

## **Double Predestination and the Quest for Certainty of Christian Salvation from an African Perspective: Towards Cumulative Case Argument and Transcendentalism**

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### **Abstract**

*Inasmuch as many people claim that they are saved, this claim is tinged with some amount of doubt whenever one reflects on their own ways of life; worse still, when the doctrine of predestination is preached. This doctrine claims that from the foundations of the earth God through his sovereignty predestined some human beings to salvation and another lot to eternal damnation and therefore, it did not matter how much the condemned lot worked to attain salvation; no human works could obtain for salvation because it is tainted with human sin. This teaching is complicated further by John Calvin's teachings that reprobates exuded characteristics similar to that of the elects. Based on this position, human beings could not by way of assessing their works come to the assurance of their salvation. How does one then tell whether they are elect or of the reprobate lot? Traditionally, the Jewish and Africans ascertained their salvation through their works but doubt is cast on this approach by Calvin's doctrine of double predestination. In an attempt to address the anxiety caused by this doctrine of double predestination, Calvin and John Wesley have proposed ways of assuaging the anxiety. However, the proposed methods have not offered satisfactory solution; people are still anxious. Using theological hermeneutics of suspicion, this article re-interprets the doctrine of double predestination. It then explores the Christian and the African theological perspectives of salvation and their certainty of it. It introduces a cumulative case that brings together objective and subjective approaches and by applying a transcendental method in reflecting on God-human encounter, proposes a possible assurance of salvation via transcendentalism.*

**Keywords: Assurance, Salvation, Certainty, Cumulative Case, Objective~Subjective, Ontological, Functional, Predestination, Election, Reprobation, Faith.**

## **Introduction**

The quest for certainty of salvation is a concern of all human religions. Since religion is as old as humankind, this anxiety too is as old as humankind. This anxiety could have been the push factor behind origin and development of religion. Whether religion developed gradually with the development of human faculties of reason, or from myths based upon original personification of natural phenomena, as proposed by Max Muller (1823-1900) or from human sense of insecurity as proposed by Sigmund Freud in his psycho-analysis of human development,<sup>1</sup> they all lead to the quest of assurance of safety both in this life and in the life hereafter.

Religious Sacrifices may have begun at the point when humans became aware of their existence and existence of supernatural powers and the relationship between the two entities. Therefore, the quest for peaceful co-existence between humans and the gods was necessary. When humans experienced hardships, they associated the cause to strained relationship between the two entities and sought for reparation of the relationship. Thus, sacrifices were initiated to act as a means of reparation of human–gods relationship.

For example, in Judaism, on the Day of Atonement the entire nation assembled at the place of worship to sacrifice; individuals and the nation confessed their sins and the presiding High Priest interceded on their behalf before sacrificing. After the sacrifice, the worshipers left assured that God’s wrath had been propitiated and their guilt expiated.

In African Traditional religion, it was believed that one incurred a curse whenever they broke a taboo. The curse barred them from being accepted both in this life within the community of the living and in life hereafter in the community of the living-dead. To remove the curse and to be accepted by the community of the living, the victim offered a sacrifice to propitiate the anger of the ancestors and to expiate the incurred curse. Upon completing the sacrifice, the worshiper left assured that they were now in the right standing with the ancestors and God and they were re-accepted into the two communities.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Sigmund Freud a child is born with the wish of protection from the terrors of life and nature. This protection, he/she finds in the father whom he/she regards as figure of absolute power. But as they grow up, the supremacy of the father reduces. Religion now comes in as a substitute to fill up the vacuum created by displacement of the father. Thus religion is a wish for protection from the terrors of life and nature.

With the advent of Christian faith, traditional sacrifices were replaced by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Protestant faith taught that the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to the ultimate sacrifice offered by Christ at the Cross and Christ's sacrifice was a once for all act. All that one needed to receive their remission of sin is to believe in Christ's death as substitute for their punishment and that through their faith they have been reconciled back to God. Based on this teaching, John Calvin taught that all we need to do for our assurance of salvation is to gaze at the Christ.

However, anxiety is accentuated when the Reformers' doctrine of election removes human good works and sacrifices from the process of salvation. Reformed theology holds that human good works do not attain or earn merits for salvation. It teaches that salvation is by grace alone (*sola gratia*) and by faith alone (*sola fidei*) and not by good works.

It also teaches that, from the foundation of the earth, some people were predestined to salvation while others to damnation and it is only the elect that shall be saved. In this double predestination, Christ's work at the Cross is not involved. The question that arises in the doctrine of election is how one can ascertain whether they are of the elect or reprobate lot.

This article explores the Christian and the African theological<sup>2</sup> perspectives of salvation and their certainty of it. It introduces a cumulative case that brings objective and subjective approaches together and applies a transcendental method in reflecting on God-human encounter to be able to ascertain their position before God. Using theological hermeneutics of suspicion, this article re-interprets the doctrine of double predestination and proposes a possible assurance of salvation via transcendentalism.

### **1.0 Double Predestination: Boon or Bane?**

Double predestination as advanced by John Calvin means that God in his sovereignty from eternity purposed to create some people for salvation and others specifically for damnation. He states, "For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others."<sup>3</sup> He supports this position with Deuteronomy 32:8-9 "When the

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<sup>2</sup> African Theology as used here in its broader sense is African Traditional theology. It excludes Christian perspectives. While in a narrower sense it refers to African Christian theological perspectives.

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Trans. Henry Beveridge), Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998). 3.21.5. (Henceforth simply cited as *Institutes* followed by Book. Chapter. Paragraph).

Most High divided the nations, and separated the sons of Adam... the people of Israel were his portion ...the cord of his inheritance.” A position which is echoed by Karl Barth, when he states that God’s creating act is grounded in his principle of election. He elects what to create and what not to create: “God elects, and therefore rejects what he does not elect.”<sup>4</sup> This presupposes that when God elects, those not elected are automatically reprobated (rejected) and are under divine judgement.

Proponents of this doctrine e.g. Lesslie Newbigin, aver that election is evident in the theology of Paul in Roman 9; in verse 15 when Paul quotes Old Testament Scripture, “For he [God] says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’” Newbigin, further notes that “Without question the point of view of the Bible is that God chose Abel and not Cain, Isaac and not Ishmael, Jacob and not Esau, David and not his elder brothers.”<sup>5</sup> Such interpretation excludes human participation in the process of salvation as God’s election is based on his eternal sovereignty and not on His foreknowledge of future human response to his gospel invitation.

In the doctrine of double predestination, Calvin taught that reprobates were capable of exhibiting false signs of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, thanks to the prevenient grace that every human being receives at creation. In his commentary on Matthew 13:20 Calvin says, “The Lord Himself illumines them [reprobates] to a degree with his Spirit and this explains their response.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, since everyone enjoys some level of illumination there can be a lot of similarities in the way they (both the elect and the reprobates) behave. Due to this fact, good works should not be used as indicators of one being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This position makes it very difficult for one to ascertain their salvation.

To complicate the issue further, Calvin in his acronym TULIP,<sup>7</sup> taught that while the elect’s portion of illumination endures, that of the reprobate is temporary. Thus once one was saved,

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<sup>4</sup> Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation*, Vol. III. Part Three, G. W. Bromiley, and T. F. Torrance (eds). (Edinburgh, T & T. Clark, 1960), 351.

<sup>5</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, (1989), 81.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries* (trans. T. H. L. Parker; edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance). Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960).

<sup>7</sup> TULIP is an acronym which summarizes John Calvin’s teaching on salvation. Calvin held that the effects of sin on humankind were Total deprivation of grace, and as such they receive Undeserved grace, and that grace is Limited to the elect, and such grace was Irresistable, and it was Persevering).

they would always be saved; they could not lose the salvation. It is only the reprobate who receives temporary grace and manifests temporary fruits. Therefore, the reprobate's manifestation of the fruits of salvation would eventually expire and they would be justly condemned to hell. On the contrary, the elects' fruits of the Spirit will endure. This poses a problem in that one is confronted with the challenge wanting to know whether their benevolent actions are fruits of the Holy Spirit or of the temporary grace given to the reprobates. How do I know that I am not a reprobate when my actions are similar to those of the elect?

Human quest to ascertain the state of their standing before God is occasioned by the nature of their existence. According to John Macquarrie a twentieth century existentialist, human beings are said to exist unlike other creatures because their existence has been disclosed to them. He states, "Men, cats, trees, rocks all are; they have being, we come across them in the world. But so far as we know, only man is open to his being, in the sense that he not only is, but is aware that he is, and aware too, in some degree, of what he is. He has his being disclosed to him..."<sup>8</sup>

Further to understanding what is meant by existence is that this could also be understood as transcending. Macquarrie explains that,

In some respects this notion of 'transcendence' better expresses the dynamic character of man's being –it is his very nature to be always transcending or passing beyond any given stage of his condition. Also the traditional word 'spirit' expressed something of the same idea, for it was the endowment with spirit that allowed man to be creative and responsible and to rise above the lower levels of life.<sup>9</sup>

It is this disclosure that causes tensions or polarities in human beings.

While the concept of 'existence' differentiates man's being from the being that belongs to objects in nature, and so sets up a certain tension between man and nature, further analysis of what is involved in 'existence' reveals that existence itself contains tensions or polarities, and that the opposition between existence and nature is paralleled by opposition within existence itself – some of them so sharp that man, as the bearer of such existence, is almost torn apart by them.<sup>10</sup>

All forms of tensions in human life culminate into the polarity of anxiety and hope. "A life lived amid tensions generated by polarities... can never be quite free from anxiety, that is to say, from

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<sup>8</sup> John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, (London; SCM Press Ltd. 1977), 60.

<sup>9</sup> Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 62.

<sup>10</sup> Macquarrie, 62.

a sense of the threat of absurdity and negativity. On the other hand, such a life can be lived only on the basis of the hope that it is somehow worthwhile.”<sup>11</sup>

Macquarrie quotes Penneberg who writes, “It is inherently in man to hope beyond death, even as it is inherent in man to know about his own death. Both anxiety and hope seem to be very deeply rooted in the being of man.”<sup>12</sup> He further quotes Paul Ricoeur who says, “Anxiety is the sense of the difference between the finite being and the mysterious totality in which he has, so it seems, an insignificant place; hope or joy arises from the sense of belonging to that totality and having some affinity with it.”<sup>13</sup> This hoping in the mysterious totality is what I am referring to as quest for assurance of salvation causing anxiety in the believer. So, is double predestination a boon or a bane?

## **2.0 Assurance of Salvation in the Theology of the Reformers**

### **2.1 John Calvin (Objective)**

The assurance or certainty of one’s salvation in the theology of John Calvin is based on three principles: (i) assurance in the gospel and gazing at Christ, (ii) testimony of a good conscience, (iii) and testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Beginning with the principle of trusting in the gospel promises, Calvin operates on the premise that since it is God himself who has promised salvation, he will surely fulfil. He says, “Whatever God mercifully promises, he also faithfully performs.”<sup>14</sup> However, it shall only be fulfilled to those who have faith in him.<sup>15</sup> God’s promises are firmly established in the believer only when they appropriate it with full assurance.<sup>16</sup> He states: “He alone is truly a believer who, convinced by a firm conviction that God is a kindly and well-disposed Father toward him, promises himself all things on the basis of generosity; who, relying upon the promises of divine benevolence toward him, lays hold on an undoubted expectation of salvation.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Macquarrie, 64.

<sup>12</sup> Macquarrie, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Macquarrie, 65.

<sup>14</sup> *Institutes*, 3.13.4.

<sup>15</sup> *Institutes*, 3.13.4.

<sup>16</sup> *Institutes*, 3.13.4.

<sup>17</sup> *Institutes*, 3.2.16.

Since Christ should be our object of faith, turning away from him amounts to loss of our faith. Thus Christ is the basis of our assurance. Calvin states, “Assurance of one’s salvation follows when we direct our gaze and set our mind on Christ.”<sup>18</sup> In his commentary to John 3:36 he states, “The sole and entire basis for certainty about one’s salvation consists in the fact that, through Jesus Christ God freely forgives us and accepts us.”<sup>19</sup>

Regarding human conscience as a principle upon which one can ascertain their salvation, Calvin taught that the Holy Spirit witnesses to the conscience of the believer that they are engrafted into Jesus Christ by faith and thus made participants not only in every good thing, but in Christ himself. The testimony of the Holy Spirit seals the truth of adoption into one’s conscience, so that they can boldly and confidently cry ‘Abba, Father’.

According to Calvin, “One argument whereby we may prove that we are truly elected by God and not called in vain is that our profession of faith should find its response in a good conscience and an upright life.”<sup>20</sup> And, “indeed, the conformity of our lives to the gospel, of which the testimony of good conscience informs us, is the most certain mark by which the children of God can distinguish themselves from the impious.”<sup>21</sup>

Calvin also grounded his argument for assurance of salvation in the fact that human beings have a direct, experiential *intuitive knowledge* of God as he offers himself to them in Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup> This knowledge is available through the testimony of the Holy Spirit, who alone gives an inward illumination to the human spirit. Thus such knowledge brought by the illumination of the Holy Spirit brings about certainty of salvation.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, apart from the Spirit’s testimony to our conscience of God’s mercy and love, we could never be persuaded concerning our own salvation. Calvin says, “Through the inner witness of the Spirit, God guarantees and seals our heavenly inheritance and assures us that he is unfailingly caring for our salvation.”<sup>24</sup> In this way, the Spirit ‘makes firm’ the promises of the gospel.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Institutes*, 3.17.1.

<sup>19</sup> *Comm.* John 3:36.

<sup>20</sup> *Comm.* 2 Pet. 1:10

<sup>21</sup> *Comm.* Rom. 8:9.

<sup>22</sup> *Institutes*, 1.4.1; 2.6.4; 2.16.9.

<sup>23</sup> *Comm.* Titus 1:1.

<sup>24</sup> *Institutes*, 3.1.3; 3.2.36.

<sup>25</sup> *Institutes*, 3.2.36.

However, Calvin teaches that the clarity of our assurance is progressive in nature. At the beginning it may appear blurred but with maturing in faith it becomes clearer. Although he teaches eventual clear certitude of salvation, he admits that, “We cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety.”<sup>26</sup>

While Calvin successfully demonstrates how one could come to certainty of their status, by inward conscience, what seems to remain unresolved is anxiety caused by the doctrine of double predestination. According to Calvin, genuine grace is only limited to the elect; the reprobate only receives temporary grace that produces fruits tainted with sin and also temporary as it expires and does not attain to salvation. How would one then ascertain whether their faith is not temporary? How would one know whether the testimony of the Holy Spirit to their spirit is not self-deception caused by temporary grace given to them as it is given to all other reprobates?

Calvin assuages this fear by pointing us to gazing at Christ. He says, those whom God has adopted as his children find their ‘chosen-ness’ not in themselves, but in Christ (Eph. 1:4, “...just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.) Thus, since the elect have been chosen in Christ, they shall not find assurance of election in themselves, nor even in God the Father if he (God the Father) is conceived of as severed from his Son. Therefore, Christ is the mirror wherein the elect must, and without self-deception may, contemplate their own election.”<sup>27</sup>

The strength of this proposal (of testimony of good conscience), is that as much as the hypocrites could embrace the promises of forgiveness and manifest fruits of the Spirit, they are not able to feign the testimony of a good conscience, given by the Spirit of sanctification to the elect.

However, Calvin’s position that by gazing at Christ the believer comes to their assurance of salvation is criticized on the grounds that “no amount of gazing at Christ can yield assurance of election when behind Christ there is ‘a hidden’ will of God”<sup>28</sup> in which Christ is not involved. In other words, if election and reprobation are eternal, and not based on the work of Christ at the Cross, then “No gazing upon Christ, however ardent, protracted, or hopeful, can inform us of

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<sup>26</sup> *Institutes*, 3.2.17.

<sup>27</sup> *Institutes*, 3.24.5.

<sup>28</sup> Victor, A. Shepherd, *The Nature and Functions of Faith in the Theology of John Calvin*. Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004: 91.

where we are with respect to that decree (reprobation) which is authored by God, implemented by the Holy Spirit, but has nothing to do with Jesus Christ.”<sup>29</sup>

Calvin’s theology of assurance can further be criticised on the grounds that if according to him the full persevering grace is only availed to the elect, then his claim that one can come to certainty of their faith through the testimony of good conscience has to be preceded by confirming one’s election.

Since Calvin’s process of ascertaining one’s salvation is firmly rooted in the testimony of the Spirit to their spirit and excludes human introspections and drawing inference based on their good works, this makes his process purely objective.

## **2.2 John Wesley: Subjective or Objective?**

John Wesley understands salvation in terms of justification which is the pardoning of the sinner by God. Although Wesley understands salvation to involve a process, whereby justification precedes sanctification (making one holy), in which this process cannot be inverted or else it would imply that sanctification merits justification, the two happen simultaneously. However, faith is prior in generation as it is the basic condition for the whole process. Thus, justification is not by works of the law, for God does not justify the righteous but the sinner (Rom 4:5); justification is by God’s unmerited grace but only on the condition of faith. Faith lays hold of Christ’s merit for which one is justified. Christ’s merits, fulfils law on behalf of the sinners and they are justified and all that remains for them is, “true and lively faith in the merits of Jesus Christ...”<sup>30</sup> On the basis of this understanding, Wesley concludes that the grace of God does not shut out the righteousness of God in our justification, but only shuts out the righteousness of man, that is to say, the righteousness of our works.<sup>31</sup>

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that although Wesley does not advocate for a doctrine of justification by works, he does stress human responsibility as part of the overall plan of redemption. Human beings are expected to respond in faith as taught by Paul that all that was

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<sup>29</sup> Lecture Notes on “The Council of Trent (1545-1563): The Decree on Justification.” (Unpublished works by Victor Shepherd).

<sup>30</sup> Albert C. Outler (ed.), *John Wesley*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 125.

<sup>31</sup> Outler. 125.

expected by human beings, was “a true and lively faith which itself is the gift of God,<sup>32</sup> i.e., evidence of one’s regeneration is a lively faith not a dormant faith. Wesley states, “Neither doth faith shut out good works, necessary to be done afterwards, of duty towards God (for we are bounden to serve God in doing good works commanded in Scripture all the days of our life). But we may not do them to this intent, to be justified by doing them.”<sup>33</sup>

Although Wesley agrees with the rest of the Reformers that one is justified by God on the basis of Christ’s merits, he however, differs with them on the question of human responsibility or participation or cooperation in their salvation. For Wesley, although God has justified humanity in eternity, this justification is conditional; it shall only be applied to those who shall believe. He says God prepared a ransom for himself without human beings asking for it, “so that Christ is now the righteousness of all them that truly believe in him.”<sup>34</sup> However, human response in faith should not be mistaken to mean he taught that our faith merited salvation. Indeed he says, “In truth, neither our faith nor our works do justify us – that is, deserve remission of our sins – but God himself doth justify us of his own mercy, through the merits of his Son only.”<sup>35</sup>

According to Wesley, true faith is accompanied by good works for “our office and duty to God is not to pass our time sinfully or unfruitfully, for this were to serve the devil and not God.”<sup>36</sup> He taught that the love and submission to God by the regenerate and service to their neighbours were the fruits of true faith.<sup>37</sup>

Now our question is whether one would use these fruits to ascertain their standing in God. By assessing one’s good works, would one confirm their faith? Wesley exhorts his listeners,

Every man therefore must diligently examine himself whether he hadth this faith in his heart or not. He that feeleth his heart set to seek God’s honour and leadeth not his life after his own desire but setteth his mind to serve God, and for his sake to love all his neighbours, whether they be friendly or adversaries, doing good to every man (as opportunity serveth) and willingly hurting no man – such a man may well rejoice in God, perceiving by his life that he hath a living faith.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Outler, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Outler. 126.

<sup>34</sup> Outler. 126.

<sup>35</sup> Outler. 127.

<sup>36</sup> Outler.128.

<sup>37</sup> Outler. 129.

<sup>38</sup> Outler. 131.

It is from this position that one can conclude that Wesley's position is that by assessing one's works, they can come to certainty of their faith (salvation). Good works are fruit of the genuine faith and therefore, they can be used to ascertain one's assurance of salvation. Based on this position, we can say Wesley's approach to certainty of salvation is subjective because human participation is involved in salvation.

However, on the flip side he also teaches that assurance becomes clear to the seeker when the Spirit witnesses to the believer that they are child of God (Rom 8:16). He roots his position in the fact that since it is by our own conscience that we come to knowledge of our state of emotions and health, it is by the same conscience that we should also come to assurance of the disposition of our heart. He states,

By the same immediate consciousness you will know if your soul is alive to God; if you are saved from the pain of proud wrath, and have the ease of a meek and quite spirit. By the same means you cannot but perceive if you love, rejoice, and delight in God... And with regard to the outward mark of the children of God, which is the keeping his commandments you undoubtedly know in your own breast if, by the grace of God, it belongs to you...<sup>39</sup>

Wesley goes on to explain how the Spirit bears testimony to our spirit. He teaches that our spirit is joined with the Spirit of God to testify to us that we are the children of God as he (the Spirit) "shines upon his own work, and clearly shows what he has wrought."<sup>40</sup> The witnessing of the Spirit is not by way of any outward voice nor by an inward voice nor by texts of Scriptures, but by immediate influence and by a strong though inexplicable operation that leads to calm. In this way the sinner becomes assured that they are reconciled to God and that all sins are forgiven.<sup>41</sup> It is this ontological approach that makes Wesley's perspective objective. His position can clearly be inferred from the following quote:

The Spirit itself witness to my spirit that I was a child of God, gave me an evidence hereof, and I immediately cried, 'Abba, Father'. And this I did (and so did you) before I reflected on, or was conscious of, any fruit of the testimony. It was from this testimony received that love, joy, peace, and the whole fruit of the Spirit flowed.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Albert C. Outler. *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 1, Sermon 1, (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1984), 273.

<sup>40</sup> Outler. (1984), 275.

<sup>41</sup> Outler. (1984), 287.

<sup>42</sup> Outler. (1984), 214.

Thus, according to Wesley, there are two testimonies: direct and indirect testimonies. Indirect testimony (fruits of the Holy Spirit) does not give knowledge that one is forgiven but direct testimony which by God's Spirit that enables one to come to this knowledge does.

The reason why we would categorize Wesley's approach to assurance of salvation as subjective is that he teaches that to authenticate that the testimony is of the Spirit and not our delusion or self-deception, is to test the fruits. "Most true: therefore, let every man who believes he hath the witness in himself try whether it be of God. If the fruit follow, it is: otherwise, it is not."<sup>43</sup> He further lists signs of true conversion as repentance or conviction. Whoever does not experience conviction of their sin does not have true conversion. He also held that if one claims to be truly born again and does not know time when they had such a change, they are not born of the Spirit and has only mistaken the voice of nature for the voice of God. He also names joy in the Lord as another sign of conversion. He says, joy in the Lord "that accompanies witness of the Spirit as an humble joy, a joy that abases to the dust; that makes a pardoned sinner cry out, 'I am vile...'"<sup>44</sup> In summary he says, a person who is not truly converted does not display virtues such as lowliness, meekness, patience, gentleness, and long suffering (endurance). In the regenerate, "there is a soft, yielding spirit, a mildness and sweetness, a tenderness of soul which word cannot express."<sup>45</sup> According to Wesley, a presumptuous person is lifted up (through self-exaltation,) incapable of receiving reproof, not meek, slow to hear and swift to speak, and unready to learn.<sup>46</sup>

Based on the understanding that direct testimony of the Spirit is objective, and introspection is subjective, we conclude that Wesley's approach to certainty of salvation is both subjective and objective

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<sup>43</sup> Outler. (1984), 295.

<sup>44</sup> Outler. (1984), 279.

<sup>45</sup> Outler. (1984), 279.

<sup>46</sup> Outler. (1984), 280.

### **2.3 Assurance of Salvation in African Theology**<sup>47</sup>

Salvation may mean different things to different religions or cultures. According to the traditional African religion, salvation meant being accepted in the community of the living and eventually in the community of the departed<sup>48</sup> (the living-dead). This understanding is also collaborated with Adeyemo, “Thus, it is plain in the oral traditions that to be saved primarily means to be accepted. One is first accepted by the community of the living by being good to one’s neighbours, and secondly accepted among the community of the dead ancestors by remembering them through prayers, and offerings.”<sup>49</sup>

Before being accepted into the city of the departed, one must have been accepted by the living community. The living community had their own pre-requisites to be fulfilled before one was accepted as full member of the community. Such requirements included going through all rites of passage from childhood to adulthood. If one did not complete the required rites of passage, they were rejected in both communities. Such a person was an outcast of the community and could not expect to be accepted in the community of the departed.

Besides rites of passage being means to salvation, procreation was the surest of all and as such it was taken very seriously. One who had progeny of their own was guaranteed elongated survival which was a form of salvation. To mitigate the situation in the event that one was not able to reproduce, for a man, assistance from outside marriage was sought secretly by the wife. As for a wife, among some communities, they would be allowed to marry fellow women to reproduce for them.<sup>50</sup> Other signs of salvation included good health, material wealth, long life, and begetting of children as a reward for their ritual communication with their ancestors.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> In this article African theology shall be differentiated from African Christian theology. African theology shall refer to theology as practised by African traditional religion before the external influence by other religions like Islam and Christianity while African Christian Theology shall be understood as the interpretation, elaboration and presentation of the Christian faith according to the African needs and mentality of the people in the Sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>48</sup> Byang, H. Kato. “A Critique of Incipient Universalism in Tropical Africa,” (a Doctoral Thesis presented to Dallas Theological Seminary, May 1974), 61.

<sup>49</sup> Tokunboh, Adeyemo. *Salvation in African Tradition*, (Nairobi, Evangelical Publishing House, 1997),93.

<sup>50</sup> Fish, C. Burnette & Gerald W. Fish. *The Kalenjin Heritage: Traditional Religions and Social Practice*. Kericho Africa Gospel Church, 1995, 116 and also confer with John Michael Kiboi, *The Tripartite Office of Christ in the Light of Worgoondet: Towards A Sabaot Christology of Inculturation*, (Nairobi, CUEA Press, 2017),14-15.

<sup>51</sup> Charles, Nyamiti, *Jesus Christ, the Ancestor of Humankind: Methodological and Trinitarian Foundations*, (Nairobi; CUEA Publications, 2005), 66.

Various arguments can be made to justify inferring salvation from the foregoing practices: One is that, since God is believed to be the source of all good things (James 1:17), if one is blessed with good health, children and material wealth, it is evidence that they had found favour with God. Adeyemo confirms this perspective when he states, “It is believed that one who excels his equals has been specially favoured by the ancestors and such an honour is indicative of salvation.”<sup>52</sup>

As we turn to African Christian theology, we note that there have arisen many theological trends since the birth of African Christianity. However, in this article we pursue the liberation theological perspective of salvation and assurance of the same. Based on the fact that African Christian theology was born in the context of colonial oppression and the struggle to independence by Africans, Adeyemo notes that, “With such a background, one is not surprised to find that among the liberal ecumenicals, salvation is first and foremost a deliverance from the here-and-now oppression, and only secondarily and remotely spiritual in the sense of life to come.”<sup>53</sup> He goes further to state that, “African understanding of salvation today is setting people free from economic, political and social bondage.”<sup>54</sup> Since a human person is a whole, which demands the wholeness of human life, if human beings are not politically, socially and economically free from external oppression, then it is unrealistic to speak of their spiritual salvation either.

A synthesis of traditional African and African Christian theological views of salvation, gives us a clear understanding of what salvation means to an African Christian today. It is evident that an African Christian is a product of the persisting African traditional religious beliefs, Christian teachings and world ideologies. Therefore, as we reflect on the assurance of salvation in the African Christianity we ought to be aware of these influencing factors.

If according to Adeyemo, salvation in African Christianity should be seen in the light of their prevailing situation, then together with traditional African theology, one can infer their state of salvation from their prevailing situations. Thus, in traditional African and African Christian theological perspective, assurance of salvation is purely subjective.

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<sup>52</sup> Tokunboh, Adeyemo. *Salvation in African Tradition*, (Nairobi, Evangelical Publishing House, 1997), 93

<sup>53</sup> Adeyemo, p. 94.

<sup>54</sup> Adeyemo, p. 95.

## **2.4 Rethinking Hermeneutics and Doctrine of Election**

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century the bible has been subjected to various theological hermeneutics.<sup>55</sup> There are many methods of biblical interpretations but they could be grouped into two major categories: Hermeneutics of Trust<sup>56</sup> and Hermeneutics of Suspicion. Hermeneutics are human exercise and as such could be erroneous. In the event that they are erroneous, they could give birth to erroneous doctrines. Richard H. Popkin and Avrum Stroll aver that “The history of science is replete with theories that have been thoroughly believed by the wisest men and were then thoroughly discredited.”<sup>57</sup> This leads to observation that “Occasionally we are shocked to discover that what we thought was certain is proved dubious or false. If this happens often enough, we may become suspicious of all claims to certainty.”<sup>58</sup> In support of this point, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) argued that, “A particular person...will interpret what he or she sees in terms of the purposes and practical standpoints around which his or her life is already organized. Pre-understanding becomes, therefore, a major hermeneutical issue.”<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, the fact that all doctrines are a product of some form of hermeneutics, and some hermeneutics could be dubious,<sup>60</sup> or erroneous and they could have given birth to some dubious doctrines, it is up to us to rethink every doctrine and ascertain the process by which it came to existence. How then should we understand doctrines of election and reprobation? Lesslie Newbigin, observes that the Bible is full of the language of election. However, he avers that the claim of election, “Leaves open the question whether these religious experiences corresponded to any objective reality, whether in fact almighty God did choose and call and send them or whether they merely thought that he had done so.”<sup>61</sup> Romans 9:11 has always been interpreted to mean God from eternity elected some to salvation and others to damnation.

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<sup>55</sup> Ferguson, S. B. defines hermeneutics as “the study of rules or principles for the interpretation of particular texts.”

<sup>56</sup> Hermeneutics of trust include: *authorial approach*; which holds that the original authors of Scriptures were inspired by God and therefore, the texts should be read literally as it appears. *Plain Approach* which holds that God intended the Bible to be understandable in all time and therefore, biblical truths are not hidden behind historical nuances of obscure symbolism. *Literal approach*: It holds that the text of the Bible is not symbolic or metaphoric in any sense.

<sup>57</sup> Popkin, R. H. and Avrum S. *Philosophy Made Simple*, (NY, Doubleday, 1993), 81.

<sup>58</sup> Popkin, et al. (1993), 81.

<sup>59</sup> Ferguson, et al., 296.

<sup>60</sup> Prosper, Mushy. “Terrorism in Africa and the Response of Theology,” *Africa Christian Studies*, Vol. 30, Number 4, (December 2014). 15.

<sup>61</sup> Newbigin. 83.

Newbigin in his reinterpretation of this text argues that this text has been misinterpreted to justify the doctrine of election. According to Newbigin, “Paul does not say that he [God] has done so, but only that, if he [God] did, we would have no ground for complain.”<sup>62</sup> Based on this reinterpretation, he concludes that false conclusions of election have been drawn from Paul. According to him, “the whole passage makes it clear that God has not done what he might have done. He has not created some for honour and some for destruction. What he has done is to consign all men to disobedience in order that he may have mercy on all” (cf. Rom 11:32).<sup>63</sup>

This doctrine of election has always been mistaken to mean election to position of privilege. Israel always thought as chosen people, they automatically were predestined to salvation as their counterpart Gentile nations were predestined to damnation. However, a critical reading of prophetic books makes it clear that that was not the case. In fact, God’s love and commitment to Israel was to use them as an instrument to demonstrate his love to all nations of the world. Indeed whenever Israel misinterpreted God’s love as a license to do as they willed, they were punished. Confer Amos 3:2, “You alone have I intimately known of all the families of earth, that is why I shall punish you for all your wrong doing.”

Further illustration of faulty interpretation and erroneous conclusion of the doctrine of election can be made clearer by looking at Isaiah 45: 13. Isaiah states that although God calls (elects) King Cyrus of Persia to his service, God does not guarantee him salvation as a reward. God declares, “I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD almighty.”

How then should we understand the doctrine of election alongside reprobation? We should understand election as being called to serve. God elects people for particular course. Israel is elected that through it, God may reveal himself to the rest of the earth’s nations. This is clearly demonstrated in the account of Abraham. God enters a covenant with Abraham, in which Abraham is promised prosperity and protection from God (Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham is elected from among a sinful people (idol worshipers of Ur) and set apart that through him the rest of the humankind may be blessed (conf. Gen. 22:18). However, within this covenant, blessings and

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<sup>62</sup> Newbigin. 83.

<sup>63</sup> Newbigin. 83.

curses are tied together. God curses whoever curses Abraham and whenever Abraham's generations broke the covenant terms; they were punished (cf. Leviticus 26:14-39).

This rhythm of blessings and curses being tied together is also witnessed in the Garden of Eden. Beginning from the Garden of Eden, God enters the covenant with the first humans. He cautions them against eating of the tree of knowledge, if they ate, they would surely die. The curse tied to that instruction was ultimate death. When Adam and Eve ate of it, they surely died.

In our time, election and reprobation are tied together and have inbuilt blessings and curses respectively and they are both tied to the person and work of Christ. In eternity, God the Father begets his only Son and appoints him the redeemer of the world to be created. Thus from eternity the Son and his gospel are the foundation of human salvation and therefore, the foundation of their election and reprobation. It is from this understanding St. John writes, "Those who believe in him *are not condemned*; but those who do not believe *are condemned already*, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:18)." We should thus understand that from the foundations of the earth, God elected to salvation whosoever would believe ('*are not condemned...*') and reprobated whosoever would reject his only Son ('*...are condemned already...*')

According to the African traditional religion, within covenant ratification, curses were inbuilt to protect it from being broken. When one breaks societal taboo or covenant they automatically incur the curse therein. Curses were greatly feared in many societies as they were believed to cause death to the persons concerned.<sup>64</sup> However, there were occasions when elders assembled to invoke a curse on those who had broken the societal norms; but otherwise, many taboos had curses already inbuilt and as such those who broke them automatically stood cursed or incurred the curses therein. Both invoked and inbuilt curses even though not disclosed, would run in the generations of the family of the cursed persons. Consequently, those who observed the societal norms received the blessings of the society and were readily accepted in the society.

From the foundation of the earth, God predestined those who would believe in his only begotten Son to salvation and those who would not, to damnation. Predestination should not mean that God arbitrarily predestined some to salvation and others to damnation, but in love elected all

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<sup>64</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, (Nairobi; Heinemann, 1969), 55.

human beings to salvation in his Son Jesus Christ that whosoever believes may be saved and whosoever, does not may perish. Therefore, we can understand double predestination from the Jewish and the traditional African covenants with their inbuilt blessings and curses.

### **3.0 The Cumulative Case Argument and Transcendentalism as Panacea**

A cumulative case argument is a philosophy used in court of law. It presumes that if partial facts are considered in isolation they may not provide sufficient evidence to conclude a case. However, when such facts are brought together they may fill in the loopholes of each other and a case may be sustained. Assume you had three buckets and each had a hole. An attempt to carry water in each one of them is futile; however, if the three buckets were fitted into each other perfectly with their holes placed away from one another i.e. not facing each other, the good part filling the hole of the other; it is possible to carry water.

Anthony Flew has however, dismissed this attempt with the aphorism, “If one leaky bucket will not hold water that is no reason to think ten can.”<sup>65</sup> And Alasdair MacIntyre also dismissed it with the argument, “But a fallacious argument points nowhere (except to the lack of logical acumen on the part of those who accept it). And three fallacious arguments are no better than one.”<sup>66</sup>

Despite these dismissals, Basil Mitchell has argued that since some Biblical accounts seem to stand opposed to each other or certain hermeneutics have resulted into contradicting doctrines, “a series of failures when treated as attempts at purely deductive or inductive argument could well better understood as contributions to a cumulative case.”<sup>67</sup> Therefore, “What is being supported rationally is a whole cluster of beliefs which hang together and which need to be evaluated not just in isolation but as whole.”<sup>68</sup>

As promised in the introduction, cumulative case argument is combined with transcendental method to arrive at an assurance of salvation. Transcendentalism is the teaching that human beings have the ability to transcend their being.

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<sup>65</sup> Anthony, Flew, *God and Philosophy*; (Hutchinson, London, 1966), 62.

<sup>66</sup> Alasdair, MacIntyre, *Difficulties in Christian Belief* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 63.

<sup>67</sup> Basil, Mitchell. *The Justification of Religious Belief*. (London: The Macmillan Press, 1973), 39-40.

<sup>68</sup> Abraham, J. William and Steven W. Holtzer. *The Rationality of Religious Belief: Essays in Honour of Basil Mitchell*: (New York: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1987), 23.

By raising their spirits, they behold the spiritual realms. Therefore, in raising their spirits and God descending in the person of Jesus Christ (incarnation), Christ the God/man becomes the meeting point between God and human beings. For Christ is

“the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), he is the revealer of God’s love par excellence; as human, he is the hearer of God’s word par excellence. Thus if we want to know what God is like and how he has involved himself with us, then we look to Jesus. Likewise if we want to know what humanity is like and how we are involved in God, then we look to Jesus. Using spatial imagery, whether our perspective is from the divine above or from the human below, Jesus Christ is the unique meeting place of the God-human relationship.”<sup>69</sup>

Thus as revelation comes from above, and human beings respond to it by raising their spirits, and reflecting on their situations, theology emerges; ontological (objective) meets the functional (subjective) in Christ (the God/man) who is the perfect revealer (image of God). In Christ we have our humanity raised and in him we have the divinity descending; Christ is the God/man in whom we come to full knowledge of God and of ourselves. This happens when we begin to ask questions about our realities, i.e., being open to our being. This leads us to gazing at Christ by raising our spirits and in that process; we meet God’s revelation in Christ Jesus. In Christ we get to know God’s will as our saviour.

As we have already stated, in Christ God has placed his assurance for our salvation. Because it is in Christ we have our salvation and even our reprobation. Therefore, starting from human point of view, we ask questions that lead us to gazing at Christ in whom we are all elected and predestined.

God as the first mover, has provided salvation in his Son Jesus Christ and has urged us to gaze at him both for our salvation and for assurance of the same. By raising our spirits to Christ, in whom we have our salvation, God meets us in this God/man and his Spirit cries in us, Abba Father and testifies to our spirit that we are God’s children and we receive assurance of our salvation. It all begins in God when he reveals himself to humans and they respond by asking questions – (objective-subjective approach) which we are referring to us transcendentalism.

How then, using cumulative case argument, would one come to assurance of their salvation? In some Church traditions, the Apostle creed is recited during church service. If truly, one believes in their heart whatever they confess with their lips about Christ then they are saved. In Romans

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<sup>69</sup> J. J. Mueller, S.J. *What are they Saying about Theological Method?* NJ: Paulist Press, 1984: 8,

10:9 Paul states: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Since God’s promises are true, and He has promised salvation for whosoever believes in His only Son, then we can infer our salvation now from the fact that we believe. Therefore, the question one should ask oneself is, ‘Do I truly believe in the only Son of God?’ If yes, then I am certain I am saved.

How does one ascertain the genuineness of their faith in the Son of God? Can a hypocrite feign such faith in the Son of God? Or how do I know I truly believe? At this point John Wesley’s perspective should be brought in; the Testimony of the Spirit to my spirit that I am child of God, bolstered with testimony of good conscience that I am not faking faith should point one to the fact that they are genuine. This should be accompanied by fruits of the Spirit as taught by Wesley.

Since according to the African traditional religion, serenity of mind, peaceful co-existence in the community, material wealth and good health were signs of acceptance by ancestors and God, we can also argue that such are indeed the sign that one is in the right standing with God and has found acceptance before God and thus indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

## **5. Conclusion**

The question whether we are elect or reprobate collapses on the basis of our reinterpretation of the doctrine of election. Our assurance of salvation is now based on our gazing on Christ in whom we are all elected and reprobated (ontological). Through the testimony of one’s sincere conscience one is able to tell whether they truly believe in the only Son of God or they do not. Once we are convinced by our conscience that we truly believe in Christ as the Son of God, who reveals God the Father and in whom our salvation is put, then we are certain of our salvation and our anxiety is assuaged.

God also points us to judge from our human relations and situations (functional). Through evaluating one’s work or fruits, one can infer their standing before God for every good thing comes from God (James 1:17). Through one’s sincere conscience, human beings have ability to tell whether they relate well with their neighbours or community and whether they are accepted in the community they live; thereby also infer their being accepted in the community of the living-dead.

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