

REFLECTING ON RESPONSIBLE GRACE AFTER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS¹

by
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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.

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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 Collins'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 fulfillment 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 pre-dates *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 insipid 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 nature² 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)* 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.

²⁵Maddox, "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.

²⁶Maddox'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 I. 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).