

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF *RESPONSIBLE GRACE*: A SYMPOSIUM

by

Jason E. Vickers

In 2019, Randy Maddox's *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* turned twenty-five years old. To celebrate this occasion, the Wesleyan Historical Society held a special symposium on the eve of the Wesleyan Theological Society's annual meeting. The symposium featured presentations by Dr. Geordan Hammond, Dr. Maureen Knudsen Langdon, Dr. Michael Lodahl, and Dr. Andrew Thompson, as well as a response by Dr. Randy Maddox, all of which are collected and published here. Both laudatory and critical, these papers contain rich queries and insights concerning both John Wesley and Wesleyan theology today. Particularly noteworthy in Dr. Maddox's own reflections are his comments about 1) the kind of text *Responsible Grace* is; 2) his understanding of the practical nature of John Wesley's theology; 3) what he regards—then and now—as the orienting concern of Wesley's theology; and 4) why he continues to prefer a “perspectival” reading of Wesley's theology over a “conjunctive” reading.

As one who has read *Responsible Grace* multiple times and used it as a textbook off and on across the years, hearing these papers was like catching up with an old friend. On the one hand, I immediately recognized many of the themes and questions that the presenters raised—themes and questions that the text itself generates. For example, I knew well the debate about the relationship between “therapeutic” and “juridical” elements in John Wesley's theology. On the other hand, the presentations also brought to light fresh angles of vision that I had not previously considered. They also helped to clarify some lingering questions that I have had. It is my hope that, for those who are familiar with *Responsible Grace* but were unable to attend the symposium, reading these papers will occasion a similar experience. And for those who have never read what can only be described as a classic work in Wesleyan theology, my hope is that reading this symposium will be the start of a new friendship that will last for decades to come.

REFLECTIONS ON *RESPONSIBLE GRACE*

by

Randy L. Maddox

Responsible Grace, my analysis of John Wesley's "practical theology" was published in fall 1994, so it recently reached its twenty-fifth anniversary.¹ My focused work on the book traces back five years earlier, with initial chapters beginning to take shape during my first sabbatical (the 1988–89 school year), a leave funded in part by a much-appreciated grant from The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of The United Methodist Church.

It did not take long for readers to recognize that *Responsible Grace* was not primarily historical in focus,² nor was it a compendium of excerpts from Wesley's occasional writings organized by doctrinal loci—a genre common in the prior decades.³ Rather, the closest recent analogue to *Responsible Grace* was a book by Colin Williams, a Methodist systematic theologian interested in the present implications of John Wesley's theology.⁴ This was no accident, for the specific character of my interest in—and initial contribution to—Wesley and Methodist Studies was shaped by the fact that my academic training was *not* in this field.

¹Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994).

²Like Albert Outler's very helpful contribution to an Oxford University Press series intended to "illumine and interpret the history of the Christian faith in its Protestant expression": *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). Outler's publication sparked renewed attention to Wesley by his theological descendants, including a number of dissertations with a dominant historical focus.

³See particularly Robert Wallace Burtner & Robert Eugene Chiles, ed., *John Wesley's Theology: A Collection from His Works* (1954; repr., Nashville: Abingdon, 1982); Philip Saville Watson, *The Message of the Wesleys: A Reader of Instruction and Devotion* (1964; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984); and Thomas Clark Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994). The differences between the later volume and *Responsible Grace* were highlighted in a session of the Wesley Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion in Nov. 1994.

⁴Colin Wilbur Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960).

To be sure, my undergraduate and seminary training included exposure to the theology of John Wesley, since the Church of the Nazarene (in which I was raised and trained) is part of the broad Wesleyan tradition. But my focus was on contemporary theological issues and movements (like process theology, and the religion and science dialogue). My doctoral study at Emory University was likewise in the field of (contemporary) Theological Studies, with a particular concentration on issues of theological method.

Significantly, my doctoral work included a supporting area in Continental philosophy. I quickly found points of resonance between this supporting area and my major field, particularly the growing challenge in both fields to the Enlightenment ideal of a supposedly “pure” search for “universal” truths.⁵ Dialoguing with philosophers like Martin Heidegger, Jürgen Habermas, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, I came to appreciate that all human knowledge is deeply *contextual*. Not only are our perspectives on experience shaped by our current social and culture contexts, but these contexts are themselves rooted in long processes of traditioning.

While some fear that affirmation of the contextuality of human knowledge leads to epistemic nihilism (surrendering any attempt to adjudicate between conflicting truth claims), Gadamer, Michael Polanyi, and others convinced me that this is not the case. Although it is not easy, and the hope for *absolute* certainty must be set aside, it is possible to cultivate significant understanding of other contextual perspectives and to reach considered judgments about the relative merit of contrasting claims.⁶ My dissertation research on alternative conceptions of the discipline of Fundamental Theology (which divided in focus largely along Protestant/Catholic lines) served to reinforce Gadamer’s suggestion that the possibility of bridged understanding is increased to the extent that the dialogue partners are each self-aware of the longer traditions within which they stand.⁷

In keeping with my training, my initial faculty position was in Religion and Philosophy, with a focus on Systematic Theology. This kept me reading, teaching, and (initially) publishing on a range of contemporary

⁵A point developed in Randy L. Maddox, “Contemporary Hermeneutic Philosophy and Theological Studies,” *Religious Studies* 21 (1985): 517–29.

⁶See in this regard Randy L. Maddox, “Hermeneutic Circle—Vicious or Victorious?” *Philosophy Today* 27 (1983): 66–76.

⁷Completed in 1982, this was published as Randy L. Maddox, *Toward an Ecumenical Fundamental Theology* (Chico, CA: Scholar’s Press, 1984).

topics.⁸ But the sensitivities developed in my doctoral work prodded me to begin cultivating deeper awareness of the Wesleyan theological tradition within which I stood in addressing these topics. I assumed at first that this would be a short-term ancillary to my main focus on contemporary topics (indeed, my funded proposal for my first sabbatical stated that I would *complete* a book on Wesley as a theologian during that year). As things turned out, the theological commitments and concerns of the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition increasingly became the primary focus of my research, writing, and speaking.

The reason for this shift was that when I began to probe my theological heritage I found that the field of Wesley Studies was just entering its truly scholarly stage. Some fine historical studies of John Wesley's life and his role in the early Methodist movement had begun to emerge. A growing number of (mainly unpublished) doctoral dissertations were investigating scattered aspects of his theology. But I found no broader studies informed by this recent work that offered insight into the range of Wesley's characteristic *emphases* or any developmental *trajectories* in his thought. This posed a major obstacle to engaging contemporary issues self-consciously from within my tradition, because awareness of such emphases and trajectories would be central to discerning what qualified as responsible appropriations and/or extensions of the Wesleyan tradition in new contexts or in the face of new challenges. Spurred on by my hermeneutical convictions, I began to devote part of my time to providing the kinds of resources needed for addressing contemporary issues responsibly within the Wesleyan tradition.

This move required some retooling on my part. I had to immerse myself not only in John Wesley's writings, but in secondary scholarship on him and his eighteenth-century Anglican context. As I turned to these tasks, I found that my prior training, with its emphasis on traditional theological debates and the spectrum of contemporary theological concerns, helped me to note connections and raise questions that had received little prior attention in Wesley scholarship. And my studies of Wesley and his context helped broaden and refocus my perspective on current theological methods and debates.

⁸For example: Randy L. Maddox, "Schleiermacher on the Holy Spirit," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 12 (1982): 93–106; "The New Quest and Christology," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 11 (1984): 43–55; "Toward an Inclusive Theology: The Systematic Implications of the Feminist Critique," *Christian Scholar's Review* 16/1 (1986): 7–23.

My doctoral studies immersed me in questions of methodology that dominated academic systematic theology in the third quarter of the twentieth century, *including* a mounting call for academic theologians to recover an understanding and practice of serious theological activity that was more closely connected to Christian life and worship.⁹ When I began to read more broadly in secondary studies of Wesley's theology I recognized the tendency of later Methodists to dismiss his significance as a theologian.¹⁰ But I also noticed a few recent voices calling for reevaluation of Wesley's theological activity, particularly Albert Outler's championing of Wesley as a "folk theologian."¹¹ I heard in these voices an echo of the growing uneasiness with the reigning academic model of theology—the model against which Wesley had been measured and found wanting. This suggested that adequate engagement with Wesley's theological writings might require more than affirming a role for "folk theology" alongside academic theology; calling instead for reconsidering what counted as "serious" theological activity.

Much of my initial work in Wesley Studies was driven by this possibility, and culminated in the contention that Wesley is most appropriately approached as a "practical theologian."¹² By this I meant that his theological activity is best understood and assessed in light of the approach to theology as a practical discipline (*scientia practica*) which characterized the pre-university Christian setting and remained influential in eight-

⁹See my survey of these dynamics in "Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline: A Contemporary Agenda," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 650–72; and "Practical Theology: A Discipline in Search of a Definition," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18 (1991): 159–69.

¹⁰For my analysis of factors contributing to this dismissal see "Reclaiming an Inheritance: Wesley as Theologian in the History of Methodist Theology," in Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 213–26; "Respected Founder / Neglected Guide: The Role of Wesley in American Methodist Theology," *Methodist History* 37 (1999): 71–88; and "An Untapped Inheritance: American Methodism and Wesley's Practical Theology," in *Doctrines and Disciplines: Methodist Theology and Practice*, ed. Dennis Campbell et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 19–52, 292–309.

¹¹See Albert Cook Outler, "Towards a Re-appraisal of John Wesley as a Theologian," *Perkins School of Theology Journal* 14 (1961): 5–14; and his "Introduction" to *John Wesley*, pages 1–33.

¹²See Maddox, "John Wesley—Practical Theologian," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 122–47 (related to the two essays in footnote 9 above).

teenth-century Anglicanism. This approach to theological activity reflected a multi-dimensional understanding of the nature of theology. At its most basic level, “theology” comprised the (often implicit) convictions and dispositions that frame believers’ lives in the world. These convictions/dispositions are not simply bestowed with conversion, they must be developed. This points to the next major dimension of theology: the disciplined concern to nurture and (when necessary) reform authentic Christian convictions and dispositions in believers. Given the communal nature of Christian discipleship, this concern took most direct expression in activities like pastoral shepherding and the production of catechisms, liturgies, and spiritual discipline manuals. These activities in turn frequently sparked “second-order” theological engagement with such issues as the grounding for, or interrelationships and consistency of, various theological commitments. But even at this level theology ideally remained a practical discipline, basing the most metaphysical reflections about God on the life of faith and drawing from these reflections ethical and soteriological implications.

I became convinced that current efforts to reform academic theology were seeking something like this earlier practice of theology as a practical discipline, and that these efforts might benefit from serious engagement with John Wesley’s embodiment of this practice.¹³ So I began to dig into the breadth of Wesley’s practical-theological materials (which, besides his well-known sermons, included letters, controversial essays and tracts, conferences, disciplinary guides for Christian life, spiritual biographies and autobiography, and a range of editorial work on creeds, liturgies, prayerbooks, bible study aids, hymnals, catechisms, and devotional guides) to gain a sense of how doctrinal convictions took shape in his practical-theological activity. The earliest fruit of this probing were essays on individual aspects or implications of Wesley’s theological convictions.¹⁴ *Responsible Grace* followed, as my attempt at a more comprehensive account of Wesley’s practical-theological convictions.

Since part of my concern in *Responsible Grace* was to commend John Wesley as a theologian worthy of consideration within current debates in

¹³For my identification of some correlations between current calls for reform of academic theology and Wesley’s practice see “Wesleyan Resources for a Contemporary Theology of the Poor,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 49/1 (1994): 35–47.

academic theology, the manuscript submitted for consideration of publication included three opening chapters offering the historical case for engaging Wesley as a “practical theologian” and surveying (with an indication of my stance) the interpretive debates in previous studies of Wesley’s theology. One of the peer-review readers (I later learned it was Thomas Langford) wisely suggested that this detracted from the primary focus of the book. As a result, this material was reduced to an eleven-page Introduction in the published form, with the more detailed analyses issued as articles.¹⁵

As Langford sensed, a key focus in *Responsible Grace* was to address the worry often expressed about highly contextual and occasional theological activity like Wesley’s “practical theology” that the demands of the situation will so dominate reflection that there will be no congruity among the various situation-related theological judgments. The burden of *Responsible Grace* was to demonstrate that—at least in Wesley’s case—an appropriate, dynamic congruence *is* discernable among his various situation-related emphases. I stressed that this congruence did not take the form of unchanging doctrinal summaries, or of an explicit and reiterated (Hegelian-like) Idea from which all truth is deduced or given order in a System. Instead, I suggested that what would provide appropriate consistency among situation-related theological emphases would be if the various specific situations were assessed and addressed in light of an abiding “orienting concern.” In Wesley’s case, I contended that this dynamic abiding concern was to preserve the vital tension between two truths that he viewed as co-definitive of Christianity: without God’s grace, we *cannot* be saved; while without our (grace-empowered, but uncoerced) participation, God’s grace *will not* save. While this concern had obvious implica-

¹⁴For example, “Karl Rahner’s Supernatural Existential: A Wesleyan Parallel?” *Evangelical Journal* 5 (1987): 3–14; “Wesleyan Theology and the Christian Feminist Critique,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 22 (1987): 101–11; “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences, and Differences,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 45/2 (1990): 29–53; “Opinion, Religion, and ‘Catholic Spirit’: John Wesley on Theological Integrity,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 47/1 (1992): 63–87; and “Wesley as Theological Mentor: The Question of Truth or Salvation Through Other Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 7–29.

¹⁵Some of the material had already appeared in “John Wesley—Practical Theologian”; much of the rest was published as “Reading Wesley as Theologian,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 30/1 (1995): 7–54.

tions for Wesley's soteriology, I sought to show how it influenced his emphases across the range of theological loci.¹⁶

I chose to designate this dynamic abiding concern in Wesley's practical-theological activity "responsible grace." I did so as a specific contrast to a frequent emphasis in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Methodist theology on "gracious ability." I wanted to make clear that Wesley was more concerned with affirming God's gracious agency than with defending human ability. But I also wanted to avoid any suggestion that Wesley viewed humans as passive pawns in salvation, or considered God's agency and human agency to be counterposed (such that the increase of one requires the decrease of the other). Thus, part of what drew me to the adjective "responsible" was its close resemblance to "response-able"—a connection that I used to stress how our *experience* of God's grace (mediated in many ways, including the community of God's people) is what enables our response, while upholding our *integrity* (or responsibility) in that response.¹⁷

I readily admit that the thrust of Wesley's abiding concern could be captured by other phrases, like "holy love." But I continue to prefer "response-able / responsible grace," in part because I continue to believe that this formulation may help Wesleyans engage more fruitfully with other Christian traditions in probing our distinctive stances within the larger Christian family. Surely all traditions would affirm "holy love"; they are more likely to ponder whether their characteristic concern is more about "free grace," or "sovereign grace," etc.¹⁸

Many of the other specific suggestions that I made in *Responsible Grace* have been adopted and endorsed by other Wesley scholars over the years; and, as one would expect, some of them have been challenged. As such, this anniversary juncture is a good time to respond to a question I receive on occasion of how my mind might have changed since the initial publication. My general response is that I stand by the overall "reading" of John Wesley's theology that I offered twenty-five years ago as both faithful to Wesley and instructive for those in Wesleyan traditions in the

¹⁶My earliest formulation of this argument was "Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19/2 (1984): 7–22. See the nuanced summary in *Responsible Grace*, 18–19, and the echoes throughout the book.

¹⁷See, for example, Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 98, 222.

¹⁸I made this point in my Closing Reflections to *Responsible Grace*, 255–56.

twenty-first century. But I have also found it necessary to clarify a few points in response to readings of *Responsible Grace* by other scholars.

To begin with, there have been readings of *Responsible Grace* that view it as identifying John Wesley almost totally with Eastern Orthodox theology. Some have endorsed this equation and extended it; others have contested it as the fundamental flaw in the text. Allow me to use this setting to stress some points that I made in the text, but perhaps did not highlight enough.

First, while I drew on scholars of later Eastern Orthodoxy to probe the dynamics of the earliest roots of that tradition, I tried to be clear that John Wesley's commitment was to the early church as a whole. My argument was that—as an Anglican—he was exposed to more of the Greek-writing theologians in the early church than typical in other Protestant traditions of the time. A few of Wesley's near contemporaries (some non-jurors in particular) did seek to align with later eighteenth-century Eastern Orthodoxy, but this was never an interest for him.

Second, I did devote particular attention to Wesley's interactions with some early Greek-writing theologians, and his resonance with theological themes common among this branch of the early church. But this was due to my conviction that Wesley scholarship needed to attend to his commitment to the *whole* early church. As I said in my original introduction, I was trying to add a “counterpart” to stand alongside and enrich “the many comparisons of Wesley to the various Western Christian traditions already available in Wesley scholarship.”¹⁹

Third, and most important, the primary contrast that runs through *Responsible Grace* is not between Eastern and Western Christianity per se, but between *therapeutic* accounts of the nature of salvation and *juridical* accounts. It is taken as a given that *both* types of account are grounded in Scripture and found within all major theological traditions. But the relative primacy of one or the other account varies some between major traditions. I was convinced that Wesley gave greater primacy to the *therapeutic* account of salvation, and highlighted in *Responsible Grace* several topics where his exposure to early Greek-writing theologians may help explain his greater emphasis on this point than found in some of his Protestant dialogue partners (and some dominantly Protestant “readings” of Wesley’s theology). In making this case I relied on scholarship at the time that tended to contrast strongly the “therapeutic” emphasis of Eastern

¹⁹Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 24.

Orthodox theology to the “juridical” emphasis of Western Christian theology. I would note that more recent scholarship on some key Western figures has highlighted the therapeutic dimension in their accounts of salvation. I take this as good news, reinforcing that Wesley’s account stands firmly within the broad Christian tradition. But it does not change my judgment that the most one-sided juridical accounts of salvation are typically found in some branches of the Augustinian strand of Western Christianity, and that Wesley was particularly concerned to counter these voices in his teachings on Christian faith and life.

This brings me to a second characteristic of my “reading” of Wesley in *Responsible Grace* that has been sharply challenged by some readers. There is a long tradition in Wesley Studies of describing John Wesley as a “conjunctive” or “both-and” theologian. In particular, some scholars contend that Wesley conjoins the therapeutic and juridical accounts of salvation in an ideal balance. While I strongly agree that Wesley embraces both accounts, I do not believe that his distinctive interweaving of these emphases is captured best as a balanced conjunction of divergent elements. This is in part because I doubt that any human is capable of maintaining a perfectly balanced account of something as complex and dynamic as salvation. As emphasized earlier, I became convinced that humans are finite beings embedded in cultures and traditions of interpretation. As such, our understandings of complex matters are necessarily *perspectival*; we inevitably are drawn to some aspect of these matters as most fundamental, and engage the other aspects from that perspective. Thus what I offer in *Responsible Grace* is a *reading* of Wesley “as one fundamentally committed to the therapeutic view of Christian life,” and reflect on how he “integrated the juridical convictions” into “his more basic therapeutic viewpoint.”²⁰ I continue to consider this reading more faithful to Wesley’s soteriology, and his theology more broadly, than one championing Wesley as adopting an ideal balance of emphases that other Christian traditions tend to bifurcate (particularly since the latter appear to me to end up privileging the juridical convictions as most foundational).²¹

²⁰Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 23.

²¹This is one of the key topics, for example, in an ongoing dialogue over my work with Kenneth J. Collins. See Collins, “Recent Trends in Wesley Studies and Wesleyan/Holiness Scholarship,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35/1 (2000): 67–86; and Maddox, “Prelude to a Dialogue,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35/1 (2000): 87–98.

Another question that I have been asked with increasing frequency in recent years, by colleagues and editors, is when I might issue a revised edition of *Responsible Grace*. Much of the reason this has not happened yet is that as I was writing the original manuscript, I was frequently reminded of its proleptic nature. We did not have available a *complete* critical edition of Wesley's published works. I often had to engage texts without the benefit of scholarly notes identifying sources, variant readings, and the like. The probing I did on some of these texts convinced me that there were important insights and nuances that would emerge only as the critical edition is completed. I also became aware of some significant manuscript items not yet available in published settings. As such, I decided at the time that any revised edition would wait for the completion of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*.

Little did I know how long that would take, or that I would increasingly be drawn into its production—now serving as General Editor (a further shift from my initial sense of scholarly vocation). Most of my time over the last two decades has been devoted to work on critical editions of the primary texts of both John and Charles Wesley. While these editorial roles have forestalled any major revision of *Responsible Grace*, my work on these textual items has suggested some alterations or elaborations of points made there. For example, in recent essays I have embraced Wesley's language of "conference" for better describing how he read Scripture.²² I have unfolded in greater detail his understanding of the holy tempers as related to his conception of Christian perfection.²³ I have probed in more detail both Wesley's millennialism and his growing commitment to the salvation of the whole creation.²⁴ And I have explored the

²²See Randy L. Maddox, "The Rule of Christian Faith, Practice, and Hope: John Wesley on the Bible," *Methodist Review* 3 (2011): 1–35; and "Honoring Conference: Wesleyan Reflections on the Dynamics of Theological Reflection," *Methodist Review* 4 (2012): 77–116.

²³Randy L. Maddox, "A Change of Affections: The Development, Dynamics, and Dethronement of John Wesley's 'Heart Religion,'" in "*Heart Religion*" in *the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*, ed. R. Steele (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 3–31.

²⁴Randy L. Maddox, "Nurturing the New Creation: Reflections on a Wesleyan Trajectory," in *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation*, ed. M.D. Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2004), 21–52; and "Anticipating the New Creation: Wesleyan Foundations for Holistic Mission," *Asbury Journal* 62 (2007): 49–66.

theological grounding of his practice as a priest/physician!²⁵ Readers who find *Responsible Grace* helpful may wish to consult these extensions of points touched on there.

It is now clear that the remainder of my scholarly career will be devoted to pushing the *Bicentennial Edition* towards completion, drawing on what I have gleaned from this process for a possible revision of *Responsible Grace*, and perhaps gathering some of my essays into published collections. But I remain conscious that these efforts mainly provide resources for the vocation that I initially intended to engage—fostering responsible appropriations and/or extensions of the Wesleyan tradition in the face of new challenges and within new contexts. I can only hope that the resources I have been privileged to play a part in providing will both stimulate a new generation to take up this task and serve them well as they do so.

²⁵Randy L. Maddox, “A Heritage Reclaimed: John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing,” in *A Living Tradition: Critical Recovery and Reconstruction of Wesleyan Heritage*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2013), 127–54, 256–64; and the “Introduction” to *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, vol. 32, *Medical and Health Writings* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018), 1–65.

REFLECTING ON RESPONSIBLE GRACE AFTER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS¹

by

Geordan Hammond

Ten years before the publication of *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*, in his 1984 article “Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology,” Randy Maddox noted that at the 1983 Bicentennial Consultation on Wesleyan Theology held at Emory University, three scholars who made presentations in the systematic theology section “on the theme of the contribution of Wesleyan theology for the future” implicitly agreed “with the conventional perspective that Wesley’s main contribution is not to be found in the area of systematic theological reflection.”² That this conventional perspective would be rejected by many scholars of Wesley today is due in no small part to the pioneering work of Randy Maddox. Scholarly debate today is more likely to focus on what—to use Maddox’s phrase—the “orienting concern” of Wesley’s theology is rather than the question of whether it has one at all.³ Maddox’s

¹This paper was presented as part of a session at the Wesleyan Historical Society meeting on 5 March 2020.

²Randy L. Maddox, “Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19/2 (1984): 7.

³This concept is introduced in Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 18. Albert Outler had argued that grace is the “axial theme” of Wesley’s theology. Albert C. Outler, “A New Future for Wesley Studies: An Agenda for ‘Phase III,’” in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991 [1985]), 135. Rupert Davies had earlier stated that “The Grace of God is the real focus of Wesley’s theology.” Rupert Davies, “The People called Methodists—1. ‘Our Doctrines,’” in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 159. Kenneth Collins asserted that Wesley’s “axial theme” is the conjunctive of “holiness and grace.” Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 6. Henry H. Knight III has posited that “Wesley’s theology is centered on the relationship between love and grace,” and emphasized Wesley’s “optimism of grace,” and “grace as the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.” Henry H. Knight III, *John Wesley: Optimist of Grace*, Cascade Companions (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), xii, xv, xiv.

work has likewise been a major factor in the shift in scholarly discussion, chiefly because of his book *Responsible Grace*, but also influenced by his numerous articles and book chapters that preceded and came after it.⁴ It is fitting that this retrospective appreciation of his work is taking place at the meeting of the Wesleyan Historical Society in conjunction with the Wesleyan Theological Society, where many of his insights were first presented as papers at the society's annual meetings and later published in its *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. It is gratifying to be able to say that his hope of recovering Wesley as a theological mentor to the Wesleyan tradition is being achieved amongst Wesleyan scholars today.⁵ Of course, as with the dynamism Wesley's theology, this must be a dynamic process. We cannot rest in this achievement; we must pass it on to the church, the wider academy, and future generations of scholars. The last point is what I, and many others, have personally experienced from Randy. Becoming wrapped up in our own work to the exclusion of others is an ever-present temptation and danger for scholars. Randy, however, is a model of generous scholarship. I, and many others, have always found him willing to answer questions and share insights.

When *Responsible Grace* was published, despite receiving a couple of surprisingly critical book reviews, it quickly became widely regarded as the most comprehensive treatment of Wesley's theology.⁶ Over a quarter of a century later, along with Kenneth Collin's *The Theology of John Wesley* (2007), this remains the case.⁷ As an attempt to gauge something of the influence of *Responsible Grace* on scholarship, I typed the book title into Google Scholar and found that it has been referenced in over 500 other works! How *Responsible Grace* has been received and used by scholars could make a good article or dissertation. It could potentially form a chapter or section of a revised edition of *Responsible Grace*. It would be

⁴Many of Maddox's articles are available on his Duke Divinity School faculty page.

⁵This hope is expressed in the conclusion of *Responsible Grace*. See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 256.

⁶See the critical reviews of James D. Nelson in *Theological Studies* 56/3 (1995): 580–82 and Roderick T. Leupp in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40/3 (1997): 494–95. Henry H. Knight III's positive review in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31/1 (1996): 221–23 is truer to the long-term reception of *Responsible Grace*.

⁷Also notable is Theodore Runyon's *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

interesting to hear Maddox's thoughts on how the book has been used by scholars, and particularly to hear about uses of it that he has appreciated as faithful extensions of his work.

Google Scholar citations are one indication of the fulfilment of one of the stated goals in the introduction of Maddox's book, namely, "to provide a guide to . . . secondary scholarship [on Wesley] that can orient readers to the basic aspects of Wesley's theology and enable them to pursue further the available works relevant to subjects of their interest."⁸ In my view, Maddox's thorough use of primary and secondary sources, including sources in German and other languages, makes it both a monograph and a reference book, and, therefore, it has since publication served as an indispensable orienting guide for scholars working on almost any aspect of Wesley's theology.

While there are many directions that a critical appreciation of *Responsible Grace* could take, in this retrospective I will make comments on (1) the early, middle, and late Wesley paradigm; (2) the controversial question of the Eastern Christian influences on Wesley's theology; (3) the encyclopedic referencing of the book; and make (4) a brief comparison of British and American Wesley Studies; give (5) some humble suggestions from a historian's perspective that might be considered in a possible revised edition of the book; and offer (6) some words of appreciation for Randy, particularly related to his current role as General Editor of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*.

The Early, Middle, and Late Wesley Paradigm

Utilization of the early (1733–38), middle (1738–65), and late (1765–91) Wesley paradigm to help explain Wesley's theological development predates *Responsible Grace*, but heavy use of it in the book has helped to popularize it and move it in the direction of scholarly orthodoxy in Wesley Studies.⁹ While Maddox is not uncritical of this threefold model, and

⁸Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 24.

⁹The insipient phase of this typology can be seen, for example, in Robert Tuttle's three dated stages in Wesley's understanding of faith (although he does not use the early, middle, and late categories); Richard Heitzenrater's urging that studies of Wesley examine continuity and change "between the early and late (as well as the middle) Wesley"; and Albert Outler's call for greater scholarly attention to be given to "the later Wesley." Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *John Wesley: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 334 n. 10. This first appeared in Tuttle's 1969 PhD thesis. Richard P. Heitzenrater, "The Present State of

does not use it in a rigid way, nonetheless, the way in which it has become commonplace in Wesley Studies runs the risk of it being appropriated in rigid and uncritical ways, with insufficient nuancing.¹⁰ In this regard, the model may have some parallels to the way in which scholarly reception of the Wesleyan quadrilateral became, over time, more critical.¹¹ One example of the limits of the early, middle, and late Wesley paradigm is Wesley's doctrine of the sacraments. Wesley's views on the Lord's Supper show considerable continuity throughout his life, and some developments that did occur, such as the Eucharist as a converting ordinance, do not neatly follow the dating of the early, middle, and late Wesley.¹² This does not detract from Maddox's convincing demonstration of the utility of the model in tracing numerous developments in Wesley's theology, such as in his doctrines of sin, justification (and the relationship between justification and sanctification), assurance, Christian perfection, and eschatology.¹³ Wesley scholars should follow Maddox's example by testing rather than assuming the paradigm regarding any given aspect of Wesley's theology.

Eastern Christian Influences on Wesley's Theology

Perhaps the most contentious claim of *Responsible Grace* is "that the soteriology of the main strands of Western Christianity (both Protestant and Roman Catholic) came to be characterized by a dominant *juridical*

Wesley Studies," *Methodist History* 22/4 (1984): 229; cf. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley: John Wesley His Own Biographer*, 2 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 1:31. Albert C. Outler, "Introduction," in *Sermons I*, vol. 1 of *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 54–55. See also Maddox's comments in *Responsible Grace*, 259 n. 30.

¹⁰See Maddox's introductory comments on his use of the threefold model in *Responsible Grace*, 20–21.

¹¹In *Responsible Grace*, Maddox's critical comments on the quadrilateral can be found on pages 46–47.

¹²For Maddox's discussion of the Lord's Supper as a converting ordinance, see *Responsible Grace*, 219–21.

¹³For Maddox's use of the model, see the 'Early/Middle/Late Wesley' entry in the subject index. For a useful overview of theological transitions in Wesley's thought as they relate to the chapters of *Responsible Grace*, see page 260 n. 32. Maddox has since stated "there is no decisive demarcation of the transition to the late Wesley," providing helpful nuancing of the paradigm. Randy L. Maddox, "Introduction to Wesley's Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises," in *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, vol. 12 of *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 20.

emphasis on guilt and absolution, while Eastern Orthodox soteriology typically emphasized more the *therapeutic* concern for healing our sin-diseased nature” and that Wesley is “best understood as fundamentally committed to the therapeutic view of Christian life.”¹⁴ While there is no need or space here to discuss this assertion and its reception in depth, a few points regarding it may be in order. First of all, in my view, Maddox’s presentation of parallels and resonances between Wesley’s theology and Greek-writing Church Fathers and the Eastern Orthodox tradition is more nuanced and modest than it has often been received by Wesleyan scholars.¹⁵ This is not to say that there is not room for clarification and perhaps modification of his argument (as Maddox suggested in this session).¹⁶ Maddox made the point that it was because of Wesley’s embeddedness within his Anglican tradition that he engaged with more Greek patristic writers than was “typical in other Protestant traditions.”¹⁷ However, perhaps this case should be made more strongly and more persistently. And I wonder whether Maddox’s continued research into Wesley’s Anglican theological context may have made this more evident. To what extent might Wesley’s therapeutic soteriology be attributed to his engagement with his Anglican tradition?¹⁸ And how far can it be traced whether therapeutic soteriology was passed on to him through his Anglican sources by their direct interaction with Greek patristic writers? Might some of the therapeutic language have come to Wesley through a Western genealogy of theological writers? Is the genealogy by which it came to him

¹⁴Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 23.

¹⁵Kenneth J. Collins has been the most prominent and persistent critic of Maddox’s argument (and *Responsible Grace* more broadly). This began with Collins’s *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley’s Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), especially 206–207. For a more recent example from Collins, see “The State of Wesley Studies in North America: A Theological Journey,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 44/2 (2009): 14–22, 36–38. For other critiques, see Thomas A. Noble, “East and West in the Theology of John Wesley,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 85/2–3 (2003): 359–72, especially 370; and more implicitly, John W. Wright, “‘Use’ and ‘Enjoy’ in John Wesley: John Wesley’s Participation within the Augustinian Tradition,” *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 6 (2014): 3–36.

¹⁶Randy L. Maddox, “Reflections on *Responsible Grace*,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 56, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 134–135.

¹⁷Maddox, “Reflections on *Responsible Grace*,” 134.

¹⁸See Albert C. Outler’s reflections on the therapeutic theme in Anglican soteriology in *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1975), 52–64.

uncertain in many cases? As Maddox noted, “I tried to be clear that John Wesley’s commitment was to the early church as a whole.”¹⁹ A revised edition of *Responsible Grace* could benefit from this argument being strengthened. When discussing Wesley’s therapeutic soteriology, to what extent might the term “Eastern Orthodoxy” be replaced with “primitive Christianity,” while allowing the point being made to still hold true?

Encyclopedic Referencing

Two of the remarkable contributions of *Responsible Grace* are the endnotes and bibliography. The over one hundred pages of endnotes and the over thirty-page bibliography are both educations in themselves. The notes are rich with additional insights into topics discussed in the book and, along with the bibliography, are a very helpful resource for digging deeper into them. The importance of the notes relates to one of my chief criticisms of the book—that the notes are endnotes rather than footnotes. When reading *Responsible Grace*, I find myself regularly flipping back and forth between three parts of the book: the main text, the endnotes, and because the endnotes often use short form citations, the bibliography. For anyone wanting to give the book a serious, close read, the endnotes form a barrier to the fluency and speed by which it can be read.

My other, perhaps chief, criticism also does not have to do with the content of the text of the book, but the lack of a detailed index. The “Index of Selected Names” is useful, but beyond this all we have is an “Index of Selected Subjects,” which at just over a page is very selective indeed. *Responsible Grace* is almost encyclopedic in its breadth and depth and so a detailed index would significantly aid its utility.²⁰ However, it can be said that the very detailed contents pages serve as a type of index and somewhat mitigate the lack of a detailed subject index. In my view, converting the endnotes to footnotes and extending the indices alone would make a revised edition of the book valuable.

British and American Wesley Studies

In inviting me to participate in this session, Randy suggested that I may want to reflect on how his work has been received in settings beyond the United States. What I can perhaps at least tentatively comment on is the

¹⁹Maddox, “Reflections on *Responsible Grace*,” 134.

²⁰Cf. the similar comments of James D. Nelson on the endnotes and index in his review in *Theological Studies*, page 581.

reception of his work in the United Kingdom, where I have lived and worked for over sixteen years. Albert Outler (1908–89) stands out as the most influential American Wesley scholar of the twentieth century. Outler was central to the creation of the ongoing movement of scholarly study of Wesley's theology in service to the academy and the church. In the UK there was no equivalent Outler figure or comparable movement. That is not to say that there were not great British Wesley scholars like Frank Baker (1910–99). Baker is representative of what is still largely true of British scholars of Methodism today—they are primarily historians. When I think of the legends of Methodist and Wesley Studies in the lifetime of my scholarly career, the triumvirate of W. Reginald Ward (1925–2010), John Walsh (1927–), and Henry Rack (1931–) come to mind, each of whom I have had the privilege to know and to learn from.²¹ They are historians, albeit, like Baker, church historians who know that study of Wesley necessitates consideration of his theology. In *Responsible Grace*, Maddox cites British Methodist minister and scholar Rupert Davies (1909–94) as an example of ambivalence toward or underappreciation of Wesley's theology. Davies's conclusion that Wesley does not rank amongst the great theologians of church history appeared in the Methodist doctrine chapter of the four volume work *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, at the same time as Outler was embarking on his project to reassess Wesley as a theologian.²² Wesley's theology is respected and utilized in Methodist and Wesleyan scholarly and church circles in the UK today, but we do not have the equivalent of Randy Maddox among British scholars.²³

All of this provides the context for suggesting that Maddox's work is certainly well-respected and cited in British Wesleyan circles, but there is minimal infrastructure in terms of Wesleyan theologians to critically engage with it. On a positive note, the predominate historical focus in British Wesley Studies and the prevalent theological focus in American

²¹In common with much of American Methodist/Wesleyan theological scholarship, the work of Ward, Walsh, and Rack does not feature prominently in *Responsible Grace*.

²²Davies, "The People called Methodists—1. 'Our Doctrines,'" 147.

²³However, there are brilliant British theologians who are Methodists, such as Professor Tom Greggs (Marischal Chair of Divinity, University of Aberdeen), Professor Anthony Reddie (Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture, Regent's Park College, University of Oxford), and Professor David Wilkinson (Principal of St. John's College, Durham University).

Wesley Studies means that we both have gifts to share with one another and hence opportunities to learn from one another that could result in the advancing of Wesley Studies. Therefore, we should be attentive to what is happening in Wesley scholarship on both sides of the Atlantic.²⁴

Suggestions for a Possible Revised Edition of Responsible Grace

In Maddox's scholarship on Wesley and the Wesleyan tradition over the last twenty-five years, it is evident that he has gained ever deeper insight into the historical context of Wesley's theology. This has no doubt been aided by his involvement in the *Wesley Works* project. His introduction to volume twelve of Wesley's *Works* (*Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*) is an example of applying this knowledge to provide a compelling and concise interpretation of Wesley's theology set firmly in Wesley's (Anglican) historical context. From a historian's view, bringing greater historical perspective to Wesley's theology is a strong argument for a revised edition of *Responsible Grace*. It should be noted, as Maddox has pointed out, that a strong historical case for reading Wesley as a practical theologian was in the original manuscript of *Responsible Grace* and was later published largely in his excellent essay on "Reading Wesley as a Theologian."²⁵ Perhaps some of this historical-contextual material should be included in updated form in a new edition of *Responsible Grace*. On another historical note, while *Responsible Grace* gives some consideration to Wesley's sources, it is not a historical study of them. Nonetheless, Maddox has developed considerable expertise in this subject, in part through his work in preparing the bibliography of Wesley's sources for a forthcoming volume of Wesley's *Works*, which could enhance and bring new insights to a revised edition of the book.²⁶

²⁴And, of course, we should also strive to learn from Wesley scholars around the globe.

²⁵ Maddox, "Reflections on *Responsible Grace*," 132. Randy L. Maddox, "Reading Wesley as a Theologian," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 30/1 (1995): 7–54. See also Randy L. Maddox, "Reclaiming an Inheritance: Wesley as a Theologian in the History of Methodist Theology," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books 1998), 213–26.

²⁶ Maddox's work in this regard builds on Frank Baker's labors, some of the fruits of which can be seen in Baker's *A Union Catalogue of the Publications of John and Charles Wesley*, 2nd edition (Stone Mountain, GA: George Zimmerman, 1991), available at: <https://wesleyworks.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/baker-union-catalogue.pdf>.

Words of Appreciation

Had Randy Maddox not become the General Editor of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, a revised edition of *Responsible Grace* may have been published by now. However, I think scholars would agree that we are grateful for his dedication to the Wesley Works project, which has led to its steady progress in the last few years with the publication of *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I* (2012) and *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II* (2013), *Letters III (1756–1765)* (2015), and *Medical and Health Writings* (2018), bringing us to twenty-one of thirty-five volumes now published.²⁷ Alongside this, Maddox has developed invaluable research resources for us via the Duke Divinity School Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition and The Wesley Works Editorial Project websites.²⁸ It was interesting to come across a note in *Responsible Grace* where Maddox stated that it may be another twenty years before the *Bicentennial Edition* is complete.²⁹ That no doubt seemed like a reasonable estimate at the time, and, so, highlights that Maddox taking on the general editorship knowing that it would require the majority of the latter part of his scholarly career, is a means of grace to all who utilize the *Works*. This, again, underscores that Randy's scholarship is for all of us—us who represent both the academy and the church. May we go and do likewise.

²⁷Maddox became Associate General Editor in 2003 and General Editor in 2014.

²⁸<https://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives/cswt> and <https://wesley-works.org/>. For example, the former contains a complete collection of Charles Wesley's published and manuscript verse, while all extant letters to John Wesley are in the process of being published on the latter site.

²⁹Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 261 n. 45.

PROFESSOR RANDY L. MADDOX'S CONCEPTION OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY¹

by

Andrew C. Thompson

The primary academic interest in John Wesley for over 150 years after his death was as a historical figure and movement founder. Where there was interest in his actual theology at an academic level, it was largely as a way to try and understand how to categorize him within the theological currents of the Evangelical Revival and/or the wider world of Protestant historical theology.² That began to change in earnest with Colin Williams' 1960 volume, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, which stands as perhaps the first serious attempt in the period of modern Wesley Studies to understand Wesley's theology as having value for its insights into certain aspects of the Christian faith and witness.³ It was during this same period that Albert C. Outler began to turn his focus to Wesley as well. Outler's *John Wesley* was published in 1964 as a single volume of primary source material published in Oxford's Library of Protestant Thought series, and it filled a significant enough need that it was still being assigned in college and seminary classes in the early twenty-first century.⁴ Outler's work on *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* over almost three decades was accompanied throughout the 1970s and 80s by numerous essays from Outler exploring different aspects of Wesley's theology. These have remained significant for highlighting different areas of Wesley's own

¹An earlier version of this essay was delivered at the panel discussion, "Responsible Grace and Theological Method: Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of Randy Maddox's *Responsible Grace*," held at the annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO, on 6 March 2020.

²A good example of this tendency from the last century is George Croft Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1935).

³Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today: A Study of the Wesleyan Tradition in the Light of Current Theological Dialogue* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960).

⁴Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

theological emphases, areas where additional work needs to be done, and even agenda setting for Wesley Studies that has had influence to this day.⁵

It was off of Albert Outler's shoulders that Professor Randy L. Maddox began to do his work in the early 1980s, a debt that he acknowledges at the beginning of his major work on Wesley's thought, entitled, *Responsible Grace*.⁶ The question that one has to ask when approaching Wesley not simply as historical figure, or as evangelist, or as revivalist, or as movement leader, but rather as theologian is this: should you take him seriously, and if so, then how? There is no *Summa Theologiae*, or *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, or *Church Dogmatics* to serve as your literary corpus. Instead, you are dealing with (as Maddox himself notes)⁷ sermons, letters, historical essays, treatises (usually dealing with contested theological topics), conference records, catechisms, hymnals, liturgies and the like. A fair amount of it is made up of edited material, which presents its own problems with how to evaluate particular items and how far to attribute them to Wesley's own thought. The eclectic and occasional nature of Wesley's writings is further complicated by the longevity of the man himself, and the fact that his thinking evolved over the course of that life. Because of that, scholars typically differentiate between the early Wesley (1725 to 1738), the middle Wesley (1738 to 1765), and the late Wesley (1765 to 1791)—and thus are faced with how much weight to give to the accents of each period.⁸

Responsible Grace was published in 1994 by the Kingswood Books division of Abingdon Press with the subtitle, “John Wesley’s Practical Theology.” This important volume both offers a great deal in terms of how to read John Wesley’s theology (for which it is always recognized) and makes a substantial contribution towards how to understand practi-

⁵Many of Outler’s essays on Wesley during this later stage of his career have been collected in Albert C. Outler, *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, ed. Thomas C. Oden & Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991).

⁶Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 15-16.

⁷Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 17.

⁸Outler himself notes the categories of an “early,” “mature,” and “late” Wesley. Maddox follows Outler’s own preference in giving greater weight to the “late” Wesley’s views than had generally been the case before the era of modern critical Wesley Studies. See Albert C. Outler, “Introduction,” in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, vol. 1, *Sermons I: 1-33*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 65-66; and Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 20-21.

cal theology as a discipline (for which it is recognized much less often). To really grasp its importance, one must begin not with *Responsible Grace* itself, but rather with the process that Maddox undertook in the years leading up to it. What I want to propose is that, what became *Responsible Grace* in 1994, is best understood through a forensic look at that scholarly process, and by looking back in this way, we can also look forward to see why *Responsible Grace* continues to be important now and in the future.

Since the subtitle of *Responsible Grace* indicates that it is a study in John Wesley's "practical theology," we first need to take a minor digression into what practical theology *is* (or what it *has been*). That starting point is discernible through the work of Vanderbilt theologian Edward Farley, whose analysis of theological method involved tracing the development of the "fourfold pattern" of theological studies from the German theological encyclopedia movement of the eighteenth century down to the structure of theological education in the modern university of the late twentieth century. Farley has shown that, as the inherited medieval unity of theology and theological study broke apart under the pressures of the Enlightenment, what evolved to take its place was a paradigm that was made up of the four areas of biblical studies, systematic theology, church history, and practical theology. Farley refers to this as the "clerical paradigm," which, he contends, means that "the only thing which studies of Scripture, theology, history, and pastoral care have in common is their contribution to the preparation of the clergy for its tasks."⁹ Whereas all aspects of what we would think of as the theological disciplines were previously collected under the heading of "divinity," beginning in the eighteenth century those disciplines began to be separated out from one another—partly under the development of a historical-critical consciousness (especially in biblical studies) and partly in reaction to a university setting that was increasingly tied to the scientific method (or what Farley refers to simply as rationalism).¹⁰ The unity of theology was lost, in other words. Increasingly, the work of systematic theologians, biblical scholars, historians, and practical theologians (if there was such a thing as practical theologians in this understanding rather than simply ministry technicians) would neither bear on one another's work in any necessary sense,

⁹Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 114.

¹⁰Farley, *Theologia*, 64–66. Farley refers to these twin developments as having the impact of a "hermeneutics of destruction" on theological study.

nor contribute to any type of unified enterprise within the Christian witness.

The challenge of the fourth category within the fourfold paradigm—that of practical theology—is that the very nature of its development has raised the question of whether it even exists. As the fourfold paradigm developed, the first conception of practical theology was that it was applied theology—i.e., theology as it pertains to practical Christian life. In the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, practical theology was meant to focus on determining the correct approach for ministerial tasks (what one might think of as a form of pastoral theology). However, the continued development of practical theology over the course of the nineteenth century broke it apart into the various functions of ministry—and this meant that the term itself became simply a label for a number of sub-disciplines that might include preaching, pastoral care, administration, liturgics, evangelism, religious education, etc.—many of them eventually owing as much to secular disciplines like psychology, management, and pedagogy as much as anything within the realm of theological studies. With a trajectory of development like that, the notion of practical theology as having any sort of unity *within itself* began to dissipate quickly.¹¹ As Farley notes, “Once the shift . . . occurred, from a theological subject matter to a technics of ministry, practical theology as such disappeared.”¹²

Prof. Maddox’s doctoral training was in the area of systematic theology, yet following his completion of the Ph.D. degree at Emory University in 1982, he seems to have been dissatisfied with the options for what the enterprise of systematics looked like in the early 1980s.¹³ At the same time, he had a deep interest in the thought of John Wesley and the Wesleyan tradition. (Maddox grew up in the Church of the Nazarene and thus had a lifelong background as a Wesleyan; he had also studied under Ted Runyon at Emory.) He quickly pivoted as he moved from graduate student to junior professor and launched into a dual investigation: into the content and character of Wesley’s thought on the one hand, and into the nature of practical theology on the other.

¹¹Farley, *Theologia*, 106. My description of nineteenth-century developments from Schleiermacher onward is drawn from Farley’s chapter 5, “The Triumph of the Fourfold Pattern,” 99–124.

¹²Farley, *Theologia*, 129.

¹³His dissertation was published under the title, *Toward an Ecumenical Fundamental Theology* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984).

The earliest fruits of these investigations can be seen in a pair of closely related articles: “Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology,” in 1984 in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*;¹⁴ and “Responsible Grace: The Systematic Nature of Wesley’s Theology Reconsidered,” in 1986 in *Quarterly Review*.¹⁵ Both these articles contained the word “systematic” in their titles. Both of them also sought to present Wesley as a “scholarly and systematic theologian.” Yet even as Maddox tipped his hat to the conventional language of academic theology, his analysis in these two essays makes it clear that he is attempting to fundamentally change the character of how theology is conceived and what constitutes theological activity properly speaking. Maddox cites recent work at the time by theologians (in particular the German theologian Gerhard Sauter) who were advocating that scholarly theology should be “practical” or integrally related to the life and practice of the Christian community.¹⁶ Under this framework, as Maddox writes:

The overarching goal of theology is to bring the tradition of Christian doctrine and the skills of disciplined thought to bear on the practical problems of the contemporary Christian community. Likewise, the goal of theological education is not primarily the memorization of a system of theology, but rather the cultivation of an ability to make theologically responsible judgments about contemporary Christian life and practice.¹⁷

Furthermore, Maddox notes Sauter’s contention that the “nature of theological argumentation and systematization” will always result in particular theologians coming to significantly different conclusions about Christian dogma—and that this is because the claims of systematic theology are flawed, or at least not well understood. In actuality, theologians are either consciously or subconsciously adopting what Sauter calls “orienting concepts,” which function like a lens through which Christian revelation is interpreted.¹⁸

¹⁴Randy Maddox, “Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19/2 (1984): 7-21.

¹⁵Randy Maddox, “Responsible Grace: The Systematic Nature of Wesley’s Theology Reconsidered,” *Quarterly Review* 6/1 (1986): 24-34.

¹⁶Maddox, “Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective,” 9.

¹⁷Maddox, “Responsible Grace: The Systematic Nature,” 25.

¹⁸Maddox, “Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective,” 10. Examples that Maddox cites as orienting concepts include Luther (justification by faith and the law/gospel dialectic) and Calvin (the sovereignty of God).

From this early period, Professor Maddox was already interested in seeking a different conception of theology—one beholden to the conception of neither systematic theology nor practical theology as then understood. Another shift can subsequently be seen in a 1988 essay published in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* entitled, “John Wesley—Practical Theologian?”¹⁹ Here the labels of systematic and scholarly are discarded entirely, and Maddox seems much more comfortable with the concept and language of practical theology itself. This last statement has to come with a qualification, however, because part of what Maddox is doing at this point is elevating the concept of practical theology to something new (or rather something very old, depending on how one views it).

In both the 1988 *WTJ* article and a 1990 essay in the journal *Theological Studies* entitled, “The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline,” Maddox engages in a historical genealogy of the concept of practical theology.²⁰ He argues that it is a notion of theology that goes back to the earliest times in the church, when theology *per se* (literally, “the knowledge of God”) was seen as a *habitus* of the soul (i.e., a character trait or disposition of the heart). In that understanding, theology-as-discipline (i.e., the work of inculcating theology as a trait or disposition in persons, while intellectual and potentially quite rigorous), was also deeply formational and practical in the sense that it was aimed at the holistic salvation of believers (i.e., conforming their present lives to Christ and preparing them for life with God in eternity).²¹

If this ancient sense of practical theology were recovered, according to Maddox, a number of characteristics would be emphasized:²²

1. Practical theology would have the common focus of unifying various theological concerns around norming Christian praxis (with “praxis” defined as the interrelationship/dialectic of action and reflection).²³

¹⁹Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley—Practical Theologian?” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 122-147.

²⁰Randy L. Maddox, “The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline,” *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 650-672.

²¹For Farley’s equivalent survey of theology as *habitus* in the early and medieval periods, see Farley, *Theologia*, 33-39.

²²Maddox, “The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline,” 665-669.

²³Maddox, “The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline,” 663.

2. Practical theology would be holistic (engaged with doctrine, discipleship, and character; that is, orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy).
3. Practical theology would give primacy to praxis in its theological method.
4. Practical theology should be inherently transformative.
5. Practical theology should seek to overcome the division of church and academy.
6. Practical theology should be contextual (related to specific socio-cultural and historical situations).
7. Practical theology should be occasional and attentive to situational needs and callings (with regard to its literature).

In short, Maddox has by this point moved from an attempt to renovate systematic theology in a more practical direction to resurrecting the concept of *practical theology* itself with reference to the norms of the ancient and medieval church. He seeks to reimagine practical theology away from the impoverished (and, one might argue, incoherent) account of it in modern theological education and toward a recovery of theology as *habitus* of the soul.

In addition to this major proposal, Maddox also carries out work on Sauter's notion of the "orienting concept." By the late 1980s he had begun referring to it as an "orienting concern" and proposed that it could solve the potential problem of a lack of consistency in the practice of practical theology. The consistency criterion, which figures prominently in the concept of what systematic theology is meant to accomplish, can be achieved in practical theology by the use of a lens that serves as a "basic orienting perspective or metaphor" that can guide various different kinds of theological reflection and work.²⁴ As he will later put it in *Responsible Grace*, the orienting concern is what "provides consistency to situation-related theological judgments[.]"²⁵

So much for practical theology. What then, of John Wesley? In actuality, Maddox's development of the notion of practical theology and his analysis of Wesley as a practical theologian went hand-in-glove over the course of the 1980s. As far back as his initial 1984 essay in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, he had already conceived of Wesley's orienting con-

²⁴Maddox, "The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline," 670.

²⁵Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 18.

cept (or concern) as “responsible grace.” At the time he defined it as, “salvation is clearly a gift of God (we cannot save ourselves), but a gift that calls us to respond and to take responsibility (God will not save us without ourselves).”²⁶ Or, as he puts it in *Responsible Grace* in 1994, “without God’s grace, we *cannot* be saved; while without our (grace empowered, but uncoerced) participation, God’s grace *will not* save.”²⁷ All the way back in his *Wesleyan Theological Journal* article in 1984 Maddox had hinted that his overarching desire was to “uncover the organic unity in Wesley’s own theology.”²⁸ What we have in the project represented in *Responsible Grace*, then, is his attempt to demonstrate that unity through a particular “orienting concern” that has stood for the past quarter-century as one of the most fruitful interpretations of Wesley’s theology in the history of modern critical Wesley Studies.

What I hope this review of Professor Maddox’s own scholarly development and investigations reveals is that his work (as it relates to *Responsible Grace* and thematically similar efforts both prior and subsequent to its publication) is driven by a twin concern:

- 1) The development of an account of practical theology; and
- 2) The characterization of John Wesley as a practical theologian according to that same account.

What has clearly not received nearly enough attention is how Maddox’s work on the first point—his description of the nature and tasks of practical theology—can be put to work in practical theological activity in the present. Because indeed, what Maddox was doing in the decade leading up to *Responsible Grace* was both historical *and* constructive; I believe the potential fruits of his constructive work have yet to be harvested. Some of his writing post-*Responsible Grace* hints at his own hope for that, though it has not been adequately picked up by theologians (in the Wesleyan tradition or otherwise).²⁹ Our hope should be that both scholars and pastors will take up that challenge to a much greater degree in the years ahead.

²⁶Maddox, “Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective,” 12.

²⁷Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 19.

²⁸Maddox, “Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective,” 8.

²⁹See, e.g., Randy L. Maddox, “Formation and Reflection: The Dynamics of Theology in the Christian Life,” *Quarterly Review* 21/1 (Spring 2001): 20-32.

HOW RESPONSIBLE IS THIS ‘RESPONSIBLE GRACE’?

by

Michael Lodahl

Responsible Grace was published when I was just half a dozen years into my teaching career, and I immediately incorporated it into my senior level, yearlong systematic theology course at Northwest Nazarene College—both my, and Randy’s, alma mater. So I have been living with, and teaching from, Randy’s fine volume from the very outset, and am doing so again this semester. I continue to be enriched and educated by his enduringly fine text. He presents Wesley as a practical theologian who operated pretty consistently with an orienting concern for the priority of divine grace—but this grace, importantly, awakens, enlists, and empowers human response. Maddox’s exploration of Wesley’s theological teaching in sermons, letters, and essays was guided beautifully, I think, by his attention to this orienting concern.

I think in his opening remarks Randy has already addressed the critique, voiced by some, that *Responsible Grace* too readily capitulated to a bifurcation between the Eastern Greek and Western Latin traditions of Christian theological reflection. No one needs to read very far into Augustine, Anselm, or Aquinas, to name just three Western thinkers, to find evidence aplenty of therapeutic language and imagery in regard to soteriology. Randy is far too careful a scholar not to notice or acknowledge this; further, I would join most others in agreeing with him that juridical descriptions are typically far more dominant in the Protestant interpretations of Augustine and Paul. Wesley, in his Anglican-formed desire to draw upon resources of the *whole* and *undivided* early church, found good reason to “counter these voices in his teachings on Christian faith and life,” to cite Randy’s words.¹

I do, however, believe there remain at least two critical junctures in Wesley’s theological reflection that are out of joint with what Randy identifies as Wesley’s ‘orienting concern’. I have written about both matters in

¹Randy L. Maddox, “Reflections on *Responsible Grace*,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 56, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 135.

other contexts already, but this seems like the perfect opportunity to air my grievances yet again.

The first is in the matter of Christology. Near the end of Chapter 4, entitled “Christ—The Initiative of Responsible Grace” (a chapter title that already signals where my objection shall lie)—Randy features heading subtitles such as “Stress on Christ’s Divinity,” “Discomfort with Accenting Christ’s Humanity,” and even “Practical Monophysitism?” This turns out to be a rhetorical question, since, in his analysis, “[Wesley] allowed Christ’s human nature to be subsumed within the divine from the very beginning of the Incarnation.”² He hastens to add, however, “I do not note this to charge him with heresy, or to defend him from it. Rather, I am interested in determining what concern pushed him in this direction.”³ In concert with his overarching theme of responsible grace, Randy concludes that “Wesley’s emphasis on the deity of Christ was an expression of his conviction that *God is the one who takes initiative in our salvation.* . . . One can surely wish that Wesley had paid more attention to other aspects of Christology,” he adds, and then concludes the chapter: “One should recognize the basic consistency of his Christological convictions with his broader theological commitments. By emphasizing Christ as the pardoning Initiative of God in salvation, Wesley has underlined the prevenience of *grace to our response.*”⁴

But this is just the problem. My handwritten note on that page, probably scrawled there in 1994 during my initial reading: “But [Wesley] has not allowed the ‘response’ dimension in Jesus its full and proper place.” In my judgment, then, there is *not* a ‘basic consistency’ in this Christology *vis à vis* his ‘broader theological commitments.’ Randy knows I think he let Wesley off the hook here way too easily and kindly. It would have been more honest and correct to accuse Wesley of *not* developing a Christology that was coherent with his orienting concern (if indeed he had one, and further that Randy correctly describes it), not to mention to accuse him of the heresy of Docetism. We could at the very least accuse him of inconsistency!

The point is not so much to be nit-picky about Wesley’s Christology and wonder why he wasn’t more coherent in his theology of ‘responsible

²Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994), 117.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid. 117, 118.

grace’, but to acknowledge that we cannot follow Wesley’s over-mythologizing of Jesus of Nazareth. This will do us no good today, and in fact will do us harm. I take very seriously Donald Baillie’s famous twentieth-century dictum, “No more Docetism!” because Christian faith and reflection must take very seriously, and deep in its bones, the truly human existence of our Savior.⁵ This is neither the time nor the place to elaborate further on this concern; suffice it to say that this remains critical for any attempts at developing a Christology actually coherent with Wesley’s ‘orienting concern’.

The second doctrinal juncture where further work needs doing is eschatology. To put the matter simply, as in Christology, so in eschatology—the ‘orienting concern’ of responsible grace would suggest that far greater attention needs to be given to the role of human response. To my knowledge, there is but one textual site in which Wesley seriously engages eschatological hope from the angle of this orienting concern. I encourage Randy, if he undertakes a second edition of *Responsible Grace*, to give “The General Spread of the Gospel” greater attention.

While Wesley certainly held a high hope for the redeeming work of God in the world, such that one day “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Is. 11:9), it is most explicitly in this sermon that he was willing to wonder about how God intends to do such a thing. Will God, would God, finally resort to some great act of coercion to set things right? In this sermon he acknowledged, for a moment, that if “the Almighty [were] to act *irresistibly*, [then] the thing is done; yea, with just the same ease as when ‘God said, Let there be light; and there was light.’”⁶ Something like this scenario seems to dominate most eschatological expectations, whether among Christians or other traditions such as orthodox Judaism, Islam, and even certain strands of Buddhism and Hinduism. It is not surprising why this is the case; even a cursory glance at the world around us, with all of its attendant evils, suffering, sorrow and sin, would lead easily to a terribly pessimistic pro-

⁵Donald M. Baillie, *God was in Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (New York: Scribners, 1948), xx.

⁶John Wesley, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” in *The Works of John Wesley* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1872 authorized ed. of the Wesleyan Conference Office), 6:280. Some of the following material is adapted from my book, Michael Lodahl, *Renewal in Love: Living Holy Lives in God’s Good Creation* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2015), 112-123.

nosis. It would seem that our only hope would be for a power that is indeed ‘almighty’ to act irresistibly to usher in justice and healing to our sad world.

I think Wesley understood this. Yet as soon as he raises the possibility of God acting in a unilateral, overwhelming way, he dismisses it. “But then man would be man no longer; his inmost nature would be changed. He would no longer be a moral agent, any more than the sun or the wind, as he would no longer be endued with liberty, a power of choosing or self-determination. Consequently he would no longer be capable of virtue or vice, of reward or punishment.”⁷ But if Wesley held such strong convictions regarding human agency and responsibility, why did he even bother to mention an eschatological scenario in which the human element is effectively silenced and nullified? Perhaps because of its enduring fascination, perhaps its widespread appeal among his presumed audience? Perhaps Wesley himself felt the attraction of this eschatological scenario, even while he judged it to be unacceptable. In any event, Wesley dismisses this possibility because he recognizes that, in it, the God of “responsible grace” would be undoing all the work that God has done. “Man would be man no longer,” indeed—but perhaps also “God would be God no longer”? If it is the case that God is the ultimate in gentle, humble Love, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”—that “God is love” as Wesley loved to quote—then perhaps to act in such an ultimately violent (because violating creaturely integrity), coercive fashion is simply out of God’s character. It would be uncharacteristic of God to do such a thing. Contemporary United Methodist theologian Catherine Keller has posed the question this way: “If God ultimately overpowers the creation, even for the sake of the creatures’ own ‘restoration,’ would this not violate the human creature’s freedom to ‘react upon’ grace, either resisting or embracing it?”⁸

Wesley was sensitive to this issue, though it seems to go unnoticed by most of his theological heirs. Love does not force its way; it invites and encourages and assists. He appeals to his audience’s experience of grace:

⁷Wesley, “General Spread,” 280.

⁸Catherine Keller, “Salvation Flows: Eschatology for a Feminist Wesleyanism,” *Quarterly Review* 23, no. 4 (Winter 2003), 416. This brief quotation does not do justice to Keller’s insightful, eminently creative reading of Wesley in this article. Her citation of the phrase ‘react upon’ comes from Wesley’s sermon “The Great Privilege of Those Who Are Born of God,” where he describes grace as “a continual action of God upon the soul” and the human response of gratitude, obedience, and prayer as “the re-action of the soul upon God.”

You know how God wrought in *your own* soul when he first enabled you to say, “The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” He did not take away your understanding, but enlightened and strengthened it. He did not destroy any of your affections; rather, they were more vigorous than before. Least of all did he take away your liberty, your power of choosing good or evil; [God] did not *force* you; but being *assisted* by his grace you, like Mary, *chose* the better part.⁹

All of this in the midst of a sermon in which he was trying to foresee how God would redeem all of creation! He believed that the power of this strengthening, enlightening, assisting grace was making its presence felt in the Methodist movement, that through it God was “already renewing the face of the earth.”¹⁰ He anticipated that a renewal in “experimental [i.e., *experiential*] knowledge and love of God, of inward and outward holiness” would recreate a Christian community like the Jerusalem church described early in Acts: “they will ‘continue steadfast in the apostles’ doctrine and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers,’ . . . and ‘none of them will say that [any] of the things which he possesses is his own, but they will have all things common.’”¹¹ In this renewed and radical community “there will be no partiality; no ‘widows neglected in the daily ministration,’ no rancor or competitiveness—and thus Wesley envisions a kind of Methodist-infected, universal Christian community where “only love informs the whole.”¹² And yet this would come about through “the work of God [that] is uniform in all ages,” such that “considering how he *does* work *now*, and how he *has* [worked] in times past” provides the necessary insight to “conceive how he *will* work” in human lives “in times to come.”¹³ If Wesley is right about this, then it only need be added that the *work* of God “is uniform in all ages” precisely because the *character* of God “is uniform in all ages.”

Much as I love and admire Randy’s work on Wesley, a theologically critical eye must necessarily focus on this pair of glaring problems with the claim that Wesley consistently was guided by an ‘orienting concern’ that might be characterized as responsible grace. My problem is not with

⁹Wesley, “General Spread,” 280.

¹⁰Ibid., 288.

¹¹Ibid., 284.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., 280. Italics are Wesley’s.

the orienting concern; I love it and resonate with it! My hope is more that we who follow in Wesley's wake will press him in these critical doctrinal foci of Christology and eschatology—and ask if we might find more faithful ways to do our theology in the light of the conviction that “without God's grace, we *cannot* be saved; while without our (grace-empowered, but uncoerced) participation, God's grace *will not* save.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 19.

RESPONSIBLE GRACE TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER: EMERGING SCHOLARS IN RESPONSE TO A SEMINAL STUDY

by

Maureen Knudsen Langdoc

Having been tasked with assaying the reception of *Responsible Grace* among emerging scholars, I asked a dozen or so colleagues to share with me their experience reading Maddox's magnum opus. Unsurprisingly, I am not the only one whose personal and academic life has owed so much to this work.

"*Responsible Grace* marked a turning point in my life," explained one scholar who was finishing his PhD.

"It taught me how to do Wesleyan theology," said another.

"One of the most important books of a generation."

"It remains the standard in Wesleyan studies."

"Its scholarly apparatus is unparalleled."

"A masterpiece."

Some of my colleagues spoke of the ways *Responsible Grace* helpfully identified the "nascent ecological theo-ethical impulses in Wesley," creating space and support for Wesleyan theologians to engage conversations about ecological justice. Another emerging scholar said Randy's demonstration of Wesley's affective moral psychology "exploded" his understanding of Wesley, allowing him to engage his research in an entirely new way. For others, *Responsible Grace* appropriately draws attention to the means of grace, reinforcing the convictions that the Christian life is not only communal, but is also a lifelong journey of transforming heart and life.

As for me, I first encountered *Responsible Grace* as an undergraduate student at a Free Methodist college. And through *Responsible Grace*, I met the formidable figure of John Wesley. As is common for many college students, I was struggling to make sense of my faith—frustrated, disappointed, perhaps even angry at an account of Christianity leaving so much to be desired. In the years since then, I have discovered much through reading *Responsible Grace*, beginning with the transformative

articulation and affirmation of a holistic soteriology. *Responsible Grace* was my first encounter with Wesley's insistence that,

By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth. This implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and by consequence all holiness of conversation.¹

And I thought, *Yes!*² *I knew that the Christian life had to be more than saying a prayer and waiting for heaven.* Of course, as I spent more time with *Responsible Grace* and more time studying theology, I discovered that Randy was highlighting the holistic nature of Wesley's soteriology in multiple ways: providing a more robust articulation of salvation than I had ever encountered—engaging the intellect and affections, cognition and trust, forgiveness and transformation, individuals and society, present and future—all without necessarily balancing the polarities. Properly speaking, the soteriological nuance wasn't Randy's; rather, it was Randy's careful, attentive, and accurate representation of Wesley's nuanced particularities—for example, nuancing Wesley's emphasis on sanctification not at the apparent expense of justification, but rather as a response to (and resulting from) his eighteenth-century Anglican context. In addition to Randy's thoughtful attention to sanctification, I have also been grateful for his contributions to my own particular areas of research—particularly an emphasis on the transformative nature of the means of grace, which can accommodate a virtue ethic reading of Wesley by offering a strong account of Christian practices and the role of the affections therein.

¹John Wesley, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Part I, I.3, in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker, Richard P. Heitzenrater, and Randy L. Maddox, 35 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984ff.), 11:106. Unless otherwise noted, references to John Wesley are taken from this critical edition of his *Works*. Hereafter, I refer to this as *Works*, followed by volume and pages numbers in addition to the accepted practice of citing paragraph and section. For Maddox's discussion of this passage, see Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 145ff.

²Here I note the presence of an exclamation point because more than any other scholar I know, Randy doesn't shy away from including such punctuation in his essays. So, exclamation point noted: *yes!*

Of the many contributions of *Responsible Grace* to emerging scholars such as myself, Randy's articulation of Wesley's orienting concern as "responsible grace" has certainly been the most influential and enduring. Specifically, it gives voice to their struggle to understand and articulate the relationship between divine and human agency. As one colleague early in her teaching career explained, "On more than one occasion while teaching electives outside United Methodist studies, I have seen students refer to 'responsible grace' as a concept and then refer their ecumenical colleagues in our class to the book when the latter are trying to articulate a balance between divine and human agency."

Indeed, "responsible grace" has become such a familiar phrase in Wesleyan theological circles that we think we know what we mean—and we think we all mean the same thing! But catchphrases can become cant phrases, and, in doing so, adopt unintended nuances. Such was the case with Outler's infamous quadrilateral, and such may be the case of "responsible grace."³ All this has led me to wonder whether Randy's articulation of Wesley's orienting concern has sometimes been misrepresented, particularly as a "balance" of divine and human agency.

This misinterpretation also fuels the critiques that an over-emphasis on the means of grace runs the risk of semi-Pelagianism. In both cases, the unstated assumption is that an increase in human agency decreases divine agency (if not substantively, at least nominally). However, this is not what Randy means by "responsible grace," nor is it an accurate representation of Wesley's perspective. Agency is not a zero-sum game. Rather, human agency is grounded in God's empowering agency. In fact, Randy prefers the phrase "responsible grace" to "co-operant grace" "because it internalizes Wesley's conviction that our requisite cooperation is only

³Much ink has been spilled over this hermeneutic of Wesleyan theology, which first appeared in a 1970 interim report during the drafting process of "Our Theological Task," a doctrinal reflection included in the 1972 *Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*. Albert Outler played a large role in drafting this landmark essay, which famously enumerates scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as integral to Wesleyan/Methodist theological reflection. "Our Theological Task" never actually employs the word "quadrilateral," and the essay is ambiguous as to whether the four are to be considered sources, criteria, and/or tools for such reflection. Furthermore, John Wesley neither used the term "quadrilateral" nor addressed all four resources in a single setting. As such, it seems most accurate to denominate the interplay of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as "Outler's Quadrilateral."

possible in *response* to God's empowering," thereby avoiding a misinterpretation.⁴ However, while a response requires an initial ("primary") call, such language may nonetheless suggest relational reciprocity.

Still, some of Wesley's own remarks can certainly be read as though God and human beings engage in a parallel give-and-take dynamic. For example, Wesley described the necessity of human response to God's grace as follows:

For it plainly appears God does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul re-acts upon God. . . . [I]f we do not then love [God] who first loved us; if we will not hearken to [God's] voice; if we turn our eye away from [God], and will not attend to the light which [God] pours upon us: [God's] Spirit will not always strive; [God] will gradually withdraw, and leave us to the darkness of our own hearts. [God] will not continue to breathe into our soul unless our soul breathes toward [God] again.⁵

While the respiratory imagery conveys the relational dimension of grace, it also suggests that the divine/human relationship involves a lateral exchange. But Wesley was not trying to cast God as one of two characters involved in an equal exchange. Rather, he was underscoring that it is only because of what God is continuously upholding in humanity that one can do anything, let alone respond. Human agency always depends upon divine agency. As Wesley himself explained, grace is "not only *from* Christ, but *in* him."

For Christ does not give life to the soul separate from, but in and with himself. Hence his words are equally true of all [people], in whatsoever state of grace they are: 'As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me; without' (or separate from) 'me, ye can do nothing.' . . . [It is like] a branch, which, united to the vine, bears fruit, but severed from it 'is dried up and withered'.⁶

Here, Wesley drew upon biblical imagery of a vine to locate human beings *within* the context of grace and not as characters in a give-and-take relationship.

⁴Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 92.

⁵John Wesley, Sermon 19, "The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God," III.3, in *Works* 1:442.

⁶John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, §19, in *Works* 13:169.

Despite his occasionally clumsy language, Wesley consistently contended that salvation requires human participation. “Even St. Augustine, who is generally supposed to favour the contrary doctrine, makes that just remark. . . , ‘[The one] that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves.’”⁷ Now, whereas Augustine upheld the absolute irresistibility of God’s grace, Wesley insisted that humans can repudiate God’s grace, thereby refuting Augustine and his theological heirs (including both Calvin and Whitefield). Although Wesley’s language seems to position divine and human agency as two equals in a lateral exchange, he is by no means advocating such a reciprocal relationship. Wesley insists that God’s grace is always prevenient, and that even the desire for God depends upon God’s initiative. What is more, even the ability to resist God is a gift of God’s grace, used wrongly.⁸ And so, while Wesley decidedly sides against predestination (especially given the particular controversies of his day), he is ever in favor of God’s grace as the very context for—not a contender with—human agency.

Quite simply, by “responsible grace,” Randy does not assume that an increase in divine agency lessens human agency. Rather, “responsible grace” articulates a model where human agency (responsibility) is deepened by God’s agency (grace), not overpowered or replaced by it. This leads me to wonder whether a better articulation of the distinction between Creator and creature can further clarify the nuances of Randy’s orienting concern. Doing so offers an interpretation of the Wesleyan means of grace as unique practices by virtue of their *telos*: their common end is a God who operates on an entirely different level of causality than creatures. Unlike all creaturely ends, God does not vie for status or position. As such, we can trust God, which frees us from our inclinations toward control.

More could be said about how growth in grace effects a transformation that is entirely a gift from God and genuinely belongs to the individual, particularly Randy’s double description of the means as “avenues through which God conveys the gracious Presence that enables our

⁷John Wesley, Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” III.7, in *Works* 3:208.

⁸Consider, for example, Wesley, Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” III.4, where Wesley asserts that no one sins because they don’t have grace, but because they don’t properly use the grace they have been given.

responsive growth in holiness and as exercises by which we responsibly nurture that holiness," which aligns with an understanding of grace as a habit or tendency.⁹ For now, we might note that Randy's "image [of] salvation's co-operant nature . . . [as] a *dance* in which God always takes the first step but we must participate responsively" could be perceived as conveying a relationship between two *equal* partners.¹⁰ Of course, a close reading of *Responsible Grace* and of his subsequent essays (most notably his disagreements with Ken Collins) repeatedly reveals that, for Randy, God is not merely another character; God is the *context* for all agency.¹¹ A clearer articulation of the difference between Creator and creature can help clarify this foundational conviction without succumbing to (semi) Pelagianism.

Finally, it's important to recall Randy's remarks this morning: his initial work in Wesley Studies occurred at a time when there was a call for academic theologians to recover a practical understanding of serious theological activity more closely connected to Christian life and worship. I have no doubt that *Responsible Grace* is a response to such a call; it makes a case for Wesley's "practical theology" by a theologian whose academic work is closely connected to Christian life and worship. As another former student of Randy explained, "It is impossible for me to separate my own reflection on Randy's work from the ways I encountered him in the classroom. As an instructor, advisor, and teacher, Randy's engagement with students models the measured engagement, pastoral sensibilities, and curiosity that characterizes his academic work." I myself recall a conversation during seminary when I told Randy that one of my friends wanted to become a professor because he hated pastoral care. Randy resisted this sort of dichotomy, describing how a great deal of his day-to-

⁹Randy L. Maddox, "Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33/2 (Fall 1998): 42. Maddox argues his claim is supported by Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1992).

¹⁰Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 151-152. Kenneth J. Collins has read Maddox in such a manner and has critiqued him in *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 99. See also Kenneth J. Collins and Christine L. Johnson, "From the Garden to the Gallows: The Significance of Free Grace in the Theology of John Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 48/2 (Fall 2013): 20 n. 50.

¹¹See, for example, Randy L. Maddox, "Prelude to a Dialogue: A Response to Kenneth Collins," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35/1 (Spring 2000): 87-98.

day work involved pastoral care with students. This is not the case for all professors, but Randy certainly sees this as part of his vocation as an ordained elder serving in the academy.

This is, of course, not a retirement party for Randy. This panel discussion is intended to reflect upon his influential text, not praise his character and celebrate his career. Yet it seems appropriate to acknowledge Randy's personal embodiment of many of his claims, particularly when the text responds to the call to connect academic theology more closely with Christian life and worship. And while I'm not currently prepared to make a case for Randy having reached "Christian perfection," there can be no doubt that his "way of being" has greatly influenced many of us who have interacted with him as our teacher, mentor, advisor, colleague, and friend.

Once, while working on a journal article, I sent Randy a frantic email, concerned about whether or not I was citing Wesley's *Works* in proper form. Randy responded in record time (because he is wicked fast with email, as all his correspondents know), having looked up all the quotations in question and noting not only the page numbers but also the full citations in proper form. I conveyed my gratitude, rhetorically asking him, "Who has the audacity to ask RANDY MADDOX to help her with citations?!" Randy immediately replied: "There is no audacity in seeking help. The best scholarship is collegial."

Randy's work models collegiality. His public disagreements demonstrate healthy, generative difference—something often lacking in the academy and in our wider society. Moreover, he sees his contributions as part of a larger project, working so that emerging scholars like myself are more easily able not only to engage Wesley critically, but also to place Wesley in conversation with other theologians, traditions, and disciplines. One of my fellow emerging scholars noted how he reads *Responsible Grace* in light of Outler's "Phase III" of Wesleyan studies—that because of the "Phase II" work of those like Outler, Baker, and Heitzenrater, a "Phase III" publication like *Responsible Grace* was made possible. And now, twenty-five years later, one might argue that *Responsible Grace* has ushered in "Phase IV" of Wesley Studies, as emerging scholars are able to take the kind of close, critical work of *Responsible Grace* and diversify it according to a plurality of theological figures, traditions, and disciplines, including liturgical studies, psychology, ecumenism, ethics, and ecology. For him, critically constructive, comparative, and collaborative theologi-

cal reflection is the “outbranching” of Phase III Wesley studies, which itself is epitomized by *Responsible Grace*.¹²

Given Randy’s commitment to such selfless collegiality, it is unsurprising to me that he has not published a revised edition (yet). For him, his editorial work with *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* far outweighs the value of revising his seminal study. So, even though numerous emerging scholars such as myself would like to see a *Responsible Grace, Part 2*, Randy views his own responsibilities as gracing us with something he lacked when writing *Responsible Grace*: a complete critical edition of Wesley’s published works.¹³

¹²These observations come from Gregory P. Van Buskirk. Van Buskirk notes that he did not coin the phrase “Phase IV,” which was floated in the 2008 AAR Wesleyan Studies Group and was subsequently featured in the inaugural issue of *Methodist Review*. Van Buskirk’s use of “Phase IV” differs a bit from his predecessors, as it is nuanced by diversity and dialogue. Still, the various self-understandings of “Phase IV” are not mutually exclusive. See Sarah Heaner Lancaster, Catherine Keller, Donald A. Thorsen, Dennis C. Dickerson, and Charles M. Wood, “What Makes Theology ‘Wesleyan?’” *Methodist Review* (2009): 7-26.

¹³Randy consistently promotes the work of emerging scholars by connecting them with opportunities and one another. In that spirit, I offer thanks to those quoted in this article by adding parenthetical notation of their areas of expertise: Dr. Dustin Benac, Visiting Assistant Professor of Practical Theology at Truett Seminary, Baylor University (practical theology, organizational theory, qualitative research methods, sociology of religion, leadership and social change, religion in the Pacific Northwest, theological education, ecclesiology); Rev. Dr. Natalya Cherry, Assistant Professor in Methodist Studies and Theology at Brite Divinity School (systematic and constructive theology, Wesley/Methodist studies, historical theology); Rev. Dr. Timothy R. Eberhart, Associate Professor of Theology and Ecology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (ecological theology and environmental ethics, public theology, critical theory, social movements); Rev. Dr. Kevin M. Watson, Associate Professor of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies, Candler School of Theology, Emory University (Methodist history and doctrine); with special thanks to Dr. Gregory P. Van Buskirk (Wesley and Aquinas, Methodist history, philosophy), who offered not only his reflections on *Responsible Grace* but also a sharp eye in editing this article.