God’s work.”³⁹⁹ And God’s will is boundless love since its source is the infinite God.⁴⁰⁰ It means that through prayer we are graciously made participants in God’s work in love. Suchocki thus writes, “When we open ourselves to God’s will in prayer, we become joined to God’s love.”⁴⁰¹ Prayer is, thus, participatory; prayer follows the lines of love. It is possible through prayer to begin in some degree the fullness of God’s perfect love. In prayer, God calls; we respond. In prayer we become joined in God’s perfection in love. Prayer is a means of grace through which a human can participate in the love of God, that is, the perfection of God.

It is through the participatory concept of prayer that Suchocki offers Methodists a practical sense that the concept of divine perfection is relational. Prayer opens us to participation in the love of God. God’s perfection is a perfect relation in love. God’s perfection lies in relativity. God’s perfection is nothing but love. In prayer, God lures us to be perfect in love, in other words, to actualize the best potentialities in love. Suchocki explores the dynamics of prayer, reading the practical view of prayer in Wesley through the lens of process perspective. She offers the process view of prayer as a partnership with, not a manipulation of, God. And through this process view of prayer she provides a concept of divine perfection as relational in practical Christian lives.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

3. Perfection as “a Never Ending Aspiration of All Love’s Perfecting Fullness”

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki explains how the word “perfection” has been “pesky” theologically, even in Wesley’s time:

“The Greek notion of God’s perfection deeply affected the Christian understanding of the Bible. Whenever the Scriptures spoke of God changing in any way, such as in Jonah 3:10 (“God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring . . .”), these changes were considered to be only figures of speech that were not really intended to speak about how God really is. They were called anthropomorphisms and discounted. However, passages that spoke of the divine faithfulness as unchanging were seized upon to claim that nothing whatsoever could change within God. For example, Malachi 3:54 speaks of God’s steadfast will toward justice: God is ‘against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien.’ In this, says Malachi 3:6, ‘I the Lord do not change.’ But the theological utilization took the passage out of its context of God’s unflinching will toward justice and turned it into support for the static perfection of God. Thus, for Wesley to apply the phrase ‘Christian perfection’ to our actual lives was to run counter to the usual understanding of the word. . . In fact, perfection was so contrary to the human condition that most people thought perfection was something that could apply to humans only after death, when God would finally make the Christian perfect. To speak of ‘growth in perfection,’ as Wesley did, was against the common sense of his time.”⁴⁰²

As studied above, Wesley’s position as to perfection is undergirded by the Eastern tradition in which perfection is understood as a “perfecting perfection,” a never ending aspiration for all of love’s fullness, rather than by the Western tradition in which it is regarded as a “perfected perfection” or a static state of perfection. According to Wesley, Christian perfection has nothing to do with perfection in ourselves for Christian perfection does not save us from human frailties. Wesley said, “They are not free from infirmities, such as weakness or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or

⁴⁰² Marjorie Suchocki, *A Perfect Love*, 116.

heaviness of imagination. Such, in another kind, are, impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation; to which one might add a thousand nameless defects, either in conversation or behavior.”⁴⁰³ Wesley thus argues that “There is no perfection of degrees; none which does not admit of a continual increase.”⁴⁰⁴ To the question, “Can those who are perfect grow in grace?” Wesley answers, “Undoubtedly they can; and that not only while they are in the body, but to all eternity.”⁴⁰⁵ For Wesley, attaining of Christian perfection does not mean that there is no growth possible; perfection is not perfected but perfecting.

How can it be possible, for Wesley, that perfection includes a continual increase or growth? It is because, for Wesley, perfection is not to be understood as being perfect in ourselves, but in the relationship for which we were created and to which we can be restored. It is a crucial point that Wesley understands perfection as relational. For Wesley, the essence of perfection is not a perfect status beyond which nothing can be added but perfect love. For Wesley, “Christian perfection” is nothing but love’s fullness. Christian perfection is that “all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love.”⁴⁰⁶ “Christian perfection,” for Wesley, is received “merely by faith.”⁴⁰⁷ Christian perfection does not depend on human natural ability; Christian perfection, for Wesley, is “grace upon grace.”⁴⁰⁸

However, this emphasis upon faith alone by Wesley does not mean that it has the same meaning of the stillness intended by the Moravians. As studied above, they are

⁴⁰³ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 16.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 85.

⁴⁰⁶ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 42.

⁴⁰⁷ Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 41.

⁴⁰⁸ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 157-190.

different in the sense that the Moravians seem to be willing to carry the logic to its conclusion and really mean absolutely alone, but when Wesley says faith alone, he means primarily rather than solely.⁴⁰⁹ Wesley accentuates doing good works and being perfect. The main difference between the two of them depends on whether there is an active pursuit of holiness and love. Both faith and works are necessary elements to go on to perfection. Faith alone for Wesley has to be understood in a sense of “foundation” toward perfection.

While phrased in different terminologies, all of the above also applies to process mode of thought. According to process thinkers, existence by definition requires the ever-present creative power of God moment by moment. For process thought, God’s becoming includes the all-inclusive process. God is pervasive of nature, present in every individual. God is directly experienced and thereby becomes incarnate in the one experiencing God. God is ever-present and omni-present. Apart from the continuous and efficacious presence of God, any existence is impossible. Nothing whatsoever comes into existence without ever- and omni-present influence of God, the influence called by Whitehead as “the initial aim,” and by Wesley as “grace.”⁴¹⁰

It is important to note that according to Whitehead, God’s initial aim is not a controlling aim but an enabling aim, meaning God’s initial aim is persuasive for Whitehead and God is gracious for Wesley. A human must take that gracious initial aim into account at its deepest level of becoming if he/she wants to actualize the best potentiality open to him/herself. It is the human who holds the power and liberty to actualize the best potentiality found in God’s gracious initial aim. And it is also the

⁴⁰⁹ W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of Love Divine*, 96.

⁴¹⁰ Suchocki, “Christian Perfection: A Methodist Perspective on Ecclesiology,” 3.

human who can refuse or distort God's influence, which is to constitute itself in ways that are less conducive to its own and common good.⁴¹¹

It follows from this that both process and Wesleyan theologies assume an essential responsiveness, freedom and thus responsibility from actual entities (e.g. humans). For Wesley, grace is not irresistible, as Calvinists claimed, while for process thinkers, the power of the becoming occasion is power enough to subvert the influence of God. In both process thought and Wesleyan theology, grace is not controlling but enabling; it is truly possible to respond positively to the grace of God or to resist it. However it does not mean that resistance will send God away, as if somehow God could no longer be present to the individual. But resistance builds up cumulative roadblocks that hinder the grace of God.⁴¹² No matter how a human responds to the initial aim or grace of God, God is present with him/her at every moment and forever. God is omnipresent with us. And by being omnipresent in all the events, the content of divine life continues to grow without affecting the underlying and enduring prior nature of God.

It follows from this that given dipolar natures of God, God's change does not include any change in the character of God as love. God's nature as love never experiences any change; God is immutable in this sense. God's perfection includes, thus, a static form of perfection, that is, perfected perfection. God's perfection, hence, involves, in part, an absolute perfection that does not allow any change to God's nature, essence, and character. God does, in this respect, not change; God is absolute, immutable, and perfected perfect.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 4.

⁴¹² Ibid.

However, divine life as love does change. God's perfection also includes, in part, a relative perfection that does allow change to divine life. God is mutable, relative, and perfecting perfect. According to Hartshorne, God is a personally ordered society of occasions of divine experience. God is a closely unified succession of actual entities in which all the past ones are fully included in the present one. This means that in God there is change from one occasion to another, and the change is always one of increase, in other words, growth. Whenever an occasion perishes, it is included in God's consequent nature. God changes, meaning God is affected by the world and therefore is continually incorporating what happens.⁴¹³ Therefore, God grows and "to say that God grows is not to say that God becomes wiser or more loving; it means only that, as new creatures arise and new experiences occur, the objects of the divine love have increased and therefore the divine experience has been enriched."⁴¹⁴ God's concrete state thereby exemplifies the relative type of perfection, in other words, a perfecting perfection that can be surpassed. Of course, God cannot be surpassed by any creature but only by God in a later moment.⁴¹⁵ Thus, for Hartshorne, God is the "self-surpassing surpasser of all."⁴¹⁶

It follows from this that God is indeed perfecting perfect, meaning God everlastingly enriches the divine life as love through the inclusion of all that happens. And it is important to notice that in order for God to be perfecting perfect in terms of inclusion of all that happens, God must be perfectly and completely related to everything that happens as it happens. This means that God's perfecting perfection must be

⁴¹³ John Cobb, *The Process Perspective: Frequently Asked Questions about Process Theology*, ed., Jeanyne B. Sletton, 33.

⁴¹⁴ David Ray Griffin, "Process Theology," in *Handbook of Christian Theology*, eds. Donald Musser & Joseph Price (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 407.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*, 20.

understood in terms of relativity. God must respond perfectly and everlastingly to the ever-changing experiences of the world and this is the meaning of divine love.⁴¹⁷

It is important to notice that “in process terms, love builds upon the essential relationality of existence by responding empathically to others toward the end of mutual well-being.”⁴¹⁸ Suchocki maintains that “to love is to be open, to be receptive to the empathic caring of others toward the self. Love necessarily creates community.”⁴¹⁹ Love is thus the energy of the universe, the creation of community, the enrichment of all aspects of becoming.⁴²⁰ Christian perfection that Wesley continued to teach for his entire life is thus our participation in the love of God; Christian perfection is our formation in the image of God or in the very nature of God as love.⁴²¹ For Wesley, Christian perfection is renewal in the image of God as well as all the thoughts, words, and actions being governed by pure love. This means that perfection, for Wesley, is dynamic or perfecting.

In order to understand better the concept of perfection as perfecting, it is important to notice the difference between Eastern and Western Christian tradition. As studied above, for the Western tradition, grace is understood as divine pardon and forgiveness. For Western tradition, salvation is nothing but justification; there is no goal higher than justification. However, in Eastern tradition, grace is not simply one generous act by a

⁴¹⁷ John Cobb, *The Process Perspective: Frequently Asked Questions about Process Theology*, ed., Jeanyne B. Sletton, 34.

⁴¹⁸ Suchocki, “Christian Perfection: A Methodist Perspective on Ecclesiology,” 6.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 6-7.

judge, but a process involving the constant presence. Behind Wesley's understanding of salvation lies "the Eastern Fathers' notion of divinization."⁴²²

According to Runyon "divinization or deification (*theosis*) should not be understood as becoming a god, but becoming more fully human, that is, becoming what God created humanity to be, the image reflecting God as that creature whose spiritual senses are enabled to participate in, to be a partner, and to share in the divine life."⁴²³ In the Eastern Fathers' notion of divinization, it is crucial to participate in the divine nature. Not only do we become deified to the degree that God's grace becomes actually effective in our lives, but we also become "perfecting" to the degree that we participate in God's nature through acting out our faith through love. In the doctrine of deification we feel and act in harmony with the divine grace luring us forward.

This means that for Wesley, salvation is not just being reinstated in God's favor as it means for Western tradition. Of course, for Wesley, salvation partly includes this side of Western tradition. We must be reinstated in God's favor and this is a relative change that we experience in the phase of justification. However, for Wesley, while faith is the mark of justification, love is mark of sanctification and entire sanctification, that is, perfection. Not only is "relative change" required, but "real change" is also necessary for salvation; the real change includes a process starting from the moment of justification to the accomplishment of the entire sanctification, that is, perfection which can "grow in grace . . . not only they [those who are perfect] are in the body, but to all eternity." Thus, love is never without faith nor is faith without love.

⁴²² Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*, 80.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 81.

It is true that, for Wesley, God is not content simply to forgive and reconcile the sinner. God's intention, for Wesley, is for us to be deified, in other words, to restore the image of God so that we fulfill the Christian perfection that is "the pure love of God and man; the loving God with all our heart and soul, and our neighbour as ourselves."⁴²⁴ According to Wesley, the process of salvation is a transformative process, with the conquering of sin as its negative branch and the increase of love as its positive goal, toward which salvation is directed.⁴²⁵ Love, for Wesley, becomes the supreme goal toward which the life of faith is directed. And the reason why love is essential for Christian perfection is because, in Wesley's terms, God's very nature is love; "thy nature and thy name is love."

According to Wesley, we are called to participate in God's own love by receiving it, being formed by it, and endlessly giving it. The doctrine of Christian perfection entails a fundamental life stance attuned to the love of God as a calling to which we respond. Thus, Christian perfection is the process of being continuously formed in the image of God, participating in God's own love. The concept of perfection is of all things the most dynamic, not static.⁴²⁶ Christian perfection is, thus, always in process or a continuous "perfect-ing." Those who are perfect can grow in grace while they are "in the body, but to all eternity." Perfection is "a never ending aspiration of all love's perfecting fullness."

⁴²⁴ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 46.

⁴²⁵ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*, 86.

⁴²⁶ Suchocki, "Christian Perfection: A Methodist Perspective on Ecclesiology," 4-5.

V. Conclusion

According to Carl Bang, “Methodism has long been assuming the character of a ‘community church,’ comprehensive, embracing all, a form of Protestantism in general that reflects a religious consensus fairly interchangeable among major denominations. . . . And yet – we are the only denomination that asks its clergy whether they are going on to perfection, and whether they expect to be made perfect [in love] in this life.”⁴²⁷ It is important to notice that Christian perfection is a Methodist subject. According to Wesley, life lived in the fullness of the perfect love of God must be something more than forensic forgiveness. Christian perfection is not just about justification. Justification is for the sake of sanctification and entire sanctification (perfection), clearing away the hindrances to renewed union with God, in order that God’s creative grace for the world shall be realized in this world to its fullest. Justification is not the end itself but the means to this great end. Not only is justification required but also sanctification is a necessary process to fulfill Christian perfection in this world. The concern for Christian perfection for Wesley is a way of getting at the quality of Christian life filled with love to the fullest. Wesley thus maintains, “Thy nature and Thy name is Love.”⁴²⁸ In proclaiming love as

⁴²⁷ Carl Bangs, “The Idea of Perfection In A Future Christian Theology” in *Wesleyan Theology Today: a bicentennial theological consultation*. Ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), 89.

⁴²⁸ “Thy nature and thy name is love” is the last line of Charles Wesley’s hymn “Wrestling Jacob.”

the very nature and life of God, Wesley hence provides to Methodists an idea that love's fullness is the destiny to which Christians can live. Christian perfection, for Wesley, is nothing but love's fullness.

According to Wesley, Christians can enjoy perfection in this world because perfection is love's fullness that is ever growing. Perfection includes an ever increasing capacity to love. God is love and divine life is love. In order that love might have opportunity to flourish in this world, God "painstakingly nurtures responsible agency. God's creative power, in Wesley's phrase, 'continually co-operates with' God's wisdom and goodness, laboring in a fashion expressive of a love that bestows, encourages, and evokes a response of love from the creature."⁴²⁹ According to Wesley, having embarked upon the divine adventure of calling forth creatures of responsible freedom, "God's work is to allow the creaturely elements 'room' to be, to grow, to exercise creaturely freedom for the sake of the possibilities of love."⁴³⁰ In its essence, love is thus relational. Love is not static but dynamic. Love is always in becoming or in process.

Given that Christian perfection is love's fullness, perfection is not static, in other words, a static state of perfection (perfected perfection) but dynamic, in other words, love's fullness that is ever growing (perfecting perfection). Suchocki hence maintains that "the love of Christian perfection can be seen as a unitive force binding all creation together in interdependence, thus leading to the temporal completion of God's creative destiny in the world."⁴³¹ Suchocki keeps saying "but we are to 'continue on to

⁴²⁹ Michael Lodahl, "To Whom Belong the Covenants? Whitehead, Wesley, and Wildly Diverse Religious Traditions" 199.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "Coming Home: Wesley, Whitehead, and Women" in *Thy Nature & Thy Name Is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue*, 59.

perfection,' since the realization of this love is a relative rather than absolute state. One could call it a processive condition, adapted to the situation of the believer, and always luring the believer on toward yet fuller realization of love."⁴³²

According to Suchocki, Christian perfection, which is the destiny of the world, is not one which is a static once-for-all state to be achieved but is historically appropriated, so that all of time becomes the moving image of God's everlasting love. Christian perfection depends upon God's grace as well as human openness to and participation in God's gracious guidance.⁴³³ Christian perfection, thus, is not perfected but perfecting perfection. There is always room to grow in perfection.

It follows from this that perfection, for Wesley, must be understood as a dynamic perfection in process or perfecting perfection rather than as perfected perfection beyond which nothing can be added. It is important to notice that, for Wesley, Adam was perfect before the Original Sin. It means that the pre-fallen state of the world was perfect. According to Wesley, after the Original Sin, the teleological vision of the world is to be perfect anew. Then, an essential question arises: What does it mean that perfection, for Wesley, is in process or perfecting?

It is important to remember that the problem of perfection as perfected defined by Western tradition is that perfection is "an absolute completion, a finishing in its form and boundaries, a rounding off and termination."⁴³⁴ Perfected perfection is the circular movement, a return to the start because perfection is the full realization; there are no degrees. Perfected perfection does not allow a room to grow or to be better. Given this

⁴³² Ibid., 59-60.

⁴³³ Ibid., 60.

⁴³⁴ Martin Foss, *The Idea of Perfection in the Western World*, 30.

concept of perfected perfection as a circular movement, how can we know that Christian perfection, for Wesley, is not a circular movement, a “return to start”? Is Wesley’s concept of Christian perfection not just going back to pre-fallen state of perfection?

Remember that, as noted in the Introduction, my argument is that the reason why Wesley’s doctrine of perfection has been so misunderstood, confused or even ignored from his time until today is because of the failure clearly to heed the distinction between the two senses of perfection: perfected perfection and perfecting perfection. The crucial difference between the two senses of perfection is whether the concept of perfection is a static state or in process, in other words, whether there is a room to grow or to be better. Does Wesley’s concept of perfection include aspects of growth or betterness?”

It is crucial to notice that Wesley’s doctrine of sin is based upon *Felix Culpa* (happy fault). According to Wesley, the fall of humanity is the miserable one which cannot be overcome as he indicates the pessimism of the nature of humanity. However, paradoxically the fall is considered as an occasion in which God’s love and grace for us is proved. Wesley indicates:

“For if Adam had not sinned, the Son of God had not died. Consequently that amazing instance of the love of God to man had never existed which has in all ages excited the highest joy, and love, and gratitude from his children. We might have loved God the Creator, God the Preserver, God the Governor. But there would have been no place for love to God the Redeemer”⁴³⁵

It would be true that the fall of humanity, for Wesley, is the fall under God’s grace and love. This comes to be clear with his definition of the sin or evil shown in his sermon, “The General Deliverance,” in which he says “the wise permission of God.” For

⁴³⁵ Wesley, “On the Fall of Man,” *The Works*, vol.2,411-2.

Wesley, even if the creation (it was perfect before the fall) was defaced due to the fall of humanity, in new creation there will undoubtedly be “an unmixed state of holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in paradise.”⁴³⁶ According to Runyon, “the loss of the original image of God is surpassed by the possibility of a new image of God in our hearts.”⁴³⁷ According to Wesley, this restoration means the restoration of the image of God and therefore it reflects “a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union” with “the Three-One God.”⁴³⁸ Furthermore, this restoration could be called universal restoration since it is not limited to humanity only but reaches to all the created. Wesley gives us a certain example of the universal restoration which will take place in new creation: “all the earth shall then be a more beautiful paradise than Adam ever saw.”⁴³⁹ It is important to notice that “the most glorious” of this restoration, for Wesley, is “the change which will take place on the poor, sinful, miserable children of men.”⁴⁴⁰ Wesley indicates that “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”⁴⁴¹

It follows from this that for Wesley, new creation transforms all dimensions of human existence, both personal and social, and transforming all dimensions of the created. The perfection of new creation, thus, for Wesley, exceeds the pre-fallen state of perfection. Wesley says, “the fall of Adam” gives “us an opportunity of being far more holy.”⁴⁴² Therefore, Wesley acknowledges that perfection includes a concept of growth or

⁴³⁶ Wesley, “The New Creation,” *The Works*, vol.2,510.

⁴³⁷ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today*, 11-12.

⁴³⁸ Wesley, “The New Creation,” *The Works*, vol.2,510.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 508.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 509-10.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 510.

⁴⁴² Wesley, “God’s Love to Fallen Man,” *The Works*, vol.2., 431.

betterness. Given his understanding of new creation, for Wesley, perfection is in process or perfect-ing.

Furthermore, this new creation is the universal restoration which will be established in this world when the renewal of the image of God is renewed. It is important to notice that to be restored as the children of God by the justifying Grace calls us to participate in love by the sanctifying grace. The fact that we are made in the image of God reflects who we are and what we have to do. It is true that the image of God represents our constituent reality. It means that we are godlike in nature and essence. Based on this we have to love because God's nature and essence is love. It follows from this that Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection which puts its core upon the image of God reminds us of the calling and vocation to which we are called. This vocation calls us to participate in "the change which will take place on the poor, sinful, miserable children of men" in the new creation. Wesley says it is this "most glorious" restoration in which "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." God's grace, for Wesley, is not just giving beneficence to the world but being sympathetic to the experiences of the world. Furthermore, Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection calls us to participate in the places where there are tears and sufferings with love in sanctifying grace. God's grace is, thus, co-operative.

The Wesley's understanding of God's grace as being sympathetic to our sufferings is similar to process concept of God as fellow-sufferer who prehends or feels our concrete experiences. Also, Wesley's concept of God's grace as co-operative, in other words, persuasive and relational rather than coercive, is one that resonates clearly with the modes of process thought. It is true that Wesley's understanding of God's grace as teleological rather than static is another that goes hand in hand with process thought.

Wesley acknowledges that there is a teleological process in human existence from *have become*, that is, being in total depravity to *might be*, that is, perfecting in love. Process is essential in fulfilling Christian perfection. Furthermore, Wesley's concept of God's grace as universally given to all humanity ties in nicely with God's omnipresence in all occasions of experience. There are many similarities between Wesley's theology and process thought in their modes of thought. However, the most crucial point in better understanding Christian perfection is the idea of love as the primary clue for comprehending what it means to be created in God's image and what it means to be restored fully, in other words, perfecting into that image.

As studied above, humans, for Wesley, are created in the image of God but that image of God was lost with Original Sin. Wesley, then, offers an immanent and intimate God whose everlasting love and sustaining presence encompass the entirety of creation. All human beings, for Wesley, are graced by the love of God. Grace is the divine calling; now it is human's responsibility to be obedient to that calling. It is our responsibility to live out the life of faith through love with God and neighbors. Perfection, for Wesley, requires a participation in love, relationship in love, and thus, the process of becoming better. According to Wesley, Christian perfection is renewal in the image of God. Christian perfection is our formation in the image of God or in the very nature of God as love. For Wesley, Christian perfection is that all thoughts, words, and actions being governed by pure love. This is the most essential area in which process metaphysics has much to offer Wesleyan theology of Christian perfection by contributing the idea of "perfecting perfection" in love.

According to process metaphysics, the conception of divine love implies relativity or relatedness. Divine perfection in relativity provides an idea that God requires the other with whom God enjoys a perfect relation in love. Divine perfection is, thus, an invitation of “Christian perfection.” The lure of God in God’s initial aim is an invitation for us to be in perfection because God’s initial aim is the best potentiality that can be actualized in our lives. Furthermore, as to the concept of relativity, we have studied that God must respond perfectly and everlastingly to the ever-changing experiences of the world, and this is the meaning of divine love. According to process thought, “God does not simply know that we suffer, he is aware of our actual pain and misery in their concreteness. God cannot remain aloof in the face of real suffering.”⁴⁴³ God is really “fellow-sufferer who understands.” The relativity of God’s perfection thus invites us to provide our ultimate trust to God only. God becomes the perfect “One” completely worthy of our admiration and utter respect. We are, in Wesley’s phrase, called to “a deep, an intimate, and an uninterrupted union with God.”⁴⁴⁴ We are called to Christian perfection in love with God.

Finally, divine perfection in relativity, as studied above, includes the concept of God as “self surpassing surpasser of all.” The perfection of God, for Hartshorne, thus includes the idea of increase and growth. God’s perfection is not perfected but perfecting. However, it is important to notice that God’s perfecting perfection is not about God’s nature but divine life. Ogden argues, “God is indeed asserted to be ontologically distinct from everything else, but everything other than God, whether self or the world, is held to be absolutely dependent on God, while God is only relatively dependent on it, being dependent for neither existence nor essential identity but solely for the becoming of

⁴⁴³ Santiago Sia, *God In Process Thought*, 93.

⁴⁴⁴ Wesley, “The New Creation,” *The Works*, vol.2,510.

God's own enduring good insofar as it is internally as well as externally related to the becoming of all transient good." Hartshorne thus maintains, "even an infinite richness," that is, the perfection of God "may be open to increase."⁴⁴⁵

Therefore, I can construct Wesley's teaching of "entire sanctification" or "Christian perfection" in process terms as a relationship in love between God and us. Christian perfection is not an ultimate static state to be entered or achieved, beyond which nothing can be added. Christian perfection is not perfected perfection. Christian perfection is not to be understood as being perfect in our selves. Christian perfection is a creative and receptive activity of love in which, as "partaker of God,"⁴⁴⁶ we are called to the renewal of the image of God whose nature and name is love as a lure for full response or a calling to be obedient. Christian perfection is in the relationship for which we were created and to which we can be restored. Christian perfection is relational through and through. Christian perfection is love's fullness that is ever growing. Christian perfection is, thus, perfecting perfection, that is, "a never ending aspiration for all of love's fullness."

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁴⁶ Wesley, "On the Fall of Man," *The Works*, vol.2,411.

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