



Josiah Baker

## Reassessing the Viability of Wesley as a Bridge in Orthodox–Pentecostal Dialogue

### Abstract

In his monograph on Orthodox–Pentecostal dialogue, Edmund Rybarczyk rejects the use of Wesleyan theology as a bridge in dialogue due to Wesley's selective use of patristic sources and his historical distance from Pentecostalism. However, more recent scholarship in Orthodox–Wesleyan dialogue recovers the viability of this bridge. Wesley's patristic engagement shaped the broader structures of his theology, resulting in a number of soteriological and anthropological similarities between Wesleyan and Orthodox theology. Wesleyan synergism allows for dialogue on the process of salvation, whereas Wesley's teaching on formational experiences creates space for discussions of mysticism.



Josiah Baker is an MDiv student at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, USA

Such similarities have been used in dialogue by ecumenists despite Wesley's historical distance from the church fathers. Many of these same similarities are also present in Pentecostalism due to its Wesleyan inheritance. Orthodox–Pentecostal dialogue can therefore be strengthened through utilizing Wesley as a bridge in its current and future theological explorations.

### Keywords

Orthodox–Pentecostal dialogue, ecumenical dialogue, Wesleyan theology, synergism, mysticism

## 1 Introduction

Nearly 20 years after its writing, Edmund Rybarczyk's dissertation has remained a key monograph in Anglophone literature for Orthodox–Pentecostal dialogue.<sup>1</sup> Rybarczyk examines the theological connections between these two Christian traditions through the lens of theological anthropology. Early in his study, he notes briefly the claims Methodist scholars have made in

---

<sup>1</sup> Edmund J. Rybarczyk, "Beyond Salvation: An Analysis of the Doctrine of Christian Transformation Comparing Eastern Orthodoxy with Classical Pentecostalism" (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999). He would later publish the dissertation as a monograph with few edits pertinent to the present study: Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation: Eastern Orthodox and Classical Pentecostalism on Becoming Like Christ* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 2004). A distillation of his study can be found in Edmund J. Rybarczyk, "Spiritualities Old and New: Similarities between Eastern Orthodoxy and Classical Pentecostalism," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 24/1, no. 1 (Spring 2002), pp. 7-25. In this article, Rybarczyk appears to attribute more significance to the influence of Wesley on the similarities between Pentecostalism and Orthodoxy than he does in his dissertation. Rybarczyk, "Spiritualities," p. 23.

using John Wesley as a historical bridge in Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue. He goes on to reject this endeavor for Pentecostal–Orthodox dialogue because of Wesley’s selective use of Orthodox sources and the historical distance between Wesley and the Pentecostal Movement despite Wesley’s influence on Pentecostalism. Instead, Rybarczyk argues that the theo-anthropological similarity between Pentecostals and Orthodox serves as a sufficient bridge for dialogue without a historical connection.

However, more recent scholarship in Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue since Rybarczyk’s initial work has expanded and nuanced scholars’ understanding of the impact of Orthodox sources on Wesley’s theology. In light of these developments, the present study will reassess Rybarczyk’s claim that Wesley cannot serve as a touchpoint for Orthodox and Pentecostal theological engagement. If Wesley can, then this provides another avenue for theological dialogue. I will argue that more recent scholarship on Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue recovers the viability of Wesleyan theology as a bridge in Orthodox–Pentecostal dialogue through its historical analysis of Wesley’s engagement with patristic sources, its soteriological analysis of Wesleyan sanctification, and its anthropological analysis of Wesleyan mysticism.

The study will begin by first overviewing the development in Wesleyan studies on Wesley’s engagement with patristic sources both before and after Rybarczyk’s work. The implications of this development for Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue will then be examined before demonstrating the implications of this same development for Pentecostal–Orthodox dialogue. The following two sections will analyze the impact that Wesley’s engagement with patristic sources had on his theology in two areas: sanctification and mysticism. For each area, the study will examine how Wesley’s theology was shaped by Orthodox thought, the ways scholars have capitalized on this theological

shaping in Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue, and how Pentecostal–Orthodox dialogue can adopt many of these same principles. After the review of Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue, the study will revisit Rybarczyk’s work and supplement it by uncovering Wesleyan influences and bringing in other Orthodox and Pentecostal voices. The article will conclude by briefly noting questions that arise from the present study that deserve further attention. The delineation of sources for this study will be determined by the ways ecumenists have identified their own traditions. The study will focus primarily on the texts of John and Charles Wesley for its engagement with Wesleyan theology rather than on the Wesleyan inheritance of numerous denominations. For its interaction with Pentecostalism, I will follow standard ecumenical practice by engaging texts from within Classical Pentecostalism, the “eldest” stream of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement that claims direct lineage from the Azusa Street Revival. Though many subjects examined in this article apply to Oriental Orthodox, I will primarily engage Eastern Orthodox writers because of the tradition’s more significant contact with the Wesleyan tradition and Pentecostalism. Insights gleaned from Charismatic Orthodox sources will only be mentioned in passing when they note similar commonalities between the Orthodox and Pentecostal traditions, again following standard practice when dialoging with Pentecostalism.

## **2 Scholarship on Wesley’s Patristic Engagement**

A brief overview of the Wesley brothers will be beneficial for those unfamiliar with the Wesleyan tradition. John and Charles Wesley were 18<sup>th</sup> century Englishmen. While studying at Oxford, they regularly read works on patristic theology. Their reading of these texts led to the formation of a small community

focused on ascetical practices and mutual encouragement towards holy living; the rigorous devotional practices of this community eventually earned them the name of “Methodists.” Charles Wesley, after ordination in the Church of England, became known principally for his prolific writing career, composing thousands of poems and hymns. John Wesley after ordination traveled to the British colonies in North America, where he quickly failed as a parish priest. After a transformative experience wherein he was given an assurance of faith and salvation, he began to preach itinerantly throughout the colonies. He became known for his open-air preaching in town centers and fields, urging his hearers towards holy living and a greater devotion to God. Everywhere he traveled, he encouraged the formation of small devotional communities that would come to typify Methodism. It is due to this extensive ministry and far-reaching influence that scholars, when referring to “Wesley,” mean John Wesley. The legacy of the Wesley brothers became embodied in the Methodist and Holiness traditions.

Wesleyan scholars did not give considerable attention to John Wesley’s engagement with patristic sources before the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though he built atop the work of others, Albert Outler is often seen as the instigator of this line of inquiry. He revealed the patristic foundations of Wesley’s theology, particularly in Wesley’s therapeutic models of salvation and his focus on asceticism in the Christian’s process of sanctification.<sup>2</sup> Outler’s work prompted a wave of Wesleyan scholars to examine the historical connections between Wesley’s theology

---

<sup>2</sup> Albert C. Outler, “John Wesley’s Interests in the Early Fathers of the Church,” *The Bulletin of the Committee on Archives and History of the United Church of Canada* 29 (1983), 5-17; reprinted in Albert C. Outler, *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis and Taylor Press, 1991), p. 103.

and patristic sources. Randy Maddox notes that early Anglicans like Wesley did not seek to mediate between East and West by comingling doctrine but by turning to their common source in the early church.<sup>3</sup> Howard Snyder similarly observes the revival of interest in patristic sources during Wesley's life; this revival would influence Wesley directly through his reading of the church fathers and indirectly through groups such as the German Pietists.<sup>4</sup>

The most significant of these works is Ted Campbell's analysis of Wesley's attempt to restore the primitive church. Campbell describes how Wesley engaged patristic sources during the era of Augustan England during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in the midst of a cultural fascination with antiquity; Wesley therefore sought to both justify his theology and reform his theology in accordance with that of the ancient church.<sup>5</sup> This focus on the ancient church led Wesley to read patristic sources during the early part of his ministry.<sup>6</sup> These sources, in turn, impacted Wesley's theology and the spiritual practices which he encouraged among his followers. He in essence sought to establish a continuity between the Methodist Movement and the early church.<sup>7</sup>

Around the same time of Campbell's work, Wesleyan scholars began to apply this scholarship to Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue. David Bundy argued that Wesley's patristic influences

---

<sup>3</sup> Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences, and Differences," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 45/2 (Fall 1990), p. 30, (29-53).

<sup>4</sup> Howard A. Snyder, "John Wesley and Macarius the Egyptian," *TATJ* 45/2 (Fall 1990), p. 55, (55-60).

<sup>5</sup> Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1991), pp. 14-16.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

could serve as a basis for ecumenical dialogue, though he stressed that these influences were mostly indirect through other authors rather than direct through patristic texts themselves.<sup>8</sup> A. M. Allchin illustrated through Wesley's theology that an East-West engagement is needed to experience the fullness of the Christian faith.<sup>9</sup> This dialogue, however, was still discussed hypothetically and almost exclusively from the Wesleyan side of the dialogue table. Therefore, by the time Rybarczyk published his dissertation, much work had been done on how Wesley was influenced by his reading of patristic sources, but the utilization of this influence in Wesleyan-Orthodox dialogue was still in its nascent form.

Scholarship on Wesleyan theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century moved beyond merely examining Wesley's references to patristic sources to study how Wesley's theology as a whole was shaped by these sources. Richard Heitzenrater nuanced the then-current understanding of the extent to which Wesley read the church fathers and argued that, though Wesley primarily encountered the fathers through mediatory texts, this encounter significantly shaped his theology.<sup>10</sup> Frances Young argued that Wesley drew from the thought of early ascetics in describing the Christian life and spiritual practices, thereby repackaging the monastic paradigm of struggle and deification for a wider

---

<sup>8</sup> David Bundy, "Christian Virtue: John Wesley and the Alexandrian Tradition," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 26/1 (Spring 1991), p. 155, (139-163).

<sup>9</sup> A. M. Allchin, "The Epworth-Canterbury-Constantinople Axis," *WTJ* 26/1 (Spring 1991), p. 35, (23-37).

<sup>10</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, "John Wesley's Reading of and References to the Early Church Fathers," in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. S. T. Kimbrough, Jr. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), p. 31.

audience.<sup>11</sup> Wesleyan scholars began to explore further how Wesley's theology was shaped by patristic belief and practice. Both Wesleyan and Orthodox scholars would go on to examine how Wesleyan theology could function as a bridge in dialogue. S. T. Kimbrough has led this discussion through his edited collections of essays on Orthodox–Wesleyan dialogue.<sup>12</sup> Kimbrough argues that Wesleyan and Orthodox traditions are kindred because they view their respective theologies as ways of life that arise from participation in the divine rather than as codified beliefs to be debated.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, Hieromonk Alexander Golitzin observes that Wesley's commonality with the church fathers is an inspiration to ecumenical dialogue because it bears witness to the Spirit's ability to transcend time and overcome divisions.<sup>14</sup> This dialogue between Wesleyans and Orthodox has grown steadily and deepened in recent years through its exploration of similarities and differences between Wesleyan and Orthodox doctrine and practice.

This more recent scholarship has significant implications for the viability of Wesleyan theology as a bridge in Pentecostal–Orthodox dialogue. In his monograph, Rybarczyk claims that

---

<sup>11</sup> Frances Young, "Inner Struggle: Some Parallels between the Spirituality of John Wesley and the Greek Fathers," in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, p. 167.

<sup>12</sup> S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007); S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006); S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*.

<sup>13</sup> S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., "Introduction," in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Hieromonk Alexander Golitzin, "A Testimony to Christianity as Transfiguration: The Macarian Homilies and Orthodox Spirituality," in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, p. 147.



Wesley acted as a “sieve” through which Eastern thought was filtered into the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition and then into Pentecostalism.<sup>15</sup> As such, Wesley cannot properly be called a bridge between the Orthodox and Pentecostals because of his selective use of patristic sources. However, as seen in the above brief overview of Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue, scholars of both traditions have been able to build their dialogue upon the broader structures of Wesleyan thought rather than the particular references to patristic sources in Wesley’s works. Scholars of Pentecostalism and Orthodoxy are able to follow suit and dialogue based on Pentecostalism’s Wesleyan inheritance. In this way, Wesley remains a viable bridge for dialogue. This viability will now be demonstrated through the article’s first theological topic of sanctification.

### **3 Wesleyan Sanctification**

Wesley’s use of patristic sources has been thoroughly over-viewed elsewhere, and so only a brief highlighting of relevant examples is needed for the present study. One of the most explicit examples of Wesley’s patristic engagement is his high regard for (Pseudo-)Macarius. When Wesley assembled his *Christian Library*, a collection of texts he recommended to clergy and well-read Christians, he included an abridgment of the *Macarian Homilies* in the first volume. Snyder identifies the chief influence of Macarius on Wesley as a positive view of the human potential for growth and synergistic sanctification.<sup>16</sup> In his sermons, Wesley refers to Macarius a number of times, including in his assertion that sin remains in the regenerate but

---

<sup>15</sup> Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation*, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Howard A. Snyder, “John Wesley,” p. 59.

no longer reigns.<sup>17</sup> The path of sanctification is therefore marked by struggle against sin and by grace to overcome sin. Though this aspect of Wesleyan patristic engagement has not received as much attention in scholarship, both John and Charles Wesley also revered Clement of Alexandria. Their poem “On Clemens Alexandrinus’s Description of a Perfect Christian,” borrowed from John Gambold, reflects on the Christian’s journey through “heavy tracts of toil ... [and] deserts” towards the “finished height of holiness;” overall, the poem shows familiarity with Clement’s *Stromata*.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, John Wesley’s tract, “The Character of a Methodist,” is based on the writings of Clement, though Wesley borrows more heavily from scriptural language in writing the tract.<sup>19</sup> This tract reveals two things about Wesley’s patristic engagement relevant to the present study. The first is that Wesley saw himself and the Methodist Movement as being in accord with the church fathers. The second is that he saw value in the church fathers for practical living in his own day. It is therefore significant to the present study that an 18<sup>th</sup> century preacher in the Church of England could point to a 2<sup>nd</sup> century Alexandrian catechist as a model of the sanctified life for his fellow Methodists;<sup>20</sup> this allows for theo-

---

<sup>17</sup> Howard A. Snyder, “John Wesley,” p. 62. For the texts, see John Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” I.7; Macarius, *Homily IX*.

<sup>18</sup> Charles and John Wesley, “On Clemens Alexandrinus’s Description of a Perfect Christian,” stanza 1; Bundy, “Christian Virtue,” p. 143. Bundy identifies similarities between the poem and Clement’s fourth and seventh *stromata*.

<sup>19</sup> David Bundy, “Christian Virtue,” p. 139; John Wesley, *Journal*, Thursday, 5 March 17.

<sup>20</sup> Neil D. Anderson, *A Definitive Study of Evidence Concerning John Wesley’s Appropriation of the Thought of Clement of Alexandria* (Texts and Studies in Religion 102, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), pp. 75-91.

logical commonality without a direct historical lineage between the traditions.

Recent scholarship has gone beyond noting Wesley's patristic engagement by utilizing it in establishing dialogue between Orthodox and Wesleyan theologians. Young picks up on Wesley's readings of Macarius and highlights the need of struggle for Christian perfection that is common to Wesley and Macarius. This struggle becomes an integral part of the Christian life because even those perfected in love can still sin.<sup>21</sup> As the Christian is perfected in love, he or she endures difficulties through God's sanctifying grace; therefore, "this struggle towards perfection is at the heart of prayer and spirituality."<sup>22</sup> Young concludes that this spiritual dynamic connects Orthodox and Wesleyan spirituality because it is central to both. Archdeacon John Chryssavgis comes to similar conclusions in his parallel reading of Wesley and Isaiah of Scetis. For both Wesley and Isaiah, in order for Christians to share in Christ's glory, they must also share in his suffering; to share in Christ's resurrection, they must share in his crucifixion.<sup>23</sup> The Christian life is subsequently characterized by suffering and glorification on the path to deification. Young and Chryssavgis both in this way use Wesley's adoption of ascetic struggle from patristic sources as a bridge in dialogue between the two traditions.

Young's essay would later influence Tamara Grdzeldze in her understanding of Wesleyan sanctification. Grdzeldze examines divine-human cooperation in the process of sanctification through her parallel reading of Wesley's sermon "On Working Out Our Own Salvation" and two eleventh-century Georgian

---

<sup>21</sup> Frances Young, "Inner Struggle," p. 165.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 163-164.

<sup>23</sup> John Chryssavgis, "The Practical Way of Holiness: Isaiah of Scetis and John Wesley," in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, p. 92.

hagiographies. In Wesley's sermon, he exhorts his hearers to actively participate in their being sanctified by God through various deeds, including reflecting on scripture, doing good to all, partaking in the Eucharist, and taking up their cross daily.<sup>24</sup> The hearers are able to do these things because grace both precedes and enables human action.<sup>25</sup> Human labor thereby becomes an integral component of a person's grace-empowered sanctification. Similarly, the Georgian hagiographies encourage their readers towards holiness by cataloging the lives of saints in their constant labors in deed and prayer.<sup>26</sup> The saints demonstrate the necessity of even arduous work in seeking to be purified, for "every struggle, whether in thought or in deed, has its value on the way to salvation."<sup>27</sup> Golitzin points to such depictions of saints as pictures of lived ideals in the world<sup>28</sup> and as pictures of entire sanctification, to use Wesley's terminology. Through this parallel reading, Grdzelizde identifies an affinity between Orthodox and Wesleyan spirituality that is grounded in the ascetic path towards sanctification.

Dialogue between Orthodox and Pentecostals can build upon this work due to Pentecostalism's inheritance of synergism from Wesley. Rybarczyk, despite his dismissal of Wesley's use in this dialogue, identifies a commonality between Wesley's synergistic sanctification and that of the Orthodox and Pentecostals.<sup>29</sup> The Christian is responsible for responding to God's sanctifying grace through various works and struggles. One can

---

<sup>24</sup> John Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," II.4.

<sup>25</sup> Tamara Grdzelizde, "The Holiness of a Human Being: A Mark of Christian Spirituality," in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, p. 175.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 177.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 182.

<sup>28</sup> Hieromonk Alexander Golitzin, "A Testimony to Christianity as Transfiguration," p. 147.

<sup>29</sup> Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation*, p. 258 n68.

therefore trace Orthodoxy's influence on Pentecostal sanctification through Wesley. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, in conversing with the Orthodox tradition about Pentecostal soteriology, notes the developments in Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue and their contribution to Pentecostal–Orthodox dialogue. Wesley's adoption of Orthodox understandings of deification fed into early Pentecostalism, resulting in remarkable similarities between Orthodox and Pentecostal synergism.<sup>30</sup> As has already been seen in scholarship since Rybarczyk's work, Wesley functions as a bridge between the two traditions because of his theology of sanctification. The study will now turn to analyze a parallel of Christian sanctification in Wesley's thought: mysticism.

#### 4     **Wesleyan Mysticism**

Mysticism within the Wesleyan tradition has admittedly received less attention in scholarship in comparison with that dedicated to sanctification. This is largely due to Wesley's own ambivalent and changing regard for mystical traditions. Robert Tuttle traces Wesley's mystical influences and his attitudes towards mysticism. Wesley's maternal grandfather was familiar with the mystical writings of Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, Wesley early in his ministry extensively read Macarius and Ephrem of Syria.<sup>32</sup> However, it is also well known that Wesley

---

<sup>30</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Grace and the Ecumenical Potential of Theosis," in *Toward a Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission*, ed. Amos Yong (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), pp. 149–165; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), p. 112.

<sup>31</sup> Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1989), p. 48.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 83.

at one point forsook mysticism and identified it as the source of his life's struggles.<sup>33</sup> Here, Tuttle inserts himself. He interprets Wesley as rejecting mystic quietism and non-action.<sup>34</sup> For much of his life, he held contempt for speculative mysticism but still admired numerous individual mystics.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, though Wesley seldom cited mystical patristic sources, his theology and praxis were shaped by mystical thought.

It should be remembered that Wesley's ministry sprang from a mystical event where his heart was "strangely warmed." This experience occurred as he read 2 Peter 1:4, which assures Christians that by God's promises they "might be partakers of the divine nature,"<sup>36</sup> a passage that has arrested the attention of mystics for centuries. Thus, even though Wesley did not actively speak in mystical terms, his depiction of Christian spirituality had mystical aspects. As the Christian grows from justification to sanctification, so he or she grows from purgation to divine union.<sup>37</sup> The concept of deification is split into two distinct but related processes. As mentioned above, Wesley's reading of the Macarian Homilies would have introduced him to the depiction of mystical communion as the end of the Christian spiritual journey.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, his reading of Clement introduced him to practical forms of mysticism.<sup>39</sup> This practical form of mysticism would have appealed to Wesley due to his criticism of

---

<sup>33</sup> Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *Mysticism*, p. 85; John Wesley, "Letter to Samuel," 23 November 1736.

<sup>34</sup> Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *Mysticism*, pp. 95-96. John Wesley even cites Cyprian in his rejection of mysticism, which clarifies what Wesley exactly was rejecting; *Journal*, 9 January 1738.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 127.

<sup>36</sup> Authorized Version. John Wesley, *Journal*, 24 May 1738.

<sup>37</sup> Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *Mysticism*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 145. Tuttle here specifically claims commonalities with Macarius' Fifth Homily.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 148.

those who neglected the instituted means of grace such as the Eucharist and communal prayers.<sup>40</sup> Even though Wesley cannot be called a mystic, his theology was nevertheless shaped by mystical influences.

The mystical aspects of Wesleyan theology have served as a touchpoint in Orthodox–Wesleyan dialogue. One such bridge that is built in dialogue is that with the hesychastic tradition. Ioann Ekonomtsev notes numerous parallels between the Wesleys and the Hesychasts, including their frequent conflicts with church hierarchs and their reaction against a perceived increase in rationalism in the church. Both groups demonstrate that the restoration of the divine image in Christians and participation in the divine results in an increase in creativity, as seen in the thought of Gregory Palamas and the poetry of Charles Wesley.<sup>41</sup> Kenneth Carveley likewise notes some similarities between Wesley’s thought and patristic mysticism in their common focus on the restoration of the divine image. Wesley claims that true religion must result in the person being molded into the image of God. This occurs through the process of being born again.<sup>42</sup> An encounter with God thereby becomes a transformative religious experience.<sup>43</sup>

Charlesworth builds on Ekonomtsev in identifying the common role of prayer between the Hesychasts and the Wesleys. The two groups exemplify a “somatic experience of the divine” through their use of language indicating an intimate and bodily encounter between the person praying and God; both Palamas

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 88; John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” I.5.

<sup>41</sup> Ioann Ekonomtsev, “Charles Wesley and the Orthodox Hesychast Tradition,” in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, pp. 236-237.

<sup>42</sup> Kenneth Carveley, “From Glory to Glory: The Renewal of All Things in Christ: Maximus the Confessor and John Wesley,” in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, p. 174; John Wesley, “New Birth,” III.5.

<sup>43</sup> Ioann Ekonomtsev, “Charles Wesley,” pp. 233-240.

and John Wesley profess that the purified experience the divine energies.<sup>44</sup> Charlesworth juxtaposes Wesley from the rest of the Western church because of his mystical focus on theology and experience.<sup>45</sup> Because of the possibility of this transformative bodily experience, both Wesleyan and Orthodox traditions view Christianity as being dependent upon an experience of the divine.<sup>46</sup> The somatic nature and effect of mystical encounter become a bridge in dialogue, a dialogue which Ekonomtsev notes is all the more necessary in a society in need of spiritual renewal because the dialogue focuses on spiritual reformers such as the Athonites and Wesley brothers.<sup>47</sup>

Dialogue concerning mysticism between Orthodox and Pentecostals can build upon this work in Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue. Similar to Wesley, though Pentecostals themselves do not often identify as mystics, they nevertheless employ mystical language frequently. In his recent book, Daniel Castelo explores the mystical underpinnings of Pentecostal spirituality. He analyzes Pentecostal language through the standard mystical progression of purgation, illumination, and union to understand the Pentecostal dynamics of divine encounter and transformation within the language of older Christian mystical traditions.<sup>48</sup> Rybarczyk notes that such mystical language unites the Orthodox and Pentecostals because the two focus on the trans-

---

<sup>44</sup> James H. Charlesworth, “Two Similar Spiritual Paths: Methodism and Greek Orthodoxy,” in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice*, pp. 119–120; cf. John Wesley, “Catholic Spirit,” 1.14.

<sup>45</sup> James H. Charlesworth, “Two Similar Spiritual Paths,” p. 109.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 119; cf. John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” 1.6; Kallistos Ware, introduction to John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, tr. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Ioann Ekonomtsev, “Charles Wesley,” p. 240.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel Castelo, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), pp. 77–81.



formational effect of personal encounter in mystical experiences. He claims this personal language, however, distinguishes the two from Mainline Protestant traditions such as Wesleyans who speak more often in terms of transformational grace rather than transformational encounter.<sup>49</sup> Yet, as seen above, this difference in language has not remained a barrier in Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue. Both Wesleyan and Orthodox scholars have been able to find common bonds within their mystical thought despite the obstacles noted by Rybarczyk. Orthodox and Pentecostals are therefore able to use the mystical influences and shaping of Wesley’s theology as a historical bridge in reflecting on both traditions’ respective mystical experiences and language.

## 5 Revisiting Rybarczyk

As seen, Orthodox–Pentecostal dialogue can benefit from the use of Pentecostalism’s Wesleyan heritage. This claim can be illustrated through a rereading of Rybarczyk’s work. His project is strengthened by revealing the Wesleyan dimension of the commonalities between Orthodox and Pentecostal theology. As mentioned above, Rybarczyk claims that the dialogue cannot use Wesley as a historical bridge because of the distance between the church fathers and Wesley and between Wesley and Pentecostals. However, scholarship on Pentecostalism has well established the Wesleyan inheritance of early Pentecostals. The Methodist tradition carried on the teachings and practices of Wesley and his successors into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From this tradition came the Holiness Movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States that urged the church towards a holier life in the

---

<sup>49</sup> Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation*, pp. 260–261.

Spirit. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Holiness Movement coalesced with other theological streams into what is today Pentecostalism.<sup>50</sup> It is worth here noting that, as numerous churches began to participate in the Pentecostal Movement, the movement was divided in its understandings of sanctification between “Wesleyan” Pentecostals and “Reformed” (Keswickian) Pentecostals. The Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal group to which Rybarczyk belongs, came from the Reformed stream. One could perhaps wonder if the book would have given more weight to Pentecostalism’s Wesleyan inheritance had it been written by a Pentecostal from the Wesleyan stream of the movement.

In his work, Rybarczyk compares the various means through which Orthodox and Pentecostals grow in their spiritual lives. Asceticism is seen as a commonality. He highlights that, for the Orthodox, one’s experience of God is clearer when the soul is purified. Subsequently, the Christian life is marked by an active pattern of service, scripture reading, and prayer.<sup>51</sup> This lifestyle is identified by the practices engaged and avoided. Pentecostal-

---

<sup>50</sup> For more information on Pentecostalism’s Wesleyan inheritance, see Laurence W. Wood, *The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism: Rediscovering John Fletcher as Wesley’s Vindicator and Designated Successor* (Pietist and Wesleyan Studies 15, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002); Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis and Taylor Press, 1987); Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1997). David Bundy and Patricia Ward thoroughly discuss the complications of tracing Orthodox influences through this theological lineage. David Bundy, “Visions of Sanctification: Themes of Orthodoxy in the Methodist, Holiness, and Pentecostal Traditions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 39/1 (2004), pp. 104–136; Patricia A. Ward, “Mapping the Traditions of Methodism and the Holiness and Pentecostal Movements: A Reply to David Bundy,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 39/2 (2004), pp. 256–267.

<sup>51</sup> Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation*, pp. 155–156.

ism similarly has seen sanctification, among other markers, as abstinence from “worldly” activities that would detract from the person’s spiritual growth.<sup>52</sup> Rybarczyk concludes that, for both traditions, “the Christian cannot be spiritually lazy” and must be active to grow.<sup>53</sup> This commonality stems from Pentecostalism’s Wesleyan inheritance. As Rybarczyk himself acknowledges, Wesley encouraged ascetical practices among his followers as cures for the “soul’s therapy.”<sup>54</sup> These individual and communal ascetical practices such as prayer were meant to encourage believers on the path towards sanctification. Wesleyan asceticism underlines this common thought in the two traditions. Simon Chan, in speaking of ascetical practices in Pentecostalism, describes the arduous toil of prayer—or “tarrying at the altar”—for the coming Kingdom.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, Archpriest Spencer Estabrooks highlights the role that the saints play in reminding Christians that prayer is work.<sup>56</sup> Wesleyan theology therefore helps to draw out this common teaching among Orthodox and Pentecostals that divinization not only requires human participation but is also hard work.

Another connecting point Rybarczyk draws out is that of divine encounter. He naturally points to Palamite experiential knowledge in his explanation of Orthodox spirituality. Through hesychastic spirituality, the Christian receives a bodily experi-

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, p. 281.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, p. 297.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, pp. 11-12.

<sup>55</sup> Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), p. 85.

<sup>56</sup> Anthony Spencer Estabrooks, “Acquisition of the Holy Spirit as the Goal of the Christian Life,” *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity* 2/1 (Winter 2007), p. 29, (13-31). <http://www.cjoc.ca/pdf/Vol2-W-2%20Acquisition%20of%20the%20Holy%20Spirit2.PDF> (15 March 2018).

ence of divine encounter.<sup>57</sup> This experience results in an “unmediated” means of theosis in addition to the sacramental life.<sup>58</sup> Rybarczyk goes on to note how Pentecostals speak of transformation as a result of encounter with the divine persons. He concludes that both Pentecostals and Orthodox acknowledge personhood as an integral component of transformation.<sup>59</sup> As mentioned above, the Pentecostal focus on personal transformation is an inheritance from Wesleyan spirituality. The encounter between persons in prayer sanctifies the Christian. This encounter also must be perceived, whether through a “heart strangely warmed” or through a vision of the Light of Tabor. This dimension of Wesleyan spirituality reinforces the commonality between Orthodox and Pentecostals. Such a commonality leads Chan and Estabrooks in their articles to independently point to the opening prayer of the Orthros (Matins) in its invocation of the Spirit to “come and abide in us, and cleanse us of every impurity and save our souls.”<sup>60</sup> The indwell-

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem, p. 38. Paraskevè Tibbs notes that Pentecostals frequently engage Orthodox thought regarding their shared concern for experiential worship and theology. Paraskevè Tibbs, “A Distinct Economy of the Spirit? Amos Yong, Pentecostalism, and Eastern Orthodoxy,” in *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship: Passion for the Spirit*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey and Martin William Mittelstadt (Leiden, NY: Brill, 2013), 221.

<sup>58</sup> Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation*, p. 149.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, p. 344.

<sup>60</sup> Simon Chan, “The Nature of the Church: The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Life,” *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 22 (2013). <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj22/chan.html> (15 March 2018); Anthony Spencer Estabrooks, “A Continuing Pentecost: The Experience of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox Christianity (With a View to Dialogue Between Orthodox Christians and Pentecostals),” *TCJOC* 1/1 (Winter 2006), p. 6, (1-20). <http://www.cjoc.ca/pdf/Estabrooks.pdf> (15 March 2018).

ing of the Spirit's person transforms the indwelt person in a perceptible way.

The process of becoming like God entails growth into the image of God. Rybarczyk analyzes this theme in the two traditions. He discusses the patristic differentiation between the image and likeness of God which leads Orthodox to claim that humans retain God's image in a distorted form; theosis thereby becomes the process through which the image is restored.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Pentecostals maintain that God restores the already present image in Christians. He quotes one Pentecostal author in saying that, "man's soul, like a sensitive photographic plate, takes on the image of that to which it is exposed; and the longer the exposure, the clearer the image."<sup>62</sup> However, Rybarczyk fails to connect these two through Wesley because he misunderstands Wesley's anthropology. Contrary to Rybarczyk's claim that Wesley believed the image of God was eradicated at the Fall, Wesley taught that the "moral" image was lost while the "natural" image was only disfigured.<sup>63</sup> Humans resembled God less, but they still bore a distorted image. One can see a continuity between Pentecostalism and Wesley that resembles Orthodox teaching. Strangely, this commonality has received little significant attention in Orthodox-Pentecostal dialogue so far.<sup>64</sup> It remains to be seen how Wesley's anthropology can serve as a

---

<sup>61</sup> Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation*, pp. 74-75, 95.

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem, p. 285. Here, Rybarczyk quotes Robert C. Cunningham, "Exposed to the Glory," in *Pentecostal Evangel*, 16 June 1963, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> John Wesley, "The General Deliverance," I.1, 4; John Wesley, "On the Fall of Man," II.6.

<sup>64</sup> John Morris, in his assessment of Charismatic movements, describes the goal of Orthodox spirituality as the transformation into God's image in accordance with 2 Peter 1:3-4, though he does not note any parallels with Pentecostal teaching. John Warren Morris, *The Charismatic Movement: An Orthodox Evaluation* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1984), pp. 16-17.

bridge between common understandings among Pentecostals and Orthodox on the image of God.

Finally, Rybarczyk asserts that Orthodox and Pentecostals conceive of the process of Christian growth similarly. Rather than seeing salvation as a single event, they affirm that it is a lifelong path. Though the Orthodox often root sanctification within the Incarnation and Pentecostals in the Spirit's work, both see sanctification as something continuous.<sup>65</sup> This does not deny the role of events or experiences in a person's divinization but reveals that these experiences should not be considered isolated events. This view of continuous growth is contrary to the claim of John Morris that Charismatic Christians seek experiences rather than growth.<sup>66</sup> Pentecostals are therefore able to affirm with Morris that sanctification is not instantaneous but involves an "absolute necessity of constant growth and struggle to reach spiritual edification."<sup>67</sup> Such a misunderstanding of Pentecostal spirituality likely stems from Pentecostalism's Wesleyan inheritance. Pentecostalism formed its doctrine of Spirit baptism from the Wesleyan experience of entire sanctification, wherein a person is perfected in love and holiness. However, both Wesley and Pentecostals believe that this singular event is not a sole moment of growth but is part of the Christian's lifelong path towards becoming like God. A common way for Orthodox and Pentecostals to understand this event/process paradigm is through the writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation*, p. 250.

<sup>66</sup> John Warren Morris, *Charismatic Movement*, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>68</sup> St. Symeon the New Theologian is a common figure in discourse between Pentecostals and the Eastern tradition. He also plays a significant role in the thought of Charismatic Orthodox in their attempts to understand their charismatic experiences within the tradition of the Orthodox church. For more information on the use of St. Symeon by

Mihai-Iulian Grobnicu compares Pentecostal and Symeonian soteriology in noting that both view the Christian's "second experience," or Spirit baptism, as being greater than his or her first initiatory experience.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Wolfgang Vondey compares Pentecostal soteriology with that of Orthodox in saying that both view salvation as praxis; the Spirit continuously enables Christians to participate in their redemption.<sup>70</sup> Highlighting Wesley's influence on Pentecostal sanctification clarifies potential misunderstandings and reveals a greater commonality with Orthodox soteriology.

## 6 Looking Forward In Dialogue

This study has argued that Orthodox–Pentecostal dialogue can capitalize on the insights offered by Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue concerning Wesley's patristic engagement and its subsequent impact on his theology. Many soteriological and anthropological similarities between Orthodox and Pentecostals can be traced to the theology of the Wesley brothers. Nevertheless, further attention should be given to the role which hymnody plays for these traditions in expressing these theological similarities. As shown by numerous articles on liturgical and hym-

---

Charismatic Orthodox, see Timothy B. Cremeens, *Marginalized Voices: A History of the Charismatic Movement in the Orthodox Church in North America, 1972-1995* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018).

<sup>69</sup> Mihai-Iulian Grobnicu, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit: An Analysis of the Doctrine [in] Symeon the New Theologian and in [the] Classical Pentecostal Movement," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 7/4 (2016), p. 199, (166-204). <http://orthodox-theology.com/media/PDF/2016.4/Mihai-IulianGrobnicu.pdf> (16 March 2018).

<sup>70</sup> Vondey here builds upon Rybarczyk's work on synergistic soteriology in Orthodoxy and Pentecostalism. Wolfgang Vondey, "Soteriology at the Altar: Pentecostal Contributions to Salvation as Praxis," *Transformation* 34/3 (2017), pp. 232-233, (223-238).

nodal practices in Kimbrough's edited collections, many insights gained through Wesleyan–Orthodox dialogue were gleaned through a cross-reading of hymns from the two traditions. This reinforces the spiritual affinity between the two. Likewise, attention should be devoted to how Pentecostal and Orthodox hymnody echo many of the themes discussed in this article. Though any casual observer of the two will witness few commonalities in liturgical practice, there are common soteriological and anthropological themes reflected in their hymnodies.<sup>71</sup> This commonality, like those above, could possibly be traced to the influence of Wesleyan hymnody on the Pentecostal tradition, thus providing yet another avenue for dialogue based on Wesley.

Another subject that deserves further attention is that of the role of sacraments in sanctification and mysticism. Rybarczyk highlights the numerous dissimilarities between the Orthodox and Pentecostals on the function of the sacraments, though he does acknowledge that both extend their views of divine communion beyond the instituted sacraments.<sup>72</sup> Chrismation is often correlated with the Pentecostal practice of Spirit baptism due to their common role in uniting the Christian with God. Additionally, Pentecostal theologians have begun to reflect more on the Eucharist. Chan claims that Pentecostals can develop their sacramental theology through dialoging with the Orthodox.<sup>73</sup> Elsewhere, he also attempts to develop this theology through Pentecostalism's Wesleyan inheritance.<sup>74</sup> Future dialogue can

---

<sup>71</sup> Edmund J. Rybarczyk, "What Are You, O Man? Theo-Anthropological Similarities in Classical Pentecostalism and Eastern Orthodoxy," in *Ancient and Postmodern Christianity: Paleo-Orthodoxy in the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 104.

<sup>72</sup> Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation*, p. 260.

<sup>73</sup> Simon Chan, "Nature of the Church."

<sup>74</sup> Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*, p. 96.



build upon Wesley's sacramental theology<sup>75</sup> in helping Pentecostals to grow in their valuing of the sacraments in both their sanctifying and mystical functions.

The role of charismata in Orthodox and Pentecostal churches also should be examined in future dialogue. The claims made by each concerning charismata often vex the other. The Orthodox association of charismatic experiences with monasticism looks to Pentecostals as an attempt to marginalize the Spirit's work, whereas Pentecostal claims of charismatic restoration look to the Orthodox as a denial of the Spirit's work in history. Just as Wesley attempted to promote ascetic practices among the laity beyond monastic communities, so Pentecostals encourage the normalcy of charismata beyond monastic communities. Orthodox, however, worry that this focus on charismatic experiences could distract Christians from the arduous work of sanctification and the instituted means of grace passed on through the church's tradition. Nevertheless, the charismata are related to sanctification and mysticism in both traditions. Archimandrite Eusebius Stephanou observes that the church fathers acknowledge a role for charismata in the divinization of saints.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, Castelo describes the charism of speaking in tongues as an attempt to express the ineffable mysteries of God through divine union with the Spirit.<sup>77</sup> Though Wesley himself

---

<sup>75</sup> Wesleyan-Orthodox dialogue has already demonstrated how to dialogue on their Eucharistic theologies. For example, see S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., "Theosis in the Writings of Charles Wesley," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52/2 (2008), pp. 199-212.

<sup>76</sup> Eusebius A. Stephanou, "The Charismata in the Early Church Fathers," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21/2 (1976), p. 146, (125-146).

<sup>77</sup> Daniel Castelo, *Pentecostalism*, p. 176. Here, Castelo is borrowing from Frank Macchia's understanding of glossolalia (speaking in tongues). For further discussion, see Frank D. Macchia, "Sighs Too Deep for

spoke little about charismata, his patristic influences ultimately affected the ways Pentecostals viewed the role of charismata. These charismatic experiences deserve further attention in dialogue concerning how they encourage sanctification and how they are related to Christians' mystical experiences. Current dialogue efforts between Pentecostals and Orthodox have slowly formed over the past generation. The need for dialogue has been revealed by the increasing interactions between Pentecostals and Orthodox. Pentecostal missionaries have formed communities within historically Orthodox countries, while the Orthodox diaspora has established a presence among largely Pentecostal regions of the world. However, these two traditions have been slow in establishing contacts. A significant event in their relations occurred during the 2005 Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Athens, where a synaxis was held on "Reconciliation and Mission: Orthodox and Pentecostal Perspectives." Though none of the presentations were published, attendees were moved by the missiological reflections of the two groups.<sup>78</sup> More recently, informal talks have been held between Pentecostals and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, though these talks have yet to result in a formal bilateral dialogue between the two groups.<sup>79</sup> This history reveals the need for con-

---

Words: Towards a Theology of Glossolalia," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1/1 (1992), pp. 42-73.

<sup>78</sup> A number of reflections were published by conference attendees, some of which discuss this synaxis. See *International Review of Mission* 94/374 (July 2005).

<sup>79</sup> John Chryssavgis, *Bartholomew: Apostle and Visionary* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2016), p. 76. Harold Hunter, Pentecostal co-chair of these talks, has chronicled the development of these relations. Harold D. Hunter, "Journey with the Orthodox: Biography of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew reviewed by Harold D. Hunter" last modified 18 January 2017. <http://pneumareview.com/journey-with-the->

structive relations between the two traditions and also gives hope for the same.

Despite the increasing interactions between Orthodox and Pentecostal communities, little theological dialogue has been conducted between the two. It is therefore imperative that scholars of both traditions attempt to bridge the historical, cultural, and theological gaps between the two in order to help their respective communities do the same. This study has attempted to show one such bridge that can be used to traverse the gap. Despite the historical distance between Wesley and the church fathers, Orthodox–Wesleyan dialogue has been able to reflect together through the thought of Wesley. Similarly, by focusing on Pentecostalism’s Wesleyan inheritance of sanctification and mysticism, Orthodox and Pentecostal scholars can use Wesley as a historical bridge in facilitating dialogue. Though this inheritance is not always explicit just as Wesley’s patristic engagement was not, it has shaped Pentecostalism’s theology and praxis to reflect in part that of Orthodoxy. In this way, Wesleyan theology remains a viable bridge for the future of Orthodox–Pentecostal dialogue.