John Wesley and the Means of Grace: Historical and Theological Context

by

Andrew Carl Thompson

Date: 7 DECEMBER 2012

Approved:

Dr. Richard P. Heitzenrater, Supervisor

Dr. Randy L. Maddox

Dr. Stanley Hauerwas

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the historical and theological context of the means of grace in the theology of John Wesley with the aim of identifying its central role in his soteriology. Examining the means of grace in its historical context requires locating the emergence of the means of grace in the English theological lexicon prior to Wesley and tracing Wesley’s own inheritance of that tradition. The task of placing the means of grace within the context of Wesley’s broader theological framework involves explaining how the means of grace, as disciplined practices engaged within the community of faith, lie at the heart of his soteriology as it finds expression in the Christian life. It is argued that the best way to conceive of the means of grace in Wesley’s theology is as the “sacramental grammar” of his thought, grounded in the Wesleyan idea of social holiness, which names both the communal arena in which the means of grace are practiced and the salvific reality experienced by those joined together in such practice.

Chapter 1 introduces the topic and explains the thesis. It describes the plan and scope of the dissertation, which is to locate John Wesley’s doctrine of the means of grace in its historical and theological context. It lays out the approach, method, and sources for the project with reference to major scholarly texts that are engaged as well as the primary source material utilized. The chapter concludes by noting that, in addition to elucidating aspects of John Wesley’s understanding of the means
of grace not present in scholarship up to this point, it also intends to serve as a way to bring discipline to the use of Wesleyan language for the means of grace in contemporary Wesleyan scholarship.

Chapter 2 – “The History of the Means of Grace: 16th and 17th Centuries” – analyzes the emergence of the language of the means of grace in the Church of England after the period of the Reformation. The chapter argues that the concept of the means of grace emerged as a way to describe the way God can be experienced through activities of devotion and worship, specifically after the loss of the full Roman Catholic sacramental system. It traces the particular use of the means of grace in Puritan practical divinity and examines its inclusion in the Book of Common Prayer. The chapter concludes with a study of John Norris’ use of “means of grace” as an example of doctrinal development at the beginning of the 18th century.

Chapter 3 – “The Reception and Development of the Means of Grace in John Wesley” – demonstrates Wesley's reception of the means of grace during the period of Oxford Methodism. It then goes on to trace Wesley's development of the means of grace specifically in relation to the influences of mysticism and Moravianism. The period it covers is from 1731 to 1746, at which time, it is argued, Wesley’s doctrine of the means of grace had reached a level of maturity as embodied in his publication of the sermon, “The Means of Grace.”

Chapter 4 – “The Content of the Means of Grace in John Wesley’s Theology” – analyzes the means of grace in Wesley’s theology with respect to two main considerations: the nature of grace and the nature of the means themselves as “practices.” It also examines Wesley’s categories of instituted means, prudential
means, and general means, noting aspects of Wesley’s distinctive understanding of each category.

Chapter 5 – “The Character and Context of the Means of Grace” – brings the preceding work of the dissertation into a consideration of the nature of salvation in Wesley, specifically in relation to Wesley’s understanding of present salvation as the recovery of holiness of heart and life. It then argues that Wesley’s doctrine of the means of grace is best characterized through an intersection of the notion of “social holiness” as the environmental context in which the means of grace are practiced and holiness becomes manifest in the Christian community.

Conclusion – The dissertation ends with a conclusion that summarizes the preceding chapters and underscores the significance of social holiness in understanding the context of the means of grace in Wesley’s theology and practice of ministry.
For Emily
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CHAPTER ONE
~ INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW ~

I. Introduction

John Wesley’s 1765 sermon, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” stands as one of the Methodist founder’s fullest expressions of his mature soteriology.\(^1\) In presenting his understanding of the via salutis, Wesley opens with reference to God’s prevenient action in drawing people to faith in Jesus Christ.\(^2\) Thereafter, the bulk of the sermon is focused on the dynamics of justification and sanctification. Wesley makes a strong affirmation of the Protestant doctrine of justification by grace through faith, stating that faith is the sole necessary condition for a sinner’s acceptance by God. He then goes on to affirm that sanctification, too, has faith as its sole necessary condition – though in the case of both justification and sanctification he qualifies the dynamics of human responsive participation in salvation by asserting that, “if there be time and opportunity,” repentance and good works are


\(^2\) I follow here the trend of many recent Wesley scholars in preferring the term via salutis over that of ordo salutis as a shorthand term to refer to Wesley’s soteriology. For a description of this shift, see Randy L. Maddox, Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 157-158. Cf. Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 178. A notable exception to this trend and argument for its converse can be found in Kenneth J. Collins, The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 307-312.
also needed.³ In this way, Wesley points to the different manner in which the two soteriological realities occur in the Christian life as he understands it. As the point of relative change in the sinner’s status before God when he is forgiven and accepted through Jesus Christ, justification occurs at a moment in time. The experiential corollary in the life of the Christian that corresponds to this change is the new birth, which can be separated logically/conceptually but not (in most instances) chronologically from justification. Sanctification, on the other hand, is best understood as a progressive change whereby the life of the justified sinner is transformed by divine love. To be sanctified is to be made holy – for Wesley, in “heart and life” – and this is a process that begins with new birth but continues thereafter throughout life. Faith is the necessary condition of both. And yet, in a normal course of life, the process of living in the world means that the real, sanctifying transformation of a person will be uneven and in need of a regular discipline of practice marked by continual repentance and (re-)commitment to good works.

The need for participation in good works is particularly important for ongoing sanctification, which is the aspect of present salvation in which all Christian believers participate throughout life after the new birth. For Wesley, however, good works are not just works. Salvation comes by grace, the active presence of God in the life of the Christian believer. Yet grace is neither coercive nor irresistible. It is received as a gift in a person’s life and is thereafter transformative insofar as the

person accepts it and responds to it. The “works” to which Wesley refers in the sermon are not truly works in more than one sense: they are certainly not works in any meritorious sense, but they are also not works in the sense of independent actions carried out through the autonomous power of the human will. They are rather means of grace, and as such they are the vehicle whereby one becomes progressively sanctified over time. Wesley categorizes the means of grace as “works of piety” and “works of mercy” in “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” while elsewhere he calls them “instituted means of grace” and “prudential means of grace.” His view of their importance is great enough that he claims they “are so necessary that if a man willingly neglect them, he cannot reasonably expect that he shall ever be sanctified.” Without participation in the means of grace, the Christian

... cannot ‘grow in grace’, in the image of God, the mind which was in Christ Jesus; nay, he cannot retain the grace he has received, he cannot continue in faith, or in the favour of God.

Wesley goes on to say that these works of piety and works of mercy are, “in some sense, necessary to sanctification.”

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4 This general statement clearly would need to be filled out at greater length, particularly with reference to the working or function of grace over the course of a human life. That consideration is pursued in the opening section of chapter 4 of the present work, which examines the nature of grace in Wesley's theology.

5 On the categorization of the means of grace into “works of piety” and “works of mercy,” see Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” ¶¶III.9-10, in Works 2:166. For an example of Wesley's use of the categories “instituted” and “prudential,” see Wesley, Minutes of Several Conversations between the Reverend Mr. John and Charles Wesley and others, from the year 1744, to the Year 1789 (commonly called the Large Minutes), in Works 10:923-924. The categorization of the means of grace is discussed at more length in chapter 4 of the present work.


With this high valuation of the means of grace within his understanding of salvation, it is clear that the means of grace must hold an important place in Wesley’s theology. And that they do. In his 1746 sermon, “The Means of Grace,” Wesley defines them by stating, “By ‘means of grace’ I understand outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end – to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.” It is a fairly barebones definition, but it does point to the notion that the means of grace are activities in which Christians engage (“outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God”) whereby they can expect to encounter the grace of God (“the ordinary channels”) in all of its dynamics (“preventing, justifying, or sanctifying”). In that sense, the means of grace represent the key for understanding how God is experienced and how salvation is received in normal Christian life.

This dissertation will examine the historical and theological context of the means of grace in the theology of John Wesley with the aim of identifying its central role in his soteriology. Examining the means of grace in its historical context requires locating the emergence of the means of grace in the English theological lexicon prior to Wesley and tracing Wesley’s own inheritance of that tradition. The task of placing the means of grace within the context of Wesley’s broader theological framework involves explaining how the means of grace, as disciplined practices engaged within the community of faith, lie at the heart of his soteriology as it finds expression in the Christian life. In pursuing this thesis, the sermon, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” therefore provides a useful entrée in the sense that Wesley cites

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8 Wesley, “The Means of Grace” (1746), ¶1.1, in Works 1:381.
the role of the means of grace right at the heart of the experience of salvation; the sermon’s particular emphases on this count are distinctively Wesleyan in that they hint at the way in which a Protestant theologian who claims a strong adherence to the doctrine of justification can nevertheless assert an equally strong claim about the participatory nature of salvation itself.

Within the argument of the sermon, for instance, the claim about the necessity of the means of grace for sanctification presents something of a dilemma. Wesley makes this claim in the very section that has argued that faith is the only condition necessary for both justification and sanctification, thus seemingly contradicting himself. His qualification about “if there be time and opportunity” is an important one, but that only suggests the means of grace are not necessary in cases where one’s experience of justification and/or sanctification occur at or near the moment of death. He clearly understands that anyone who experiences justification and new birth and then goes on to live anything approaching a full life will necessarily need to participate in the means of grace in order to be sanctified – to grow in grace, to recover the full image of God, and to gain the mind that was in Christ Jesus. “This is the way,” Wesley writes, “wherein God hath appointed his children to wait for complete salvation.”

One way to explain this seemingly contradictory impulse in Wesley’s account of salvation is to take the tack of many Wesley scholars from the time of George Croft Cell in the 1930s onward, who have pointed out that Wesley tends toward a “both/and” approach on theological questions rather than an “either/or.” Thus, we

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can understand Wesley’s theological position as encompassing the Catholic and the Protestant, justification and sanctification, faith and works, law and gospel, God’s grace and human response, etc. Otto Albert Outler alludes to this feature of Wesley’s theology as being situated around a “stable core of basic coordinated motifs.” Kenneth Collins centers on it as well in his description of Wesley as a “conjunctive theologian.” Richard Heitzenrater comments on the fact that the “horizon of [Wesley’s] concern” encompasses “many seemingly disparate emphases that had typically not been held together” elsewhere in Christian theology. And specifically with regard to Wesley’s soteriology, Randy Maddox refers to the two “vital truths” in Wesley’s view that he describes with the comment, “without God’s grace, we cannot be saved; while without our (grace-empowered, but uncoerced) participation, God’s

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10 See George Croft Cell, The Rediscovery of John Wesley (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1935), 359-360. Cell describes Wesley as holding together a “Protestant doctrine of justification by faith” with a “Catholic appreciation of the idea of holiness” (359). Henry Knight characterizes the tendency to which I refer in Wesley as a “refusal to engage in oppositional thinking,” and suggests that, when Wesley was confronted with the problem of the either/or in theological issues, he “characteristically questioned the presuppositions upon which their supposed conflict was based and offered an alternative account of their necessary interrelation in the Christian life.” See Henry H. Knight III, The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992), ix.


13 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 320.
grace will not save."\(^{14}\) That is, in the case of present salvation, both faith and participation in the means of grace are required.

Taken together, these scholarly views point to something significant in Wesley’s theology – both in his method or approach to theological issues and in his characteristic resolutions to those issues. In the present study, I am less interested in retracing the fine work done by the scholars cited above (and others) so much as I am in focusing on the character and context of the means of grace themselves in Wesley’s theology on a trajectory arising out of those scholars’ prior work. My aim in this study is to examine both the historical inheritance of the means of grace in Wesley and his distinctive development of the means of grace as a doctrine within his theology. The issue of historical context is key, exactly because it locates Wesley as a part of the broader Anglican tradition and places the means of grace as he treats them in a larger narrative of doctrinal development. Beyond that, the theological context for the means of grace in Wesley’s thought can proceed along two main fronts: first, the way in which participation in the means of grace facilitates the “growth in grace” that is a constituent part of salvation in this life; and second, the context in which the means of grace can be seen as a coherent set or practices (communal in nature and disciplined in engagement) whereby sanctification is possible. The first of these aims must be made with reference to the recovery of holiness in the individual, while the second will place that recovery in the context of what Wesley calls “social holiness.” The need for such a project is implied in the position Wesley takes in “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” in the first instance, but I

\(^{14}\) Maddox, Responsible Grace, 19.
believe it is also suggested by the lack of attention to certain aspects of Wesley’s view of the means of grace in scholarly treatments of that specific area of his theology. There have been a number of such treatments – by Ole Borgen, Henry Knight, Dean Blevins, and others – and these will be drawn upon as conversation partners for my own work.¹⁵ My hope is to be able to build upon the important work done in the scholarly monographs of these authors, as well as the shorter essays and articles on the topic by others, while offering my own original contribution that will provide a fuller understanding of the role of the means of grace in Wesley’s soteriology.

II. Plan and Scope

The thesis for the present work is divided into two main parts: the first part calls for an examination of the means of grace in their historical context, and the second centers on the way the means of grace find expression in Wesley’s larger theological framework. It is appropriate at this point to explain a bit more about how I conceive of this two-pronged approach with reference to some internal considerations within those two parts. This I will do both to explain the plan of the dissertation and to trace the contours of its scope.

¹⁵ See Ole E. Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments: A Definitive Study of John Wesley’s Theology of Worship (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1986) [originally published 1972]; Knight, The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace; Dean G. Blevins, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace: An Approach to Christian Religious Education” (Claremont School of Theology: PhD diss., 1999). These represent the major monograph-length works on the means of grace in Wesley’s theology. There also exists an unusually large number of essay-length treatments of the means of grace (some of them very significant), and they are cited where appropriate in the body of the dissertation.
The means of grace are so integral to Wesley’s thought and practice that they have often been treated in Wesleyan scholarship as if they have a self-evident meaning. While the means of grace may be reasonably called a Wesleyan concept when viewed within a certain tradition traced from his life and from the history of early Methodism, they are not Wesley’s own concept in the sense of having originated with him. The means of grace, rather, were inherited by Wesley from a prior tradition which was formative for him and in which he stood. The term that names the concept itself – “means of grace” – has a history of use within that tradition that calls for explanation both in how it was received by Wesley and how it was, in turn, used by him. The means of grace both conceptually and practically did become situated over time in Wesley’s understanding of the Christian life such that they came to bear on practically every significant aspect of his theology: e.g., moral psychology, practical ministry, ecclesiology, and (perhaps most significantly) soteriology. In doing so, he gave shape to an understanding of the means of grace in a distinctive way. Thus a significant part of any account of the means of grace in Wesley’s theology must involve examining how he receives the means of grace within his own tradition and how he contributes to that tradition as a participant in it. From that historical contextualization, we will then be able to move into the realm of Wesley’s theological framework and the role of the means of grace within it. In this area, I argue that the means of grace make up a “sacramental grammar”\textsuperscript{16} in

Wesley’s thought, in that they form the basic conceptual categories for his understanding and articulation of faithful Christian worship and discipleship.\(^1^7\)

We can elaborate on the two main parts of the thesis with reference to the foci of the chapters present in the dissertation. With reference to our first main part of investigation, I propose that the means of grace, as a core concept in Wesley’s theology pointing to real practices of worship and ministry, are not developed by Wesley himself independently of the context in which he was formed as a priest and theologian within the Church of England. They were, rather, inherited by Wesley both from his own Anglican tradition and – more broadly – from a Protestant theological tradition that sought to present a new way in which grace is salvifically available via certain practices of the Christian church.\(^1^8\) The impetus for this

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\(^{17}\) Though the term, “discipleship,” is not used by Wesley in a significant way, I employ it here for the purpose of convenience as a term familiar to our contemporary discourse – specifically to refer to that embodied form of faith expressive of the love of God and love of neighbor and borne out in good works.

\(^{18}\) An implicit claim here is that the same Protestant tradition from the Reformation onwards, by rejecting the sacramental system and many of the associated spiritual practices of the Roman Catholic Church, lost a “sacramental grammar” in which soteriology could be meaningfully understood in conjunction with the church’s clerically mediated and officially approved sacramental practices of devotion and worship, as well as with that pattern of life marked by good works that in today’s parlance we might call “discipleship.” (It is a claim that will be made explicit in chapter 2 of the present work.) In developing doctrinal commitments most obviously related to the Pauline doctrine of justification by grace
development is a problem arising from doctrinal changes that occurred in Protestant churches following their break from Rome, where rejection of papal authority coincided with an embrace of the doctrine of justification and a rejection of the Roman Catholic conception and practice of the seven sacraments. Most (though not all) Protestant churches sought ways to describe how faith could be inculcated in the lives of Christian believers through certain appointed means – the two accepted sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, of course, but also the Word of God and other activities broadly understood as aspects of worship and discipleship. So Martin Luther utilizes a concept of the means of grace (die Gnadenmittel) to describe the Word of God, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and the Power of the Keys (i.e., for forgiveness and absolution of sin). There may thus be

through faith (and the diminished ecclesiology that came with it), Protestantism facilitated an atrophying of the understanding in which grace is mediated to Christian believers. Moreover, the predestinarian qualities of Lutheran and, more pointedly, Reformed conceptions of salvation obviated the need for more nuanced understandings of the mediation of grace through Christian practices apart from the preached word. For a discussion of this shift in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Protestant world, see Jason E. Vickers, Invocation and Assent: The Making and Remaking of Trinitarian Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 29-67. Following the work of William J. Abraham, Vickers characterizes the shift in relation to the understanding of Scripture as moving from “canon” to “criterion.” Vickers’ thesis is primarily about the relative diminishment of Trinitarian theology, but because it includes an analysis of the concept of the regula fidei as it evolved from a confessional idea associated with the doctrine of God to an epistemic idea associated with the propositional truth of Scripture, his study has significant relevance for the place of the means of grace in Protestant soteriology in general. My own reading of the theology of Puritans and Anglicans in the 16th and 17th centuries leads me to believe that a theological void (or perhaps incoherence) was created by the developing tradition of the Church of England retaining a Catholic emphasis on sacrament and liturgy without the Roman Catholic doctrine of the sacraments. There are significant differences within the English Church, of course; the Puritan party’s emphasis on the means of grace is related much more to the doctrine of assurance than it is to any inherent love of liturgy. These developments are traced in chapter 2 of the present work.

seen in Luther a general concept of the means of grace that replaces the Roman Catholic sacramental system he rejects, though Luther cannot be understood as developing a formal doctrine of the means of grace. This kind of development, visible in Luther first, appears in other branches of the Reformation as well. The sacramental theology of the Church of England, in particular, dating from its Protestant turn in the mid-16th century, intersects with the language of “means of grace” in the writing of Puritan writers who were themselves seeking sacramental (or quasi-sacramental) substitutes in language within Puritan practical divinity intended to nurture the godly toward the experience of assurance. On the English scene, the language of the means of grace slowly becomes adopted broadly and receives a degree of conceptual development such that it becomes something of a formal doctrine in Anglican liturgy. Thus, the first task of demonstrating how the means of grace find their place in Wesley’s theology must be an analysis of how the means of grace were received by Wesley from the tradition and how Wesley’s framing of the concept is related to that inherited tradition.

Chapters 2 and 3 will be devoted to this first stated task. Specifically, chapter 2 examines the history of the means of grace as it emerged out of the post-Reformation English context and slowly took on the characteristics of a doctrine in the theology of the Church of England. This chapter will examine first the way that English theologians of the late 16th and early 17th centuries grappled with how to

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20 See Jaroslav Pelikan, “The Theology of the Means of Grace,” in Accents in Luther’s Theology: Essays in Commemoration of the 450th Anniversary of the Reformation, ed. Heino O. Kadai (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 124-147. Though the term “means of grace” is commonplace in current Lutheran theology, Pelikan does a good job of showing how it should and should not be seen as an explicit category in Luther’s own thought.
speak of the way grace is mediated through devotional and worship practices in a new way and without reference to the sacramental system of the Roman Catholic Church. This line of inquiry will focus on the use of the language of the means of grace in Puritan practical divinity, which emphasizes the concept specifically as a part of the Puritan attempt to connect devotion and worship with the need for a sense of the assurance of salvation. From its beginnings among the Puritan party, the chapter will look at how the language of the means of grace found its way into the Book of Common Prayer and thus into the official body of liturgy in the Church of England. Finally, chapter 2 will examine the contribution of the Anglican priest and theologian John Norris, significant both for the degree to which he develops the concept of the means of grace at the beginning of the 18th century and because he serves as one of John Wesley’s primary sources in his own early reception of the means of grace.

Chapter 3 moves to the reception and development of the means of grace in the thought of John Wesley. This move requires an examination of Wesley’s inheritance of the means of grace through direct channels (the Book of Common Prayer; John Norris) as well as through Wesley’s general formation as an Anglican and his participation in the practices of Oxford Methodism. The chapter then treats certain influences on Wesley from 1741-1746, when his contact, first with William Law and mysticism and then the Moravian Brethren, led Wesley to develop his doctrine of the means of grace to the point that it found a central place in his theology and ministry. The aim of this chapter is thus to identify how the means of grace, adopted by Wesley while still in Oxford, further evolved in his theology.
through his contact with these external influences. I refer to the period in question
as a “crucible of development” because of the way in which so much of the evolution
of Wesley’s thinking takes place in an environment of controversy and conflict of
both a spiritual and interpersonal nature.

The second goal of this study is to articulate Wesley’s sacramental grammar
with reference to the way the means of grace find expression in his larger
theological framework. This goal is pursued in chapters 4 and 5 of the present work.
Chapter 4 examines the content of the means of grace in Wesley’s theology in a
particular way. It does not focus heavily on collating and enumerating the categories
of the means of grace in Wesley, which is a task that has been accomplished any
number of times in previous scholarship. Rather, it examines the content of the
means of grace by examining the nature of grace that the means bring persons into
contact with, as well as the nature of the means themselves as “practices.”

Some attention is necessarily paid to Wesley's categories, but this is done less to present
those categories as historical artifacts and more to explore the logic of the
categories, how Wesley develops them with reference to his inherited tradition, and
how they relate to one another. The major sections on the nature of grace and the

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21 The term “practice” is not without its own significance. Utilizing the description of
practice offered by Alasdair MacIntyre in After Virtue, I intend to apply the notion of
practice as a socially-cooperative activity, aiming at a common goal and pursued over time,
and through which the goods internal to the practice are systematically extended (as well as
the horizon in which such goods are seen and comprehended), as the framework in which
any one of the individual means of grace is to be understood. In that sense, the means of
grace will be shown to be more than simply acts; they rather have a quality of self-reflective
activity – and a communal location – that means they are practices in the sense in which
MacIntyre intends when he uses the term. See Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, 3rd ed.
nature of the means serve as bookends to the consideration of Wesley’s categories in this way, which is appropriate as a way to explicate the Wesleyan grammar that serves to fund the theology of the means of grace in Wesley’s thought.

Chapter 5 moves from an internal consideration of the means of grace to an examination of how the means of grace relate to broader themes in Wesley’s soteriology and ministry. In pursuing this end, the chapter looks first at the nature of present salvation in Wesley in terms of the recovery of holiness of heart and life – a possibility that in Wesley is heavily dependent on disciplined participation in the means of grace. For Wesley, the heart of sanctification or holiness is the recovery of the *imago dei*, the image of God, in the life of the Christian believer. Yet this recovery is not solely an interior reality; it is something that encompasses the whole life of the person and is the reason he prefers to speak of “holiness of heart and life.” In just this sense, the means of grace are crucial for present salvation because engagement with them is formational in a holistic way that finds its telos in Christian love.

From the treatment of moral psychology, chapter 5 then moves toward a consideration of social holiness in Wesley’s theology and argues that it represents both the environmental context in which the means of grace are practiced by the Christian community and the soteriological reality experienced by Christians who are so engaged. Wesley’s concept of social holiness is one that is often misinterpreted by contemporary figures both in church and academy, and the aim of this part of chapter 5 is intended to locate it properly with respect to the means of grace and within Wesley’s doctrine of salvation. Wesley’s view of grace as the
presence and power of God (which he treats as analogous to the work of the Holy
Spirit)\textsuperscript{22} received within the active, communal Christian life is present in his thought
in such a way that is indebted to his formation but expressive of his own theological
idiom. The peculiarly Wesleyan understanding of social holiness as naming both the
corporate sphere in which the means of grace are efficacious and the regenerating
reality experienced by persons within that sphere is one of the most important
articles of scholarly analysis needed to fully understand Wesley’s theology of the
means of grace within his larger soteriology; thus, it is the final and culminating
element of the present work. In sum, the final chapter argues that, for Wesley, the
means of grace rightfully belong within a soteriological understanding that is both
focused on the recovery of the \textit{imago dei} in the soul and located contextually within
the community of faith.

III. Approach, Method, and Sources

A. Approach

As a study in historical theology, this dissertation is focused primarily in the
thought and practice of John Wesley and, in particular, in that aspect of Wesley’s
soteriology in which the means of grace play a crucial role. Recognizing that

\textsuperscript{22} See, e.g., Wesley, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit,” (1746) ¶15, in \textit{Works} 1:309, where
Wesley writes, “By the grace of God is sometimes to be understood that free love, that
unmerited mercy, by which I, a sinner, through the merits of Christ am now reconciled to
God. But in this place it rather means that power of God the Holy Ghost which ‘worketh in us
both to will and to do of his good pleasure’. As soon as ever the grace of God (in the former
sense, his pardoning love) is manifested to our soul, the grace of God (in the latter sense, the
power of his Spirit) takes place therein.” This is but one citation of Wesley’s view of grace,
but it is an important one for viewing the way he sees grace as both \textit{pardon} and \textit{power}. It is
built upon in chapter 4 of the present work.
significant scholarly studies have been done on both Wesley’s sacramental theology and Wesley’s theology of the means of grace in recent decades, the dissertation will engage with such contemporary interpretations; it will also converse with scholarly accounts that relate to Wesley’s view of theological anthropology, moral psychology, and the character of ecclesial community, insofar as these topics relate to the thesis. Regarding the relevant contemporary scholarship, my own work builds off of previous analyses while seeking to demonstrate important aspects of Wesley’s understanding of the means of grace that are either underdeveloped or missing from those analyses. Because of my own conviction that Wesley’s view of the means of grace needs to be put in greater context of the broader tradition that he inherits, the dissertation will also engage with primary sources that are influential on Wesley’s own thought. The following description of the approach the dissertation will take will be made first by drawing out the relevant terms of content, character, and context. Then it will, secondly, explain how the dissertation’s thesis will be pursued with reference to existing scholarship.

The content of the means of grace refers to, most obviously, the doctrinal content of the means of grace in Wesley’s theology. However, because Wesley does not create the idea of the means of grace de novo, a major part of approaching his understanding of the means of grace must come through investigation into prior tradition. Identifying the contours of Wesley’s conception of the means of grace is a task that requires an explication of the origin of the term itself as received by Wesley, inherited as it was from the theological tradition that preceded him. For instance, the means of grace in the Anglican tradition preceding Wesley are
inclusive of the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, but they also include aspects of Christian practice that go beyond these two sacraments and are, if not sacraments in the formal sense, understood as having a certain sacramental efficacy in the Christian life. The conceptual contours of the means of grace are, moreover, generally understood as inclusive of a certain set of Christian practices without which a Christian life cannot be fully lived – and thus without which the very reality of salvation is not ordinarily possible. Examining the content of the means of grace, then, requires an account of why the practices called the means of grace actually are means of grace. Any survey of these practices that produces a list of what the means of grace includes will only be meaningful if and when the constituent practices signified by “means” are shown to be somehow integral to a holistic Christian life. So the content of the means of grace in Wesley’s thought (and practice of ministry) must include an explanation of how and why the constellation of Christian practices they include come to be seen as crucial to Wesley’s account of genuine Christianity – from the way in which such practices found their way from the tradition to Wesley, to Wesley’s development of them, and finally to Wesley’s integration of them into his understanding of the via salutis.

To speak of the character of the means of grace is to speak of the defining contours and significance of the term as used by Wesley.23 If “content” suggests a conceptual outline of a certain set of practices, then “character” suggests the efficacy

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of that set of practices on the life of the Christian believer engaging in them over the course of time. The former calls for an historical examination of Wesley’s thought in the broader context of the tradition of which he is a part. The latter requires a theological account of the effects of the means of grace on the Christian life within Wesley’s soteriology. Beyond the bare fact of the activity represented by this set of practices, an analysis of the character of the means of grace will describe the interaction between the grace related by the means and the soul of the Christian believer who participates in them – how they are efficacious and to what degree. This, too, is a task done with reference to Wesley’s via salutis, but with respect to the dynamics at work in the power of the means of grace as it is manifest in salvation. Hence, the character of the means of grace is intimately related to the change that grace effects when the means are present at the heart of Christian practice. This is an aspect of the means of grace we have already identified with moral psychology; it is relevant to the reality of salvation at any point in human life, and particularly so in ongoing sanctification.

To speak of the context of the means of grace in Wesley’s theology is to shift the emphasis of analysis from thought to practice. As a practical theologian, Wesley was interested not primarily in speculative considerations of theology but rather with their embodied expression in Christian life.24 Addressing the context of the means of grace therefore requires an account of how Wesley understood the means

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24 The terms “practical theology” and “practical theologian” can have a number of connotations. I refer to Wesley here as a “practical theologian” in the way framed by Randy Maddox in his article, “John Wesley – Practical Theologian?” Wesleyan Theological Journal 23 (1988): 122-147.
to find expression in the lives of Christians and, indeed, in the life of the Christian community. Wesley understands the efficacy of the means of grace to depend on a certain kind of reception – which in turn depends on a certain social arena. Such a view is not a repudiation of the inherently gracious character of the means, i.e., the divine power they convey. But it is to say that, while God’s grace inhere in the means, it is only effectively conveyed under certain conditions. This is a remarkable quality of Wesley’s thought, and it suggests that grace is not an irresistible force.

There are ways in which the prevenient and empowering character of grace must be highlighted in order to explain why the human social context is significant at all. For, while Wesley is clear that faith is the only necessary condition of both justification and sanctification, he is equally clear that a life patterned by the means of grace is the ordinary way in which sanctification becomes manifest in the believer.  

This dissertation does not set out to definitively answer the nuances of grace in all its prevenient, convincing, justifying, and sanctifying dynamics, but it will attend to the way in which grace – in Wesley’s understanding – invites, enables, and empowers a human response within an ecclesial setting and that, furthermore, it is via this particular construal of life-in-community that the work of salvation proceeds.

Explaining what those conditions are and how they are manifest represents the question of context. Furthermore, because Wesley is a practical theologian, this account of context will note not only how the means of grace are effectively present in the Christian life in theoretical fashion but also in the actual expression of Christian discipleship.

B. Method and Sources

As a study primarily oriented toward the thought of John Wesley, the issue of method should make reference first to the primary source material available in Wesley. Fortunately for the purposes of this dissertation, there has never been a better time to engage in a study of Wesley's thought. The period of modern critical Wesley Studies over the past half century has produced both the resources to understand more fully Wesley's theology and the students who have put those resources to use in areas ranging from church history and theology to ecumenism and practical ministry.26 As a topic within Wesleyan theology, the means of grace have benefited from such study. Both the critical development of sources and the reflection on those sources over the past fifty years have allowed for an increasing degree of development in Wesley Studies that makes the current dissertation

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project possible and provides the outlines of its thesis. In terms of sources, the most important body of material to be utilized is the Wesleyan corpus itself. The ongoing work of developing a truly critical edition of Wesley's collected works means that students of Wesley's thought and the history of early Methodism now have at their disposal the most reliable collection of Wesley's original (and edited) material to date. This dissertation will make use of the Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley wherever possible, supplemented with the relevant older editions of the Wesleyan corpus as needed (e.g., the Jackson edition of the Works and the Telford edition of the Letters). It will also take as a guiding interpretive principle the conviction of Wesley scholars, from Albert Outler onward, the need to attend to the "whole Wesley" in order to achieve a responsible historical depiction of Wesley's thought.  

Because work will also be done in investigating the means of grace in the Church of England prior to Wesley, other primary sources will be utilized as well: the Reformation-era theological material of the Church of England, including the 39 Articles, the Homilies, and the Book of Common Prayer (in its various editions up to the 1662 revision of the Prayer Book that Wesley knew). Additional use will be made of the writings of theologians in the Church of England who contribute to the

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27 Outler highlighted the concern to take into account Wesley’s works from throughout his lifetime on a number of occasions. He was in particular concerned that thorough readings of the later Wesley be used to balance Wesley materials from the late 1730s and 1740s (i.e., the Wesley of the post-Aldersgate period). See, e.g., Outler, “Introduction,” in Works 1:65-66, and Outler, “A New Future for Wesley Studies: An Agenda for 'Phase III',” 46-47. Cf. Heitzenrater, “Wesley Studies in the Church and the Academy,” 4-5; Maddox, “Reading Wesley as a Theologian,” Wesleyan Theological Journal 30:1 (Spring 1995): 19-26; and Maddox, “Celebrating the Whole Wesley: A Legacy for Contemporary Wesleyans,” Methodist History 43:2 (January 2005): 74-89.
development of the doctrine of the means of grace. Some of these sources are significant for the tradition as a whole while others are significant to Wesley in particular. Where modern critical editions of such material are available, they are preferred. Where they are not, original editions of the works will be consulted.\textsuperscript{28}

Beyond the use of primary sources, there is a need to engage relevant secondary source material in each of the major sections of the dissertation. A part of this engagement will connect with scholarship related to areas of historical interpretation that support aspects of the larger thesis, e.g., scholarly interpretations of the evolution of the Church of England after the Reformation, the character of Puritan practical divinity, and the development of the \textit{Book of Common Prayer}. Within the realm of the theology of John Wesley and the history of early Methodism, there is of course a vast literature that has developed in recent decades; here, the approach taken is to examine particular studies where appropriate while also taking into account broader considerations of Wesley that have become accepted as standards in the field (from the likes of Albert Outler, Frank Baker, Richard Heitzenrater, Henry Rack, Randy Maddox, Kenneth Collins, etc.).

Specifically in regards to the means of grace in Wesley’s theology and certain themes related to it, there is a particular set of contemporary scholarly accounts that are important. Because the present work intersects with these accounts in significant ways, a word should be said about them in more detail. The two most

\textsuperscript{28} The online databases \textit{Eighteenth Century Collections Online} and \textit{Early English Books Online}, which provide access to a large catalogue of English language publications from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, are important resources in this regard. The ECCO an EEBO resources provide access to digital facsimile copies of original editions from the periods.
substantial studies of the means of grace in John Wesley’s thought to appear in recent years are in the form of dissertations by Henry H. Knight III (1987) and Dean G. Blevins (1999). An earlier study by Ole Borgen on Wesley’s sacramental theology (1972) also has substantial sections on the means of grace. In addition to these, the most relevant work on the Wesleyan concept of social holiness is the dissertation of R. George Eli (1990). All of these works make major contributions to their topics, and all of them will be significant conversation partners for the present work.

Henry Knight’s 1987 dissertation at Emory University on the means of grace in John Wesley’s thought stands as the fullest study of the subject in the contemporary period. Later published as The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace, Knight’s purpose in his study is to articulate the “inner logic of Wesley’s pattern of means of grace.” Knight pursues this goal both by comparing Wesley’s views of sanctification against contemporary options he rejects, as well as by tracing in detail the “practices and discipline which Wesley

advocates” through the various means of grace themselves. Knight’s argument rests on two major claims: first, that grace is relational, meaning that it invites us to participate in a relationship with an objective other; and second, that it is received through a pattern of activity that allows for its maintenance and growth in the individual and that this pattern is reflected in the structure and ministry of early Methodism. His thesis represents the fullest development of the means of grace in Wesley’s theology extant, and thus it is a major building block for the current project. My own work seeks to contribute to that begun by Knight by supplying important historical analysis about Wesley’s inheritance of the means of grace as well as aspects of the place of the means of grace in Wesley’s doctrine of salvation that are absent from Knight’s own analysis (both in terms of the nature of sanctification and the contextual framework of social holiness).


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32 This twin argument, which makes up the bulk of Knight’s study, is first described on pp. 8-15.
Wesleyan tradition through the lens of the means of grace. He does not, however, utilize the means of grace in a simply instrumental way. Blevins also provides an original analysis of the means of grace in an historical frame. Here, he echoes Knight at points and adds to Knight’s language of the means of grace as patterns of life by speaking specifically of the means of grace as practices. He does not, however, flesh out what he means by the term “practices,” and therefore suggests a potentially fruitful avenue of analysis that is not fully pursued. Blevins also pays attention to elements of Wesley’s development of the means of grace specifically in regards to the period in the 1730s and 40s, which is taken into account in the present project.

Ole Borgen’s study on Wesley’s sacramental theology also points to the means of grace as communal practices to a degree, but as with Blevins, he does not fully explain what is implied by such a concept. In addition, Borgen’s intent is primarily to present a study of Wesley on the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. While the means of grace make up a part of his analysis, they are a subordinate component of the larger study on Wesley’s sacramental theology that is his primary interest. One element of Borgen’s contribution to an understanding of the means of grace that is specifically drawn upon is his identification of Wesley’s concept of Christian conference as the “environmental context” in which the rest of the means of grace find their home; this claim by Borgen will be adapted but put to

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34 See the discussion in Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 103ff., where Borgen does an admirable job of distinguishing between the categories of the means of grace in Wesley’s writing but without fully exploring the underlying logic to the means. See also Borgen, “John Wesley: Sacramental Theology – No Ends Without the Means,” in John Wesley: Contemporary Perspectives, ed. John Stacey (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 67-82.
use with Wesley's notion of social holiness which, it will be argued, is a more fitting concept for the contextual location of the means of grace on the whole.

Added to these works on the means of grace in Wesley is R. George Eli’s study on social holiness in Wesleyan thought, originally in the form of Eli’s 1990 dissertation and later published as Social Holiness: John Wesley’s Thinking on Christian Community and its Relationship to the Social Order. Eli’s work is argued in clear and driving fashion, though it is framed from its beginning with the a priori commitment to discerning the way in which Christian communal discipleship in a Wesleyan mode can responsibly interact with the “social order.” This is drawn from his interest in the religious culture of his native Singapore and the effects of late 20th-century political developments there that he sees as adversely affecting the social witness of the Methodist Church. Eli’s work has much to commend it regarding the logic of Wesley’s thought regarding social holiness, however; while his thesis may be tied too strongly to social justice concepts in Methodism that postdate Wesley, he still contributes valuable analysis to the way in which social holiness is present in Wesley’s thought and, in particular, in early Methodist practice. The main point of divergence in my own account will be to examine the Wesley’s concept of social holiness within Wesley’s own thought rather than for instrumental purposes aimed at contemporary social ethics.

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36 See Eli, Social Holiness, 1-4.
IV. Prolegomenon: Navigating Options for the Means of Grace in Current Wesleyan Discourse

The chief purpose in carrying out the project represented in this dissertation is to elucidate aspects of Wesley’s theology of the means of grace not present in studies up to this point. There is, however, one other consideration that deserves note before concluding the introductory chapter. This consideration has to do with disciplining the Wesleyan theological vocabulary around the means of grace in contemporary Wesleyan theology. The term “means of grace” is obviously an elastic one that can be used with any number of connotations. When used in elastic fashion, “means of grace” typically takes on the characteristics of a common, rather than proper, noun. My own analysis claims that, for Wesley, “means of grace” (collectively) is a proper noun – a doctrine, with specific content and a specific theological logic. This I take to be a characteristic feature of a concept that forms what amounts to the sacramental grammar of Wesley’s thought. It also suggests that, when employing the means of grace as a Wesleyan concept, we should take into account the Wesleyan dynamics that inhere within it.

In constructive Wesleyan theological discourse of the present, the means of grace takes on different connotations. Two recent examples will suffice to show the diversity of usage. First, William J. Abraham, a theologian at Southern Methodist University, has incorporated the concept of the means of grace as a central part of the “Canonical Theism” project that has made up a large part of his scholarly activity
since the 1998 publication of his book, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*.\(^{37}\)

Though Canonical Theism is an ecumenical rather than an explicitly Wesleyan endeavor, Abraham’s status as a Methodist who has done extensive work in Wesleyan theology gives his project distinctly Wesleyan overtones.\(^{38}\)

In that work, Abraham uses the terms, “materials, persons, and practices,” repeatedly to refer to his notion of the means of grace. In addition, he equates “canon” with “means of grace.” For instance, he writes, “An ecclesial canon is essentially a means of grace: that is, materials, persons, and practices intended to initiate one into the divine life.”\(^{39}\) The extensiveness suggested by “materials, persons, and practices,” is indicated elsewhere when he refers to “creed, Scripture, liturgy, iconography, the Fathers, and sacraments.”\(^{40}\) Likewise, in another context,

\(^{37}\) William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Canonical Theism attempts, in Abraham’s own description, to diagnose a shift over time in the understanding of the canonical heritage of the church from a “complex means of grace” aimed at “initiating converts into the life of faith” to an “epistemic norm,” located primarily in Scripture and, to a lesser extent, in the Christian tradition, that functions as a “criterion of rationality, justification, and knowledge” (28, 27). The intended constructive aspect of Canonical Theism is in recovering the original sense of canon as means of grace, thus leaving questions of epistemology to their more proper place within philosophical investigation. The influence of Abraham on his students and their contributions to the Canonical Theism project can be seen in the more recent collection of essays represented in William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, & Natalie B. Van Kirk, eds., *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology & the Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), which itself includes an autobiographical account by Abraham of the emergence of Canonical Theism in his own theological work (see 141-155).

\(^{38}\) Though it is unnecessary to analyze the Wesleyan character of Canonical Theism in detail in the present context, it is worth noting that the ecumenical intent of the proposal itself, as well as both its employment of the concept of the means of grace and its generally sanctificationist emphasis, can all be seen as echoing Abraham’s Methodist background, formation, and previous scholarly work. Using the language of Butler, Abraham’s work can be understood to fall within the category of a “Phase III” Wesley studies project in the sense that he is utilizing broadly Wesleyan themes for purposes of ecumenical theology.

\(^{39}\) Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 27; cf. 1.

\(^{40}\) Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 1.
Abraham names the means of grace within the church’s canonical heritage as “not just a canon of books in [the] Bible but also a canon of doctrine, a canon of saints, a canon of church fathers, a canon of theologians, a canon of liturgy, a canon of bishops, a canon of councils, a canon of ecclesial regulations, a canon of icons, and the like.”

We might consider this the “broad view” of the means of grace, inasmuch as Abraham’s account of the means of grace is inclusive of all those aspects of the church’s heritage that relate to an embodied Christian life in the ecclesial community. Thus, the means of grace – like the canonical heritage of the church – is a form of shorthand for referring to a whole constellation of items in the tradition that together simply make up what we mean by “the Christian faith” or “Christian practice” as it relates to God’s ways of inviting us out of sin and alienation and back into restored communion with God in Jesus Christ. “Means,” here is meant in its most obvious grammatical sense as a mediating object or force that connects one thing to another – in this case, the Christian believer with the triune God.

Another way the means of grace have been used in recent scholarship is found in the cross-disciplinary work of Paul Shrier and Cahleen Shrier – both of Azusa Pacific University, the former a practical theologian and the latter a biologist. In an article appearing in the Journal of Pastoral Theology, Shrier and Shrier offer a

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41 Abraham, “Canonical Theism: Thirty Theses,” in Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology & the Church, 2. This description is given in Thesis IX and pertains to the relationship between Canonical Theism and the canonical heritage of the Christian church.
42 See also Abraham’s descriptions offered in his “Thirty Theses” on Canonical Theism in Abraham, Vickers, and Van Kirk, eds., Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology & the Church, 1-7.
comparative analysis of Wesley’s account of the means of grace with recent work in neuroscience, particularly as a way of better understanding “the role of our daily activities in spiritual growth.” 43 Shrier and Shrier see Wesley’s view of how disciplined participation in the means of grace functions in sanctification as compatible with the neuroscientific understanding of how “mirror neurons” work. These neurons are discharged in the brain when a person observes some activity in another, and they serve both to facilitate action-understanding in the observant (potentially increasing empathy) and to allow for the learning of new skills and abilities. 44 Shrier and Shrier posit a “non-reductive physicalism” as the best alternative in theological anthropology for what they see as the more typical Christian view of a sharply dualistic understanding of body and soul (or even brain and mind). 45 By drawing on the fruits of neuroscientific research, they believe that Christians can overcome this dualistic view and see better how important the means of grace can be in transforming cognition and behavior.

The role of the means of grace in Shrier and Shrier’s work represents another major use of the concept in contemporary Wesleyan theology, which can best be described as “functional.” That term should be understood as in opposition to “necessary,” and it is used here to suggest that the means of grace – which in most accounts would be seen as an inherently theological category – are employed by

Shrier and Shrier in a way that is “thinly-theological.”46 This is not a judgment on the merits of their essay so much as it is a comment on the place of the means of grace within it. As creative as the cross-disciplinary analysis of Shrier and Shrier is, it is unclear exactly why the means of grace are essential in advancing their argument about psycho-biological transformation. This can be seen by simply recognizing how superfluous the idea of “grace” is at all in the essay; the process of psycho-biological transformation that Shrier and Shrier are explicating rests not on Wesley’s (or anyone else’s) account of the means of grace but rather on neuroscientific claims about how mirror neurons work in the brain. Their account lacks a necessary metaphysic (which is something quite different from the “radical dualism” they are at pains to avoid); the theological language that is employed is laid as a kind of patina on the surface of an analysis that does not require it. In that sense, the interpersonal activities to which they allude could just as easily be those of the Boy Scouts or the Kiwanis Club as the theologically-construed practices of discipleship represented by the means of grace.47

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46 I borrow this term from Thomas Dixon, who uses it to describe a form of quasi-theological analysis that utilizes theological terms as a sort of thin veneer on an argument that does not require them in any essential way. See Thomas Dixon, “Theology, Anti-Theology, and Atheology: From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” *Modern Theology* 15:3 (July 1999), 299-301. Dixon’s use of the term is a way of describing the character of certain eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophical treatments of human psychology, made by persons nominally Christian and writing in a broadly Christian cultural context. In a way that makes my own use of it all the more apt, in that the merits of the essay presented by Shrier and Shrier rest fundamentally on the conclusions of neuroscience rather than theology and do not require theological language for their value.

47 This is not to suggest that there cannot be an adequate account of how the means of grace, in particular, mutually inform the work of mirror neurons, only that Shrier and Shrier haven’t given us one. Their analysis lacks any necessary place for grace, theologically construed.
The two examples cited – from Abraham and from Shrier & Shrier – show two widely different ways that the concept of the means of grace can be used. The first is broad enough to include all those aspects of the Christian tradition that relate to the formation of Christian identity, while the second is thin enough to be unnecessary to the argument in which it appears. Put another way, “means of grace” in the first seeks to serve as the shorthand term for the entire content of the Christian life while in the second it serves as an item of theological nomenclature artificially tacked on to an overarching logic of natural science that predominates.

In both cases, I suggest that the specific category “means of grace” is unnecessary or at least not essential to the tasks being undertaken. Shrier and Shrier are interested in a certain understanding of means; the means required are the kind of active observation that engage the mirror neurons and thereby drive cognition and behavior. Grace, on the other hand, is not only absent from their analysis but also simply unnecessary. Their proposal is only thinly-theological, not because they do not claim to appreciate the Wesleyan view of the purpose of the means of grace, but rather because their own primary interest is not theological but biological. The cross-disciplinary effort is admirable and represents something needed more in theological reflection, but their own version of it does not make the theological grammar necessary.

Abraham, on the other hand, puts means of grace at the very heart of his articulation of Canonical Theism. The project in which he and others are engaged is significant, both in the contribution it makes to the understanding of the role of canon and its potential for how the canonical heritage of the church can be
perceived and engaged by the church in the present (i.e., soteriologically rather than epistemically). However, it is not clear that the term means of grace has anything other than the most generalized of notions in the way Abraham uses it. Abraham admits as much in the way he treats “means of grace” and “canonical heritage” as synonymous.\footnote{See, e.g., Abraham, “Canonical Theism: Thirty Theses,” in \textit{Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology \& the Church}, where he writes, “The canonical heritage of the church functions first and foremost soteriologically. It operates as a complex means of grace that restores the image of God in human beings and brings them into communion with God and with each other in the church” (Thesis XI, p.3). Cf. Abraham’s statement, “In canonical theism[,] canon is construed fundamentally as a means of grace, a way through which the Holy Spirit reaches and restores the image of God in human agents” (Thesis XVII, p.4).} He could conceivably have used another term, such as “formational qualities” or “salvific matrix.” On the one hand, the fact that he does not use any other term indicates something of the significance that the phrase means of grace carries in Christian thought. On the other, the fact that he does see the need to explain the conceptual parameters of the term suggests that the meaning is apparent. But is it?

At this point, it is clear that an historical investigation into the means of grace as a doctrinal concept within a particular tradition is needed. That investigation will seek as its goal to determine whether it is possible to trace the heritage of means of grace language in the Anglo-Wesleyan tradition such that it is both essential to theological discourse (in opposition to Shrier and Shrier) but also suggestive of specific parameters (in distinction from Abraham). We therefore have our jumping-off point for the present project, which begins not with Wesley but with his theological forebears in the Church of England. For indeed, the concept of the means of grace was one inherited by Wesley just as it has been inherited by us. And if we
seek to use it in the present in its Wesleyan sense, the first step in knowing how to
do so lies with uncovering the roots of the concept within the tradition.

V. Notes on Bibliography and Citations

Before proceeding, a few notes on my approach to citing sources are in order.
First, in my citation of primary source material from Wesley, I have included the
date of publication for each source at the first instance of that source's citation in the
dissertation. For example:

Wesley, “The Means of Grace” (1746), ¶II.1, in Works 1:381.

In this example, the parenthetical “1746” alerts the reader that this particular text
was first published in that year. This convention is intended to allow the reader to
know the chronological dating of a given source within Wesley's adult life, which
shows whether it derives from the early, middle, or late Wesley. There is ample
material on the means of grace from all periods of Wesley’s active ministry, and
taking into account the date for any particular source helps to show continuity and
change within Wesley's thought.

Second, while the monograph-length studies of Wesley already noted in this
chapter contain much of the important material on Wesley’s theology of the means
of grace, it is also the case that many of the secondary sources on Wesley and the
means of grace from contemporary scholarship are found in article or chapter-
length essays from larger collections and anthologies. In the bibliography, I have
listed essays that are directly cited in the footnotes section of the dissertation under
the name of the essay author as opposed to including a single entry for the
anthology under its editor(s). Thus, for collections or anthologies containing
multiple essays from which I have drawn material, each essay cited receives a
separate bibliographic entry at the end.49 This gives the reader the ability to cross-
reference footnote citations of essays in the text of the dissertation with the material
in the bibliography. On the other hand, in the case of collections or anthologies that I
have referenced in my research as a whole but from which I have not cited directly
in a footnote, or which are cited in the notes generally as an anthology (even if
particular essays are cited individually from such a collection at a different point),
the entry of the work in the bibliography is made under the name of its editor(s).

49 The exception to this rule is Richard Heitzenrater’s work, *Mirror and Memory: Reflections
on Early Methodism*, from which I cite extensively in chapter three. *Mirror and Memory* is a
collection of essays all of which are authored by Heitzenrater. In the notes, I have cited them
using the titles of both the individual essays and the book as a whole. In the bibliography, I
have only listed the book since all of the essays are Heitzenrater’s.
CHAPTER TWO

~ The History of the Means of Grace: 16th and 17th Centuries ~

I. Introduction

Understanding the significance of the concept of the “means of grace” in the Anglo-Methodist tradition requires first grappling with the evolution of the term itself over time. Like the term sacramentum in the Latin West, the English term means of grace originated with a less defined, more general usage that was made more specific through later development. That is, what began as a casual term – or almost a turn of phrase – eventually came to be something of a doctrinal category with specific content. There is overlap between sacramentum and means of grace, in fact, since the sacraments are among the means of grace in the Anglo-Methodist tradition. But there is a divergence between the development of the concepts as well; whereas sacrament began to receive more specific theological description with Augustine and was, in the Roman Catholic tradition, given settled form theologically by Thomas Aquinas and dogmatically in series of councils culminating in the Council of Trent, the means of grace did not receive a similar degree of development until after the Reformation. Additionally, the means of grace as they are dealt with in the theological tradition of the Church of England encompass more than the (Protestant) sacraments of baptism and Lord’s Supper. They are expansively sacramental in that sense, so much so that the English divines who began to give specific content to the means of grace in the late 16th and early 17th centuries can be seen as attempting to supply a newly Protestant church with a “sacramental
grammar” it had largely lost when it rejected the Roman church and the fullness of its sacramental system.¹ Thus, the history of the means of grace is a history of how a church that lost its ability to speak of salvation sacramentally in a broad way groped to find a substitute that would meet the theological and pastoral needs of its new context.

II. The Sacraments in Pre-Reformation England

The history of the Reformation in England did not progress in straightforward fashion. Recent revisionist accounts have done much to challenge an older “Protestant narrative” that attempted to tell the story of the establishment of a Protestant Church of England as the inevitable result of a grassroots religious movement that only needed official royal and ecclesiastical decrees to legitimize developments already preceding them on the local level. The historian Christopher Haigh has argued that it is more accurate to speak of English “Reformations” rather than about a Reformation in the singular, with the top-down political impositions happening first and the religious shift among the people coming only gradually, in

¹ For the introduction of my use of the term “sacramental grammar,” see above pp.9-10, n.16. I am intrigued by the notion that Englishmen of the 16th and 17th centuries understood the authority and use of the sacraments in such a way that it served as a “grammar” of their faith in the Wittgensteinian manner I reference above. Brad Kallenberg has suggested, “By the notion of ‘grammar’ Wittgenstein intended us to realize that there is no way to extract the complicated matrix of all our behavior (in short, our world) from our use of language” (Brad J. Kallenberg, Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001], 218). The grammar that is constitutive of theological concepts and language for a given people in this sense provides that people a comprehensive worldview – a “religious consciousness and mode of living,” in the words of Michael Harvey (Harvey, “Wittgenstein’s Notion of ‘Theology as Grammar,’” 93). My argument in this chapter is that the sacramental grammar once supplied by the Catholic sacramental system was, by fits and starts over the late 16th and early 17th centuries, replaced by the language of the means of grace on the English scene.
fits and starts, thereafter. With regards to the sacramental character of English religious life, the uneven reception of Protestant ideas about justification by faith and the enduring practices of worship and devotion among the English people meant that well into the latter half of the 16th century a residual Catholicism remained in a church that was – officially at least – Protestant. Diarmaid MacCulloch refers to the ecclesiastical developments of the latter 16th century in the Church of England as “the building of a Protestant Church which remained haunted by its Catholic past.” He means specifically that, while repudiating the ecclesiastical structure that organized the English church under the bishop of Rome, the Reformation did not successfully abolish the Catholic devotional and worship practices that centered on a sacramental view of the Christian life.

The Roman Catholic sacramental system in pre-Reformation England was as central to the faith of the English people as it was anywhere else in Europe. It consisted of the seven sacraments of baptism, confirmation, marriage, holy orders, penance, Eucharist, and extreme unction. In addition, the Church recognized (either

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officially or unofficially) any number of rituals and practices that were seen as having some sacramental power even if they did not rise to the status of the sacraments themselves; hence the term “sacramentals.” The doctrine underlying this system served as the foundation of much of Catholic ecclesiology: its pastoral care, its view of priestly authority, its theology of worship, and its ecclesiastical hierarchy. Indeed, the centrality and importance of the sacraments explains why Martin Luther’s attack on the Church’s sacramental doctrine in 1520 through his treatise, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, was seen as such a ground-shaking event. The threat Luther’s treatise represented to English religious life in particular is reflected in the response of the English sovereign, King Henry VIII, who published the *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* (or *Defense of the Seven Sacraments*) in 1521 and thereby earned the title “defensor fidei” from Pope Leo X. Insofar as the king represented the collective views of his people, Luther’s attack was clearly received as an attack on the Christian faith itself.

The king’s response to Luther does, in fact, serve as a useful expression of the centrality of the sacraments in English religion prior to the Reformation and is a

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5 Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, 297-301. The concept of sacramentals is inclusive of an eclectic body of practices arising in the medieval period that could include the anointing of kings, prayers for the dead, almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage, and the churching of women, among others.

6 The English translation of Luther’s treatise is technically *The Pagan Servitude of the Church*, but it is more commonly known as *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. See John Dillemberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 249-359.
benchmark by which to measure events thereafter. Following a point-by-point critique of Luther’s treatment of the Lord’s Supper in the German reformer’s own work, Henry exhorts his reader to recognize the danger that Luther’s teaching represents, writing, “These are the excellent Promises of Luther; this is that spacious Liberty he promises to all those who forsake the Catholic Church to follow him, viz. That they may be freed at last from the Use and Faith of the Sacrament!” It would only be 12 years before Henry’s minister Thomas Cromwell began orchestrating the series of parliamentary acts that took the Church of England out of the Roman Catholic fold and set Henry up as its supreme head. But in 1521, Henry’s effort was recognized as significant in the struggle against the nascent German Reformation as shown by the papal praise both the treatise and its author received. The English king’s treatise carries a degree of significance as well in that it shows something of the way the sacraments themselves (and particularly the Eucharist) were

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7 While the nature of the authorship of the Assertio has been under question almost since it was published, it is not a question of significant importance for my use of it here. For those interested in the issue of authorship (and particularly on the possible role of Thomas More), see J. Manwaring Brown, “Henry VIII’s Book, ’Assertio Septem Sacramentorum,’ and the Royal Title of ‘Defender of the Faith,’” Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 8 (1880): 242-261, and Richard C. Marius, “Henry VIII, Thomas More, and the Bishop of Rome,” Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies 10 (1978): 89-107. Both articles offer a lucid overview of the various options regarding the authorship of the Assertio.

8 Henry VIII, Assertio Septem Sacramentorum, or Defence of the Seven Sacraments, ed. Louis O’Donovan (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1908), 296.

9 These included the Act in Restraint of Appeals (1533), the Act in Restraint of Anates (1534), the Dispensations Acts (1534), the Act for Submission of the Clergy (1534), the Succession Act (1534), the Act of Supremacy (1534), the Act for First Fruits and Tithes (1534), and the Treason Act (1534). See Dickens, The English Reformation, 137-145.

10 The irony that the defensor fidei of the Roman Catholic Church would take the entire kingdom of England out of communion with the bishop of Rome is only increased by the fact that the Assertio Septem Sacramentorum is begun not with the sacraments themselves but with a robust defense of papal authority. See Henry VIII, Assertio Septem Sacramentorum, 192-209.
understood as the grammar of the Christian faith in pre-Reformation England. In opening his defense, Henry identifies Martin Luther as the one “who now begins to murder and destroy the Sacraments,” and in the same breath refers to Luther’s “fight ... against our most holy Faith.”¹¹ And while it is clear that Henry’s notion of the Christian faith is more expansive than the seven sacraments, it is the sacraments that are the monarch’s pervasive concern and that which he identifies as primarily threatened by Luther.¹² This is evident, for instance, in the crescendo of critique that Henry reaches near the end of the Assertio, after he has finished a final defense of the sacrament of extreme unction. He charges that Luther “so undervalues the Customs, Doctrine, Manners, Laws, Decrees, and Faith of the Church ... that he almost denies there is any such Thing as a Church.”¹³ The customs, doctrine, and faith to which Henry is alluding are clearly those related to the sacraments; and for the king, to deny these is to deny the church herself. To say that the sacraments were the grammar of the Christian faith for Henry and for the English people is simply to recognize the central importance of the church’s sacramental ministrations – and particularly that of the Eucharist (which Henry identifies as that “from which the Sanctity of all the other Sacraments flows”¹⁴) – for how English men and women made sense of their world, their lives, and their experience of the divine.

¹² Other elements of Henry VIII’s defense of the Catholic faith include a defense of papal authority and the attendant commitment to the unity of the Catholic faith under the papacy in two chapters prefacing the work, as well as criticisms of Luther’s biblical exegesis and use of the early church fathers – two themes that appear repeatedly throughout the Assertio.
¹³ Henry VIII, Assertio Septem Sacramentorum, 454.
¹⁴ Henry VIII, Assertio Septem Sacramentorum, 450-452.
At issue when examining the development of a Church of England distinctly Protestant in its doctrinal self-understanding later in the 16th century are questions related to soteriology. Theological developments of a Protestant character typically came later in England than they did in Lutheran and Reformed areas on the European continent. The English also tended to take their cues from the continent – first from Lutheran influences in the 1530s, and then from Reformed theology in the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I. There were, of course, significant differences in the way various continental theologians expressed dissent from the Catholic doctrine of the sacraments. But there were also basic points of agreement that they shared and that led all of them to reject the doctrine and practice of the Roman Church.\footnote{In his major survey of the European Reformation, the historian Euan Cameron bases his analysis of Protestant commitments around soteriology, scriptural authority, ecclesiology, and sacramental theology on the fundamental points of agreement among reformers, even as he notes significant differences between various Lutheran and Reformed theologians where they occur. See Euan Cameron, \textit{The European Reformation} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 111-167.} These issues of soteriology for the Protestants included the doctrine of justification by faith (including the imputation of Christ’s “alien” righteousness as the basis for the believer’s acceptance before God), the authority of Scripture (over against that of the Roman Church’s magisterium), a view of the true church as invisible and constituted by the elect, and a belief that the only true sacraments were those of baptism and Eucharist.\footnote{Here we would want to bracket out the so-called “Radical Reformation” from the Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican branches. Clearly, the radical reformers had theological concerns that set them apart on questions such as ministry, ecclesiology, and sacramental theology.} Related to these views was a dramatic alteration in the theology of ministry on the part of the reformers, which Euan
Cameron characterizes as a shift from “sacrificing priests to preaching ministers.”\textsuperscript{17} The reformers rejected the belief that clerical mediation was needed to make the gifts of God available to the faithful. Their endorsement of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers saw all Christians as equals in God’s sight; there were naturally to be certain set-apart clerical offices in the church as reflected in the New Testament, but these offices were primarily functional in nature and their authority was grounded in the community itself rather than in some qualitative change in status conferred by ordination.\textsuperscript{18}

A central part of the function of the Protestant minister was to be the preaching of the word of God, just as a part was also to be the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It was the preaching of the word and the faith given by the hearing of it (\textit{fides ex auditu}) that the reformers emphasized, however, and this commitment was reflected in their revised view of the sacraments. The change is shown in bold relief in Eucharistic theology in particular: from the Catholic belief in the power of the mass ritual and the transubstantiated elements on the altar, the reformers adopted the view of a sacrament as “a promise of God, to which a sign was added.”\textsuperscript{19} The reformers’ theology of the word placed the word of God as the efficacious force at work in both preaching and sacraments. And the view of faith as a gift received through the word meant that the clerically

\textsuperscript{17} Cameron, \textit{The European Reformation}, 148.
\textsuperscript{18} Cameron, \textit{The European Reformation}, 148-151.
\textsuperscript{19} Cameron, \textit{The European Reformation}, 157. Obviously, the reformers’ views of the Eucharist were one of the most contested of Protestant doctrinal developments in the 16th century, and my all too brief comments here are not intended to suggest that the theologians of the period were without very significant differences in their Eucharistic understandings.
mediated sacramental system of medieval Catholicism was decisively undercut; under the theological revisionism of Lutheran and Reformed thinkers, forever gone was the view of “the sacraments as the exclusive channels of grace and ... the prerogatives of the clergy, by whom the sacraments are exclusively administered.”

The reformers wanted to maintain an important place for the sacraments, but only under certain conditions seen to be in harmony with the particular kind of biblical theology out of which they were working. Their reforms in this area were intended to disabuse the faithful of the belief in the sacraments having some type of magical power dispensable by priests who were themselves on a different spiritual plane from the laity. In place of this, they supplied a new theology of the word of God, where sacraments were visible signs intended to build up a faith that came primarily through an encounter with the preached word. This shift also served to locate the sacraments more as the practices of the community, even as it maintained a kind of supervisory role in their administration by educated ministers.

20 The phrase is Roland H. Bainton’s, from his classic work, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 137.
21 For the seminal role of Martin Luther in advancing this notion, and for Luther’s view of the sacraments as visible expressions of the word, see John Theodore Mueller, Notes on Luther’s Conception of the Word of God as the Means of Grace,” Concordia Theological Monthly 20:8 (August 1949): 580-600; Bainton, Here I Stand, 224-225; and Pelikan, “The Theology of the Means of Grace,” 124-147.
22 On the English scene, the anticlericalism and embrace of a doctrine of priesthood of all believers was particularly emphasized by the “godly” or Puritan party, discussed in connection with the means of grace below. This strain of belief and practice at least partially explains such aspects of Puritan religiosity as the widespread devotional manuals of Puritan practical divinity, the attention to “family religion,” and the Puritan conception of the means of grace themselves. See, e.g., Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, “Practical Divinity and Spirituality,” in The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism, ed. John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 191-205. For a view on the way in which parents took on the symbolic role formerly occupied by priests in Puritan family religion,
Events moved more slowly in England prior to the 1547 death of Henry VIII, who was in most respects a theological conservative. Yet change did eventually come, and the Protestant doctrinal positions embraced by reformers on the English scene mirrored those held by their continental counterparts. Given the pervasive quality of the sacraments in the English Church up through the reign of Henry VIII, we might then ask ourselves what happens to a people’s religious understanding when the system out of which it has been constituted is rejected. The stock Protestant position – that salvation comes by faith – finds articulation in the homily on salvation in the 1547 edition of the Book of Homilies. The Homilies were, however, only the official position of the church; they do not necessarily reflect actual views on the parish level. And in any event, the differing religious proclivities of Henry VIII and his three children meant that a wide number of ecclesiastical and doctrinal issues would not be settled until the third of those three to reign – Elizabeth I – effected a settlement through parliamentary action followed by a lengthy and stable reign. It was just such a reign that would allow public opinion to slowly conform to ecclesiastical policy over time. Even if the Reformation in England was never really completed (as some revisionist historians argue), we can see how the religious policies of the (national) Catholic Henry VIII, the evangelically Protestant Edward VI, the (Roman) Catholic Mary I, and the moderate Protestant

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Elizabeth I made for a situation of acute upheaval from the time of Cromwell’s legislation in the 1530s to the time of the Elizabethan Settlement in 1559/60 and thereafter.24

III. “Certain Bodily Exercises” and a Sacramental Grammar in Transition

Real development of sacramental doctrine in a Protestant direction only took shape after Henry VIII’s death, as the Protestant bishops and theologians under Edward VI began to grapple with how to talk about the sacramental aspects of the Christian faith in a situation where the full sacramental system itself was no longer intact. It is to the writing of ecclesiastical figures under Edward, as well as Elizabeth I, that we must turn to see the idiosyncratic way that the theological understanding of the English Church would emerge toward a position that explicitly maintained the Protestant sola fide doctrine while simultaneously embracing a sacramental (or quasi-sacramental) view of salvation as mediated through particular practices of the Christian life.

Much like Henry VIII’s Assertio Septem Sacramentorum, the English Protestants of the 1550s and beyond were not shy about adopting a polemical style

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24 Christopher Haigh characterizes the reigns of Henry VIII and his three children as corresponding to three distinct political reformations, each with its own character and aims. Added to these is the evangelical (or religious) reformation in thought and practice which began in its most embryonic form among intellectuals in the 1520s, which spread to other classes of people over time, and which – in Haigh’s view – was never completed. See Haigh, English Reformations, 12-21. In the period covering Henry VIII’s later reign, it is important to remember that the king remained by and large a Catholic in doctrine if not in political allegiance, as demonstrated by the passage of the Act of the Six Articles in 1539 that halted the Protestant-leaning doctrinal reforms favored by Henry’s chief minister Thomas Cromwell and archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer. The Act of the Six Articles can be found in Gerald Bray, ed., Documents of the English Reformation (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 222-232.
in order to insert what they understood as the English point of view into the ongoing theological debates of the age. They also wrote in other genres as well, as the developing Protestant ecclesiastical life of the realm called for various kinds of religious literature in order to provide the necessary resources for worship and devotional life as well as for public theology. We will begin by looking at the way in which typically Protestant language about faith as the condition for salvation came to be placed at the heart of the Church of England’s doctrinal summaries. Following that, two texts from early in the Elizabethan period will occupy our attention, one of them polemical in tone and the other devotional – John Jewel’s *Apologie of the Church of England* and John Ponet’s *Short Catechisme*.

Edward VI’s accession as a minor under Protestant-minded advisors (first Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset, and from 1549 John Dudley, duke of Northumberland) led to a sea change where conservative bishops were forced from office and replaced by reform-minded Protestants. Cranmer’s continuing leadership as archbishop allowed him to oversee the publication of the first two editions of the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1549 and 1552. A part of this liturgical and doctrinal change involved a transformation of the Church of England’s official doctrine of the sacraments so that it conformed to the magisterial Protestant view of just the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. This doctrine is found in the 39 Articles, where Article 25 (“Of the Sacraments”) states in no uncertain terms that “baptism and the supper of the Lord” are the only two acts that can properly be
understood as sacraments. Concomitant with the diminution of the role of the sacraments was a characteristically Protestant emphasis on the doctrine of justification by faith. Here the English Church was positioning itself with its continental counterparts. The *Book of Homilies*’ homily on justification summarizes the emergent Protestant soteriology well enough when it refers to the Pauline doctrine of justification in Romans as containing:

... three things, which must go together in our justification: upon God’s part, his great mercy and grace; upon Christ’s part, justice, that is, the satisfaction of God’s justice, or the price of our redemption by the offering of his body and shedding of his blood with fulfilling of the law perfectly and throughly; and upon our part, true and lively faith in the merits of Jesus Christ; which yet is not ours but by God’s working in us.

These three elements – what the homily later summarizes as “God’s mercy, Christ’s justice, and a true and a lively faith” – ably capture the Protestant emphasis on salvation *sola fide*. What they do not include is, clearly, just as significant: any attention to the efficacy of the sacraments. That the two sacraments of baptism and

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25 Article 25 goes on to state, “Those five, commonly called Sacraments, that is to say, Conformation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures: but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God” (Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 680). The 39 Articles further define the two sacraments in Article 27 (“Of Baptism”) and Article 28 (“Of the Lord’s Supper”). The Articles of Religion were originally 42 in number and were approved as such in 1553. The death of Edward VI and the accession of the Roman Catholic Mary I meant that they were quickly discarded, however, and they were only revived in 1563 in the reign of Elizabeth I. They received their final form in 1571. On the development of the Articles of Religion, see Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 279-282; Edgar C.S. Gibson, *The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, 9th ed. (London: Mewthuen & Co., 1915); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 517-542 and 621-622.

Eucharist continued to be seen as important is clear; but the broad view of salvation had now become a word-centered reality that was to be received directly by faith. There is no attention to the sacramental character of other practices. And the theological chasm that was widening in the English Church during this period between Catholic and Protestant conceptions of soteriology is only underscored in the 39 Articles, which took shape during the period. Article 11, which lays out the fundamental *sola fide* Protestant position, states, “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deserving.”27 Likewise, Article 28 on the Lord’s Supper stipulates, “The mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper, is Faith.”28 The sacramental character of the Church is present but in a reduced form, and it is framed in the larger Protestant context of justification by faith.

The reformation of sacramental theology and practice as contained in the Church of England’s official doctrine is reflected in various writings of Protestant theologians in England under Edward VI and Elizabeth I. Within these theologians’ writings it is possible to discern the way in which they were attempting to frame the manner in which grace is mediated in the newly Protestant framework. Any positive reference to the Roman Catholic doctrine of seven sacraments is, of course, absent. And in their largely apologetic tone, they are often phrased in such a way to state specifically what should be believed about the sacraments that remain. Yet it is also

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in such texts that we see the residual traces of Catholic piety that MacCulloch describes.

John Jewel’s landmark *Apologie of the Church of England* (1562) published early in Elizabeth’s reign addresses the character of the sacraments in Jewel’s view. With an insistent citation of early church fathers to demonstrate the Church of England’s conformity with the primitive church, Jewel lays out his sacramental theology:

> [W]e allow the sacraments of the Church, that is to say, certain holy signs and ceremonies, which Christ would we should use, that by them he might set before our eyes the mysteries of our salvation, and might more strongly confirm our faith which we have in his blood, and might seal his grace in our hearts. And those sacraments, together with Tertullian, Origen, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, Basil, Dionysius, and other Catholic fathers, do we call figures, signs, marks or badges, prints, remembrances, and memories. And we make no doubt, together with the same doctors, to say that those be certain visible words, seals of righteousness, tokens of grace; and do expressly pronounce that in the Lord’s Supper there is truly given unto the believing the body and blood of the Lord, the flesh of the Son of God, which quickeneth our souls, the meat that cometh from above, the food of immortality, grace, truth, and life; and the Supper to be the communion of the body and blood of Christ, by the partaking whereof we be revived, we be strengthened, and be fed unto immortality, and whereby we are joined, united, and incorporate unto Christ, that we may abide in him, and he in us.”

This statement of Jewel begins as a general statement of the theological significance of the sacraments, but it clearly morphs into a statement primarily about the

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Eucharist. Following it in the Apologie, Jewel states that the Church of England specifically asserts two sacraments, and that these are baptism and the Eucharist.

Turning his attention to baptism, Jewel affirms the following:

We say that Baptism is a sacrament of the remission of sins, and of that washing, which we have in the blood of Christ; and that no person, which will profess Christ’s name, ought to be restrained or kept back therefrom; no, not the very babes of Christians; forsomuch as they be born in sin, and do pertain unto the people of God.30

Then he moves on to speak specifically about Holy Communion, emphasizing such Protestant convictions as the need to receive the Lord’s Supper frequently, the propriety of giving Communion in both kinds to the laity, the idolatrous character of venerating the sacrament, and the theological error involved in saying masses for the dead.31

Jewel’s presentation of sacramental theology is important not only for what it says positively, but also for what it leaves out. Regarding the latter point, the full Roman Catholic sacramental system is gone, and with it the ritual way in which grace is received in the Christian life through the priestly rites covering the whole of life from cradle to grave. There is, however, real importance given to the sacraments that remain. This comes particularly through the string of attributes he assigns to the Lord’s Supper: marks or badges, visible words, seals of righteousness, tokens of grace, etc. Jewel does not hold to a bare memorialism in terms of the significance of the sacraments; in fact, he presents a version of what can be considered a doctrine of “spiritual presence,” which is most closely aligned with the Reformed

30 Jewel, Apologie of the Church of England, 27.
understanding of the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{32} We might see Jewel’s account here as something of a sacramental theology in transition for the broader Church of England of which he was a part. For instance, he writes, “We affirm that bread and wine are holy and heavenly mysteries of the body and blood of Christ, and that by them Christ himself, being the true bread of eternal life, is so presently given unto us, as that by faith we verily receive his body and blood.”\textsuperscript{33} A later statement echoes and reinforces this view:

For we affirm that Christ doth truly and presently give his own self in his Sacraments; in Baptism, that we may put him on; and in his Supper, that we may eat him by faith and spirit, and may have everlasting life by his cross and blood. And we say not, this is done slightly and coldly, but effectually and truly. For, although we do not touch the body of Christ with teeth and mouth, yet we hold him fast, and eat him by faith, by understanding, and by the spirit ... For Christ himself altogether is so offered and given us in these mysteries, that we may certainly know we be flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bones; and that Christ continueth in us, and we in him.\textsuperscript{34}

As something of an early doctrinal statement for the Elizabethan church, Jewel’s \textit{Apologie} thus embodies Protestant convictions about the sacraments that conform to the continental models (Reformed, in particular) that were by this point heavily influential on the institutional Church of England. The notion of the sacraments as instrumental practices undergirding faith is key, and as Jewel indicates, their power for that work is best described as coming “by faith and spirit.” This is a point Calvin


\textsuperscript{33} Jewel, \textit{Apologie of the Church of England}, 28.

\textsuperscript{34} Jewel, \textit{Apologie of the Church of England}, 29.
takes care to emphasize in the *Institutes*, the sacraments are enactments of the word for the purpose of building up faith and are effective by the power of the Spirit.\(^{35}\)

Given that the theology of the English Church was, in the main, moving in such a solidly Protestant direction, it is perhaps surprising that it also retained a significantly Catholic element that attempted to see the mediation of grace in a more multivalent way. For a view to the way in which grace can be received beyond the two sacraments, we can turn to a slightly earlier Protestant theologian of the period, John Ponet. Ponet was appointed as bishop of Rochester in 1550 and was translated to the bishopric of Winchester the following year. His *Short Catechisme* appeared a decade earlier than Jewel’s *Apologie* (Latin edition, 1552; English edition, 1553), and it stands as the first in a series of English catechisms that built upon the brief catechism in the first Prayer Book and that led ultimately to the inclusion of an expanded catechism in the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1604. The Edwardian and Elizabethan Prayer Book Catechisms each included sections on the creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer; in Ponet’s catechism, a section on the sacraments was included and it was this element that would be added to the Prayer Book after the accession of James I in 1603.\(^{36}\)


\(^{36}\) For the text of the catechisms in the Edwardian and Elizabethan editions of the *Book of Common Prayer*, see the relevant sections of Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*. I use “Catechism” to denote the material that became “official” through inclusion in the Prayer Book, whereas “catechism” will describe the publications of individuals such as Ponet and, later, Alexander Nowell. The additions made to the Prayer Book Catechism and its relationship to the language of the means of grace is discussed below.
Ponet’s *Catechisme* is written in the manner of a dialogue between a master and student, and in it the sacraments are put in a wider framework of Christian practice. In this technique, we can begin to see a tendency to stretch the newly Protestant sacramental theology of the English Church so that it can encompass something of the older Catholic devotional pattern:

*Master.* What be the parts of that outward serving God, which thou saidest even now did stand in certain bodily exercises, which are also tokens of the inward serving him?

*Scholar.* First, to teach and hear the learning of the gospel; then the pure and natural use of the ceremonies and sacraments; last of all prayer made unto God by Christ, and in the name of Christ, which without fail obtaineth the Holy Ghost, the most assured author of all true serving God, and upright religion.37

The three components that Bishop Ponet lists here are significant: to teach and hear the learning of the gospel; the pure and natural use of the ceremonies and sacraments; and prayer made unto God by Christ. In Ponet’s description, the sacraments fit within a larger framework of “exercises in the service of God” that serve as “tokens and witnesses of ... assured trust.” Within his particular set of examples, there are both Catholic and Protestant elements present: the sacraments are there, but now they are meant to include only baptism and the Lord’s Supper; the example of “the ceremonies” is ambiguous but surely has connections with the still highly liturgical worship of the *Book of Common Prayer*; the “learning of the gospel” is, of course, a thoroughly Protestant statement grounded in the Protestant theology of the word of God; and “prayer made unto God by Christ” echoes the older

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(and familiar) Catholic devotional life without reference to the penitential system that had by this time been rejected.

Notable also in Ponet’s description is the phrase, “certain bodily exercises, which are also tokens of the inward serving him.” This phrasing seems to echo the standard Augustinian description of a sacrament as a visible sign (or “token”) of an invisible reality, though Ponet is applying his version of the formula to practices that extend beyond the Protestant doctrine of the sacraments. In opening the possibility for the mediation of grace in specific acts of devotion and worship that are not limited to the sacraments, a way is opened to the development of a new form of sacramental language. The English Church of Ponet and later Jewel is self-consciously Protestant, complete with a doctrine of salvation sola fide. But it has not (as MacCulloch argues) rejected all of the old Catholic devotional life, and in Ponet’s somewhat awkward language there is an older concept straining to find new language in which it can be expressed.

As a side note, it can be pointed out that the kind of development in language that is visible in the work of Ponet was echoed in later theological writing as well. The following section will examine that development as it finds expression in a new category called the “means of grace” in the writing, particularly, of Puritan authors. Yet there were other options available as well, one of which can be found in a High Church theologian such as John Donne (1572-1631). Donne was a noted poet and popular preacher under the early Stuart monarchs who held the prestigious position of dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London from 1621-1631. In his preaching, Donne insists on the need for a real, inward transformation by grace as the mark of
victory over sin in the life of the Christian believer rather than bare conformity to
outward expressions of religion. He refers to the progressive healing from sin by
way of a “continuall succession of Grace, working effectually to present Habits of
religious acts, and constituting a holy purpose of persevering in them.” The
language used – with references to grace working in tandem with “Habits of
religious acts” that serve to produce a “holy purpose persevering in them” – has
echoes with Ponet’s catechism. His language is anything but memorable, though, and
it seems as if Donne (a master of the English language, after all!) is straining to
express a concept for which he has no theological category.

IV. The Emergence of the Means of Grace in Puritan Devotional Literature

In reading such phrases as “certain bodily exercises” and “habits of religious
acts,” one gets the distinct sense that the authors in question are straining to
describe a concept for which there is no settled language. So it is significant that the
language of the means of grace was emerging in the English tongue during just the
period that these other, more awkward expressions were tumbling off the pens of
men like John Ponet and John Donne. In the beginning, “means of grace” (or, as it
was often written, “meanes of grace”) had no more pride of place than any other
phrase that sought to describe what sacramental language once had. It appeared at
first sporadically, but after a while it became more common. Two 17th century
developments served to push the “means of grace” from being a helpful turn of

38 The passage from Donne’s sermon is quoted from William H. Shontz, “Anglican Influence
phrase to something approaching a doctrinal category, however. These developments included the attachment of specific Christian practices with the means of grace on the one hand, and the inclusion of the phrase in the *Book of Common Prayer* on the other.

The first place the phrase “means of grace” seems to appear in print is, ironically, from the pen of the Jesuit priest Robert Parsons (1546-1610), who spent a good portion of his life fighting for the recovery of Roman Catholicism in England.\(^{39}\) In 1585, Parsons published a devotional manual entitled, *A Christian Directorie, Guiding Men to Their Salvation*. The eleventh chapter of Parsons’ *Directorie* is entitled, “Of the Greate and Severe Paines and Pvnishmentes Appointed by God for sinners after this life,” and he begins it by stating, “AMONGST all the meanes which God vseth towards the children of men in this life, to moue them to the resolution, wherof I entreate; the strógest & most forcible is, the consideratió of punishmentes prepared by him for rebellious sinners and transgressours of his cómaundeméts.”\(^{40}\) He goes on to write:

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\(^{39}\) It is, at least, in Robert Parsons that I have found the earliest example of the phrase in English. Searches in the database *Early English Books Online* indicate that Parsons should receive such an attribution. There is a sizable body of secondary scholarship on the means of grace in both the Puritan and Wesleyan traditions (much of which is represented in the bibliography for the present work), but none of it cites a use of “mean[es] of grace” prior to about 1600. As noted in p.64, n.52 below, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites no example earlier than William Prynne in 1630.

\(^{40}\) Robert Parsons, *A Christian Directorie Guiding Men To Their Salvation* (New Edition, 1585), 444-445. Parsons offers little other publication information besides the date in this edition of the *Christian Directorie*. He does indicate that it is a “new edition” and in the preface he sharply criticizing the “foule and false dealing” of a man named “Edm[und] Buny” who had published an earlier edition of the book about which Parsons has many objections. The digital facsimile of Parsons’ 1585 edition is accessible through the online database *Early English Books Online*. 

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A third consideration to induce vs to the vnderstáding of the greatnes of Gods punishmentes in general; may be his maruailous patience, and long suffering of sinners in this life. As that (for example) he permitteth diuers mé from sinne to sinne, from day to day, from yeare to yeare, fró age to age, to liue continually in the contempt of his Maiestie, and transgression of his commaundementes; refusing al persuasions, allurementes, good inspirations, or other **means of grace** and fauor, that his merciful goodnes can devise to offer for their amendment. And what man in the world could suffer this?\(^{41}\)

It is the only time in the entire work that “means of grace” is used, and the way it is used in this place would suggest that Parsons is employing it as a common, rather than a proper, noun. That is, the phrase comes at the end of a series – “persuasions, allurementes, good inspirations, or other means of grace and fauor.” And there is no indication that Parsons understands the phrase as denoting specific practices. But use it he does, and there is no indication of the phrase appearing earlier in the 16th century in print than in this instance.

The example of the Catholic Parsons notwithstanding, it would be the “godly” within the Church of England, or Puritans, who rendered “means of grace” into something of a reified doctrinal category.\(^{42}\) Puritan counsels about the use of the means of grace developed in the late 16th and early 17th centuries as a part of the

\(^{41}\) Parsons, *A Christian Directorie*, 448. Bold print added on the phrase, “means of grace.” Otherwise, spelling and punctuation have been left as original to the 1585 edition. Note the use of the accent over some vowels, which implies a following consonant (e.g., “fró” for “from”). This convention is characteristic of this printed edition.

\(^{42}\) There is in the historical study of early modern England some debate over exactly what the group commonly known as Puritans should be called (as well as to what extent it can be known as a cohesive movement within the Church of England). The name “Puritan” dates from about the year 1565, although it would be decades later that the moniker became the most commonly used one to describe the group in question. Other appellations included “the godly,” “precisians” or “precise men,” “true gospellers,” “vain glorious men,” and “unspotted brethren,” among others. On the development of the name and the class of people with which it was associated, see Patrick Collinson, *English Puritanism* (London: The Historical Association, 1983), 7-11; and Patrick Collinson, “Antipuritanism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, 19-33.
Puritan devotional literature meant to support the Christian life through personal piety, family religion, and congregational participation.\(^{43}\) The Puritans’ use and development of the term, beginning with William Perkins and Richard Greenham in the 1590s and extending well into the 17th century, took it from common to proper in form. And unlike Parsons (whose employment of it seems incidental), various Puritan divines began to use either “means of grace” or “meanes of grace” in such a way that they appear to be developing a sacramental or quasi-sacramental vocabulary to describe a set of practices broader than the sacraments themselves. In that sense, they were developing a language to speak in an expansively sacramental way that had been absent from the English theological lexicon since the reign of Edward VI.

William Perkins (1558-1602) is an early example of a Puritan divine who uses the language of the means of grace in a more self-conscious way in his popular manual of devotion, *A Golden Chaine*.\(^{44}\) Arguing against a doctrine of “universal

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\(^{44}\) Perkins is one of the best studied of the early Puritan divines in recent decades. In addition to the numerous studies of Puritan practical divinity, casuistry, and family religion that include considerations of Perkins as an exemplar of this tradition, see Louis B. Wright, “William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of Practical Divinity,” *Huntington Library Quarterly*
saving grace,” Perkins suggests that such a view “breeds a carelessness in the use of the means of grace, the word and Sacraments.” Here, the phrase in question is set in apposition to the “word and Sacraments,” which suggests that Perkins has in mind something particular when he uses it. Perkins, in a sense, marks the point at which we can consider the transition of the means of grace from a common to a proper noun; it is something more than a turn of phrase in Perkins exactly because he supplies it with specific content. It is sacramental, because it includes the sacraments themselves. But it is broader than the sacraments as well, in that Perkins includes “the word” as included in it.

The notion that it was in Puritan thought that the means of grace finds its first real development as a doctrinal category is further supported by its use in a contemporary of Perkins, Richard Greenham (c.1540-1594). In a work of Puritan practical divinity called Godly Instructions for the Due Examination and Direction of All Men, Greenham likewise refers to the “means of grace” and summarizes them as “to heare the word, to use prayer, Sacraments, and admonition.” He then counsels


45 William Perkins, A golden Chaine: or, The Description of Theologie, containing the order of the causes of Salutation and Damnation, according to Gods word (Cambridge, 1600), 477.


47 Richard Greenham, Godly Instructions for the Due Examination and Direction of All Men, to the attaining and retaining of faith and a good conscience, in Henry Holland, ed., The Workes
his reader that "we drawe neere to God by meanes." Elaborating on what he understands the “meanes” to be, Greenham writes

The **first meanes is prayer**, we goe to God by prayer, not by paces: Prayer is a sacrifice to God, a refuge to man, a whip for the diuell. The **second meanes is hearing of his word**: if we will haue God heare our prayers, it is meete God should claime thus much of vs, that we shulde heare his word ... The **third meane whereby we draw neere to God, is by the Sacraments**. The word it selfe is an audible word, the Sacrament is a visible word; the commandement is flat, 1. Cor. 11. *Doe this.*

There is something of a concern in Greenham that his readers understand the means of grace in their proper context. He insists that we “apply our meanes to God, and not put our trust in them, but in God.” Despite the warning, it is clear that he is attempting to establish a category whereby faithful (Protestant) Christians can understand the mediation of grace in practical Christian living. The overarching doctrinal point is that we are saved via faith rather than works for Greenham, but that faith is nurtured in us through practices of worship and devotion: hence the telling statement that we come to know God “by prayer, not by paces.”

The connection with John Ponet’s earlier mention of “certain bodily exercises” in the *Short Catechisme* is remarkable in the close similarity between the types of practices Ponet cites with those of these later Puritan divines. They can be viewed in parallel in the chart below:

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50 Greenham, *Godly Instructions for the Dye Examination and Direction of Al Men*, 674.
Table 2.1 - Early Citations of the Means of Grace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>WORK</th>
<th>OPERATIVE PHRASE</th>
<th>SUB-CATEGORIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Ponet</td>
<td><em>Short Catechism</em></td>
<td>&quot;certain bodily exercises&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;to teach and hear the learning of the gospel&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;the ... use of the ceremonies and sacraments&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;prayer made unto God by Christ&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Perkins</td>
<td><em>A Golden Chaine</em></td>
<td>&quot;means of grace&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;the word and Sacraments&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Greenham</td>
<td><em>Godly Instructions</em></td>
<td>&quot;means of grace&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;prayer&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;hearing of his word&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;the Sacraments&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The idiom of these writers is unmistakably Protestant. They place a high value on the role of the word. Their characterization of the means of grace is not, however, identical with a Protestant theology of the word of God that places all other considerations subsidiary to that one category. The development is clearly toward a set of complementary practices, of which the word of God is one alongside others. And the new term – “means of grace” – is beginning to act as a genus of which there are discernible species examples.

If Perkins and Greenham represent the beginning of a tradition that explicitly connected “means of grace” with a certain set of devotional and worship acts, the Puritan writers who followed them in the 17th century continued that tradition and established it within the theological vocabulary of the Church of England.51 This is not to suggest that the language of “means” or “meanes” was not used in the much broader context of English religious literature – both Puritan and “Anglican” (or

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51 See, e.g., Lovelace, “Puritan Spirituality: The Search for a Rightly Reformed Church,” 294-323. Lovelace notes the presence of the concept of the means of grace in 17th-century Puritan writers in the context of a larger examination of Puritan spirituality.
High Church and moderate) – during the same period.\(^{52}\) It is, however, to suggest that it was within the realm of Puritan devotional literature (i.e., “practical divinity”) that the specific language of the means of grace began to take on greater substance as something of a doctrinal category related to the mediation of grace through participation in a set of worship and devotional practices constitutive of the faithful Christian life. This development supplied language and content for the sacramental aspect of English religious life, which had undergone severe changes related to the reduction of the full Catholic sacramental system to the Protestant doctrine of faith as given by the word (and baptism and Eucharist as expressions of that word) from the Edwardian period forward. In the process, it created a distinctly English sacramental vocabulary that eventually found its way into the Church of England’s official liturgy, the *Book of Common Prayer*.

V. The Means of Grace in the *Book of Common Prayer*

Curiously, the language of the means of grace does not seem to appear with any prevalence in theologians who represent the other main theological option within the Church of England throughout the first half of the 17th century. There is

\(^{52}\) The aforementioned John Donne, a High Church exemplar from the first third of the 17th century, offers an example of this point. In Donne’s published sermons, he uses an abundance of “means” or “meanes” language, though he does not use the phrase “means/meanes of grace.” See e.g., John Donne, *Fifty Sermons preached by that Learned and Reverend Divine, John Donne* (London: M.F., J. Marriot, and R. Royston, 1649). See also the entry for “mean” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* ([cited here from the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)]); note especially the etymology of the term “mean” and the word history for “means of grace” in definition 2d. Curiously, the earliest instance the *OED* lists for the theological use of “means of grace” is the Puritan William Prynne in 1630.
no tidy term to describe this group – “Arminian” is common but somewhat
misplaced; “Anglican” is useful insofar as it was this group that came to dominate
the Church of England after the Restoration, but it is still something of an
anachronism, as the term itself did not come into common use until the 19th
century; “High Churchmen” or “High Church party” are perhaps more accurate
terms but are nevertheless cumbersome and tend to collapse Laudians and
moderates of the first half of the 17th century into a single category.53 For the
present purpose, I will use “Anglican” for sake of ease, while noting that – like
“medieval” or “Renaissance” or even “Enlightenment” – it is a later term applied to a
historical period/group that was not used by the group itself.54

The influence of means of grace language in Puritan thought on the
institutional church can be seen in its appearance in the pages of the Book of
Common Prayer. While nothing like a “doctrine of the means of grace” ever found its
way into the Prayer Book, there are two significant places that some version of the
phrase did come to be inserted. And just as with the unplanned and gradual
development of means of grace language in individual writers of the period, the
Prayer Book examples show something of a developing tradition that took shape
over time.

53 Collinson has recently suggested “conformable Protestant” as an alternative, though I
hesitate to employ a term that appears so vague to the reader. See Collinson,
54 On the use of the term “Anglican” in the way I do so here, see John Walsh and Stephen
Taylor, “Introduction: the Church and Anglicanism in the ‘long’ eighteenth century,” in John
Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor, eds., The Church of England c.1689-c.1833: From
Toleration to Tractarianism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 51-60.
At the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558, a series of parliamentary acts re-established the Protestant Church of England that had existed under the reign of her brother Edward. A revised version of the Articles of Religion was confirmed in 1563 as the doctrinal foundation of the church (38 in number, which would reach the final number of 39 in the year 1571). The Book of Homilies was reaffirmed and a second volume was eventually produced to complement those that Cranmer had compiled in the 1540s. The Book of Common Prayer was also reinstated as the norm for worship and liturgy in the realm, with the second Edwardian Prayer Book of 1552 serving as the basis for the new 1559 edition.\textsuperscript{55}

The 1559 Prayer Book does not contain the language of the means of grace, however. The century following the issuance of the 1559 Elizabethan Prayer Book would change that, as Puritan agitation, the English Civil War, and the eventual Restoration influenced changes to the Prayer Book’s contents. In particular, the language of the means of grace came to appear in two specific places: the Catechism and the General Prayer of Thanksgiving following the Litany. While these two instances might seem rather meager, they do reflect the fact that the language of “means of grace” was becoming more widespread in the English theological and ecclesiastical lexicon in the late 16th and 17th centuries. As the means of grace was developing into a concept with real doctrinal content that was at once sacramental and yet more expansive than the sacraments proper, the influence of the Puritan

\textsuperscript{55} The constituent parts of the Elizabethan Settlement can be found in Dickens, The English Reformation, 349-361.
practical divinity where it appeared made its way, ironically, into the body of liturgy that so many Puritans rejected as “popish.”

The Catechism of the 1559 Prayer Book contains sections on the creed, the Ten Commandments, the two great commandments to love God and neighbor, and the Lord’s Prayer. It does not, however, contain any material on the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The brevity of the Catechism would be among the issues that the Puritan petitioners to James I would include in their requests for revision at the beginning of his reign in 1603. The immediate background for the expansion of the Prayer Book Catechism is the catechism developed by Alexander Nowell (c.1507-1602), dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral under Elizabeth I. Nowell’s catechism of 1570 includes a teaching section on the sacraments that is lacking in the official Catechism of previous editions of the Book of Common Prayer. In particular, Nowell’s work contains the following in its section on the sacraments:

M. Now having ended our treating of the law of God, of the Creed, or Christian confession, and also of prayer and of thanksgiving, it resteth last of all to speak of the sacraments and divine mysteries, which alway have prayer and thanksgiving joined unto them. Tell me, therefore, what is a sacrament?

S. It is an outward testifying of God’s good-will and bountifulness toward us, through Christ by a visible sign representing an invisible and spiritual grace, by which the promises of God touching forgiveness of sins and eternal

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57 For an analysis of Nowell’s catechism that includes an examination of Nowell’s dependence on the earlier catechisms of both John Ponet and John Calvin, see William P. Haugaard, “John Calvin and the Catechism of Alexander Nowell,” Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte 61:1 (January 1970):50-66. Haugaard shows Nowell’s greater reliance on Calvin than Ponet, though it is notable that Ponet’s earlier Short Catechisme did play a direct role in Nowell’s own work. As the article is concerned with the influences on Nowell, it makes only passing reference (54) to the impact of Nowell on the 1604 revision to the Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer discussed below.
salvation given through Christ, are, as it were sealed, and the truth of them is more certainly confirmed in our hearts.

M. Of how many parts consisteth a sacrament?

S. Of two parts: the outward element, or visible sign, and invisible grace.

M. Why would God so have us to use outward signs?
Surely we are not ended with mind and understanding so heavenly and divine, that the graces of God do appear clearly of themselves to us, as it were to angels. By this mean therefore God hath provided for our weakness, that we which are earthly and blind should in outward elements and figures, as it were in certain glasses, behold the heavenly graces which otherwise we were not able to see. And greatly for our behoof it is that God’s promises should be also presented to our senses, that they may be confirmed to our minds without doubting.58

Nowell’s catechism was made semi-official in the Church of England when the archbishops of Canterbury and York issued disciplinary canons in 1571 that included an order for schoolmasters to use the catechism in their instruction.59 Thus, when a more developed catechetical section for the Prayer Book was raised as one of the issues for which Puritans advocated at the Hampton Court Conference early in James I’s reign in January of 1604, it was Nowell’s catechism that served as the basis for enlarging the Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer.60 These changes can be seen in the Prayer Book Catechism, where the text as revised offers the following in the section on the sacraments:

58 Alexander Nowell, A Catechism, trans. Thomas Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1853), 205. The original Latin phrase in Nowell’s catechism reads, “hac eras ratione” for “by this mean therefore” in the relevant paragraph. See p.84 of the same edition. Note that the English translation is a later one and therefore the use of “mean” in translation represents an editorial decision made by the later translator.
59 Haugaard, “John Calvin and the Catechism of Alexander Nowell,” 54.
**Question.** HOW many Sacraments hath Christ ordained in his Church?

**Answer.** Two only, as generally necessary to salvation, that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord.

**Question.** What meanest thou by this word Sacrament?

**Answer.** I mean an **outward and visible sign** of an **inward and spiritual grace** given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof. ⁶¹

Note, then, that among other changes, the answer given to the meaning of “sacrament” includes that it is an outward sign of inward grace “given ... as a means whereby we receive the same.” Nowell’s singular “mean” (hac ratione in the original Latin) has become the collective plural “means.” The use of “means” in the plural in the 1604 revision of the Catechism may reflect a change in the wider usage of the English word itself. The *Oxford English Dictionary* claims that the use of “the plural form means with singular concord and meaning appears to have originated in the early 16th cent[ury].” and offers a citation from as early as 1512 with the use of “meanys” in this sense. The *OED’s* earliest citation of the phrase “means of grace,” however, is only in 1630 and we have already seen much earlier examples of the phrase used in this way above. ⁶² It is, in any case, not the exact phrase “means of grace,” but it is closer and foreshadows the second instance of the use of the phrase in the later Prayer Book addition.

The English Civil War of the 1640s resulted in Parliament’s rejection of the *Book of Common Prayer* in favor of the *Directory of Public Worship.* ⁶³ Thus at the

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⁶³ The official title of the Prayer Book’s replacement was *A Directory for the Publique Worship of God throughout the Three Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland.* For an
restoration of the monarchy in 1660 and the accession of Charles II, a new edition was commissioned that resulted in the 1662 Prayer Book. Among the editorial changes made, a section on “Occasional Prayers” that follow the Litany in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer were placed in their present position when the Prayer Book was reconstituted and reissued at the Restoration. It was at this time that a “General Thanksgiving” was situated in this section. Edward Craddock Ratcliff explains this, stating, “Thanksgivings, corresponding with the prayers at the end of the Litany, were first provided by order of King James I in 1604; in 1662 they were supplemented by the ‘General Thanksgiving’ and by that ‘For restoring public peace at home.’”64 This “General Thanksgiving” was the contribution of Edward Reynolds, the Bishop of Norwich, who was in fact the only Puritan divine who ascended to the episcopacy following the Restoration of the monarchy.65 Bishop Reynolds’ prayer reads as follows:

ALMIGHTY God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men; [*particularly to those who desire now to offer up their praises and thanksgivings for thy late mercies vouchsafed unto them.] We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord

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Jesus Christ; **for the means of grace**, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.\(^{66}\)

Thus with the prayer’s use of “for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory,” we have the one explicit use of the phrase inserted into the Prayer Book, where it remains to this day. Its authorship by the Puritan Reynolds provides a connective tissue between the influence of the Puritan tradition on the concept of the means of grace and the adoption of the term itself in the Prayer Book of the Church of England after the Restoration in 1660.

Disconnected from other considerations, it would not be clear that the developments described here would have relevance for a doctrine of the means of grace at all. But given the time period in which the two significant Prayer Book additions were made (1604 and 1662), we can connect what was happening with the Prayer Book with the way in which the language of the means of grace was developing more broadly in the tradition of the Church of England. Most importantly, it should be noted that the language of the means of grace found an official and institutional place in the liturgy of the Church of England at the very time when Puritanism itself was on the wane. Indeed, the period after the Restoration signaled the point at which non-conforming Puritans became dissenters and thus officially out of bounds from the standpoint of the established Church.

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Their language would remain, however, to influence Anglican theology among figures who could not in any sense be considered Puritans themselves.\footnote{By way of example, Scott Kisker in his study of Anthony Horneck and the rise of the religious societies in late 17th-century England specifically points out that Horneck’s appropriation of Continental pietism’s stress on corporate devotional practices and the importance of good works was done as a way to counter the attractiveness of Roman Catholic sacramental practice. (See Scott Kisker, Foundation for Revival: Anthony Horneck, the Religious Societies, and the Construction of an Anglican Pietism [Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008].) Though a consideration of the influence of pietism on the formation of religious societies in England, and their connection with early Methodism, is beyond the scope of the present work, it does serve as a point of historical connection with the kind of religiosity that the means of grace represent in this era of Anglican practice.}

The place of the means of grace in the English theological lexicon in the latter half of the 17th century can thus be expressed in this way: In an environment where the Roman Catholic sacramental system had been rejected and sacramental theology thereby diminished, the concept of the means of grace was developed largely by Puritan divines as a way to describe how faith is nurtured and grace received by Christians in the daily life of devotion and worship.\footnote{This is not to suggest that the sacramental changes in the English Reformation caused the development of the concept of the means of grace in any direct way, but it is to suggest that those changes resulted in an ecclesial environment where a certain space was opened for a new expression of sacramental understanding. The development of that understanding proceeded according to its own historical circumstances and contingencies. Whether the idiosyncratic character of the English Church made the development of the means of grace concept more likely is perhaps not historically provable; but it can be said that a Protestant church with such a strong continuing tie to liturgy provided fertile ground in which the concept could be planted.} This Puritan influence found its way into the Church of England’s Prayer Book through historical events in 1604 and 1661-1662, thus supplying the larger Anglican tradition with a distinctive way to speak about the mediation of grace in the life of the church. A concept that emerged through historical accident was thereby developed into a
doctrinal category the content of which was a new, expansively sacramental practical theology.

VI. The Means of Grace in the Theology of John Norris

Given the history narrated thus far, it is perhaps surprising that one of the most significant contributors to the doctrinal development of the means of grace in the next half-century is the decidedly un-Puritan John Norris (1657-1711).69 Often associated with the Cambridge Platonists, Norris was actually educated at Oxford (B.A. 1680, M.A. 1684) and spent his life after 1689 as an Anglican priest at Newton St. Loe, Somerset, and later at Bemerton, Wiltshire. Norris shared the Platonist affinities of such figures as Benjamin Whichcote, Henry More, Ralph Cudworth, and Richard Cumberland, and he was significantly influenced by the French philosopher

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69 In what follows, I do not mean to suggest that the Puritan writers on the means of grace adopted a static formula that was only expanded much later by Norris. Indeed, there are numerous examples of Puritans who individually expanded the use of the means of grace language at different points. As an example, in the same period as Perkins and Greenham, the Puritan Richard Rogers refers to “meanes whereby God hath appointed that his people shall continue, and growe in a godly life,” calling them “religious exercises” and dividing them into categories of “publike or priuate” (i.e., public or private). See Richard Rogers, Seuen treatises containing such direction as is gathered out of the Holie Scriptures, leading and guiding to true happines, both in this life, and in the life to come: and may be called the practise of Christianitie (London: Thomas Man and Robert Dexter, 1603), 212. Rogers’ development of the means of grace is one of the best examples of an early Puritan development of the concept and is found in the third treatise of the work, entitled, “The Meanes Whereby a Godly Life is Holpen and Continued” (211-293). His three public means match up with the typical Puritan rendering of the means of grace and include the “ministerie of the word,” the Sacraments, and “publike prayer.” The private means (or “helpes”) include a variety of personal devotional practices. In addition, Rogers’ scheme is summarized in Johnston, “The Means of Grace in Puritan Theology,” 203. A later Puritan writer who uses the language of the means of grace frequently (though without this kind of systematic development) is Richard Baxter in The Saints’ Everlasting Rest (see Baxter, The Saints’ Everlasting Rest, ed. John T. Wilkinson [London: Epworth Press, 1962]).
Nicolas Malebranche. Among his philosophical works, Norris also wrote in the area of moral theology. It was in one such work near the end of his life – *A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence* – that Norris engaged the doctrine of the means of grace.

The *Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence* was published in 1710 in the year before Norris’ death. His aim in the *Treatise* is to provide a “System of Christian Morality” by framing the Christian life under “that Vertue which sits at the Helm, and governs all the rest, conducts the whole Movement of Life, and is as it were a kind of Universal Vertue.” The virtue in question is, of course, prudence. Norris considers it to be supreme among the cardinal virtues of courage, temperance, prudence, and justice. He goes so far as to call it the “one great Cardinal Vertue,” not to suggest that it is the only virtue or that all the virtues are summed up within it, but rather than prudence is the “true Hinge upon which all morality turns.” In this sense, he is suggesting that prudence is necessary for the attainment of any other virtue, whether moral or intellectual. “Prudence,” he writes, “contains them all.

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71 Norris, *A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence: or The Principles of Practical Wisdom, Fitted to the Use of Human Life, and Design’d for the Better Regulation of It* (London: Samuel Manship, 1710). In citations from the *Treatise*, the spelling, capitalization, and italicization of Norris’s original edition have been retained.


radically or seminally, that is, it contains them all in its Power, and necessarily infers them as a Principle, and so is a kind of universal Vertue, as I may call it."\(^{75}\)

The claim about the supremacy of prudence among the virtues is a bold one, and a bit more needs to be said about it to better understand how it frames the way Norris approaches his task in the Treatise. He identifies prudence as an intellectual (rather than a moral) virtue, which is seated in the understanding rather than the will. As such, prudence "directs and governs" virtues that are moral in character, and this can be understood in that the understanding is prior to the will and must direct the will to act in a rational creature.\(^{76}\) The way Norris draws a distinction between the understanding and the will is, of course, a topic of moral psychology, and here his Platonic indebtedness is clear. In Norris' commitment to the priority of the understanding and its role in governing and directing the will, the image of Plato's chariot from the Phaedrus can be invoked to get a clear idea of what he is intending.\(^{77}\) The will has the capacity for good in drawing the soul on its course in life; it must be trained and directed by the intellect toward that end, all the more so if it is to overcome the influence of the unruly appetites that make up its yokefellow.

Coupled with the argument about prudence as an intellectual virtue seated in the understanding is a parallel argument about the nature of knowledge. Here the

\(^{75}\) Norris, A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 56.

\(^{76}\) Norris, Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 62-63. Hedging against too firm a distinction between the intellectual and the moral, Norris does admit that there is a moral element in prudence in the way it is oriented toward its object, which is to say that prudence aims toward the moral good. Regardless, his interest is in exploring it first with respect to the subject, i.e., human being, and where it is situated as it is possessed by that subject.

\(^{77}\) See Plato, Phaedrus, ll. 253c-257a, trans. Christopher Rowe (New York: Penguin, 2005), 34-38.
distinction Norris makes is that between speculative (or notional) knowledge and practical knowledge. Speculative knowledge is that knowledge that “contemplates Truth for itself,” a form of knowledge whose only activity is in contemplation. Practical knowledge, on the other hand, “has an order or reference to Action,” which Norris elaborates upon by stating that it “contemplates Truth ... not merely as Truth, but as a Rule or Principle of some Human or Moral Operation.” The two strands of his argument converge when he makes the point that prudence is a kind of knowledge (as an intellectual virtue), and more specifically that it is a kind of practical knowledge. He writes,

... [W]hen I make Prudence to be a Practical Knowledge, I don’t mean only that ’tis a Knowledge of Practical things, but a Knowledge that has an order to Practice, that is, that it contemplates Moral Truths, not barely as Truths, but as Rules and Principles of Action. 

By this he means that it is “a Knowledge actually directive of our Practice.” Thus, prudence is a form of knowledge, but it is a knowledge ever aimed towards a certain kind of activity. And this activity is not just about the ho-hum activity of daily life; it is rather moral activity, the kind of activity whereby one chooses good over evil.

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78 Norris, Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 65-68.
80 Norris, Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 68.
81 Norris, Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 69. There is a subsidiary argument in the sections of the Treatise on the nature of knowledge where Norris draws a distinction between “habitual knowledge” and “actual knowledge,” arguing that prudence is necessarily of the latter kind (see 64-65 and 71-88 passim.). His point is that practical activity of a moral character has to be directed from actual knowledge rather than habitual (or “dormant”) knowledge in human life exactly because a person must be “awaken’d into a right sense of things” in order to move intentionally toward the good (64). A part of this concern on Norris’ part seems to be to distinguish the supremacy of the intellectual virtue of prudence that expresses itself as a form of knowledge from the moral virtues that express themselves in the form of ingrained habits (e.g., courage or temperance). I do not regard this element of Norris’ analysis as greatly impinging the discussion at this point and so will leave it in this note rather than raising a consideration of it in the text above.
Prudence therefore encompasses the knowledge of good and evil, and the way in which it directs the human being toward the good is through the ability it gives to judge rightly.\textsuperscript{82}

Up to this point, Norris has been considering prudence in a general sense. His interest is, however, in Christian prudence. Thus, he seeks to narrow the scope of his consideration of prudence by putting it in a specifically Christian framework. This he accomplishes by couching Christian prudence in the confessional context that moral theology requires in order to be truly Christian; he states, “Christian Prudence is a Practical Knowledge of that Good which Christianity requires and of that Evil which it forbids, actually directive of the Will in the choice of that Good, and the refusal of that Evil.”\textsuperscript{83} The good, here, is conceived as an end to which activity points. And for Norris, the end to which prudence-as-means directs us is unmistakable: “There is but one particular Act of Prudence related to the End, all the rest will be found to respect the Means,” he writes. “Now that which relates to the End is this, that we propose \textit{God} as our last End.”\textsuperscript{84} With such a statement, Norris’ overarching concern about prudence as the supreme virtue, as well as the constitutive claims regarding the character of prudence in relation to practical knowledge and directive activity, become clear. And thus we can see why he would make his initial claim at the outset of the \textit{Treatise}: “Prudence is the Guide and Director of Human Life, the Compass whereby we steer the course of it through the various Waves of this

\textsuperscript{82} Norris, \textit{A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence}, 69.

\textsuperscript{83} Norris, \textit{A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence}, 70.

\textsuperscript{84} Norris, \textit{Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence}, 147.
troublesome and dangerous World, so as to arrive at the land of everlasting Life."\textsuperscript{85} His aim is to offer a discourse on salvation as it is received in the Christian life; this is a task related to the practical aspects of life’s activity, and such activity can only be rightly undertaken by one possessing Christian prudence.\textsuperscript{86} It is the necessary means to our intended end in God.

With the introduction of “means” and “ends” into the discussion – that is, with prudence properly conceived as teleological in character – we can move in short order to a consideration of the way in which Norris picks up the language of the means of grace in the \textit{Treatise}. Norris enters into the consideration of how prudence leads us to God by contending that the chief means to our ultimate end is given by that end himself – the law and commandments we receive from God in Scripture.\textsuperscript{87} Divine commandment is thus the “direct means” or the “principal and immediate means” to our intended end, but there exists also a set of “subordinate means” that fall under the heading of “the Consideration and Use of Christian Prudence.”\textsuperscript{88} Of these subordinate means, Norris proposes two types which can be seen in the table below:

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item Norris, \textit{Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence}, 6.
\item Norris' stated purpose for writing the \textit{Treatise} in the work's preface is that he has written it "with an Honest and Charitable Design to serve the Interests of true Religion and Vertue, and to make him that reads it Wise unto Salvation" (preface).
\item Norris writes, “… these Means which God has already chosen for us, and by his Choice and Direction warranted us to chuse and follow, are more explicitly, his Laws and Commandments. Which were both given and intended by God for our Direction to Happiness, and are also the true and only Means that lead to it … For as God made us for himself, so the Government which he exercises over us, and the Laws which he prescribes us, are but a pursuance of the same kind Design, namely, to bring us to \textit{himself}” (165).
\item Norris, \textit{Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence}, 257.
\end{itemize}
He offers a typology of two main categories of subordinate means that allow for our participation in the direct means of following the law and commandments of God. In the first of these, Norris includes means which are both moral virtues and instruments – what he calls “mixed means” as opposed to the “pure means” that serve as instruments only. The “pure means” are the other category of subordinate means, and these are what he considers to be the means of grace. They are not virtues but rather forms of activity – specifically, practices of worship or devotion that serve as a way to draw closer to God. Within this second category, he further subdivides the instrumental means into means that have been instituted by God and
means that are discoverable through Christian prudence. Both main categories are 
examined below.89

Norris’ first category includes subordinate means to our end in God that 
includes faith, prayer, the love of God, and inward purity. These he considers to be 
means that consist of a “double Capacity,” in that they are instrumental to their end 
but are also moral virtues in their own right.90 When considering these four, it might 
be wondered why Norris does not instead opt for the classical theological virtues of 
faith, hope, and love (since indeed both faith and love make his list). Of the four he 
does choose, the three of faith, the love of God, and inward purity seem to belong 
most naturally together. They can all be conceived as inward states of the soul 
allowing for communion with the divine, as indeed Norris seems to suggest in his 
explication of them. He describes faith as “that natural Homage which the 
Understanding or Will ... pays to God in receiving and assenting to what he reveals, 
upon his bare Word or Authority.”91 The love of God is for him “a Principle of

89 Norris alerts the reader that he is enlarging on categories that were originally developed 
by fellow Anglican priest John Scott in his work, The Christian Life (see Treatise, 257-258). The full title of Scott’s work is The Christian Life, From its Beginning, to its Consummation in Glory; together with The several Means and Instruments of Christianity conducing thereunto; with Directions for private Devotion and Forms of Prayer Fitted to the Several States of 
Christians (London: Walter Kettilyb, 1681). Scott had proposed the categories of “the 
Practice of those Heavenly virtues, in the Perfection whereof consists the state of Heaven” 
and “the Practice of certain Instrumental Duties, which are necessary to our acquiring those 
Heavenly virtues and overcoming the Difficulties of them” (The Christian Life, 38-39). By 
Norris’ own account, he wants primarily to expand upon Scott’s first category in that he 
regards certain virtues to be both virtues and instruments. It might also be added that Scott 
does not use the phrase “means of grace,” and it is because my own interest is in the 
doctrinal development of this particular language and the content it names that it seems to 
me unnecessary to offer a full analysis of Scott in the present text.

90 Norris, A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 258. Norris also calls these means of a 
“mixed nature” (283).

91 Norris, A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 259.
Obedience to God’s Commands, and of Conformity to his Will.” 92 With regards to
inward purity, Norris holds that it consists of “the due Order of our Minds, the
Government of our Thoughts and Affections, and their Subjection and Conformity to
right Reason, and to the Will and Law of God.” 93 As states of the soul, these means
are virtues; but as virtues, they are also instrumental means of drawing us closer to
God.

The outlier in Norris’ list of “mixed means” is prayer. And indeed, given his
subsequent descriptions of the “pure” or solely instrumental means of grace, it
would seem that prayer would more naturally belong in that category. (It is with the
means of grace, after all, that prayer most often appears in the writing of the Puritan
divines.) Nevertheless, Norris regards prayer as both a virtue and an instrument,
and the reason he does so has to do with the state of the soul he sees as necessary
for proper prayer to be offered to God. For Norris, prayer requires “Moral Goodness
in the Action” such that true prayer is not just an action but an underlying
disposition in the soul. Because outward prayer requires the right inward state, it is
“still Moral as to the inward Habit and Disposition” of the person offering it. 94 He
thus places it with the first category of means that are both instrumental means and
moral virtues.

The second main category of subordinate means are means “to the
performance of Moral Duties” only, meaning that they are not virtues in their own

92 Norris, A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 279.
93 Norris, A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 281.
right. He subdivides this category under two headings: those that are “appointed and commanded by God” on the one hand, and those on the other that are “recommendable by Human Prudence considering what is fit and adviseable to be done from the nature of the thing it self, tho’ without any Warrant from Divine Authority.” This second category with both its subheadings Norris terms “Means of Grace,” adopting the terminology of both the Puritan divines and the Book of Common Prayer. He offers the following definition:

They are outward Means in opposition to the Grace of God, which is a Means too, but such as works inwardly in our Hearts. And they are Means in opposition to those Moral Vertues and Duties to which they serve as to an End. And accordingly we ordinarily call them by the name of Means of Grace, by Grace I suppose meaning, not only the Grace of God or the assisting Operations of his Spirit, but also that Holiness or Goodness which is the effect of that Grace, and which these Means also by the help and under the direction of that Grace serve to work in us.

It will be helpful to look at his descriptions of both subheadings, beginning with those means instituted by God and then continuing to consider the means recommended by prudence but without explicit divine sanction.

The first point to note about the divinely commanded means of grace is how closely they resemble the lists named by Puritan writers going back to Richard

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95 Norris, A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 258.
96 Norris, A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 258.
97 Norris, A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 284. Bold print added. In differentiating this type of means from his first main category, Norris states that they are “Means that are Means and no more, or only Means, as having no Moral Goodness in them, and whose Goodness is only the usefulness that they have to serve the End and Interest of true Religion and Vertue, that Moral and Practical Part of Christianity, wherein pure and undefiled Religion consists, and which is our immediate qualification for Happiness” (283).
Greenham and William Perkins, and even to the “pre-Puritan” John Ponet.\textsuperscript{98} Norris’ list includes the reading of the Scriptures, the hearing of the Word preached, the use of the Sacraments (and, as he notes, particularly the Lord’s Supper), and a practice he calls “Church Communion.”\textsuperscript{99} These means he also calls “those pure Means that are of Divine Institution.”\textsuperscript{100} Each of these contain an element of both ordinance (or duty deriving from divine command) and sacrament (or the mediation of grace). Thus, under the heading of reading the Scriptures, Norris states that such a practice is “Our Duty, as being required by God, who as he gave us the Holy Scripture for our Direction and Edification, so he requires us to make use of it” and that it is also “our Advantage as well as Duty, as being a most excellent Means both for the Illumination and Information of our Understandings in all useful and most important Truths, and also for the composure of our Minds into the most Pious and Religious Frame and Temper.”\textsuperscript{101} Similar claims about duty and advantage are made for each of the four practices under this subheading. The sacramental efficacy (broadly speaking) is perhaps best summarized in his statement on the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper itself, where Norris claims that it “serves as a Channel or Conduit to convey God’s Graces and Favours to us, and as a Pledge to assure us of them.”\textsuperscript{102} There is a sacramental quality to all four practices, however, even if they are not all

\textsuperscript{98} The exception here would be prayer which, as noted above, Norris considers to be both an instrumental means and a virtue in its own right.  
\textsuperscript{99} Norris, \textit{A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence}, 284-292.  
\textsuperscript{100} Norris, \textit{A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence}, 284.  
\textsuperscript{101} Norris, \textit{A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence}, 285.  
\textsuperscript{102} Norris, \textit{A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence}, 290.
sacraments properly so-called. They are all divinely ordained practices within the
church that serve the Christian “to assist and further him towards his End.”

The category of means recommendable by prudence is a more hazy
subheading. In his introduction to the means of grace, Norris indicates that he will
deal first with the divinely ordained means and then examine the means
recommended by prudence “conveniently under the Consideration of the last
Chapter” (i.e., of the Treatise). There are, however, two full chapters of the
Treatise following the one where this statement is made, and it is actually in the
penultimate chapter rather than the final one where material exists that would seem
to conform most closely to the “list” or sequential approach that Norris adopts to
discuss the means as a whole. Whether his statement is an oversight or not is not
entirely clear, though it seems advisable to follow the form of his exposition in this
section of the Treatise rather than that which would naturally follow from a face
value reading of a single (and possibly mistaken) alert embedded in the text of the
section on the means of grace. That, at least, is the tack that will be taken in the
present analysis.

The means of grace recommended by prudence are of a quite different sort
than those instituted by divine command. They are six in number and can be

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103 Norris, A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 292.
104 Norris, A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 283. He promises the reader “that I may
not make this too long, I shall adjourn them thither.”
105 I believe this decision is supported by Norris’ introductory paragraph in the penultimate
chapter of the Treatise, where he summarizes his analysis on the means up to that point and
then indicates that “herein we have laid the main Grounds and Principles of Practical
Wisdom” (294). The final chapter of the Treatise is taken up with a more eclectic essay on
the study of Christian wisdom, and it does not follow the sequential pattern of the preceding
sections that are unmistakably on the means of grace.
summarized as follows: Regulation of the senses; Regulation of the mind/understanding; Regulation of the will and affections; Regulation of the conscience; Regulation in the choice of religion; Regulation with respect to the “world.”¹⁰⁶ Two primary points can be made that can characterize this subheading of the means, both how they relate to the divinely instituted means and what they share in common with one another. It is clear that Norris is here not concerned with practices of the church so much as he is focused on personal habits related to the inward constitution of the soul. In that sense, Norris’ Platonic commitments show through in a way that they do not as much when he is covering activities of worship and devotion in the instituted means that he considers to be Scriptural and historic within the church. Throughout his consideration of these prudential forms of “regulation,” Norris shows a deep skepticism of the sensible world and invokes the classical psychology of reason, will, and appetites (or “passions”). So for instance, with regards to the regulation of the will and affections, he speaks of the need to subject the will to the “habitual dictates” of reason and particularly reason when not clouded by the inflamed passions.¹⁰⁷ The “Pleasures of Sense,” for Norris, are “intirely different … from the refined Intellectual Felicity of Heaven,” and when we give in to them they are sure to “alienate us from the Life of God.”¹⁰⁸ We must therefore take care to close ourselves off from harmful sensible experiences and objects entirely, and to regulate all aspects of our lives so that the soul is formed in ways proper to its intended end. There is personal activity implied in such a process,

¹⁰⁷ Norris, A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 318.
¹⁰⁸ Norris, A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 300.
which is seen in each of the prudential means: not eating or drinking to excess (with
regards to the senses), instructing the conscience on its proper moral duty (with
regards to conscience), employing reason to choose a religious practice that
promotes real holiness rather than simply following custom (with regards to
religion), etc. Yet it is all personal activity that is intensely focused in an inward
direction; the point of all the forms of activity that Norris suggests is so that the soul
can be ordered rightly and not disturbed by the distractions of the outward
realm.  

Norris’ emphasis in the material on the prudential means suggests a
conjunction of his soteriology and his epistemology. As a Platonist, it is not
surprising that Norris held to a form of divine illumination in terms of the possibility
of the knowledge of God. In his consideration of the regulation of the will and
affections, for instance, he counsels the reader to pay close attention to the
“Immediate and Internal Light” available to us through reason, and he couples that
with the external light known to us through the revealed word of God. It is not a
notion developed with any detail in the Treatise, but neither is the Treatise intended

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109 For, as Norris contends, to the Christian the world is “a place of great Peril and Danger,
where he walks among Snares and treads upon Traps and Gins. He apprehends a great deal
of Danger from Sensible Objects, which inflame our Passions, ingage our Affections, and
divert our Minds from those greater and better Goods which are more worthy of them, and
only can satisfie them” (340-341).

110 See Mander, Philosophy of John Norris, 61-97. It should be noted that Mander is
interested almost entirely in Norris’ Platonism and shows little interest in his theological
commitments; indeed, the Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence is not considered in his
text and his chapter on “Faith” could have been improved by a consideration of it (see 99-
125). The section cited is however helpful in providing an overview of Norris’ epistemology.
Also helpful in locating Norris’ understanding of the spiritual senses is John C. English, “John
Wesley’s Indebtedness to John Norris,” Church History 60:1 (March 1991), 62-64.

111 Norris, Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 318-319.
to be an exposition of epistemology. It is a rather a text of moral instruction, and Norris is content to leave his more fully developed treatments of the direct knowledge of God elsewhere.\(^{112}\) What is of interest here is the way in which his commitments about the knowledge of God in practical Christian life are dependent upon a certain kind of life that tends toward – in the Christian vocabulary – “Holiness of Life.”\(^{113}\)

To sum up the consideration of Norris’ presentation of the means of grace, a few observations can be made. The first is that his understanding of the means bears superficial similarities to that of the Puritan divines while differing in substance. On the superficial level, he includes the main elements seen in earlier Puritan practical divinity: the word/Scripture, the Sacraments, and prayer. In substance, it is clear that Norris does not share the Reformed emphasis of the Puritans on such matters as the absolute sovereignty of God, election, and the need (because of the Reformed doctrine of election) to find a way to offer pastoral counsel about acceptance (by God) or assurance (of salvation). Norris’ philosophical commitments are Platonic


\(^{113}\) Norris, *Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence*, 338. Norris summarizes the “kind of life” to which I refer near the end of the *Treatise* where he writes, “And now we are got into the good and right way, I do not know any one more effectual Means to fix and preserve us there, than to keep our walk towards the midst of it, pretty far in within the lines, so as not to tread upon the Edges. My meaning is, that we should not go to the outside of what is lawful, but rather set our selves in all our Actions at the greatest Distance from Sin, and abstain from all the Appearances, Occasions, and Beginnings of it” (379-380). It is an endorsement of the life of philosophical moderation, where prudence once embraced by the individual allows him to abstain from excess, to govern the excesses of both the sensible world and the unruly soul, in order to better attain that happiness that can only be known in God.
and his ecclesiastical commitments are High Church Anglican.\textsuperscript{114} He is interested in shaping a theological account of how Christians can “move toward their intended end in God” (echoing his own language), where that movement is largely understood as the formation of a virtuous character. Alongside this emphasis is a significant attention to theological anthropology – it isn’t that he is unaware of a doctrine of sin, it is just that he is less interested in speaking of it in terms of guilt and forgiveness and more interested in focusing on the healing of one’s moral psychology so that one can approach God through/with a rightly ordered soul. Like the Puritan writers, Norris’ aim in the Treatise is pastoral, but it is pastoral with a heavy dose of implied Platonic metaphysics that does not tend to factor into Puritan practical divinity.

A second point relates to the role of Norris in developing the means of grace as a doctrine. His method of categorization and explanation represents something new with respect to this language, and he furthers the meaning of the means of grace as a form of sacramental language in the English theological lexicon. Puritan practical divinity that included the language of the means of grace was first about pastoral counsel and secondly about nurturing the sense of assurance in the English faithful. This, too, is a kind of pastoral theology for the educated readership of the Church of England. But it is more substantially about how to understand the means of grace within the actual process of salvation. More than assurance, it is about the conformity of the soul to a holy state whereby it is made ready to know God as its

\textsuperscript{114} On the subject of the latter, note Norris’ fascinating consideration of the term “High Church” on 395-396.
ultimate end – the essence of salvation in the Anglican view of a theologian like Norris.
CHAPTER THREE

~ The Reception and Development of the Means of Grace in John Wesley ~

The preceding chapter’s analysis provides an overview of the historical development of the means of grace as a doctrine in Anglican theology and in the liturgy of the Church of England. It also provides the historical background from which to understand John Wesley’s reception of the means of grace in the 18th century. The fact that Wesley’s parents were both the children of Puritan ministers who developed into High Church Anglicans in their early adulthood may be nothing more than an historical curiosity, but given that the concept of the means of grace found its way into Anglican thought via the Puritan tradition, the Wesleyan familial parallel is an interesting one.¹ The biographical details of Wesley’s early life and his wider social and religious context are well recorded in the scholarly sources and do not bear repeating here.² Some details will be offered where necessary, but only

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those that bear a direct relevance to our consideration of the place of the means of
grace in Wesley's theological reflection and practice of ministry.

I. Wesley's Reception of the Means of Grace

John Wesley's landmark 1746 sermon, “The Means of Grace,” states directly
what he considers the means of grace to be. Following an introduction to the topic,
Wesley writes:

By ‘means of grace’ I understand outward signs, words, or
actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end – to be the
ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men preventing,
justifying, or sanctifying grace.3

Furthermore, Wesley gives a rationale behind the use of the term itself. It is, to his
mind, a term employed by the church catholic and particularly by the Church of
which he is a part. Wesley writes,

I use this expression, 'means of grace', because I know none
better, and because it has been generally used in the Christian church
for many ages: in particular by our own church, which directs us to
bless God both for the 'means of grace and hope of glory'; and teaches
us that a sacrament is 'an outward sign of inward grace, and a means
whereby we receive the same'.4

The reference to “our own church” is, of course, to the Church of England. That
Wesley also considered the Anglican usage of the category of “means of grace” to be
grounded in biblical teaching is seen in an entry in his published Journal in 1740,

wing of the Revival in light of his relationship to the Church of England is found in Baker,
John Wesley and the Church of England; in addition, a recent consideration of Methodism in
its 18th-century context with reference to the historiography of the past can be found in
J.C.D. Clark, “The Eighteenth-Century Context,” in The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies,
where he states, “Although this expression of our Church, ‘means of grace’, be not
found in Scripture, yet ... the sense of it is undeniably found in Scripture.” Wesely
thus seeks to preserve the theological vocabulary of the Anglican tradition in his
own exposition while arguing that the terminology itself is – if not directly
Scriptural – at least implied in Scripture’s teaching.

Notable also in Wesley’s statement in the sermon is the fact that he invokes
one of the primary sources for his understanding of the means of grace. This comes
in the pair of quoted phrases: “means of grace and hope of glory” and “an outward
sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same.” Both phrases are
drawn from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. The first, “means of grace and hope of
glory,” comes from the General Prayer of Thanksgiving, noted in the previous
chapter as having been authored by Bishop Edward Reynolds and included in the
Prayer Book when it was revised and reissued in 1662. The second phrase, “an
outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same,” is drawn
from the Prayer Book Catechism as enlarged in 1604 and inspired by the earlier
catechism of Alexander Nowell. Wesley’s basis for his understanding of the means
of grace is thus, by his own explanation of it, grounded in the liturgical teaching of
the Church of England; it is no innovation on his part, he insists, but rather part of
the Prayer Book tradition as it had developed in the Elizabethan and Stuart periods,
settled finally in the ecclesiastical formulation of the Restoration.

6 See the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, as found in Cummings, ed., The Book of Common
Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662. For first phrase, see “A General Thanksgiving”
under the section on Prayers and Thanksgivings (268); for the second, see the Catechism
(429).
The 1746 sermon on the means of grace does not represent the beginning of Wesley's development of a doctrine of the means of grace in his own theology, however. If anything, the landmark sermon represents the close of a nearly two decades long period in which his theological reflection on the means and their place within his soteriology was conducted. So while the publication of the sermon in 1746 can be treated as a milestone in Wesley's development, it is necessary to go back and examine the circumstances around his initial consideration of the means.

For the initial stages of Wesley's consideration of the means of grace, we must go back to the beginnings of Oxford Methodism in the late 1720s. Richard Heitzenrater has suggested the term "meditative piety" to refer to the method and manner of activity that John Wesley followed during the latter 1720s and early 1730s in Oxford, including the time in which Oxford Methodism took shape. This activity took inspiration from the holy living tradition as represented by such figures as the 15th century Thomas à Kempis, the 17th century Anglican bishop Jeremy Taylor, and Wesley's own contemporary William Law. The aim of the

7 Heitzenrater, "The Meditative Piety of the Oxford Methodists," in Mirror and Memory, 78-105. See also Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 43-44. The full account of this period in Wesley's life is found in Heitzenrater, "John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists, 1725-35" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1972).
written works of these holy living divines was to inculcate holiness in the life of the believer. As such, the holy living writers avoided engaging in theological controversy and instead focused their writing on loving devotion to God in all aspects of life. Among their concerns was the careful use of one’s time and the need for sincerity in how one went about the devotional life. It was these concerns that drove Wesley’s own religious practice during this period of time, and he himself influenced the other early Methodists in Oxford in the same endeavor.

While the historical distance involved in viewing this earliest expression of Methodism from the present day causes us to sometimes think of Wesley and his colleagues as forming a neatly organized group, the reality is somewhat different. Heitzenrater sees it as somewhat inaccurate even to speak of “membership” in the Methodism of the Oxford period and instead prefers to characterize the identity of a Methodist in terms of “adherence to a particular standard.” He writes, “The primary requisite for being called a Methodist was the desire to work out one’s salvation and to engage in the pursuit of perfection.”

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9 This is, for instance, while I will not use the term “Holy Club” to describe the Oxford Methodists. The use of such a term suggests a situation significantly different than the reality, and “Holy Club” was in fact only one of several epithets the Oxford Methodists attracted. Others included the Bible-Moths, the Godly Club, the Supererogation-Men, and, of course, the Methodists. See Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 41-42 and 45-46.

(which they studied together), the Oxford Methodists were also shaped in an idiosyncratic way by their experiences together and by contributions made by various participants at different times. In developing the concept of meditative piety to explain the way they expressed their religious devotion, Heitzenrater has identified three major forms of activity around which Wesley and the Oxford Methodists organized their activities: scholarship, devotion, and social outreach. These activities intersected with the lives of the Oxford Methodists in the study, in church, and in the streets of the city. Many of their emphases match up with what Wesley would later term the instituted, prudential, and general means of grace. It is through these practices, all of them together constitutive of the “meditative piety” of Heitzenrater’s description, that we can discern the form of religious life later dubbed “Methodist” taking shape. Insofar as those practices correlate to the means of grace, we can also come to a better understanding of how Wesley himself conceived of the means within the Christian life by viewing his growing appreciation for them during this same period.

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... was on an inward state of the soul that would be reflected in (and measured by) their Christian life style” (Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 47).

11 I have mentioned Kempis, Taylor, and Law in connection with the holy living tradition. While these three were certainly important (and were the three mentioned by Wesley as influential later in his preface to the Plain Account of Christian Perfection), Heitzenrater has shown the wide range of authors read by Oxford Methodist groups related to holy living, meditation, prayer, fasting, etc. See Heitzenrater, “The Meditative Piety of the Oxford Methodists, in Mirror and Memory, 86-89.

The “first rise of Methodism,” as Wesley would later term it, can be dated from late in the year 1729.\footnote{Wesley utilizes a tripartite division of the “rises” of Methodism as the first rise (in Oxford), the second rise (in Savannah), and the last rise (in London) in the \textit{Short History of the People Called Methodists} (1781), ¶9, in \textit{Works} 9:430.} In November of that year, Wesley returned to Oxford after serving a period as his father Samuel’s curate at Epworth and Wroot and assisted his brother Charles in the desire of Charles and others to engage in a more intentional form of Christian devotion.\footnote{See Heitzenrater, \textit{Wesley and the People Called Methodists}, 37-40.} This Wesley did, although the controversy that the “Methodists” created in the university community of Oxford due to the diligence of their efforts led Wesley to some inward searching about the wisdom of their methods and aims. It was in this context that his reading of John Norris’ account of the means of grace in the \textit{Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence} intersected with reflections on the current circumstances of his life and led him to seek advice from his mother Susanna on the wisdom of what he and others were embarking upon.\footnote{Wesley read Norris as early as 1725, and his diary records that he read the \textit{Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence} during June of 1731, the very month that he wrote his mother Susanna concerning the categories of “instituted” and “prudential” means of grace mentioned in his letter of 11 June 1731 (discussed below). See Heitzenrater, “John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists, 1725-35,” 513-514.} In a letter dated June 11, 1731, Wesley asks his mother about whether he and his associates have been guilty of being “righteous overmuch” or – in Wesley’s own words – of “being too strict in religion.”\footnote{Wesley, “Letter to Mrs. Susanna Wesley,” 11 June 1731, in \textit{Works} 25:283. On the phrase “righteous overmuch,” see Ecclesiastes 7:16.}

Wesley describes in the letter a conversation where his group of confederates considered the following:
All the ways of being too righteous or too strict which we could think of were these: either the carrying some one particular virtue to so great a height as to make it clash with some others; or the laying too much stress on the instituted means of grace, to the neglect of the weightier matters of the law; or the multiplying prudential means upon ourselves so far, and binding ourselves so far, and binding ourselves to the observance of them so strictly, as to obstruct the end we aimed at by them, either by hindering our advance in heavenly affections in general, or by retarding our progress in some particular virtue.¹⁷

Clearly, Wesley’s overarching interest in the letter is in discerning the best form of Christian devotional practice for himself and others among the Methodists in Oxford. Notable as well at this point is that Wesley is employing two distinct categories for the means of grace: instituted and prudential. With respect to the second point, it is notable that Wesley records reading John Norris’ Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence in the same month he wrote the letter in question; it seems to have had an immediate impact on how he conceives of the means of grace.¹⁸ In addition, the letter to his mother Susanna is not the only piece of evidence in which he shows the influence of Norris. Letters to his friend and correspondent Mary Pendarves (whom he calls “Aspasia”) and his brother, Samuel Wesley, Jr., later in 1731 show Wesley invoking the same categories of instituted and prudential when speaking of the means of grace.¹⁹ His reading of Norris clearly influenced his thinking about the means of grace and led to his adoption of Norris’

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¹⁸ See above p.96, n.15.
categories as he sought to integrate his growing belief about the importance of the means in a life of holiness.

Wesley’s early adoption of the concept of the means of grace was central to his view of the life of sanctification for the balance of his ministry. His theology from this period is sometimes distorted in secondary literature, though, and particularly when the earlier Wesley is read backwards through the lens of his Aldersgate experience in 1738. For that reason, a brief consideration of the historical interpretation of Aldersgate can serve as a coda to this section and lead us into the following one. By understanding Aldersgate in its context (and by understanding the effect traditional interpretations of Aldersgate have had on the depiction of the pre-Aldersgate Wesley), some clarity can be gained around the development of Wesley’s soteriology in the 1720s and 30s.

At times in both popular and academic discourse of the past, Wesley’s well-known experience at Aldersgate on May 24, 1738, has been used as a lens through which to view his theological development up to that point of his life in a way that characterizes the activities of the Oxford Methodists (as well as his missionary experience in Georgia) as based in a “works righteousness” theology. On this

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20 This view is typically couched in terms of Aldersgate as Wesley’s “conversion experience,” and it is not without some basis in Wesley’s own evaluation following Aldersgate. A classic example is Luke Tyerman, The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists, Vol I, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), 179-181. Tyerman’s stark depiction of Wesley’s spiritual state prior to Aldersgate can be seen in his statement that “[Wesley’s] heart was heavy. He felt that there was no good in him; and that all his works, his righteousness, and his prayers, so far from having merit, needed an atonement for themselves” (179). Popular accounts have often veered in the direction of Tyerman and even further; see, e.g., Francis Gerald Ensley, John Wesley Evangelist (Nashville: Methodist
reading, Wesley received the proper understanding of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith at Aldersgate and was only then “converted” to true Christian faith. The interpretive work of Heitzenrater and others on Wesley’s early period has been crucial for providing a better framework in which to understand Oxford Methodism; Heitzenrater, for instance, argues strongly that Wesley and the early Methodists were not engaging in a works righteousness approach but were rather embracing the virtue theology embedded in the Anglican approach to the religious life.21 The key shift in the meditative piety of the Oxford period is in Wesley’s growing conviction that it is the inward state of holiness in the soul that marks true faith rather than outward conformity to forms of Christian practice. Wesley draws heavily on the holy living tradition for this conviction (Kempis, Taylor, Law), coming

Evangelistic Materials, 1958), where Ensley refers to Wesley’s “legalistic conception of religion” prior to Aldersgate and its “emotional deadness and stuffy pride” (14-15).

On the need for a fresh reading of Aldersgate that seeks to correct such older, one-sided views, see Heitzenrater, “Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity,” in Mirror and Memory, 106-149, a wide-ranging and insightful analysis that places Wesley’s Aldersgate experience in the broader context of his theological development. Also significant are the essays contained in Maddox, ed., Aldersgate Reconsidered (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990). Especially helpful regarding the historiography of Aldersgate interpretations is Maddox, “Aldersgate—Signs of a Paradigm Shift?” (Aldersgate Reconsidered, 11-19) and Maddox, “Aldersgate: A Tradition History,” (Aldersgate Reconsidered, 133-146). Heitzenrater’s essay, “Great Expectations,” is reprinted here as well (Aldersgate Reconsidered, 49-91). Generally speaking, the reevaluation of Aldersgate can be seen in historiographical terms as a move to consider Wesley’s life and religious experience with a view to the whole as opposed to singling out his personal self-understanding in the period immediately before and after Aldersgate.

21 See Heitzenrater, “The Meditative Piety of the Oxford Methodists,” in Mirror and Memory, 98-105; and “Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity,” in Mirror and Memory, 112-116. In addition to simply reading the pre-Aldersgate Wesley carefully, a part of this interpretive work has come in locating Wesley in the Anglican theological context itself. See, e.g., the way in which John C. English shows Wesley’s connection to one strand of this tradition – the Anglican “moderates” with whom he includes the Cambridge Platonists as well as the late 17th century Latitudinarians – in English, “John Wesley and the Anglican Moderates of the Seventeenth Century,” Anglican Theological Review 51:3 (July 1969): 203-220. Also see Shantz, “Anglican Influence on John Wesley’s Soteriology,” 33-52.
to believe that it is "the exercise of grace in the development of those virtues which make a person fully human (renewed after the image of God, seen in Christ) while at the same time one continually struggles with the contrary vices."\(^{22}\) As a virtue-oriented approach to the Christian life, this theology placed importance on the imitation of holy exemplars as well as on engaging in specific types of activity that embodied the virtues themselves; in both cases, the aim was toward an inward transformation of the soul by grace.\(^{23}\) Thus, the impact of Aldersgate in 1738 was real, but its importance should be seen in Wesley’s understanding of the basis of the assurance of faith (and an increasing attention to the witness of the Holy Spirit) rather than the character of the inwardly renewed soul itself.\(^{24}\)

In the context of the Oxford period, Wesley developed an understanding of sanctification grounded in the soul’s renewal in the image of God that remained constant throughout the balance of his life. This view is expressed amply in the 1733 university sermon, “Circumcision of the Heart,” preached by Wesley at St. Mary’s, Oxford. In the sermon, Wesley describes sanctification and its telos, Christian perfection, as


\(^{23}\) Two essays that show the importance of imitation for Wesley in this way (and which both make reference to his reliance on the holy living tradition) are Heitzenrater, “The *Imitatio Christi* and the Great Commandment: Virtue and Obligation in Wesley’s Ministry with the Poor,” in *The Portion of the Poor: Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 49-63; and Geordan Hammond, “John Wesley and ‘Imitating’ Christ,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45:1 (Spring 2010): 197-212.

\(^{24}\) See, e.g., Heitzenrater, “Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity,” in *Mirror and Memory*, 126-132. The obvious and unmentioned issue related to Aldersgate and Wesley’s grasp of assurance is that of the doctrine of justification by faith, which will be considered below in the section on Wesley’s interactions with the Moravian Brethren.
... that habitual disposition of soul which in the Sacred Writings is termed ‘holiness’, and which directly implies the being cleansed from sin, ‘from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit’, and by consequence the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus, the being so ‘renewed in the image of our mind’ as to be ‘perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect.’

The change of sanctification is, for Wesley, a real change in the soul. Indeed, it is salvation as salvation is experienced in the present life. The virtues “which were also in Christ Jesus” that become resident in the Christian believer are those of humility, faith, hope, and love. In having such virtue formed in the soul, the believer finds herself truly renewed – in holiness of heart and life, which Wesley will later summarize as “inward and outward conformity in all things to the revealed will of God.” Such a change results from the work of God – “a change wrought in the soul by the operation of the Holy Ghost” in the words of a sermon from a few years later – and yet it calls for a kind of active participation on the part of the individual as well.

With this image for the nature of true holiness, we can see the way that the activities making up the meditative piety of the Oxford Methodists became the way that sanctification found expression in practical Christian living. It is also the first example in Wesley's adult life where theological reflection and engaged communal

\footnote{Wesley, "Circumcision of the Heart" (1733), ¶1.1, in \textit{Works} 1:402-403.}
\footnote{To cite an example from slightly later in Wesley that is nevertheless in harmony with the view expressed in "Circumcision of the Heart, note Wesley’s statement that salvation is “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” (Wesley, \textit{A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion} [1745], Part I, ¶1.3, in \textit{Works} 11:106).}
\footnote{Wesley, “Advice to the People Called Methodists” (1745), ¶2, in \textit{Works} 9:123.}
\footnote{Wesley, “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God” (1748), in \textit{Works} 1:432.}
discipleship coalesce around a version of the means of grace in what we might call a systematic way. Moving forward from this point, our issue will be to consider the place of the means of grace specifically as the practical constituents of that participation, and to better understand the degree to which the means of grace have this role it is necessary to look more closely at how Wesley’s views were shaped by his engagement with two important forces in the 1730s and 1740s – mysticism and Moravianism.

II. Crucible of Development: Mystics and Moravians

The period from Wesley’s adoption of the major categories for the means of grace in 1731 and his publication of the sermon on the means of grace in 1746 witnessed a great deal of development in his understanding of the place of the means of grace in salvation. That is, he did not read Norris’s Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence and adopt the earlier theologian’s position wholesale. There was development, and that development was shaped in large part by tensions between Wesley and two separate groups that came to be on the receiving end of some of his sharpest polemical barbs: mystics and Moravians. For Wesley, the label of “mystics” refers to a set of texts and the authors who wrote them as well as to a particular understanding of how persons come to know God; above all, his conception of mysticism was influenced by his contact with his older contemporary, William Law
(1686-1761). The Moravians are a more easily defined group, though there are distinctions that need to be made here as well. In general, “Moravians” refers to the Moravian Brethren or Brüdergemeine, a group with some basis in the Unitas Fratrum of Moravia and Bohemia in the pre-Reformation period, but who coalesced as a religious body with (somewhat strained) ties to continental Pietism in the 18th century under the protection of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) in Saxony. There they established a community called Herrnhut (“the Lord’s house”) that served as the basis for a broad missionary movement under Zinzendorf’s leadership. Wesley’s initial attraction to both groups, as well as his eventual rejection of them, play a crucial role in his development of the means of grace within his theological scheme.

A. Mysticism

In his Plain Account of Christian Perfection (1766), Wesley states that in the year 1729 he began to see

the indispensable necessity of having the mind which was in Christ, and of walking as Christ also walked; even of having not some part

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only, but all the mind which was in Him; and of walking as He walked, not only in many or in most respects, but in all things.31

This is the root idea contained in Wesley’s conception of holiness – which, of course, has its aim as the perfection that is the subject of the Plain Account. It is notable that by the end of 1729 – the same period in which Oxford Methodism began to take shape – Wesley had already been immersing himself for sometime in such works from the holy living tradition as Thomas à Kempis’ Imitation of Christ and Taylor’s twin works, The Rule and Exercise of Holy Living and The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying.32 During the early 1730s, he became attracted to William Law, a nonjuring Anglican priest whose Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life and Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection were studied by Wesley and joined Kempis and Taylor in the list of holy living divines who were influential on Wesley’s understanding of holiness.33 He would later write that the two works “convinced me more than ever of the

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32 Wesley’s diary account records that he read Kempis in April of 1729 and Taylor in August of 1729. See Heitzanrater, “John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists, 1725-35,” 521. Correspondence with his mother Susanna, however, reveals Wesley discussing both Kempis and Taylor as early as 1725. See, e.g., Wesley, “Letter to Mrs. Susanna Wesley,” 28 May 1725, in Works 25:162-164; and Wesley, “Letter to Mrs. Susanna Wesley,” 18 June 1725, in Works 25:167-170. Wesley’s comments about the importance of these works (as well as Law’s) in the preface to the Plain Account of Christian Perfection further underscore their significance in his growing belief in the significance of holiness, even if Wesley’s memory about dates in the Plain Account (as elsewhere when he is recounting his personal history or the history of the Methodist movement) is somewhat faulty.
33 Wesley first read the Serious Call in December of 1730, and he followed that by studying Christian Perfection in November of 1732. See Frank Baker, “John Wesley’s Introduction to William Law,” Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society 37:3 (October 1969): 78-82. Baker’s essay is helpful in providing an accurate timeline of Wesley’s introduction to Law’s work and corrects Wesley’s own erroneous memory in the preface to the Plain Account of Christian Perfection. Heitzanrater also provides the chronology of Wesley’s encounter with Law’s works through his diary records in “John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists, 1725-35,” 510.
exceeding height and breadth and depth of the law of God.”34 After reading the *Serious Call* and *Christian Perfection*, for Wesley, “The light flowed in so mightily upon my soul that everything appeared in a new view.”35

The introduction to Law – both the man and his writing – was one of the formative influences on the early Wesley’s theology both positively and negatively.36 In the positive sense, Law represented to Wesley an older and respected theologian who seemed to offer through his writing in the *Serious Call* and *Christian Perfection* an account of just the vision of holiness Wesley was seeking. Wesley was attracted by Law’s view in the *Serious Call* on the need for the will to be conformed wholly to God, and he followed his reading of it with a personal visit to Law at his home in Putney in July of 1732.37 While there, Law passed on a copy of the mystical work, the *Theologica Germanica*, and under Law’s influence other mystical writers soon became a staple of Wesley’s study: Madame Guyon, Antoinette Bourignon, Cardinal Fénelon, and the Marquis de Renty.38

The esteem in which Wesley held Law for a period thereafter is apparent through an exchange of letters between the two in 1734, when Wesley wrote to Law

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34 Wesley, *Journal* for 24 May 1738, in *Works* 18:244.
38 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 52-53. If the “contemplative man” of his May 24, 1738, journal entry is indeed Law (as seems likely; see *Works* 18:245 n.46), then it is noteworthy that Wesley lays great stress on the way in which his personal conversations with Law gave him added strength to his conviction that “inward holiness, or a union of the soul with God” is a necessary component of salvation (see *Works* 18:245-246). That the same journal entry goes on to criticize the more mystical aspects of the advice given by the “contemplative man” fits with Wesley’s growing disaffection with Law during the mid- to late-1730s (see discussion below).
seeking the latter’s advice on problems related to a pupil of his at Oxford named John Robson. Wesley describes Robson as a “young gentleman of good sense, an even temper, and pretty good learning,” whom he had attempted to influence as regards Robson’s religious practice by introducing him to the writings of Robert Nelson, Thomas à Kempis, and Law himself.\textsuperscript{39} The increased seriousness of Robson began to wane in the spring of 1734, though, which Wesley took note of by Robson’s unwillingness to undertake a Lenten fast and the shifting of his attention from Christian writings in favor of classical pagan authors. Wesley’s concern over Robson’s increasingly lax attitude was augmented when he discovered that his pupil had stopped receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion, which he had previously received weekly.\textsuperscript{40} After repeatedly asking Robson as to whether he believed himself in a state of salvation and failing to get a satisfactory answer or even to provoke any concern, Wesley wrote to Law to seek advice.

The high regard with which Wesley obviously views Law in the initial letter only serves to emphasize the disappointment Wesley indicates he felt in receiving Law’s reply. That reply is not extant, but the advice Law apparently offered to Wesley can be seen in a letter from John Clayton to Wesley on August 2, 1734. Wesley, disturbed by Law’s letter back to him, has sought the opinion of Clayton on the advice Law proffered. In his letter to Wesley, Clayton quotes a part of the reply that Wesley had shared with him. Law told Wesley to “let him alone,” as the best

way to deal with Robson. Clayton sympathizes with Wesley's view, even while trying to maintain the proper respect deserved by a person of Law's stature. He in fact seems to indicate that perhaps he (Clayton) and Wesley do not understand the point of view Law is representing, admitting that he “is not capable to digest the strong food [Law] administers.” In an implicit endorsement of Wesley's own view, Clayton admits that he believes the means of grace to be both necessary to the Christian life and required by God. After all, Clayton reasons, “prayer, meditation, hearing the Word, and receiving the Sacrament” are “divine institutions” that are a crucial component of anyone’s life who seeks the “unum necessarium” of the life of holiness.

If the exchange of letters over the case of John Robson is a first inkling of Wesley’s disaffection with Law, it is clear that his admiration for Law only waned further over the rest of the 1730s. This part of Wesley's development – in which he came to view Law in a negative light – coincides with an aspect of Law’s own theological shift toward an ever more mystical orientation and a fascination with the 17th century German mystic writer Jacob Boehme. In considering Wesley’s growing rejection of Law, a couple of points are worth noting. The first is that Law should not be seen as a negative foil for Wesley's views, even if Wesley in his polemical style presents him as such in print in later years. Law deserves to be considered on his own terms, even as Wesley’s views of him also need to be

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understood as they relate to his conception of the means of grace.\footnote{For a recent appreciative view of Law’s mysticism, see Alan Gregory, \textit{Quenching Hell: The Mystical Theology of William Law} (New York: Seabury Books, 2008). See also the insightful treatment of Law’s theological outlook vis-à-vis the socio-political views of Edward Gibbon in B.W. Young, “William Law and the Christian Economy of Salvation,” \textit{The English Historical Review} 109:431 (April 1994): 308-322.} Secondly, it is clear that Wesley never repudiated those works of Law’s that he saw as solid expositions on the theology of holiness: the \textit{Serious Call} and \textit{Christian Perfection}. Indeed, Wesley published versions of both works himself in the early 1740s.\footnote{Wesley published an extract of the first two chapters of the \textit{Treatise upon Christian Perfection as The Nature and Design of Christianity} (London: William Strahan, 1740) and later an abridgement of the whole as \textit{A Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection} (Newcastle upon Tyne: John Gooding, 1743). He later published a version of Law’s \textit{Serious Call as A Serious Call to a Holy Life} (Newcastle upon Tyne: John Gooding, 1744). I am grateful to Prof. Randy Maddox for bibliographic information on Wesley’s abridgements of Law, which derives from the earlier research of Frank Baker. See also Heitzenrater, “John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists, 1725-35,” 510; Isabel Rivers, “William Law and Religious Revival: The Reception of A Serious Call,” \textit{Huntington Library Quarterly} 71:4 (December 2008): 640-643; and Isabel Rivers, “John Wesley as Editor and Publisher,” in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley}, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 150.} Nevertheless, it is clear that Wesley began to view mysticism much more critically in the mid-1730s, and particularly during his missionary experience to the Georgia colony from 1735-1738. On November 23, 1736, Wesley wrote to his brother Samuel from Georgia, reflecting on the development of his views in the preceding period and specifically focusing on his engagement with mystic writers. In the opening section of the letter he states, “I think the rock on which I had the nearest made shipwreck of the faith was in the writings of the mystics, under which term I comprehend all, and only those, who slight any of the means of grace.”\footnote{Wesley, “Letter to the Revd. Samuel Wesley, Jun.,” 23 November 1736, in \textit{Works} 25:487.} Thereafter he offers to Samuel an essay where he lays out his understanding of the mystic position on the means of grace which he has by this point found wanting.


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Wesley, the mystics view the means (including in this particular text prayer, Scripture, self-denial, fasting, and the Lord’s Supper) as dependent upon individual preference as each person does or does not see them as necessary for the intended end of love. Once love is attained, in any event, the use of the means can cease. Mystical communion with the divine – a kind of “sight” – renders the practice of the means not only unnecessary but actually hindering to the “passive state” that the mystic obtains. Thus, in Wesley’s evaluation, there are two key tenets of mysticism that heavily qualify the role of the means of grace in Christian life: first, an allowance for their (initial) use that is based on individual preference about a person’s views about what is and is not beneficial; and second, the belief that the means are only temporarily beneficial instruments that can rightly be discarded once the mystic finds himself at the point where he is directly “taught by the Holy Spirit” and therefore spiritually beyond the need for such practices.47 We can classify these as issues of authority, on the one hand, and efficacy on the other.

Wesley’s implications in the letter about what the mystic view lacks reveal something of his own opinion both of the value of the means of grace in ongoing, even perpetual practice, as well as the authoritative basis for that practice. Whereas the goal of the mystics is for a communion with the divine apart from any material means, Wesley sees the means as fundamental to the ability to know God. Whereas the mystics’ desire is to be directed by the Holy Spirit in an individual way, Wesley sees the Spirit as working through the means themselves. And whereas the mystics

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base their view of the profitability of the use of the means on an individual’s felt
sense of need, Wesley is grasping at some larger rule of life (Scripture, the church,
etc.) to guide any particular individual’s practice of the Christian life. On the issues
of authority and efficacy, he clearly sees the means of grace as both obligatory in
their use and crucial in their role of mediating God’s grace to Christian believers.
While on his way back from Georgia, Wesley composed a personal memorandum
where he lays out his consideration of various theological influences over the
previous few years. By this point, he has already concluded that “all the other
enemies of Christianity are triflers; the mystics are the most dangerous of all its
enemies.”48 The memorandum offers no spiritual resolution to the personal
dilemma he felt at the time, but in it Wesley clearly affirms that he believes the
answer must lie somewhere in the midst of a path that includes following God’s
commands to practice the means of grace in Christian living.49

to mysticism continued thereafter; in the early editions of the Journal installment that
includes his account of the Aldersgate experience on 24 May 1738, Wesley describes the
mystics as those “whom I declare in my cool judgment, and in the presence of the most high
God, I believe to be one great antichrist” (Works 18:246 n.47). Wesley published this
installment of the Journal in 1740.
49 One way of viewing Wesley’s position at this point is that he was simply unwilling to
forsake either the formation in which he had long participated and believed or what he
understood Scripture as commanding, though the influence of Wesley’s reading of the High
Church Anglican tradition during the 1730s should not be overlooked. See Geordan
Hammond, “High Church Anglican Influences on John Wesley’s Conception of Primitive
Christianity, 1732-1735,” Anglican and Episcopal History 78:2 (June 2009): 174-207;
Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 72-73.
B. Moravians

Wesley's initial contact with the Moravians came during his journey from England to Georgia, where the calm disposition of fellow Moravian passengers during a dangerous storm so impressed him that he later remarked on it in his journal.\textsuperscript{50} Together with this first meeting, Wesley encountered members of the Moravian Brethren at distinct points during the later 1730s: first on board the \textit{HMS Simmonds} en route to Georgia in 1735; then in the Georgia colony where he met August Spangenburg and associated with Moravians in the colony; in London upon his return where he met and was influenced by Peter Böhler in the spring of 1738; and finally in a visit to Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf's Herrnhut community in August of 1738.\textsuperscript{51} These were all what we might call "positive" encounters in that they served to assist Wesley in his spiritual pilgrimage during a trying time in his life. The impact of each of the encounters influenced Wesley in different ways, and both the particular Moravian personalities involved and Wesley's spiritual state at the various points played a significant role. Taken together, the Moravian influence has to be seen as the most profound influence on Wesley during the period of his life that included the missionary experience in Georgia, the time around Aldersgate, and

\textsuperscript{50} Wesley, \textit{Journal} for 25 January 1735, in \textit{Works} 18:142-143. Wesley was attracted to the Moravians almost from the time he boarded the \textit{HMS Simmonds} and reports that he began to study German in order to be able to communicate with them (see \textit{Works} 18:137).

the beginnings of the revival (i.e., Wesley’s “last rise” of Methodism). Wesley continued to associate closely with the Moravians in England after his return from Herrnhut in the late summer of 1739, though from this time onward until the split of the Fetter Lane Society in the summer of 1740, his interactions with the Moravian leader Philip Henry Molther and others were increasingly contentious and marked by sharp theological dispute. The ways in which the Moravians influenced Wesley positively were many: the depth of their faith, their resemblance (in Wesley’s mind) to the primitive church, their evangelical teaching on justification by faith, and the effectiveness of their forms of organization. There was also a major way in which the Moravians influenced Wesley negatively, though, and by “negatively” here we mean a way in which Wesley was repelled by Moravian teaching and example, and influenced toward developing his position in a distinctively different direction from what the Moravians represented. The issue in this case was the means of grace. It was the “English” Moravians Wesley knew in London (and with whom he collaborated in the formation of the Fetter Lane Society) who had the most significant impact on his theology of the means of grace, so it is to Wesley’s interactions with them that we will focus our attention.52

52 I use “English” in scare quotes not because the Moravians active in London were actually English (they were German) but in order to differentiate them from the Moravians Wesley knew in Georgia as well as the Moravians of the Herrnhut community on the continent. The best source for the Moravians in England during this period is Colin Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). As with Law, it is important not to let Wesley’s eventually negative evaluation obscure a consideration of the Moravian Brethren in their own right, and Podmore’s careful study allows for that. Podmore’s reading of Wesley’s relationship with the English Moravians can, in fact, serve as a counterweight to typical Wesleyan readings in that he thinks Wesley’s role in the development of the Fetter Lane Society is generally overblown (see 29-71).
Making the claim that the Moravians influenced Wesley’s theology of the means of grace seems obvious, but it also runs counter to the way his interactions with various Moravian figures in the late 1730s and early 1740s is usually described. The usual tack taken in describing Wesley and the Moravians focuses on the spiritual breakthrough to which they contributed in Wesley’s life by impressing upon him the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith.\(^{53}\) This was the “new doctrine” that Wesley began preaching in March of 1738.\(^{54}\) And this was also the

For a discussion of the significance of Wesley’s encounter with the Moravians on his soteriology particularly after his return from Georgia, see Heitzenrater, “Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity,” in *Mirror and Memory*, 121-141; and W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of ‘Love Divine’: John Wesley’s Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 83-103. In addition, Frederick Dreyer attempts a balanced reading of Wesley and the Moravians with reference to the issue of soteriology, which is helpful to consider alongside Podmore’s study as well as those of Heitzenrater and Gunter; see Dreyer, “John Wesley: ein englischer Pietist,” *Methodist History* 40:2 (January 2002): 71-84.

\(^{53}\) The chief influence on Wesley between the time of his return to England at the beginning of February 1738 and his experience at Aldersgate the following May was Peter Böhler, whom Wesley first met in London on February 7th (see *Works* 18:223-224). Böhler had recently arrived in England from Germany and shortly thereafter made his way to the American colonies. His influence on Wesley is recounted in Wesley’s *Journal* between February 7th and May 4th of 1738 (see *Works* 18:223-237).

\(^{54}\) Wesley, *Journal* for 6 March 1738, in *Works* 18:228. Wesley on this day records that he was preaching “salvation by faith alone,” and it is true that around this period he referred to the doctrine that the Moravians had taught him was that (rather than “justification by faith,” as I have suggested in the text above). Cf. Wesley’s sermon, “Salvation by Faith,” which he preached as a university sermon at St. Mary’s, Oxford, only days after the Aldersgate experience (in *Works* 1:117-130). However, Wesley’s terminology must be seen as temporarily lacking nuance in this regard, and it was qualified later on, as in for example the preface to the installment of this very section of the *Journal*, which was penned by Wesley in the autumn of 1740 and speaks of “justifying faith.” (Wesley’s appropriation of the Moravian teaching on faith would, of course, be qualified by him almost as soon as it had been made due to Wesley’s desire to grapple with the issue of degrees of faith in the life of the believer.) Heitzenrater comments on this same issue in Heitzenrater, “Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity,” in *Mirror and Memory*, 124-126. In general, the sense Wesley gives in his published *Journal* of this period of his life is the utter lack of assurance in his faith and an inability to experientially trust in Christ for salvation. Thus, his accounts of conversations with Böhler tend to stress aspects of justifying faith including its sheer giftedness from God, its deeply personal (or relational)
understanding of faith as pure gift that Peter Böhler was trying to help Wesley grasp when he counseled Wesley in response to the latter’s sense of unworthiness:

“Preach faith till you have it, and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.” It was also the assurance of just such a faith to which Wesley testifies about his famous Aldersgate experience on May 24, 1738, when he says that he came to trust “Christ alone for salvation,” saying that “an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

Nevertheless, and despite all that the Moravians did contribute to Wesley’s theological formation, we know that he found the (English) Moravian soteriology lacking even in the immediate post-Aldersgate afterglow. The reason for this was the all-or-nothing, unnuanced way that Molther and others insisted that faith had to be understood. Wesley believed that there must be “degrees of faith,” that is, that faith was a reality that could be born in a person’s soul and could then grow toward maturity. Much later he would call this the distinction between the “faith of a servant” and the “faith of a son.” In the period immediately following Aldersgate, it helped him to understand how he could find himself “in peace, but not in joy.” The

nature, and the instantaneous quality of its reception (see, e.g., the Journal for 22 April 1738, in Works 18:233-234). When Wesley began exploring the tradition of justification by faith in the doctrinal heritage of the Church of England (as embodied in the Homilies), he did so under that specific term (see Works 19:21).


Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 261. The distinction between these two orders of Christians in the later Wesley is found in Wesley, “The More Excellent Way” (1787), in Works 3:263-277.

Wesley, Journal for 28 May 1738, in Works 18:252. Wesley’s reasoning on this point at the time can be found in a journal entry for May 29, where he compares himself to a Moravian convert by the name of Mr. Wolf by stating, “I was much strengthened by the grace of God in him: yet was his state so far above mine that I was often tempted to doubt whether we had
reality of degrees of faith thus squared with his own experience as well as his broader Anglican formation, and his visit to the Moravian community at Herrnhut revealed that it was a concept congenial to other Moravians as well.\footnote{Wesley makes repeated reference to this point in the \textit{Journal} as he raised it with both Zinzendorf and other Moravians such as Christian David. See Wesley’s reference to Zinzendorf on justification and assurance during their conversation at Marienborn (\textit{Works} 18:259-261) as well as the references to conversations with various Moravian men at Herrnhut (\textit{Works} 18:270-291). As later events would show, however, there was mutual misunderstanding around the nature of salvation which, if not realized at this time, certainly did come to light during the events of 1741 when Wesley spoke with Zinzendorf in person during the latter’s trip to England. See Wesley, \textit{Journal} for 3 September 1741, in \textit{Works} 19:211-215.}

The other side of the coin in considering the influence the Moravians had on Wesley’s conception of justification and new birth is to highlight as well the impact that his rejection of a certain understanding of faith and the means for receiving faith had on his developing view of the importance of the means of grace.\footnote{It is in this area that I think Dreyer’s analysis is lacking (see Dreyer, “John Wesley: \textit{ein englischer Pietist},” 71-84). In attempting to locate the whole of the Wesley/Moravian dispute in a misunderstanding (and mistiming) of the \textit{Bußkampf}/\textit{Versöhnungslehre} development in Moravian piety, Dreyer ignores the issue of the means of grace which was important to Wesley well before he ever met his first Moravian. Dreyer’s emphasis on Moravian developments is helpful and relatively rare in analyses of the Wesley/Moravian episode; his one-dimensional read of Wesley is less so.} The Moravians under Philip Henry Molther taught the practice of stillness as the way by which one was to await the gift of faith via spiritual rebirth.\footnote{Wesley reports on the beginning of this controversy in the \textit{Journal} for 1 November 1739 (in \textit{Works} 19:119), and it continues until the dramatic departure of Wesley, his brother Charles, and others from the Fetter Lane Society in London on July 20, 1740 (\textit{Works} 19:161-162). Two days later Wesley organized the Methodist society at the Foundery, where it met thereafter (\textit{Works} 19:163).} This doctrine of stillness (or “quietism”) precluded the use of the means of grace; indeed, the means
were seen as detrimental to gaining a faith that could only be given directly by Christ, who was seen by Molther and the Moravians in London as the only true means of grace.\(^{62}\)

For Wesley, the theological commitment to a faith that could grow was mirrored by the practical commitment to participation in the means of grace. As he incorporated the doctrine of justification by faith into his understanding of salvation, it took its place in complementary, rather than adversarial, fashion alongside the view of sanctification he held pre-Aldersgate. As he came around to agree with Peter Böhler’s teaching on the nature of faith, Wesley reports that he resolved within himself to seek it by renouncing any notion of the goodness of his own works or righteousness, and by “adding to ‘the constant use of the’ other ‘means of grace’, continual prayer for this very thing, justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me.”\(^{63}\) He did not seek to replace full participation in the means of grace with faith; rather, he sought to work out a way in which faith as “the free gift of God” (in Wesley’s terms) could fit into the matrix of a Christian life defined by a rich panoply of formative practices. His theological reasoning around this complementary view of faith and the means of grace can be seen in a Journal entry for June 22, 1740, where he writes,

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\(^{62}\) Wesley speaks strongly on this subject in the preface to his Journal installment of 1737-1738, composed in September of 1740 (see Works 18:219-220). See also citations of this conflict in the Journal entries covered in Works 19:120, 131-134, 147, and 153-157. Wesley reports that in personal interviews Molther expressly denied the reality of a “weak faith” and the concept of degrees of faith, as well as the notion that there are such things as means of grace. Cf. Hynson, “John Wesley and the ‘Unitas Fratrum’: A Theological Analysis,” 40-43; and Stephens, “Wesley and the Moravians,” 32-33.

... I took occasion to give a plain account both of the work which God had begun among us and of the manner wherein the enemy had sown his tares among the good seed, to this effect:

After we had wandered many years in the new path of salvation by faith and works, about two years ago it pleased God to show us the old way of salvation by faith only. And many soon tasted of this salvation, ‘being justified’ freely, ‘having peace with God’, ‘rejoicing in hope and of the glory of God’, and having his ‘love shed abroad in their hearts’. These now ran the way of his commandments; they performed all their duty to God and man. They walked in all the ordinances of the Lord, and through these means which he had appointed for that end, received daily grace to help in time of need, and went on ‘from faith to faith’.

Wesley’s view of salvation on the whole is that it is an “entire work of God,” received in the life of the believer through faith alone. And yet Wesley’s view of God’s grace is one of “responsible” grace. The actual, embodied practices of devotion, worship, and engaged Christian living that the believer uses while receiving that grace are the “means which [God] hath ordained” for the continual reception and upbuilding of grace – the means of grace.

The conflict with Molther and the exodus of Wesley and his followers from the Fetter Lane Society in July 1740 were followed by further misunderstandings in the next year. Disagreements over the relationship of justification and sanctification, the possibility of perfection, charges of sectarianism and antinomianism (by Wesley), further disputes about the means of grace, and the acrimony caused by competing egos all combined to scuttle the possibility of any kind of rapprochement.

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65 The phrase is one of those Wesley uses to describe the totality of God’s salvation in human life in Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” ¶1.1, in Works 2:156.
66 The framing of grace as “responsible” in Wesley’s thought here is derived from the work of Randy Maddox; see, e.g., Maddox, Responsible Grace, 84-87.
between Wesley and the Moravians.⁶⁸ Seen in one way, all these issues (save the ego conflicts) were aspects of the same root theological dispute over the nature of the via salutis and the way it finds practical expression in the life of discipleship. In any event, Wesley's commitment to the means of grace clearly was only solidified and strengthened by his fruitful but stormy relationship with the Moravian Brethren.

It is through the conflicts with mysticism and Moravianism in the 1730s and 40s that we can see Wesley as coming to something of a mature position on the means of grace and their place in his understanding of salvation. The desire for an experiential knowledge of God and the assurance of one's acceptance by God that Wesley could not find in mysticism was provided by the Moravian teaching on salvation by faith. Yet in the end the Moravians, in Wesley's view, fell into an error all too similar to the mystics by minimizing the role of the church as expressed in its worship, liturgy, and devotional practices – all of which Wesley took to be grounded in Scripture.⁶⁹ To Wesley, they did not understand the way that God had determined to mediate grace through certain means, Scripturally discernible and experientially provable. Considering that it was under Moravian influence that Wesley made his final break with Law, it is remarkable how theologically similar his later break with

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⁶⁹ Note, for example, John Wesley's letter to his brother Charles on 21 April 1741 (in Works 26:56), where he complains against the Moravians first and foremost because "their whole scheme is mystical, not scriptural, refined in every point above what is written, immeasurably beyond the plain doctrines of the gospel." (A portion of the letter is recounted in the Journal for 21 April 1741, in Works 19:191.) He repeats the theme of Moravian mystical tendencies and the problems with the mystical interpretation of Scripture in Wesley, "Letter to Count Zinzendorf and the Church at Herrnhut," 5-8 August 1740, in Works 26:29-30; cf. Wesley, Journal for 3 September 1741, in Works 19:219.
the Moravians would be to the reasons that divided him from Law. With Law, it was
the perceived consequences of mysticism, which divorced faith from the church’s
practices as developed from Scriptural teaching – and not truly the doctrine of
justification itself. The issue with the Moravians was over the stillness doctrine, that
Molther taught as the proper attitude for those awaiting the experience of new birth.
As a doctrine, Moravian stillness does not differ a great deal from that of mysticism,
and in just this way: both reject the very understanding of mediation that had
always been a part of Wesley’s life – from his early formation, to his study and
practice at Oxford, right through his struggles of the mid- to late-1730s.70 Wesley’s
immersion into the resources of his own tradition helped him to discover that the
sola fide doctrine of the Moravians was part of the Reformation-era teaching of the
Church of England as well, and through this finding the came to realize that the
teaching of salvation as the work of God through grace could be embraced without
discarding the religious life, with all its practices, in which he has been formed since
childhood. It was even more than the accommodation of the two, however, because
through a robust interpretation of the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of
the means of grace Wesley came to see that the two were inseparable: by practicing
the means of grace one moves into a pattern of life that makes one ready to receive
faith and therefore new birth, and by continuing practice of the means of grace

70 Wesley at one point connects Moravian theology with mysticism via Martin Luther. The
same Luther he had referred to in 1738 as “that glorious champion of the Lord of Hosts,
Martin Luther” (in Wesley, “Salvation by Faith,” ¶III.9, in Works 1:129), he describes in a
Journal entry for 15 June 1741 as “deeply tinctured with mysticism ... and hence often
fundamentally wrong” (Works 19:201). In this same entry he comments, “Here (I
apprehend) is the real spring of the grand error of the Moravians. They follow Luther, for
better, for worse.”
thereafter one continually receives and makes use of the grace that makes one holy in heart and life.

In this sense, the alternative vision for the state necessary for the reception of faith posed by Moravian stillness never convinced Wesley to stray from the position on the means of grace he had set down during his return from Georgia in January of 1738: “I have ... from the very beginning valued both faith, the means of grace, and good works, not on their own account, but as believing God, who had appointed them, would by them bring me in due time to the mind that was in Christ.”71 Wesley’s indebtedness to the Moravians in showing him that faith is an “experiential reality” was lasting.72 He had come to understand faith as a “disposition of the heart” that is

... not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ, a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon him as our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us. It is a sure confidence which a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God; and in consequence hereof a closing with him and cleaving to him as our ‘wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption’ or, in one word, our salvation.73

Yet for all the power of this doctrine of faith, Wesley saw the (English) Moravian view of the reception of faith as lacking any sense of nuance, collapsing faith and assurance and not allowing for degrees of faith in the life of the believer.74 He blamed Law for not giving him an adequate understanding of the role of faith in

72 The phrase is Heitzenrater’s. See Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 80.
73 Wesley, “Salvation by Faith” (1738), ¶1.4-5, in Works 1:120-121.
74 See Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 77-89.
Christ as the ground of salvation. And he blamed the Moravians for providing that understanding in too one-dimensional a form.

C. Concluding Note

There is an exchange of letters between Wesley and Law in May of 1738 that can serve as a coda to Wesley’s engagement with both mystics and Moravians during the period that his developing view of the role of the means of grace in salvation was ongoing. The exchange is a revealing one because of what it shows about Wesley’s view of Law at the time and what it foreshadows about his eventual break with the Moravians. The letters from Wesley to Law are accusatory in tone; he blames Law and Law’s writing in the *Serious Call* and *Christian Perfection* for pointing toward salvation but offering no real way to attain it. One the one hand, the “two practical treatises” of Law have led Wesley to conform himself to a way of life that will supposedly lead to the experience of salvation. But on the other hand, this is to Wesley some form of works righteousness that can only lead to a “deeper captivity to the law of sin.”75 He then reveals that a “holy man to whom God lately directed me” – surely a reference to Peter Böhler – articulated for him the classic doctrine of justification by faith, that he should, “Believe in the Lord Jesus with all thy heart, and nothing shall be impossible to thee.”76 To this man, Wesley reveals, he had only been able to speak of “mystical matters” and thereby showed his own understanding to be sorely deficient. He then challenges Law that the teaching he

had received from Law regarding faith was lacking on Law’s part because Law “had it not yourself.”

Law’s reply to Wesley expresses exasperation, and it is an exasperation that is surely justified. One cannot help in reading a pair of letters and replies between the two men but to conclude that Wesley's own internal spiritual turmoil in the spring of 1738 is leading him to lash out at his erstwhile mentor for what he perceives to lack in himself. Yet in the period after Aldersgate when Wesley's view of faith begins to grapple with the reality of “degrees of faith,” he turns his criticism on the same Moravian tradition that he had found so life-giving after his return from Georgia. He concludes that the (English) Moravians are guilty of something similar to Law and the mystics in the way their doctrine of faith is expressed through Quietism. For both mystics and Moravians, the way to salvation is an unmediated way – whether that be direct communion with the Holy Spirit (in the case of the mystics) or the direct reception of faith (in the case of Moravian stillness doctrine). The basis for Wesley’s rejection of both options is that faith is indeed mediated, through the means that God has provided and which are expressed in the practices of the church as grounded in Scripture’s teaching. If, indeed, the experience of salvation is via faith that is a gift of God, those who wait for it are enjoined to “wait for it in the means.”

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78 Law asks Wesley, for instance, “Is not faith in Jesus Christ the very sum and substance of what is meant by mystical religion?” (Works 25:545).
79 Indeed, Wesley states the point against the Moravians in just this way in the Journal for 28 January 1741, in Works 19:179.
CHAPTER FOUR

~ The Content of the Means of Grace in John Wesley’s Theology ~

John Wesley’s theology of the means of grace is a topic within his thought that has gained increasing attention in recent years. In addition to the major monographs or dissertations of Borgen, Knight, and Blevins, other scholars seeking to present a comprehensive view of Wesley’s theology have recognized the importance of the means of grace within his theological scheme.¹ There are many other examples of scholars analyzing the Wesleyan view of the means of grace in scholarly articles or as sections within larger works.² These investigations into the


3 For reasons of scope, the present study has not taken up a consideration of Charles Wesley on the means of grace, or the place of the means of grace in early Methodist hymnody. While scholarly literature on the means of grace is overwhelmingly focused on John Wesley's theology, a recent example of work on Charles Wesley can be found in E. Byron Anderson, “The Power of Godliness to Know: Charles Wesley and the Means of Grace,” Wesleyan Theological Journal 43:2 (Fall 2008): 7-27. See also the poem, “The Means of Grace,” published by Charles Wesley in April of 1740 and subsequently included in John Wesley and Charles Wesley, Hymns and Sacred Poems (London: Strahan, 1740), 35-39. This edition of Hymns and Sacred Poems is available at Duke Divinity School's Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition; URL: http://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/cswt/.

of the means of grace in Wesleyan theology and for the ongoing Wesleyan tradition generally.

The present chapter seeks to examine the content of the means of grace in Wesley’s theology. It will take into account both recent contemporary scholarship as well as the issues of reception and development dealt with in the current project up to this point. The chapter will begin not by launching immediately into that examination, however. It will instead first take up a consideration of the nature of grace in Wesley’s theology. “Grace” is a term that has been used in an unselfconscious manner up to this point. As an entrée into discussing the means of grace as practices, it is necessary to flesh out Wesley’s view on grace somewhat more fully – both to avoid the tendency toward an anthropocentrism in our discussion of the efficacy of the means of grace, and as a way to represent fairly Wesley’s own concern about the source of the means’ power in particular.

I. The Nature of Grace

With regards to the power of the means of grace, the view Wesley expresses in his second discourse “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount” (1748) is instructive, in that he somewhat surprisingly refers to a version of the General Rules – doing no harm, doing good, and using the means of grace – as “what the world accounts religion.”5 About these three standards for continued participation in a Methodist society, Wesley says pejoratively, “He in whom these three marks are

5 Wesley, "Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, II," (1748), ¶II.4, in Works 1:496.
found is termed by the world a religious man.”6 Such a status is unsatisfactory for “him who hungers after God,” according to Wesley. His meaning here is echoed in the sermon, “The Means of Grace,” where he makes three key points about how properly to understand the means of grace. These may be seen as follows:

- First, Wesley states, “[T]he whole value of the means depends on their actual subservience to the end of religion” and that “if they do not actually conduce to the knowledge and love of God they are not acceptable in his sight.”7 In other words, the value of the means of grace, according to Wesley, consists in their function within the larger framework of salvation. Considered apart from the actual regeneration effected by grace, the means themselves are useless.

- Second, Wesley asserts that “all outward means whatever, if separate from the Spirit of God, cannot profit at all.”8 Here we see the way in which the means of grace are connected intimately to Wesley’s view of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. He contends that there is no “inherent power” in the outward acts associated with the means, and further that God is “the author of all grace.” The means of grace, therefore, in order to have any power at all, must be wedded to the action of the Holy Spirit.

- Third, Wesley asserts “that the use of all means whatever will never to atone for one sin; that it is the blood of Christ alone whereby any sinner can be reconciled to God.”9 And thus, we can see the way in which the means of grace, for Wesley, are dependent upon a strong view of Christ’s meritorious sacrifice on humanity’s behalf. It is the work of Jesus Christ alone that is the ground of salvation.

Restated in reverse order, we can say that – in Wesley’s view – the means of grace are necessarily grounded in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, guided by the power of the Holy Spirit, and directed toward the salvation of the Christian believer. We can classify these three key concerns as under the headings of Christology,

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6 Wesley, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, II,” ¶II.4, in Works 496-497.
pneumatology, and soteriology. These three qualifications offer a window into the centrality of a certain conception of grace that lies at the heart of his doctrine of the means of grace.

An insightful statement on the nature of grace is made by Wesley in the 1746 sermon, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit,” where he writes,

By ‘the grace of God’ is sometimes to be understood that free love, that unmerited mercy, by which I, a sinner, through the merits of Christ am now reconciled to God. But in this place it rather means that power of God the Holy Ghost which ‘worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure’. As soon as ever the grace of God (in the former sense, his pardoning love) is manifested to our soul, the grace of God (in the latter sense, the power of his Spirit) takes place therein.10

In this passage, Wesley holds together a view of grace that encompasses both justification and sanctification – that of God’s mercy or pardon, and that of God’s regenerating work or power. He also locates the source of grace in commitments both Christological and pneumatological; Christ’s meritorious death is the source of grace as pardon, and the work of the Holy Spirit is the source of grace as power. The nature of grace is revealed as none other than the love of God, and the grounding of that love in the presence of the Holy Spirit suggests that grace is not to be understood as having an ontological status apart from God’s own self. It is a relational reality, and as such it is known to the extent that God is known through the presence of God’s own Spirit.11 Working from Wesley’s pneumatological emphasis in particular, Heitzenrater has characterized Wesley’s view of grace as the

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11 Hence Wesley can place grace and the Holy Spirit in apposite, as he does where he writes “the grace of God, the power of his Holy Spirit” (Wesley, “The Good Steward” [1768], ¶1.8, in Works 2:286). Cf. Maddox, Responsible Grace, 84-87.
“active presence or power of God.” Its relational quality is often emphasized by Wesley as an experiential knowledge with reference to the language of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:14-17 regarding the witness of the Spirit – “whereby the Spirit of God ‘witnesses to my Spirit that I am a child of God’; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God.” Moreover, it is by keeping our focus on grace as originating in God and as remaining in God that we can properly conceive of salvation as the work of God; Wesley expounds upon the words of Philippians 2:12-13 about God working in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” by stating that the “position of the words, connecting the phrase of ‘his good pleasure’ with the word ‘worketh’, removes all imagination of merit from man, and gives God the whole glory of his own work.” Any view of the efficacy of the means of grace in salvation must begin, then, with the view that it is God’s grace that gives the means their power and that the grace that the means convey is the relational power of God for salvation – the power to forgive sin, reconcile persons to God, and sanctify human life.

It is true that the Wesleyan view of grace is most often sub-categorized into headings such as prevenient (or preventing) grace, convincing grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. This is a tendency that finds thorough basis in Wesley’s

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13 Wesley, “The Witness of the Spirit, I” (1746), ¶1.7, in Works 1:274. It is, of course, this same passage from Romans 8 on the assurance of the Holy Spirit that was important for Wesley in his Aldersgate experience (cf. Works 18:249-250).
own thought.\textsuperscript{15} The categorization of grace in this way has even been called by Harald Lindström the “stages” of grace.”\textsuperscript{16} Such a move may be helpful in describing the work of grace as it is received in human life, and to be sure, Wesley gives ample attention to corresponding states of the soul (awakening, repentance, justification, new birth, sanctification, and perfection). There is a danger, though, in placing too much emphasis on categories of grace if such a move leads one to think of there being separate “graces.”\textsuperscript{17} Heitzenrater guards against the view of grace as separate from the presence of God in human life in a helpful way where he writes, “[G]race is not a substance, a thing. Grace is relational – it is God’s relationship with us, his activity in our lives, grounded in his loving attributes directed toward us.”\textsuperscript{18} He goes on to describe grace with reference to the differentiated experience of grace (as received in human life) while respecting the reality of undifferentiated grace (as it exists in the being of God):

Grace is God’s presence (that is to say, power) active in our lives … If we understand God’s grace in this way, it helps us understand Wesley’s soteriology more clearly as a theology of grace, as traditionally taught. God’s presence/power enlightens us at the beginning (prevenient grace); God’s presence/power judges our sinfulness (convicting grace); God’s presence/power forgives our sins (justifying grace); God’s presence/power empowers us (sanctifying

\textsuperscript{15} See esp. Wesley, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” ¶II.1, in \textit{Works} 3:203-204. Also notable is “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” which begins with an introductory section on preventing grace before going on to focus the sermon on justification and sanctification (see \textit{Works} 2:155-169).
\textsuperscript{17} Maddox recognizes this in \textit{Responsible Grace} where he writes, “For [Wesley] the following aspects of human salvation [e.g., regeneration, awakening, repentance, justification, etc.] were not an ordered series of discrete states, they are intertwined facets of an overarching purpose – our gradual recovery of the holiness that God has always intended for us” (158).
But these are not "four graces" or four different kinds of things. All of these are part of one reality – the grace of God, the power/presence of God working in our lives, to inform, convict, liberate, and strengthen us.\(^{19}\)

Henry Knight concurs in this assessment of Wesley's view of grace as relational, stating, "Grace for Wesley is most essentially God's triune act of love which has as its goal the renewal of human lives. The foundational act of grace is the atonement of the Son for us; present acts of grace are the work of the Holy Spirit in us."\(^{20}\) Taking such care in describing the nature of grace is important, in the Wesleyan view, for ensuring that grace remain the province of God and in God, and specifically of the pardon of Christ's atoning work and the power of the Holy Spirit's love.

Within Wesley's doctrine of grace, it is his notion of God's prevenient (or preventing) grace that is crucial to understanding how the means of grace become efficacious in the Christian life.\(^{21}\) The "way of salvation" or \textit{via salutis} begins with God's prevenient action, and it is through the prevenient work of grace that Wesley's view of salvation commences; thus he sees it as extending "to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory."\(^{22}\) It is also through this view of prevenient grace that allows Wesley (in the memorable

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\(^{19}\) Heitzenrater, "Wesleyan Ecclesiology: Methodism as a Means of Grace," 125. See also Heitzenrater, "God with Us: Grace and the Spiritual Senses in John Wesley's Theology," 91-92.


phrase of Borgen) “to steer his course past the shoals of Pelagianism and the rocky cliffs of the ‘horrible decree’ [i.e, predestination].”

Wesley’s conception of prevenient grace finds its root in Article 10 of the 39 Articles of Religion in the Book of Common Prayer, which states:

Of Free-Will. The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

This is a statement on the agency of the will that affirms the necessity of grace “coming before” (praevenire) any good that a person can do or any movement of soul toward God. Wesley affirms this view of grace as it relates to Calvinism is evident in the Minutes for the 1745 Conference, which reads:

Q.23. Wherein may we come to the very edge of Calvinism?
A. (1) In ascribing all good to the free grace of God; (2) in denying all natural free will and all power antecedent to grace; and (3) in excluding all merit from man, even for what he has or does by the grace of God.

The careful way in which the language of the 1745 Minutes frames the issue is important. The denial of “all natural free will” and “all power antecedent to grace” points towards a view of Original Sin and total depravity as a result of the fall, both of which were strong commitments of Wesley. In this, he would be in agreement with the Calvinist position. Likewise, the endorsement of role of grace as the ground of salvation (and the denial of free will or human merit) puts him in agreement with

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23 Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 125.
24 Book of Common Prayer, 1662.
the Calvinist position as well. Where Wesley's view brings him to the edge of
Calvinism but no further is in his understanding of the “free grace of God,” a phrase
that points to his belief in the universal atonement and the availability of grace to all
who would receive and respond to it.26 This is sometimes called the “Arminian view”
of grace to distinguish it from the Calvinist doctrines of election and irresistible
grace, though it is less Arminian in a technical sense and more indebted to the broad
Anglican tradition that (in contrast to the Puritan tradition in the Church of
England) always maintained a place for graced human participation in the work of
salvation.27 It was this Anglican conception of grace and participation within
salvation that grew in the 17th century as the influence of Puritan theology
diminished, though it should also be noted that what would later be dubbed
“Anglican” was present in the English theological tradition since the Reformation.28

A full exploration of prevenient grace in Wesley’s theology would show the
way in which prevenient grace should be conceived both technically among the
major elements of the via salutis and generally as the empowering force leading
persons toward a growth in holiness at all times and in all aspects of life.29 The

26 Wesley expresses this judgment with particular polemical fervor in the sermon “Free
Grace” (1739), in Works 3:544-563. In his view, “The grace or love of God, whence cometh
our salvation, is free in all, and free for all” (Works 3:544).
27 See, e.g., Maddox, Responsible Grace, 90.
28 The classic statement of this view in the Anglican tradition is, of course, in Richard
Hooker’s Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. For Wesley’s connection to the prior Anglican
tradition on the character of grace, see Shontz, “Anglican Influence on John Wesley’s
Soteriology,” 33-52. Maddox also makes the point of Wesley’s broad grounding in Anglican
thought in Maddox, Responsible Grace, 84 and 86.
29 I mention these two senses of prevenient grace intentionally, following the analysis of
prevenient grace of Maddox (see Responsible Grace, 84). Maddox is careful to note that
Wesley expresses a view of prevenient grace that gives it a place both narrowly in the sense of
“God’s saving work in fallen humanity prior to justification” and broadly in the sense of
former sense of prevenient grace within the *via salutis* as the work of God awakening persons to their sinful state, convicting them of their helplessness apart from God and thus to repentance (sometimes characterized by the separate label of “convincing grace”), and leading to an experience of justification and new birth, has been considered in any number of scholarly studies of Wesley’s soteriology.\(^{30}\) Our current consideration of prevenient grace seeks to work from those analyses to locate the intersection of prevenient grace and participation in the means of grace, which is a task taken out of the conviction that prevenient grace plays a crucial role in Wesley’s understanding of how the means of grace can be efficacious for salvation. This is a task that requires less of a view into prevenient grace vis-à-vis other elements of the *via salutis* in a formal sense (with comparison to justification, sanctification, etc.), and more of a focus on the sense of prevenient grace as preceding (and enabling) all movements of the soul toward God.

As the presence and power of God for salvation, the work of grace is always oriented toward the reconciliation of human beings to God and the restoration of human life in the love God intends for it. This grace always “comes before” humanity and leads it toward God. The effects of prevenient grace are seen, first in the universal atonement, which implies that no one is wholly lacking in God’s favor. Universal atonement is simply an affirmation that Christ’s atoning death on the

cross was intended universally, for all humanity. Therefore, the true beginning of
humanity’s restoration comes through God’s prevenient grace, which is given as
God’s free gift. Total depravity might seem to suggest that we can think or do
nothing good, but prevenient grace counters that by affirming that all people have
been enabled to walk the way of salvation by virtue of God’s prevenient work in
their lives. For Wesley, this universal gift explains the phenomenon of conscience,
which he regards as “a supernatural gift of God” and a direct consequence of
prevenient grace. Conscience allows for the discernment of basic questions of right
and wrong, an important first step in moral reasoning, even while the more
soteriological function of prevenient grace comes in the way it leads individuals to a
sense of conviction and repentance for sin.

All this suggests that it is more accurate to speak not of “free will” in the
Wesleyan view but rather of a “graced will.” It is what allows Wesley to state, “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

31 On the universal atonement in Wesley, see “Free Grace,” ¶21, in Works 3:553. On the
assertion that prevenient grace is received universally, see “On Working Out Our Own
Salvation” (1785), ¶III.4, in Works 3:207.
32 See, e.g., Wesley, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” ¶III.1, in Works 3:203, where
Wesley states that “salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly)
33 Wesley, “On Conscience” (1788), ¶I.5, in Works 3:482-484. Wesley goes on to assert that
conscience has a “threepart office,” which is described as follows: “First, it is a witness,
testifying what we have done, in thought, word, or action. Secondly, it is a judge, passing
sentence on what we have done, that it is good or evil. And thirdly, it in some sort executes
the sentence, by occasioning a degree of complacency in him that does well, and a degree of
uneasiness in him that does evil” (¶I.7). Cf. Wesley, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit,” ¶5, in
did not take away your understanding, but enlightened and strengthened it.”34 It is through grace given in just this way that Wesley frames participation in the means of grace in the sermon, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” with the means of grace here spoken of in terms of works of piety and works of mercy:

But what are the steps which the Scripture directs us to take, in the working out of our own salvation? The prophet Isaiah gives us a general answer touching the first steps which we are to take: ‘Cease to do evil; learn to do well.’ If ever you desire that God should work in you that faith whereof cometh both present and eternal salvation, by the grace already given, fly from all sin as from the face of a serpent; carefully avoid every evil word and work; yea, abstain from all appearance of evil. And ‘learn to do well’; be zealous of good works, of works of piety, as well as works of mercy. Use family prayer, and cry to God in secret. Fast in secret, and ‘your Father which seeth in secret, he will reward you openly.’ ‘Search the Scriptures;’ hear them in public, read them in private, and meditate therein. At every opportunity be a partaker of the Lord’s Supper. ‘Do this in remembrance of him,’ and he will meet you at his own table. Let your conversation be with the children of God, and see that it ‘be in grace, seasoned with salt’. As ye have time, do good unto all men, to their souls and to their bodies. And herein ‘be ye steadfast, unmoved, always abounding in the work of the Lord.’ It then only remains that ye deny yourselves and take up your cross daily. Deny yourselves every pleasure which does not prepare you for taking pleasure in God, and willingly embrace every means of drawing near to God, though it be a cross, though it be grieved to flesh and blood. Thus when you have redemption in the blood of Christ, you will ‘go on to perfection’; till, ‘walking in the light, as he is in the light’, you are enabled to testify that ‘he is faithful and just’, not only ‘to forgive your sins’, but ‘to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.’35

34 Wesley, "The General Spread of the Gospel" (1783), ¶11, in Works 2:489. There are important ways both here and elsewhere in Wesley’s writing on prevenient grace where the nascent recovery of moral psychology is seen as an effect of prevenient grace. That topic will be covered in more detail in the following chapter of the present study.
The terms placed in bold face print in this passage correspond to Wesley’s major categories of the means of grace: instituted, prudential, and general. They also echo the General Rules of the United Societies: to do no harm, to do good, and to attend upon the ordinances of God. In its context in the sermon, it is clear that Wesley understands that these means are efficacious (and necessary!) regardless of the point along the way of salvation at which one might find oneself. That is, the means of grace can lead a person to the knowledge and love of God known in repentance, in justification and new birth, and along the journey of sanctification. But the character of grace as prevenient is always present in every instance. And thus, he will close the sermon with the exhortation, “Go on, in virtue of the grace of God preventing, accompanying, and following you, in ‘the work of faith, in the patience of hope, and in the labour of love’.” The means of grace are God’s work precisely because they are channels of grace rather than human works arising out of human effort and for the purpose of human merit. Wesley sees them as forms of participation in God’s work of salvation, a kind of human co-operation but fundamentally enabled by the empowerment of grace.

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36 These categories are discussed in more detail in the section following, including the way in which “instituted” and “prudential” relate to Wesley’s language of the works of piety and works of mercy.
37 See, e.g., the delineation of elements of grace under the headings of preventing, convincing, justifying, and sanctifying in ¶I.1 in Works 3:203-204 that precede the passage on the means of grace.
38 Cf. Outler’s statement that “‘prevenience’ is not a stage of grace but the crucial aspect of grace in all its manifestations. It signifies the divine initiative in all spirituality, in all Christian experience” (Outler, “A New Future for Wesley Studies: An Agenda for ‘Phase III,’” in The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions, 44.
In the broad sense of prevenient grace as always coming before and enabling human participation with God, we have a better picture of the overall work of grace as it relates to the place of the means of grace. In its narrow sense, prevenient grace cancels the guilt of Original Sin through the atonement of Jesus Christ, and it restores the rudimentary moral faculties of human beings via conscience and the ability to act for the good prior to the experience of justification. In the broader sense, it is prevenient grace that allows the means of grace to be truly means of grace. The grace conveyed by the Holy Spirit beckons human beings toward a fuller knowledge of God through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Grace is indeed God’s presence and power at work in human life, to convince, justify, and sanctify; but the presence of grace is always and everywhere a prevenient force that enables persons to respond in faith. That response finds concrete expression through the means of grace, which draw men and women along the way of salvation toward justification and new birth, and then once born anew, further along the path of holiness that all of life might become defined by the love of God and neighbor.

40 Maddox summarizes these three elements by stating, “Wesley understood Prevenient Grace to be God’s initial move toward restored relationship with fallen humanity. As a first dimension, this involved God’s merciful removal of any inherent guilt, by virtue of Christ. A second dimension of God’s initial move to restored Presence is a partial healing of our debilitated human faculties, sufficient for us to sense and respond to God. The final dimension is God’s specific overtures to individuals, inviting closer relationship. If these overtures are welcomed, a grace-empowered relationship of co-operative and progressive transformation sets forth” (Maddox, Responsible Grace, 90).
II. Categories of the Means of Grace in Wesley’s Thought

Wesley's categories of the means of grace fall under a number of headings. The two most prominent are those of the instituted and prudential means of grace, terms that Wesley adopts from John Norris’ *Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence*. He also uses the alternate terms “works of piety” and “works of mercy,” which largely correspond to the instituted and prudential categories, respectively. A third category – the general means of grace – also appears in Wesley’s writing. While having some resonance with the work of Norris, this category does not appear in Norris’ *Treatise* and seems to be of Wesley’s own coinage. Henry Knight has examined the various Wesleyan categories in *The Presence of God in the Christian Life* and has argued persuasively that the best typology through which to understand Wesley’s terminology is that of instituted, prudential, and general means of grace, with the understanding that there is some significance in whether “instituted/prudential means of grace” or “works of piety/mercy” is used in specific contexts. The following analysis follows Knight’s basic pattern while allowing for

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41 The correspondence is more exact between instituted means of grace and works of piety than it is between prudential means of grace and works of mercy. For the nuances of meaning in the latter pair, see the section below on the prudential means of grace.

With regards to whether the language of “means of grace” or “works of piety/mercy” is used, Knight draws a distinction between the relevant terms as they relate to the basis of authority or the object to which the activities they include point. That is, “instituted” and “prudential” refer to the sources of authority whereby we know certain things to be means of grace (whether directly from God in Scripture or discoverable by the practical wisdom of an engaged Christian life). On the other hand, “works of piety” and “works of mercy” suggest
different accents in Wesley's view as regards his reception of terms and
development of their corresponding concepts.

A. Instituted Means of Grace

The sermon, “The Means of Grace,” lists three items that Wesley calls the
“chief” means of grace: prayer, searching the Scriptures, and the Lord’s Supper.
These three represent what Wesley considers “instituted” means of grace, which
correspond to activities of worship or devotion that constitute “actions ordained of
God” to be the “ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men preventing,
justifying, or sanctifying grace.”43 Elsewhere he describes these practices, because
they have been given to Christians by Jesus Christ in the Scriptures, as the “stated
channels of his grace.”44 The three items from “The Means of Grace” do not exhaust
the things he considers to be instituted means of grace in other places, however, and
in fuller listings of this category – both early and late in his career – Wesley adds
fasting together with Christian conference (or the gathered fellowship of
believers).45 Wesley also uses the term “ordinances” to describe the instituted

the objects of the actions in question – whether directed towards the love of God or the love
of neighbor. His use of “general means of grace” is in contradistinction to “particular means
of grace” and is drawn from Wesley’s usage in the 1745 edition of the Conference Minutes.
In this differentiation, a particular means of grace refers to “specific acts” whereas a general
means of grace refers to “certain attitudes and practices which pervade the Christian life”
(3). All these alternative categories are discussed in context in the section below.

44 Wesley, “Scriptural Christianity” (1744), ¶1.8, in Works 1:164.
45 Though he does not use the exact term “means of grace,” the early sermon “On Love”
(1737) clearly includes the full listing in the form of the following: “[C]ry to thy Father who
seeth in secret, and pour out thy heart before him” [prayer]; “Make my word a lantern to thy
feet, and a light unto thy paths” [searching the Scriptures]; “Turn unto me ... by eating that
bread and drinking that cup” [the Lord’s Supper]; “Turn unto me with fasting as well as
means of grace, highlighting his view that these are activities commanded by God in Christian observance and that can thus be counted upon as aspects of Christian practice where grace can be found.46 Yet he is careful to point out that “all outward means whatever, if separate from the Spirit of God, cannot profit at all.”47 Or put another way, Wesley wants to insist “that outward religion is nothing worth without the religion of the heart.”48 The larger point about the instituted means of grace is that they are specifically appointed by God as grounded in the Scriptural witness. When we read Wesley as describing them as “ordained of God as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men,”49 we can read the word “ordinary” in the dual sense of commanded by God (as an ordinance) and as the

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46 By way of example, Wesley lists the instituted means of grace under the heading “the ordinances of God” in the General Rules; see Wesley, The General Rules of the United Societies (1743), ¶6, in Works 9:73. He also makes an equivalence between ordinances and means of grace in the Journal for 25 June 1740, in Works 19:157. See also Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 103-104; and Campbell, “Means of Grace and Forms of Piety,” 280-281.
48 Wesley, “Means of Grace,” ¶1.4, in Works 1:379. There is concern by Wesley that the means of grace not be understood as functioning ex opere operato, but in this Wesley (as in the case of many Protestants past and present) misunderstands the Roman Catholic use of this term. For Wesley’s use of a version of the term, see Wesley, A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part I, ¶III.4, in Works 11:122. Knight characterizes this concern of Wesley’s as his guarding “against formalism” in worship and devotional life (see Knight, The Presence of God in the Christian Life, 29-35). Maddox also offers a good discussion of this point in Maddox, Responsible Grace, 195-197 and 346-347 n.16 and n.21. For the proper meaning and context of ex opere operato from a Roman Catholic perspective, see Kurt Stasiak, Sacramental Theology: Means of Grace, Ways of Life (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 38-41.
49 Wesley, “Means of Grace,” ¶II.1, in Works 1:381.
regular places where grace may be found (when received with a searching heart and/or living faith).

Given the dependence of Wesley on earlier sources for the overarching concept of the means of grace, there are a number of significant points to make regarding the way in which Wesley develops it. Some of these aspects to Wesley’s view of the means of grace are idiosyncratic to his theology as it developed in his theological reflection and practice of ministry. Others seem to be conscious choices made for particular reasons as regards his inheritance of the means of grace concept from earlier tradition. They are presented in the paragraphs that follow primarily as items to be noted in Wesley’s content of the means of grace, although some will be remarked upon later in this study as needed.

It is, first, noteworthy that the tripartite listing of the means of grace in the 1746 sermon follows roughly the earlier Puritan clusters of prayer, the word of God, and the sacraments.50 There is also a degree of correspondence with Norris’ listing of “those pure Means that are of Divine Institution,” in the Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, which include the “reading of the Scriptures, the hearing of the Word preach’d, the use of the Sacraments, and the living in the Communion of the Church.”51 With regards to comparison, there are five main distinctive points about Wesley’s full listing of the instituted means. The first is that he includes prayer, which Puritan lists had tended to do but which in Norris’ categorization had fallen into the heading of means that are both instrumental means of grace as well as

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50 See above pp.59-64.  
moral virtues in their own right (a category that for Norris had included faith, prayer, the love of God, and inward purity).^52 Wesley’s use of prayer as among the instituted means is evident in his original writings, of course, but the fact that he considers critically Norris’ use of it can also be seen in an extract Wesley published of Norris’ *Treatise*. This much-condensed version edits Norris on the means of grace so that there are two categories (instituted and prudential) rather than Norris’ original three (i.e., means that are also virtues, instituted, and prudential). In his revision of Norris, Wesley places prayer alongside the reading of the Scriptures, the hearing of the Word preached, the Sacraments, and Church Communion.^53

Secondly, while Wesley’s list of the instituted means of grace adds prayer, it does not include the sacrament of baptism. This is a feature of his listing of the instituted means of grace that has been much remarked upon in previous scholarship, and it deserves some attention.^54 It is notable that Wesley has revised the category of the means of grace from his antecedents in this regard. As we have seen, both Puritan examples and John Norris used “sacraments” in the plural. That Wesley regarded baptism as a means of grace seems clear. His extract of Norris reprints “Sacraments” rather than reducing it simply to “the Lord’s Supper,” even as it also reprints Norris’ special attention to the Lord’s Supper in the relevant section

^52 Norris *Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence*, 258-283.
of the *Treatise.*\(^{55}\) Wesley also points to baptism as among the means of grace in his *Treatise on Baptism*, abridged from his father Samuel's longer work, *The Pious Communicant Rightly Prepared*, and included in his own 1758 work, *A Preservation Against Unsettled Notions in Religion*. In it, Wesley states that baptism "is the initiatory sacrament which enters us into covenant with God. It was instituted by Christ, who alone has power to institute a proper sacrament, a sign seal, pledge and means of grace, perpetually obligatory on all Christians."\(^{56}\) Yet he spends little time on baptism in his original writing, and in works dealing with the new birth he is careful to argue that baptism should not be relied upon as a means of grace apart from (and certainly not in opposition to) spiritual rebirth.\(^{57}\) Thus, it can be understood that, while Wesley affirms baptism as a means of grace (even going so far in the *Treatise on Baptism* to affirm a doctrine of baptismal regeneration), it remains a marginal item in his consideration of the means of grace on the whole.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{55}\) See Wesley, *A Treatise on Christian Prudence, Extracted from Mr. Norris*, 22. The passage reads, "Neither will the Sacraments ... be ever undervalued or neglected by a Prudent Christian, who never things himself either too wise or too good for any Institution of God. As to the Lord’s-Supper in particular, he never omits any Opportunity of receiving it, knowing the excellent Ends for which it serves, and its great Usefulness to serve them." The paragraph goes on to elaborate on the Lord’s Supper further without specifically mentioning baptism at all. Wesley’s edition of Norris’ *Treatise* is here, as elsewhere, much condensed. But the corresponding section of the original *Treatise* likewise expounds upon the importance of the Lord’s Supper without treating baptism similarly (see Norris, *Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence*, 289-291).


\(^{57}\) See, e.g., Wesley, “The New Birth” (1760), ¶¶IV.1-4, in *Works* 2:196-201.

\(^{58}\) This feature will be discussed in more detail below in the section on “Clarifying Examples.” Wesley invokes baptismal regeneration in Wesley, *Treatise on Baptism*, 321-323. Gayle Felton provides a helpful overview of Wesley’s theology and practice of baptism in Gayle Carlton Felton, *This Gift of Water: The Practice and Theology of Baptism Among Methodists in America* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992). In particular, see “The Practice of Baptism in the Ministry of John Wesley” (13-25) and “Wesley’s Theological Understanding of Baptism” (26-48).
Thirdly, Wesley repeatedly uses the phrase “searching the Scriptures” drawn from John 5:39 as the means of grace inclusive of the Bible, the Word of God, the Scriptures, etc. Earlier Puritan writers had typically used “the word” or “the word of God” to denote Scripture as a means of grace, and Norris used two different phrases to highlight the activities of reading the Bible and hearing it preached. There were thus other forms of phrasing antecedent to Wesley, and indeed Wesley uses a variety of phrases himself to refer to Scripture as a means of grace. His selection of the biblical phrase from John 5:39 is used repeatedly, however, in some of the places where Wesley highlights the means of grace most specifically such as the General Rules, the Minutes of the 1745 Conference, his sermon, “The Means of Grace,” and the Large Minutes. His characterization of Scripture as means of grace in this way – as wrapped up in the activity of “searching” – thus deserves note.59

Fourthly, Wesley adds fasting to his list of the instituted means of grace. There does not appear to be a precedent for this move on Wesley’s part, at least when considering his direct antecedents in the tradition. What should be noted here is that Wesley includes among the instituted means of grace those items for which he finds direct warrant from Jesus Christ in the gospels. The practice of fasting certainly fits this standard (e.g., Matthew 6:16; 17:21). A version of fasting appears in Norris, however, except that Norris groups it under the “government of the senses” as one of the prudential means of grace.60 In this development in Wesley’s

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59 As with baptism, this feature will be discussed in more detail below in the section on “Clarifying Examples.”
60 On this topic, Norris holds that the prudent Christian “will not in flame a Passion which is already but too violent” and advises that “the more we abstain from the Pleasures of Sense,
thought, he has opted against the more philosophical conception of Norris and for a more straightforwardly biblical and historical framing of the issue. Wesley began the practice of fasting in earnest during his Oxford period in imitation of the practice of the early church. The difference with Norris should not be overstated, though the fundamental reason for why it is considered a means of grace (and how to classify it) is oriented toward a different basis of authority.

Finally, Wesley’s use of “Christian conference” or “fellowship” as an instituted means of grace deserves mention as well. He clearly inherits the category from Norris, who calls it “Church Communion.” Wesley’s use of “conference” has importance with respect to the Methodist practice of conferencing. Yet Wesley clearly does not intend to limit the formal institution of conference as the only expression of the means of grace known as conferencing or fellowship. Even so, neither does he intend for fellowship within the bounds of the church proper to be the only form of the means of grace in this category, either. In that sense, his conscious use of “conference” or “fellowship” as contradistinguished from Norris’ “Church Communion” is significant. As in other aspects of his theological reflection and practice of ministry, the example of the early church is key. Wesley saw great

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the more cold and indifferent we grow to them” (Norris, Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 299).

61 See Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 44-45.

62 While “Christian conference” is the term most often cited due to its presence in the Large Minutes (see Works 10:923) as well as the significance of conference in Methodist history, Borgen has shown the way in which Wesley’s use of “fellowship” is just as significant and perhaps more common. See Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 106-107 and 113-115. Note, for example, Wesley’s use of “Christian fellowship” in Wesley, “Self-denial” (1760), ¶II.1, in Works 2:245.

63 Norris, Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence, 291-292.
significance in the description of the apostolic church in Acts and quoted from that
description in Acts 2:42 – including reference to the Christian life as grounded
“steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of
bread, and in the prayers.”64 It is also in this broad sense of “fellowship” that his use
of “the public worship of God” in the General Rules as well as the phrase, “Forsake
not the assembling together with thy brethren,” in the sermon, “On Love,” should be
read, considering that such gatherings could be framed as the worship of a
congregation in a parish church or the worship of a society in a Methodist preaching
service.65

B. Prudental Means of Grace

The prudential means of grace are those that are discovered to be means of
grace through Christian prudence, or the wisdom gained by an engaged
participation in the life of discipleship.66 Knight’s listing of the prudential means of
grace aggregates examples from Wesley at various times and includes particular
rules of holy living (such as those contained in Wesley’s General Rules), class and

64 Wesley, “The Mystery of Iniquity” (1783), ¶9, in Works 2:455; cf. Wesley, “The General
Spread of the Gospel,” ¶20, in Works 2:494. It should also be seen as significant that Wesley
cites this passage from Acts at the outset of the sermon, “The Means of Grace” (in Works
1:378).
65 Wesley, The General Rules of the United Societies, ¶6, in Works 9:73; and “On Love,” ¶4, in
Works 4:381. See also Tucker, “Wesley’s Emphases on Worship and the Means of Grace,”
225-241. Tucker’s analysis provides a variety of ways in which Christian fellowship-as-
worship is seen by Wesley as a means of grace, including attention to Wesleyan hymnody
(which, for reasons of scope, is not a part of the current study).
66 While made in a somewhat different context than a discussion of the means of grace,
Wesley’s definition of prudence as “an habitual consideration of all the circumstances of a
thing” seems relevant here; see Wesley, “Advice to the Clergy” (1756), in Works (Jackson)
10:485.
band meetings, auxiliary services of worship (e.g., watch-nights, covenant renewals, and love feasts), visiting the sick, and devotional or theological study. The eclectic nature of such a list points to the open-ended character of the prudential means of grace. There is no real limit to such a category, so long as it is understood within certain parameters – what Borgen describes as “Whatever is conducive to holiness and love becomes, to that extent, a means of grace.” Wesley’s logic of the prudential means of grace is shown early on in his correspondence. Writing to his brother Samuel in 1731, he states, “[A]s to prudential means, I believe this rule holds of things indifferent in themselves: whatever I know to do me hurt, that to me is not indifferent, but resolutely to be abstained from; whatever I know to do me good, that to me is not indifferent, but resolutely to be embraced.” A letter to Mary Pendarves earlier in the same year expresses this sentiment about the prudential means of grace in a similar way. The way in which Wesley frames the prudential means of grace in these letters bears a striking similarity to the first two rules of the General Rules published twelve years later, save that the injunctions to do no harm

67 Knight, The Presence of God in the Christian Life, 5. Cf. Collins, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace,” Drew Gateway 56:3 (1986): 27, where Collins states that “the prudential means of grace provide the structure, the parameters, through which the greatest advances in grace can be realized in Christian practice. In other words, prudential means are those which are considered prudent by an enlightened reason and by informed experience and which direct and guide the spiritual life as it continues to encounter the rich grace of God both in and through these particular practices.” This apt description serves to point both to the great potential of the prudential means as well as the flexible sense in which they are conceived through Christian experience.

68 Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 105. Ted Campbell identifies the prudential means of grace as limited to “distinctively Methodist practices” (Campbell, “Means of Grace and Forms of Piety, 282), a claim that seems far too narrow given the diverse articulation of the prudential means of grace by Wesley that we have cited in this section.


and to do good are elaborated upon in the *General Rules* in a way they are not in the earlier, personal correspondence.\(^{71}\)

Among the prudential means of grace that became particularly important for the Methodist revival under Wesley’s leadership were those forms of discipleship that became characteristic of early Methodism such as classes and bands. Wesley was convinced that such forms of small group fellowship were true means of grace at the very outset of the revival in Bristol in April of 1739; indeed, he remarks in the *Journal* after beginning to work with the bands there, “How dare any man deny this to be (as to the substance of it) a means of grace, ordained by God?”\(^{72}\) The class meeting that developed in the 1740s and became the standard way of organizing the local societies is specifically mentioned among the prudential means of grace in the *Large Minutes*.\(^{73}\) One way to characterize the forms of small group organization is that they were the prudential expression of the instituted means of grace Wesley calls Christian fellowship or Christian conference; for Wesley, the calling of Christians to practice their faith together is clearly enjoined by the gospel while the particular ways in which the Methodist people found to do so were contingent upon the times and circumstances in which they lived – and therefore the result of


\(^{72}\) Wesley, *Journal* for 4 April 1739, in Works 19:47.

\(^{73}\) For the standard contemporary treatment of the class meeting, see David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1985). Watson characterizes the class meeting as “a prudential means of grace whereby Christians in witness to the world could sustain one another in their distinctive tasks assigned by God at a particular time and place in human history” (145), a description of the class meeting as a specific expression of the prudential means of grace that is in harmony with the overall description of the prudential means in the present study. On the class meeting, see also Thompson, “‘To stir them up to believe, love, obey’ – Soteriological Dimensions of the Class Meeting in Early Methodism,” *Methodist History* 48:3 (April 2010): 160-178.
prudence.\textsuperscript{74} This can be seen in the statement from Wesley's \textit{Journal} above: the “substance” of what happened in the bands (conference/fellowship) is a means of grace “ordained by God” (i.e., instituted). What makes the band meeting or class meeting a prudential means of grace in its form is that these particular expressions of conferencing were found to be conducive to growth in holiness at a particular time and a particular place in history.

The other moniker Wesley uses for the prudential means of grace is “works of mercy.” The two terms largely overlap, though not exactly. When Wesley uses the term “works of mercy,” he has in mind the example Jesus lays out in Matthew 25:31-46.\textsuperscript{75} The prudential means of grace as works of mercy are, in one sense, those activities by which we love our neighbor – feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting those who are sick and in prison.\textsuperscript{76} Wesley’s belief that such works are more than “works” is adamant; he argues in the sermon, “On Visiting the Sick,” that “there are works of mercy, as well as works of piety, which are real means of grace.”\textsuperscript{77} There is, in Wesley’s thought, a kind of gracious reciprocity that occurs when the works of mercy are pursued. Those receiving care (the “poor” whether in


\textsuperscript{76} Wesley makes this point, comparing works of piety as tied to the love of God and works of mercy as tied to the love of neighbor, in Wesley, “The Important Question,” ¶III.5, in \textit{Works} 3:191. Knight sees significance in the works of piety and works of mercy as geared toward the love of God and love of neighbor, respectively (see Knight, \textit{The Presence of God in the Christian Life}, 3-4).

body or spirit) can clearly have good done for them and to them. This can be bodily/material good or it can be spiritual good; either way, it is aimed at relieving distress or suffering (and is constituted by attitudes and actions of love). For Wesley, though, the works of mercy are also beneficial to those undertaking them. In Maddox’s terms “We are encouraged to engage in works of mercy because God has graciously designed this engagement to have an empowering and formative impact on us.”  

Works of mercy are means of grace because engaging in them opens all concerned to the restoring power of the Holy Spirit.

The works of mercy are similar to the prudential means of grace more generally in the sense that the substance of such practices is, in fact, instituted by God (i.e., activities of engaged discipleship) while the form is dependent on time period and circumstance. That is the primary way that we can account for the fact that activities as diverse as class meetings and prison visitation all fit under the category of the prudential means. That is, the practical expression that such means will find may vary while the root calling and purpose for these means remains constant.

C. General Means of Grace

A third category in Wesley’s language of the means of grace is that of the general means of grace. Wesley refers to “the general means which God hath ordained for our receiving his sanctifying grace” in the 1745 Conference Minutes,

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naming these as “universal obedience; in keeping all the commandments; in denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily.” In this context, he juxtaposes the general means against the “particular” means that he identifies as “prayer, searching the Scripture, communicating, and fasting” (or, in other words, the instituted means of grace that all take the form of specific and concrete actions). In the Large Minutes of 1789, he gives a special significance to this category of the means of grace by arguing that, while instituted and prudential means may be used “without fruit,” this third set of the means of grace cannot but produce fruit in the lives of believers. Here he does not use the specific term “general means of grace,” but the listing of 1789 is close enough to that of 1745 to indicate that the concept is the same. In the Large Minutes, the items Wesley names include “watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, [and] exercise of the presence of God.”

A question arises when comparing the general means of grace to the instituted and prudential means of grace exactly around the issue of why, for Wesley, the general means of grace will always produce spiritual fruit in the lives of their practitioners whereas the other means of grace possibly can be engaged with no spiritual benefit. The apparent answer has to do with the nature of the general means of grace vis-à-vis all the other means. With regards to the instituted and prudential means of grace, it would be possible to engage the associated activities with a hardness of heart if one was determined to do so: whether in participating in the Lord’s Supper or caring for the poor, a person could “go through the motions”

79 Wesley, Minutes for 1745, in Works 10:155.
80 Wesley, Large Minutes, in Works 10:924.
81 Wesley, Large Minutes, in Works 10:924.
while remaining spiritually closed off to the grace such means are intended to give. For Wesley, the general means of grace necessarily require something more.

Wesley points to the “something more” of the general means of grace in his 1760 sermon, “Self-denial,” when he connects the practice of these means of grace with the inward state of soul as it relates to God’s will. In its fallen state, the will “naturally” pursues forms of life that only contribute to its continual corruption. The fallen man or woman has a will that is “wholly bent to indulge our natural corruption.” To deny oneself is to deny these corrupting tendencies, and to take up one’s cross is to conform oneself to the will of God. By extension the same logic can be applied to Wesley’s other items among the general means of grace. They are all forms of inward discipline whereby one comes into harmony with God’s will through the operation of his grace. All such means of grace will bear fruit because the proper use of them simply is the work of becoming inwardly transformed. This process is not an act of the will (as Knight has rightly observed) but rather the result of the gracious activity of God. The general means of grace do not involve the will transforming itself but rather the soul being transformed by participation in the work of the Holy Spirit – what Knight calls “graced responses to grace received.” In this sense, the general means of grace become a kind of disposition by which the

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83 Wesley, “Self-denial,” ¶¶1.6-7, in Works 2:243. There are important connections here between sanctification and the restoration of moral psychology that will be covered in the next chapter.
84 Note, for example, Knight’s discussion of the general means of grace as related to the inward transformation of the soul in Knight, The Presence of God in the Christian Life, 122-126.
85 Knight, The Presence of God in the Christian Life, 125.
outward means of grace (instituted and prudential) should be engaged. They are
less a category alongside the instituted and prudential means of grace and more an
underlying one that must needs be a part of the holistic Christian life in order for
that life to be one in which God’s grace is truly efficacious for salvation.86

The general means of grace, then, represent a crucial concept in Wesley’s
theology even if they do not appear by name with the same frequency of the
instituted and prudential means in their various expressions. Earlier we cited
Wesley’s sermons, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, II,” and “The Means of
Grace,” in our discussion of the nature of grace.87 There, we took care to point out
that the means of grace are not properly means of grace unless they are oriented
toward their proper end. To make use of the means faithfully in this way requires
the right disposition in the Christian believer; that disposition is, in a sense, a
disposition of faith, or what Wesley calls, “submitting to the ‘righteousness which is
of faith’, the believing in the only-begotten Son of God.”88 Where the general means
of grace become an undergirding and necessary support for such a faith is the way
in which they counteract the danger of what Wesley calls “dissipation.” This he
defines as “uncentering the soul from God.”89 Wesley understands dissipation to be a
constant danger for creatures whose lot it is to live in a fallen world.90 And it is

87 See above pp.125-127.
89 Wesley, “On Dissipation” (1784), ¶11, in Works 3:120.
90 He writes, e.g., “We are encompassed on all sides with persons and things that tend to
draw us from our centre. Indeed, every creature, if we are not continually on our guard, will
draw us from our Creator. The whole visible world, all we see, hear, or touch, all the objects
either of our senses or understanding, have a tendency to dissipate our thoughts from the
precisely why the general means of grace are so crucial, both for the very possibility of a sustained faith in general and for the right use of the means of grace in particular. Wesley points to the dispositional purpose of the general means when he asks, “Can anything be a greater help to universal holiness than the continually seeing the light of his glory?”91 The response he gives to the question is that this very consideration is why it is so important to practice “the exercise of the presence of God.”92 This phrase is one of the items he names as a general means of grace in the *Large Minutes* and serves as a useful statement of the function of the general means of grace as a whole.

III. Clarifying Examples: Baptism and Searching the Scriptures

Examining the content of the means of grace allows us to see a significant aspect of the means’ contextual place in Wesley’s theology. The means of grace make up a sacramental grammar in his thought, where the worship, devotional, and discipleship practices of the Christian life establish the patterns in which God’s grace is mediated in a saving way. There still lurks a question, however, having to do with what makes all the items we would name as “means of grace” species sharing a common genus. Put another way, how is it that each of the means is a particular expression arising from the same broader conceptual category? This is an issue that

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must be explored, insofar as it is not at all clear on the surface what the Eucharist has in common with the class meeting, or what prayer has in common with visiting the sick. To say that their commonality is found in that they are all among the means of grace simply begs the question. We therefore need to inquire into the matter of what makes a means of grace (as a particular practice) a means of grace (within the larger doctrinal category).

One way of approaching this issue is by looking at two of the means of grace that share the fact that Wesley treats them oddly given his inheritance of them from earlier tradition. They are the means of baptism and searching the Scriptures. As noted in the previous section, baptism figures only tangentially in Wesley’s consideration of the means of grace. It would naturally fit within the category of the instituted means of grace, and yet it does not appear in any of Wesley’s listings of the instituted means of grace (or works of piety). This would seem strange on the surface given the Scriptural criterion Wesley applies for the instituted means. Baptism is ordained by Jesus through his own example (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34), and the Gospel of John indicates that Jesus’ disciples baptized by his authorization (John 3:22; 4:1-3). Moreover, baptism is specifically commanded by Jesus in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). It is implied in Jesus’ teaching about the necessity of birth by “both water and the Spirit” in the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3:5). In addition to the biblical warrant, baptism is one of the sacraments recognized by both Protestants and Catholics alike, and its doctrinal formulation is found in Articles 25 and 27 of
the 39 Articles of Religion of the Church of England. As noted previously, most summaries of the means of grace in sources dating from the late 16th century name the sacraments as among them, inclusive of both baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

That Wesley considered baptism among the means of grace is without doubt. There is his occasional citation of the “sacraments” in conjunction with the means of grace, as well as his tacit endorsement of John Norris’ inclusion of baptism under the heading of the sacraments through the extract of Norris’ Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence that he published. There is, too, the citation of baptism as a means of grace specifically in Wesley’s Treatise on Baptism. Another sign of the high value Wesley placed on baptism is through the fact that Wesley maintained an edited form of both articles related to baptism from the 39 Articles in the revised Articles of Religion that he sent to the nascent Methodist Episcopal Church in America in the Sunday Service in 1784. Thus, despite baptism’s absence from numerous listings of the means of grace by Wesley throughout his life, he clearly sees it as fitting the category.

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94 In the sermon, “Self-denial” (1760), Wesley refers to “the means of grace; of hearing the true word of God spoken with power; of the sacraments; or of Christian fellowship” (Works 2:245). On his tacit endorsement of Norris’ use of the collective “sacraments,” see Wesley, A Treatise on Christian Prudence, Extracted from Mr. Norris, 22.
95 Wesley, Treatise on Baptism, 319. The Treatise states, “[Baptism] was instituted by Christ, who alone has power to institute a proper sacrament, a sign, seal, pledge and means of grace, perpetually obligatory on all Christians.”
96 Articles 25 (Of the Sacraments) and 27 (Of Baptism) became Articles 16 and 17 in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church following Wesley’s revisions in the Sunday Service. For a comparison of the edits Wesley made to these articles, see Wesley, Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America, ed. James F. White (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House and the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1984), 311-312.
However, as previous scholars have noted, baptism is a singular act of worship that is received only once in a lifetime. The *Treatise on Baptism* affirms a doctrine of baptismal regeneration, explicitly, and it is strongly hinted at in the 1748 sermon, “Marks of the New Birth.” Yet it would be important not to place too much emphasis on these instances just for the fact that they are relatively underdeveloped. Wesley nowhere develops the theology behind the doctrinal affirmation in any detail. This places a dilemma on the notion of baptism as a

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97 See, e.g., Henry Knight, who notes, “Although Wesley clearly thought baptism was a means of grace, he consistently omitted it from his various lists and general discussions of means of grace. The most obvious reason for these omissions is practical: baptism was a onetime initiatory event, and thus had no further role to play in the ongoing life of the Christian” (Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 178). Cf. Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments*, 121.


99 Some commentators have sought to demonstrate a degree of coherence between Wesley’s baptismal theology and his otherwise greater emphasis on the theology of the new birth (as experienced by adults). See, e.g., Geoffrey Wainwright, “The Sacraments in Wesleyan Perspective,” *Doxology* 5 (1988): 12-13, where Wainwright argues that Wesley understood the sacraments to be always efficacious when administered in the proper way (“to people who have come to repentance and faith, or to the infants of believers who stand within the covenant”). This drives at the connection between baptism and baptismal regeneration, and the experience of new birth following lapse into sin during adulthood. Wesley takes up this issue in “Marks of the New Birth,” seemingly affirming regeneration but taking it for granted that the regeneration effected in (infant) baptism would be voided by willful sin by the time of adulthood. Wainwright is sympathetic to the logic of Wesley’s position while pushing against Wesley’s language. He, for instance, states that “any later restorations to life are made on a baptismal foundation and within a baptismal context” and suggests that such restorations be placed within the context of penance and/or covenant renewal (13). Wainwright’s “restorations to life” is for Wesley simply the new birth, and thus Wainwright’s interest seems to be to drive deeper at whether an adult “new birth” should be called as such if in fact a doctrine of baptismal regeneration (as an infant) is affirmed. The difficulty of working through the language and their attendant concepts within a Wesleyan framework should, in any event, demonstrate the inadequacy of the way in which
means of grace, exactly because the means of grace in Wesley’s theology are practices of Christians that are repeatable and integrally related to the whole of salvation. That is, the means play a role not only in awakening sinners and ushering them toward repentance and new birth; they also play a crucial role in the ongoing process of sanctification. At this point, the analysis of Henry Knight becomes important, in that Knight has suggested a way in which the singular experience of baptism as a sacramental act can be seen in Wesley’s view of the *via salutis* as a means of grace in a broader sense – namely, as an ongoing reality in the life of the Christian whereby his place in the divine covenant established by Christ is quickened, not once, but repeatedly and with a sanctifying efficacy. The genesis of such a broader understanding, of course, is in the sacrament itself. Wesley endorses the view that both sacraments are “not only badges or tokens of Christian Men’s Profession; but rather they are certain Signs of Grace, and God’s good Will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him.” More specifically, baptism itself “is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration, or the new birth.” These are core Anglican doctrinal statements, with which

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baptism, baptismal regeneration, and the new birth have been dealt with in the Wesleyan tradition. By way of comparison, see Borgen’s attempt to reconcile Wesley on the issues of baptismal regeneration, spiritual rebirth, and the developmental stages in which baptism can be received (infancy or adulthood), in Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments*, 157-177.  

100 Wesley, *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, 311. The quotation is drawn from Article 16 (*Of the Sacraments*).  

101 Wesley, *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, 312. The quotation is drawn from Article 17 (*Of Baptism*).
Wesley was in agreement and which he gave to the Methodists in America as they sought to establish themselves as a church following the end of the Revolutionary War. Yet, the ongoing efficacy of baptism extends beyond the fact of the sacrament in Wesley's thought and practice in the importance he placed on covenant renewal from about 1755 onwards.

During the summer of 1755, Wesley began to organize local Methodist societies in a practice of “renewing their covenant with God.” These covenant renewal services were derived from Richard Alleine (1611-1681) and his work, the *Vindication of Godliness*. Wesley made use of Alleine in instituting covenant renewal for the early Methodist movement, explaining it to the society in Spitalfields as “another means of increasing serious religion.” In numerous instances over the following years Wesley engaged various societies in the practice, reporting on the deep spiritual impact that the covenant renewal had on participants. These services are described by Wesley as happening in conjunction with other among the means of grace, particularly prayer and fasting. The context of the covenant renewal

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within meetings of the society clearly shows it to be placed within Christian conference/fellowship as well.

Knight has pointed out Wesley’s identification of the covenant in question with the covenant of baptism itself, as seen in Wesley’s pamphlet, Directions for Renewing our Covenant with God.\textsuperscript{106} He also suggests that, along with the regular practice of the Lord’s Supper, it is in the practice of covenant renewal that baptism becomes an ongoing means of grace in the life of the Christian community:

For baptism to have continuing significance in the Christian life, there must be occasions in which persons reexperience God’s faithfulness and renew their commitment to God. The Lord’s Supper is of course one such occasion, in which Christ’s offering for us is reexperienced and we in turn offer our lives to Christ. The annual services of covenant renewal, in which the remembrance of God’s promises is combined with our own confession and recommitment, were others.\textsuperscript{107}

Given the testimony of Wesley in his Journal about the impact of covenant renewal on the early Methodists, Knight if anything understates the case. Wesley’s frequent references to the practice include such reports as “God broke in mightily upon the congregation”\textsuperscript{108} and “[M]any felt God was there. It was ’a day of his power’ not to be forgotten, a day of godly sorrow and strong consolation.”\textsuperscript{109} Covenant renewal was seen to provide “a season of great refreshment” in which “the fear of God was upon

\textsuperscript{106} See Tripp, The Renewal of the Covenant in the Methodist Tradition, 184. I am indebted to Knight for highlighting this passage to me (see Knight, The Presence of God in the Christian Life, 190). The full text of Wesley’s 1780 pamphlet outlining the covenant renewal service is found on 177-188 of Tripp.

\textsuperscript{107} Knight, The Presence of God in the Christian Life, 189.

\textsuperscript{108} Wesley, Journal for 11 April 1757, in Works 21:91.

\textsuperscript{109} Wesley, Journal for 30 September 1764, in Works 21:490.
all.”\textsuperscript{110} It provoked “a time of remarkable blessing.”\textsuperscript{111} What we see in such commentary by Wesley is a practice in which God’s gracious presence was experienced in dynamic ways. Thus, we can come to understand how baptism can be seen as a vital means of grace in Wesley’s theology, even as he fails to develop that idea explicitly. It is there, but its status as an ongoing means of grace is tied to the way in which the grace received in baptism is renewed by the corporate act of worship via periodic covenant renewal in a communal setting.

The other means of grace in question at this point is the one that Wesley terms, “searching the Scriptures.”\textsuperscript{112} It is a phrase is taken from John 5:39, where Jesus says, “Search the Scriptures: in them ye are assured ye have eternal life: and it is they that testify of me.”\textsuperscript{113} Noting the preferred nomenclature is important, for in it Wesley accentuates something important for how he sees the word of God in Scripture as efficacious for the Christian life. Recall that John Norris in the \textit{Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence} had used two phrases when speaking of Scripture as a means of grace: “reading of the Scriptures” and “hearing of the Word preached.” Wesley follows Norris’ emphasis on a certain kind of activity associated with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{110} Wesley, \textit{Journal} for 25 July 1758, in \textit{Works} 21:159.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Wesley, \textit{Journal} for 9 October 1765, in \textit{Works} 22:24.
\item \textsuperscript{113} This translation is Wesley’s own and is the one in his \textit{Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament}. In the Authorized Version (KJV) the phrase, “ye are assured ye have eternal life,” actually reads, “think ye have eternal life.”
\end{itemize}
Scripture, namely that which treats the Scripture as a channel of grace when engaged in the proper way.\textsuperscript{114} The active verb “searching” is conspicuous in both the 1746 sermon, “The Means of Grace,” and in the \textit{Large Minutes}. In both texts, Wesley’s approach to the use of Scripture is similar as seen in the following excerpts:

“The Means of Grace” (1746):

[A]ll who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in ‘searching the Scriptures’ ... It is probable that in some [of the early Christians] who had ‘received the word with all readiness of mind’, ‘faith came (as [the Apostle Paul] speaks) by hearing,’ and was only confirmed by \textit{reading} the Scriptures. But it was observed above that under the general term of ‘searching the Scriptures’ both hearing, reading, and meditating are contained.\textsuperscript{115}

\textit{Large Minutes} (1780, 1789):

Searching the Scriptures: by (1) Reading: \textit{constantly}, some part of every day; \textit{regularly}, all the Bible in order; \textit{carefully}, with the \textit{Notes [Upon the New Testament]}; \textit{seriously}, with prayer before and after; \textit{fruitfully}, immediately practicing what you learn there? (2) Meditating: at set times? By any rule? (3) Hearing: Every morning? Carefully? With prayer before, at, after? Immediately putting in practice? Have you a New Testament always about you?\textsuperscript{116}

In each of these selections, Wesley places emphasis on the three activities of reading, hearing, and meditating on the word of God. The first two of these – besides following Norris’ lead – represent the way in which the message of Scripture can be


\textsuperscript{116} Wesley, \textit{Large Minutes}, ¶48.2, in \textit{Works} 10:923. In the \textit{Minutes} of Conference, Wesley first uses the phrase “searching the Scripture” as early as 1745 (see \textit{Works} 10:155).
received at all. The third ("meditating") can be connected with how Wesley understands the word once received initially to be continually transformative through the work of the Holy Spirit as a person reflects upon and applies the Scripture in one’s own life.\footnote{On Scripture as a means of grace, the role of the Holy Spirit in the use of Scripture, and the purpose for which Scripture is ultimately intended, see Jones, \textit{John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture}, 104-110, and Maddox, “The Rule of Christian Faith, Practice, and Hope: John Wesley on the Bible,” 13-16 and 26-34.}

The focus of Wesley on a certain kind of activity in relation to the reception of the living Word of God as found in Scripture is likewise in place even in instances where Wesley does not explicitly use the term, “searching the Scriptures.” In the 1744 sermon, “Scriptural Christianity,” he refers to apostolic teaching as “food of the soul.”\footnote{Wesley, “Scriptural Christianity,” ¶1, in \textit{Works} 1:164.} In “The Reformation of Manners” (1763), Wesley states, “It is true the Word of God is the chief, ordinary means, whereby He changes both the hearts and lives of sinners; and He does this chiefly by the ministers of the gospel.”\footnote{Wesley, “The Reformation of Manners” (1763), ¶II.8, in \textit{Works} 2:311. Cf. Gerald McCulloh’s examination of the intersection of preaching as a means of grace and early Methodist discipline in McCulloh, “The Discipline of Life in Early Methodism Through Preaching and Other Means of Grace,” in \textit{The Doctrine of the Church}, ed. Dow Kirkpatrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 161-181.} He refers to the “hearing and reading the Scripture” as a means of grace in the 1786 sermon, “On Visiting the Sick.”\footnote{Wesley, “On Visiting the Sick,” ¶1, in \textit{Works} 3:385.} Each of these examples, then, emphasizes not so much the text of Scripture as they way it is applied and received: as teaching that amounts to spiritual sustenance, through the preaching of ministers, and by hearing or reading in settings of worship and devotion.
A further example is found in Wesley’s *Journal* entry for June 26, 1740, where he states,

I showed, concerning the Holy Scriptures: (1) That to search (that is, read and hear them) is a *command* of God. (2) That this *command* is given to *all, believers* or *unbelievers*. (3) That this is commanded or ordained as a means of grace, a means of conveying the grace of God to all, whether *unbelievers* (such as those to whom He first gave this command, and those to whom faith cometh by hearing) or *believers*, who by experience know that ‘all Scripture is profitable,’ or a means to this end, ‘that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works.’\(^{121}\)

This last example comes from the midst of his conflict with Moravian quietism, and the stress on the use of Scripture as a means of grace reflects his conviction that this means (as well as all other means of grace) is intended by God for all in mandatory fashion. But the broader point holds as well: Scripture becomes a means of grace when it is used properly. That proper use must be one of active engagement, an approach Wesley speaks about in reverent terms in the preface to his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*:

In the language of the sacred writings, we may observe the utmost depth, together with the utmost ease. All the elegancies of human composure sink into nothing before it: God speaks not as man, but as God. His thoughts are very deep: and thence his words are of inexhaustible virtue ... To understand this thoroughly, we should observe the *emphasis* which lies on every word; the holy *affections* expressed thereby, and the *tempers* shown by every writer.\(^{122}\)

It is something of an encomium to the depth of the power contained in Scripture, knowable when it is received actively and with right intention. All this suggests why Wesley would be hesitant to ever state that the Bible itself is a means of grace. Such

\(^{121}\) Wesley, *Journal* for 26 June 1740, in Works 19:158.

a position would make no more sense than to say that a baptismal font filled with water is a means of grace, or an altar set with the bread and wine of Holy Communion. The objects themselves absent the sacramental activity of utilizing them in the practice of worship or devotion convey no grace at all.

It is, in fact, in a particular employment of the term “practice” that the context of the means of grace becomes fully clear. The preceding analysis of both baptism and searching the Scriptures points to a crucial component of what determines whether a particular kind of thing or activity is actually a means of grace in Wesley’s theological understanding. And the first conclusion that can be made is that a thing is not a means of grace at all. Baptism can be understood as a means of grace, naturally, because it holds the status of a sacrament – and thus, obtains a level of efficacy that is only shared by the Lord’s Supper. But beyond its sacramental status within Christian doctrine, it continues to be a means of grace because when is continually made new in the life of the Christian via participation (first) in the reality of spiritual rebirth and (thereafter) in the practice of covenant renewal within the community of faith. Even so, searching the Scriptures is a means of grace because all those activities which are signified with the shorthand phrase – “searching the Scriptures” – involve an active reception of grace via the transmission of the gospel to faithful men and women. Just as Wesley explicitly affirms that the efficacy of baptism itself is not in the water but in the working of the Holy Spirit that the water signifies, so too is the efficacy of searching the Scriptures not in the bound pages of the printed text but rather in the grace made present by the Holy Spirit in the midst of receiving the holy words of that text by reading, hearing and
meditating. What we are driving at here is an understanding of the means of grace as implying a certain kind of activity – intentionally engaged, repeated in an habituated and disciplined way, and construed in a manner that engenders reflection and formation. The best way to frame this understanding is to see the means of grace as practices, and it is toward a fuller elaboration of that we will now turn.

IV. The Means of Grace as “Practices”

One way to conduct an examination into the means of grace is to explore the meaning of the constituent parts of that term: means and grace. The chapter began with an exploration into the meaning of grace in Wesley’s understanding, particularly the way in which grace as the presence and power of God must “come before” all human efforts and empower human participation in a work that is truly God’s own. The task now before us is to examine what Wesley understands by “means,” and the preceding excursus on baptism and searching the Scriptures as clarifying examples leads us to consider means as practices, with “practices” framed in a very particular way.

Interpreters of Wesley on the means of grace have referred to the means as “practices” at times in the past. What is lacking in such accounts is a thickened

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123 Dean Blevins in particular refers to the means of grace as “religious practices” or “practices” numerous times in his dissertation, though without any real examination into what the nature of a “practice” is meant to be. See Blevins, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace: An Approach to Christian Religious Education,” 141, 175-176, 286-287, and 297.
description of “practice,” and it is just such a description that we seek at present.\(^{124}\)
We have seen, for instance, the way in which Wesley’s view of the means of grace resists the notion of things or objects as means of grace. (For instance, it is not the Bible that is a means of grace but rather the complex and multivalent activity that Wesley calls “searching the Scriptures.”)\(^{125}\) In addition, within the view of the means of grace as calling for a certain kind of activity, it is equally important to stress that it involves repeated activity – hence, the relative neglect of baptism itself as a means of grace in most of Wesley’s expositions on the means of grace, but also the possibility of locating baptism robustly as a means of grace in the Christian life through the periodic renewal of the covenant within the Christian community.

There is a genre of literature in contemporary Christian theology that has sought to key on the importance of practices as a way to understand how Christian discipleship is embodied both through the cultivation of virtues in the person and through a communal embrace of practices that allow any individual Christian access to a form of religious life not accessible on one’s own. This movement (in the

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\(^{124}\) Though he is examining Charles Wesley (rather than John), it is notable that Paul Chilcote is doing something similar to what I explore in this section in Chilcote, “Charles Wesley and Christian Practices,” *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society* 12 (2008): 35-47.

\(^{125}\) It is on this point that I am intrigued, yet unsatisfied, in the central place given to the means of grace in the scholarly project known as Canonical Theism (see, e.g., above pp.28-30 and 33-35). Canonical Theism argues (in the words of Charles Gutenson) that the “canonical heritage” of the church, which it summarizes as “materials, persons, and practices canonized by the early church” has primarily the soteriological function of bringing Christian believers into an encounter with the living God, i.e., that the church’s canonical heritage functions as a means of grace (see Charles Gutenson, “The Canonical Heritage of the Church as a Means of Grace,” 244). What Canonical Theism does not do, in my opinion, is give an adequate account of how “materials, persons, and practices” actually function as channels of God’s grace. The two best hints are found in essays in Abraham, et al., eds., *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology & the Church*: Gutenson, “TheCanonical Heritage of the Church as a Means of Grace,” 244-255; and Douglas M. Koskela, “The Authority of Scripture in Its Ecclesial Context,” 210-223.
academic sense) is associated with the work of Craig Dykstra, Dorothy Bass, and others, and it has been ecumenical in its attempt to identify and explore practices of worship, devotion, and social ministry in which there is broad consensus across branches of the Christian tradition. While engaging topics of systematic and practical theology, the practices movement has been less interested in constructive work on those topics themselves so much as it has been interested in putting them in conversation with concepts of ecclesiology and embodiment – in a sense, attempting to ground such topics (Trinity, sacraments, Scripture, liturgy, hospitality, theological reflection, etc.) within the lived reality of the church.

In framing their understanding of “practice,” Dykstra and Bass state, “By ‘Christian practices’ we mean things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.” A number of aspects to this description deserve mention. For instance, Dykstra and Bass ground their view of practices in a theological milieu. They conceive of practices as activities engaged in response to a

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126 See, e.g., Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002). This collection of essays is not the earliest example of scholarly work within the practices movement but does serve an important function in laying out something of the theological agenda that theologians engaged with the idea of Christian practices are seeking to articulate. An earlier volume also important in this conversation and geared more for a wider reading audience is Dorothy C. Bass, ed., Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1997).

127 An example of this move with the Trinity and the life of the church in relation to practices can be found in James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago, eds., Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001).

providential God, who is actively working for good in the creation. They also view practices as shared activities, undertaken by persons in community with one another and – to carry the point a bit further than does the quoted definition – whose life together is in some way constituted by the practices themselves. Dykstra and Bass later elaborate on their understanding of practices by describing them as “the constituent elements in a way of life that becomes incarnate when human beings live in light of and in response to God’s gift of life abundant.”\textsuperscript{129} Finally, it seems clear that Dykstra and Bass see practices as containing a teleological thrust in their activity and purpose. Their language about practices addressing “fundamental human needs” is intended to point both toward the condition in which persons are located socially and historically as well as the kind of life God intends for them (and toward which God’s grace works to move them). Thus, they can speak of Christian practices rightly understood as “attuned to the human condition in a given time and place and to the intentions of God,” a view that seeks to include “the active presence of God for the life of the world” and which means that the aim of practices is to “[increase] our knowledge of the Triune God.”\textsuperscript{130} In Wesleyan terms, we might suggest that practices as described here are framed within the way of salvation; they are theologically conceived, grounded in a communal (or ecclesial) context, and soteriological in aim.

The philosophical background behind the recent interest in Christian practices is, as many of those writing in this area have acknowledged, indebted to

the earlier work of Alasdair MacIntyre. It is to MacIntyre and his influential 1981

text, *After Virtue*, that the conversation around Christian practices owes its genesis
and from which it took its initial direction. Briefly, then, we can look at how
MacIntyre himself describes the way in which a particular kind of social activity can
result in desired goods that are inaccessible apart from each constituent component
of the social activity in question. The key idea of a practice, in MacIntyre’s
description, is as follows:

By a ‘practice’ I ... mean any coherent and complex form of
socially established cooperative human activity through which goods
internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to
achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and
partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human
powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and
goods involved, are systematically extended.\footnote{Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame:
University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 187. The first edition of MacIntyre’s text appeared in
1981.}

For MacIntyre, the concept of a practice has great significance for the way in which
persons are capable of acquiring the virtues, an aspect of his abiding philosophical
interest. It should be noted that MacIntyre’s view of practice is not necessarily
theological in nature.\footnote{Though, in the intriguing terms of a colleague, Craig Heilmann, the notion of a practice in
MacIntyre does seem to suggest a “secular form of sanctification.” Heilmann related this
perspective in a personal conversation, and in that context he elaborated further, stating,
“The virtues name an ability to act. But in acting differently, we are able to see differently.”
The inherently communal nature of a practice in MacIntyre’s understanding suggests that
such a transformation happens to individuals and yet not in individuals absent from the
larger community in which the practice itself is located (historically and socially).} As he describes “practice” in *After Virtue*, it is tied to the
Aristotelian virtue tradition. Yet as Dykstra, Bass, and others have adopted and
developed it, the concept of practice has been shown to have great relevance for
conversations about the life of the Christian community and the activity of Christian discipleship as well.

Generally speaking, the reason we would want to consider the means of grace as practices ought by now to be clear. MacIntyre’s language of “goods” and “standards of excellence” needs some translation in order to be useful in a Christian theological framework, and in a way that is what the work of Dykstra, Bass, et al., allows us to do. In the Christian guise, the goods internal to the means of grace (as practices) are made up of the grace manifested by the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, which both renews us inwardly and increases holy affections within us.¹³³ The standards of excellence are indeed virtues after a fashion, but they are the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love, and we would be better served in the Wesleyan vocabulary by simply referring to them collectively as holiness of heart and life. And indeed, that holiness is a progressive and cumulative reality ("systematically extended") that aims toward a perfection in love. The means of grace are not things, and they are certainly not one-off acts; rather, they are practices that are engaged repetitively, intentionally, and in a disciplined way.¹³⁴

¹³³ Knight offers a helpful gloss on this notion in his examination of the priority of the work of grace in Wesley’s doctrine of salvation, placing the means of grace as “spiritual disciplines” that “aid people to continue in a relationship with God and to serve as concrete, daily reminders of our ongoing need for grace” in Knight, “Love and Freedom ’by Grace Alone’ in Wesley’s Soteriology: A Proposal for Evangelicals,” Pneuma 24:1 (Spring 2002): 57-67.

In addition, note that I use the term “holy affections” intentionally. The language of "tempers" and "affections" – as the constituent elements of the will – is important in Wesley’s moral psychology and will be taken up in the following chapter of this study.¹³⁴ It is for this very reason that I would take issue with the conclusions Dykstra himself draws in Dykstra, “Christian Education as Means of Grace,” Princeton Seminary Bulletin 13:2 (1992): 164-175. In an article that uses the practice of Scripture study and the practice of hospitality as its primary illustrations for means of grace (and invokes Jaroslav Pelikan on
By way of example, we can look at two of the means of grace as Wesley
describes them that can help to illuminate how the characterization of the means as
practices makes sense. One of these (the Lord’s Supper) will come from the
instituted means of grace while the other (visiting the sick) will come from the
prudential means of grace. The first example comes from Wesley’s description of the
Lord’s Supper as a “converting ordinance” during his controversy with Moravian
quietism in 1740. In his published *Journal* for June of 1740, Wesley attempts to work
through the issue of how the Lord’s Supper should be received, by whom, and to
what purpose.⁹¹ He is concerned by the view that those who are “unbelievers” or
“unconverted” should not receive Holy Communion.⁹² On that view, the sacrament
is only a “confirming” ordinance rather than a “converting” ordinance, to be taken
only by those who had an identifiable and prior conversion experience.

Wesley will have none of this view. Basing his own opinion on both Scripture
and experience, Wesley argues that in fact the Lord’s Supper is a converting
ordinance and a means of grace for all who are willing to receive it.⁹³ The picture he
paints is of a Christian community at worship where men and women of various

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the practice of writing as a means of grace multiple times), Dykstra concludes by suggesting
that the academic discipline of Christian Education and the people known as Christian
educators are both means of grace. After building a case for the significance of the means of
grace as concrete practices, Dykstra’s closing remarks come across as something of a non-
sequitur. It is a facile and unfortunate conclusion to an otherwise well-written and
insightful essay. By way of comparison, it is for the same reason that I would also take issue
with Abraham’s overly broad description of the means of grace mentioned earlier (see
chapter 1).

⁹² Wesley is using the categories of unbelievers and unconverted in this context not in the
sense of the unbaptized but rather those who have not experienced the new birth.
⁹³ Wesley argues warrants from both Scripture and experience in the *Journal* for 27 June
1740, in *Works* 19:158.
spiritual states are gathered around the altar, moved by grace to receive the body and blood of Christ. Regardless of whether the Lord’s Supper is offered to those who have been converted in the evangelical sense or not, it is clear to Wesley that there are none who do not need the grace present in the sacrament, and that indeed it is for all people “a means of conveying to men either preventing or justifying, or sanctifying grace, according to their several necessities.”\textsuperscript{138} For Wesley, the grace is in the practice of receiving the Lord’s Supper; it is efficacious for all who participate with “a desire to receive” regardless of their particular location on the way of salvation and – clearly by implication – is something which Christians should do every time the opportunity presents itself.\textsuperscript{139} It is, to Wesley, the “grand channel” whereby the grace of God is “conveyed to the souls of all the children of God,” and hence was (in Wesley’s view) rightly practiced daily by the early church.\textsuperscript{140}

The second example can be seen in the practice of visiting the sick, one of those “works of mercy” that is instituted in the sense that Jesus commands it in Matthew 25:35-36, but which is best classified as prudential because time and circumstance will determine for us who are “the sick” and what it means to visit them in a given context. In his sermon, “On Visiting the Sick,” Wesley makes a case

\textsuperscript{138} Wesley, \textit{Journal} for 28 June 1740, in \textit{Works} 19:159. Wesley recorded experiences of persons experiencing grace in a transformative way while receiving the Lord’s Supper from time to time in the \textit{Journal} after this period. For instance, in the \textit{Journal} for 13 November 1763, in \textit{Works} 21:438, Wesley records, “I found much of the power of God in preaching, but far more at the Lord’s Table. At the same time one who had been wandering from God for many years and would fain have been with us, but could not, found that the Spirit of God was not hindered or confined to one place. He found out —, the poor backslider, in his own house and revealed Christ anew in his heart.”

\textsuperscript{139} A view that is not implicit but quite explicit elsewhere, in Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion” (1787), in \textit{Works} 3:428-439.

\textsuperscript{140} Wesley, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, VI,” ¶III.11, in \textit{Works} 1:584-585.
for visitation of those in need – i.e., “the sick” in a very broad sense of those with physical or spiritual needs of any kind.\footnote{Wesley, “On Visiting the Sick,” ¶1.1, in \textit{Works} 3:387.} He begins by describing visitation as a “plain duty,” but very quickly he goes beyond the language of obligation to characterize it as a “means of grace.”\footnote{Wesley, “On Visiting the Sick,” ¶1.2, in \textit{Works} 3:387 (for visitation as means of grace).}

In explaining various aspects of visitation, Wesley touches upon ways that it can be beneficial to both parties.\footnote{Wesley, “On Visiting the Sick,” ¶¶1.1-6, in \textit{Works} 3:389-392.} Christians can do great good simply by their presence with those in need, but it must be a real bodily presence; simply sending aid (or sending a physician!) is not enough. In the practice of visitation, the sick can be attended to, both with respect to their bodily needs and their spiritual needs. If they lack food, clothing, or the ability to have a fire in cold weather, those things can be provided. They can also be offered spiritual counsel, and Wesley encourages those visiting to always pray with the sick before the conclusion of their time together. The benefits received from such encounters are not all for the infirm, however. As a means of grace to those visiting, Wesley argues that visitation is “an excellent means of increasing your thankfulness to God” and a way “of increasing your sympathy with the afflicted, your benevolence, and all social affections.”\footnote{Wesley, “On Visiting the Sick,” ¶1.3, in \textit{Works} 3:387.} He also suggests that visiting the sick – an endeavor apparently as intimidating then as now for many people – be approached with humility and supplication, as a way to open one’s heart to the strength of God.\footnote{Wesley, “On Visiting the Sick,” ¶II.1, in \textit{Works} 3:389-390.}
Wesley's belief is that the visitation of the sick is a calling upon all Christians – rich and poor, old and young, male and female.\textsuperscript{146} It is something he testifies as doing in his own life and ministry as well. He describes such an experience in his \textit{Journal} for November 24, 1760, that speaks to the way in which visiting the sick is a practice that can be mutually transformative. Wesley writes,

\begin{quote}
I visited as many as I could of the sick. How much better is it, when it can be done, to \textit{carry} relief to the poor than to \textit{send} it! And that both for our own sake and theirs. For \textit{theirs}, as it is so much more comfortable to them, and as we may then assist them in spirituals as well as temporals. And for \textit{our own}, as it is far more apt to soften our heart and make us \textit{naturally care} for each other.\textsuperscript{147}
\end{quote}

As in the sermon, his concern is to show the way in which ministry with the needy is more than obedience to divine command or act of charity. It is a practice, which is enjoined by God and which can therefore be counted upon to have God’s presence in the midst of it. As with the Lord’s Supper, it is an activity all Christians are called to join in, that they might find grace there. In that, it is a means of grace, one in which both visitor and visited can experience transformation in holy love.\textsuperscript{148}

Bringing this strand of analysis into our consideration of the means of grace shows a way in which the best manner of conceiving of the means of grace is as expressions of practices in the manner herein described. We have shown that the

\textsuperscript{146} Wesley, "On Visiting the Sick," \textit{I}III.1-9, in \textit{Works} 3:392-397.

\textsuperscript{147} Wesley, \textit{Journal} for 24 November 1760, in \textit{Works} 21:290.

\textsuperscript{148} In this vein, Wesley’s letter to Miss J.C. March is helpful as well, where Wesley puts visitation of the poor in the context of progress toward Christian perfection. He advises Miss March, “Go and see the poor and sick in their own poor little hovels. Take up your cross, woman! Remember the faith! Jesus went before you, and will go with you.” See Wesley, "Letter to Miss March, 9 June 1775" in \textit{Letters} (Telford) 6:153-154. Cf. Maddox’s analysis of the correspondence with Miss March and it significance for visitation of the sick or poor as a means of grace in Maddox, “‘Visit the Poor’: John Wesley, the Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers,” 77-79.
means of grace – whether instituted, prudential, or general – are intensely
theological in basis and practice-oriented in character. Wesley’s view of the means
of grace is that they are channels of God’s grace for salvation, taking into account the
conception of grace as laid out above. The one element of the means of grace as
practices that has not been explicated adequately is their inherently social context.
This is in the terms of Dykstra and Bass the “things Christian people do together
over time” element of their definition. Or, in the more technical description of
MacIntyre, the aspect of a practice that marks it as a “coherent and complex form of
socially established cooperative human activity.” For our two examples of the Lord’s
Supper and visiting the sick, the social nature of such practices is obvious. But what
about for fasting? Or for prayer? In fact, the social context is an element of Wesley’s
doctrine of the means of grace without which there can be no real holiness on the
part of any individual Christian for, as we shall see, both the means of grace and the
holiness they nurture are both inescapably social. Thus, what requires further
consideration now is how we would place the context of the means of grace as
practices with their salvific character. That is, we still need to examine how
salvation is to be understood in Wesley’s view and what can be seen as the
soteriological character of salvation in the present-sense reality in which the means
of grace are practiced by Christians in the life of community. That analysis will lead
us to Wesley’s concept of “social holiness” and will be pursued in the following
chapter. A part of that further analysis will be concerned with showing how the
character of the means of grace dictate that they are not only incidentally communal
in context, but necessarily so.
CHAPTER FIVE

~ The Character and Context of the Means of Grace ~

Up to this point, we have sought to examine the means of grace with respect to a number of important points. First, we have looked at the emergence of the language of “means of grace” in the English theological lexicon, arguing that it came to replace a discarded sacramental system and provided (first to Puritans and later more broadly) a way to speak about how Christians come to experience God through the life of worship and devotion. Secondly, we have traced the way in which categories of the means of grace were expanded in a figure such as John Norris, who spoke about the means in a variety of senses: as both instruments and moral virtues, as instituted by God, and as discoverable through prudence. Thirdly, we have traced John Wesley’s reception and development of the means of grace to the point that it became a real doctrine within his soteriology and practical theology, and we have seen the way in which his interactions with mysticism and Moravianism played key roles in that development. Fourthly, we have examined the content of the means of grace in Wesley’s theology. A part of that has included a look at Wesley’s categories of instituted, prudential, and general means of grace – both their character as he sees them and the way in which his development of them in idiosyncratic ways put a particularly Wesleyan stamp on them. Another part of our examination of Wesley’s content of the means of grace has involved coming to see the means of grace as “practices,” meaning that they are particular kinds of activity engaged by Christians wherein a salvific form of life is possible.
At this point, there are two issues that need to be explored in some detail and without which the notion of the means of grace as practices is insufficient. The first issue has to do with the character of the salvific life which I have suggested is known through the practice of the means. Following Wesley, I will describe this primarily with reference to moral psychology, a dimension of ethics related to the personal dynamics involved in moral deliberation and action. In Wesley, the emphasis on moral psychology is made through reference to his classical conception of the soul as constituted by reason (or understanding), the will (or tempers and affections), and liberty (as the harmony of the soul’s internal operations). As a corollary to Wesley’s psychology, some reference also needs to be made to happiness, which he frames in distinctly soteriological terms as the form of life enjoyed by those who have come to know real holiness of heart and life. Also in conjunction with Wesley’s psychology, some reference needs to be made to his understanding of the spiritual senses, which intersects not only with moral psychology, but also with his pneumatology.

The second issue that needs to be explored is the social context of the means of grace, which corresponds to the social context of a practice as I have employed that concept. I suggested in the last chapter that the means of grace are inescapably social; by that, I mean not only that they are social in a practical sense as regards their execution but that there is something about the nature of their sociality that is fundamental to them really being means of grace. The key Wesleyan concept that helps to describe this point is that of social holiness. Wesley only uses the term once in print, but a part of the analysis of the present chapter is the conviction that it is a
concept that pervades his soteriology and is therefore indispensable for understanding his doctrine of the means of grace.

I. Salvation and Moral Psychology

At points where Wesley undertakes to provide a description of “salvation,” he takes care to emphasize certain elements of the character of salvation about which he does not wish to be misunderstood. These elements can be seen by looking at two of the fullest descriptions of salvation made by Wesley, the first from the 1765 sermon, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” and the second from the 1745 treatise, A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion:

What is salvation? The salvation which is here spoken of [in Ephesians 2:8] is not what is frequently understood by that word, the going to heaven, eternal happiness. It is not the soul’s going to paradise, termed by our Lord ‘Abraham’s bosom’. It is not a blessing which lies on the other side [of] death, or (as we usually speak) in the other world. The very words of the text itself put this beyond all question. ‘Ye are saved.’ It is not something at a distance: it is a present thing, a blessing which, through the free mercy of God, ye are now in possession of. Nay, the words may be rendered, and that with equal propriety, “Ye have been saved.” So that the salvation which is here spoken of might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory.  

By salvation I mean, not barely ... 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

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implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and by consequence all holiness of conversation.³

These descriptions are not meant to be exhaustive of Wesley’s understanding of salvation, but they do represent two examples of Wesley’s view that include important elements of that understanding. In them, Wesley is concerned to explain the biblical concept of salvation as a present reality in the life of the Christian believer. It is “a blessing” given by God’s grace, as Wesley contends in the sermon, which is to be experienced as “a present thing” and something “ye are now in possession of.” It is not so much that Wesley wants to deny the post-mortem dimensions of salvation; he simply isn’t interested in engaging in speculations about its eternal qualities when there are, to his mind, much more present dynamics to impress upon his readers.⁴ It is those present dynamics of salvation that take up practically all of his concern in the quotation from “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” and his interest there is in stressing the immediacy of salvation as something manifest in actual life.

The description of salvation in the Farther Appeal, while shorter than that of the sermon, is also multivalent in a way that the sermon is not. The same interest in presenting salvation as a present reality is there, but Wesley goes beyond that point to characterize salvation under a number of descriptive phrases: a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, a recovery of the divine nature, and the renewal of the soul in the image of God according to

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⁴ Though Wesley does on occasion engage in such speculative tendencies in connection with soteriology, as in Wesley, "The New Creation" (1785), in Works 2:500-510.
certain moral attributes (justice/righteousness, holiness, mercy, truth). He then
goes on to say that this salvic state implies “all holy and heavenly tempers,” using a
peculiarly eighteenth century term related to the will.

Both the sermon and the treatise refer to salvation as a present state, and in
the Farther Appeal we begin to get an idea about what that state looks like in a
human life. For Wesley, it is depicted in terms related to classical psychology (i.e.,
the constitution of the soul) and specifically as tied to moral concerns reflected in
certain divine attributes. The attributes listed are not intended to be exhaustive,
clearly, but it is significant that those used by Wesley relate to what he considers the
moral nature of God. When not employing a string of phrases as he does in the
quoted selection from the Farther Appeal, the term Wesley tends to use to refer to
present salvation in this sense is either “holiness” or “sanctification.” These are also
the terms used most often in contemporary Wesleyan discourse at either the level of
popular piety or that of academic study. Such terminology is, of course, useful as a
shorthand way to refer to a relatively complex phenomenon; and yet, for our
present purposes it would be helpful to dig more deeply into what is meant by a
regenerated state that can be characterized as a “restoration of the soul to its
primitive health” and as consisting of “all holy and heavenly tempers.” To do so will
require a dual task: analyzing contemporary scholarly studies on Wesley’s

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5 Indeed, Wesley says as much with regard to the equivalence of holiness and salvation in
the Farther Appeal, where he writes, “Now if by salvation we mean a present salvation from
sin, we cannot say holiness is the condition of it: for it is the thing itself. Salvation, in this
sense, and holiness, are synonymous terms” (Works 11:106).
psychology, and tracing Wesley’s view of the decimation of the soul’s faculties and their restoration by grace through the drama of salvation.

A. Wesley’s Moral Psychology in Recent Scholarship

The reason a review of moral psychology in Wesley is important is, in short, because it is through an understanding of moral psychology that we arrive at the best description of holiness or present salvation. In engaging this topic, Maddox has explained moral psychology as the “understanding of how humans make moral choices and enact them,” and elsewhere, as “the technical title for proposed accounts of the dynamics involved in moral choice and action.” In a classical Christian moral psychology (like the one inherited by Wesley), the constitution of the soul is conceived in essentially Platonic terms while the larger anthropology finds resonance with a more Aristotelian hylomorphism of a soul/body composite. Within the consideration of psychology itself, the moral character of the individual must be considered with reference to the drama of salvation: Sin, fall, forgiveness, redemption, and progressive sanctification. As a prelude to viewing this in Wesley, it will be helpful to review contemporary scholarly examinations of Wesley’s

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8 Wesley's development of the psychology he inherited is analyzed in Maddox, “A Change of Affections,” 5-13. On the body/soul dimension of Wesley's anthropology, see Maddox, Responsible Grace, 70-72.
psychology, including those by Gregory Clapper, Theodore Runyon, Kenneth Collins, and Randy Maddox.

Wesley’s understanding of the soul’s constitution is divided into the components of understanding (or reason), will (or tempers and affections), and liberty, a description consistently present in his writing from the beginning to the end of his career.\(^9\) Among these faculties, it is the will that Wesley will focus the most upon, and it is the will to which his many references to the “religion of the heart” allude. In recent years, some of the most extensive treatment of Wesley’s heart religion has been that of Gregory Clapper.\(^10\) Most significant is Clapper’s monograph-length work, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, which is a revision of his 1985 dissertation.\(^11\) A major claim of Clapper’s is that Wesley’s language of the affections stands as a key to his practical theology; he contends that Wesley believed “being a Christian consists, to a large extent, of having certain religious affections,” which means that “Wesley’s affection-laden language is ... in fact the most true and adequate way to talk about Christianity. This language is, therefore, a direct expression of his theological (not merely rhetorical) grasp of the Christian faith.”\(^12\)

In his approach to Wesley on the affections, Clapper assumes an equivalence

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\(^12\) Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 3.
between Wesley's language of the affections and the contemporary (i.e., modern) understanding of emotion.\(^{13}\) He is interested in the notion that one does not have affections/emotions in the abstract, but only insofar as they take an external object. There is thus an epistemic concern on Clapper's part, specifically in the sense of how one comes to know and experience God. This concern is grounded in Wesley's view of the Holy Spirit as the divine agent whose role it is to shape the inward life of the believer and elicit affections of a certain type.\(^{14}\) In this activity, the external object that the Spirit-motivated affections take is God, and in fact, there is a mutually-reinforcing aspect to this process in the sense that the holy object of the religious affections (God) in turn makes the affections more holy themselves.\(^{15}\) Properly formed religious affections can be identified with reference to biblical notions in such groupings as the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), the content of the

\(^{13}\) Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 7-8. Since the original publication of Clapper's work, Thomas Dixon has demonstrated the considerable difference between “affections” and “emotions” in pre-Enlightenment philosophical and theological discourse, with the evolution of the latter term to its current place of dominance coming in the late 18th and early 19th centuries through the influence of Scottish philosophers such as David Hume and Thomas Brown. See Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). In a recent essay, Clapper has recognized the pivotal work of Dixon on the genealogy of affectional language in the Western tradition but oddly without any recognition that it calls for a revision of his own previous conclusions; see Gregory S. Clapper, “Is Love an Affection or an Emotion? Looking at Wesley’s Heart Language in a New Light,” in *The Many Facets of Love: Philosophical Explorations*, ed. Thomas J. Oord (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 75-84.

\(^{14}\) Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 69-75.

\(^{15}\) Clapper explains this process under the heading of the “transitivity of emotion.” See Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 76-78.
inward kingdom of God (Romans 14:17), or the theological virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13) – peace, righteousness, temperance, faith, hope, love, and the like.\textsuperscript{16} 

Clapper’s work is important for the way in which it has served to accentuate the moral dimension of Wesley’s theology, specifically the notion that the recovery of the moral image of God really is at the heart of Wesley’s understanding of sanctification. The term Clapper uses to describe this facet of Wesley’s thought is “orthokardia,” or a heart rightly oriented.\textsuperscript{17} Theodore Runyon has explored this same area of Wesley’s theology, employing the similar term “orthopathy” as a way to denote right feeling or experience, which resonates with such terms as “orthodoxy” (right belief) and “orthopraxis” (right practice).\textsuperscript{18} In general, Clapper’s (as well as Runyon’s) work on experience (i.e., heart religion or inward religion) in Wesley serves to locate experience more firmly as an aspect of salvation connected with the objective reality of God rather than as the provenance of subjective belief in the individual – a helpful corrective for a religious tradition that has sometimes erred the other way.

However, considering the way in which the affections – and the related concept of the “tempers” – are so deeply embedded in Wesley’s psychology, there are significant considerations missing from Clapper. For instance, Clapper demurs

\textsuperscript{16} Clapper, \textit{John Wesley on Religious Affections}, 85-89. Clapper identifies both positive affections as well as their converse, and he connects the biblical concepts with the way they are engaged in Wesley’s writing.


\textsuperscript{18} Runyon explains the three related terms in Runyon, \textit{The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today}, 147-149.
from any consideration of the affections in relation to Wesley's psychology and holds that his interest is simply “to understand Wesley's affection-related theology” (a project which he sees as separable from a broader investigation into aspects of theological anthropology). A question that must be raised here is around why the affections are significant in Wesley's theology at all; Clapper's view seems to be that they are related to epistemic considerations of how one comes to know and experience God, and yet in Wesley there is a rootedness to the affections (i.e., in the will) that calls for a deeper articulation of how they relate to what it means to be a sanctified person. This consideration must push us toward a consideration of Christian character that is missing from Clapper. Equally troubling is Clapper's presumed equivalence of the affections to the contemporary sense of the emotions, as well as the direct correlation he posits between Wesley's use of “affections” and “tempers” to one another. There is a tendency in Clapper to treat all affectional language as equal (both within Wesley and between Wesley and the contemporary period), which simplifies matters for his purposes but may not do justice to the complexity of the concepts in question.

Kenneth J. Collins covers some of the same ground as Clapper in his work covering Wesley's “topography of the heart.” Collins’ desire is to describe the

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19 Clapper, John Wesley on Religious Affections, 10-11.
20 This point may explain Clapper's confusing claim about the distinction between “feeling an emotion” and “having an emotion,” as well as the criticism he makes of Theodore Runyon around this topic (see Clapper, John Wesley on Religious Affections, 162). For the work of other scholars on the differentiation of affectional language in Wesley and elsewhere, see below.
“substance of sanctification,” something he views as largely lacking in the many studies of the process or way of sanctification in the Wesleyan tradition.\textsuperscript{22} In his analysis, the terms Collins keys upon are those of dispositions, tempers, and affections. He highlights Wesley’s identification of faith as a “disposition of the heart,” which Wesley uses as a way to explain the notion of faith as a living reality within the soul (as opposed to a rational assent of the intellect).\textsuperscript{23} Dispositions are “enduring inclinations towards various ‘objects’ ... of the human heart,” which suggests an inward attitude of the person that, when properly oriented, allows for communion with God.\textsuperscript{24} The concept of the tempers, Collins argues, is synonymous to that of the dispositions. The only distinction is that Wesley actually uses the term “tempers” more often than he does “disposition(s).”\textsuperscript{25} To underscore the point about the synonymy of the terms, Collins cites Wesley’s use of them in apposite, as when he writes that true religion consists “in the tempers of the heart, in right dispositions of mind towards God and man.”\textsuperscript{26}

The third concept considered by Collins is that of the affections, the very term that makes up almost all of Clapper’s own analysis of Wesley. Collins argues a point quite different from Clapper, which is that the affections can and should be differentiated from the dispositions or tempers. Pointing to Wesley’s note on 1

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Collins, “John Wesley's Topography of the Heart,” 162.
\item Collins, "John Wesley’s Topography of the Heart," 162.
\item Collins, “John Wesley's Topography of the Heart,” 165. Though, of course, dispositions can be wrongly oriented as well and incline the heart toward evil (a point which Wesley makes and which Collins draws out).
\item Collins, “John Wesley's Topography of the Heart,” 165-166.
\item Collins, “John Wesley's Topography of the Heart," 167. The Wesley quote is drawn from the essay, "A Short Address to the Inhabitants of Ireland."
\end{enumerate}
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Thessalonians 2:17 from the *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, Collins highlights Wesley’s juxtaposition of “transient affections” with “calm standing tempers, that fixed posture of [the] soul” in his commentary on the passage.\(^{27}\) He goes on to discuss the difference between the two at more length where he writes:

> What, then, are the affections? And how are they distinguished from tempers? According to Wesley, the affections are simply “the will exerting itself [in] various ways” [a quotation from the 1781 sermon, “The End of Christ’s Coming”]. In other words, they are the expression of the will, the particular actualizations of an undergirding reality. Tempers, on the other hand, seem to be more foundational and may even inform the affections themselves since Wesley seems to indicate ... that the affections flow from the tempers.\(^{28}\)

It isn’t that the affections and tempers are wholly different. In fact, the one seems to depend upon the other. But in what way?

The clarification Collins offers on the tempers and affections is carried further in the work of Randy Maddox on Wesley’s moral psychology.\(^{29}\) Maddox shares broad agreement with Collins, although there are some noteworthy aspects to his examination of Wesley that are unique. One of the most helpful aspects of Maddox’s analysis is the way in which he puts Wesley’s moral psychology in a broader historical perspective – both examining Wesley’s sources for his anthropology and his understanding of the soul’s faculties, as well as tracing the fate

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of Wesley’s views in the hands of his descendants. One of the curious aspects of
Collins’ analysis of the tempers and affections is his seeming reluctance to engage
the full language of classical psychology, which would involve utilizing the language
of the will (a reluctance shared by Clapper). Collins favors the language of the
heart generally and takes Wesley’s employment of it largely at face value, though he
also utilizes such a phrase for tempers and affections as “Wesley’s dispositional
repertoire.” Maddox corrects this by identifying more fully the organic connection
between the affections and the tempers both by locating them in the will and
drawing the connection between the heart and the will, though he contends that the
language of the heart marks a shift in Wesley from the psychology he inherits in that
it suggests “a more holistic model of human volition” than would more traditional
(Platonic) terminology.

In Maddox’s view, the hallmark of Wesley’s moral psychology is the
development of a view of the heart/will in which the affections are shaped into

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30 Issues of historical context are particularly dealt with in “Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism” and “A Change of Affections.” Maddox’s examination of the legacy of Wesley in the hands of his descendants focuses primarily on the nineteenth century American Methodist context.

31 Collins at one point even seems to suggest that the language of the heart and the will are opposing concepts in Wesley when he suggests that, because the affections flow out of the tempers, “then it is the tempers and dispositions of the human heart rather than the will itself (in a more direct fashion) which pose the objects of the affections” (171). In the various sermons in which Wesley displays his psychology, and with it his view of the moral image of God, it seems clear that the tempers and affections together constitute the will (discussed at more length below).

32 See Collins, “John Wesley’s Topography of the Heart,” 170; Collins’ use of the language of heart religion is found throughout the article including, of course, in the article’s title.

33 Maddox, “A Change of Affections,” 13-15. Maddox also notes that the “heart” is a pliable concept in Wesley, which can be connected to the will, the spiritual senses, the inmost thoughts of a person, etc. (15). Thus, it can be considered to be a general equivalent to the will so long as the lack of absolute consistency in Wesley’s employment of the term is taken into account.
enduring character dispositions (or “tempers”) marked by holy love. The heart’s affections are formed into tempers over the course of time such that affections and tempers share a moral correspondence (i.e., repeated virtuous expression of the affections forms virtuous tempers, while repeated vicious expression of the affections forms vicious tempers). Here Maddox differs somewhat from Collins as seeing affections, rather than tempers, as the foundational category of Wesley’s psychology. The affections are “springs to action” that make willing possible; tempers are dispositions to particular action formed through repeated exercise of the affections. As the formed posture of the soul, tempers give rise to certain feelings, thoughts, or actions. Wesley articulates the similarity between tempers and affections in the fourth discourse, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount” (1748), where he refers to “the inward tempers contained in that holiness ‘without which no man shall see the Lord’ – the affections which, when flowing from their proper fountain, from a living faith in God through Christ Jesus, are intrinsically and

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34 As an analogy for tempers in the human heart, Maddox offers the helpful image of tempered metal as a substance that has been put through a heating process in order to give it a characteristic hardness and consistency; they are character dispositions requiring significant formation over time in order to be ordered well (see Maddox, “A Change of Affections,” 15). On the primacy of love among the tempers, see Maddox, Responsible Grace, 132.

35 Maddox, Responsible Grace, 69.

36 The view of the tempers as distinct from the affections is shared by Maddox and Collins, even if they differ regarding which category is logically prior. It is one of the distinguishing marks of their view of Wesley’s psychology that differentiates them from Clapper. In a recent essay Clapper has challenged this view and asserted again his view that the tempers and affections are entirely synonymous, but on the whole his argument is unpersuasive. See Gregory S. Clapper, “John Wesley’s Language of the Heart,” Wesleyan Theological Journal 44:2 (Fall 2009): 94-102.
essentially good, and acceptable to God.”37 The distinction Maddox wants to make is one of habituation; the affections shape tempers within the soul because they are repeatedly experienced, over a period of time. Thus, Maddox rightly describes Wesley as holding to a “virtue psychology.”38 The affections are malleable, capable of being shaped (and reshaped) into alternative dispositions or tempers; while the formed tempers orient the ordinary expression of the heart’s affections. The tempers are “holy tempers” when they express the fruit of the Spirit, i.e., when the affections are shaped by the presence of the Holy Spirit into dispositions of love, joy, peace, and the like.39 Together, these are constitutive of the will, and through the affectional language Wesley adopts it is clear that he understands the heart as shaped through a process of formation but also as responsive in the sense of eliciting certain types of feeling and behavior.40

B. Sanctification through the Lens of Moral Psychology

With this scholarly overview of Wesley’s view of “heart religion” in place, it will now be helpful to examine the way in which the renewal of the heart actually takes place as Wesley understands it. The best way to engage in such an examination is to survey Wesley’s depiction of the drama of salvation as it exists in the soul through his homiletical presentations of it across time. This is possible

37 Wesley, “Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, IV” (1748), ¶1, in Works 1:572-573. For a description of these right affections, see Wesley, “Letter to Conyers Middleton” (1749), ¶VI.1.7, in Works (Jackson) 10:68-69.
38 Maddox, Responsible Grace, 132.
39 Maddox, Responsible Grace, 131-133.
40 Maddox highlights the responsive aspect of Wesley’s affectional language for the heart/will in Maddox, “A Change of Affections,” 16-17.
because of Wesley's abiding interest in the topic; it appears in sermons as early as 1730 and as late as 1782. The following section, then, will follow Wesley's depiction of the decimation of the soul's faculties (by sin) and their restoration (by grace) as an expression of the process of sanctification in human life by utilizing a number of these sermons from early to late in Wesley's career. We will find through this survey that the key sense of holiness or sanctification in a person, for Wesley, is one who is being progressively transformed inwardly – a kind of regeneration that profoundly affects all the soul’s faculties but is seen most especially in the will. This fact will explain Wesley's willingness to claim starkly that “True religion is right tempers towards God and man.”41 It is a transformation of the soul (“holiness of heart”) that leads thereafter to an outwardly transformed life (“holiness of life”). The logic of heart and life is significant, as Wesley sees any sustained ability to live a holy life as dependent on a prior inward renewal.

1. The Consequences of the Fall

In its original, prelapsarian state, humanity (usually described by Wesley as either “Adam” or simply “Man”) enjoyed the three faculties of reason, will, and liberty, in their perfection. That is, prior to the fall, Adam's understanding was such

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41 Wesley, “The Unity of the Divine Being” (1789), ¶16, in Works 4:66. Wesley's elaboration upon this claim is instructive in that he connects "right tempers" with a disposition towards love in the dual sense of Jesus' two great commandments. Wesley writes, "It is, in two words, gratitude and benevolence: gratitude to our Creator and supreme Benefactor, and benevolence to our fellow-creatures. In other words, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves" (Works 4:66-67). Wesley makes a similar statement in the sermon, “On Charity” (1784), where he states, "We conclude ... that true religion, in the very essence of it, is nothing short of holy tempers" (¶III.12, in Works 3:306).
that he saw things according to their own nature. For him, “Light and darkness there were, but no twilight; whenever the shades of ignorance withdrew, in that moment the broader day appeared, the full blaze of knowledge shined. He was equally a stranger to error and doubt; either he saw not at all, or he saw plainly.”42 With such a perfect understanding, Adam “discerned truth by intuition.”43 There was no veil of ignorance or confusion separating Adam’s reason from things-as-they-are.

Coupled with his reason, Adam enjoyed a perfection of the will as well. Treating the will as expressive of the affections, Wesley asserts that Adam’s affections were “set right, and duly exercised on their proper objects,” meaning that they existed in an uncorrupted state and in harmony with reason.44 A perfect reason and will are aspects of humanity’s creation in the natural image of God, but Wesley does not see them as the totality of God’s creative work. He also views the doctrine of creatio ad imaginem dei as encompassing a will formed by holy love.45 So not only is Adam created in God’s natural image, he is also created in the moral image of God.46 Wesley, following 1 John 4:16, connects the moral image of God with divine love, and it is depicted as the supreme aspect of creation in God’s image. The emphasis on creation in conformity to God’s moral attributes is here stressed in the supreme place Wesley gives to the will’s perfection: “Far greater and nobler was his

44 Wesley, “The End of Christ’s Coming,” in Works 2:475. Commenting on Wesley’s identification of the will as expressive of the totality of the affections, Maddox describes the will as constituting the “motivating dispositions” of a person, which suggests an active rather than static quality (Maddox, Responsible Grace, 69).
second endowment, namely, a will equally perfect. It could not but be perfect while it followed the dictates of such [a perfect] understanding. His affections were rational, even, and regular – if we may be allowed to say ‘affections,’ for properly speaking he had but one: man was what God is, Love."47 A perfect will is a will formed by love, allowing Adam to “love, desire, and delight in that which is good."48

The soul’s third constitutive property is that, from a perfect understanding and a perfect will, humanity also enjoyed a perfect liberty or freedom. Here, Wesley links the two faculties of understanding and will in a way that reflects the nature of perfection itself. That is, human action could be directed by reason in a way that was uncontrolled by any exterior forces or interior corruptions that would inhibit it. Wesley describes the soul’s liberty as “a power of choosing what was good, and refusing what was not so,”49 or “a power of directing his own affections and actions, a capacity of determining himself, of choosing good or evil.”50 Liberty here is seen less as part of the soul’s substance than as the inherent freedom derived from the perfection of understanding and will – and a freedom that completes creation in the divine image: “Without this both the will and the understanding would have been utterly useless. Indeed without liberty man had been so far from being a free agent that he would have been no agent at all.”51

Liberty, then, gives humanity the freedom to participate in the divine image fully, even as it does not compel that participation. With the will having the ability to

freely follow the dictates of understanding, the soul’s constitution obtains a
harmony of operations that defines true _happiness_. Wesley concludes,

The result of all these – an unerring understanding, an uncorrupt will,
and perfect freedom – gave the last stroke to the image of God in man,
by crowning all these with happiness. Then indeed to live was to
enjoy, when every faculty was in its perfection, amidst abundance of
objects which infinite wisdom had purposely suited to it, when man’s
understanding was satisfied with truth, as his will was with good;
when he was at full liberty to enjoy the Creator or the creation.\(^{52}\)

In the area of moral reasoning, humanity in its original perfection has the full ability
to pursue love, not under compulsion but rather by the freedom that is
characteristic of God himself. And this, for Wesley, is the proper understanding of
happiness. It is not the freedom and ability to love any particular thing, any object
chosen via whim or arbitrary choice. It is rather the freedom to love God, and to love
God as God loves – freely and by the harmonious, unconstrained action of the heart.
The liberty of the soul means that it can follow either holy or unholy inclinations;
when it utilizes its capacity to love God, then it comes to know true happiness.

The harmony enjoyed by the soul was subsequently decimated by the Fall,
with the rebellion against God’s original intent for human happiness occurring
through a perversion of the very liberty human beings enjoyed in their perfection.
Adam, Wesley explains, “having this power, a power of choosing good or evil, he
chose the latter – he chose evil.”\(^ {53}\) Satan’s temptation in the Garden of Eden is,
moreover, not understood as a trick ultimately played by God, but instead as the

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\(^{52}\) Wesley, “The Image of God,” ¶1.4, in _Works_ 4:295. This view is underscored in “The
Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law” (1750), where Wesley argues that the will
was created in conjunction with understanding and liberty so that humanity might be able
to follow the moral law (¶1.1, in _Works_ 2:6).

\(^{53}\) Wesley, “On the Fall of Man,” ¶1, in _Works_ 2:401.
necessary trial implied by perfect liberty; that is, without the temptation to choose evil over good, there would have been no real liberty at all.\(^{54}\) The choice ultimately made – that of rebellion, evil, and idolatry – was a free one made by a free moral agent. As Wesley contends, Adam “sinned with his eyes open.”\(^{55}\)

The effects of sin extend beyond the damage to human psychology and into the full composite of body and soul. Wesley’s theological anthropology takes into account the effects of rebellion against God’s original intention of harmonious happiness and considers them devastating for both matter and spirit. The just retribution of God and the curses leveled in Genesis 3:14-19 are experienced bodily through pain, corruption, and the decay of the physical body, and ultimately through death.\(^{56}\) The soul also experiences the effects of sin through the corruption of all of its faculties: understanding, will, and liberty. Understanding “mistook falsehood for truth,” the will “was … seized by legions of vile affections;” and liberty “became the slave of vice.”\(^{57}\) Thus, Wesley’s theological anthropology is marked by sin’s devastatingly disordering effects, which leaves the human body subject to decay and moral psychology in a debilitated state. In that state, human beings cannot think rightly, feel rightly, or act rightly. Absent grace, it is only possible to rightly speak of the human condition as “the universal depravity of our nature,”\(^{58}\) a reality Wesley also describes as “the entire depravation of the whole human nature.”\(^{59}\)

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\(^{57}\) Wesley, “The Image of God,” ¶1.2-4, in Works 4:298-299.

\(^{58}\) Wesley, “Of the Church” (1785), ¶1.21, in Works 3:53.

The picture of humanity under the effects of sin is therefore one of disorder and devastation. The disorder is expressed through the heart’s inclination toward the opposite of its intended end: vice rather than virtue, sin rather than love, and the earthly and transient rather than the spiritual and eternal. The devastation comes in the hopeless condition that persons are rendered in sin, which is fit for both an earthly and an eternal death. The previous examination of the impact of sin within Wesley’s theological anthropology considered the matter of depravity in the abstract, however. We should note that no one, in fact, is in as hopeless a condition as the abstract illustration would suggest. Two considerations in Wesley mitigate the reality of the fall when it is viewed in actual human life rather than in the abstract. The first is the distinction between how sin affects reason and the will, while the second is the universal presence of prevenient grace as God’s gracious gift to all persons.

On the one hand, Wesley indicates at certain points that he understands the faculty of reason to be damaged but not destroyed. That is to say, Wesley’s conception of total depravity tends to be more concerned with the will than with reason. It is with the will, in particular, that he sees the corrupting effects of sin in a person leading inevitably to such idolatries as pride, self-will, and an inordinate love of the world, all of which bespeak of an enslavement to “sensual appetites” that “have, more or less, the dominion over him.”60 In the case of reason, Wesley tends

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not to be as uniformly harsh. While he can speak in his 1759 sermon, “Original Sin,” about human nature as “totally corrupted in all its faculties,” he does not always present reason as corrupted in the same way that the will is – even apart from God’s healing work through grace. Some later homiletical treatments are more optimistic. In “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered” (1781), for instance, Wesley seems to suggest that reason is left somewhat intact despite the effects of the fall. Though he criticizes Enlightenment thinkers who view reason as “the great unerring guide,” his criticism is aimed at the idea that reason can show us too much, not that it is wholly debilitated. Likewise, in “On the Fall of Man” (1782), Wesley states in regard to Adam’s choice, “In that moment he lost the moral image of God, and, in part, the natural.” He is therefore willing to admit that reason has a role to play in the human being’s ability to skillfully navigate day-to-day life in a complex society, even apart from the active reception of God’s grace.

As significant as the capacity for reason is, though, the use of reason as a hollow echo of what humanity once possessed does not begin to approach a recovery of the image of God. This is because reason – as important as it is – remains

62 See Wesley, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered” (1781), ¶3-4, in Works 2:588. In the same sermon, Wesley ventures a definition of the rational faculty of the soul as providing for three main processes: (a) simple apprehension (or comprehending objects); (b) judgment (or drawing distinctions or correlations between different, apprehended things); (c) discourse (or, proceeding rationally from one judgment to another) [Works 2:590].
64 Wesley, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered,” ¶I.I3-5, in Works 2:590-591. After listing the specific abilities given by bare reason, Wesley goes on to consider more complex tasks of reason, from agriculture to the arts, and from mathematics to governance. This sermon is intended as a critique of what Wesley sees as the Enlightenment over-confidence in reason and so lacks any real treatment of the work of God’s prevenient grace in humanity’s nascent restoration.
secondary to the will. The loss of the moral image of God, which is for Wesley the highest expression of creatio ad imaginem de'i, is seen in that sin-damaged reason can no longer freely direct the will toward love. Wesley refers to the loss of liberty in the soul in the way in which the sin-deformed appetites “lead [a man] captive, they drag him to and fro, in spite of his boasted reason.”65 And he contends that those who rationally deliberate apart from the Christian revelation have only “the dim light of reason” at their disposal.66 Thus, while bare reason remains, a person with a functioning rational capacity and nothing more is still unable to love as God loves. Absent the restored will, unruly appetites continue to enslave; and absent the restored will, the love of God remains beyond reach. Possessing the powers of understanding, in other words, can be instrumentally helpful in practical life though such a power plays little role in the recovery of the image of God.

The second consideration for why the fall appears different in actual human life as opposed to the abstract is, of course, due to Wesley’s robust understanding of prevenient grace. As covered in the previous chapter, prevenient grace is a universal gift of God to all persons. It is, in Wesley’s view, the presence of prevenient grace

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65 Wesley, “Original Sin,” ¶1.9, in Works 2:180. Wesley elsewhere makes a statement about sin causing humans to sink “lower than the very beasts of the field,” a somewhat oblique point about the relative depravity of the will and reason, in that our partially intact reason fails to keep us from sinning, whereas animals (lacking the naturalis imago de)i act only according to their natures (see Wesley, “The One Thing Needful,” ¶1.2, in Works 4:354).

66 Wesley, “Original Sin,” ¶2, in Works 2:172. Wesley’s evaluation of reason here can be helpfully compared to the view of John Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding, where Locke refers to the understanding as “the most elevated faculty of the soul” but has no sense of reason’s deformity through sin. See Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1996), 1. Locke’s Essay was first published in 1689.
that initiates the work of salvation in the person. It explains in an important sense why Wesley can call reason “the candle of the Lord,” which has the role of “laying the foundation of true religion, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, and in raising the whole superstructure.” Prevenient grace also explains the phenomenon of conscience, which is the first mark of a recovery of moral capacity in the soul. The presence of the conscience has real significance for Wesley in the way of salvation, which can be seen by the fact that he considers it a form of nascent restoration of the will (and hence the first step in the recovery of the moral image of God). A person with an active conscience does not on its own constitute salvation, of course; but the conscience is, however, a sign of the universal gift of God’s prevenience and is therefore a first and necessary step on the way of salvation. In short, it is the universality of prevenient grace (given to all people) that means that the effects of the fall in actual life are always mitigated and that the work of salvation is already begun by God’s own initiative.

2. The Gift of Redemption: The Spiritual Senses

Beyond the gift of prevenient grace, which prepares a person for a more substantial regeneration by the initial reordering of the inner dynamics of the soul’s faculties, Wesley argues that the gift of God’s grace actively and responsively working in the soul is required for real holiness to become manifest. This renewal

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comes first with justification by faith in Jesus Christ (pardon) and thereafter with
the sanctification of the Holy Spirit (progressive healing). The atoning work of Jesus
Christ removes the guilt of sin, but this is not the totality of salvation. Salvation
continues through the work of God the Holy Spirit, who brings about progressive
renewal in both the natural image and moral image of God. Wesley relates this
renewal to the development of “spiritual senses” in the soul that are wholly
deadened subsequent to the Fall. The spiritual senses are intimately related to
Wesley’s psychology, exactly because they are considered to be a kind of quickened
moral capacity that becomes active at the same time as the gift of living faith is
received. Because of this close connection with the moral life, it is appropriate to
focus on the spiritual senses at just this point in the midst of the larger examination
of moral psychology.

In terms of the significance of the spiritual senses, it is not an exaggeration to
say that it is the quickening of the spiritual senses that makes the recovery of
holiness of heart and life possible, insofar as Wesley from the early 1740s onward
equates the spiritual senses with faith. A considerable amount of scholarly
literature has investigated this aspect of Wesley’s theology in recent years, with

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70 For the classic account of sanctification in Wesley, see Harald Lindström, Wesley &
71 The other possible tack would be simply to continue through the way of salvation with
reference to the various functions of grace – a process that has been adequately pursued at
any number of times and by any number of scholars elsewhere. I find it preferable to
instead delve into the spiritual senses for just the reason that they seem to offer Wesley’s
most vivid example of how a restored moral capacity, continually quickened by the Holy
Spirit, finds expression in practical life.
72 See Mark T. Mealey, “John Wesley’s Use of the Idea of the Spiritual Senses in His
Definitions of Faith & the New Birth,” Papers of the Canadian Methodist Historical Society 13
some of the main findings being related to the sheer ubiquity of the concept in the mature Wesley as well as the way in which it connects Wesley with the broader tradition of a metaphysics of participation and divine illumination in early and medieval Christianity.\textsuperscript{73} Its relationship to moral psychology has not been explored with as great detail, but the connection is a crucial one within Wesley’s soteriology.

The spiritual senses are used by Wesley as an analogue to the natural senses, in that they are understood to allow a person experiential access to an aspect of reality not available otherwise. The senses – whether natural or spiritual – allow the apprehension of the exterior realm to which those senses correspond. So sight allows a person access to the visible reality around himself; hearing gives access to the auditory world. The spiritual senses give a person access to the spiritual realm, to “God and the things of God.”\textsuperscript{74} Wesley describes this in a number of different ways. The “Letter to Conyers Middleton” (1749) refers to the spiritual senses as


\textsuperscript{74} Versions of this phrase are employed by Wesley with some frequency. See, e.g., Wesley, \textit{An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion} (1743), ¶6, in \textit{Works} 11:46; Wesley, \textit{A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part I}, ¶V.27, in \textit{Works} 11:170; Wesley, “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” ¶I.6, in \textit{Works} 1:433-434; Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” ¶II.1, in \textit{Works} 2:160.
“faculties capable of discerning things invisible.” In the *Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* of 1743, he draws the comparison between the spiritual senses and the natural senses:

> And seeing our ideas are not innate, but must all originally come from our senses, it is certainly necessary that you have senses capable of discerning objects of this kind – not those only which are called ‘natural senses’, which in this respect profit nothing, as being altogether incapable of discerning objects of a spiritual kind, but *spiritual senses*, exercised to discern spiritual good and evil. It is necessary that you have the *hearing ear* and the *seeing eye*, emphatically so called; that you have a new class of senses opened in your soul, not depending on organs of flesh and blood, to be ‘the *evidence* of things not seen’ as your bodily senses are of visible things, to be the avenues to the invisible world, to discern spiritual objects, and to furnish you with ideas of what the outward ‘eye hath not seen, neither the ear heard’.

At times, readers of Wesley have taken his use of spiritual senses as an analogue to natural senses in literalistic fashion. John B. Cobb, Jr., for instance, interprets Wesley as positing the spiritual senses as an “additional set of organs” that provide epistemic abilities for a certain kind of (metaphysical) reality in the way the natural sense organs allow for knowledge of another kind of (physical) reality. To Cobb, this bifurcated notion of epistemic ability suggests “a radical difference between the bases of natural and spiritual knowledge that does not fit our experience.” Cobb’s criticism, however, fails to recognize that the spiritual senses are less about

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epistemology for Wesley than they are about soteriology. It is not that there aren’t epistemic ramifications for Wesley’s doctrine of the spiritual senses; it is just that it isn’t epistemology that Wesley is attempting to flesh out when he employs the concept. The spiritual senses do not reveal anything about God that can’t already be learned in Scripture and the teachings of the church. What they give is an apprehension of the divine life via participation in that life by virtue of the Holy Spirit – and this both explains why Wesley’s descriptions of the spiritual senses are focused on the power they convey (rather than knowledge in the form of content) and why Cobb’s literalistic reading of a “set of organs” misses Wesley’s rich metaphorical point.79

The quickening of the spiritual senses is, for Wesley, an event that comes through the reception of living faith. In the “Scripture Way of Salvation,” Wesley connects the quickening of the spiritual senses with this process, writing, “Faith ... implies both a supernatural evidence of God and of the things of God, a kind of

79 Take, for instance, the following description of Wesley in “The Scripture Way of Salvation” which describes the impact of the spiritual senses’ quickening: “We have a prospect of the invisible things of God. We see the spiritual world, which is all round about us, and yet no more discerned by our natural faculties than if it had no being; and we see the eternal world, piercing through the veil which hangs between time and eternity. Clouds and darkness then rest upon it no more, but we already see the glory which shall be revealed” (¶II.1, in Works 2:160-161). The metaphorical content of this language seems evident, as does the fact that Wesley does intend the sensory language (here, the verb “to see”) to be taken in literal fashion. This point is supported by the way in which Wesley frames the spiritual senses in a sermon such as “The End of Christ’s Coming,” where the “view” that the enlightened sight allows is “that ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their former trespasses,’ not imputing them to me” (¶III.1, in Works 2:480-481); cf. Wesley, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” ¶2, in Works 1:401-402. It is also possible, of course, that a large part of the reason Cobb misreads Wesley is that he attempts to read him as a (Lockean) modernist in his epistemology, whereas Wesley’s actual epistemological orientation is pre-modern and grounded in the Aristotelian tradition as it was received by the medieval church (see above pp.201-202 and n.73).
spiritual light exhibited to the soul, and a supernatural sight or perception thereof."\textsuperscript{80} He goes on to add that through these new abilities, "We have a prospect of the invisible things of God. We see the spiritual world, which is all round about us, and yet no more discerned by our natural faculties than if it had no being; and we see the eternal world, piercing through the veil which hangs between time and eternity."\textsuperscript{81} Wesley echoes this connection of faith and the spiritual senses in the \\textit{Earnest Appeal}, where he calls faith "the spiritual sensation of every soul that is born of God."\textsuperscript{82} The connection of the spiritual senses with faith underscores the importance of the spiritual senses within Wesley's soteriology and the sheer giftedness of the spiritual senses. To the latter point, it is significant that they cannot be developed or exercised through any human ability. They are a gift of the Holy Spirit and remain quickened in the person to the extent that the person's faith remains living.\textsuperscript{83} Wesley's attention to the spiritual senses is a pervasive aspect of his view of present salvation from the time of the \\textit{Earnest Appeal} in 1743 onward;

\textsuperscript{81} Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," ¶II.1, in \\textit{Works} 2:161.
\textsuperscript{82} Wesley, \textit{An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion}, ¶6, in \\textit{Works} 11:46. The full quotation in context reads, "Now faith ... is ... the demonstrative evidence of things unseen, the supernatural evidence of things invisible, not perceivable by eyes of flesh, or by any of our natural senses or faculties. Faith is that divine evidence whereby the spiritual man discerneth God and the things of God. It is with regard to the spiritual world what sense is with regard to the natural. It is the spiritual sensation of every soul that is born of God."
indeed, as Mark Mealey has pointed out, the concept is so central to Wesley that it is found in the last section of the last sermon he wrote before his death in 1791.84

It is in Wesley’s 1760 sermon, “The New Birth,” that we can see a clear point of contact between the spiritual senses and the recovery of moral psychology. Here, Wesley makes the usual analogy between the natural and the spiritual senses, suggesting that the new birth is necessary for the use of the spiritual senses just as natural childbirth is necessary for the use of the natural senses.85 In both cases the capacities are present beforehand but the ability is not; the proper precipitating event must happen in order for the senses (in either category) to begin functioning. At the point of the spiritual new birth, a Christian “feels, is inwardly sensible of, the graces which the Spirit of God works in his heart.”86 Wesley then offers one of his most arresting descriptions of present salvation, which is worth quoting in some detail:

And now he may properly be said to live: God having quickened him by his Spirit, he is alive to God through Jesus Christ. He lives a life which the world knoweth not of, a ‘life’ which ‘is hid with Christ in God’. God is continually breathing, as it were, upon his soul, and his soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into his heart, and prayer and praise ascending to heaven. And by this intercourse between God and man, this fellowship with the Father and the Son, as by a kind of spiritual respiration, the life of God in the soul is sustained: and the child of God grows up, till he comes to ‘the full measure of the stature of Christ’.87

This description is, as Wesley mentions in the passage, one of spiritual respiration. The concept as Wesley describes it is at once intimately Trinitarian and evocative of the relational nature of grace.

Embedded in the midst of this reflection on the nature of the new birth and the experience of salvation from the sermon, “The New Birth,” is a persistent strand of emphasis on the spiritual senses. As the above quoted process of spiritual respiration is ongoing, the spiritual senses are “exercised to discern’ spiritual ‘good and evil’. Wesley continues, “By the use of these he is daily increasing in the knowledge of God, of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and of all the things pertaining to his inward kingdom.” The way in which the material on the new birth and the spiritual senses is interlaced is no accident. The Christian’s experience of salvation is the experience of having “the image of God stamped upon the heart.” It entails a “restoration of the soul to its primitive health” and “a recovery of the divine nature” (to quote the Farther Appeal). This means that it is a restoration of those internal faculties of reason and will such that a real liberty or harmony once again obtains among them. The role of the spiritual senses in all of this is as the ability to exist and interact with the world, and to know and interact with God, through means not inspired, breathed into the new-born soul; and the same breath which comes from, returns to God.” A similar Trinitarian emphasis, framed with reference to the soul’s ultimate happiness, can be found in Wesley, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” ¶1.12, in Works 1:408.

90 Wesley, “The New Birth,” ¶III.1, in Works 2:194. Wesley follows this by stating that it “consists of all heavenly affections and tempers mingled together in one,” suggesting the heart of salvation as most fundamentally the recovery of the moral image of God, seated in the will, and marked by holy love.
possible previously. The spiritual senses are quickened capacities to apprehend the
divine, but they are also the abilities to act with a recovered holiness. In one sense,
the spiritual senses are identified with the reception of faith; yet in another, the
(re)acquisition of them must be regarded as a sign of the restoration of the will (or
heart). The basis for this is ongoing, relational connection to the Holy Spirit: the
spiritual senses are productive of holy love in the person in whom they have been
quickened exactly because the spiritual respiration that animates them is a
respiration of the Spirit to the human heart.

3. The Telos of Love

To this point, we have looked at the restoration of the soul with regard to its
inherent faculties, with some attention to the exercise of the spiritual senses in that
process. Wesley describes this condition of internal, ongoing restoration – properly
speaking, holiness of heart – in his early sermon “Circumcision of the Heart” (1733),
in a way that remains consistent throughout his life. For Wesley, the circumcision of
the heart (from Romans 2:29) is:

[T]hat habitual disposition of soul which in the Sacred Writings
is termed “holiness,” and which directly implies the being cleansed
from sin, “from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit,” and by
consequence the being endued with those virtues which were also in
Christ Jesus, the being so “renewed in the image of our mind” as to be
“perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect.”

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91 In this sense, it is more accurate to speak of Wesley’s view of the capacity of the will not
as “free will” but rather as “graced will.” See, e.g., Wesley, “The Circumcision of the Heart,”
¶11.4, in Works 1:411, where he writes, “[The Holy Spirit] alone can quicken those who are
dead unto God, can breathe into them the breath of Christian life, and so prevent,
accompany, and follow them with his grace as to bring their good desires to good effect.”
This experience of sanctification entails a progressive transformation through humility, faith, hope, and love (each building on the other). And in this progression, the holiness of heart will naturally manifest itself in a holiness of life where the Christian’s daily activities are loving expressions of the inwardly renewed soul.93 Moreover, Wesley’s account of progressive spiritual renewal further rejects those Enlightenment options of empiricism and rationalism, popular in his day, that rely either on sense experience or natural reason and depend upon an essentially neutral starting point from the soul’s perspective.94 An explanation of how one can know or do the good, for Wesley, is only possible with an accounting of how sin is overcome and the soul is healed – a soteriological rather than epistemological perspective.

Given that Wesley’s view of the heart is something of an expansive category for the will, this is, then, the “religion of the heart” summarized: an inward faith constitutive of a certain disposition of the soul, marked by holy tempers, and

93 A good example of this dynamic is found in Wesley’s “Letter to Conyers Middleton,” which undergirds the logical progression from inward holiness (a state of being) to outward holiness (a state of action). See Wesley, “Letter to Conyers Middleton,” ¶VI.17-9, in Works (Jackson) 10:68-69. Cf. Wesley, “On Charity,” ¶III.8, in Works 3:304-305, where Wesley counsels that good works done for the wrong reasons cannot “supply the want of holy tempers” and that those who would be tempted to try to make them do so would “take care that they may spring from them!” (i.e., that the works would spring from tempers rightly formed).

94 For an engagement with such options, see “The Unity of the Divine Being,” ¶18-20 in Works 4:67-69. While older readings of Wesley often connected him with the Enlightenment empiricism of John Locke, newer readings have rejected this view and instead see Wesley as emblematic of older (pre-modern) understandings of empiricism that allow for intuitionist capacities dependent upon some version of divine illumination. See, e.g., Maddox, “A Change of Affections,” 12-13; Mealey, “Tilting at windmills: John Wesley’s reading of John Locke’s epistemology,” Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester 85:2-3 (Summer/Autumn 2003): 331-346; Long, John Wesley’s Moral Theology.
expressive of intrinsically good affections. This entire process, the recovery of a soul whose faculties are once again working rightly and in harmony, as well as the ability to utilize spiritual senses empowered by the Holy Spirit, aim at the telos named by Jesus’ two great commandments to love God and love neighbor. Nurturing that kind of love was the purpose of all Methodist practice, for Wesley. The connection between the idea of holiness, the status of tempers as the core dispositions of the will, and the telos of holy love is shown in Wesley’s letter to Joseph Benson on October 5, 1770, where he writes, “Holiness is the love of God and man, or the mind which was in Christ ... And are not the love of God and our neighbor good tempers? And, so far as these reign in the soul, are not the opposite tempers, worldly-mindedness, malice, cruelty, revengefulness, destroyed?” It is this over-lapping set of connections between the will, holiness/sanctification, and love, that allows Wesley to make a statement like, “True religion is right tempers towards God and man.” To possess tempers that are, at their most fundamental level, marked by the love of God and neighbor, means that the soul has been restored by grace received and the person thereby transformed.

Moreover, Wesley’s moral psychology of renewed holy tempers illuminates the connection between the means of grace and sanctification. Wesley’s particular appropriation of the Pauline doctrine of justification by grace through faith keys on Paul’s statement in Galatians 5:6, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”

95 See Wesley, The Character of a Methodist (1742), ¶5, in Works 9:35.
notion of a “faith working through love” is one at harmony with an understanding of faith that brings with it spiritual senses that are, themselves, forms of participation in the divine life. It is also one that is at home with Wesley’s view of grace as the “the power of God the Holy Ghost” at work in persons.\textsuperscript{97} Wesley invokes the notion of faith working by love as that which marks a person as an “altogether” (rather than an “almost”) Christian.\textsuperscript{98}

The fullest homiletical depiction of faith working by love is found in “On Zeal” (1781), a presentation remarkable for the fact that it does not try to argue technically the way that faith, the means of grace, and love interact, but rather presents a metaphorical image of the soul that reflects perfectly what life with God enables and empowers.\textsuperscript{99} The image comes in the form of a series of concentric circles and is worth quoting in some detail. Wesley writes:

\begin{quote}
In a Christian believer love sits upon the throne, which is erected in the inmost soul; namely, love of God and man, which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival. In a circle near the throne are all holy tempers: long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, fidelity, temperance – and if any other is comprised in ‘the mind which was in Christ Jesus’. In an exterior circle are all the works of mercy, whether to the souls or bodies of men. By these we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that all these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed works of piety: reading and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{99} Wesley, “On Zeal” (1781), in \textit{Works} 3:308-321. I do not claim originality for the point I make here and in the following paragraphs; indeed, the image Wesley provides in “On Zeal” has been seen as significant for most of those who have written either on Wesley’s moral psychology or the means of grace. There is good reason for that, because so much of his view of the tempers/will, the role of holy love, and the means of grace is captured here in almost snapshot fashion. Thus, I believe it is an important sermon to use probably for the same reasons other scholars have found it to be so.
hearing the Word, public, family, private prayer, receiving the Lord’s Supper, fasting or abstinence. Lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one – the church, dispersed all over the earth; a little emblem of which, of the church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation.\textsuperscript{100}

The love that Wesley places “upon the throne” in the soul of the Christian is not a passive thing but is rather active and, indeed, definitive of the Christian’s whole identity. The tempers that collectively define a will rightly ordered (including long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, fidelity, and temperance) are said to be closest to the throne of love, and this makes sense in that sanctification is most fundamentally a recovery of the moral image of God. Next there are the means of grace, expressed in terms of the works of mercy and works of piety. It has been remarked at times in the past that Wesley places the works of mercy (i.e., expressing love toward neighbor) closer to the center of the throne of love than works of piety (i.e., expressing love toward God); this is, presumably, because works of mercy “not only give expression to love for one’s neighbor, but in so doing both obey God’s command and emulate God’s character.”\textsuperscript{101} This is surely the case. Also notable, however, is Wesley’s language about the means of grace providing the opportunity to “exercise all holy tempers” and “continually improve them.”\textsuperscript{102} Participation in


\textsuperscript{101} Knight, “The Role of Faith and the Means of Grace in the Heart Religion of John Wesley,” 278.

\textsuperscript{102} Though Wesley seems to connect these statements with the works of mercy in the way the sermon is phrased, I would argue that they apply equally to the works of piety as well (and indeed, Wesley does not suggest otherwise; his concern rather seems to be that works of mercy are considered means of grace, whereas the fact that works of piety are means of grace he does not take to be in dispute). Maddox covers this same issue in “A Change of Affections,” where he refers to the means of grace as the “framework of Wesley’s heart
the means of grace are channels whereby God’s grace is conveyed, and in “On Zeal,” Wesley is suggesting that the entire pattern of life they point toward is, collectively the manner whereby the means are effective at forming Christian character (and intimately connected to the recovery of moral psychology). With respect to the active and progressively transformative nature of Wesley’s language, this is exactly what we have meant through the notion of a “practice” in the way we have discussed it up to this point.

The arresting image from “On Zeal” provides an adequate summary of a moral psychology fully regenerated. Love’s restoration as the ruling temper of the soul means, finally, that freedom is again present in the soul and happiness a reality: “Such a love of God is this as engrosses the whole heart, as takes up all the affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul, and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties.” Wesley is clear that such a restoration will usually only occur over time. But that is simply the manner of a power that acts as a kind of divine medicine, working upon the soul via the love of God, mediated by Christ and known

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104 See, e.g., “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765), where Wesley speaks of “the gradual work of sanctification,” in which “we are more and more dead to sin” and “more and more alive to God” (¶I.8, in Works 2:160). Note also the integral connection between initial (justifying) faith and subsequent (sanctifying) faith over time.
through *faith*. The soul renewed and restored by grace that can seek its happiness in God through restored liberty, ironically, acquires the freedom to submit itself entirely to God. And with the soul’s healing, a return “to virtue, and freedom, and happiness” also precipitates responsible moral agency – the ability to think, feel, speak, and act for the good. Because this state is only nurtured in the individual through the power of divine love, it is equivalent to what Wesley means by Christian perfection. This entire process does not happen in the abstract, and it is not some work of magic that occurs apart from the engaged life of Christian discipleship. Rather, as “On Zeal” shows so well, it happens in the midst of a life patterned by the means of grace.

There is one crucial, culminating point to be made about this view of the holy life: it cannot be obtained, nor can it be sustained, alone. Wesley references this fact in the final circle of the image from “On Zeal,” when he writes, “Lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one – *the church*. Given this corporate commitment on Wesley’s part, we have a need to articulate more specifically what Ole Borgen will call an “environmental context” for how the

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107 See, e.g., Wesley, “Christian Perfection” (1741). ¶¶I.9-II.4 and II.24-26; and Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 33. In the case of ¶¶II.24-26 of the sermon in particular, note the degree to which perfection is for Wesley a question of the healing of the will or tempers.
means of grace are located and sustained in the lives of Christians over time. This context is found in Wesley's doctrine of social holiness.

II. The Means of Grace and Social Holiness

Social holiness is a phrase that in contemporary Wesleyan discourse is used with a frequency all out of proportion to John Wesley's own employment of it. The most common examples of social holiness being used by Wesleyans in recent years have either been by those who consider "social justice" a synonym for "social holiness," or by those who use the term as one half of the combined phrase, "personal and social holiness." It would perhaps come as a surprise to those who invoke social holiness in either of these ways to learn that the application of both these two usages to Wesley is anachronistic and historically unsupportable.

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Wesley’s life antedates the development of the concept of social justice, which derives primarily from the social ethics of a 19th century Italian Jesuit named Luigi Taparelli D’Azeglio.\textsuperscript{111} While Wesley demonstrated social concern throughout his life (and in fact strongly connected works of mercy with the means of grace!), the way in which he did so is not equivalent to the neo-Thomistic political theory of a figure like Taparelli. Likewise, the phrase “personal and social holiness” is also foreign to Wesley insofar as he simply never used it; and moreover, the application of it to Wesley risks bifurcating his theology of holiness in exactly the kind of way he would want to avoid.\textsuperscript{112} 

Language is, of course, in a constant state of evolution and it is entirely possible – even perhaps expected – that a term like social holiness could take on new meanings in new social and historical contexts. Likewise, a phrase such as personal and social holiness can become invested with semantic content in a given setting without apologies to any historical antecedents (or in this case, mistaken historical antecedents). The problem arises when historical claims are made about terms or ideas as a way to lend legitimacy to the use of those terms and ideas in the present. That is the issue in contemporary Wesleyan discourse, where both “social holiness-as-social justice” and “personal and social holiness” are claimed to have specifically Wesleyan content.\textsuperscript{113} Examining Wesley’s actual understanding of social holiness will help to clarify the situation for contemporary discourse generally, and

\begin{flushright}
\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{111} I cover the origin of social justice in Taparelli’s thought in Thompson, “From Societies to Society,” 145-151.
\textsuperscript{112} This danger of bifurcation is taken up below in the context of the chapter.
\textsuperscript{113} I offer examples of this tendency in the introductory section to Thompson, “From Societies to Society,” 141-145.
\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushright}
more important to the task at hand, will also assist us in coming to understand
the centrality of social holiness as Wesley understood it for the practice of the means of
grace. One of the surprising findings we will encounter is that while Wesley only
uses the exact term “social holiness” a single time in his published writings, it is
infused throughout the entirety of his thought.

A. Holiness in the Theology of John Wesley

An initial step into the investigation of social holiness can be made by first
exploring the more fundamental biblical notion of holiness itself as Wesley
understands it. The concept of holiness is central to Wesley’s thought and can be
understood in the most fundamental way as the moral attribute of God that is
expressive of divine love. As such, it is an attribute in which humans are meant to
share as creatures made in the image of God.\footnote{See, e.g., John Wesley, “The New Birth,” ¶1.1, in \textit{Works} 2:188. Wesley comments on the
cracter of humanity created in the moral image of God as that “which, according to the
Apostle, is ‘righteousness and true holiness’ [cf. Ephesians 4:24]. In this image of God was
man made, ‘God is love’ accordingly man at his creation was full of love, which was the sole
principle of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions.”} That they cannot do so under the
penalty and power of sin is a central part of the human dilemma, for it is basic to the
Christian understanding that holiness is God’s desire and command for all his
children: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16; cf. Leviticus 19:2). And
yet God makes holiness a possibility despite the guilt and utter dysfunction caused
by sin, through the person and work of Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. This
possibility comes by the grace of God, which we receive through faith and which

\footnote{See, e.g., John Wesley, “The New Birth,” ¶1.1, in \textit{Works} 2:188. Wesley comments on the
cracter of humanity created in the moral image of God as that “which, according to the
Apostle, is ‘righteousness and true holiness’ [cf. Ephesians 4:24]. In this image of God was
man made, ‘God is love’ accordingly man at his creation was full of love, which was the sole
principle of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions.”}
mediates pardon from sin’s guilt and healing from sin’s power. Christ’s atoning work in justification is that which offers pardon, while it is the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification that brings healing (and thereby makes holiness a reality) – aspects of which have been surveyed in the present work under the guises of the functions of grace (chapter 4) and the recovery of moral psychology (chapter 5).

Wesley indicates his understanding of holiness as lying at the heart of Methodist identity in the 1742 apologetic treatise, The Character of a Methodist. In it, Wesley defends the activities of the Methodists in England by stating that a Methodist is simply one who “has ‘the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him’; one who ‘loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength’.” For Wesley, those who are inwardly renewed by such holy love will necessarily express it through an outwardly transformed life, a fundamental characteristic of his doctrine of holiness that underlies the oft-repeated phrase, “holiness of heart and life.”

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115 Indeed, Wesley was careful to hold both senses of grace – pardon and power – in tandem. See, e.g., Wesley, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit,” ¶15, in Works 1:309, where he speaks of God’s grace as both “pardon ing love” and “the power of his Spirit.” Cf. Heitzenrater’s description of grace in the Wesleyan understanding as the “active presence or power of God,” in Heitzenrater, “God with Us: Grace and the Spiritual Senses in John Wesley’s Theology,” 92 (covered also in chapter 4 above).


118 See, e.g., Wesley, “Advice to the People Called Methodists” (1745), ¶2, in Works 9:123-124, where Wesley states, “By Methodists I mean a people who profess to pursue ... holiness of heart and life, inward and outward conformity in all things to the revealed will of God; who place religion in an uniform resemblance of the great Object of it; in a steady imitation of him they worship in all his inimitable perfections; more particularly in justice, mercy, and truth, or universal love filling the heart and governing the life.” Though he does not use the phrase “holiness of heart and life” in the sermon, Wesley’s “Circumcision of the Heart” is perhaps the best early example of this core concept in his theology, which frames
progressive transformation of holiness in the life of the Christian believer serves, indeed, as the counterpart to justification in Wesley’s soteriology. Whereas the latter signifies a relative change in one’s status before (and thus relationship with) God, the new birth and the growth in holiness consequent upon it result in a real change within the believer by the transforming effect of God’s love. This salvific process can also be understood in terms of Christ’s righteousness – a righteousness implanted and nurtured in the growth of holiness, just as it had been imputed via the forgiveness and reconciliation of Christ’s justifying work.

The two terms “holiness” and “sanctification” are in fact synonymous in Wesley’s theology; the telos toward which they point (in this life) is Christian perfection, a cleansed and “completed” state wherein not only the penalty but also the power of sin is overcome. Yet even as Wesley is willing to adopt (and defend!) the language of perfection to describe the teleological character of sanctification according to the virtues of faith, hope, and love. See Wesley, “Circumcision of the Heart,” in Works 1:398-414.


120 Wesley’s articulation of the distinction between imputed and implanted righteousness can be seen in Wesley, “The Lord Our Righteousness” (1765), ¶II.12, in Works 1:458-459. Cf. Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 221-223.

121 See, e.g., Wesley, “On Perfection” (1784), ¶I.8, in Works 3:75. Wesley’s view is that perfection is the completion of the renewal of the moral image of God in the soul. As such, he connects perfection with holiness: “So God created man in his own image” [Genesis 1:27]. Now the moral image of God consists (as the Apostle observes) ‘in righteousness and true holiness’. By sin this is totally destroyed. And we can never recover it till we are ‘created anew in Christ Jesus’. And this is perfection ... ‘As he that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation’ [1 Peter 1:15]. According to this Apostle, then, perfection is another name for universal holiness – inward and outward righteousness – holiness of life arising from holiness of heart” (¶I.8). On salvation as encompassing freedom from both the penalty and power of sin, see Randy Maddox’s description of salvation in Wesley’s understanding in its fullness as including deliverance from the penalty of sin (immediately in justification), the plague of sin (progressively in sanctification), and the presence of sin (eschatologically), in Maddox, Responsible Grace, 143.
holiness/sanctification, he is also insistent that perfection itself is never a static
state.\textsuperscript{122} He rather understands it to be subject to the same kind of dynamic growth
that is a facet of ongoing sanctification from the time of new birth, going so far as to
claim at one point that those who are perfect can continue to grow in grace “not only
while they are in the body, but to all eternity.”\textsuperscript{123} The connection between all three
terms – holiness, sanctification, and perfection – can be seen in his overlapping
treatment of them in his commentary on relevant Scripture passages in the
Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament.\textsuperscript{124} In Wesley’s understanding, the kind
of graced transformation of the person implied in the concept of holiness is at its

\textsuperscript{122} Indeed, Wesley understands that one can continue to “grow in grace” after having
reached perfection in the sense that the soul is not exhausted by the love of God and can
come to an ever-greater knowledge of the Father’s love in Jesus Christ through the power
of the Holy Spirit. This is a point made early by Wesley even before his soteriology reached its
\textsuperscript{123} The statement from Wesley comes from “Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection,”
written in 1761 and first published in 1763. It was incorporated thereafter in A Plain
Account of Christian Perfection. It reads in full, “Q.29. Can those who are perfect grow in
grace? A. Undoubtedly they can; and that not only while they are in the body, but to all
eternity.” See Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, 85. On the composition and
\textsuperscript{124} See Wesley, Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament. In commenting on the Apostle
Paul’s counsel in 2 Corinthians that, having received the promises of God in Jesus Christ, we
should “cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness
in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1), Wesley writes, “Carrying it to the height in all its
branches, and enduring to the end in the loving fear of God, the sure foundation of all
holiness” (460). Cf. Wesley’s comment on Paul’s statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 (“For this
is the will of God, even your sanctification”) that offers a definitional statement:
“Sanctification – Entire holiness of heart and life” (529). Wesley brings the three terms
(holiness, sanctification, and perfection) neatly together in his comment on Jesus’ prayer in
John 17:17 (“Sanctify them through the truth: thy word is truth”) by stating, “Sanctify –
Consecrate them by the anointing of thy Spirit to their office, and perfect them in holiness,
by means of thy word” (263). Holiness, then is viewed by Wesley as that regenerated state
of soul that comes by the activity of the Holy Spirit and admits of continual increase so long
as one continues to receive grace and respond in faith – a dynamic process articulated as a
kind of “spiritual respiration” by Wesley elsewhere (cf. Wesley, “The New Birth,” ¶ II.4, in
Works 2:193).
core what the Apostle Paul means in his language of the “faith which worketh by love.”

1. Personal Holiness

There are a number of regular phrases Wesley uses to describe holiness, with “holiness of heart and life” or some variation on it being the most prominent. This bipartite phrasing points to the logic of Wesley’s psychology in its needful state and the healing effects of grace received: It is the will that needs the fullest rehabilitation from depravity, though the understanding requires a graced enlightenment as well. But added to the restoration of the soul’s faculties is a quickening of spiritual senses that, as we have seen, gives the Christian believer a Spirit-empowered ability of apprehension she would not have known previously. The word “heart” serves as the shorthand for this transforming work, with “life” as the term to represent the changed attitudes, habits, and engaged participation in Christian activity that follow. The new life arises out of the transformed heart, as the (super-) natural consequence of the work of grace upon the soul.

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125 See Wesley’s comment on Galatians 5:6 in the Notes, where he interprets the Pauline phrase as, “All inward and outward holiness” (Wesley, Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament, 484).

126 My fullest examination of the restoration of the soul’s faculties via grace apart from the current work can be found in Thompson, “Outler’s Quadrilateral, Moral Psychology, and Theological Reflection in the Wesleyan Tradition,” 58-70. See also the consideration on moral psychology in the present chapter above.

127 And thus Wesley will also at times substitute phrases such as “inward and outward holiness” and “inward and outward righteousness” as synonymous terms for “holiness of heart and life.”
This point bears mentioning with respect to those contemporary commentators on Wesleyan thought at both the academic and popular levels who employ the phrase “personal and social holiness,” a move that is either meant to supply a substitute for “holiness of heart and life” or to serve as a stand-in term for a set of practices generally intended to signify the means of grace (e.g., works of piety and works of mercy, or instituted and prudential means of grace). Given its frequent use and its application to Wesley, it can only be seen as remarkable that Wesley does not appear to have ever used the phrase “personal and social holiness” at all. Each term appears on its own in his work – i.e., personal holiness and social holiness – but never as a paired set.128 Given that fact, it is crucial to come to an understanding of how Wesley uses the terms separately to discern whether they can or should be used together by those seeking to speak with a Wesleyan theological vocabulary and out of the Wesleyan tradition.

The term “personal holiness” appears a handful of times in Wesley’s published works, including the treatises, *The Doctrine of Original Sin according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience* and *A Preface to a Treatise on Justification*, the sermon “On the Wedding Garment,” and the colorfully titled polemical essay, “A Blow at the Root; or, Christ Stabbed in the House of his Friends.” The first two of these are extracts by Wesley from other works and thus are not primarily from his own pen, although Wesley’s edited publication of them suggests that the views they

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128 In my own investigations, the only places where I have found Wesley’s pairing of the terms “personal” and “social” are in Wesley’s use of the phrase, “social and personal happiness” (Wesley, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Part III, ¶IV.14, in *Works* 11:323), and “personal and social happiness” (Wesley, *Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions* (1773), ¶I.6, in *Works* (Jackson) 11:56.
contain can at least be taken as endorsed by him. The latter two works are Wesley’s own and so express his views more directly. In all four works, where “personal holiness” is used, it is employed as part of a claim about the importance of linking sanctification along with justification within the doctrine of salvation. That is, in each of these texts and in various ways, Wesley insists that without the implanted righteousness of Christ inering in the soul of the believer, the imputed righteousness of Christ alone will not fulfill Scripture’s enjoiner to “that holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Wesley argues this point in the 1790 sermon, “On the Wedding Garment,” where he writes,

The righteousness of Christ is, doubtless, necessary for any soul that enters into glory. But so is personal holiness, too, for every child of man ... The former is necessary to entitle us to heaven; the latter, to qualify us for it. Without the righteousness of Christ we could have no claim to glory; without holiness we could have no fitness for it.\(^{129}\)

Likewise, the other works that utilize the language of personal holiness all engage the relationship of justification to sanctification with an emphasis on the necessity of the latter.\(^{130}\) The reason for using the language of personal holiness is to distinguish it from the holiness of God: it is rather the holiness that is planted and takes root in persons. In no case does Wesley pair personal holiness with social holiness as a single combined term. Nor does Wesley aim toward the meaning that contemporary commentators often do, which amounts to a bifurcation of holiness


\(^{130}\) See Wesley, The Doctrine of Original Sin, according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience, Part III, Section VIII, in Works (Jackson) 9:340-341; Wesley, A Preface to a Treatise on Justification, in Works (Jackson) 10:330-331; and Wesley, “A Blow at the Root; or, Christ Stabbed in the House of his Friends,” in Works (Jackson), 10:366-367.
into private and public guises that are *either* equivalent to distinct "ways of being holy" *or* to concrete acts distinctly individual or social in their expression.

2. Social Holiness

While Wesley only rarely uses the term “personal holiness” in his published work, he uses “social holiness” in just a single instance – a fact that is perhaps surprising given its prominence in contemporary Wesleyan discourse. That single instance takes place in the *Preface* to the edition of *Hymns and Sacred Poems* published jointly by John and Charles Wesley in 1739. A consideration of the *Preface* can therefore complete our analysis of the Wesleyan theological vocabulary and provide a degree of clarity in regards to the relationship of social holiness to the other terms with which it is often identified.

The aim of Wesley’s *Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems* is two-fold: Wesley is interested in establishing both the theological ground of salvation and the context in which salvation should be understood to be manifest in present life. In both of these concerns, he presents himself as responding to the views of a group he simply calls the "Mystic Divines." The group is no more closely identified than the broad category that the term itself suggests, but given Wesley’s experience in the years prior to 1739, the mysticism he proceeds to react against is identifiable as that introduced to him by William Law through the influence Law had on Wesley in the

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early 1730s. It was a relationship that communicated a particular understanding of mysticism to Wesley's mind. As sources dating from Wesley's missionary sojourn in Georgia make clear, he came to view mysticism as a flawed and even dangerous approach to the Christian faith that rejected Scriptural teachings about the importance of the means of grace and the significance of the church in favor of an understanding of divine love as apprehended by human beings in unmediated fashion through the operations of the Holy Spirit.

Wesley's first concern in the Preface is to assert an evangelical doctrine of justification by faith alone over against the view of divine acceptance on the basis of human merit. In this he sees a sleight of hand on the part of the mystic writers who, Wesley believes, denigrate the righteousness of human works only so they can substitute human righteousness on the basis of the internal virtue of the will. Wesley writes, “[Mystics] speak largely and well against expecting to be accepted of

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132 For a description of Wesley's engagement with Law and with mysticism generally, see chapter 3 of the present work.
134 We have already seen, for instance, the verdict Wesley gave on mysticism in his letter of 23 November 1736 sent to his brother Samuel Wesley, Jr., while he was serving as a missionary in the Georgia colony (see above pp.108-109). Also significant, of course, is the personal memorandum Wesley wrote on 25 January 1738, onboard the ship he took back to England from Georgia. That document is particularly notable given its proximity to the publication of the Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems the following year. In it, Wesley recounts being initially attracted to the mystics' "noble descriptions of union with God and internal religion," but he reports that he came to reject their teaching as antithetical to Scripture, in particular with regard to their belief that the mystical apprehension of divine love gave "a plenary dispensation from all the commands of God." Wesley indicates that the mystics eventually only deepened his sense of spiritual crisis during this period due to their unanchored view of faith and left him more deeply perplexed as to his own state. He then writes, "Nor can I at this hour give a distinct account how or when I came a little back toward the right way. Only my present sense is this: all the other enemies of Christianity are triflers; the mystics are the most dangerous of all its enemies" (Works 18:212-213).
God for our virtuous actions; and then teach, that we are to be accepted for our virtuous habits or tempers. Still the ground of our acceptance is placed in ourselves.” For Wesley, this perceived distinction fails to properly locate the ground of our acceptance by God in the work of Christ alone. For whether the emphasis is placed on outward human action or inward human virtue, the overarching view remains one of justification originating in human being rather than in Christ. Wesley counters this view, writing, “The sole cause of our acceptance with God ... is the righteousness and the death of Christ, who fulfilled God's law, and died in our stead. And even the condition of it is not (as they suppose) our holiness either of heart or life; but our faith alone; faith contradistinguished from holiness, as well as from good works.” The context, moreover, of this emphasis on faith in the Preface makes it clear that faith itself is not something that human beings can claim as their own; while Wesley describes it as the “condition” for one’s acceptance by God, it is in no way to be considered the “cause” which is attributable to Christ’s righteousness alone.

135 Wesley, Preface, ¶2, in Works (Jackson) 14:319.
136 Wesley, Preface, ¶2, in Works (Jackson) 14:320.
137 Cf. Wesley, “Salvation by Faith,” ¶3, in Works 1:118, a university sermon preached by Wesley at St. Mary’s, Oxford, in the weeks following his experience of assurance at Aldersgate. In seeking to distill the utter giftedness of salvation, Wesley writes, “By grace’, then, ‘are ye saved through faith.’ Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salvation.” It should, however, be noted that Wesley is at his most “Protestant” during the period in which both “Salvation by Faith” and the Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems were published. He offers a more nuanced soteriology in subsequent years (e.g., the landmark 1765 sermon, “The Scripture Way of Salvation”) that does not bifurcate faith and works as radically, and indeed, even in “Salvation by Faith” he speaks “of a faith which is ... necessarily productive of all good works” (Works 1:125). The point here is not to make a comprehensive statement about Wesley's soteriology but rather to examine the structure and content of the Preface for the framework in which the concept of social holiness is used within it.
The second main point of the Preface and the subject to which Wesley devotes the majority of attention is an energetic description of the context of sanctification, which Wesley indicates can only be understood properly once the ground of justification is established. Here Wesley takes aim at the mystics once again, using language that evokes images of St. Antony and the early Desert Fathers. He contends specifically that the mystics’ understanding of the environmental context of sanctification is badly misguided, or as he puts it, “opposite to that prescribed by Christ.” 138 He continues, “[Christ] commands to build up one another. They advise, ‘To the desert! to the desert! and God will build you up.’” 139 Recognizing first the good of periodic retirement from the world for purposes of prayer or spiritual renewal, Wesley then asserts that such a practice is something much different than the sanctification-via-isolation that the mystics teach.

“Numberless are the commendations that occur in all their writings, not of retirement intermixed with conversation, but of an entire seclusion from men, (perhaps for months or years) in order to purify the soul,” he writes. “Whereas, according to the judgment of our Lord and the writings of his Apostles, it is only when we are knit together that we ‘have nourishment from Him, and increase with the increase of God.’ Neither is there any time, when the weakest member can say to the strongest, or the strongest to the weakest, ‘I have no need of thee.’” 140 In

138 Wesley, Preface, ¶3, in Works (Jackson) 14:320.
139 Wesley, Preface, ¶3, in Works (Jackson) 14:320. Capitalization has been retained as the text appears in the Jackson edition of the Works.
140 Wesley, Preface, ¶3, in Works (Jackson) 14:320. The two Scripture paraphrases that Wesley employs here are taken from Colossians 2:19 and 1 Corinthians 12:21ff., respectively.
Wesley’s characterization, therefore, the mystics’ solitary path runs counter to the model of a lived faith in Scripture – both as given by Jesus and, as he makes clear through repeated citations, in other portions of the New Testament as well. This critique of mysticism over the proper context of sanctification, while coming on the heels of his shorter critique on the ground of justification, is quite different from it. The former dealt with the basis of the believer’s acceptance before God, a soteriological issue that Wesley engages in the Preface in the juridical terms often favored by Protestants. The latter critique does not touch on the efficacy of Christ’s saving work or the place of faith as the sole necessary condition for acceptance by God. It is rather about the environmental context of Christian life in which sanctification can be understood to occur.

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141 The mention of the Scriptural model or pattern as the only acceptable one to be pursued cannot be over-exaggerated as it pertains to Wesley’s views on soteriology. Whether he always exegetes Scripture well on matters of either justification or sanctification can be debated, but the fact that Wesley believed he was conforming to the biblical witness and that he saw Scripture as the authority of first and last resort on matters of faithful Christian practice is without doubt. In The Character of a Methodist, Wesley describes a Methodist as “a Christian, not in name only, but in heart and in life. He is inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written Word.” ([¶] 17, in Works 9:41). Likewise, in “A Short History of Methodism” (1765), written almost twenty-five years later, Wesley describes himself and his Oxford colleagues in the earliest period of Methodism by stating that their practices had been undertaken with an eye to that which “was bound upon them by their one book, the Bible, it being their one desire and design to be downright Bible Christians – taking the Bible, as interpreted by the primitive Church and our own, for their whole and sole rule” ([¶] 6, in Works 9:368).

142 Here and subsequently in the essay, I use “environmental context” to describe the conceptual character of social holiness. I am drawing the phrase from Ole Borgen, who uses it as a way of describing Christian fellowship (or Christian conference) as the instituted means of grace “within which all the other instituted means, as well as other prudential means, may be exercised.” See Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 119. Borgen also briefly connects Christian fellowship with Wesley’s mention of social holiness in the Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems at another point in his analysis, though he does not specifically utilize Wesley’s phrase other than the quote itself (see Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 114-115). The connection between social holiness and environmental context is present in seminal form in Borgen’s work, and my adoption of it is intended as a way to
Wesley finally drives his argument home by reiterating what he sees as the chief aspects of salvation as covered in the Preface – the ground of our acceptance in justification (termed the “foundation”) and the proper context of sanctification (called the “manner of building thereon”). Because the mystical understanding of both are so fatally misguided, this can only mean that mysticism’s overarching soteriological framework (what Wesley calls “the superstructure”) must be seen as catastrophically flawed as well. And in that sense, the mystics’ endorsement of human virtue and individualized human striving is really all of one piece, as Wesley contends, “For the religion these authors would edify us in, is solitary religion.” He then unleashes a rhetorical torrent, and in it we finally come upon his use of the phrase in question:

Directly opposite to this is the gospel of Christ. Solitary religion is not to be found there. ‘Holy solitaries’ is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. ‘Faith working by love’ is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. ‘This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loves God, love his brother also;’ and that we manifest our love ‘by doing good unto all men; especially to them that are of the household of faith.’ And in truth whosoever loveth his brethren, not in word only, but as Christ loved him, cannot but be ‘zealous of good works.’ He feels in his soul a burning, restless desire of spending and being spent for them.143

From this excerpt three points should be noted. First, social holiness names the environmental context in which Christians are progressively transformed by grace, which is a fundamentally social one. But the referent to which “social” points is extend his own use of it along the line he was pointing. I connect the idea of social holiness as the environmental context in which the means of grace are practiced communally and with discipline in the chapter’s final section below.

143 Wesley, Preface, ¶5, in Works (Jackson) 14:321.
crucial: Wesley’s sense of social holiness is of a certain type and quality of fellowship, where men and women come to a fuller experience of God-in-Christ together via the change effected when grace is actively received in community. This use of the adjective is in its original Latin sense of *socialis*, describing those allied together for a common purpose.\(^{144}\) The converse to it would be solitary holiness, which is the form that holiness takes (by Wesley’s account) in mysticism and which sees the means of grace given by God and known in Christian community as ultimately unnecessary and even hindering to the individual’s reception of divine love. Wesley not only argues against holiness in its solitary form; he asserts that such a holiness simply does not exist. The polemical language of holy solitaries / holy adulterers is evidence of the stringency with which Wesley rejects this mystical alternative and, indeed, the extent to which he views it as contrary to the salvation that is found in the New Testament and which is only properly known in the body of Christ knit together as one. Social holiness, then, is the environmental context in which sanctification can possibly occur, reflective of true Christian fellowship in a

\(^{144}\) See the entry for *socialis* in P.G.W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, updated with revisions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 1777. In both the adjective (*socialis*) and the noun forms (*societas*), the Latin sense is primarily one of close fellowship or camaraderie rather than with our modern sense of society. The words are related to *socius*, a term for a companion often referring to a comrade or ally in a military sense. A good example of the way Wesley tends to use this term is found in the 1750 sermon, “A Caution Against Bigotry,” where he writes, “...the unavoidable consequence of any of these differences will be that he who thus differs from us must separate himself with regard to those points from our society. In this respect therefore ‘he followeth not us;’ he is ‘not (as we phrase it) of our church’” (¶11.4, in *Works* 2:70-71).
community that is made possible by grace and which is given its content by the
shared activities of those who constitute its membership.\textsuperscript{145}

The second point to note is that, while social holiness refers foundationally to
the environmental context of sanctification, the concrete community that finds its
life within that context does not exist as an enclosed sphere separated from the
outside world. On the contrary, those who are being transformed in love within the
fellowship of Christian community will find themselves motivated to go out into the
world and share that love more broadly with those who have not been recipients of
grace in the same way.\textsuperscript{146} Wesley alludes to this movement of engaged discipleship
in the \textit{Preface} when he follows the assertion that social holiness implies that “he
who loves God, love his brother also ... by doing good unto all men; especially to
them that are of the household of faith,” with the statement that such a person
“cannot but be ‘zealous of good works.’” Still, the wider context in which the \textit{Preface}
is written makes it clear that Wesley’s chief interest in describing the concept is that
of a social context rather than social action, thus the conclusion that social holiness
itself refers to a certain environment in which holiness is made manifest rather than

\textsuperscript{145} Perhaps the best textual example of Wesley’s view on how this “environmental context”
takes shape in a Christian community is found in the \textit{General Rules of the United Societies} (in \textit{Works 9}:69-75). I attempt to present the early Methodist class meeting as a paradigmatic
element of just this type of community in Andrew C. Thompson, “‘To stir them up to believe,
love, obey’ – Soteriological Dimensions of the Class Meeting in Early Methodism,” \textit{Methodist

\textsuperscript{146} This outflowing of social holiness in good works is so closely connected to the
transformed life implied by holiness itself that social holiness cannot be properly
considered apart from it. This does not, however, mean that the works of mercy (Wesley’s
term for the engaged Christian activity carried on by persons expressing the love of
neighbor) are themselves social holiness properly conceived. Such a notion is sometimes
hinted at in the scholarly sources on Wesley’s social holiness (see section below on “Social
Holiness in Recent Scholarship”).
to the works that sanctified people thereafter pursue. In this sense, a necessary companion to reading the Preface is Wesley's 1746 sermon, “Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount, IV,” where Wesley uses the language of Christianity as a “social religion” and accentuates this orientational quality of the holy life with the examples of the city on a hill and the lamp set on a stand from Matthew 5:14-15 as guiding images. While this sermon text speaks repeatedly of the good works done by a “real Christian,” he unmistakably points to the virtue of the Christian – couched in the language of meekness, mercifulness, and purity of heart drawn from the Sermon on the Mount – as being mutually reinforced within the Christian community so that it might have a positive influence on the ungodly. As a way of describing the meaning of “society” he utilizes the phrase “living and conversing with other men” in apposite, an indication that he is thinking not of society writ large but of the societas found within the fellowship of the religious society.

148 Wesley, “Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount, IV,” in Works 1:531-549. While this sermon does not use the term “social holiness,” the way in which Wesley utilizes “social religion” helps to flesh out the parameters of the concept.
149 Wesley, “Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount, IV,” in Works 1:535-537. Theodore Runyon brings the Preface and “Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, IV” into comparison in a way that illuminates this point particularly well in Runyon, The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today, 112-114. Cf. Wesley's description of the marks of a “Methodist” in Wesley, The Character of a Methodist, ¶5-16, in Works 9:35-41, in the way that the love of God and love of neighbor are expressed. Wesley concludes this section by emphasizing what it means for those who have such a love resident within them being moved to “[do] good unto all men’ – unto neighbours, and strangers, friends, and enemies” both as a natural consequence of their faith and as a means of drawing others to God.
150 Wesley uses the two terms in apposite throughout the sermon. See, e.g., Wesley, “Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount (IV),” ¶1, in Works 1:533-534. For the Latin sense of societas and related terms, see above p.230, n.144.
The third point to be made from Wesley’s argument in the Preface is that social holiness refers neither to the historically later concept of social justice nor to a counterpart for personal holiness, whether understood as a bifurcated way persons can exhibit holiness or to a private / public division of the means of grace. Any application of social justice to this distinctively Wesleyan phrase is not only anachronistic but conceptually misplaced. With regards to social justice, it must be observed that Wesley is speaking here not of social ethics but of soteriology. With regards to the connection between social holiness and personal holiness, it is clear that personal holiness is not social holiness’ counterpart either positively or negatively; the implied corollary to social holiness is solitary holiness, a concept that Wesley categorically rejects. Wesley’s conception of personal holiness, on the other hand, is highly context specific and should therefore be considered within the quite different subject matter of those published works where he invokes the phrase. In short, “personal and social holiness” is simply not a Wesleyan phrase.

B. Social Holiness in Recent Scholarship

Previously we have cited examples of ways in which commentators at the academic and ecclesiastical levels have misconstrued Wesley’s concept of social holiness. It should be noted that there are a number of scholars who have presented the concept accurately in the context of larger examinations of Methodist history or Wesleyan theology.\footnote{See Knight, The Presence of God in the Christian Life, 109-113; Brian E. Beck, “Connexion and Koinonia: Wesley’s Legacy and the Ecumenical Ideal,” in Rethinking Wesley’s Theology for Contemporary Methodism, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998),} Additionally, there are other scholars who have engaged the
concept of social holiness historically and in detail, seeking to understand it in its own historical and theological milieu – that is, as it relates to the history of early Methodism and the theology of John Wesley. Surveying a number of the proposals on offer from these scholars is helpful in getting a sense of how social holiness is perceived by those who have engaged it in its historical context (as opposed to those who utilize it for more constructive purposes).

Among scholars who have examined Wesley’s concept of social holiness, John A. Newton comments on “two aspects of ‘social holiness’” that are “vitally related.”¹⁵² Newton identifies the first aspect of social holiness as, “social action in the name of Christ, outreach and service in the community, or mission alongside the poor.”¹⁵³ The second he terms, “[the] insistence that growth in grace and Christian character [requires] sharing together with others, building one another up in the faith, [and] an exploration of what it means to be members together in Christ.”¹⁵⁴ A number of points can be made about Newton’s presentation of social holiness. The first is that he gives primary emphasis to the “social action” aspect of social

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¹⁵⁴ Newton, “Methodist and the Articulation of Faith,” 54-55. Elsewhere Newton summarizes the two as “caring outreach to the community and growth in grace through shared fellowship in the small group” (57).
holiness. Additionally, Newton emphasizes the outward thrust of social holiness with specific acts of ministry and discipleship aimed at those who would be considered outsiders to the faith community. Thirdly, there is almost no reference in Newton to social holiness as it relates to the means of grace. While he does point to the various group contexts experienced by early Methodists (society, class, band, etc.) and the need to develop Christian character through community life, he neither locates those groupings within the language of the means of grace nor does he invoke any of the other means of grace as constitutive of that communal form of practice. Newton’s presentation of social holiness generally encompasses what we have shown Wesley’s understanding of the concept to be, though it does not track Wesley’s logic and thus does not grasp the particular coherence Wesley gives to it. In addition, Newton’s emphases are out of order and, notwithstanding his introductory remarks, he does not identify the deep interconnection between the significance of the Christian community itself and the outwardly focused work of that community. In Wesley, this is a connection which is related to the natural consequences of sanctification as it occurs within a certain kind of environmental context rather than as something separable (or even prior) to it.

Another example of one who takes up Wesley and social holiness is David Guy, who calls Wesley an “Apostle of Social Holiness” and focuses on the aspect of

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155 See Newton, “Methodist and the Articulation of Faith,” 51-54.
Wesley’s ministry that aimed at broad social reform. For Guy, the core meaning of social holiness is summed up under three main points:

1. Wesley’s personal response to social problems by preaching, teaching[,] action and attitude.

2. Wesley’s influence upon his converts and later generations influenced by his life-style and holiness teaching.

3. Wesley’s experiments in social service and the relevance of his teaching to both community care and social protest. Elsewhere he refers to these three points as the way Wesley went about “challenging the social evils of his own day” by way of “his words, attitudes and example.” In not dividing up social holiness into community/outreach headings (as does Newton, for example), Guy shows that he is more committed to reading Wesley’s view of social holiness as at least approaching our contemporary understanding of social justice – the pitfalls of which we have already noted. Guy is, however, one of the most nuanced expositors of the approach to framing Wesley’s social holiness as either social justice or social outreach. For instance, he attempts to avoid anachronism by observing that “Wesley did not set out to alter the structures of society, nor did he view himself as a social reformer, except in the sense that every evangelist hopes to see a changed society through changed people. But that he expected a practical result cannot be doubted.” He also invokes an element of

[156] David Guy, “John Wesley: Apostle of Social Holiness,” in John Stacey, ed., John Wesley: Contemporary Perspectives, 115-128. Guy also at one point refers to Wesley as an “apostle of social righteousness” (127), though he does not indicate whether he sees a material difference between the two titles he bestows.
Wesley’s ministry around social holiness that Newton does not, which is the notion of life-style and example – essentially, the outward expression of inward virtue – as being of importance to the community of the Methodist faithful; but that, of course, makes it all the more ironic that Guy does not engage in any sustained consideration of the significance of community life itself. Guy remains primarily interested in Wesley as a figure rather than in the concrete referent Wesley intends for social holiness, which is of course the life of the Christian community.

By far the most thorough treatment of the Wesleyan concept of social holiness is that of R. George Eli, whose 1990 dissertation at Duke University was later published as Social Holiness: John Wesley’s Thinking on Christian Community and its Relationship to the Social Order.160 The impetus for Eli’s work on Wesley’s concept is driven by his background in his native Singapore, where the passage of a set of laws in 1990 “defined and separated religious and political discourse.”161 As he states, “These laws had the effect of precluding possibilities of moral and ethical debate by Christian community on all matters of public policy.”162 Eli found the attitude among Methodists in Singapore in the wake of the new legal restrictions to be unpalatable, in that the Methodist community allowed its religious life to be defined in such a way that “denies both their social reality and political validity as Christian community.”163 On the one hand, they accepted the state’s view of faith as a primarily individualized phenomenon, while on the other, they have accepted that

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161 Eli, Social Holiness, 1.
162 Eli, Social Holiness, 1.
163 Eli, Social Holiness, 1.
whatever corporate identity they have as a Christian community could have no larger socio-political implications.

Eli’s analysis of the religious and political situation in Singapore leads him to conclude that the ruling ethos of Singaporean society is of a government-sponsored paternalism marked by the national government’s concerted attempts to craft a socio-political climate where collective trust is put in the state to make decisions for the good of the populace.¹⁶⁴ This situation has led to a number of restrictions on religious organizations, such as the confinement of social engagement to charity work and the restriction of preaching deemed potentially political in nature.¹⁶⁵ There also exists a phenomenon he calls “theological individualism,” which is related to a form of Christian piety lacking in a robust understanding of shared membership in the body of Christ. Eli’s response to this critical survey of the situation in Singapore is to dig deeply into the resources of the Wesleyan tradition as a way to provide a context for religious self-understanding of the contemporary Singaporean Methodist community. As he states, “The distinctive Wesleyan understanding that the shared holiness of the community underwrites a social holiness which then proceeds to lead Christian community through its ministry into society, has not been grasped.”¹⁶⁶ He then goes on to add, “Wesley's twofold understanding of Christian community as the context for Christian discipleship and maturity, and in its relationship to the social order, has not yet fully taken root.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Eli, Social Holiness, 6-9.
¹⁶⁵ Eli, Social Holiness, 12.
¹⁶⁶ Eli, Social Holiness, 15.
¹⁶⁷ Eli, Social Holiness, 16.
The hints Eli provides about his view of social holiness in these preliminary moves indicate that he is preparing to give an account of the concept that is at once more subtle and complex than those on offer from Newton and Guy. Like Guy, he is going to want to stress an aspect of social holiness that has as its aim the transformation of a larger social order. And similar to Newton, he is going to present a two-fold understanding of social holiness that includes – in Eli’s own words – “life within the Christian community of faith, and Christian life in society.” With these points, however, the similarities end. Eli’s analysis proves to be a much richer one on the whole, with greater attention to the corporate formational dynamic of the Christian community (including some limited mention of the place of the means of grace) and the consideration of the influence of the community on broader society through an account of Christian virtue. These points are not without problems in Eli, but they do stand as improvements on the other texts considered.

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168 Eli, Social Holiness, 45. The fuller description of the Eli’s view of the two-fold dimension of social holiness is found on p.3: “There are two dimensions to social holiness. The first dimension relates to the structure and the function of the church as a transformed community, in which Christian life is nurtured and grows to maturity. It is within this transformed community that individual faith life both begins and grows, and corporate Christian identity is also nurtured, as oneness in Christ grows and develops into the mature witness of the church ... The second dimension of social holiness is that which brings Christian community into relationship with the social order, because the church has been given the mission of being a transforming community in the world. From the perspective of such a mission, the qualities and the virtues of all Christian character, and the demonstrated characteristics of Christian discipleship, become meaningful only as they are made relevant to, and find their place in, specific form and function within the social order, thereby proving through Christian witness that transformation is really available for the social order and its structures, in and through a relationship with Christ.”

169 The aspect of Eli’s analysis most lacking is his failure to engage the language of social holiness in its historical context. It seems odd that in a project entitled, “Social Holiness,” Eli does not consider the origin of the term in question (particularly given that he is making a specifically Wesleyan argument). Eli’s work also falls short on the depth in which he
In his consideration of the nature of Christian community, Eli stresses the way in which Wesley tends to see grace at work in communal contexts. He refers to the diverse working of grace as, “the formative dimensions of God’s grace in Christian community, essential to the nurture and growth of Christian faith.” The community itself is the primary locus of social holiness for Eli (contrasting with Newton), which he argues with reference to the disciplined accountability and progress in sanctification that marked early Methodist small group structures. This allows Eli to describe social holiness quite aptly as “the communal context necessary to Christian character formation.” His inclusion of the means of grace as constituent elements of this communal context are made in passing at points, a weakness in the overall presentation but at least a minor recognition of the role of the means of grace in the very possibility of social holiness.173

In his consideration of the aspect of social holiness that embraces the intersection of the Christian community and the larger social order, Eli expresses a view that the Christian community’s purpose is that of “transformation.” The kind of transformation Eli has in mind differs from either that of Newton or Guy, however, and it is significantly different as well from the facile tendency to equate social holiness with social justice. Eli explains it best when describing the mode of

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170 Eli, *Social Holiness*, 34.
173 For Eli’s citation of the means of grace in his analysis, see Eli, *Social Holiness*, 37,72, and 85. A fuller development of this point would have been the single greatest factor in clarifying and strengthening Eli’s argument on the whole.
transformative presence early Methodist community structures were intended to possess:

This community strived to influence society by means of its characteristics, for these demonstrated its rootedness in Christ. It was to be ‘seasoned’ with grace, so that grace moved through this community to all others. As model and exemplar, the community’s mission would be to communicate Christian perspectives and values, providing an orientation toward the priorities of the kingdom of God ... The community was to demonstrate the reality of alternative priorities and possibilities.¹⁷⁴

Elsewhere he speaks of the community having “the qualities and virtues of all Christian character” as well as “the demonstrated characteristics of Christian discipleship” which together serve to prove “through Christian witness that transformation is really available for the social order and its structures, in and through a relationship with Christ.”¹⁷⁵ Unlike other examples we have surveyed, what makes Eli’s account different is his full embrace of exactly the kind of “social religion” to which Wesley refers in the fourth discourse “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount.” The transformation of the broader society that a committed religious society can effect is one of acting as the lamp on the stand or the city on the hill from Jesus’ examples in the Gospel of Matthew. This for Eli (as it was for Wesley) is an issue of Christian virtue. It is not that works of mercy shouldn’t be pursued; it’s simply that they aren’t conceived in the instrumental way that contemporary authors assume when they apply more modern understandings of social justice onto the Wesleyan notion of social holiness. The works of mercy are means of grace as

¹⁷⁴ Eli, Social Holiness, 70.
¹⁷⁵ Eli, Social Holiness, 3.
opposed to mechanisms of societal reconfiguration. And by their logic, if true societal reconfiguration (i.e., redemption!) is to be effected at all, it will come by grace and the Holy Spirit rather than by social engineering. This perspective does not limit robust human participation in the work of justice in the larger social order. Far from it. It does, however, conceive of the redemption of society in soteriological terms that maintain a view of grace as the true agent of transformation and of the Christian community as the paradigm for what real justice looks like.

C. The Environmental Context of Sanctification

Eli’s work on social holiness advances our understanding of the nature of social holiness in Wesley’s thought. In particular, his recognition that social holiness represents “the communal context necessary to Christian character formation” and that the community formed by character provides an authentic witness to the broader world points to a certain kind of milieu without which sanctification is not possible. The idea of character formation that Eli invokes can be connected with the restoration of moral psychology that we have covered up to this point. Eli’s language of necessity finds echo in our analysis up to this stage of the argument as well, specifically in reminding us of Wesley’s claim that the means of grace (expressed as

\footnote{At times it is noted that Wesley shows a proto-social justice sensibility through such late treatises as \textit{Thoughts Upon Slavery} and \textit{Thoughts Upon the Present Scarcity of Provisions} and that the later Wesley was trending postmillennialist in his view that society could be eventually perfected. I agree with the assessment about his proto-social justice sensibility, though I am not at all convinced that his recognition of structural injustices in the social order was matched by a real (postmillennialist) belief in society’s perfectibility. Sermons such as “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity” (1789) and “On God’s Vineyard” (1787) seem to my mind to cast doubt on the latter point.}
works of piety and works of mercy) are “in some sense, necessary to sanctification.”

Is it possible, then, to establish a connection between social holiness and the means of grace?

Making the connection between social holiness and the means of grace is not only possible; it is inescapable and essential to a full understanding of Wesley’s doctrine of the means of grace. As practices, the means of grace are forms of activity engaged in a regular and repeated way; they are also socially cooperative kinds of activity that are either inherently communal in character or else dependent on community in order to be sustained. The means of grace are also practices whereby persons receive and experience God’s grace—an aspect to the means about which we can be assured either because they have been given by Jesus Christ (in the case of the instituted means), or because they have been found to convey grace through the use of practical wisdom over the course of time (in the case of the prudential means). As practices that convey grace to believers, the means of grace are always “means to an end.” The end is communion with God, but the path that leads from means to end is also a path of profound transformation from reprobation to redemption, and from sin to salvation. The name Wesley gives for this broad, lifelong journey is sanctification, or holiness. And as he contends, “There is no holiness but social holiness.” If that affirmation is a true affirmation, then the social character of the means of grace is no accident. As the way God has provided for his children to experience redemption and grow in holiness, the means of grace constitute the social reality in which salvation becomes manifest.

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Eli’s use of the phrase, “communal context necessary to Christian character formation,” as the description of social holiness finds resonance with another phrase that we have already introduced: “environmental context,” which is the term favored by Ole Borgen to characterize the root importance of that means of grace that Wesley calls Christian conference or Christian fellowship. For Borgen, Christian conference can rightly be called an environmental context because it is the arena “within which all the other instituted means, as well as other prudential means, may be exercised.”178 Borgen’s claim on this point has some limitations when one considers the expansive forms of activity that make up the means of grace (particularly those prudential in character) and the original connotations of Christian conference or fellowship in the Wesleyan framework. However, Borgen’s succinct phrase itself – “environmental context” – does translate very well if one rather considers it expressive of the concept of social holiness. For social holiness is both a context requiring a certain kind of environment in order to be properly called “holy,” as well as a context that creates that environment through the communal practices of those inhabiting it. It is a salvific reality experienced by the Christian community, and it is a form of communal, public virtue presenting an image of the kingdom of God “before the watching world.”179 With this recognition, we have the contours for a doctrine of the means of grace that was central to John Wesley’s understanding of sanctification, namely, one whose character and context is bound up in social holiness – a concept that, while mentioned only once in his published

178 Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 119.
work, is nevertheless as conceptually ubiquitous in his theology as are the means of grace themselves. The form of religious life modeled within the Wesley home at the Epworth rectory was the initial context in which Wesley experienced social holiness, and the practices of the Oxford Methodists were the first arena in which Wesley was able to develop and experiment with it in a theologically self-conscious way.

Following the events of 1738 and 1739, the Methodist revival under Wesley evolved in such a way that social holiness became its defining context. The *General Rules* were established to guide it and the overlapping structures of the Methodist societies existed to facilitate it. The body of preachers in connection with Wesley and one another represent a form of it through their shared ministry. At the heart of Methodist practice – indeed, the glue that held the whole together – was a certain commitment to the practice of the means of grace. It is to just this image that the concept of social holiness applies: a community of men and women, seeking holiness in heart and life, bound together by a common faith and a common practice of the means of grace as the means to the end of the love of God and of neighbor.
CONCLUSION

We have sought in the present work to examine Wesley’s doctrine of the means of grace with respect to two major considerations. The first of these has been the historical context of the means of grace that is inclusive both of Wesley’s inheritance of the means of grace from prior tradition and the development of the means of grace in Wesley’s own theological reflection. The second consideration has been the theological framework of the means of grace in Wesley’s understanding of salvation, which has involved issues of content, character, and context. In the area of historical context, the aim has been to locate the means of grace within the broader tradition of the Church of England – a tradition of which Wesley is only one part, even as he does make his own distinctive contribution to the means of grace through his inheritance and development of it as an “expansively sacramental” doctrine. In the area of theological framework, the aim has been to identify the central place the means of grace occupy in Wesley’s soteriology and practice of ministry. This we have done by tracing the role of the means of grace in sanctification, in particular, and as the constitutive set of practices that define, and allow for, the reality of social holiness.

To refer to the means of grace as Wesley’s sacramental grammar is simply to assert that the language of the means of grace and the conceptual dynamics to which that language refers operate as structure of his thought and speech around what we would consider his sacramental theology. There is no point where Wesley attempts to describe a sacramental theology with reference solely to the sacraments of
baptism and the Lord’s Supper; moreover, Wesley’s relative lack of any sustained attention to baptism in particular makes it difficult to construct a sacramental theology centered solely on the sacraments proper. The best attempt to do such a thing is in the work of Borgen, yet it is significant that Borgen finds it necessary to locate the full range of the means of grace at the center of his analysis as well as in the overarching topical structure he adopts.¹ Thus, Wesley’s sacramental theology is truly a theology of the means of grace; he is interested in connecting his view of a living faith with a robust sacramental sense of the Christian life, but it is a sense embedded in the full range of the means of grace.

Wesley does not develop his doctrine of the means of grace de novo but rather inherits it from the tradition of the Church of England. He cites that tradition specifically as it is present in the Book of Common Prayer.² Though, as we have seen, the means of grace only come to find a place in the English Prayer Book because after first emerging out of the post-Reformation attempt to describe the way God can be experienced through activities of devotion and worship. A part of this development of language can be attributed to the idiosyncratic character of the Church of England, which retained a greater sense of its Catholic past in terms of structure and liturgy. It is however, and perhaps surprisingly, first with the Puritans within the English Church that the actual language of the means of grace finds

¹ Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments, 94-120, 121, 183, 271-273, 280-281. It is also significant that, at the very end of his analysis, Borgen notes that Wesley nowhere develops a doctrine of the sacraments apart from his larger doctrine of the means of grace, meaning that he fails to suggest why or how the sacraments are efficacious in a qualitatively different way from the full range of the means of grace (281).
purchase. For the godly, the issue was one of the need for assurance of salvation in a theological framework which placed great importance on the absolute sovereignty of God and the doctrine of unconditional election. And thus, the devotional life encouraged in Puritan practical divinity was intended to nurture just such a sense of assurance. Yet when the language of the means of grace found their way into the Church of England as a whole (as represented in the *Book of Common Prayer*), it found a ready environment for a form of ecclesiastical life that retained (or regained) its emphasis on liturgical worship following the Restoration. The Anglican priest and theologian John Norris serves as an ample example of one who accepted the notion of the means of grace and developed it in constructive ways in the generation prior to Wesley.

Wesley’s personal reception of the doctrine of the means of grace therefore comes by way of this tradition. Like Norris, he made his own contributions to it and gave it some distinctively Wesleyan accents. As Heitzenrater has noted, there is a dynamic relationship between Wesley’s spiritual pilgrimage and his theological reflection: his own experiences often engendered the motivation for considered theological questioning that took years to fully sort themselves out.³ In a broad sense, that kind of dynamic was at play for Wesley in his understanding of the means of grace from the time of Oxford Methodism until the mid-1740s. The external influences of Law and mysticism, and of the Moravian Brethren, all played their part. He comes to adopt a version of the Protestant *sola fide* view of salvation, but his particular understanding of faith is one of faith working by love. This, of

course, is where the means of grace become so significant as the outward ways that Christians are able to “exercise the presence of God.”

In emphasizing the importance of using the means of grace, Wesley is also careful to stress that they be used as means to their proper end. That end is God, and the grace that the means bring persons into contact with is, in Wesley’s view, none other than the presence and power of God the Holy Spirit. Because the means of grace facilitate a relationship with God in this way, they also cannot be conceived as “things.” They are, rather, “practices” where the outward and visible sign serves to help Christian believers experience a grace that is transformative of heart and life. To use the concept of a practice in this way is to suggest certain distinctive features about it: namely, that it is repeated in a way that is both habitual and intentional, and that it is located in a community of persons who engage it together. In other words, a practice is both disciplined and communal in character.

Knight has pointed in his analysis of Wesley on the means of grace that the means of grace are both relational in nature and that together they serve as a pattern for the Christian life. We have pointed to the way in which the means of grace are relational in that they serve as aids to the recovery of the image of God in the life of the Christian believer. Wesley’s psychology puts great emphasis on role of holy affections and the formation of holy tempers in expressing, in particular, the moral image of God in the Christian life. His view of the spiritual senses conceives of them as capacities to love as Christ loves, through continual relationship with the

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4 See Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 92-167 (on the means of grace as moving believers toward the presence and identity of God) and 168-196 (on the means of grace as a pattern of discipleship).
Spirit. The telos of such a recovery is a form of life where “love sits upon the throne” and where one is transformed to love God and neighbor. This is the heart of present salvation, what Wesley calls sanctification or holiness.

Yet the means of grace as means toward this kind of holiness is not the end of the story, or at least not if holiness is conceived as a kind of personal holiness in the possession of the individual. Wesley’s view of holiness is that of social holiness. To understand this is, in a sense, to understand the entirety of early Methodism under Wesley’s leadership. Take, for instance, the following two descriptions of the kind of discipleship Wesley understood to be taking place within Methodist practice:

Such a Society is no other than ‘a company of men “having the form, and seeking the power of godliness”, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation’.6

It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to ‘bear one another’s burdens’, and ‘naturally’ to ‘care for each other’. As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for each other. And ‘speaking the truth in love, they grew up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, increased unto the edifying itself in love.’7

The first of these descriptions is drawn from the General Rules of the United Societies and explains the nature of a Society in early Methodism. The second is a more specific explanation of what Wesley understands to be going on in the class meeting,

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7 Wesley, A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists (1749), ¶11.7, in Works 9:262.
taken from *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*. Both of them are littered with references to the means of grace, and both of them express exactly what Wesley means by social holiness. Social holiness is, in the first instance, the name for the communal arena in which the means of grace are practiced. In the second, it is the term for the salvific reality experienced by those joined together in their common practice. It is thus an environmental context in which the means of grace are practiced and through which they bring the Christian community into relationship with the living God. Social holiness, therefore, signifies what it means to love God and love neighbor, which is the purpose for which the means of grace lie at the heart of the Christian faith.
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Biographical Statement

The Reverend Andrew C. Thompson (b.1976) was born and raised in Paragould, Arkansas. He is the son of Charlotte B. and Robert F. Thompson, Jr., and has three siblings, Robert F. Thompson III, Barkley S. Thompson, and Charlotte Ann Thompson Grumbles. Mr. Thompson was baptized and raised in the First United Methodist Church of Paragould. He graduated from Ridgecrest High School in Paragould in 1994. Prior to matriculating in the Doctor of Theology degree program at Duke Divinity School, Mr. Thompson was educated at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas (B.A., 1998) and Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee (M.Div, 2001). While a student at Hendrix College, he was elected to membership in Phi Beta Kappa.


In addition to his academic writing, Mr. Thompson has also written extensively for ecclesiastical audiences in a variety of publications. He has served as a columnist for the United Methodist Reporter since 2005, where his column writing has been recognized with the Award of Excellence by the Associated Church Press (2005).

Mr. Thompson was ordained in the United Methodist Church in 2005 and serves as an elder in full connection in the Arkansas Annual Conference of the UMC. He has served pastoral appointments as the associate chaplain of Lambuth University in Jackson, Tennessee (2001-2003), the associate pastor of First United Methodist Church in Searcy, Arkansas (2003-2006), and the pastor of Mount Carmel United Methodist Church in Henderson, North Carolina (2008-2010). His ministerial work has also included service as a ministry coordinator for the Duke Youth Academy for Christian Formation (2008-2013).

Since August of 2011, Mr. Thompson has served on the faculty of Memphis Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tennessee, where he teaches in the areas of historical theology and Wesleyan studies.

He is married to the former Emily Austin, to whom this dissertation is dedicated. They are the parents of a daughter named Alice Elizabeth.