Introduction

The very title of this volume makes a claim and extends an invitation. Simply put, the claim is this: John Wesley was an adherent of covenant theology. The invitation is to investigate Wesley's thought in light of this claim. Accepting this invitation is not without risk, as well-established conclusions regarding Wesley's thought may need to be revised and their implications for praxis reconsidered. But neither is it without reward: namely, a new and deeper appreciation of the substantial theological underpinnings of his pastoral convictions and counsel.

As a leading figure of the Evangelical Revival in eighteenth-century England, John Wesley labored to define, clarify, and communicate "the Successive Conquests of Grace, and the gradual Process of the Work of God in the Soul."[1] To this end he corresponded frequently with numerous leaders and laity, travelled incessantly, and published extensively as he monitored the growing number of Methodist societies, engaged in controversy, and set pen and voice to persuasive proclamation. In the face of difficulties in his personal life, conflict, and disappointments, Wesley wrestled like Epaphras for the souls of his hearers that they might "stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured."[2] This was his pastoral task and passion, driven and sustained by a vision of the way of salvation that pushed him past parish boundaries and protocols and into the fields and beyond.[3]

From time to time over the course of more than fifty years as Methodism's leader, Wesley made an intriguing and instructive distinction between those who have "the faith of a servant" and those who have "the faith of a son." And in sermons, correspondence, and various publications, he applied this distinction as a way of helping those he led

1. Wesley and Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), iv.

2. Col 4:12 (NIV 1984).

3. It was in defense of his field-preaching that Wesley declared, "I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation." Wesley, *Works* (BE), 19:65–66. See also ibid., 19:46.

understand and chart their way forward spiritually. There is no question he viewed the distinction as a helpful summary of convictions that belonged to the core of his soteriology.

There have been many questions, however, as to what this distinction reveals about the substance of those convictions. Indeed, the conclusions reached by respected scholars about what Wesley intended to say by his use of the metaphors have been not only divergent but sometimes diametrically-opposed to each other. It is noteworthy that the one thing these diverse conclusions have in common, beyond the servant-son distinction itself, is that none of them indicate any recognition of the relationship between the metaphors and Wesley's appropriation of classic covenant theology. A short tour of these conclusions tells the story best.

In *John Wesley's Theology Today* Colin Williams concluded that the distinction between servant and son indicates that Wesley understood justification to have two movements: "Preliminary faith, which includes the free response to God's prevenient grace and a desire to please him but is still only the 'faith of a servant'" and "Justifying faith proper, which is a sure trust and confidence in Christ bringing a conviction of forgiveness, this being 'the faith of a son.'"[4] Bernhard Holland, however, suggested that John Wesley "finally came to accept that there are *three* kinds of faith which suffice to give acceptance with God: *suppliant faith* (the effort to keep God's law and a pleading for a deeper faith); *justifying faith* (an assurance that "Christ died for me"); and *saving faith* (an assurance of God's pardon)."[5] He further contends that while Charles Wesley viewed suppliant faith—the faith of a servant—as justifying faith, and believed that "the act of supplication itself . . . is met by God's saving response," John Wesley did not equate the two and thus gave no such encouragement to those having "only the faith of a servant."[6]

On the basis of his proposal that John Wesley's theological thought in his later years was more akin to that of Eastern Christianity than to the dominating juridical concerns of Western Christianity, Randy Maddox concludes that "Wesley came to emphasize that there was a crucial degree of regeneration prior to the New Birth: the universal

4. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, 65.

5. Holland, "The Conversions of John and Charles Wesley," 49.

6. Ibid., 53. The great weakness of Holland's argument is that he entrusts too much to Melvill Horne's interpretation of John Wesley's views in Horne's early-nineteenth-century controversy with Thomas Coke concerning the witness of the Spirit, and deals too little with Wesley's own correspondence and publications. See Melvill Horne, *An Investigation of the Definition of Justifying Faith*.

nascent regenerating effect of Prevenient Grace."[7] This involves Maddox in making an important shift, conceiving of the continuum of grace[8] as a continuum of regeneration. Accordingly, he concludes that Wesley understood faith to be "justifying from its earliest degree—i.e., the mere inclination to 'fear God and work righteousness.'" However, lacking "clear assurance," this "nascent faith was not yet the fullness of Christian faith" but was "the faith of a 'servant.'"[9] Thus, the difference between servant and son is not a matter of whether one is justified but is simply a matter of whether one has a sense of assurance regarding her salvation.

Kenneth Collins takes exception to Maddox's conclusion: "Though Wesley did at times link the phrase 'fear God and work righteousness' with justification, he most often associated it with *preparation for* the forgiveness of sins and thereby maintained an important distinction between prevenient grace and justifying grace."[10] For Collins, then, those having the faith of a servant lack assurance precisely because they are neither justified nor regenerated, though they have embarked on the way of salvation. Those having the faith of a son, on the other hand, have been justified and enjoy a sense of pardon as well as a discernible measure of freedom from the power of sin.[11]

Some Wesley scholars have determined that the distinction between servant and son centers not on the question of justification at all but on the matter of the degree of one's progress in the Christian life. Like Maddox, Theodore Runyon declares unequivocally, "Wesley places the encounter with divine grace and love in Christ, testified to in the Lutheran doctrine of justification, within the context of the Eastern understanding of the transforming power of the Spirit both within us and through us."[12] However, he takes up the servant-son metaphor in

7. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 159.

8. For the phrase "continuum of grace" see Wynkoop, "Theological Roots," 95. The phrase is used here to refer to the various workings of God's grace as distinguished by Wesley in his sermon, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation": preventing grace, convincing grace, and saving grace. Wesley, *Works* (BE) §II.1, 3:203–4. Wesley does not use the phrase "saving grace" in the sermon but the terminology is commonly supplied to summarize the distinction he describes. See, for example, Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, 40.

9. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 127.

10. Collins, "Recent Trends," 68–69.

11. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 55, 58. The views of both Maddox and Collins stand opposed to that of Scott Kisker who suggests that Wesley associated justifying faith with the faith of a servant and regeneration itself with the faith of a son. See Kisker, "Justified but Unregenerate?," 44–58.

12. Runyon, *The New Creation*, 214.

his discussion of Wesley's doctrine of assurance and asserts that Wesley relied on the distinction between servant and son primarily "to point to the advantages which the direct witness of the Spirit brings."[13] Richard Heitzenrater, in his essay "Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity," treats Wesley's use of the servant-son metaphor simply as one of several descriptions used by Wesley to mark progress on the *via salutis*:

> [Wesley's] later distinctions between two orders of Christians, between the faith of a servant and of a child of God, between the young convert and the mature Christian, between faith and assurance (and allowing for various degrees of both), are all the result of his finally differentiating between justification and sanctification as theologically and experientially distinguishable steps on the spiritual pilgrimage.[14]

Laura Felleman's view falls along the lines of Heitzenrater's. "'Full' or 'Proper' Christian faith," she writes, "refers to the promises of assurance and Christian Perfection. The servant of God has experienced justification, but this degree of faith does not include the full promise of sanctification. . . . The difference between the infant state and the mature state seems to be that those with the faith of a child of God sense the witness of the Spirit."[15] And Wesley Tracy, based on his evaluation of Wesley's extensive correspondence with Ann Bolton, has proposed that Wesley called upon the servant and son metaphors in order to distinguish between those who have been justified and the justified who have gone on to perfection.[16]

The conclusions of Heitzenrater, Felleman, and Tracy were anticipated by Umphrey Lee in *John Wesley and Modern Religion*, published in 1936. By 1770, Lee asserts, Wesley "had adopted the theory of the infinite grades of faith and of assurance which he set forth to more than one correspondent" and "had decided on the division of Christian experience into two stages, the condition of a servant and the condition of a son, which is part of his mature doctrine of Christian Perfection."[17]

13. Ibid., 69.

14. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, 148.

15. Felleman, "John Wesley and the 'Servant of God,'" 79–80.

16. Tracy, "John Wesley, Spiritual Director," 148–62. Evidence from the available correspondence between Wesley and Bolton, as well as Bolton's own recollection, argue strongly against Tracy's conclusion which relies too uncritically on John Banks' reconstruction of Bolton's spiritual journey. See Banks, *Nancy Nancy*.

17. Lee, *John Wesley and Modern Religion*, 166–67.

Lee is not alone in suggesting that the distinction between the faith of a servant and the faith of a son was a relatively late development in Wesley's theological thought.[18]

This diversity of conclusions might easily be dismissed as par for the course in terms of the nature of scholarly debate. However, such a dismissal is problematic in view of the fact that apparently both Wesley and his reading and listening audience understood the distinction well enough that it rarely needed a lengthy, theological explanation. *Something* important and clarifying was being communicated by Wesley, and that something was specific, pertinent, and reasonably accessible to his recipients.

This observation suggests that inquiries into the servant-son metaphor have looked past, or have overlooked altogether, this important contextual question: what is it about the metaphor that made it theologically amenable to Wesley and accessible to his audience? That is, what was already in place theologically—below the surface, so to speak—when the Methodist Conference in 1746 distinguished between "a Jewish faith" and "the proper Christian faith," and described someone with a Jewish faith as "a servant of God" and someone with a "proper Christian faith" as "a child of God"?[19] Why was this explanation acceptable as an accurate and effective response to the question that had been raised? Fast-forward a couple of decades and the same questions arise. When Wesley wrote to Ann Bolton in 1768, what theological framework gave him the confidence that she would be able to make sense of his affirmation, "[God] has already given you the faith of a servant. You want only the faith of a son"?[20] And twenty years after this, in 1788, what common ground was accessed in his sermon "On the Discoveries of Faith" when Wesley admonished his readers to advance "'from faith to faith'; from the faith of a *servant* to the faith of a *son*"?[21]

Responding to the contextual question, this study demonstrates that Wesley's contrasting of the metaphors of servant and son provided both him and his audience a definitive narrative of the way of salvation, and that this narrative is grounded in his covenant theology. Indeed, it is

18. Felleman, for example, suggests the summer of 1766 as a turning point and as the time frame during which Wesley jettisoned Peter Böhler's teaching on the instantaneous blessings of faith. Felleman, "John Wesley and the 'Servant of God,'" 86. M. S. Fujimoto argues that the metaphor signals a late and significant shift in Wesley's view of justification. Fujimoto, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Good Works," 257–59.

19. *Minutes*, 1746 (Jackson), Q. 9–11, 8:287–88.

20. Wesley, "John Wesley to Ann Bolton, April 7, 1768," *Letters*, 5:86.

21. Wesley, *Works* (BE) §14, 4:35.

this imaging (i.e., the servant-son metaphor) of the narrative that acts as a point of entry for the discovery and exploration of Wesley's covenant theology and serves as the focus of this study.

But what, exactly, *is* covenant theology? As Peter Lillback points out, covenant theology is "an elastic term" whose "varying definitions demonstrate its complexities and vast scope."[22] That being said, getting a handle on what this term means in relation to our present purposes might begin with considering its broadest sense. Covenant theology, says J. I. Packer, is "a hermeneutic . . . a way of reading the whole Bible."[23] Similarly, Michael Horton describes covenant theology as "an architectonic structure" that "holds together the structure of biblical faith and practice."[24] Lillback himself adopts Jürgen Moltmann's description of covenant theology as "a theological method which utilizes the biblical theme of the covenant as the key idea for a) the designation of the relationships of God and man, and b) the presentation of the continuity and discontinuity of redemptive history in the Old and New Testaments."[25]

Yet, while the idea of covenant as an overarching theme surely informed Wesley's theological understanding, this broad sense does not accurately portray the contours of his covenant theology. The reason is that it fails to account for key developments in the century before Wesley that had hued covenant theology into a more sculpted theological construct. By Wesley's time the superstructure of covenant theology that was generally recognized and accepted consisted of two covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Upon these two covenants, the basis for and nature of relationship between God and humanity were delineated. The progressive nature of the covenant of grace, culminating in the revelation of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, came to be identified in terms of various "moments" (dispensations) of God's redemptive activity. This superstructure is also referred to as theological federalism, emphasizing Adam and Christ as the representative heads, respectively, of these two covenants.[26]

Admittedly, the idea of linking Wesley with covenant theology seems a bit suspect when laid alongside a declaration like Horton's that "*Reformed* theology is synonymous with *covenant* theology."[27] Without

22. Lillback, "The Continuuing Conundrum," 45–46.

23. Witsius and Packer, *The Economy of the Covenants*, 1:np.

24. Horton, *God of Promise*, 13.

25. Lillback, "The Continuuing Conundrum," 46.

26. Some scholars would argue that federal theology is an outgrowth of covenant theology. See Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology*.

27. Horton, *God of Promise*, 11.

doubt, the family tree of covenant theology has a Reformed likeness to it. As J. I. Packer notes, "Historically, covenant theology is a Reformed development: Huldreich Zwingli, Henry Bullinger, John Calvin, Zacharias Ursinus, Caspar Olevianus, Robert Rollock, John Preston, and John Ball, were among the contributors to its growth, and the Westminster Confession and Catechisms gave it confessional status."[28] To Packer's shortlist we must certainly add Johannes Cocceius, one of the most influential covenant theologians of the seventeenth century.[29] But this roster of Reformed divines tells only part of the story.

A careful inspection of the historical development of covenant theology discloses that it is something more than Reformed theology. In other words, the inverse of Horton's declaration is considerably less defensible. As the subsequent examination will show, Wesley maintained the superstructure of covenant theology apart from the predestinarian template of Reformed theology that was part and parcel of its historical development. Still, the home field advantage never was Wesley's, as an essentially Reformed perspective remained strongly influential despite the failure of the Puritan experiment of the mid-seventeenth century. In recognition of the established and integral relationship between Reformed theology and covenant theology, in this study "Wesley's covenant theology" means Wesley's *appropriation* of covenant theology.

Still, questions remain concerning the claim of the influence of covenant theology in Wesley's theological thought. Among the various strands of covenant theology, of which was Wesley an adherent? How does knowing this and accounting for it influence our understanding of his soteriology? And if this truly is of significance, hasn't this already received adequate and focused attention by the numerous and noteworthy scholars who have contributed discerning explorations of Wesley's theological thought?

These important questions will certainly be engaged in the following chapters. However, the last question merits some consideration here at the outset. The short answer is that Wesley's covenant theology has received surprisingly little attention. Yet, this is not because his acquaintance with covenant theology has gone wholly unrecognized. In his extensive work on John Wesley's sermons in the Bicentennial Edition of *The Works of John Wesley*, Albert Outler identified covenant theology as part of Wesley's theological heritage. However, the implications of

28. Packer, "Introduction," *The Economy of the Covenants*, 1:np.

29. Packer does acknowledge Cocceius but discounts the worthiness of his contribution." Ibid., 1:np.

this for Wesley's thought are left unexplored.[30] Other than this, only Robert Monk and Jason Vickers present specific discussions of the interface of covenant theology with Wesley's theological thought.[31] However, Monk's study, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage*, is restricted by the confines of his primary objective and suffers, at points, from a limited understanding of covenant theology in that phase of its development. Vickers' contribution acknowledges the fact of Wesley's acquaintance with covenant theology and introduces aspects of how the theological currents of the day influenced the way his thought interfaced with it. Although Vickers' treatment is necessarily brief, it is, nonetheless, a valuable aid to this neglected area of Wesley Studies.

Aside from Outler, Monk, and Vickers, mention of the relationship of covenant theology to Wesley's theological thought is scarce to non-existent.[32] But why is this? What has side-lined serious investigation of Wesley's covenant theology? While any response to this question is necessarily somewhat speculative, I suggest that the following four factors have contributed toward obscuring the imprint of covenant theology on Wesley's thought.

First, even though Wesley openly articulates the core convictions of covenant theology, at no point does he explicitly speak to its influence on him. However, the significance of this fact is not so much that he *didn't* acknowledge this influence, but that he *didn't have* to draw the connection. The reality is that covenant theology was the dominant dialect of theological discourse in his day[33] and its essential features were woven into the very fabric of his theological thought. At times he clarified aspects of his covenant theology and, frequently, he applied it; but it no more needed to be announced and identified as such than did the fact that he breathed air like everyone else in his audience. Perhaps

30. Outler, "Introduction," *Works* (BE), 1:80–81; 1:203 n. 2; 3:175 n. 42. Thomas A. Noble also acknowledges Wesley's acquaintance with covenant theology, noting that in the sermon "The Righteousness of Faith," "Wesley adopts the scheme of federal Calvinism." However, the sense of the observation seems more a recognition of Wesley's making use of the schema of covenant theology rather than an intimation of its integral role in his theological thought. Noble, "John Wesley as a Theologian."

31. See Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage*, 96–106 and Vickers, "Wesley's Theological Emphases," 190–206.

32. Rupwate, "The Covenant Theology of John Wesley," 79–90. Though promisingly titled, Rupwate's interest is in Wesley's theology of covenant in relation to Wesley's Covenant Service.

33. Jason Vickers highlights this fact as well, noting that "Anglican theologians in the long eighteenth century . . . spoke a common theological language—namely, the language of covenant." Vickers, "Wesley's Theological Emphases," 191.

for this very reason its persistent voice in Wesley's theological thought has faded from our attention like nondescript white noise, despite its pronounced influence on his vision of the way of salvation. However, as we shall see, the evidence clearly reveals covenant theology was deeply embedded in his theological thought and played an integrative role that left a clear imprint on his soteriology.

A second factor that seems to have come into play might be described as doctrinal profiling. Given the fact that covenant theology, in terms of its historical development, is so entwined with defining a theological framework for the predestinarian views of Calvinism in particular, there seems to be an unspoken and untested assumption that Wesley, as an Arminian, simply would find no common ground with the core theological components of covenant theology.[34] Consequently, it is further assumed that covenant theology really has little if anything to add to a truly Wesleyan understanding of God's redemptive activity in the world.

Yet, it is important to recognize that some difficulty lay in the phrase, "Wesley, as an Arminian." With this epithet comes a whole string of conclusions that make perfect sense for dismissing the influence of covenant theology on Wesley's thought; that is, until considered in light of the historical evidence. Certainly, he was opposed to hyper-Calvinism's Five Points "when these were argued in an absolute sense," as Herbert McGonigle notes.[35] Wesley, however, "believed that his convictions found a place within the framework of Reformed thought and [that] his difference with the Calvinists did not threaten the foundations of Protestant orthodoxy."[36] His rejection of Calvinism was not a wholesale rejection, but reflected a critique of Calvinism in the vein of the rejection of what Ellen More describes as "the more rigid aspects of Calvinist theology" that had emerged from within the culture and polity of English nonconformity during the middle and second-half of the seventeenth century.[37] John Goodwin (1595–1666) is a prime example of this critique from within, and is important to this discussion because he

34. There are some notable exceptions to the view that Arminianism and covenant theology are exclusive of one another. See, for example, Blacketer, "Arminius' Concept of Covenant in Its Historical Context," 193–220 and Lettinga, "Covenant Theology Turned Upside Down," 653–69. While Wesley's covenant theology is not a direct reflection of either of these views, these examples are indicative of the breadth of the influence of covenant theology.

35. McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 2.

36. Ibid., 1.

37. More, "John Goodwin and the Origins of the New Arminianism," 51.

had been thoroughly Calvinistic and a solid adherent of covenant theology. And while he ultimately drifted into a rationalistic Arminianism with which Wesley himself would *not* have concurred,[38] it is noteworthy that he retained the elements of covenant theology.[39] Nevertheless, with all of this overlooked—as it seems to have been, for the most part, at least in Wesleyan circles—the superstructure and language of covenant theology has consequently received so little consideration that Wesley's own overt references to his covenant theology are rarely detected much less contemplated.

A third factor is the accumulation of appraisals of Wesley's theology that are thoughtful and compelling *apart* from any consideration of his covenant theology.[40] Over time, this formidable array of studies seems to have inoculated Wesley scholars to the influence of covenant theology on his theological thought. There is nothing intentional or academically-suspect about these very significant contributions to Wesley Studies. Rather, the point here is to call attention to what seems to have been, over the long history of scholarly investigations of Wesley's theological thought, a momentum of assumptions and perspectives that has pushed to the edges the importance of the influence of covenant theology on Wesley.

Lastly, a fourth factor—and perhaps the greatest contributor to the general neglect of covenant theology in relation to Wesley's theological thought—is John Fletcher's "dispensational" understanding of God's saving activity. Fletcher is frequently perceived as Wesley's theological spokesman, largely because Wesley, in the wake of the firestorm created by the publication of the minutes of the 1770 Conference, opted to defer to Fletcher to carry the weight of responding to the fury of the critics of the minutes. And respond Fletcher did, with a passionate and voluminous defense in which he incorporated his own unique understanding of the various dispensations of God's redemptive work. However, the distinctiveness of his views is generally overlooked. W. R.

38. McGonigle distinguished Wesley's Arminianism as "evangelical Arminianism" in contrast to the Arminianism that typically embraced rationalism and latitudinarianism. McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 7–9.

39. More, "John Goodwin and the Origins of the New Arminianism," 70. Notably, in his debate with hyper-Calvinist James Hervey, Wesley attached his rejoinder to an extract of Goodwin's *Treatise on Justification* which Goodwin had written in 1642, just as his own critique of high Calvinism was taking shape.

40. Two examples of comprehensive studies of Wesley's thought that immediately come to mind are Kenneth Collins' *The Theology of John Wesley* and Randy Maddox's *Responsible Grace*.

Davies, for example, describes Fletcher's covenant theology as "reminiscent of seventeenth-century covenant theology."[41] While this is true in some respects, the difficulty with Davies' assessment is that it suggests a greater theological continuity than was actually the case. In reality, Fletcher developed a kind of dispensational construct that was *not* a feature of mainstream seventeenth century covenant theology, a fact easily obscured by the tendency to assume that similarity in terminology constitutes equivalence in meaning. Fletcher himself seems to have made just such an assumption, claiming in his unpublished essay on the new birth that both John and Charles Wesley "hold the doctrine of dispensations" in common with him.[42] This, however, would be true only in a general sense. In actual fact, there is no evidence in Wesley's published writings or correspondence that he espoused or subscribed to Fletcher's particular conception of dispensations. In fact, Fletcher's conception of dispensations was the basis of his identifying entire sanctification with Pentecost, a view with which Wesley disagreed.[43]

Nevertheless, it is the case that, by and large, the attention given in Wesley Studies to the idea of dispensations has been almost if not entirely dominated by Fletcher's distinctive views. This may be attributed in part to Fletcher's much more extensive use of the terminology of covenant theology. But even this is dependent on the assumption that Fletcher's views are Wesley's, an assumption rooted in what Peter Forsaith identifies as a perception of Fletcher that is deeply entrenched in a "pro-Wesley historiography."[44] This historiography, contested only relatively recently, appears to find support in Wesley's own *A Short Account of the Life and Death of the Rev. Mr. John Fletcher* (1786) and in his acknowledgement of Fletcher's declension of covenant theology in the opening paragraphs of his (Wesley's) sermon, "On Faith." However, the *Short Account* was motivated not by Wesley's interest in defending Fletcher's rendition of covenant theology but by his concern to portray Fletcher as "the Arminian dogmatic champion and exemplar of Christian perfection."[45] And with respect to the sermon, to take Wesley's appreciation for Fletcher's contribution as Wesley's endorsement of Fletcher at all points is assuming more than the evidence can support. There is merit to Richard Watson's *caveat* that "Mr. Fletcher's writings are not to be considered, in

41. Davies, "John William Fletcher of Madeley as Theologian," 222.
42. Fletcher, "An Essay on the Doctrine of the New Birth," 35–56.
43. Raser, *Our Watchword and Song*, 29–30.
44. Forsaith, *Unexampled Labours*, 6.
45. Ibid., 4.

every particular, as expressing the views of Mr. Wesley, and the body of Methodists."[46]

Nevertheless, the promotion of Fletcher's writings especially among American Methodists[47] along with Luke Tyerman's 1882 biography of Fletcher, Wesley's *Designated Successor*, have furthered acceptance of Fletcher as Wesley's theological spokesman. Consequently, Wesley's concept of the dispensations of the covenant of grace—which generally reflects the superstructure of seventeenth-century Reformed covenant theology—has been overrun by Fletcher's. As a result, Wesley's appropriation of covenant theology, if detected at all, has been made to appear embryonic and uneventful in his theological thought. That is, Fletcher is made out to be the one with a developed covenant theology. However, as the ensuing study will demonstrate, there is convincing textual evidence that long before Fletcher added the force of his pen to the Methodist cause, Wesley held a well-developed and thoughtfully nuanced covenant theology and that this significantly shaped his soteriology and informed his pastoral guidance.

Yet, despite Wesley's occasional use of the technical terminology of covenant theology, its pivotal role in his theological thought is not particularly obvious. As it turns out, its imprint and influence on him is evidenced in less direct though no less convincing ways. And as this investigation reveals, there may be no marker of its presence at the core of his thought that is more captivating or more summative of his soteriology than the distinction he made repeatedly between the faith of a servant and the faith of a son.

Accordingly, the opening chapter takes a closer look at the occurrences of this imaging in the John Wesley corpus. By examining the emergence and the momentum of the metaphor in Wesley's sermons, correspondence, and his various other writings, a clearer picture is gained of its value to him. The following chapter explores the ancestry of his covenant theology. For the benefit of having some sense of direction as we delve into this subject, Outler's assertion that Wesley came by covenant theology by way of William Perkins, William Ames, and the Westminster Confession will serve as a guide.[48]

46. Watson, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley*, 70. Watson's statement appears as a footnote in the course of his description of the fall-out of the 1770 Minutes.

47. Wood, "John Fletcher as the Theologian of Early American Methodism," 189–204.

48. Wesley, *Works* (BE), 1:203; fn 2.

Based upon what is discovered about the ancestry of Wesley's covenant theology, chapter 3 examines both Wesley's coherence with and departure from classic covenant theology. Distinctives of his covenant theology come into view and a foundation is laid for the assessment of his soteriology in the final chapter. How covenant theology functions as a hermeneutic for Wesley in his exegesis of scripture is the emphasis of chapter 4, "John Wesley's Covenant Theology and Holy Scripture." The influence of non-Puritan sources on his covenant theology becomes evident in this part of the study.

Chapters 5 and 6 together bring to light the broader historical context of soteriological concerns that influenced the shape of Wesley's covenant theology. Long-standing conversations concerning the role of good works and the question of the divine response to the "responsive unregenerate" are introduced, and Wesley's own engagement on these pivotal matters is considered. The significance of these conversations for Wesley's appropriation of covenant theology becomes increasingly evident in the remainder of the study.

The final chapters focus all of the foregoing on the implications of Wesley's covenant theology for his vision of the way of salvation. Chapters 7 and 8 present his understanding of the salvific sufficiency of the various dispensations of the covenant of grace, introducing his conception of the covenant of grace as multi-dimensional and contrasting his soteriology with what characterized the predominantly Calvinistic covenant theology of his day. Extensive attention is given to his understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in light of his covenant theology. Chapter 9 illustrates Wesley's appropriation of covenant theology at the pastoral level, providing a rich and intriguing view of his understanding of the way of salvation and his conscientious endeavor to draw out the role of human response while holding firmly to the Reformation doctrines of *sola gratia* and *sola fidei*. The way Wesley's covenant theology functioned in his theological thought is seen in the capacity of the servant-son metaphor to carry forward this agenda. This is highlighted with specific examples from his dealings with rank and file Methodists. And finally, an epilogue concludes this volume with some observations on the findings of this study and with some initial reflection on the implications of Wesley's covenant theology in helping his Methodists find their place in the unfolding story of their salvation: the story of a servant, the story of a son—the story of encounter with the God of all grace and the divine invitation to advance "from faith to faith."[49]

49. Wesley, "On the Discoveries of Faith," *Works* (BE) §14, 4:35.