The Antithetical Homiletic of John Wesley’s
Sermons on Several Occasions, I-IV

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CONTENTS

1 RHETORICAL FORM AND FUNCTION IN JOHN WESLEY’S
SERMONS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS I-IV: A LITERATURE
REVIEW

The Neoclassical Sermon: Form and Function
Notable S O S O Editions
The Purpose of S O S O I-IV
Antithesis as Central to S O S O I-IV and Normative in the Early Modern Sermon
Method
Conclusion

2 “TO DISTINGUISH THIS WAY OF GOD FROM ALL THOSE WHICH
ARE THE INVENTIONS OF MEN”: A REAPPRAISAL OF THE 1746
PREFACE TO S O S O I-IV

Via Salutis Doctrine versus Non-essential Doctrine
Scriptural Teaching versus Unscriptural “Inventions”
Holy Affections versus Unholy Affections
The 1746 Preface and S O S O’s Homiletic Features
Conclusion

3 “THIS VASTLY IMPORTANT SUBJECT”: JOHN WESLEY’S
ANTITHETICAL INTRODUCTIONS IN S O S O I-IV

Sermon Text and Antithetical Patterns
Explicit, Implicit, and Artificial Antithetical Texts
Explicit Antithetical Sermon Texts in S O S O I-IV
Implicit Antithetical Sermon Texts in S O S O I-IV
Artificial Antithetical Sermon Texts in S O S O I-IV
Significance Descriptors: Scope, Universality, Permanence, Immediacy, Humility, Sublimity, Gravity 61

Significance Descriptor Patterns 62

_Ethos_ Perceptions in the _Exordia_ of _SOSO I-IV_: Wesley as Trustworthy Teacher, Spiritual Guide, and Doctrinal Defender 66

_Ethos_ in the Sermon on the Mount _Discourses_: Jesus as Teacher, Guide, and Defender 73

The Antithetical Homilietic _Proposito_ or _Partitio_ 76

Punctuation Emphases in the _Exordia_: Rhetorical Questions, Italics, and Exclamations 78

The Rhetorical Agenda of Literal Questions and Rhetorical Questions in the _Exordia_ 78

Antithetical Uses of Italics in the _Exordia_ 81

Exclamations in the _Exordia_ 84

The Antithetical Dynamic of Combined Punctuation 85

The _Via Salutis_ Theme in _SOSO I-IV_ (Direct and Indirect): An Evaluation 86

_The Lord Our Righteousness_ as Exemplar of _Exordia_ Homiletic Dynamics in _SOSO I-IV_ 90

4 “ARE YOU CONVINCED THAT THIS IS SCRIPTURAL CHRISTIANITY?” JOHN WESLEY’S ANTITHETICAL ARGUMENTS IN _SOSO I-IV_ 94

Scripture as the Foremost Source of Authority 95

Wesley’s Antithetical Arguments for Scriptural Christianity 109

Sermons with Extended Antithesis: Irony in the Beatitudes 110

_Extended Antitheses: False versus True Teaching, Law versus Faith, and General Rules versus Saving Faith_ 111

Antithesis in Chronological Sermons 115

_Antithesis through Definition_ 115
Antithesis of Loss of Religious Affections versus Gain of Religious Affections
Antithesis through the Anglican Hermeneutic and Christian Experience
Antithesis through Categories
Antithesis through Analogies

Sermons with Multiple Antitheses
Antitheses in Chronological Sermons
Antitheses in Formal and Informal Refutatio Arguments

The Antithetical Dynamic in the “Scriptural Christianity” Probatio and Refutatio Arguments of SOSO I-IV: Preliminary Conclusions

5 “PURIFIED FROM EVERY UNHOLY AFFECTION”: JOHN WESELY’S ANTITHETICAL CONCLUSIONS IN SOSO I-IV

Four Antithetical Pairs of Affections
Holy versus Unholy Affections
The Affections of Faith, Love, Hope, Peace, Joy, Meekness, Thanksgiving, Holy Fear, and Happiness

The Unholy Affections of Pride and Self-Will, Love of the World, Jealousy, Anger, Malice, Hatred, Envy, Resentment, Revenge, Covetousness, and Unholy Fear
The Interdependency of Affections

Exhortation to Repentance and Eternal Blessedness versus Eternal Judgment
Exhortation to Temporal/Daily Obedience versus Disobedience or Laxity
Exhortation to Self-Examination versus No Self-Reflection and/or Self-Deception

Seven Non-Antithetical Common Features

Peroratio Elements in Expansive Crescendos: An Analysis of Sermons
The Way to the Kingdom: An Homiletic Exemplar of Affectional Emphases
Other Sermons with Dominant Affectional Emphases
Holy and Unholy Affections in the Eternal Blessing versus Eternal Punishment Antithetical Pair
Holy versus Unholy Affections with an Expansive Crescendo on Eternal Blessedness
Holy versus Unholy Affections with an Expansive Crescendo on Love
Holy versus Unholy Affections with an Expansive Crescendo on Faith
1. Holy versus Unholy Affections with an Expansive Crescendo on Joy and Gratitude 177
2. Holy versus Unholy Affections with an Expansive Crescendo on Prayer 180
3. Holy versus Unholy Affections with an Expansive Crescendo on Doxology 181
4. Notable Antithetical Perorations 182

Wesley’s Antithetical Homiletic in the *SOSO I-IV Perorations*: Preliminary Conclusions 187

6. THE ANTITHETICAL HOMILETIC OF JOHN WESLEY’S SERMONS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS I-IV: CONCLUSIONS 190

Bibliography 210

72,046 Words
This thesis recognizes John Wesley (1703-1791) as a conventional Anglican preacher rooted in the humanist rhetorical tradition. As such, Wesley was a homiletical theologian who presents doctrine sermonically. The thesis presents an interface between current Wesley Studies scholarship, which addresses the theological component of Wesley’s so-called “Standard Sermons,” and current studies of the early modern British sermon. By doing so, it provides a more thorough description of the rhetorical dimension and dynamic of Wesley’s _Sermons on Several Occasions I-IV_ (_SOSO_).

The introductory chapter offers a literature review which first locates John Wesley the homilist within the context of the early modern British sermon, then within the nineteenth and twentieth century biographical and theological perspectives of Wesley’s preaching. It then reviews notable _SOSO_ editions, the variety of perspectives regarding the purpose and audience of _SOSO I-IV_, establishes that Wesley’s use of rhetorical antithesis is similar in kind to his pulpit contemporaries, and offers a methodology for exploring Wesley’s antithetical preferences.

Chapter Two presents a reappraisal of Wesley’s 1746 _Preface_ to _SOSO I-IV_. The _Preface_ indicates Wesley’s focus on the homiletic aspects of the series, and this chapter suggests categories for these features. Wesley also clearly states that the overarching theological purpose for _SOSO I-IV_ was to “distinguish” Scriptural Christianity from the doctrinal imbalances of formalism (primarily moralism) and antinomianism. From the _Preface_ declaration of the antithetical aim of _I-IV_, develops the thesis statement proper: This thesis conducts an analysis of the neoclassical form and homiletic features in John Wesley’s _Sermons on Several Occasions IV_, to delineate an antithetical rhetorical pattern intended to correct persistent formalistic and antinomian doctrinal imbalances.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five provide rhetorical (_dispositio_) analyses of the fifty-three _SOSO_ sermons to discover internal support for the thesis statement. Chapter Three examines and categorizes the neoclassical introductions (_exordium_ and _partitio_ movements). In these, Wesley’s rhetorical use of _via salutis_ doctrine versus non-_via salutis_ doctrine gains attention and interest. Chapter Four discusses his thematic use of “Scriptural” versus unscriptural Christianity in the sermon’s argumentative (_probatio_ and _refutatio_ sections). Chapter Five charts Wesley’s use of holy versus unholy affections in the sermonic conclusions (_peroratio_). For Wesley, these antithetical themes counter the errors of moralism and antinomianism.

Chapter Six reflects on the findings of the preceding chapters and confirms the consistency of rhetorical antithesis in _SOSO I-IV_. It argues for an antithetical “homiletic reading” of the _Sermons_ which, more accurately than the prevalent “standardization reading,” measures their form, function, and theological message. This interpretive pursuit more fully connects the contemporary reader of Wesley’s sermons with the purpose, homiletic skill, rhetorical force, and spiritual vitality with which they were originally preached, heard, and read.
Declaration

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CHAPTER ONE

RHETORICAL FORM AND FUNCTION IN JOHN WESLEY’S
SERMONS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS I-IV: A LITERATURE REVIEW

John Wesley’s preaching career was firmly located in “the period 1689-1901,” which William Gibson notes “may be said to represent a ‘golden age’ of sermon culture in Britain.”¹

Notable sermons in this era are collectively ‘golden’ for their quality, pervasiveness, and influence, all of which created a popular desire for sermons, both in pulpit and in print.

Among the prolific publishing ventures of Wesley (1703-1791), a founder of Methodism and eventually the central figure of England’s eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival, his Sermons on Several Occasions (SOSO) are the most enduring volumes.² This is largely due to the early SOSO volumes’ role as fixed doctrinal standards within Methodism and their importance as primary documents for theological reflection in the Wesleyan tradition. All Wesley scholars are familiar with its content and to some degree must offer an opinion of its literary function. The present chapter provides a brief literature review of SOSO I-IV’s homiletic context, its varied notable editions, its function and form, and clarifies this thesis’ methodology toward analysing its predominate homiletic pattern.

The role of the early modern oral sermon versus its published counterpart remains debatable. Keith Francis and others claim that oral and printed sermons served distinctly different purposes: “Put simply, the published sermon served a very different purpose from the preached one.”³ Theologian Albert Outler agreed, specifically regarding Wesley: “He

² Hereafter referred to as SOSO, Sermons, I-III, or I-IV. Throughout the thesis, all Sermons are primarily referenced from an original Wesley edition: John Wesley, Sermons on Several Occasions: in Four Volumes. By John Wesley, M.A. Late Fellow of Lincoln-College, Oxford. Fifth Ed. (4 vols.; London: G. Whitfield, 1796-99). Wesley’s sermon numbers are followed. This edition does not include The Lord Our Righteousness and On the Death of George Whitefield, therefore they are individually referenced from original editions. Since Wesley’s sermonic main points and sections are quite consistent across editions, these are supplied in the footnotes to facilitate locating particular quotations in any edition the reader is using.
saw an important difference between the principle aims of an oral and a written sermon: the former is chiefly for *proclamation* and invitation; the latter is chiefly for *nurture* and reflection.”⁴ But Arnold Hunt’s recent research argues that an oral-literate merge was underway: “It was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the distinction between reading and preaching,” and provides Wesley’s own mother, Susanna, as an example⁵:

By the eighteenth century, printed sermons were so firmly established as the model for oral preaching that there no longer appeared to be any substantial difference between preaching one’s own sermon and reading someone else’s….While her husband, Samuel, was absent in London, Susanna took charge of the household prayers and began inviting her neighbours to join her while she read a sermon on Sunday afternoons. Soon these gatherings were attracting several hundred people.⁶

It is reasonable that Wesley’s mother modelled for him, then, the oral influence of the printed sermon.⁷ To some degree the popularity of the printed sermon was probably in Wesley’s mind in 1746 when the first volume of *SOSO* was prepared for publication. Increasingly, he had a publically recognized role in the Evangelical Revival and his readership was broadening. However, sermon reading was not limited to public gatherings in pulpit or home, since individual consumption of sermons was an expanding market. Wesley encouraged individuals to read particular titles in the *SOSO* collection.⁸ As Rosemary Dixon describes, “vast numbers” of sermons were published by Wesley’s time, for “different groups of readers,” including individuals.⁹


⁶ Hunt, Hearing, 184.

⁷ Mary Morrissey recommends an intentional re-valuing of this oral element in the study of early modern sermons, recognizing their role as literary “events”: “Early modern sermons are complex and carefully structured arguments that begin with a text from Scripture and that use this text to create interpretations capable of providing moral and political instruction in the ‘here and now’ of the sermons ‘application’.” Mary Morrissey, “Interdisciplinarity and the study of Early Modern sermons,” *The Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), 1117.


One of the most divisive homiletic issues in Wesley’s sermon culture was whether vibrant preaching was best ensured by stepping into the pulpit with a carefully prepared manuscript to be read aloud, with a prepared manuscript committed to memory then left aside (memoriter), or to preach with or without notes guided by the ‘authentic’ impulses of extemporaneous delivery. All three styles were practiced and defended, and it is unhelpful to historians that many homilists rarely left clear indications of which style they practiced, exclusively or intermittently, or commented on their practical or strategic reasons for doing so. The conclusion most commonly expressed among scholars, both of sermon studies and Wesley, is that due to Wesley’s itinerant preaching settings and oftentimes unchurched auditors, the evangelist most frequently preached extemporaneously. Their estimations are echoed by Tennant: “Wesley preached indefatigably and usually extemporized.”

Wesley himself regularly testifies to this strategy: “Began preaching extempore on the Beatitudes”—in the Castle at Oxford.” Thus Chamberlain rightly notes that “the advent of the Methodists” renewed extempore delivery. Yet, in the 1746 Preface to S O S O I, Wesley strongly suggested that the four included Oxford University sermons were manuscripts of the sermon events. Either notes or a manuscript for Scriptural Christianity was immediately delivered to the Vice-Chancellor after Wesley concluded the sermon, and was likely distributed to other University faculty. It was normative for truly occasional sermons to be read aloud from a manuscript, and soon after the Oxford sermons’ deliveries each was

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12 Preface (¶7), I: 5.

published separately, in several editions, and widely circulated. Other occasional sermons in SOSO I-IV are The Great Assize, The Circumcision of the Heart, The Reformation of Manners, and On the Death of George Whitefield. It is noteworthy that in his abridged version of Directions Concerning Pronunciation and Gesture, Wesley retained the advice to deliver with “a short pause after every period,” and “take care not to sink your voice too much at the conclusion of a period,” indicating his assumption that Methodist preachers in meetinghouse settings will deliver with manuscripts before them. However, John’s father Samuel used the memoriter, or memorized sermon model, which Charles Wesley unsuccessfully attempted, but with which John would have been familiar and perhaps served well by in itinerant settings. Telford’s frequently cited retelling of The Methodist Magazine account that in 1735 Wesley preached in a pulpit without a manuscript and experienced such liberation that he “never afterwards took a sermon into the pulpit,” if accurate, still does not exclude the memoriter model, especially in Wesley’s ‘sermon barrel’ use of frequently preached sermons in the outdoor settings of itinerant revival preaching. John’s comment to Charles regarding rhetorical style, that “in connexion I beat you; but in strong, pointed sentences you beat me” points to John’s penchant for sermonic structure, on which he likely insisted regardless of delivery mode. It is prudent, then, to recognize the probability that a preacher as prolific as Wesley variously delivered read, extemporized (with and without notes), and memoriter sermons throughout his career, as audiences and settings changed.

A narrower issue for this thesis is with what level of confidence we can estimate that

15 James H. Potts, Living Thoughts of John Wesley: A Comprehensive Selection of the Living Thoughts of the Founder of Methodism as Contained in His Miscellaneous Works (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1891), 374.
18 BE, I, 2, footnote 6.
Wesley’s preached *SOSO I-IV* sermons bear reliable resemblances to the printed versions. This is a persistent challenge for sermon studies in general, which often attempt to offer analytical conclusions about sermons now preserved solely in printed form. For many of Wesley’s contemporary homilists in the ‘long eighteenth century’ who firmly rejected extemporaneous delivery, there was greater probability that their prepared manuscript or subsequently printed version paralleled the content as delivered. Yet, in practical terms, even the majority of ‘extemporaneous’ Anglican sermons were manuscript-based and, regardless of sermon delivery, the content of the sermon naturally followed the outline and vocabulary of a prepared manuscript lightly used, or unused, at delivery. Jeffrey Chamberlain helpfully describes the regular method of parish Anglican sermon writing before and during the decades of the initial *SOSO* volumes. “Before 1730 or so, preachers usually used small (duodecimo) booklets to write out their discourses. Not long after 1730, most were using booklets closer to octavo in size….Once the outline was completed…presumably all sermonmakers…wrote out the discourse from start to finish….overall, once the thinking and planning were completed, parsons wrote out their sermons and did very little editing later.” Some Wesley Studies scholars insist that the evangelist considerably edited his sermon manuscripts for the publication of *SOSO I-IV*, thus the printed *Sermons* barely resemble what he preached. Henry Rack judges that “the printed sermons clearly represent only the solid skeletons of discourses, written down and published as pieces of systematic teaching to give a framework for Methodist doctrine.” Others also tend to define the *Sermons* as

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19 Jeffrey S. Chamberlain, “Parish Preaching.” 48, 49. Moore’s hagiographical account that beginning in 1746 Wesley “simply took his Hebrew Bible and Greek Testament with him” and “retired to the house of his friend Mrs. Blackwell at Lewisham, where he composed at several visits the first four volumes of his sermons” is highly irregular from the conventional Anglican homiletic process and did not corroborate with the fact of the many *SOSO I-IV* sermons Wesley had already preached and published individually.

“theological tracts” and “written summaries.”\textsuperscript{21} Tennant reduces the \textit{Sermons} to “theological reference points.”\textsuperscript{22} Gibson more moderately suggests that this was true for only some of the \textit{Sermons}: “Wesley certainly published sermons which bore little or no resemblance to those he delivered,” and Sugden concluded that some sermons are “tractates” unintended for performance.\textsuperscript{23} Yet when Outler compared Wesley’s printed sermon \textit{On Charity} with an eyewitness report of the sermon event, he concludes: “The essential reliance of his preached sermon upon his published text in that instance is obvious, even though Wesley preached without the material before him.”\textsuperscript{24} Heitzenrater finds, more broadly, no basic inconsistencies in preached and printed versions:

\begin{quote}
On the basis of contemporary firsthand reports, it appears that Wesley’s oral preaching does not seem to be radically different from the form and content of his published sermons. The main observation from such a comparison of these records of preached and published sermons is that there is a definite congruency between the two. [T]here was more than likely a consonance of form and a consistency of message between the broader range of Wesley’s preaching and the typical forms of Wesley’s published sermons, even though in some ways the latter were designed to serve a more didactic purpose.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

Such eyewitness and shorthand corroboration lends considerable weight to the position that a number of the \textit{SOSO I-IV} sermons reasonably reflect Wesley’s preached form and content.

A third issue of importance in pursuing an analysis of \textit{SOSO I-IV} is the rhetorical value of the \textit{Sermons}. From Wesley’s earliest biographers, throughout the renewed critical attention toward Wesley as a theologian in the latter half of the twentieth century, into the current twenty-first century analysis of the early modern British sermon, \textit{SOSO}’s rhetorical

\textsuperscript{22} Bob Tennant, “Sermons of Evangelicals,” 119.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{BE}, IV, 515. See also \textit{BE}, I, 53: “…at least some of Wesley’s oral sermons were remarkably similar to his written texts in both rhetoric and substance….”
identity remains variously described. The majority of Wesley’s early biographers suggest an incompatibility between rhetorical features and the Puritan “plain style” adopted by many Anglican priests prior to and throughout Wesley’s ministry. Francis McConnell insisted: “There is nothing suggestive of oratory in the sermons. We may well wonder if Wesley himself was ever much moved by oratory. His own style is always rigorous, direct, and plain. Much of the material is dry [with] no appeal to pathos.”26 “In plain and earnest appeal his use of rhetoric was sparing,” stated Rigg.27 Rattenbury agreed: “John Wesley’s literary style was terse, logical, and effective; but he had no wings—only feet.”28 C.T. Winchester concurred: “He was rather afraid of anything that might seem like affectation or ornament; his own style is clear, direct, and entirely plain.”29 More recently, Tennant even suggests Wesley as an eighteenth-century classical preacher was unskilled in thinking critically about his rhetoric: “His standard published collection of sermons was carefully reworked for domestic use and as theological reference points for his followers, but during rewriting, as we have suggested of Whitefield, the contemporary lack of tools for linguistic analysis would have prevented his being aware of his own fundamental rhetorical structures.”30

A number of the early evaluations of John Wesley’s preaching account for his preaching success with tones of hagiography, so much so that any rhetorically critical estimation of his published sermons was often depreciated. Wesley’s early biographer, Henry Moore, warned: “[T]o consider his sermons according to the usual mode of criticism, would be to forget, or to be insensible to, his whole character, as a man who had been truly sent of God, to teach the

way of God.”\(^{31}\) James Rigg, offering a biographical sketch of Wesley a century later, conceded that part of Wesley’s sermonic success was their logic, but immediately overshadowed any rhetorical skill on Wesley’s part with a spiritual gloss: “The power by which he gripped and held and overwhelmed the souls of his hearers was partly logical, partly spiritual. Multitudes resorted to Wesley some because they felt mysteriously drawn and fascinated by the prophet-like force and gifts of the man.”\(^{32}\) Hurst believed that “his printed sermons as a rule do not represent the energy and directness of his extempore preaching when vast crowds hung upon his lips.”\(^{33}\) Rattenbury concluded: “A great preacher like Wesley, capable of moving multitudes as few men ever have done, never depends for his results on the words he writes. His power is personal, and often momentary. His influence is difficult to describe. The spell he casts is realized at the time and only half remembered by those who were captured by it, and very difficult to analyse.”\(^{34}\) Other biographers and theologians, early and contemporary, disagree with hagiographical explanations and place emphasis on the *Sermons*’ rhetorical strength. John Simon complimented Wesley’s sermonic language, though he does not offer any rhetorical analysis: “Are those sermons, that roused the anger of the University authorities, only sedate theological treatises? After calm exposition they became ardent appeals….The same may be said of the remainder of the *Sermons*.”\(^{35}\) One of Wesley’s confidants also praised the early *Sermons* rhetorically: “The first four volumes were written in the early part of Methodism….The subjects are important and the discourses written with great animation and strength of language.”\(^{36}\) These

\(^{32}\) Rigg, *The Living Wesley*, 128, 129.
\(^{33}\) J. F. Hurst, *John Wesley the Methodist: A Plain Account of His Life and Work* (New York: Eaton and Manes, 1903), 245.
\(^{34}\) Rattenbury, *Wesley’s Legacy*, 90.
rhetorically positive estimations support Tom Webster’s warning: “The label of ‘plain style’ should not be taken as synonymous with simplicity. It demanded the translation of abstruse theology into a language comprehensible to all laypeople.” 37 Richard Lanham also insists that clarity is itself a deliberate rhetorical strategy: “Clarity signifies, after all, an immense act of exclusion, of restraint….To rhetorical man, at least, the world is not clear, it is made clear.”38 Such “plain style” language of Puritan and eventually Anglican preaching, argued Debora Shuger, included Renaissance figures of speech and passionate eloquence, and preserved the ‘Christian grand style’ of oratory.39 Thus a consensus has not been reached on the rhetorical value of *Sermons on Several Occasions*, but recent interdisciplinary efforts to rediscover the sermon’s form and widely influential role in the milieu of early modern Britain facilitate a closer examination of Wesley’s rhetoric.40 Scrutiny in the following thesis intends to demonstrate that Wesley’s *Sermons* do remain rhetorically vibrant within the “plain style” tradition.

**The Neoclassical Sermon: Form and Function**

Following the preaching of the Reformation, almost all English sermons from nonconformist to Anglican evinced the neoclassical *dispositio*, re-standardised by English Renaissance rhetoric. The most basic feature of the eighteenth-century neoclassical Anglican sermon was this *dispositio* progression. The Latin term *dispositio* is best translated as “organization” or

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40 Current focus on the early modern British sermon more significantly respects their cultural context than did the focus on prose found in Mitchel and Blench. For further discussion, see McCullough and Ferrell, *English Sermon Revised*, 3-9.
“arrangement,” and is located second within the Ciceronian five-fold model of speech preparation commonly known as the five canons of rhetoric. The *dispositio* is itself divided into either four or six parts:

The *exordium* is the beginning part and is aimed at making the audience open and indeed well-disposed to what follows. The *narratio* then explains the nature of the disputed matter. The *partitio* or *propositio*, which follows the *narratio* or is included in it, is where the essential proposition(s) of the speaker and perhaps also of the opponent are laid out. The *probatio* brings in arguments to support the speaker’s case. In the *refutatio*, which is often included in the *probatio*, the opponent’s arguments are disproved or weakened. Finally, the *peroratio* recapitulates the main points of the *probatio*, attempting to arouse the audience’s emotions in favor of the speaker’s viewpoint by amplifying what has been said before.41

Each of these movements achieve a crucial rhetorical task which cumulatively produce, in the homiletic context, a persuasive sermon conventional to Established Church auditors.42

According to Ford, such streamlined *dispositio* movements were standard: “The reformers did not adhere strictly to the parts of a classical oration—Exordium, Narration, Division, Confirmation, Confutation and Conclusion—but developed some and omitted others.”43

Preliminary observation verifies that the majority of Wesley’s *SOSO I-IV* sermons closely and consistently follow these *dispositio* movements but, true to Ford’s point, allowed for more emphasis on some movements than others. Wesley’s *dispositio* tend to streamline this progression and cluster into three movements: 1. *exordium/narratio(explication)/partitio*; 2. *probatio/refutatio*; and 3. *peroratio*. Such delineation of the *dispositio* was also represented

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41 Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 44.

42 In many neoclassical sermons the full spectrum of the *dispositio* may not be present, thus even the rhetorically critical listener discerns the individual movements with difficulty. Hugh Blair admits: “There may be excellent Discourses in public, where several of these parts are altogether wanting: where the Speaker, for instance, uses no Introduction, but enters directly on his subject; where he has no occasion either to divide or explain; but simply reasons on one side of the question, and then finishes. But…the parts…are the natural constituent parts of a regular Oration; and…in every Discourse whatever, some of them must be found.” Rolph P. Lessenich, *Elements of Pulpit Oratory in Eighteenth Century England (1660-1800)* (Cologn and Vienna: Bohlau, 1972), 42.

in the Book of Homilies, displayed in the other oral and printed Anglican sermons familiar to Wesley, and was the form he was taught at Oxford. Peter Mack argues that the homiletic expression of neoclassical rhetoric was a sermon developed according to the techniques of humanist logic, organization, and style. These are the tools which construct the sermon dispositio from textual interpretation, to sermon structure, to dialectic, to emotional appeal. Mack finds in Lancelot Andrewes a general example of Anglican neoclassical sermon development (which reflects well Wesley’s style):

Andrewes’s sermons begin with a classical exordium, gaining the attention of the audience by explaining the importance of the text he is going to explain. There then follows a careful logical division, grounded in the divisions of his chosen text. In the main section of the sermon, each of the divisions is explained, amplified, and applied, on the basis of close analysis of the words of the text. Finally, he reverts to the classical oration with recapitulation and an emotional appeal to the audience to follow the instruction he has expounded.

Mack (contrary to Tennant’s position that Wesley was rhetorically unaware) notes the effect of the Erasmian humanist agenda on the Oxford curricula which shaped Wesley:

Theology students were required to give sermons, which employed techniques of classical rhetoric alongside biblical exegesis and within a non-classical structure. Erasmus’ Ecclesiastes, which is found frequently in the booklists, provides instruction on biblical interpretation and a comprehensive rhetoric course adapted to the needs of the preacher.

This neoclassical rhetoric so essential to Wesley’s sermonic style is rarely recognized, however, by contemporary Wesley scholars, since the dispositio movements are not overtly

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44 Church of England, Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches at the Time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory (London: SPCK, 1899).
46 Mack, Elizabethan Rhetoric, 67. (See Tennant, “Sermons of Evangelicals,” 119.) Mack methodically traces a more thorough understanding of neoclassical rhetoric’s momentum linked with the rise of Protestantism through the Elizabethan era, into the humanist reform of English grammar schools and university curricula (particularly as encountered by the young Wesley at Oxford), and clearly projected through the seminal Anglican sermons impressed upon Wesley’s generation of Anglican priests. It is immediately observable in the general structure of each SOSO I-IV sermon that John Wesley was a homilist thoroughly shaped in this Anglican tradition of neoclassical sermonic style. For reinforcement of Mack’s description of the Oxford curriculum, see L.S. Sutherland, “The Curriculum,” in ed. L.S. Sutherland and L.G. Mitchell, The History of the University of Oxford: Vol. V, The Eighteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) 469-491.
revealed in sermon headings and the *Sermons* are more commonly consulted for theological content rather than rhetorical form. For this reason, most descriptions of Wesley’s sermonic rhetoric are either correct but imprecise, or they incorrectly posit that Wesley’s “plain style” avoids any strict rhetorical structure altogether. Regarding the former, Martin Schmidt offers an accurate list of *SOSO*’s rhetorical qualities, but not in neoclassical categories: “They keep strictly to the subject, but without being slavishly bound to the text. Not infrequently they offer detailed exegesis of particular texts….The sermons forgo rhetorical embellishment, vivid imagery, startling turns of phrase. They use a wealth of biblical quotations, but otherwise settle for familiar phraseology.”

Even H. Vaughn’s Whithead’s rhetorical analysis of Wesley’s Oxford sermons is neo-Aristotelian rather than neoclassical or humanist.

**Notable *SOSO* Editions**

Wesley’s choice of *Sermons on Several Occasions* as a series title was not original. It was among the more popular general titles of well-known Anglican preachers, and reflects those sermons’ status as discourses previously delivered in respected or prestigious pulpits to “important audiences.” The first hint of the *SOSO* project was “the circular containing the proposal for printing three volumes of Wesley’s *Sermons* by subscription…dated September 7, 1745.” Though Wesley hoped volume one will be delivered by Michaelmus (September 29), the London printer W. Strahan did not go to press with the first edition until

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49 Outler, *BE* 1:40. Two observations emerge when Wesley’s published sermon titles are compared with the Anglican sermon titles of his contemporaries. Wesley’s tend to be brief, and (for occasional sermons) their main title rarely indicates the occasion itself. Both of these features are made obvious by comparing Wesley’s titles to the several other common Anglican titles provided in the footnotes of this chapter.


the next year.\textsuperscript{52} Strahan made Vol. II available in 1748, and III in 1750, with other publishers, in Bristol and Dublin, producing second and third editions thereafter.\textsuperscript{53} Wesley’s originally unforeseen fourth volume of \textit{Sermons} appeared in 1760, and in fact was not titled “Vol. IV.” He included the four \textit{SOSO} volumes in the first edition of his \textit{Works}, in thirty-two duodecimo volumes, in 1771-74.\textsuperscript{54} Next came \textit{SOSO V}.\textsuperscript{55} Editor Joseph Benson claimed that his first posthumous edition of the \textit{Works} (seventeen volumes, 1809-13), truly represents Wesley’s corpus.\textsuperscript{56} He helpfully made significant corrections to Wesley’s editions, but was criticized for including some unverified sermons and excluding authentic others.\textsuperscript{57} Thomas Jackson’s much-anticipated contribution of a third edition (fourteen volumes, octavo, 1829-31) was by far more correct and complete. His access to Wesley's own corrections of the first edition, plus his addition of an index of Wesley’s sermon topics, made this edition, for some time, the popular standard for the Wesley’s \textit{Works}.\textsuperscript{58} The first complete American edition of the \textit{Sermons} appeared in John Emory’s first two volumes of the \textit{Works}, again based on the Jackson text, but newly supplied “With translations, notes and an original preface by John Emory.”\textsuperscript{59} But it was a less critical edition than the subtitle suggests, a fact apparent in Emory’s \textit{Preface} description of the notes: “At the close of the second volume, we have added ‘Notes on the Sermons,’ consisting chiefly of translations of such passages in foreign languages, ancient or modern, as had been left untranslated by Mr. Wesley; with brief notices of a few other things.”\textsuperscript{60} Approximately two decades later (1856), John Beecham prefixed a

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\textsuperscript{53} See Green, \textit{Bibliography}, n. 107, 53, and no. 139, 67.
\textsuperscript{55} John Wesley, \textit{Sermons on Several Occasions, by John Wesley, M.A. Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, Vol. V.} (London: New Chapel, City Road, 1788).
\textsuperscript{57} Green, \textit{Bibliography}, 252.
\textsuperscript{58} Thomas Jackson, ed. \textit{The Works of John Wesley} (14 vols.; London: Mason, 1825-31).
\textsuperscript{60} Emory, \textit{Works}, iii.
\end{flushleft}
brief “Life of John Wesley” to an edition of the Jackson text.\textsuperscript{61} Burwash aimed to editorially strengthen the Jackson text *Sermons* into doctrinal tools by identifying ten “progressive” (loosely *ordo salutis*) sections, treating each sermon with an introductory outline (“Analysis”) and its context (“Introductory Notes”).\textsuperscript{62} Despite the Burwash edition’s considerable analysis, E. H. Sugden claimed his *Wesley’s Standard Sermons* (1921) as the first “annotated” edition of the Jackson text, which supplies not only introductory historical and doctrinal perspective but adds explanatory footnotes.\textsuperscript{63} Timothy Smith cited its weakness in the dating of the *Sermons*, most of which Smith insists were written and preached earlier.\textsuperscript{64} Burwash and Sugden provide much more critical clarity than any previous editions, and their lasting influence is the affirmation of the value of reading each sermon in its theological context, with an awareness its intended audience. John Lawson’s *Notes on Wesley’s Forty-Four Sermons*, while it did not include the *Sermons* themselves or attempt formal rhetorical analysis, was an engaging commentary on Wesley’s sermonic phraseology.\textsuperscript{65} Eventually it, and the Burwash and Sugden editions before it, were overshadowed by Albert Outler’s copious work in Vols. I-IV of the *The Bicentennial Edition* of Wesley’s *Works*.\textsuperscript{66} Outler offered ample biographical, historical, theological and, to some extent, rhetorical background for Wesley’s 151 published sermons. The appendices reveal unprecedented scholarly labour with the textual history. Oden, however, censures Outler for

\textsuperscript{63} Sugden, *Standard Sermons*, 7. He includes the fifty-three sermon version.
\textsuperscript{64} Timothy Smith, “Chronological List of John Wesley’s Doctrinal Sermons and Essays.” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 17 (1982), 90.
\textsuperscript{66} Outler, *BE*. 
“systematic neglect” of the Jackson edition in his textual analyses.67 John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology (Outler and Heitzenrater) includes sermons beyond SOSO and proceeds in a temporal sequence that provides “an impetus for a fresh interest” in Wesley’s theological development.68 Two modern English versions of SOSO have been produced. James D. Holway’s single volume is less modern than it purports, offering minor alterations but retaining much of Wesley’s phraseology. Kinghorn’s (fifty-three) Standard Sermons in Modern English presents transcriptions which update Wesley’s vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, and only in a handful of instances takes interpretive license.69 The next notable contribution is Collins’ and Vickers’ recent The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey, which maintains the BE text, but provides a sixty sermon ordo salutis chronology and sermon introductions designed to be more suitable for Christian spiritual formation.70

The Purpose of SOSO I-IV

Emerging from this variety of critical editions of SOSO, and subsequent scholarship, are quite divergent conclusions among Wesley scholars regarding his intended readership and original purpose for the Sermons. Frank Baker and Thomas Oden support a ‘Methodist Homilies reading’ of the Sermons that argues for Wesley’s full intentionality in producing SOSO as a doctrinal standard for organizational stability.71 In their estimation, these sermons

70 Collins and Vickers, A Collection.
are not aimed at a popular readership, but toward Methodism’s organizational need for an official set of doctrinal positions. In this regard SOSO’s original purpose was to codify Methodist theology, mirroring the role of the Homilies as a sermonic standard for Anglican doctrine. Richard Heitzenrater proposes a similar but more specific aim for the S O S O series: A homiletical compilation for the training and doctrinal guidance of Wesley’s lay preachers. He constructs this view by inference, according to the evolving “tone” of the S O S O series and Wesley’s supposed opinion of what should be the lay preachers’ emphases in preaching.72 He and others interpret the 1744 and 1745 Minutes to reflect that the preachers requested the sermons’ publication for their own use, not primarily for any popular readership. The Sermons, according to this view, fulfil another similar use as the Homilies: guides to preaching. They are, as Oden and Baker contend, a ‘Methodist Homilies’—but for lay preachers’ training in itinerant proclamation. A slightly different position was that of Burwash and Sugden, who conceded that Wesley originally meant for each sermon to be read at face value, but because the S O S O series became a fixed theological and thematic standard for Methodist preaching, the Sermons should now normatively be read and studied as such. According to this ‘regulatory reading,’ by the time of the 1771 publication of the series Wesley’s intent was that Methodist laity and clergy insist that S O S O I-IV’s doctrinal positions and emphases be expounded (and re-expounded) from their pulpits.73 Outler and Rack accept a broader original audience for S O S O than do most Wesley scholars.74 They point to S O S O as a deliberate extension of Wesley’s itinerant preaching ministry, intended for a diverse readership—what might be termed a ‘revival movement reading.’ Simon held a similar view and directly states: “It must be remembered that in compiling his first volume of Sermons John Wesley had no immediate intention of making it a standard of doctrine by

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72 Richard P. Heitzenrater, People Called Methodists, 197.
74 Outler (BE, 1: 18-26); Henry Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, 349.
which the teaching of his preachers should be judged. It was, rather, an appeal to the world in defence of the doctrines which he himself preached.”

William Abraham adds that the more particular function was Wesley the spiritual director offering a devotional approach to doctrine. Keith Francis suggests that Wesley was among those popular preachers who “published sermons in order to add to the corpus of their works and advance their careers and reputations….John Wesley” was “similarly well known for the number of sermons” he “published.”

In relation to these variant views, the present thesis finds the broader purpose of S O S O I - IV, held by Outler and Rack, to be consistent with Wesley’s 1746 Preface description of the Sermons’ purpose as fundamentally homiletic. In Wesley’s most specific summation of the original series, he described their aim to “distinguish” formalism and antinomianism “from the true, Scriptural, experimental religion.” The Sermons, then, were directed at the immediate theological concerns of his readers: converts of the Evangelical Revival “liable” to the misdirection of formalistic and antinomian teaching, whom he must “guard” and “warn” against such doctrinal error. Burwash acknowledged this role: “No one can properly read these sermons who loses sight of their controversial aspect. They defend the truth against formalism and Antinomianism…. [T]hat which appears here is not a mere theological polemic, but a practical conflict. It is not so much against an erroneous theory that these standards have erected a defence, as against the evil influence of error.” These two extremes represent what might be considered a ‘theological antithesis,’ with the strictness of

78 Burwash, Doctrinal Standards, XVIII.
of formalism in direct contrast to unconstrained antinomianism.

Antithesis as Central to *SOSO I-IV* and Normative in the Early Modern Sermon

This theological antithesis which Wesley highlighted within the *Sermons* was, however, achieved by a matching rhetorical antithesis, a pattern visible even in a cursory reading of most of the sermons. The classical rhetorical device of antithesis is produced “where contraries are opposed and distinguished.”79 This thesis’ enquiry of the homiletic design of *SOSO I-IV* can be reliable only by adequately analysing Wesley’s prevalent and overarching antithetical patterns as the central rhetorical device of the series. To date, there exists no scholarly exploration of the rhetorical implications of Wesley’s antithetical pattern. Such enquiry will enhance an accurate evaluation of the *SOSO* collection and further the agenda of Wesleyan studies to robustly assess the theology and ministry of the founder of Methodism. Therefore, this thesis proposes an analysis of the neoclassical form and homiletic features in John Wesley’s *Sermons on Several Occasions I-IV* to verify, describe, and explain the centrality of an antithetical rhetorical pattern intended to correct persistent formalistic and antinomian doctrinal imbalances. In so doing, the thesis will demonstrate the viability of a ‘homiletic reading’ of *SOSO I-IV*. 80

Wesley’s use of antithesis was not a novelty, but a fundamental, longstanding rhetorical device practiced among his contemporaries. A selected review of other published neoclassical sermons within the early modern period, both Anglican and nonconformist, verifies (as Shuger argued) the continued conventional use of figures of speech, including antithesis. Though antithesis emerged through the Reformers, it was demonstrated in Wesley’s era in the homiletic legacies of John Tillotson and Joseph Butler, and his

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80 This serves as the thesis statement proper.

One of the sermons which Wesley placed in The Christian Library was the Anglican divine Richard Allen’s A Rebuke to Backsliders, and a Spur for Loiterers (1677), in which at one point Allen antithetically framed former godliness versus present spiritual lack: former prayerfulness versus present lack of worship; present “frozen” spirits versus the former “fire” of devotion; spiritually asleep in religious duties versus spiritually awakened by religious duties; spiritual and heavenly versus carnal and earthly spiritual state; speech: savoury and useful versus unsavoury and unprofitable. Wesley was also influenced by the Puritan preaching style, two samples of which reveal the highly rhetorical use of antithesis. Stephen Charnock’s The Fruits of Converting Grace in the Salvation of Sinners (published in 1683)

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81 Andrew Pettigree, Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20.
84 Thomas Secker, Sermons on Several Subjects, By Thomas Secker, LL.D., Late Lord Archbishop of Canturbury, Sermon VI. Heb. xii. 2 (London: J. and F. Rivington, second edition, 1771), 107.
takes as its text 1 Tim. 1:15, and in the final third of the sermon he described the power of the Gospel for personal transformation. He emphasizes the antithesis of pre-conversion and conversion: entering a church a tiger versus leaving the church a lamb; lusts as giant and Goliath versus lusts grovelling in the dust; Saul hating the church versus Paul embracing the church; Saul the Pharisee versus Paul the preacher; Saul the persecutor versus Paul the martyr; Saul’s religious status versus Paul’s “poverty, misery, cruel scouragements, and death.” The Gospel “changes persons from beasts to men, from serpents to saints.”

The seventeenth-century Puritan theologian and controversialist Richard Baxter was well known to Wesley. In Baxter’s *The Cure of Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow* (1682), he contrasted “overmuch sorrow” and “unspeakable joy,” “passionate grief” and “the grace and promises of the gospel.” His guiding analogy was therapeutic: the condition versus the cure.

Among the nonconformists, few influenced Wesley as did the Presbyterian Matthew Henry, whose Old Testament commentary Wesley acknowledged as one of his primary sources for his *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament*. The following excerpts from Henry’s 1711 sermon *Faith in Christ Inferred from Faith in God* display frequent uses of antithesis. In the *exordium*, he asserted: Sinners should fear versus believers hearts are not

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87 “In England Puritanism with its strong concern for personal piety had never died out. Many were very uneasy about the tepid devotional life and conventional morality fostered by Anglicanism. The works of the great Puritans such as Richard Baxter were still being read. Although John and Charles Wesley were brought up in a home firmly committed to Anglicanism,…the Wesley’s were deep thinking, and they quickly adapted Continental Pietism to their native land.” Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Vol. 5: Moderatism, Pietism, and Awakening* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 75-76.
“troubled”; Believers will not “faint” versus unbelievers will “not be established”; those who profess and believe versus those who only profess, but do not believe; those who have heard the gospel versus those who have not. Henry then moved into the probatio arguing, in each sermonic division respectively, the antithesis between deistic belief and revelatory belief: Belief in God only as the Father of creation versus belief also in God as the Father of the Son; Belief in God the Father only as the Eternal Mind versus belief also in God the Son as the Eternal Word; Belief only in God the Father as the Creator and Governor versus belief also in God the Son as the co-Creator and co-Governor; Belief only in God the Father as the Owner of Creation versus belief also in Christ as Owner of Redemption; Belief only in God the Father as Judge versus belief also in Christ as Advocate; Belief only in God the Father as the End versus belief also in Christ as the Way. Henry’s second division continued the antithetical pattern: Those who falsely “acquaint” themselves with God versus those who truly “acquaint” themselves with God through Christ; Those who only worship “God” versus those who truly worship God through Jesus Christ; Those who “fear” only God versus those who “fear” also Christ; Those who seek only “God’s” will versus those who also seek Christ’s will (II. 4); Those who delight in only “God” versus those who delight also in Christ (II. 5); Those who “depend” only on God versus those who depend also on Christ. In Henry’s third division, the antithesis was no less pronounced: Believing in God only versus believing also in Christ Who is One with God; Believing in God only versus believing also in the one God has sent; Honouring God only versus honouring God by believing in Christ; Accepting God’s word through Moses and the prophets only versus accepting God’s Word also in Christ; Believing in sin only versus believing also that Christ is Mediator of forgiveness of sin.

A final example of homiletic influence on Wesley is John Howe (1630-1705), whom Wesley celebrated in his The Christian Library and whose teaching had been “brought to
flower” by Matthew Henry.\footnote{John Wesley, A Christian library : consisting of extracts from and abridgements of the choicest pieces of practical divinity which have been published in the English tongue by John Wesley, Vol. 28. (London : Printed by T. Cordeux for T. Blanshard, 1819-1827) [Cited 2.5.16]. Online: http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/a-christian-library/a-christian-library-volume-28/. For Henry’s influence on Howe, see Hughes Oliphant Old, The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Vol. 5: Moderatism, Pietism, and Awakening (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 25.} In Howe’s A Discourse What We Are to Do, after Strict Enquiry Whether or No We Truly Love God,\footnote{John Howe, A discourse what we are to do, after strict enquiry whether or no we truly love God By the late Reverend Mr. John How, Minister of the Gospel. (Third ed. London: S. Keimer, for J. Lawrence at the Angel in the Poultry; and N. Cliff and D. Jackson, at the Bible and Three Crowns in Cheapside, 1714) 9.} he designed the first division of the sermon antithetically. The exordium posed the question: “Are we lovers of God, or are we not?” Division I. then argues: A saint loves God versus a devil does not; Claiming to love God versus never committing an act of love to God; Claiming to love God versus loving the world; Claiming to love God versus not keeping God’s commandments; Claiming to love God versus not valuing God; Claiming to love God versus unconcern for God’s presence. Howe claimed that all of the above assertions are “absurdly spoken,” for each must be true if one loves God. I.3 ends with “[I]f there be not Love…there is Aversion, and that’s Hatred: And what, is Hatred to be called Love?”

A confirmation that these antithetical patterns were widespread in published sermons for more than a generation prior to Wesley’s ministry was supplied in a late seventeenth-century formal preaching manual by the French Protestant Jean Claude. In his Essay on the Composition of a Sermon (1688), Jean Claude summarized the conventional elements of Established Church sermons in the long eighteenth century.\footnote{Jean Claude, Essay on the Composition of a Sermon in Two Volumes (1779) ed. Robert Robinson. (Cambridge: printed by Francis Hodson: sold by J. Buckland, London; and T. Fletcher Cambridge, 1778). According to Rolph Lessenich, Claude’s assessment of Anglican homiletic practice was highly accurate, therefore our confident discussion here regarding Wesley’s awareness of the homiletic role of antithesis. Lessenich, Elements, 28. It should be noted that other earlier preaching manuals of which Wesley was undoubtedly aware do not emphasize antithetical rhetoric as much as does Claude, for example, William Perkins’ Arte of Prophecying (1592), though its “influence and vogue were enormous” in the seventeenth, and into the eighteenth, century. W. Fraser Mitchel, English Pulpit Oratory, 99.} Significantly, Claude offered
ample advice on the use of antithetical patterns: “Remark the Divers Characters of a Vice, Which is Forbidden, or of a Virtue, which is Commanded.” Claude further recommended:

Consider Consequences[:] Thus, when you explain the doctrine of God’s mercy, it is expedient (at least sometimes) to remark the good and lawful uses….You may also observe the false and pernicious consequences….In general, then, this way of good and bad consequences ought to be used, when there is reason to fear some may infer bad consequences; and when they seem to flow from the text itself; for in this case they ought to be prevented and refuted, and contrary consequences opposed against them.5

Even Claude’s recommendation of comparison eventually serves as antithesis:

Compare Words and Actions with Similar Words and Actions[:]…You may then make an edifying comparison between Moses and Jesus Christ: both did and taught; but there was a great difference between the teaching of the one and that of the other. One taught justice, the other mercy—one abased, the other exalted—one terrified, the other comforted. There was also a great difference between the deeds of the one and those of the other. Most of the miracles of Moses were miracles of destruction….But the miracles of Jesus Christ were always miracles of benevolence.

Compare the Different Parts of the Text Together[:]….You may oppose and compare these two subjects in the text [of Eph. 2], dead in sin, and rich in mercy, as being two extremes, extreme misery, and extreme mercy, one in us, and the other in God.6

Several of Claude’s rhetorical strategies use the words “contrast” and “different,” as does this heading: “Remark the Differences of Words and Actions on Different Occasions,” and a paragraph titled: “Contrast Words and Actions”7 The Essay offered many other such antithetical techniques, and Lessenich’s assertion that it was a compendium of conventional eighteenth-century Anglican homiletic practice at least confirms the general use of antithesis as a sermonic figure of speech in Wesley’s era, continuing in the stream of Renaissance

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94 Jean Claude, Essay 29. Robinson’s comment then connected this homiletic technique to the classical rhetorical concepts of “propria and differentia.”
95 Claude, Essay, 156-157.
96 Claude, Essay, 174, 265.
rhetoric. It is comparable to *syncrises*, a figure that “looks always for a comparator, choosing always to rank one subject directly or indirectly against another.”

Finally, Wesley himself emphasized the need to properly convey figures of speech in sermonic delivery, including antithesis. In his abridgment of Michel Le Faucher’s *Directions Concerning Pronunciation and Gesture*, Wesley mentioned at least three figures of speech which require intentionality in tone and volume: “In a climax the voice must gradually be raised to answer every step of the figures. In an aposiopesis the voice, which was raised to introduce it, must be lowered considerably. In an antithesis the points are to be distinguished, and the former to be pronounced with a stronger tone than the first; but in an anadiplosis the word repeated is pronounced the second time louder and stronger than the first.”

In the least this points to Wesley’s positive opinion of well-placed sermonic figures of speech, and at most to his expectation that early Methodist preachers use rhetorical devices well in both word and delivery. It also makes more intriguing this thesis’ analysis of Wesley’s immense reliance on antithesis in *SOSO I-IV* as his chief figure of speech.

**Method**

A method toward the discovery and description of *SOSO I-IV* as primarily a homiletic endeavour with antithetical emphasis begins, of necessity, with a close examination of Wesley’s 1746 *Preface* in general and the key terms “formalism” and “antinomianism” within the sixth paragraph in particular. The definition of formalism as discussed here is the “undue insistence on the outward observances of religion or the prescriptions of a moral code, with a corresponding neglect of the inner spirit or significance which the ‘forms’ were designed to safeguard.”

For Wesley, its influence was both personal and institutional: “For

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many years… I was but ‘almost a Christian,’” and “mere outside religion”\textsuperscript{102} Antinomianism may be understood as “…primarily…the belief that the justified believer is no longer bound by the moral law” and “can also imply…indifference…to the use of the means of grace.”\textsuperscript{103} “In a word,” it is “spiritual conceit and moral laxity.”\textsuperscript{104}

Following a renewed focus on Wesley’s 1746 \textit{Preface}, the sermon texts themselves must be analysed for their antithetical dynamics. The text examined here (as cited in footnote 2) is the fifth edition of \textit{SOSO I-IV} (1796-99), the final edition reflective of Wesley’s own editorial hand.\textsuperscript{105} The analysis and conclusions of this thesis, therefore, are based on Wesley’s own version of the \textit{SOSO I-IV} sermon texts. This is especially necessary since the claims of the thesis concern Wesley’s personal rhetorical choices and style. Editions beyond Wesley’s lifetime reflect the Wesley editions of \textit{SOSO} in varying degrees and would provide less analytical confidence in the present endeavour.

As earlier acknowledged, Wesley’s sermons are neoclassical in form and function, and so would be most accurately explored by respecting their \textit{dispositio} movements. To that end, Chapter Three will evaluate the presence of antithesis in Wesley’s sermonic introductions, encompassing the basic \textit{exordium/partitio(n)} movement. Chapter Four will examine antithesis in the \textit{probatio/refutatio(n)} argumentative sections. Chapter Five completes the

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{The Almost Christian}, I: 13; \textit{Preface}, ¶6, I: 5.


\textsuperscript{104} Heitzenrater, \textit{People Called Methodists}, 269.

\textsuperscript{105} The choice of the 1796-1799 fifth edition of \textit{SOSO} is strategic. A comparison of Wesley’s earlier editions of \textit{SOSO} with this one reveals a textual consistency necessary for the analytical aims of this thesis. In Wesley’s lifetime, he alone edited the \textit{Sermons}. This fifth edition still represents his editorial hand and comes prior to the appearance of Jackson’s first edited edition. The publisher makes no claim to any editorial alterations, so it is presented as an unedited version of \textit{SOSO I-IV} which retains Wesley’s own authorial rhetorical and grammatical features. Those features are the focus of this thesis’ examination and claims.
textual analysis with focus on the peroratio(n), or Wesley’s homiletic conclusions. As is necessary, in each chapter other stylistic features will be described for their relevance to Wesley’s overall rhetoric, or to the antithetical constructions specifically. Finally, Chapter Six supplies conclusions about Wesley’s antithetical homiletic, and offers recommendations for further research on Wesley as an early modern British homilist.

Conclusion

The rhetorical function and form of Wesley’s Sermons on Several Occasions I-IV deserves a close textual analysis, one method among several in a current renewed interest in the early modern British sermon. Regarding function, SOSO was a formulaic title for printed sermon series aimed at a popular readership. The general popularity of the printed sermon in this ‘golden age’ of English preaching, as well as Wesley’s recognized leadership in the burgeoning Evangelical Revival, points to his intention of a broader reading audience than most recent Wesley scholars suggest. According to Wesley’s own 1746 Preface description of SOSO’s purpose, it was designed to “distinguish” antinomianism and formalism from Scriptural Christianity. Regarding form, even a cursory examination of the printed Sermons evinces that Wesley represented the conventional Anglican homilist who constructs his sermons in the neoclassical dispositio. It is highly likely that John Wesley, given the Anglican culture of manuscript sermon preparation and delivery practiced by his predecessors and contemporaries, initially produced versions of the early revival sermons of SOSO I-IV in written form. Wesley’s only options for delivery were to then read his sermons, to use the manuscript as notes, to deliver them memoriter, or to leave behind the carefully-studied manuscript and preach extemporaneously. Regardless of his method of delivery, it is plausible that manuscripts of Wesley’s early revival sermons existed which could be revised for print, and which eventually appear in the SOSO I-IV collection as accurate representations of his delivered sermons. Even of these, his most well-known
sermons, there are varying estimations of their rhetorical value. The present thesis will highlight the *Sermons'* skilfully-constructed neoclassical *dispositio* movements, and especially their prevalent use of antithesis. A brief overview of Wesley’s contemporaries reveals that antithesis was in common use, a fact also reflected in Jean Claude’s description of eighteenth-century neoclassical preaching and in an abridgment of *Directions Concerning Pronunciation and Gesture* that Wesley supplied to his preachers in the connexion. This thesis is the first effort to examine Wesley’s sermonic introductions, arguments, and conclusions to verify, describe and explain the centrality of *SOSO*’s antithetical themes as a corrective against imbalanced doctrine. By doing so, it hopes to add the heuristic value of Wesley’s antithetical homiletic to ongoing enquiries of both the early modern sermon and Wesley studies.
CHAPTER TWO

“TO DISTINGUISH THIS WAY OF GOD FROM ALL THOSE WHICH ARE THE INVENTIONS OF MEN”: A REAPPRAISAL OF THE 1746 PREFACE TO SOSO I-IV

John Wesley’s Preface to the 1746 publication of SOSO I yields key insights regarding his antithetical design for the series and its undergirding homiletic style. The Preface’s most direct description of Wesley’s homiletic approach appears in paragraphs 5-10, which collectively account for nearly three-quarters of Wesley’s Preface material, a proportion which confirms its significance. His phraseology in these paragraphs progresses logically from a general to a specific description of his antithetical homiletic purposes for the SOSO project. Wesley prioritizes three interconnected antithetical themes, each of which was related to their opposite: Essential via salutis doctrine versus non-essential doctrine, Scriptural teaching versus the unscriptural “inventions” of formalism and antinomianism, and religious affections versus unholy affections. Additionally, though it was not directly mentioned but assumed, is the significant fact of Wesley’s use of the neoclassical dispositio form which facilitates the Sermons themselves.

Via Salutis Doctrine versus Non-essential Doctrine

At the beginning of the Preface, Wesley notes that the sermons were selected for their focus on doctrinal essentials: “I am not conscious there is any point of doctrinal which I regularly preach, in passing or at the centre of the sermon that is not offered here to every Christian reader.”¹ He then particularizes these essentials as “the way to heaven,” or via salutis.²

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¹ Preface (¶1), I: 3.
² Preface (¶5), I: 5.
Gunter helpfully summarizes the priorities Wesley places on the via salutis: “The willingness to submit to discipline to attain spiritual vitality: the importance of an experiential knowledge of salvation; the conviction that the pursuit of holiness in its highest earthly form was indispensable; and the knowledge that all of these together, without the exception of any one, was the correct path. Throughout his life, these remained significant “signposts” along Wesley’s via salutis.” Wesley emphasized (with uncharacteristic flourish) that SOSO’s sermonic scope was limited to the via salutis. Therefore, this sermonic “collection” (¶1), that is, Wesley’s original three SOSO volumes, will include sermons which reflect essential via salutis doctrines and will not contain sermons addressing themes secondary to “the way to heaven.” In one sense, this distinction was rooted in classic Anglican soteriological prioritization: “The issue of salvation was at the centre for the early Anglicans….Hooker’s axis [in Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity] is a soteriological one….Through the Scriptures God has provided all that is needed for the salvation of believers. This is God’s purpose, and God’s purpose is the Bible’s purpose.” The Homilies clarify salvation by faith, and SOSO reflects this normative classical Anglican soteriological emphasis. In another sense, Wesley’s SOSO preoccupation with the via salutis accurately reflects his evangelical mission.

He reminds his reader in On The New Birth: “Without descending into curious, critical

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4 Collins provides proper distinction between the via salutis and the ordo salutis, the former encompassing Wesley’s “general counsels” and the latter representing his “particular soteriological advice.” Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers, The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013), xx. It is within this overarching via salutis that the more specific ordo salutis, always significant within Christian theology, becomes paramount to Wesley’s understanding of justification and sanctification. Oden summarizes: “[Wesley] was the grateful inheritor of the well-known order of salvation in ancient Christian teaching. This order can be seen implicitly in the Council of Nicea and in the consensus-bearing texts of Cyril of Jerusalem, John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin. Among Anglican divines, it is prominent in Thomas Cranmer, John Jewel, and John Pearson.” Thomas Oden, John Wesley’s Teachings, Volume 2: Christ and Salvation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 24.
5 Stephen W. Gunter, Scott J. Jones, Ted A. Campbell, Rebecca L. Miles, and Randy L. Maddox, eds. Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 31, 34.
6 Church of England, Certain sermons or homilies appointed to be read in churches at the time of Queen Elizabeth of famous memory (London: SPCK, 1899).
inquiries, we can give a plain Scriptural account of the nature of the new birth. This will satisfy every reasonable man who desires only the salvation of his soul.”

His evangelical impetus partly determined what was “essential.” Therefore, according to evangelical theological commitments, Wesley chooses the via salutis as the organizing dynamic of the Soso series. The Sermons progress through the via salutis, unfolding in a logical (though not strictly chronological) manner.

Another dimension of the via salutis versus non-via salutis antithesis regards Wesley’s homiletic use of the Anglican hermeneutic of Scripture, tradition, reason, and the added dimension of Christian experience. In his effort to contrast via salutis essentials with nonsoteriological doctrine, Wesley extends the use of the threefold Anglican hermeneutical method beyond a theological tool and employs it for homiletic effect. In other words, Scripture, tradition, and reason, plus Christian experience are not only authoritative sources, but create rhetorical impressions. All four hermeneutical sources are frequently used for Wesley’s immediate homiletic needs. Representative examples of the homiletic uses of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience provide a helpful description of the general dynamic.

Regarding Scripture, Wesley’s countless uses of unquoted, uncited Scriptural language represents more than his “natural speech” as a Scripturally knowledgeable Anglican priest. He was well aware that Scripture also achieves credibility, creates tone, and evokes attitudes and feelings within the auditor/reader. One use of Scripture was to evoke personal spiritual confidence, as Wesley did in this excerpt from The Witness of Our Own Spirit:

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7 L. On The New Birth (II. 3), IV: 25.
8 Further discussion of Anglican theological method, as specifically revealed in the 1746 Preface, appears later in this chapter.
9 BE, I:69. Outler comments: “Many of his sentences are deft fusions of biblical language and his own.” However, neither Outler nor most other Wesleyan scholars explore the rhetorical effect of this major sermonic characteristic.
We may now therefore readily conceive how he that hath this testimony in himself ‘rejoiceth evermore.’ “My soul” (he may say) “doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour.” …I rejoice because his Spirit beareth witness to my spirit that I am bought with the blood of the Lamb, and that believing in him, “I am a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.”…I rejoice because he gives me to feel in myself “the mind that was in Christ.”

This monologue was composed of both Scriptural quotations and unquoted Scriptural language which Wesley places on the lips of his reader as an affirmation, evoking a sense of personal spiritual confidence. The effect was enhanced by the repetition of “I rejoice…”

Wesley’s appeal to tradition was likewise at times used homiletically:

It has been observed before that the opposite doctrine, that ‘there is no sin in believers’, is quite new to the church of Christ; that it was never heard of for seventeen hundred years, never till it was discovered by Count Zinzendorf. I do not remember to have seen the least intimation of it either in any ancient or modern writer, unless perhaps in some of the wild, ranting antinomians….But whatever doctrine is new must be wrong; for the old religion is the only true one; and no doctrine can be right unless it is the very same ‘which was from the beginning’.  

In this paragraph Wesley uses tradition to berate doctrinal novelty. The reader senses the irrationality and instability of such a “new” doctrine when compared with “true” doctrine which spans the past “seventeen hundred years.” In Salvation by Faith the theme of tradition rallies revival: “Nothing but [the Protestant doctrinal tradition of salvation by faith] can give a check to the immorality which hath overspread the land as a flood.”

Reason was used homiletically in The Righteousness of Faith as the theme of the two sermonic divisions, folly and wisdom: “the folly of trusting in ‘the righteousness which is of the law,’ and “the wisdom of submitting to ‘the righteousness of God which is by faith’.”

The wisdom theme set this sermon’s structure. It was not evidence supporting a point, it was
the point; “wisdom” and “folly” were persuasive by virtue of Wesley’s obvious promotion of one and warning against the other.

Considerable discussion surrounds the role of Christian experience within the framework of the Anglican hermeneutic. In classical Anglicanism it was not overtly included among Scripture, reason and tradition as an interpretive source for theological reflection. The question, then, concerns its evolving role. Marcella Huson’s review of Anglican theological method helpfully describes this evolutionary dynamic:

The century just prior to Wesley also saw the rise of the scientific method and the idea of observable scientific fact, or experience. These developments all played a role in shaping the Anglican theological method of the seventeenth century…. Many of the early British scientists, including Newton and Boyle, were Anglican Christians who saw no conflict between truth revealed in Scripture and truth observed in nature, or faith and science.

In his discussion on the growing influence of the scientific method during the seventeenth century, McAdoo repeatedly pointed out that Anglicans were at great pains to develop a theological method that allowed the integration of this new knowledge. This emphasis, ‘helped to create in Anglican theological method a marked disposition to natural theology which has remained one of its most resistant components.’ It can be demonstrated from many sources already quoted that experience, particularly observation and experimentation, played a key role in supporting theological assertions among later seventeenth-century Anglican theologians.\(^\text{14}\)

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\(^{14}\) Marcella Huson, “A Critical Comparison of Theological Method in John Wesley with that of Vladimir Lossky” (Ph.D. diss., Nazarene Theological College/University of Manchester, 2011). Huson’s quote of McAdoo is from Henry R. McAdoo, The Spirit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological Method in the Seventeenth Century (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1965), 285. The centrality of the three classical Anglican elements for theological method was rooted in Hooker’s Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, and widely practiced among Wesley’s contemporaries. See Richard Hooker, and Stephen Arthur, ed. Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: A Critical Edition with Modern Spelling (3 Vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Helpful discussion of each element in Wesley’s theological method appears in Oden, Scriptural Christianity, Ch. 2 and in Thorsen, Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Many consider the role of experience an addition by Wesley while others submit that Hooker and early Anglicanism acknowledged the experiential dynamic. For the assertion that experience was legitimately integrated with the other three in Anglican theologizing prior to Wesley, see Donald A.D. Thorson, “Experimental Method in the Practical Theology of John Wesley,” Wesleyan Theological Journal 24 (1989), 117-141, and Gunter on Cranmer’s liturgical innovations toward experiential worship (Gunter, et. al. eds. Quadrilateral, 20). Pasquarello points to earlier ecclesial acknowledgements of experience as a hermeneutical necessity, namely that the early church considers this fact uniquely displayed in the act of preaching (Pasquarello, A Preaching Life, 2-25). Perhaps the strongest indication that Wesley consciously placed experience within the Anglican hermeneutic structure was that he regularly lists it with two or three of the other elements. Gunter summarizes Wesley’s conventional use of the four-fold method: “[T]he basic fourfold commitment of the Quadrilateral was less distinctive of Wesley than characteristic of him, as one nurtured in his Anglican context” (Gunter, Quadrilateral, 131). Thomas Noble argues that the fourfold
However, Christian experience may be used, not only as an objective for verifying faith, but in the homilist’s shaping of tone or appeal. In *The Scripture Way of Salvation* Wesley creates a tone of expectancy regarding entire sanctification:

> There is then no danger. You can be no worse, if you are no better for that expectation. For were you to be disappointed of your hope, still you would lose nothing. But you shall not be disappointed of your hope: it will come, and it will not tarry. Look for it then every day, every hour, every moment. Why not this hour, this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith.

The concluding “practical application” divisions featured in most of the sermons strategically focuses on homiletic uses of Christian experience. The homiletic effects are a spiritual self-awareness, an invitational tone, and a hope for personal transformation.

In their rhetorical uses, Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience exceed the hermeneutic interpretive function and assume a rhetorically persuasive function; they set tone, warn, inspire, remind, appeal, and perform other homiletic tasks. In this regard, Wesley thoroughly demonstrates an Anglican understanding of homiletic theology. One dimension of this thesis’ analysis is to identify instances when these fourfold sources function homiletically rather than hermeneutically, to appropriately categorize those uses, and to

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15 Donald Thorsen summarizes experiential objectivity: “Although such [religious] experiences require the personal participation of the knower in acts of understanding, they do not make that understanding subjective. All acts of understanding require some degree of personal involvement in the knowing process…Knowledge derived from a personal, experiential encounter with God is objective in the sense of establishing contact with a real, albeit hidden, reality….Experiential knowledge functioned decisively for Wesley in the entire range of religious understanding.” Donald A.D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 216-17.

16 XLVI. *The Scripture Way of Salvation* (III. 18), III: 239.

17 Maddox summarizes: “[A]s Wesley understood and practiced theology, the defining task of ‘real’ theologians was neither developing an elaborate System of Christian truth-claims nor defending these claims….The primary (or first-order) literary forms of ‘real’ theological activity for Wesley were not Systematic Theologies or Apologetics; they were carefully crafted liturgies, catechisms, hymns, sermons, and the like.” Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 17.
evaluate their homiletic contribution. The larger point is that Wesley uses the four sources homiletically to place via salutis essentials and non-essentials in antithesis. They reinforce those soteriological priorities which Wesley intends for SOSO to promote. The sermons in late-IV and the remainder of the SOSO series are not, by comparison, centrally soteriological. Scripture, tradition, reason, and Christian experience remain as central homiletic features, however.

**Scriptural Teaching versus Unscriptural “Inventions”**

There is general scholarly agreement that a via salutis pattern exists in the “Standard Sermons.”\(^{18}\) However, as briefly stated in Chapter One, there has been little recognition of the formalism-antinomianism pattern.\(^ {19}\) The present thesis assigns it foundational importance in Wesley’s organizational scheme for the Sermons. It is the broadest pattern among the three antithetical themes, allowing Wesley to join the theological via salutis emphasis with practical formalism-antinomianism correctives. Wesley discusses this pattern in the Preface: “I have accordingly set down in the following sermons what I find in the Bible concerning the way to heaven, with a view to distinguish this way of God from all those which are the inventions of men.”\(^ {20}\) He next specifically identifies the representative extremes of these “inventions”: formalism and antinomianism. In antithesis with his endeavour to “describe the true, Scriptural, experimental religion, so as to omit nothing which is a real part thereof, and to add nothing thereunto which is not,” formalism and

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\(^{19}\) Burwash most clearly promotes this pattern. Burwash, *Doctrinal Standards*, XVIII-XIX and XXIII-XXVIII.

\(^{20}\) Preface (¶6), I: 5.
antinomianism consist of these very aberrations. Moralism, the expression of formalism the
Sermons most frequently contest, tends to recommend additions of human effort to the
doctrine of salvation by faith:

Moralism [grew] out of the teachings of Bishop George Bull, Herbert
Thorndike, and Henry Hammond. These men were convinced that the
imputed righteousness of Christ as the formal cause of justification, which
was the classical Anglican teaching, was insufficient to safeguard the
requirements for goodness and righteousness on our part. They therefore
asserted that some measure of personal righteousness is required for final
justification. Good works are required, and God in his mercy, accepts as
adequate the imperfect righteousness of our good deeds. This is the works-
righteousness tradition that Wesley recognized as a fruitless moralism.21

The Sermons also respond to formalistic nominalism, ceremonialism, sacramentalism, and
legalism.22

Antinomianism, especially in the forms of quietism and sectarianism, advocates
omissions of human effort. Wesley succinctly states this in the 1744 Doctrinal Minutes:

Q. What is Antinomianism? A. The doctrine which makes void the law through
faith. Q. What are the main pillars hereof? A. (1) That Christ abolished the moral
law. (2) That, therefore, Christians are not obliged to observe it. (3) That one
branch of Christian liberty is liberty from obeying the commandments of God. (4)
That it is bondage to do a thing because it is commanded, or forbear it because it is
forbidden. (5) That a believer is not obliged to use the ordinances of God, or to do
good works. (6) That a preacher ought not to exhort to good works; not unbelievers,
because it is hurtful; not believers, because it is needless.23

SOSO addresses other particular manifestations of antinomianism such as enthusiasm,
perfectionism, and mysticism.

Again, in the Preface, Wesley states that “it is more especially” his “desire” that the
Sermons achieve a positive correction of these very formalistic and antinomian teachings in

21 Gunter, Limits, 247.
22 Despite the accusations of his detractors, it was clear from Wesley’s position in VI The Way to the Kingdom
(I. 4-6) and throughout XII The Means of Grace that Wesley was not a sacramentalist in the sense of linking
sacramental theology to the doctrine of justification.
regards to the essential doctrine of salvation. Rival teachers of these imbalances directly oppose Wesley’s preaching and threaten to reverse the fruitful gains of the revival. This thesis maintains that the practical impact of persistent theological “inventions” on the believing community provides more shape to *SOSO I-IV* than any other single factor. These sermons were produced within the turbulence of the revival, including the Fetter Lane Society crisis (Fall, 1739-July, 1740) and other communal tensions inspired by both formalistic and antinomian teachings. Such threats represent a spiritual exigency that Wesley the priest, evangelist, and movement leader must address. Noticeably, in the *Sermons* Wesley rarely directly mentioned “formalism” or “antinomianism” as theological systems. His central concern was their manifest misguidance of individual and congregational faith.

**Holy Affections versus Unholy Affections**

The Preface also reveals a third antithetical theme: holy affections (or “heart-religion”) versus unholy affections. Here, Wesley defines heart-religion as the synergy of two of the signal Christian virtues, faith and love: “…the religion of the heart, the faith which worketh by love.” The practical outcomes of formalism and antinomianism undermine this spirituality. Formalism, “mere outside religion,…has almost driven heart-religion out of the world” by equating works with faith. Antinomianism “make[s] void the law through faith,”

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24 Preface (¶6), I: 5.
25 For a review of the Fetter Lane controversy, consult Gunter, Limits, Ch. 7.
26 One exception was On Sin in Believers (¶5-7 and III. 9) I: 182,186; II: 363-364, 369. Wesley’s more usual practice was to correct a moralistic or antinomian teaching without directly labelling it as such. For example, in The Law Established through Faith, Discourse 1 the entire sermon corrects antinomianism but mentions the word only twice (II.7; III. 4), III: 43, 45.
27 Ironically, the Methodist movement itself was accused of antinomianism (Gunter, Limits, 9-34). It was likely that, in some measure, Wesley hoped the published *Sermons* would discount such allegations.
28 Wesley uses “unholy affections” in XXII Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third, and elsewhere. For the purposes of this thesis, it is the most helpful term to contrast with “holy affections.”
disconnecting works from faith. Both disable the dynamic of heart-religion: faith expressed by love. According to this statement, preserving heart-religion was integral to Wesley’s special “desire,” or core purpose, for the SOSO series. In a sense, the spiritual fruit of salvation was the goal to which each of the Sermons inevitably appeals.

Gregory Clapper's thorough analysis of “religious affections” recognizes their role in Wesley’s sermons, and noticeably in the via salutis agenda particular to SOSO I-IV:

Wesley’s theological discourse, especially as found in the sermons, is so laden with affection-terms that it is possible to describe the entire pattern of salvation in terms of the process of gaining and deepening the pattern of affections which manifest the saving presence of God in human beings. Prevenient grace draws us to attend to the things of God. Thus fixed on His self-giving love and our unworthiness, we feel sorrow for our sins and fear of judgment which leads to repentance. Seeing that we are justified by grace through faith brings forth trust in Christ, and we become filled with love, joy, peace and therefore happiness, while anger and hatred wither. These affections (which are the assurance of faith) become well-springs of action, disposing us to love our neighbor in concrete ways, and to attend to the means of grace which strengthen these affections. After a life of love, we become glorified pure love, fully recovering the image of God lost through Adam and made reachable again through Christ.29

In terms of our present guidance from the 1746 Preface, for Wesley holy affections were manifestations and confirmations that one was pursuing “the way to heaven.…the true, the Scriptural, experimental religion” of the “way of salvation.”30 The antithesis of holy and unholy affections was present even in his final Preface comments, where the evangelist advocated for an irenic understanding between himself and the reader which would display the supreme spiritual fruit of love, in contrast to impatience and anger. Wesley then closes the Preface by referencing the (uncited) text of Romans 15:13: “May he prepare us for the

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29 Gregory S. Clapper, John Wesley on Religious Affections: His views on Experience and Emotion and their Role in the Christian Life and Theology (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1989), 123-24. The broad terms “spiritual affections” and “unholy affections” (XXII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third (I. 2, II: 84; I: 357) are more helpful to this thesis’ discussion than Clapper’s term “religious affections” because spirituality is at the crux of Wesley antithetical language. At times Clapper distinguishes between “religious affections” and “virtues,” a nuance this thesis will recognize when necessary, but for the present purposes will frequently use synonymously.

30 Preface, I: 5.
knowledge of all truth, by filling our hearts with all his love, and with all joy and peace in believing”. Far from an incidental benediction, this final sentence of the Preface represents the essence of Wesley’s homiletic goals. Love, joy, peace, and faith (“in believing”) are among the major terms of Wesley’s sermonic language and argument within SOSO. They are the premier positive holy affections of the authentic, experiential (“experimental”) Christianity he intends for SOSO to illumine. Wesley reinforces these affections with associate terms, like the remainder of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), and “hope,” “assurance,” “confidence,” “power,” “holiness,” “purity,” “rejoicing,” “happiness,” etc. His sermonic language consistently contrasts these with negative, unholy counterparts: “hate,” “fear,” “guilt,” “shame,” “doubt,” “confusion,” “anger,” and so on. Positive spiritual affections measure authentic spirituality, and unholy affections measure incomplete, or the lack of, spirituality.

At times Wesley overtly structures the main sermonic headings according to positive spiritual affections, for example in XVIII there is faith, hope and love. In other sermons they directly support the main points, as in IX’s fear or love; verses fear, nor love; versus fear and love; verses love. Then false peace verses no peace; verses genuine peace.31 These are predominately descriptive uses of the spiritual affections and obviously are antithetical, as well. However, spiritual affections do not serve a merely descriptive role. Their frequency, placement, and intensity clearly signal Wesley often intends them for persuasive ends. In The Circumcision of the Heart, humility, faith, hope, and love are first used to describe heart-circumcision, then used persuasively for self-evaluation.32 In Scriptural Christianity the movement was similar: the fruit of the Spirit as descriptive of past and future authentic Christianity, and the fruit as self-evaluative of present authentic Christianity.33 Each of these

31 XVIII. The Marks of the New Birth, II: 16-30; IX. The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption, I: 122-139.
32 XVII. The Circumcision of the Heart, II: 3-16; I: 266-279.
33 IV. Scriptural Christianity, I: 45-94.
self-evaluations suggests that the reader’s unspiritual affections may be antithetical to the sermon’s description of spiritual affections.

The most pervasive use of spiritual affections was not at the divisional (main point) or supportive (sub-point) levels discussed above, but their prevalent use at the paragraph and sentence levels. Just as Wesley’s constant use of Scripture accustoms his reader to inseparably link topic and Scripture, his abundant use of spiritual fruit versus unholy affections faced the reader with antitheses which call for self-evaluation. Wesley even requested such spiritual self-evaluation in syllogistic form! More characteristic was his use of rhetorical questions regarding spiritual fruit, such as the final section of Sermon IV. His hearers are challenged with synonymous rhetorical questions: “are you ‘filled with the Holy Ghost’? With all those ‘fruits of the Spirit’….Is your heart whole with God? Full of love?” Since the doctrinal imbalances of formalism/moralism and antinomianism impede the work of the Spirit and produce unholy affections, Wesley’s use of this antithesis in the Sermons provides some of his most effective homiletic material. For example, again in Sermon X Wesley contrasts the positive spiritual fruits of the witness of the Spirit with those produced by enthusiastic antinomian presumption. On the sentence level, the appeal to spiritual affections was most rhetorically effective in Wesley’s concluding appeals. Their presence throughout a sermon was at times preparatory to their central role in its latter divisions. The methodology of this thesis accounts for that reality, and proposes a principal focus on the spiritual and unholy affections in those divisions.

Therefore, according to the 1746 Preface, there are three antithetical themes within Sermons on Several Occasions I-IV. These, plus the unmentioned dispositio form of each sermon, provide a methodological framework for this thesis. One antithetical theme

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34 X. The Witness of the Spirit, I (I. 11), I: 146.
35 IV. Scriptural Christianity (IV. 6), I: 60.
36 X. The Witness of the Spirit, I (II. 6), I: 149.
distinguishes via salutis doctrinal essentials from other less soteriological sermons, and effectively separates the mission of SOSO I-IV (the original forty-four sermons) from the latter volumes of the series (the 1771 and 1788 editions). The via salutis serves as the fundamental organizational scheme of I-IV, and this emphasis was traditionally Anglican. Wesley’s Anglican hermeneutic was also used homiletically to emphasize these doctrinal essentials. Theme two more specifically contrasted Scriptural via salutis doctrine with the unscriptural, extreme “inventions” of formalism and antinomianism. In the revival atmosphere, these doctrinal imbalances bred confusion among believers, both corporately and individually. SOSO I-IV displays the formalism-antinomianism antithetical pattern both between sermons (inter-sermonically) and within individual sermons (intra-sermonically). In the former instance, sermons throughout I-IV alternately address formalistic or antinomian imbalances (except The Great Assize and On The Death of George Whitefield, two specifically occasional sermons). Intra-sermonically, the antithetical pattern may be disclosed (or implied) in the introduction, thematically, divisionally, or in the final application of the sermon. Third, Wesley emphasizes spirituality and its affections (“heart religion”) versus unholy characteristics. These holy affections are abundantly present throughout each via salutis sermon, from divisional to sentence levels, and perform both descriptive and persuasive ends. They are the most frequent and immediately rhetorical of all antithetical patterns. This thesis proposes that analysis of this third antithetical theme most reveals the intra-sermonic dynamic that make Wesley’s SOSO sermons, when read carefully, effective on the emotive level. They achieve an antithetical structure on the sermonic level parallel to the larger antithetical patterns supplied by themes one and two. Finally, the Preface itself did not overtly announce the dispositio within Wesley’s Anglican, neoclassical sermonic form, but this dynamic is key to discerning his antithetical patterns. Through the

37 Preface (¶6) I: 5.
progression of neoclassical *dispositio* (*exordium, partitio, probatio, refutatio, and peroratio*)

Wesley “distinguishes” the *via salutis* from formalistic and antinomian aberrations.\(^{38}\)

Collectively, these four elements make an antithetical homiletic the dominant feature of *Sermons on Several Occasions*. *SOSO* I-IV varies topically and was composed over a two-decade period, but the series as a whole maintains Wesley’s initial editorial aim. That purpose was to publish revival sermons proclaiming the Scriptural “way of salvation” in antithesis to the unscriptural “inventions” of formalism and antinomianism. In doing so, Wesley intends to “guard” and to “warn” his readers with preached word through the published page.

**The 1746 Preface and *SOSO*’s Homiletic Features**

In the second paragraph of the 1746 *Preface*, Wesley briefly addresses *SOSO*’s homiletic features and continues to make intermittent comments about them throughout the *Preface*. Wesley anticipates that “curious readers” may approach the *SOSO* series with misplaced stylistic expectations. Consumers of the written sermon who still prefer “elaborate, elegant or oratorical dress” (for example, “Donne’s, Andrewes’s, and Taylor’s baroque pulpit oratory”\(^ {39}\)) should “spare themselves the labour of seeking for what they will not find.”\(^ {40}\) He informs his *Preface* reader that he has adopted the plain style preaching by now quite conventional in segments of the Established church (previously noted in Chapter One). His passing description notes for the *SOSO* reader three general stylistic commitments, both in his oral preaching and in the series: linguistic clarity, argument simplicity, and Anglican theological method.

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\(^{38}\) *Preface* (¶6), I: 5.


\(^{40}\) *Preface* (¶2), I: 3.
He first proposes to use language accessible to an “ad populum” audience, and offers advance apology for inadvertently using any uncommon terms. However, Wesley did assume a “Christian reader,” and perhaps even a readership whose education level acquaints them with some Latin phrases and enough familiarity with literary culture to recognize his quotations and allusions. Even in these references he maintains clarity, and Outler notes that “they were almost always translated lest a reader be embarrassed or miss the point.”

Significantly, he purposely links linguistic clarity to his itinerant ministry and oral preaching style. His itinerancy “would not permit” the editorial investment necessary to alter sermons composed for oral delivery into a literarily elaborate sermonic style. Moreover, his very intention for the *SOSO* series (“But in truth I at present designed nothing less) envisions that it remains representative of his oral preaching (“for I now write (as I generally speak) *ad populum*”). Next, Wesley indicates argument simplicity: “Therefore of set purpose I abstain from all nice and philosophical speculations, from all perplexed and intricate reasonings, and as far as possible from even the show of learning.”

With this principle, Wesley again positions his homiletic priorities within the mainstream Anglican communicative emphasis on audience comprehension. He avoids lengthy logical formulation, but intermittently engages his Enlightenment reader by punctuating some sermonic arguments with a syllogism. He also desires to shape sermonic argument with the “sentiments” of his own heart and the “chain” of his own thoughts rather than engaging in literary debate.

Finally, Wesley summarily describes his interpretive (that is, hermeneutical) process. Wesley then relates

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41 *Preface* (¶1), I: 3.
43 *Preface* (¶3), I: 3-4.
44 “Intelligibility both to the educated and the uneducated was a declared aim of neoclassic art” (Lessenich, *Elements*, 17).
45 *Preface* (¶4), I: 4; As is examined more thoroughly in subsequent chapters, Wesley’s frequent use of hypothetical dialogue serves a crucial stylistic role in his *refutatio* arguments, but such dialogue was conducted as if between himself and an objector and was not synonymous with formal debate.
that his *Sermons* submit to the foundational Anglican theological sources of Scripture, reason, and tradition, plus experience:

I…search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, ‘comparing spiritual things with spiritual’ [Scripture]. I meditate thereon, with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable [reason]. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God [experience], and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak [tradition]. And what I thus learn, that I teach.⁴⁶

Such a method immediately identifies Wesley’s unremarkable conformity to theological method within his tradition, and to its influence in homiletic construction.⁴⁷ Wesley’s *Preface* description of this method signals its prevalence and emphasis throughout the *SOSO* series. Here, he speaks of this theological method in personal terms (“I then search….I meditate….I consult…I thus learn.”⁴⁸ A wider reading of the *Sermons*, however, confirms that he advocates this interpretive process for all readers of Scripture.⁴⁹ He refers to it constantly within the *Sermons*. A subtle but significant rhetorical strategy is discernable in Wesley’s succinct statement: “And what I thus learn, that I teach.” This suggests that the hermeneutic method so critical to confirming Wesley’s personal understanding of Scriptural doctrine may overtly disclose itself in his teaching/preaching, as well. Inferentially, this brief

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⁴⁷ Discussion in this section acknowledges Wesley’s normative Anglican homiletic practice. Vickers recommends expanding quite generally the notion of Wesley’s ecclesial allegiance to the Church of England. See Jason E. Vickers, *Wesley: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clark, 2009). Conformity does not diminish Wesley’s originality. This thesis will identify and evaluate examples of Wesley’s sermonic creativity, but such artistic adaptations only nuance the neoclassical, Anglican homiletic identity he maintains.


⁴⁹ Throughout the *Sermons* Wesley recommends the four-fold interpretive method to his reader, in variable combinations. On *Sin in Believers* overtly uses all four sources (II), but in the next sermon Wesley mentions three: “…they have laid it down as a general rule, in spite of Scripture, reason, and experience” (XIV. *The Repentance of Believers*, I. 2), I: 197.
mention of hermeneutical guidelines may serve Wesley’s followers and critics alike. It potentially serves as pedagogical advice to readers regarding proper interpretive standards. In the least, alerted readers now recognize the author’s exercise of these sources. Wesley’s tracing of this fourfold process may also function to reassure critics of his symmetry with the Established Church. Regardless of the reasons for Wesley’s openness about theological method, these sources considerably contour his sermonic content and flow of argument, as the forthcoming third though sixth chapters will demonstrate.

Conclusion

To summarize, in the Preface Wesley intentionally addresses some of SOSO’s homiletic characteristics. He did not supply in descriptive detail the range of homiletic features the sermons display, but did acknowledge his awareness of their importance by allotting a portion of the Preface to general comments about them. In early Wesley advocates a correct homiletic reading of SOSO. He recommends that the reader respect the author’s intentional stylistic priorities: linguistic clarity (consistent with his intended audience and his itinerant preaching style), argument simplicity (“plain truth,”) and theological method (Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience). ⁵⁰

⁵⁰Preface, I: 3-5.
CHAPTER THREE

“THIS VASTLY IMPORTANT SUBJECT”: JOHN WESLEY’S ANTITHETICAL INTRODUCTIONS IN SOSO I-IV

The sacred orator who composed an *exordium* not only tried to awaken and rouse the hearers’ interest, but also strove to prepare their minds for the following explication of the text from its context.¹

John Wesley began the majority of his *Sermons* with the same gravity sensed in the introductory words of *Justification by Faith*: “In order to do justice, as far as in me lies, to this vastly important subject, to save those that seek the truth in sincerity from ‘vain jangling’ and ‘strife of words,’ to clear the confusedness of thought into which so many have already been led thereby, and to give them the true and just conceptions…I shall endeavour to show.”² Perilous untruths compel Wesley to preach on essential *via salutis* doctrines. As a neoclassical homilist, he was ever aware that his sermon introductions must convey the urgent importance of the sermonic theme.

In Wesley’s homiletic tradition, no conscientious Anglican divine would forego introductory material.³ Lessenich (in the quotation above) clarifies two of those expectations: the *exordium* makes the listener attentive/receptive and the *explication* properly develops a sermonic theme from the chosen Scripture text. Elsewhere he added that the *propositio(n)* supplies a thesis statement and the *partitio(n)* briefly lists the sermonic divisions.⁴ The majority of listeners and readers of neoclassical sermons anticipated these four elements, or at least two of them, which adequately achieved the introductory task.

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² V. *Justification by Faith*, I: 95.
³ “Eighteenth-century critics [and practitioners] took the *exordium* to be a natural part of speech, attributing to it the same official role as the classical masters, Cicero and Quintilian” (Lessenich, *Elements*, p. 49)
This chapter analyses the introductory material (exordia) of SOSO I-IV to confirm the presence, consistency, and quality of these four sermonic movements. In doing so, it examines categories helpful to an assessment: sermon text, significance descriptors, ethos perceptions, propositios and partitios, punctuation emphases, and the combined effect of these rhetorical elements on the central via salutis theme of the Sermons. Finally, it offers The Lord Our Righteousness as an exemplar exordium that demonstrates these homiletic dynamics. The aim of this probe remains focused on this thesis’ claim that Wesley’s primary homiletic characteristic in I-IV was a pattern of rhetorical antitheses which differentiated vital via salutis doctrine from non-essential doctrine.\(^5\) If such patterns operate pervasively in this introductory material, the claim of the thesis is already verified to some degree. The forthcoming examination of these elements, representing Wesley’s compliance with standard eighteenth-century Anglican sermonic introductions, is crucial for constructing a proper assessment of SOSO I-IV.

Chapter Two noted Wesley’s 1746 Preface commitment to limiting the (original) SOSO I-III collection to via salutis sermonic themes.\(^6\) (This thesis includes examination of volume IV, which continues to exhibit a general via salutis emphasis.) The claim of the current chapter is threefold: a) that Wesley deliberately identified a via salutis theme early in each sermon, in the exordium, and did so by contrasting (that is, presenting antithetically) the

\(^5\) In this thesis, the term “via salutis” is used in its broadest sense, as was Wesley’s practice.

\(^6\) “His first forty-four homilies (later designated Standard Sermons) focus explicitly upon the basic themes of salvation.” Thomas C. Oden, John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 277. SOSO V-VIII did not address via salutis themes with the revivalistic zeal of I-IV, but Collins’ observation that Wesley was ever-expressive of soteriology is wellfounded: “Accordingly, few, if any scholars can doubt that soteriology is the dominant theme in what has been traditionally referred to as the Fifty-Three Standard Sermons. What has not been fully appreciated, however, is that the doctrine of salvation remains a principle theme in the remainder of the sermon corpus. Granted, in many of his later sermons, Wesley branches out and explores such topics as the doctrine of God, the church, eschatology, to name a few...Nevertheless even here soteriology is still the structure on which may of these considerations are hung....What for him was and remained of first rank [was] the redemption of souls.” Kenneth J. Collins, A Faithful Witness: John Wesley’s Homiletical Theology (Wilmore, KY: Wesley Heritage Press, 1993), 125-126.
Sermon Text and Antithetical Pattern

As stated in Chapter Two, the primary influence on neoclassical sermonic theme and content is the chosen text. Current sermon studies attend to the significance of the biblical text, as did James Caudle in his analysis of anti-Jacobite sermons during Wesley’s early life and ministry.\(^7\) The sermon texts of *SOSO I-IV* are rather narrow in scope, to serve Wesley’s specified purpose for the series.\(^8\) A summary of the textual clusters reveals this agenda. Thirteen are from Matthew 5-7 in the Sermon on the Mount *Discourses* (plus one other Matthew text); eleven from Romans; four from 2 Corinthians; three each from Mark, Luke, John, Acts, and Ephesians; and one each from Genesis, Numbers, 2 Kings, Psalms, Jeremiah, Malachi, Philippians, 1 Peter, and 1 John. The combined twenty-four Sermon on the Mount and Romans texts, then, constitute almost half of the series, and the nine texts from Mark, Luke, and John more than one-sixth of the collection. Therefore, two-thirds of *SOSO I-IV* texts are from the gospels and Romans. Clearly, these texts provide Jesus’ and Paul’s teaching on the role of the moral law in the believer’s life and aptly fit Wesley’s purpose to

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\(^8\) Heitzenrater’s oft-quoted observation that many of the original *SOSO I-IV* texts do not appear in Wesley’s sermon records, and so must have been exclusively written for *SOSO*’s publication, is problematic. See Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (second ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 2013). First, Sugden and Smith locate within the sermon records, in the least, distillates of almost all of the *SOSO I-IV* texts. This indicates that Wesley was, at minimum, preaching nearly all, if not all, of the *SOSO I-III* sermons in the early revival period. The initial sentences of Wesley’s 1746 *Preface* points to this fact: “The following sermons contain the substance of what I have been preaching for between eight and nine years last past. During that time I have frequently spoken in public on every subject in the ensuing collection” (¶1). Secondly, Wesley himself suggested that the original *SOSO I-III* does not represent the orb of his preaching, but is the “substance” of his *via salutis* proclamation from the early revival.
“distinguish” true Christianity from the doctrinal errors of formalism/moralism (moral religiosities above spirituality) and antinomianism (so-called spirituality above the gospel’s moral implications).  

Explicit, Implicit, and Artificial Antithetical Texts

Beyond this doctrinal connection, in the majority of these texts, there is a consistent rhetorical characteristic: an explicit or implicit antithetical construction in the sermonic introduction. In an explicit construction, the text clearly indicates two alternatives, two opposing principles, or two contrastive images. If the brevity of the one or two verse sermon text did not reveal its explicit antithesis, Wesley sometimes quoted more verses in the exordium to fully show the antithetical dynamic. However, a textual antithesis may be only implied, which Wesley must further develop in the partitio or sermon design. Then, there are texts which are not inherently antithetical, but from them Wesley artificially constructed antithetical main “heads,” or points. Finally, there are non-antithetical texts which Wesley did not develop antithetically, though other antithetical patterns appear in the sermon. The degree and consistency with which this introductory antithetical characteristic exists evidences Wesley’s conscious editorial selection of those texts which most clearly “distinguish” Scriptural doctrine from unscriptural doctrinal error. Each of the above patterns requires closer examination.

Explicit Antithetical Sermon Texts in SOSO I-IV

More than half of the sermon texts for SOSO I-IV are explicitly antithetical. Since in the 1746 Preface Wesley stated that his primary doctrinal goal was to “distinguish” via salutis

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9 Preface (¶6), I: 5.
“scriptural…religion” from the two unscriptural extremes of formalism and antinomianism, it is reasonable that he carefully chose sermon texts which rhetorically facilitate this aim. This provides Wesley with a textual, not simply an artistic, means to design the divisions and/or material of the sermons around two opposing alternatives, principles, or images. Most frequently, Wesley positioned these opposites as representative of Scriptural Christianity versus erroneous doctrine. This section summarizes his uses of these explicitly antithetical texts to determine their contribution to the homiletic composition of \textit{SOSO I-IV}.

As mentioned above, three interrelated categories distinguish the nature of these explicitly antithetical sermon texts: alternatives, principles, and images. Some of the texts Wesley chose indicate an option between two alternatives. More frequently, however, Wesley’s selected texts focus on the opposing principles behind these dual alternatives. Finally, some of his sermon texts present an antithesis of two or more images. The difference in these uses is sometimes subtle and requires consideration of a single verse’s context, but each type of use supplies Wesley with a text-based means to construct an antithetical sermonic pattern. In sermons V and VI, the texts, Romans 4:5 and 10:5-8 respectively, directly discuss works-righteousness and faith-righteousness as antithetical alternatives and usefully served Wesley’s aim to distinguish moralism from faith.\footnote{10} Whether the conscience operates from “godly sincerity” or “fleshly wisdom” is the alternative presented in 1 Corinthians 1:12, the text of sermon XII.\footnote{11} Wesley’s design of sermon LIV was based on Matthew 18:15-17 which concedes that the offender “may hear” the concern of the offended and reconcile, or “not hear” and refuse reconciliation.\footnote{12} Most of the explicit antithetical \textit{SOSO I-IV} sermon texts, however, presented a reality of two opposing principles and their resulting influences. In \textit{The First Fruits of the Spirit I}, the selected Romans 8:1 text contrasts

\footnote{10 V. Justification by Faith, I: 95; VI. The Righteousness of Faith, I: 80.} \footnote{11 XII. The Witness of Our Own Spirit, I: 168.} \footnote{12 LIV. The Cure of Evil Speaking, IV: 96.}
the principle of living “after the flesh” versus that of living “after the Spirit.” The text (Romans 8:15) and title of sermon IX reveal the former influence (spirit of bondage) and new experience (Spirit of adoption) within the believer. A similarly clear antithesis is apparent in the Romans 2:29 text of The Circumcision of the Heart: “Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter.” The list of other examples includes: abolishing versus establishing the law, to forbid versus not to forbid, sorrow over Jesus’ absence versus joy in his presence, active stewardship versus ended stewardship. All thirteen of the Discourses texts are antithetical, five of which present multiple principle-based contrasts: destroy law versus fulfil law, break commandments versus keep commandments, Pharisee-righteousness versus kingdom-righteousness; prideful versus humble almsgiving, vain prayer versus childlike prayer; visible fast versus secret fast; serving God versus serving mammon; and entering versus not entering the kingdom. The Discourses also provide examples of the third category of explicit antithetical images: savour versus loss of savour which is both an image, that is, salt, and a principle) earthly treasure versus heavenly treasure, single eye and light versus evil eye and darkness; mote versus beam, pearls versus swine, bread versus stone, fish versus serpent; broad gate versus narrow gate; sheep versus wolves, good fruit versus bad fruit; rock versus sand. The other sermon contributing an antithetical image was Charles Wesley’s awake versus asleep metaphor of the spiritual state. (Although John Wesley included this sermon of his brother’s because it was an Oxford sermon, it also

14 IX. The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption, I: 122.
15 XVII. The Circumcision of the Heart, II: 3.
16 XXXIV. The Law Established through Faith, I, III: 34; and appears in XXXV. The Law Established through Faith, II, III: 48; XXXVII. A Caution against Bigotry, III: 75; LI. The Wilderness State, IV: 40; XLV. The Good Steward, III: 209.
17 XXIV. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse V, II: 124; XXV. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse VI, II: 146; I: 423-447; XXVI. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse VII, II: 167; XXVIII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse IX, II: 210; XXXII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse XIII, III: 255.
18 XXIII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse IV, II: 104; XXVII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse VIII, II: 179; XXIX. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse X, II.
19 III. ‘Awake, Thou that Sleepest,’ I: 30.
represents a highly antithetical structure.) These examples of antithetical alternatives, principles and images directly presented in the sermon text demonstrate the ease with which Wesley homiletically extended the text’s duality. In fact, the rhetorical effect begins simply with the reading of the text, prior to the sermon proper. The antithetical dynamic emerging from the text prepares the auditor/reader, subtly or overtly, for continued antithesis as the sermon progresses.

_Implicit Antithetical Sermon Texts in SOSO I-IV_

Wesley selected other sermon texts which are antithetical but only imply dual opposites rather than directly revealing both of the alternatives, principles, or images. In sermon I “works” is not mentioned in the Ephesians 2:8 sermon text, but is in the following v. 9: “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” The entirety of the sermon addresses the alternative of grace and faith versus works-righteousness, though in v. 8 this is only implied. “Born of God” in the John 3:8 text of sermon XVIII implies the opposite reality, that some are not born of God. The 1 John 3:9 text of sermon XIX states: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin,” but Wesley also treats its implication that whomever does commit sin must not be born of God. Notice that these spiritual “birth” texts contain both an implied antithetical image (unborn spiritually versus born spiritually), and extends to a spiritual principle (the practice of sinning versus the practice of not sinning). The _Discourses_ offer further examples of texts with implied antitheses, via principles or imagery. Principles are: spiritual wealth from poverty of spirit versus (implied) a prideful spirit, and joy from mourning versus (implied) joy from celebration; meekness is powerful versus (implied) force is powerful, hunger satisfies versus (implied) contentment satisfies, mercy/love toward others
is self-fulfilling versus (implied) loving self is fulfilling; inward purity versus (implied) outward purity, victory through peace-making versus through (implied) conflict; reward through persecution versus through (implied) popularity. Disc. 4 presents the image-based contrast of light versus (implied) darkness.²³

Artificial Antithetical Sermon Texts in SOSO I-IV

Chapter One noted the position of some Wesley scholars and biographers that SOSO represents a markedly non-rhetorical style, a conclusion supported by the Sermons’ absence of rhetorical flourish and sparing use of figures of speech. The claim of this thesis is that, when observed in its neoclassical dispositio, the SOSO series was far more rhetorically shaped than initial glances might suggest. Its primary rhetorical characteristic was antithesis, which the current chapter observes in the SOSO I-IV exordia. Within a portion of these introductions, however, and within the antithetical framework, Wesley employed another significant rhetorical strategy: artificially shaping the sermon text into an antithetical design.

In The Way to the Kingdom, for example, Wesley’s stated text (Mark 1:15) is not inherently antithetical, but in the exordium he immediately added a secondary text which is: “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (outward ceremonialism versus inward spirituality).²⁴ This enabled him to artificially, antithetically, orient the primary sermon text. In The Almost Christian (a theme not original with Wesley), the Acts 26:29 text does not include “altogether” as a counterpart to the term “almost,” but adding “altogether” supplies the needed alternative for a antithetical sermon design.²⁵ The Philippians 3:12 text for Christian Perfection is not inherently antithetical, but in the exordium Wesley noted that “perfect” in v. 12 seemingly contrasts

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²³ XX. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse I, II: 44; XXI. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse II, II: 63; Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse III, II: 83; XXIII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse IV, II: 104.

²⁴ VII. The Way to the Kingdom, I: 95.

with (that is, contradicts) “perfect” in v. 15 shortly following.\(^{26}\) It was this seeming antithesis which allowed him to proceed with a homiletic antithetical pattern. Similarly, the 2 Corinthians 10:4 text of the next sermon in the series is not antithetical, but Wesley oriented it antithetically by distinguishing the mystics’ interpretation of the verse and its proper interpretation.\(^{27}\) On the Use of Money provides a final example of reorienting a non-antithetical text into an antithetical sermon.\(^{28}\) The sermon text is Luke 16:9: “I say unto you, Make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into the everlasting habitations.” Wesley proceeded, not to closely follow the text, but to address the antitheses between the wrong uses versus the right uses of money.

The significant proportion of explicit, implicit, and artificial contrastive texts in SOSO IIV suggests that Wesley selected sermon texts, in part, for their compatibility with his homiletic preference for antithetical patterns. Like preachers throughout the centuries, Wesley primarily chose sermon texts as an authoritative source and guide for “Scriptural explication,” of specific sermonic themes.\(^{29}\) The above examples demonstrate, however, that many of Wesley’s SOSO I-IV texts contribute directly the secondary role of sermonic construction, specifically in antithetical patterns. The remaining twenty SOSO I-IV texts which display no antithetical language confirm that Wesley did not use a single homiletic strategy, but a plurality of sermonic components and dispositio movements to create antithetical patterns. The sum of these elements points to the pervasive nature of Wesley’s antithetical approach for the series.

\(^{26}\) XXXIX. Christian Perfection, III: 108.
\(^{27}\) XL. On Wandering Thoughts, III: 135.
\(^{28}\) LV. On The Use of Money, IV: 113.
\(^{29}\) Lessenich, Elements, 43.
Significance Descriptors: Scope, Universality, Permanence, Immediacy, Humility, Sublimity, Gravity

Previous discussion described the *exordium* tasks of gaining listener attention and interest. This includes establishing the significance of the sermon text and/or sermonic theme, commonly recognized among *exordium* strategies in eighteenth-century Anglican sermonizing. A survey of Wesley’s published sermons confirms his preference for this approach, and the current section provides an initial analysis of this homiletic dynamic in the introductory material of *SOSO I-IV*.

Wesley partially achieved the *exordium* requirement of gaining listener attention and interest with the use of what may be termed significance descriptors. Careful analysis identifies seven separate significance descriptors used most frequently in the *Sermons*: scope, and/or universality, and/or permanence, and/or immediacy and/or humility and/or sublimity and/or gravity. The present section demonstrates the widespread presence of significance descriptors, the patterns by which it operates, and analyses how the descriptors cumulatively achieve the *exordium* task of gaining listener attention and interest.

The Oxford sermon cluster (sermons I-IV) provides instances in which significance descriptors are plentiful, only minimal, or altogether unused. The introductory language of sermon I points out that: “All [scope] the blessings which God hath bestowed upon man [universality] are of his mere grace….” and “continues [permanence] to us, at this day” [immediacy]. The human “heart is altogether corrupt and abominable [humility]” and

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30 As summarized by Hustler, “The weight of the sermon is in the middle section, but the sermon needs an *exordium* in order to engage the congregation with the text.” Jonathan Hustler, *Making the Words Acceptable: The Shape of the Sermon in Christian History* (London: Epworth, 2009), 116.
32 These elements appear conventional among Wesley’s contemporaries, though varying emphases on each was allowable.
33 I. *Salvation by Faith*, I: 8-20; *The Almost Christian*, I: 20-29; III. *‘Awake, Thou that Sleepest’*, I: 30-44; IV. *Scriptural Christianity*, I: 45-94.
lacking its original “glorious righteousness” [sublimity], so “it concerns us [immediacy]
carefully [gravity] to inquire” about divine grace, because salvation is “the greatest of all
blessings [sublimity]” (emphases mine).34 In sermon II, Wesley commented on the chosen
text: “And many [scope] there are who go thus far: ever since the Christian religion was in
the world [permanence] there have been many [scope] in every age [permanence] and nation
[universality] who were almost persuaded to become Christians” and so “it highly imports
[gravity] us [immediacy] to consider…” the two sermonic divisions. Charles
Wesley’s *Awake, Thou that Sleepest* (sermon III) exemplified the *exordium* truncated to a
*partitio*.35 (Sermon VII, *The Way to the Kingdom*, reflects that John Wesley infrequently also
streamlined the developed *exordium* and provided only a *partitio* of the sermonic divisions.)
The *exordium* of sermon IV displayed the language of significance when the introduction
asserts that “all Christians [scope] in all ages [permanence]” were given the fruits of the
Spirit, which will “remain throughout the ages [permanence]” and so are “useful to consider”
[immediacy] under three sermonic divisions.36 The Oxford sermon cluster, then,
demonstrated the use of several significance indicators, of none, and of only a few. The
variation of few or several indicators is more accurately described by recognizing patterns of
significance language use.

**Significance Descriptor Patterns**

When several significance descriptors appear, they typically interrelate in one of three
patterns: through interaction, interchange, or integration. Interaction occurs when a majority
of the seven separate concepts appear within the introductory paragraphs (for example, the

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34 In this section, each quotation appears within the opening paragraphs of the identified sermon. To facilitate
the flow of quoted material, citation of the particular paragraph is provided only when strict clarity is required.
35 That this sermon presents the *partitio* without constructing preparatory material was a suitable introductory
design. Obviously, brief *partitios* rarely exhibited significance language.
36 In this sermon’s *exordium*, scope and permanence achieve a theological aim as much as a rhetorical one. The
doctrine of the fruit of the Spirit must be addressed in this sermon because it should manifest in “all Christians
in all ages.”
sermon *exordium* includes scope, universality, permanence, immediacy, and gravity, but not sublimity or humility). Interchange is the appearance of two predominant indicators in an alternating manner (for example, universality, gravity, universality, gravity). Integration occurs with the simultaneous use of two indicators (for example, scope and universality or immediacy and gravity).

A few exemplary *exordia* demonstrate how these several descriptors form a cumulative effect which establishes the importance of the sermonic theme and heightens the listener’s/reader’s early engagement with Wesley’s sermons. For example, an interaction of the majority of the significance concepts is visible in the Oxford sermons I and II mentioned above, as well as the *exordia* of *Disc. 12*, which displays interaction among all of the significance concepts except humility and sublimity.37

It is scarce possible to express or conceive [gravity] what multitudes [scope] of souls run on to destruction….Such is the folly and madness of mankind [universality] that thousands [scope] of men still run on in the way to hell only because it is a broad way. They walk in it themselves because others do: because so many [scope] perish they will add to the number. Such is the amazing influence [gravity] of example over the weak, miserable children of men! It continually [permanence and immediacy] peoples the regions of death, and drowns numberless [scope] souls in everlasting perdition.

To warn mankind [universality] of this, to guard as many as possible [scope] against this spreading contagion, God has commanded his watchmen to cry aloud, to show the people the danger they are in. For this end he has sent his servants, the prophets, in their succeeding generations [permanence], to point out… and to exhort…. A caution this of the utmost importance [gravity].

A number of Wesley’s *exordia* established interaction among three or four of the significance concepts, such as scope, immediacy and gravity in sermon XV:

How many [scope] circumstances concur to raise the awfulness of the present solemnity [immediacy and gravity]! The general concourse of people of every age, sex, rank and condition of life, willingly or unwillingly gathered together, not only from the neighbouring but from distant parts…[scope]. The occasion likewise of this assembly adds not a little to the solemnity of it.[gravity]

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37 XXXI. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse XII*, I: 256.
But as awful as this solemnity is, one far more awful is at hand” [gravity]. It may not therefore be improper, or unsuitable to the design of the present assembly, to consider.” [immediacy]³⁸

Another use of these significance concepts is the interchange of primarily two. This alternating pattern reinforces each of the two concepts and elevates listener/reader awareness of the sermon’s importance. Disc. 7 yields such a pattern:

It has been the endeavour of Satan from the beginning of the world to put asunder what God hath joined together;…And herein he has met with no small success [gravity].

Many [scope] in all ages have been strictly attached to …the performance of outward duties, but in the meantime wholly regardless of inward righteousness [gravity]….And many [scope] have run into the opposite extreme…Faith and works have so often been set at variance with each other [gravity].

And many [scope] who had a zeal for God….Others…have run as much too far the contrary way [gravity]….

But of all [scope] the means of grace there is scarce any concerning which men have run into greater extremes [gravity] than…fasting. How some have exalted this …! And others utterly disregarded it….Whereas it is certain the truth lies between them both” [gravity].³⁹

The exordia of Disc. 1 and Disc. 7 likewise use the scope-gravity interchange. In Disc. 1, The Son of God is “the Lord …and Creator [sublimity] of all [universality]….whose kingdom is from everlasting to everlasting [permanence], and ruleth [sublimity] over all [universality]…who can enforce all his laws” [universality] and “can punish with everlasting destruction” [gravity]. He is “the eternal Wisdom of the Father [sublimity]…who knows…every creature [universality] which God hath made.” And, climactically: “All his

³⁹ XXVI. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Seventh, II: 167-169, ¶1-4.
words are true and right concerning all things, and shall stand fast for ever and ever” [sublimity, permanence].⁴⁰

Already in the above examples are brief instances of two concepts used in a phrase or sentence simultaneously, that is, a pattern of integration. This is more clearly evidenced in an exordium sentence which emphasizes both gravity and scope, like: “In order to explain and enforce these deep words, so little regarded because so little understood, [gravity and scope]…”⁴¹ It also appears in Sermon LV with the integration of scope and gravity, then immediacy and gravity.⁴² Wesley’s emphasis is that the scope, gravity, and immediacy of money’s importance makes it a worthy sermon topic. Integration is also implicit in On Satan’s Devices, which suggests both scope and gravity in an early sentence: Satan’s devices are “numberless as the stars of heaven or the sand upon the sea-shore.”⁴³ That Satan’s devices are “numberless” is not a mere quantitative fact, but points to their qualitative threat to believers. There is significance in addressing Satan’s devices since the scope of such evil intent confirms their gravity.

The use of a single significance descriptor or of the interaction, interchange, and integration of dual or multiple descriptors assists in accomplishing the exordium aims of listener attention and interest. Significance language creates a simple yet serious tone and serves the expectation of the neoclassical audience that the sermon addresses the practical priorities of Christian living. Such descriptors also assist with Wesley’s preference for antithetical patterns. Significance descriptors tend to enhance his antithesis of via salutis essentials from non-soteriological (though still Scriptural) teaching. In the least, the significance component combines with other exordium elements to engage the listener.

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⁴⁰ XX. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount Discourse I, II: 45; See also XXX. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse XI, II: 245 and XL. On Wandering Thoughts, III: 135-136.
⁴² LV. On The Use of Money, IV: 113-114, ¶2.
⁴³ XLI. On Satan’s Devices, III: 147.
homiletically. The following sections continue to describe the complementary roles of these other elements in Wesley’s sermon introductions.

**Ethos Perceptions in the Exordia of SSO I-IV: Wesley as Trustworthy Teacher, Spiritual Guide, and Doctrinal Defender**

Peter McCullough notes that John Donne’s tone in the funeral sermon of Sir William Cokayne avoids “any casting of himself as intellectually superior,” and Wesley consistently did the same throughout **SSO**. Yet he did not avoid the rhetorical requirement of establishing high credibility. Previous discussion noted the role of *ethos* in his homiletic introductions, specifically in reassuring the listeners of Wesley’s goodwill regarding their spiritual welfare and his desire to sermonically clarify and correct doctrine. At times, an antithetical pattern emerges from his description of doctrinal error verses his own correct Scriptural position. Otherwise, his *ethos* appeals serve to lend credibility. The present section more specifically identifies the usage of these appeals and examines their influence in the clarifying function of the *exordium*.

More than four of every five *exordia* in **SSO I-IV** display discernible *ethos* appeals which differ in emphases. These numerous *ethos* appeals formulate three primary but interrelated perceptions which reassure the listener of Wesley’s genuine goodwill and theological integrity. Key words such as “understand,” “know,” and “clear” created the perception of Wesley as a trustworthy Scriptural teacher. Other *ethos* material suggests to

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45 Forty-five of the fifty-three sermons.

46 Wesley’s neoclassical rhetorical training would have required him to establish a credible *ethos* with his audience in the *exordium*. In his case, however, was the added matter of negative popular perceptions of his ministry. Particularly early in the revival, Wesley was a controversial figure whose *ethos* is widely debatable. He was often the subject of misunderstanding, misinformation and disinformation: “During John Wesley’s active years of ministry, hundreds of publications appeared criticizing his teaching and opposing the spread of Methodism…The body of literature reflects a wide range of complaints” (Gunter, *Limits*, 9). It is possible that many of Wesley’s *exordia* reflected his efforts to establish a reputation *ethos* as much as, or more so, than a rhetorical *ethos*.
the listener that Wesley was a pastoral spiritual guide deeply concerned for the salvation and growth of all under his care, conveyed in the terms “darkness,” “hurt,” and the image of being prevented from “running the race which was set before them.” Still other introductory *ethos* appeals point to him as an apologist, a doctrinal defender of the *via salutis* against the persistent imbalances of formalism, antinomianism, and their derivations (moralism, enthusiasm, perfectionism). However, he defends doctrine with the broader aim of Christian unity. The frequently-used terms shaping this perception are “extreme,” “guard,” and “defend.” The frequency and use of these three perceptions is confirmed in an overview of their *exordia* appearances.

A number of *SOSO I-IV* introductions suggest that Wesley was a trustworthy teacher by whose knowledge and instruction the listener is taught proper doctrine. This was not uncommon among Anglican parish preaching, as in a Daniel Renaud sermon which suggests that “parishioners should follow the lead of the minister of the parish because he, as a…‘Teacher of Righteousness’, would lead them into truth.” 47 In sermon LIII Wesley went to considerable lengths to convince the listener that others have inadequately addressed the subject. He concluded the *exordium* with: “I know of no writer in the English tongue who has described the nature of self-denial in plain and intelligible terms such as lie level with common understandings, and applied it to those little particulars which daily occur in common life. A discourse of this kind is wanted still.” 48 This introduction was exemplary of Wesley’s common argument that his Scriptural instruction was comparatively more clear and helpful. 49 Wesley rarely devoted as much of the *exordium* (as demonstrated above) to

48 This in no way suggests that Wesley tended toward strict self-expression. His entire legacy bespeaks of generous borrowing, paraphrasing, quotation, and reprinting of the broad spectrum of Christian teaching. He offered his own teaching as superior only as an affirmation that not all doctrinal teaching is Scripturally accurate or equally helpful.
emphasizing his teaching role, but the frequency of this emphasis was consistent. He was concerned that his listener gained proper doctrinal understanding: “And yet how little hath this important question been understood! What confused notions have many had concerning it!”50 “Perhaps there are few subjects within the whole compass of religion so little understood as this….In order to explain and enforce these deep words, so little regarded because so little understood, I shall endeavour to show” and “[n]othing can be more intricate, complex, and hard to be understood, than religion as it has often been described….Yet how easy to be understood, how plain and simple a thing, is the genuine religion of Jesus Christ. Provided only that we take it in its native form, just as it is described in the oracles of God.”51 Similarly, he speaks of understanding in LIV: “Yea, how few are there that so much as understand it? What is ‘evil-speaking’?”52 Wesley lamented in The Use of Money that this “subject” was “not sufficiently considered” by believers, “neither do they understand how to employ it to the greatest advantage,” thus they need to be “instructed” by his sermon.53 The opening paragraph of Sermon XVIII asks a series of rhetorical questions, the answers of which Wesley taught in the sermon. It ends with an emphasis on the need to “know” these answers.54 Wesley regularly considered his role as that of a Scriptural clarifier who properly discerns doctrinal differences.55 Though it was never stated openly in any sermon, Wesley’s teacher ethos was indirectly reinforced by the “Late fellow of Lincoln College” designation on almost every published sermon title page.

50 V. Justification by Faith, I: 95.
52 LIV. The Cure of Evil Speaking, IV: 96.
53 LV. The Use of Money, IV: 113-114.
54 XVIII. The Marks of the New Birth, II: 16.
55 XIX. The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God, II: 32. The word “confusion” is a key term for Wesley both in the teaching ethos and the pastoral ethos. The pastoral use tends to further emphasize (often with exclamation) the harmful personal and communal effects of the confusion and Wesley’s pastoral urgency to clarify erroneous doctrine.
A recognizably different ethos appeal within the exordia presented Wesley as a spiritual guide with pastoral concern for believers, both individual and corporate. It is not surprising that he would have exercised such care in clearly pastoral situations as the eulogy On the Death of George Whitefield, and he acknowledged to the congregation that “an elaborate exposition of the text” was “not…expected” but rather a personal portrait of “your beloved brother, friend, and pastor; yea, and father too; for how many are here whom he hath ‘begotten in the Lord!’” However, few of the SOSO I-IV sermons represent such an overt pastoral response, nevertheless Wesley’s ethos as spiritual caregiver and guide was clearly established. In most discourses this manifests in his disturbance at the emotional and spiritual harm resulting from imbalanced doctrinal teaching. His primary concern was that doctrinal error misguides them from the via salutis as well as from the more practical matters of Christian living. For example, Wesley preached on The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption because those “influenced only by slavish fear” cannot experience the love of God. It was a “state of mind” from which he desired their liberation. He requested the empathy of those listeners, who recall their liberating experience, toward those who are “still afar off”.

Another state of mind he carefully explained was “the heaviness (Wesley’s emphasis) of soul which is…common, even among believers,” intervening pastorally to prevent a “slide out of heaviness to darkness.” In XIV he addressed the misconception among Christians that “repentance and faith are necessary only at the beginning of our Christian course” and insisted they are “requisite after we have ‘believed the gospel’; yea, and in every subsequent


57 John Wesley, A Sermon On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, Preached at the Chapel in Tottenham-Court-Road, and at the Tabernacle near Moorfields, on Sunday, November 18, 1770. By John Wesley, M.A. Late Fellow of Lincoln-College, Oxon, and Chaplain to the Right Honorable the Countess Dowager of Buchan (Boston: John Fleming, 1771), 1.

58 IX. The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption, I: 123 (¶3).

59 LII. On Heaviness through Manifold Temptations (¶1), IV: 61.
stage of our Christian course, or we cannot ‘run the race which is set before us.’”

Pastorally he reminded his listeners that the practice of repentance was “necessary, in order to our continuance in growth and grace.” Clearly Wesley presented himself as a spiritual guide intent on assisting the believer “in growth and grace.” Some of Wesley’s spiritual guidance specifically aimed at peace-making between believers. In *The Lord Our Righteousness*, he lamented religious “contests” wherein believers waste time, “hurt one another’s spirits,” offend the weak, legitimate disregard for religion, and leave mature believers weeping. He admitted that not all doctrinal differences are reconcilable, but “understanding one another” was of high value, and this discourse intended that very goal.

Similarly, *Catholic Spirit* displayed Wesley’s pastoral ethos toward Christian love: “Though we can’t think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt we may”. The sermon then proceeded to provide Jehu as an example of Wesley’s confidence that Christian affection was achievable. As these descriptions of “hurt” and “weeping” suggested, Wesley was pastorally sensitive to believers’ emotional states. He was intent that his listeners experience lasting joy, but erroneous doctrinal teaching and spiritual warfare threaten believers’ spiritual-emotional state. He expressed disappointment that proponents of perfectionism stirred such spiritual and emotional turmoil within many believers.

Wesley’s deep pastoral concern was also evident following a brief explanation of the title phrase *The Wilderness State*. Spiritual warfare may also be the source of such spiritual-emotional strain, intended to “destroy,” “torment,” and “to perplex and hinder them from running the race which is set before them.”

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60 XIV. *The Repentance of Believers*, I: 196-197.
61 John Wesley, *The Lord Our Righteousness: A Sermon Preached at the Chapel in West Street, Seven Dials, on Sunday, November 24, 1765*, John Wesley (London: 1766), 4 (¶1).
64 XL. *On Wandering Thoughts*, III: 135-136 (¶2).
65 LI. *On The Wilderness State*, IV: 41.
sermon introductions evidence intentionality on Wesley’s part to relate pastorally to his listeners when the sermon theme befits the ethos of a concerned spiritual guide. This perception may considerably influence listener openness and the sermon’s ability to persuade. If the sermon is motivated by genuine concern, the listener can receive it unguardedly.

A third and final category of ethos perception in the Sermons was Wesley as a doctrinal defender who was concerned both to defend Scriptural truth and to unify believers in the process. In the exordium Wesley made the listener aware of a doctrinal threat to which the sermon responds with corrective Scriptural teaching, thus Wesley was the defender of heart religion orthodoxy. In both the language and tone of several sermonic introductions he also envisioned that his corrective can reduce doctrinal divisions and restore the Christian unity he so highly prized. Therefore, Wesley desired to navigate individual believers and the competing voices of the Evangelical Revival safely through doctrinal extremes—particularly those formalistic/moralistic and antinomian in nature. He rarely explicitly identified moralism or antinomianism, rather he described their respective viewpoints and resulting negative spiritual consequences. Due to his emphasis on the contrast between these unscriptural positions and Scriptural doctrine, these introductions sometimes conveyed a mixed tone of factional tension, urgent correction, and hopeful reconciliation. Wesley unapologetically undertook the role of doctrinal defender, as evidenced in the exordium of XI where he pointed to the imbalance of both formalism and enthusiasm:

And it is the more necessary to explain and defend this truth, because there is a danger on the right hand and on the left. If we deny [the witness of the Spirit], there is a danger lest our religion degenerate into mere formality; lest, ‘having a form

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66 It is interesting that Heitzenrater overviews Wesley’s early (thus the SOSO I-IV era) doctrinal defenses antithetically: “The theological disputes in which Wesley became embroiled during the first few years of the revival were over large issues—election or universal atonement, stillness or good works, imputed righteousness or Christian perfection” (Heitzenrater, Methodists, 128.)
of godliness’ we neglect if not ‘deny, the power of it’. If we allow it, but do not understand what we allow, we are liable to run into all the wildness of enthusiasm. It is therefore needful in the highest degree to guard those who fear God, from both these dangers by a Scriptural and rational illustration and confirmation of this momentous truth.67

This exordium segment also demonstrates that, for Wesley, doctrinal defence was normally achieved by Scripturally-based doctrinal balance. This balance he often presented as the “middle” alternative, a position unfortunately disregarded or rejected by proponents of the doctrinal extremes. In The Witness of the Spirit, I he again described the extremes of enthusiasm and formalism, and argued for the (Scriptural) middle course.68 The above examples clearly reveal the dynamic of an antithetical pattern, as do most of those exordia emphasizing Wesley’s doctrinal defender ethos. The exordium of On Sin in Believers produced an antithetical pattern between the extremes of little sanctification in this life to complete sanctification in this life.69 This pattern of one doctrinal extreme as antithetical to another, each corrected by Wesley’s Scriptural “middle” course, was evidenced by a number of his exordia.70 For example, in XVI Wesley narratively recounted the disparity between moderate formalists who “abused the ordinances of God” and moderate antinomians who “despised” the means of grace.71 But the majority of exordia focused on formalism or antinomianism, rather than both. The dynamic of antithesis remains: formalism versus Scriptural teaching or antinomianism versus Scriptural teaching. Formalism/moralism is clearly the concern when Wesley warned of works-righteousness, as in exordium of The Righteousness of Faith.72 Antinomianism was the focus of The Law Established through

69 XIII. On Sin in Believers, I: 181-182.
70 For the listener/reader, this establishes a three-way antithetical emphasis; a) Scriptural use of the means is a corrective both b) for not using them and c) for overusing them. Outler observes that this position is decidedly Anglican, but that in Wesley’s own context it represents “a sort of ‘high-church’ evangelicalism—a rare combination, then and since” (BE 1:377).
72 VI. The Righteousness of Faith, I: 80-81.
Faith I and II, respectively: “Many in all ages of the church, even among those who bore the name of Christians, have contended that...‘faith...’ was designed to make void the whole law....But is the zeal of these men according to knowledge? Have they observed the [Scriptural] connection between law and faith?”73 In XXXV, Wesley’s exordium reviewed antinomian principles and reveals a “better [Scriptural] pattern.”74 Notice that Wesley’s approach in The Witness of the Spirit II was also the “rational illustration and confirmation” of Scriptural versus formalistic/antinomian teaching, an appeal to the Enlightenment sensibilities in his audience. As Nigel Aston summarizes: “Men were to use their minds in hearing the Word of God and be guided by the clergy towards a correct understanding of the scriptures.”75

Ethos in the Sermon on the Mount Discourses: Jesus as Teacher, Guide, and Defender

Interestingly, in the Sermon on the Mount Discourses introductions Wesley shifted the source of homiletic ethos from himself to Jesus. All three ethos perceptions were present; Jesus was the original and authoritative Teacher of the Sermon, the divine spiritual Guide, and the Defender of Truth. In Wesley’s extended introduction of Disc. 1 he addressed Jesus’ ethos, or character, in general: “From the character of the speaker we are well assured that he hath declared the full and perfect will of God.”76 The final part of the introduction emphasized the superiority of this sermon, Jesus’ good will motivated by “amazing love,” the sense of Christ’s authority in the sermon, and the sermon’s perfect composition. In the remainder of the Discourses’ exordia Jesus’ ethos more specifically reflected the Teacher, Guide, and Truth-giver roles. The introduction of Disc. 4 first offered a general description

73 XXXIV. The Law Established through Faith, Discourse I, III: 35-36.
74 XXXV. The Law Established through Faith, Discourse II, III: 48.
75 Nigel Aston, “Rationalism, the Enlightenment, and Sermons,” in Francis and Gibson, The British Sermon, 392.
76 XX. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First, II: 45 (¶7-10).
of Jesus’ divine image: “The Son of God himself…the ‘character, the stamp, the living impression, of [God’s] person’ who is the fountain of beauty and love, the original source of all excellency and perfection.” Then Wesley described Jesus as doctrinal Defender against antinomian (quietist) teaching: “But has our Lord been wanting on his part? Has he not sufficiently guarded us against this pleasing delusion? Has he not armed us here with armour? Yea, verily. Here he defends, in the clearest and strongest manner, the active, patient religion he had just described.” In the exordium of Disc.5 Jesus’ ethos was the misunderstood Teacher (whose instruction in this sermon’s text corrects both formalism and antinomianism). In the introduction to Disc.10 Wesley again credited Jesus “our Great Teacher.” The exordium of Disc.11 portrayed him as the spiritual Guide intent on caring for the welfare of souls. Similarly, in Disc.12 Jesus our spiritual Guide was the “wise and gracious master” who “so solemnly cautions us against” false prophets who “devour” and destroy “multitudes of souls.” Jesus ethos as the divine, authoritative Teacher returned in the final Disc.13: “Our divine Teacher, having declared the whole counsel of God with regard to the way of salvation, and observed the chief hindrance of those who desire to walk therein, now closes the whole with these weighty words; thereby, as it were, setting his seal to his prophecy, and impressing his whole authority on what he had delivered, that it might stand firm to all generations.” By describing Jesus as the source of these ethos perceptions, ethos continued its function of establishing the rhetorical credibility of the communicator. Wesley, who remained the immediate communicator, received a derived credibility as the
teacher of the Teacher’s Sermon, the spiritual guide who applied the divine Guide’s advice, and the doctrinal defender of the Truth declared by Christ.

Two summative observations emerge from the brief preceding analysis of Wesley’s three ethos perceptions within the introductory material of SOSO I-IV. First, the above ethos perceptions are conventional to eighteenth-century Anglican homiletic practice, thus Wesley made no extraordinary claims for his credibility as a preacher. Thomas Oden notes that Wesley’s sermons parallel the Anglican tradition of “tutorial homilies” in which teaching was the principle aim. This sermonic teaching emphasis was not mutually exclusive of the spiritual guide role, but tonally the latter conveys more pastoral concern about individual spiritual ruin and communal strife in the wake of erroneous teaching. Historically, the Anglican priest consciously and pastorally guarded his parish from the dangers of unorthodoxy. For Wesley, this concern manifests in his role as a spiritual-organizational leader of Methodism and the numerous doctrinal/spiritual challenges to its adherents’ disciplined practice of the holy life. Lastly, Wesley regarded Methodism as a Scriptural renewing of early church and Anglican doctrinal commitments, and therefore worthy of apologetic defence. From this perspective, Scriptural teaching on via salutis doctrine was is controversialist but rather the status quo position requiring faithful articulation.

Second, these ethos perceptions clearly influenced the dynamic of Wesley’s sermon introductions, both in content and in tone. According to neoclassical homiletic convention, Wesley selected exordia content primarily for its attentive function, but the above examples reveal that within some introductions multiple sentences served to convey an ethos perception designed to establish his credibility. Those perceptions, added to other homiletic

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83 Oden, Scriptural Christianity, 19.
dynamics, then shape an exordium tonally, and its listener senses Wesley’s ability and intent
to teach, advise, warn, comfort or unify in the opening words of the sermon.

The Antithetical Homilietic Propositio or Partitio

The proposito was the neoclassical thesis statement which commonly appeared in the final sentences of the exordium. However, the thesis statement may appear in a divisional form which lists, by Roman numeral, the upcoming main points. This alternative was the partitio, and it sometimes substitutes for the fuller proposito and perhaps for the exordium proper. The function of each of these approaches was to provide the listener with a clear preview of the sermonic material, thus clarity was the standard by which they are considered effective or ineffective.

In SOSO I-IV, thirty-six of the thesis statements are in proposito form, seven in a numerical partitio list, and only two of those partitos substitute entirely for the exordium. Though eight of the introductions exhibit no proposito or partitio (that is, no specific sermonic preview), half of these are from the Sermon on the Mount Discourses which tend to review the previous discourse and broadly preview the next few discourses. Therefore, Wesley did make an intentional rhetorical effort to clarify the upcoming sermonic material. Few indeed are those sermon introductions in which Wesley did not preview his main points to achieve absolute clarity in the mind of his listener.

The homiletic effect of these previews on the listener was more than helpfulness in organizational clarity; it supplied two other significant contributions. First, it emphasized, in general, the sermon’s thesis. This concise statement of the sermonic goal established what

84 This is Lessenich’s distinction between proposito and partitio.

85 XI. The Witness of the Spirit, II (I: 154); XIII. On Sin in Believers (I: 181); XVI. The Means of Grace (I: 232; and XXXV. The Law Established through Faith, Discourse II (III: 48).

86 Perhaps the Kinghorn edition recognizes this role when it editorially adds a final sentence to the proposito of The Use of Money: “These rules are gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.” Kenneth Cain Kinghorn. John Wesley on Christian Practice: The Standard Sermons in Modern English, Vol. III (Nashville:
Outler described as an “expository ‘contract’ between the preacher and the reader (‘I am to show’).” In this sense of increasing expectation in the listener-reader, the clear preview reinforces the interest-building function of the exordium. This dynamic was substantive in both the sermonic setting where parishioners are accustomed, as “neoclassical listeners,” to anticipating cues from the propositio and/or partitio, and substantive in the printed version of the sermon. In fact, such propositio and partio cues already rhetorically functioned as argument (propositio).

Secondly, and more specific to SOSO I-IV’s homiletic aim, the propositios may reveal the antithetical pattern of the upcoming probatio section. The propositio of Dis. 4 presents such a signal: “In order fully to explain and enforce these important words, I shall endeavour to show that Christianity is essentially a social religion, and that to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it; secondly, that to conceal this religion is impossible, as well as utterly contrary to the design of its author.” The listener-reader was aware of the antithetical probatio section to follow: social religion versus solitary religion, and revealed versus concealed religion. In sermon II the listener only hears of the almost versus altogether antithesis in the propositio. In The Righteousness of Faith, the antithesis of folly versus wisdom was revealed, not between main points, but within the second main point alone: “Secondly, the folly of trusting in ‘the righteousness…of the law’, and the wisdom of ‘submitting to that which is of faith’.” The antithesis in Disc.13 was the rock-sand image: “…first, to consider the case of him who thus builds his house upon the sand; secondly, to show the wisdom of him who builds upon a rock.” Christian Perfection pointed out antithetically: “First, in

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Abingdon, 2003), 323. This sentence does not exist in other SOSO editions and few such editorial liberties appear elsewhere in the Kinghorn edition.

87 BE, I: 97.
88 XXIII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth, II: 106.
89 II. The Almost Christian (divisions I and II), I: 20-23.
90 VI. The Righteousness of Faith, I: 81-82.
91 XXXII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth, III: 4.
what sense Christians are not [Wesley’s emphasis], and, Secondly, in what sense they are [Wesley’s emphasis], perfect.”92 These propositios/partitios either introduced or at least reinforced the antithetical patterns soon to appear in the argument section of the sermon.

**Punctuation Emphases in the Exordia: Rhetorical Questions, Italics, and Exclamations**

Punctuation was one of the means of securing attention, interest, and clarity in the neoclassical sermon text. In the absence of observing the delivery of a sermon, during which the preacher added emphases through the nonverbal cues of vocal inflection and gesture, the literary equivalents for such signals were question marks, italics, and exclamation.93 The sermon writer directed the reader to prioritize sentences indicating a question or rhetorical question, or italicised word(s) or phrase(s), or sentences ending in exclamation. These were present throughout the full sermon, but proved quite critical to the homiletic task of his exordium and propositio material. At this juncture, it is necessary to review specific examples and to evaluate their role in Wesley’s antithetical homiletic.

**The Rhetorical Agenda of Literal Questions and Rhetorical Questions in the Exordia**

Wesley consistently used literal questions and rhetorical questions in his sermonic introductions, both to increase and focus reader attention as well as to create contrasts. Questions and rhetorical questions may appear separately or together, but share the basic attention-heightening effect. Rarely did Wesley ask a literal question, that is, one with no rhetorical intention beyond its forthright answer. However, there are instances, such as the orienting question designed to focus the reader’s attention on the sermonic topic. Particularly effective were his placement of orienting questions at the very beginning of the sermon. The

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93 In all modern rhetoric textbooks, vocal inflection is considered a nonverbal, rather than a verbal, cue.
initial three sentences of *On Sin in Believers* are: “Is there then sin in him that is in Christ? Does sin remain in one that believes in him? Is there any sin in them that are ‘born of God’, or are they wholly delivered from it?” 94 Similarly, the first two sentences of *The Means of Grace* ask: “But are there any ‘ordinances’ now, since life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel? Are there, under the Christian dispensation, any ‘means’ ordained of God as the usual channels of his grace?” 95 Wesley’s audience was well aware of the competing opinions and controversies surrounding these topics, and his questions insert the sermon directly into their interest in, or confusion about, the current debate.

Some patterns of questions are infrequent, but effective within the *exordium* Wesley was crafting. Not all straightforward questions are located in the sermons’ initial sentences. In *The Cure of Evil Speaking*, the questions, “But how can we avoid giving offence to some, and being offended at others? Especially suppose they are quite in the wrong, and we see it with our own eyes?” are near the end of the *exordium*. 96 Also infrequent was the strictly definitional question, following which the reader expected Wesley to explain the meaning of a word, phrase, or concept: “How is everyone that is ‘born of the Spirit’? That is, ‘born again’, ‘born of God’? What is meant by the being ‘born again’? 97 The *probatio* then explained what these phrases mean. Wesley did consistently take considerable care to define terms, but did not always initiate that definitions with a question.

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94 XIII. *On Sin in Believers*, I: 181 (I. 1, Wesley’s emphasis). Notice that, at times, following the questions themselves is a defence of their significance: “Let no one imagine this to be a question of mere curiosity; or that it is of little importance whether it be determined one way or the other. Rather, it is a point of the utmost moment to every serious Christian; the resolving of which very nearly concerns both his present and eternal happiness” (I. 1). These two literal questions, then, also serve the rhetorical role of significance descriptors. It should be noted as well that Wesley’s own lack of theological nuance has, in some measure, inspired such questions: “This sermon is most valuable as a corrective to the conclusion which might fairly be drawn from some of the earlier sermons, that after conversion, the believer is entirely free from sin; and that the existence of sinful desires in him is proof that he has not exercised saving faith in Christ.” Sugden, *Standard Sermons*, II: 361.


96 LIV. *The Cure of Evil Speaking*, IV, 99 (§5).

97 XVIII. *The Marks of the New Birth*, (¶1), II: 16.
The majority of Wesley’s questions performed a more intentional rhetorical function. To Wesley’s Oxford audience, the key question in the introduction of sermon I (“Wherewithal then shall a man atone for any the least of his sins?”) initially appeared to be an orienting question answerable by further discussion about moral rectitude. But Wesley quickly denounced that thought: “With his own works? No.” Though an actual answer was supplied, the context noticeably turns rhetorical. Another example was the introduction to Disc. 2, where Wesley presented what appears to be a definitional question: “But who are the meek?” However, immediately follows a series of highly rhetorical via negativa alternatives: “Not those who….Not those who….Nor does Christian meekness imply….It does not” He proceeded to define and describe true meekness according to the Beatitudes sermon text. The initial question, then, provided an opportunity for antithesis between incorrect definitions and correct biblical teaching. In the exordium of V, Wesley asked rhetorically: “What peace can there be while our own heart condemns us; and much more, he that ‘is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things?’ What solid joy, either in this world or that world to come, while ‘the wrath of God abideth on us’?” In A Caution against Bigotry, Wesley paraphrased the question of the Apostle John into a rhetorical question: “‘Ought we not rather to have forbidden him? Did we not do well therein?’ Each of these rhetorical questions heightened the attention of the reader, whose natural reaction was to engage with the question, discern its internal answer, easily grasp the writer’s point, and follow the writer’s next statement with interest. These examples are noticeably from initial sermonic paragraphs, but in other instances rhetorical questions appear throughout the exordium. Disc. 4 presented five consecutive rhetorical questions and three paragraphs later asked three more.

98 I. Salvation by Faith, I: 8.

99 XXI. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Second, II: 63-64 (¶1-3).


101 XXXVII. A Caution against Bigotry, II: 105.
therefore it offered but one of many instances of clusters of rhetorical questions, that is, a succession of questions.\(^{102}\) In *Disc. 12* Wesley warns of false prophets by asking: “But what if the watchmen themselves fall into the snare against which they should warn others? If they ‘cause the people to ere from the way’? What shall be done if they point out, as the way to eternal life, what is in truth the way to eternal death? And exhort others to walk, as they do themselves, in the broad, not the narrow way?”\(^{103}\) The homiletic effect of these clustered rhetorical questions was that the preacher’s tacit “answer” to these questions was emphatic and unmistakable: False prophecy is a tragic irony. Wesley’s *exordia* use of questions reveals at least two rhetorical commitments. First, simple orienting and definitional questions are, in the least, intentional efforts toward gaining reader attention and interest. Second, Wesley’s preferred rhetorical agenda for questions, and especially for rhetorical questions, was designed to heighten even more the quality of reader interaction with the sermonic theme or Scripture.

**Antithetical Uses of Italics in the *Exordia***

As with questions, italicised words and phrases appear throughout the *SOSO* material, but their use in *exordium* movements points clearly to their rhetorical effectiveness. Wesley’s conscious use of italics alerts the reader to a word or phrase whose placement or meaning was crucial to his current point.\(^{104}\) It was an immediate visual signal that the author’s words are carefully chosen and must be interpreted as such. Wesley’s rhetorical uses of italicization are viewed more appreciably when compared to his non-rhetorical uses. Certainly in some cases he italicized in a rather non-rhetorical manner, to simply clarify or specify. In the

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\(^{102}\) XXIII. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth*, II: 97 (I. 2, I. 5).

\(^{103}\) XXXI. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Twelfth*, II: 256-257 (¶2-3).

\(^{104}\) Some disparity in the use of italics exists among editions of *SOSO I-IV*. This chapter reflects, as does the entirety of the thesis, those italicizations found in Wesley’s own (fifth) edition (1796-99). Outler also meticulously preserves these in the *Bicentennial Edition*. Jackson’s edition preserves most, but not all.
introduction to *The Good Steward*, Wesley carefully emphasized the differing roles by which humanity relates to its Creator: the *debtor*, the *servant*, and the *steward*.\(^\text{105}\) He explained that these terms proceed from general to specific, and that “steward” was precisely the focus of the sermon.

Another non-rhetorical reason for Wesley’s use of italicization was simply to enable the reader to more easily follow his sermonic point. For example, in the lengthy irenic *exordium* of *The Lord Our Righteousness*, he insisted that most Christians share the same faith experience, but their descriptions of it appear contradictory. He found it necessary to italicize his description of this phenomenon: “But if the difference be more in *opinion* than real *experience*, and more in *expression* than in *opinion*, how can it be that even the children of God should so vehemently contend with each other on the point?...the chief [reason] is their not understanding one another, joined with too keen an attachment to their *opinions* and particular modes of *expression*.”\(^\text{106}\) Also easily recalled was Wesley’s narrative of uses and abuses of the ‘ordinances’ in church history: “some began to mistake the *means* for the *end*.\(^\text{107}\)

However, more common are Wesley’s rhetorical intentions for italicizing. Among his uses for italicization are emphases of the sermon text, sermon topic, or sermon points. There are instances of Wesley’s italicization of the language of the sermon text. This occurs in the *partitio* of sermon II: “First, what is implied in being *almost*, Secondly, what in being *altogether* a Christian.”\(^\text{108}\) This was not a phrase original with Wesley, but his italicization of the “almost” directly emphasizes the sermon text.\(^\text{109}\) Another example appears in *Disc. I*,

\(^{106}\) Wesley, *The Lord Our Righteousness*, 6 (¶6).
\(^{107}\) XVI. *The Means of Grace* (1.2), I: 232.
\(^{108}\) II. *The Almost Christian*, I: 20 (¶1).
\(^{109}\) *BE* 1:131, footnote 1.
where he emphasizes the text’s phrase “he taught them (the multitudes) as one having authority.”

At times, Wesley felt obligated to italicize the text’s meaning: “The strange imagination of some that St. Paul, when he says, ‘A man is justified without the works of the law,’ means only the ceremonial law, is abundantly confuted by these very words….It was the moral law only of which he might truly say, we do not make void but ‘establish’ this ‘through faith.’” Notice that in the two latter examples above, the context of Wesley’s italicization was to contrast his interpretation of the text with other interpretations he deems erroneous. In some instances, Wesley found it necessary to place italic emphasis on the sermon topic. Perhaps this was also applicable to sermon II mentioned above, but another instance appears in XXXVI: “It is therefore acknowledged that the madness under which he labours is of a particular kind. And accordingly they are accustomed to distinguish it by a particular name—enthusiasm.” Again, Wesley’s aim was to contrast his own use of the term “enthusiasm” with those who allow no place for the “religion of the heart.” To some degree, Wesley’s italicized emphases in the Sermons achieved a mnemonic aim. The New Birth succinctly expressed the difference (that is, antithesis) between justification and sanctification: “If any doctrines within the compass of Christianity may properly be termed fundamental they are doubtless these two—the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: the former relating to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins; the latter to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature.” Again, the attempt here was to helpfully draw an antithesis between the role of justification from that of sanctification. Many of the italicized words or phrases in Wesley’s sermonic introductions functioned antithetically when placed in the context of his opening point(s). They need not

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110 XX. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse I, II: 46-47 (¶4).
111 XXXIV. The Law Established through Faith, I (¶3), III: 35.
112 XXXVI. The Nature of Enthusiasm, III: 60 (¶4, ¶10).
113 L. On The New Birth, IV: 20 (¶1). He used this same expression in XIX. The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God (¶2), II: 31.
do so overtly, as in the *partitio* of XXXIX: “First, in what sense Christians are *not*, and
Secondly, in what sense they *are*, perfect”.\textsuperscript{114} He may italicize important words from the
sermon text or topic to their correct meaning antithetically with those errant interpretations he
sought to correct, or to demonstrate antithesis between two terms which he insists that his
readers must clearly distinguish.\textsuperscript{115}

\textbf{Exclamations in the Exordia}

Wesley’s most forceful *exordium* exclamations appeared in the initial sentence or sentences
of the *Sermons*. In *The Witness of the Spirit* he began: “How many vain men,
notwithstanding what they speak, neither whereof they affirmed, have wrested this Scripture
to the great loss if not the destruction of their souls! How many have mistaken the voice of
their own imagination for this ‘witness of the Spirit’ of God, and thence idly presumed they
were the children of God while they were doing the works of the devil!”\textsuperscript{116} He declared in
the first sentence of *The Great Assize*: “How many circumstances concur to raise the
awfulness of this present solemnity!”\textsuperscript{117} Likewise, *Disc. 3* began: “How excellent things are
spoken of the love of our neighbour!”\textsuperscript{118} Such exclamation summons the reader’s immediate
attention and sets a tone of proclamation. In the first of these examples (*The Witness of the
Spirit*) an antithetical aim was apparent since Wesley generally drew a distinction between
others’ erroneous interpretation of the sermon text and his correct interpretation. In some
instances his exclamation marks emerged from the sermon text itself, or another Scripture
quotation. “‘Let my last end be like his!’ Wesley quoted from the sermon text as he began

\textsuperscript{115} The effort to understand Wesley’s italicized emphases is best demonstrated by the writing style of Collins,
for example in \textit{Wesley on Salvation}, where he frequently draws upon Wesley’s italicizations. Less helpful is
Oden’s style in \textit{Scriptural Christianity}, due to his own profuse use of italicization.
\textsuperscript{116} X. \textit{The Witness of the Spirit}, I, I: 139 (¶1).
\textsuperscript{117} XV. \textit{The Great Assize}, I: 214.
\textsuperscript{118} XX. \textit{Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First}, II: 50 (I. 1).
Whitefield’s eulogy.119 Similarly, in *Salvation by Faith*: “what can we say to these things but ‘Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!’”120 Consecutive uses of exclamation heightened the rhetorical energy of Wesley’s current main point. *On Wandering Thoughts* had two consecutive exclamations: “For how many of those who fear God, yea, and love him, perhaps with all their heart, have been greatly distressed on this account! How many, by not understanding it right, have not only been distressed, but greatly hurt in their souls!”121 This continuation of exclamation creates rhetorical momentum for Wesley’s antithesis between the harm done by unscriptural interpretations and his own Scriptural interpretation forthcoming in the *probatio* of the sermon. Larger clusters of exclamation often produce a crescendo-like rhetorical flourish. This effect was noticeable in *Disc. I* as near the end of the *exordium* Wesley presents a cluster of seven exclamations in two paragraphs.122

**The Antithetical Dynamic of Combined Punctuation**

Discussion to this point demonstrates the individual effectiveness of four uses of punctuation in Wesley’s introductory material (questions, rhetorical questions, italics, and exclamation), but some of his *exordia* displayed a combined effect of these elements. These combinations tremendously shaped the rhetorical tone and contrastive aim of the sermon introductions in which they appear. In *The Lord Our Righteousness*, all four punctuations appeared across the breadth of the *exordium*, and heighten the rhetorical emphasis.123 Sermon LIV displayed all four, as well: a simple question, a rhetorical question, italics (*pride* and *anger*), four exclamations, and a final simple question.124 Pertinent to the claims of this thesis, then, many of Wesley’s sermonic introductions displayed questions, rhetorical questions, italics, and

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120 I. *Salvation by Faith*, 1: 8 (¶2).
121 XL. *On Wandering Thoughts*, III: 136 (¶2).
122 XX. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First*, II: 49 (¶8-9).
123 Wesley, *The Lord Our Righteousness*, 2-7 (¶1-6).
exclamations which serve his antithetical rhetorical aims. In clusters and in combination, their rhetorical effect considerably heightened. Even further, when Wesley’s emphatic exordial punctuations were integrated with significance descriptors the rhetorical collaboration among these numerous elements ensured Wesley’s exordial aim of generating readers’ attention and interest.

**The Via Salutis Theme in SOSO I-IV (Direct and Indirect): An Evaluation**

Analysis of the rhetorical characteristics of Wesley’s *SOSO I-IV exordia* confirms that these sermonic introductions, just as Wesley signalled in the *Preface*, indeed focus on the *via salutis*. Mention of the *via salutis* may be direct or indirect, yet each approach achieved the stated *Preface* goal of leading the listener/reader in the Scripture way of salvation.125 In some instances, references to the *via salutis* were direct.126 Direct *exordia* references to the *via salutis* included the phrase “way to heaven” or the terms “salvation,” “saving,” or “save.” Sermon I refers to “the greatest of all blessings—salvation.” However, Wesley built toward this declaration rhetorically, including significance language (“all”; “so many”), rhetorical questions, exclamations, and a contrast between Edenic sinless humanity and fallen humanity. The declaration of “the greatest blessings of all, salvation” was climactic, and so the *via salutis* was recognized as the focal point of the exordium.127 The sermon text of *The Righteousness of Faith* does not mention “salvation,” but Wesley soon noted that the pericope includes Paul’s earnest prayer: “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they may be saved” (Ro. 10:1). Wesley then echoed, “Surely my heart’s desire, and prayer to God for you, brethren, is that ye may be saved.”128 Thus Paul and Wesley share the

125 “Late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century [English] preachers still perceived the sermon as the first reformers had done—as a divinely appointed means of turning the unregenerate to God and encouraging the regenerate to follow his ways.” Ian M. Green, “Continuity and Change in Protestant Preaching in Early Modern England,” *Friends of Dr. Williams’s Library Sixtieth Lecture* (London: Dr. Williams’s Trust, 2009), 45.
126 Another sermon directly referencing the *via salutis* was XLIV. *The Reformation of Manners* (¶2-3).
pastoral plea for their readers’ salvation and, in this sermon, Wesley insists that the role of “righteousness” in salvation be rightly understood. To explain its role, he exipated the sermon text’s contrast between the “righteousness of the law” and the “righteousness of faith,” a contrast further emphasized by the “folly” of the former versus the “wisdom” of the latter. Thus this sermon’s *via salutis* theme and antithetical pattern are almost imperceptibly intertwined. Wesley considered the *via salutis* the central theme of the Sermon on the Mount and emphasized apprehending them in that context: “And what is it which he [Jesus] is teaching? The Son of God, who came from heaven, is here showing us the way to heaven…. He is teaching us the true way to life everlasting, the royal way which leads to the kingdom. And the only true way; for there is none besides—all other paths lead to destruction”.

Each subsequent *Discourse* retains Wesley’s broad context of salvation, that is, justification and sanctification, even if their truncated *exordia* do not directly use the “salvation” or “saved” terms. The Beatitudes (*Disc. 1-3*) are a virtual *ordo salutis*. Poverty of spirit and mourning position the heart for confession and faith leading to justification. Mercy (love), purity of heart, peace-making, interior and exterior righteousness, and persecution are continuing steps in sanctification, until believers are “perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect!” Sanctification requires being salt and light, living law and gospel, works of mercy and piety, pure intentions, kingdom perspective, and maintaining faith amidst spiritual deceptions.

Wesley insisted in *Disc. 10* that salvation (justification and sanctification) was the core theme of Jesus’ teaching on proper spiritual judgement. In the final *Disc. (13)*, he reiterates the *via salutis* focus of the Sermon on the Mount *Disc.*: “Our divine Teacher,
having declared the whole counsel of God with regard to the way of salvation….For thus saith the Lord, that none may ever conceive there is any other way than this”. 131

Indirect references in the exordia no less effectively convey soteriological significance to the sermons, and the via salutis continues to be emphasized by significance language and/or antithesis. Synonyms sometimes form an indirect reference to the theme of salvation, such as the general use of “justification.” The exordium of V combined the elements of significance language, contrast, and punctuation with the term “justification” to establish the sermon’s via salutis theme: “How a sinner may be justified [via salutis] before God, the Lord and Judge of all [universal]ty], is a question of no common importance [gravity] to every child of man [scope]…And yet how little hath this important question been understood! [exclamation] What confused notions….as light to darkness [antithesis].” 132 Further emphasis was added by the presence of two rhetorical questions and two exclamations. This exordium displayed a range of punctuation and contrast elements at Wesley’s disposal to emphasize the via salutis theme. Other instances of indirect but clear references to the via salutis are in two pneumatological sermons. The sermonic contrast in XIX was the principle difference between justification and regeneration, two via salutis doctrines. Wesley’s emphasis of this contrast was achieved with italics: “God, in justifying us, does something for us; in begetting us again, he does the work in us”. 133 The contrast also appeared in X where Wesley warns that true doctrinal enthusiasm effects “the great loss, if not the destruction, of …souls.” 134 Enthusiasts erroneously consider themselves “children of God, while they were doing the works of the devil,” estranged from authentic salvation. Finally, at times the sermon reader assumed the necessity of salvation by the thematic context of Wesley’s introduction. The

131 XXXII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth, III: 3.
132 V. Justification by Faith, I: 83.
133 XIX. The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God, II: 31 (¶2).
theme of divine judgement in *The Great Assize* unmistakably heightens the importance and necessity of salvation. In *Original Sin*, the certainty of sin’s reality strongly implied that a *via salutis* was necessary, as does a recognition of the more nuanced expressions of sin (*On Sin in Believers*). Therefore, in a number of instances the terms “salvation” or “saved” do not appear in sermon introductions which nevertheless clearly indicated that the sermon addresses a theme vital to the *via salutis*. To identify a sermon’s connection with the overarching homiletic focus on salvation, Wesley may use synonymous *via salutis* terms or themes integral to *via salutis* or *ordo salutis* priorities. Beyond the obvious function of providing introductory clarity to soteriological sermons, it was rhetorically significant that direct and indirect *via salutis* language contributed homiletic value to the exordia of non-soteriological sermons. The preceding overview makes evident that in non-*via salutis* sermons such as *The Great Assize* and *The Reformation of Manners*, Wesley indirectly connected their themes to the need for salvation and this appeal heightened the sermon’s significance and thus the listener’s interest. *Sermons* XXXIII, XXXVII-XXXIX, XXXI, XV, and XLV display no *via salutis* language and so achieve attention and interest through other exordia elements. This confirms that, though Wesley consistently framed the *SOSO I-IV* sermons within the *via salutis* context, he was not formulaic. Rather, his sermons displayed varying combinations of elements that achieved his broader theo-rhetorical (that is, homiletical theology) agenda.

In general, the foregoing analysis verifies that the rhetorical dimension of Wesley’s exordial material indeed achieved the theological goal he expressed in the 1746 *Preface*. The rhetorical characteristics discussed in each section of this chapter converge to ensure a cumulative (and usually antithetical) exordial emphasis of the *via salutis*. Together, they call the reader to value and engage with these sermons as essential to real religion, in antithesis with discourses non-essential to the way of salvation.
The Lord Our Righteousness as Exemplar of Exordia Homiletic Dynamics in SOSO I-IV

An exemplar of the homiletic elements identified in this chapter is found in The Lord Our Righteousness. 135 Identifying these elements within the sermon text provides a helpful summary of their presence and function within the exordium:

“This is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness”
(Jeremiah 23:6) [non-antithetical sermon text]

How many [scope] of these in all ages [universality], instead of joining together against the common enemy, have turned their weapons against each other, and so not only wasted their precious time but hurt one another’s spirits, weakened each other’s hands, and so hindered the great work of their common Master [integration of sublimity and gravity, exclamation]! How many [scope] of the weak have been offended! [exclamation] How many of the ‘lame turned out of the way’ [exclamation]! How many [scope] sinners confirmed in their disregard of all religion, and their contempt of those that profess it [exclamation]! And how many [scope] of ‘the excellent ones upon the earth’ [sublimity] have been constrained to ‘weep in secret places’ [gravity; interchange of scope and sublimity; ethos perception, pastoral/spiritual guide; exclamation]!

What would not every lover of God and his neighbour do, what would he not suffer, to remedy this sore evil [rhetorical question]? To remove contention from the children of God [rhetorical question]? To restore or preserve peace among them [rhetorical question]? What but a good conscience would he think too dear to part with in order to promote this valuable end? [sublimity; rhetorical question] And suppose we cannot ‘make these wars to cease in all the world [universality]’, suppose we cannot reconcile all the children of God [scope] to each other; however, let each do what he can, let him contribute if it be but two mites toward it. [humility] Happy are they who are able in any degree [humility] to promote ‘peace and goodwill among men’ [exclamation]!

Especially among good men; among those that are all listed under the banner of ‘the Prince of Peace’ [sublimity], and are therefore peculiarly engaged, ‘as much as lies in them, to live peaceably with all men’ [ethos perception: spiritual guide, peace-maker].

It would be a considerable step toward this glorious end [sublimity] if we could bring good men to understand one another. Abundance of disputes [gravity] arise purely from the want of this, from mere misapprehension. Frequently neither of the contending parties understands what his opponent means; whence it follows that each violently attacks [gravity] the other while there is no real difference between them. And yet it is not always an easy matter to convince them of this. Particularly

when their passions are moved: it is then attended with the utmost difficulty [gravity]. However, it is not impossible: especially when we attempt it, not trusting in ourselves, but having all our dependence upon him with whom all things are possible [humility]. How soon is he able to disperse the clouds, to shine upon their hearts, and to enable them both to understand each other and ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’ [ethos perception: spiritual guide, peacemaker; exclamation]!

One very considerable [gravity] article of this truth is contained in the words above recited, ‘This is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness:’ a truth which enters deep into the nature of Christianity [gravity]. Of this undoubtedly may be affirmed what Luther affirms of a truth closely connected with it: it is articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae—the Christian church stands or falls with it [gravity]. It is certainly the pillar and ground of that faith of which alone cometh salvation [gravity, via salutis]—of that catholic (italics) or universal [universality] faith which is found in all the children of God [scope], and which ‘unless a man keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly’ [gravity; via salutis].

Might not one therefore reasonably expect, that however they differed in others, all those who name the name of Christ [scope] should agree in this point [rhetorical question]? But how far is this from being the case [descriptor integration: scope and gravity; exclamation]? There is scarce any wherein they are so little agreed [scope], wherein those who all profess to follow Christ seem so widely and irreconcilably [descriptor integration: scope, gravity] to differ. I say ‘seem’, because I am thoroughly convinced [ethos] that many of them [scope] only seem to differ. The disagreement is more in words than in sentiments: they are much nearer in judgment than in language. And a wide difference [scope] in language there certainly is, not only between Protestants and Papists, but between Protestant and Protestant; yea, even between those who all believe justification by faith, who agree as well in this as every other fundamental doctrine of the gospel [via salutis].

But if the difference be more in opinion [italics] than real experience [italics], and more in expression [italics] than in opinion [italics], how can it be that even the children of God so vehemently contend [gravity] with each other on the point [question]? Several reasons may be assigned for this: the chief is their not understanding one another, joined with too keen an attachment to their opinions [italics] and particular modes of expression [italics; in this ¶, interaction of descriptors].

In order to remove this, at least in some measure, in order to our understanding one another on this head [ethos perception: spiritual director], I shall by the help of God endeavour to show, I. What is the righteousness of Christ; II. When, and in what sense, it is imputed to us; And conclude with a short and plain application

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136 Wesley’s exordium has, to this point, established the universal significance of church unity. But this paragraph begins to suggest the more recent church dissertation regarding imputation and impartation, a debate Wesley had earlier with Whitefield and most recently with James Hervey. The original reader of this sermon, then, is likely quite aware of the contrasting opinions to which Wesley here refers. An excellent review of the imputation versus impartation background from which this sermon arises is provided by Heitzenrater (Methodists, 221-223).
[partitio: clarity].

In a number of ways the above identification of homiletic elements assists in evaluating Wesley’s sermon introductions. First, it verifies Wesley’s conscious efforts to fulfil the conventional rhetorical tasks of gaining listener attention and interest in the exordium. It also evidences the quantity of homiletic elements he brings to bear on this task. In varying degrees, he used the sermon text, significance descriptors, the via salutis theme, ethos perceptions, the propositio or partitio, questions, and emphasis through rhetorical questions, italics, or exclamation marks to construct a sermonic introduction that was clear, interesting, and focused on the via salutis thematic priority. Third, this particular exordium also exhibits Wesley’s preference for antithetical patterns. Two antitheses appear here: Christian contention versus Christian unity, and perceived doctrinal differences versus similar Christian experiences. Finally, at the root of these antitheses was Wesley’s series-wide concern to distinguish Scriptural Christianity (particularly essential via salutis doctrine) from antinomianism, one of the two doctrinal extremes (the other, formalism/moralism) addressed by SOSO I-IV. It was the antinomians who had wrongly interpreted the phrase “the Lord our righteousness” and exacerbated disagreements among believers. Isolating these homiletic elements for analysis and considering their interactive dynamics illumines both Wesley’s homiletic style and his theological agenda.

Such an analysis does not suggest that Wesley was formulaic in his preparation of exordia material, but that he was consistent in his approach and preferred an antithetical dynamic in his sermon introductions. His exordia use the via salutis theme, significance descriptors, ethos, and emphatic punctuation with regularity, but in a variety of combinations. The central claim of this thesis is that from this set of exordia elements emerges an antithetical homiletic pattern which continues throughout the dispositio of the sermons and is the overarching homiletic characteristic of SOSO I-IV. Chapter Four further examines this
antithetical homiletic dynamic as it continues to operate within the sermon’s *probatio* and *refutatio* (that is, argument) movements.
CHAPTER FOUR

“ARE YOU CONVINCED THAT THIS IS SCRIPTURAL CHRISTIANITY?”
JOHN WESLEY’S ANTITHETICAL ARGUMENTS IN S5So 1-IV

Preachers used logic to divide up their texts, to explore the implications of each section, and to debate the interpretation of a particular text…. [They] used the figures of rhetoric to interpret the Bible and to embellish key passages of their sermons.¹

John Wesley the homilist both perceived and practiced argumentation in the humanist tradition. Peter Mack helpfully charts the influence of humanist rhetoric in Elizabethan religious discourse, from its emphasis in the grammar school, to its influence through the curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge, and its prevalence in preaching which continues into Wesley’s era. Wesley’s treatises, such as the somewhat controversialist An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, reveal his acumen as a former tutor in debate. Clearly, however, his preferred means of messaging was the sermon, which required adaptations of humanistic rhetorical style. Mack’s discussion of the particular rhetorical influences on biblical interpretation, logic, organization, and style assist the current chapter’s description of Wesley’s central sermonic argument: Scriptural Christianity. Across the spectrum of the fifty-three sermons in the S5So 1-IV endeavour, John Wesley addressed a variety of evangelical doctrinal themes, but collectively these sermons advanced the single coherent argument that Scriptural Christianity alone was the key preventative for doctrinal error, or its needed corrective. The doctrinal errors of particular concern are moralism and antinomianism, the two extremes clearly identified in Wesley’s 1746 Preface as the focus of his correction in the initial volumes of the S5So series. This chapter undertakes a general analysis, then, of the rhetorical shape of this single Scriptural

Christianity argument. It must begin with a definition of what, for Wesley, constituted
“Scriptural Christianity” as opposed to unscriptural doctrinal teaching. Once defined, the
broader “Scriptural Christianity” argument was more accurately recognized when it appeared.
This thesis, of course, is particularly focused upon the prevailing antithetical form in which it
appears, and offers a systematic understanding of the rhetorical dominance of antithesis in
Wesley’s early neoclassical Evangelical Revival sermons. Wesley’s definition of Scriptural
Christianity was not expressed in a formal statement, but emerged from his numerous sermonic
uses of the phrase. It was a constellation of ‘meanings’ about the authoritative role of Scripture,
each meaning arising from Wesley’s immediate argumentative need in a sermon. Together,
these ‘meanings’ formed his theological and rhetorical commitment to Scriptural Christianity.

Scripture as the Foremost Source of Authority

Mack points to the frequent humanist use of applying classical rhetorical categories to the
analysis and interpretation of any specific biblical text, “exploring its meaning by use of other
texts and applying its teaching.”\(^2\) This fittingly describes Wesley’s sermonic method and
explains (rhetorically, though there are theological reasons as well) why his arguments appealed
more to the authority of Scripture than to other authoritative sources. In *The Witness of Our
Own Spirit, II* Wesley argued that Scripture was authoritative in moral matters: “But the
Christian rule of right and wrong is the word of God, the writings of the Old and New
Testament”, and “there is absolutely required, first, a right understanding of the word of God; of
his ‘holy and acceptable and perfect will’ concerning us, as it is revealed within.”\(^3\) He
acknowledged that Scriptural authority then works closely with the human conscience in

discerning right from wrong, so other sources (conscience, reason, tradition, experience) are not disregarded, but they are subservient to the clear teaching of Scripture.

In Wesley’s view, then, doctrinal discussion requires Scriptural support. He challenged opponents who offer no Scriptural support: “I pray, where is this written? I expect you should show me the plain Scripture for your assertion; otherwise I dare not receive it, because I am not convinced that you are wiser than God.”

Notice that in this statement Wesley expressed his insistence on Scriptural authority in the context of reasoned argument—no one should make an assertion that cannot be backed by rhetorical proof, and thus no one should make a doctrinal assertion and neglect to offer Scriptural proof. His own firm belief in the doctrine of Christian perfection, for example, “is a divine evidence and conviction, first, that God hath promised it in the Holy Scripture.”

It follows that Wesley considered that Scripture speaks thoroughly and sufficiently about all essential doctrines. He believed that Scripture was not silent on any foundational doctrines or theological themes. For example, Scripture, rather than deistic sentiment, rightly described the doctrine of sin. Grace is a doctrinal priority, thus he maintains in *The Means of Grace*: “It cannot possibly be conceived that the Word should give no direction on so important a point,” or that Jesus the Saviour would not teach about the role of grace in salvation: “And in fact he hath not left us undetermined; he hath shown us the way wherein we should go. We have only to consult the oracles of God, to inquire what it written there….According…to the decision of Holy

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6 XLIX. *Original Sin* (¶4), IV: 4.
Writ, all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the means which he hath ordained.”

The doctrine of the final Judgment was narratively “recorded in the oracles of God”, and so was “The incarnation of our Lord, …the ever blessed Trinity, and every other doctrine contained in the oracles of God.” These represent “Scriptural Christianity,” a set of biblical themes doctrinally essential to the authentic life of faith in Christ.

It was a grave error, then, to be unknowledgeable of the very Scripture that is a so sufficient source of doctrinal truth. Scriptural Christianity cannot flourish amidst Scriptural ignorance. Wesley pointed to this as one of the major causes of “the wilderness state”: “If men know not the Scriptures, if they imagine there are passages either in the Old or New Testament which assert that all believers without exception must sometimes be in darkness, this ignorance will naturally bring upon them the darkness which they expect.” He specifically identified “the mystic writers of the Romish Church” and “many of the most spiritual and experimental” within the Established Church as promulgators of this error, who “lay it down with all assurance as a plain, unquestionable Scripture doctrine, and cite many texts to prove it.” Scriptural Christianity, then, required one to discern “the true meaning of those texts which have been misunderstood,” and to avoid interpreting Scripture out of its context. Therefore, mysticism joins the excesses of moralism and antinomianism in the production of harmfully inaccurate Scriptural interpretations, and like them must be contrasted with accurate doctrine.

Mack’s discussion of sermon organisation notes examples from Hooker, Cranmer, and Andrewes, together exemplifying a variety of sermonic structure, yet overall following basic

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7 XVI. The Means of Grace, I: 238 (IV. 1, II. 8-III. 1).
8 XV. The Great Assize, division II; VII. The Way to the Kingdom, I: 97 (I. 6, II. 8-III. 1).
9 II. The Wilderness State (II. 2 (II. 1), II. 48.
10 IX. The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption, I: 126 (III. 7, I. 7).
rules of *dispositio*. Wesley, in typical Anglican fashion, established Scripture as his foremost sermonic authority then added the other typical sources (reason and Christian tradition, plus faith experience) not only to strengthen Scripture’s case, but to organize his sermonic arguments. This was starkly evident in Wesley’s teaching in *The Witness of the Spirit I* and *II*. The “foundation” of Wesley’s confidence in the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit (*I*) was “laid in those numerous texts of Scripture which describe the marks of the children of God; and that so plain that he which runneth may read them.” Those unconvinced of the doctrine “may receive it by attending on the ministry of God’s Word,” which will assemble reason, tradition, and experience to confirm its orthodoxy. Similarly, the first sentence in the *exordium* of *II* prepared the reader for Wesley’s main argument: “None who believes the Scriptures to be the Word of God can doubt the *importance* of such a truth as this: a truth revealed therein not once only, not obscurely, not incidentally, but frequently, and that in express terms; but solemnly, and of a set purpose.” These introductory words invoked the testimony of Scripture as the primary source for the doctrine of assurance, and Scripture again was supported by the other elements of the Anglican hermeneutic and Christian experience: reason and experience, and tradition. In the *refutatio*, Wesley defended the role of experience: “It is objected…‘Experience is not sufficient to prove a doctrine which is not founded on Scripture.’ This is undoubtedly true….But…it has

12 It is unsurprising but significant that, in Wall’s list of Wesley’s ten “interpretive practices” which shaped his Scriptural arguments, the threefold Anglican hermeneutic is the most prominent influence. See Robert W. Wall, “Wesley as Biblical Interpreter,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 122-128.
been shown that this doctrine is founded on Scripture. Therefore experience is properly alleged to confirm it.” To the objection that some “enthusiasts” embrace the doctrine of assurance, Wesley again asserted its Scriptural basis: “a scriptural doctrine is no worse because men abuse it to their own destruction.” Even when Scripture offers no specific direction on an issue regarding the divine will, its guiding “general principle” is human decision that leads to sanctification. Quite subtly Wesley may argumentatively conflate elements of the Anglican hermeneutic and Christian experience while maintaining the primacy of Scripture. For example, in his advice about listening to false prophets, Wesley presented Scriptural authority seamlessly with Christian tradition: “And see that you bring whatever you hear ‘to the law and the testimony’. Receive nothing untried, nothing till it is weighed in ‘the balance of the sanctuary.’ Believe nothing they say unless it is clearly confirmed by plain passages of Holy Writ.” In The Almost Christian, he openly stated that his description of the “altogether” Christian comprising the remainder of the probatio relies on Scripture and experience. Such instances reassert that, though Scripture is the preeminent source of truth, any one of the other three elements may interlock with it rhetorically. However, the direct appeals to Scriptural Christianity demonstrate Wesley’s conviction that Scripture itself is the chief hermeneutic source which no other supposed logic can invalidate.

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16 “If any doubt of this privilege of the sons of God, the question is not to be decided by abstract reasonings …..Neither is it to be determined by the experience of this or that particular person…..‘To the law and to the testimony’ we appeal. ‘Let God be true, and every man a liar.’ By his Word will we abide, and that alone.” XXXIX. Christian Perfection, II. 2, 115, and also IV. 1 and IV. 2.
17 XXXI. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Twelfth, II: 265, (¶23 and III.9). Here Kinghorn’s modern English paraphrase is helpful: “Receive nothing that has not been tested; it must first be in agreement with the doctrine of the church.” Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, John Wesley on The Sermon on the Mount: The Standard Sermons in Modern English, Vol. II (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 281.
18 II. The Almost Christian (I. 11), 24 (¶3).
Wesley adhered to the basic premise that Scripture itself, not private or communal interpretations, defines “Christianity.” Scripture sets the standard for who is, and is not, an authentic believer. He insisted that Scriptural Christianity includes saving faith (described at length in sermons I, II, V and VI) and spiritual fruit (emphasized in sermons IV, VII, and XVIII). Antinomian ‘faith’ does not fit this biblical sense, so: “That they are not Christians is clear and undeniable, if we believe the oracles of God.”19 Neither is submitting to the literal meaning of Scripture necessarily equivalent to saving faith. Even the nominal Christian values Scripture’s moral teachings: “A second thing implied in the being ‘almost a Christian’ is the having a form of godliness, of that godliness which is prescribed in the gospel of Christ….Accordingly the ‘almost Christian’ does nothing which the gospel forbids”.20 More dramatic is demonic acceptance of the biblical record, which must not be equated with saving faith: “Faith…is not a bare assent to…all the propositions contained…in the Old and New Testament….but a disposition of the heart.”21 In S0SOI-IV, the importance of a Scriptural definition of ‘Christian’ was the ability it granted Wesley to de-legitimize moralistic and antinomian notions of ‘Christian.’ Wesley was concerned to show that moralism unnecessarily trusts in works of piety and mercy to define ‘Christian,’ and antinomianism views a proper ‘Christian’ as one who eschews works for pure belief. Regarding moralism, for example, Wesley’s homiletic treatment of the ironic contrasts in the Beatitudes exposed and corrected a number of moralistic teachings. In Disc. 1, the “Romish church” misinterprets “poverty” as material rather than a poverty of spirit, and under perfectionistic teaching the new believer “can scarce believe that [sin] remaineth in him.” In Disc. 2, moralists erroneously thought that meekness disallows “zeal for

God,” and “heathen wisdom” cannot fathom how meekness will inherit the earth. Even the General Rules represented mere religious formality if one did not “hunger and thirst after righteousness.” Militant periods of Protestant history reveal its failure to be merciful. Disc. 3 described legalists (Pharisees) and formalists as “the false teachers of all ages” who focus on outward behaviour rather than purity of heart. In Disc. 4 we are reminded that moralists were appropriately wary of associating with “men of the opposite character” and wish to “convey [faith] into others in a secret, and almost imperceptible manner,” but balanced Scriptural teaching instructs believers to “impart the religion they have received.” In Disc. 5 Wesley required moralists to recognize that true Christianity was not all external but included internal “tempers.” Formalists were warned in Disc. 6 about the wrong intentions of piety (alms, prayer) for show, since real Christianity required “purity of intention.”

Wesley also argued Scriptural Christianity against the other doctrinal extreme, antinomianism. Wesley’s probatios against perfectionistic teaching are well represented by The Repentance of Believers, which countered the doctrine that repentance was unnecessary for believers, to whom has been imputed Christ’s righteousness. “These sincerely believe and earnestly maintain that all sin is destroyed when we are justified, and that there is no sin in the heart of a believer, but that it is altogether clean from that moment.” The “mischievousness of that opinion….does immense harm,” thus Wesley offered Scriptural correction. In the first sermonic division, he unfolds in narrative form the evolving experience of the new believer: elation, pride, self-will, “other tempers” than love. However, the bases of these experiential arguments are two key scriptures: I Jn. 2:16-17 (the threefold description of depravity), and Deut. 6:4-5 (the Shema priority of love). Ez. 36:29 serves as the key Scripture for the thematic argument (“cleansing”) in division II. Yet Wesley also ably argued for Scriptural Christianity by
addressing both moralistic and antinomian errors regarding a particular doctrine. In The Righteousness of Faith Wesley used Ro. 10:5-8 to argue, against the moralistic position, that works-righteousness was allowable under the Adamic covenant alone. He closely explicated the sermon text, and the majority of his other Scripture references remained from Romans. The principle antithetical argument was the folly of works-righteousness versus the wisdom of Christ-righteousness through faith. A similar theological antithesis between the terms “law” and “faith” occurred in The Law Established by Faith, I and II, and again Wesley used a Romans text (3:31). However, these sermons combated the opposite theological extreme: antinomianism. In Disc. I, his discussion expanded the Ro. 3:31 text to 3:21-31, and interspersed intermittent refutation of common antinomian objections. Though he addressed “heathens” and moralists in division I of I, Wesley’s earnest concern was antinomians who “magnify faith beyond all proportion…and who so totally misapprehend the nature of it.” In contrast to overvaluing the “works” of moralism or the “faith” of antinomianism, Scriptural faith is “originally designed” for “establishing the law of love in our hearts.” Therefore, these three discourses contrasted the extremes of both moralism and antinomianism with what Wesley insisted was a balanced, Scriptural understanding of the moral “law” and saving “faith.” But Wesley was not always successful in making this balance obvious. Most Wesley scholars point out that the evangelist’s lack of clarity on this issue, due to his over-emphasis on justification by faith early in the revival, resulted in vehement misunderstanding among Wesley’s Anglican constituency. Outler’s assertion that Wesley was “unnuanced” in this regard pinpoints a significant rhetorical weakness.

22 XIV. The Repentance of Believers (I-II), I: 197-211. Within each of these sermons was Wesley’s dual attention to formalism and antinomianism, a fact which significantly affirms the position of this thesis regarding SOSO I-IV’s focus on combating these two erroneous perspectives and his preference for antithetical rhetoric to effectively achieve that goal.

23 XXXIV The Law Established through Faith, I., II. 6, III. 54-55.
in his early preaching which is beyond the current discussion but worthy of future analysis.\textsuperscript{24} In the context of the \textit{SOSO I-IV} collection, the rhetorical and (more clearly balanced) theological elements work in tandem: contrast (rhetorical antithesis) was presented to distinguish moralism and antinomianism (doctrinal error) from Scripture (doctrinal truth).

Though Wesley must correct genuine false teaching, he conceded in \textit{Catholic Spirit} that not all believers will agree in their interpretations of Scriptural Christianity. Nevertheless, each believer should maintain Scripture as the standard of their convictions. Wesley testified: “I believe the episcopal form of church government to be scriptural and apostolical.”\textsuperscript{25} Others may be “otherwise persuaded” or “not be convinced,” but Wesley presumed that other Christians likewise form their beliefs and practices according to a particular interpretation of Scripture. Someone at theological variance with Wesley was indeed “the man of a truly catholic spirit” when he “is clearly convinced that \textit{this} manner of worshipping God is both scriptural and rational.” His belief was based, not on mere self-originating or popular opinion, but “according to the light” (that is, divine revelation) made available to him. Therefore non-essential doctrinal differences do not sanction believers to question each other’s authentic faith: “Hence even the children of God are not agreed as to the interpretation of many places in Holy Writ; nor is their difference of opinion any proof that they are not the children of God on either side”\textsuperscript{26}

Hermeneutically, Wesley’s commitment to Scriptural Christianity included his initial deference to the literal sense of Scripture. Thus in sermon V he was most comfortable stating:

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\textsuperscript{24} Outler, \textit{BE} I: 202.
\textsuperscript{25} XXXVIII. \textit{Catholic Spirit} (II. 2), III: 101; (III. 2), III: 105.
\textsuperscript{26} XXXIX. \textit{Christian Perfection} (III. 2; I. 5), II: 111.
\end{flushright}
“The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins.”27 Again and again, Wesley insisted on doctrine formulated by the plainest sense of Scripture.28 If some passages require theological nuance to discover the principles of true, Scriptural Christianity, then Wesley willingly engaged in that process. Either way, the ultimate hermeneutical aim remains recognizing Scriptural Christianity. This was inseparable from his argumentative rhetoric, which is the focus of the present chapter. He signaled this in the Preface comment to critics who may disagree with his biblical interpretation: “Point me out a better way than I have known. Show me it is so, by plain proof of Scripture.”29 Wesley insisted that it is by the plain sense of Scripture that he has grounded his sermonic arguments. Thus, he often reinforced his preference for biblical language and terms, suggesting that more accurately conveys Scriptural Christianity. In defining the term conscience, he mentioned that “Some late writers have given a new name to this, and have chose to style it a ‘moral sense.’ But the old word seems preferable to the new….to Christians it is undeniably preferable…because it is scriptural; because it is the word which the wisdom of God hath chose to use in the inspired writings.”30 In The Cure of Evil Speaking Wesley advised that, when personal counsel is offered to someone evil-speaking, the very language of Scripture should be used: “[Speak] in the most serious and solemn manner, as far as may be in the very words of the oracles of God (for there are none like them).”31 On the one hand he generously allowed others to use Scriptural language as they see fit: “Let them use this or such other expressions as they judge to be more exactly scriptural,” yet he advised

27 V. Justification by Faith (II. 5) I: 100.
28 Wesley maintains that we are “never to depart from the plain, literal sense, unless it implies an absurdity” (# 74 Of the Church, ¶13, BE III: 50). See also R. Larry Shelton, “Wesley’s Approach to Scripture in Historical Perspective,” Wesleyan Theological Journal 16 (1981), 23-50.
29 Preface, ¶9.
“guarding them against…abuse.”

In Catholic Spirit, he balked at adding a common phrase to a
scriptural phrase: “Does thou love God? I do not say, ‘above all things’, for it is both
unscriptural and an ambiguous expression, but ‘with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and
with all thy soul, and with all thy strength?’”

Therefore, Wesley affirmed that scriptural
Christianity is best expressed in scriptural language, but acknowledged that such expression
demands disciplined use.

Wesley sometimes declared, with a sweeping statement, that a complete survey of scripture
yields proof of his argument and exposes the imbalances of erroneous doctrine.

For example, in Salvation by Faith: “This is the great salvation foretold by the angel before God brought his
first-begotten into the world: ‘Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from
their sins.’ And neither here nor in other parts of Holy Writ is there any limitation or
restriction….All his people…all that believe, he will save all” (emphasis mine).

He argued similarly in On Sin in Believers: “Indeed, this grand point, that there are two contrary principles
within believers…the flesh and the Spirit—runs through all the epistles of St. Paul, yea, through
all the Holy Scriptures. Almost all the directions and exhortations therein are founded upon this
supposition” (emphasis mine).

The SOSO corpus demonstrates Wesley’s stance that many of

32 John Wesley, The Lord Our Righteousness: A Sermon Preached at the Chapel in West Street, Seven Dials, on
Sunday, November 24, 1765, John Wesley (London: 1766), 30.
34 “This is the principle of the analogy of faith, analogia fidei, which, in accord with classic Christian exegesis,
Wesley constantly sought to employ….Scriptural wisdom comes out of a broadly based dialogue with the general
sense of the whole of Scripture, not a single set of selected texts.” Thomas C. Oden, John Wesley’s Scriptural
Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 57-58.
Underlying most of Wesley’s scriptural “proofs” was his agreement with classical, consensual doctrinal
interpretation. Therefore, the hermeneutical element of church tradition is tacitly but effectively present in the
analogy of faith. The arguments of church tradition are latent in Wesley’s interpretation of Scripture (Oden,
Scriptural Christianity, 57.). The implication of this for his probatio and refutatio movements is that Wesley’s
arguments are not novel and, rhetorically speaking, represent the doctrinal status quo position which critics must
disprove.
35 I. Salvation by Faith (II. 2), I: 11.
the essential doctrines comprising Scriptural Christianity are supported by the whole of (“the constant tenor of”) Scripture. The analogy of faith funded one of Wesley’s most notable homiletic features, his profuse use of Scripture. It made available to him the whole of Scripture in supporting his sermonic arguments. More particular to the focus of this thesis, it also provided a nearly unlimited series of antithetical possibilities for Wesley’s agenda to “distinguish…the inventions of men…from the true, the Scriptural….religion.”

In Mack’s discussion of humanist logic, he notes that in the Admonition Controversy of the latter 1500s one of the Puritan practices of Scriptural interpretation was arguing from Scriptural silence. Wesley sometimes appealed to Scriptural Christianity with the same logic—a basic silence, or Scripture’s lack of direct teaching on an issue. In Disc. 7, he deferred to contemporary church tradition in the practice of abstinence from food. What the Established Church “seems peculiarly to mean by the term abstinence” was “the eating little.” He then argued from silence: “I do not remember any scriptural instance of this. But neither can I condemn it, for the Scripture does not. It may have its use, and receive a blessing from God.” Scripture’s silence may tacitly allow some opinions, practices and beliefs, and these cannot be considered unscriptural. In the same discourse, and akin to the argument from silence, is an instance of Wesley’s willingness to infer a command from Scripture: “[Christ] does not in this place [Mt. 6:16-18] expressly enjoin either giving of alms, fasting, or prayer. But his directions

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37 VII. The Way to the Kingdom (I. 12), I: 100.
38 1746 Preface (¶6).
40 XXVI. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Seventh (I: 4), II: 170.
how to fast, to give alms, and to pray, are of the same force with such injunctions. For the
commanding us to do anything thus is the unquestionable command to do that thing” (Wesley’s
emphasis). This interpretive rule helped Wesley to quell the antinomian argument that in no
particular Scripture does Christ overtly command prayer as a means of grace. In other words,
some practices of Scriptural Christianity may be discerned by inferences carefully drawn from
the context of key Scripture passages.

Whether the biblical doctrine is direct, from silence, or inferred, once it is known, Scriptural
Christianity requires it to be actively practiced. Anglican homiletical practice insisted that life
application was the goal of biblical revelation. The argumentative crescendo (division III) of
Disc. 13 represents one of Wesley’s directives to apply biblical truth. He noted that the
moralist sincerely believes his own position to be Scriptural: “Whereon do I build my
expectation of entering into the kingdom of heaven?...Upon my orthodoxy or right opinions…
upon my having a set of notions, suppose more rational or scriptural than many others have?”
The moralist claimed his church membership to be Scriptural, as well: “Perhaps [I build my
expectation of heaven] on my belonging to so excellent a church, reformed after the true
scriptural model.” Wesley acknowledged that these may be “helps to holiness,” but though a
moralist “hear and search the Scriptures,” he or she has not necessarily lived the Scriptural
mandates contained in the Sermon on the Mount Discourses which concludes with this sermon.
In a word, saving faith flows not from hearing or knowing the Scriptures, but actively living
Scriptural truth. Wesley’s homiletic interpretation of Jesus’ closing teaching in the Sermon on

42 XXVI. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Seventh (II: 12), II: 180.
43 XXXII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth, III: 11-15.
44 “For Wesley, the locus of activity relevant to the gospel of Christ was the experience or behaviour of a person; to
most of the Reformers…the locus was in verbal or printed statements—books, pamphlets, creeds, confessions,
the Mount was that all is for naught if the hearer does not “do” these things, does not avoid the errors of moralism and antinomianism by living Scripturally.

Wesley’s sermonic statements also advised that the use of Scripture presents an antithesis, with the Spirit using it to speak truth and Satan distorting it to promote falsehood. Wesley insisted that the Spirit speaks through Scripture to the believer, therefore the Spirit leads believers into Scriptural Christianity.45 “But what saith the Holy Ghost? ‘Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ.’”46 “The Spirit reproves him more sharply, and saith, ‘This is the way, walk thou in it.’”47 Wesley warned of excessive antinomian claims that the Spirit is speaking directly, “without any rational or scriptural ground!”48 However, both John’s and Charles’ sermons implored the reader to interface with the written Word as a dialogue with the Spirit: “Hear the voice that wakes the dead, and feel the hammer of the Word”49 The sermon thesis of Sermon IV was that authentic faith is lived in the life of the Spirit.50 In other words, Scriptural Christianity is Spirit-filled Christianity. This pneumatological theme undergirds all of the Sermons, and should be assumed in other uses of the phrase “Scriptural Christianity.” Conversely, in On Satan’s Devices Wesley addressed an ironic dimension of Scriptural Christianity: Satan’s own use of Scripture against the believer, to deplete the joy, peace, and holiness of the Christian life. Specifically, the sermon confronted a brand of moralistic antinomianism which interpreted Scripture to command labour in good

45 “Though the Spirit is our principal leader, yet He is not our rule at all; the Scriptures are the rule whereby He leads us into all truth.” Wesley, in a letter to Thomas Whitehead, Feb. 10, 1748, as quoted in Oden, Scriptural Christianity, 59.
46 I. Salvation by Faith (III. 7), I: 17.
47 XIX. The Great Privileges of those that are Born of God (II. 9), II: 40.
49 III. Awake, Thou that Sleepest,’ (II. 13), I: 38. Also see IX. The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption (II. 1), I: 127.
50 IV. Scriptural Christianity, I: 47-93.
works toward “a greater change to come—and that unless all sin be done away with in this life we cannot see God in glory….Thus does the subtle adversary of God and man endeavour to make void the counsel of God by dividing the gospel against itself, and making one part of it overthrow the other—while the first work of God in the soul is destroyed by the expectation of his perfect work.”51 Wesley here acknowledged that even Scriptural Christianity, the hallmark of orthodoxy, may be perverted into uses quite foreign to its divine purposes.

Wesley’s Antithetical Arguments for Scriptural Christianity

Wesley’s frequent direct use of the phrase “Scriptural Christianity,” or instances when he appeals to the authority of Scripture by implication, confirms that Scriptural Christianity was indeed his ‘background’ argument throughout the evangelical sermons of SOSO I-IV. However, this thesis hypothesizes that the ‘foreground’ of Wesley’s arguments was his arrangement of Scriptural Christianity into a dominant rhetorical pattern: antithesis. According to Peter Mack’s review of the humanist reaffirmations of classical rhetorical style, antithesis features prominently.52 His sermon excerpts from Thomas Cranmer and Henry Smith highlight their use of comparison and contrast. The issue with Wesley’s use of antithesis are the categories into which they form, and their function as rhetorical ‘proof’ within the argumentative divisions of SOSO I-IV.

As noted in Chapter Two, there was a rhetorical difference in Wesley’s Sermons which displayed a single, extended antithesis throughout the discourse, and those in which he used multiple antitheses over the course of the sermon. A single, sermon-wide antithesis reinforced for the sermon reader the preacher’s offer of a clear choice between two images or alternatives.

51 XLI. On Satan’s Devices (I. 1, 12), III: 149, 155.
The use of multiple antitheses presented the reader with a variety of choices or images that brought the reader to a decision point about the doctrine preached. Both of these may emerge from the sermon text itself or have been artificially shaped by Wesley. They share the purpose to accumulate rhetorical ‘weight’ on the sermonic theme, but each achieved this differently, either with the depth of the single antithesis or breadth of multiple antitheses.

**Sermons with Extended Antithesis: Irony in the Beatitudes**

Mack notes that, among the many rhetorical elements treated in renaissance English style manuals, was irony.\(^{53}\) *Disc. 1-3* in Wesley’s Sermon on the Mount series explicated the Beatitudes, and these ten verses are rich in irony, which is necessarily antithetical in nature.\(^{54}\) To achieve his rhetorical preference for antithesis, Wesley only needed to emphasize the ironies already present. In *Disc. 1*, it was ironic that the “poor” in fact possess a “kingdom,” and therefore happiness (“happy” was Wesley’s translation of “blessed”) results from spiritual humility. Also, those who “mourn” are “happy” because they are divinely “comforted,” so happiness ironically resulted from spiritual distress. In *Disc. 2*, the “meek” are patient and content with their lot, but ultimately they “inherit the earth”—happiness resulted from spiritual “resignation” (Wesley’s term) to the divine will. Ironically, a person was “filled” and “happy” through ongoing spiritual “hunger and thirst,” thus happiness resulted from spiritual desire. Wesley advised: “Cry unto him…that this divine appetite may never cease.” Again, ironically, those who love most sacrificially (“the merciful”) more abundantly receive God’s love (“obtain mercy”). *Disc. 3* continued the Beatitudes and thus these ironic antitheses, namely that the spiritual narrowness of the “pure in heart” allowed them to “see God” in the expanse of the

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\(^{54}\) XX. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First* through XXII. *Discourse the Third*, II: 44-103.
divine nature, thus spiritual simplicity procured happiness. The peace so desired and pursued by the “peacemakers” was met with its opposite, the world’s hatred and persecution, yet peacemakers are “happy.” Throughout Disc. 1-3, Wesley achieved an antithetical homiletic by exposition, and expansion, of these available textual antitheses.

**Extended Antitheses: False versus True Teaching, Law versus Faith, and General Rules versus Saving Faith**

The *probatio* of Disc.3, however, partially signals a new antithetical theme, consistent throughout Disc.3-6: Pharisaical false teaching versus Jesus’ true teaching. In the argument of Disc.3, Wesley inserted Matthew 5:27-32, 5:33-37, 5:38-42 and 5:43-48 to illustrate the three Beatitudes in 5:8-12. In Disc.4, Wesley slightly shifted the false versus true teaching antithesis from past false teaching to present false teaching. The sermon text of Disc.4 is not overtly antithetical but, as usual, Wesley’s Anglican commitment to combat antinomianism provides a helpful artificial contrastive dynamic. While expositing the text, he contrasted Jesus’ Matthew 5:3-16 teaching with its most contemporary challenger: extreme mysticism. The argument pattern, then, remains true teaching versus false teaching, but with emphasis on the errors of mysticism: Jesus’ teaching affirmed that Christianity is a social (“salt” and “light”) religion versus extreme mystical teaching advocating social seclusion; Jesus affirmed that faith (by nature) is revealed outwardly versus mysticism’s privatization of faith. Wesley reinforced this contrast with the *refutatio*, and again in the concluding section on “practical application.” In the

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56 XXIII. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth*, II: 104-123.

57 One of the chief concerns expressed to John and Charles Wesley by Bishop Edmond Gibson and Archbishop John Potter was that the Wesleys continue to uphold the Anglican resistance to antinomianism, which both brothers consented to do. See Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth, 1970), 58-62.
Sermon on the Mount, in *Disc. 5* and 6 Wesley took full advantage of the false-true teaching theme within the text, emphasizing this antithesis throughout those *probatio*. Though Wesley followed an expository design in *Disc. 5*, his argument was that in the early portion of the sermon text Jesus’ teaching stands against antinomian/mystic doctrinal tendencies and, in the latter portion, against formalistic aberrations. The sermonic argument, then, was the antithesis of false antinomian and formalistic teaching past and present, and Jesus’ corrective true teaching. In *Disc. 6*, the false versus true teaching emphasis returns to the setting of the text—the Pharisees’ hypocritical works of mercy versus Jesus’ teaching on works of mercy and the Pharisees’ hypocritical works of piety versus Jesus’ teaching on works of piety. So Wesley took full advantage of the antithetical nature of most of the Matthew 5 and 6 texts in these first six discourses by enhancing their antithesis within his expository sermons. Even when the text does not present antithetical images, as in *Disc. 4*, Wesley artificially placed antithesis in the sermonic design. In this way, he shaped over one-third of the Sermon on the Mount into two basic antithetical themes: the ironies of kingdom happiness and false teaching verses true teaching.

Wesley was confident that showing the antithesis of law and faith would correct both moralistic and antinomian teachings. He clearly developed antithesis in *The Righteousness of Faith*, where he proposed to distinguish between “what the righteousness is which is of the law,

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58 XXIV. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fifth, II: 127-145 (divisions II, III, and IV).
59 XXV. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Sixth, II: 150-164 (divisions I-III).
60 Antithesis between these two does not equate with *contradiction*. Wesley firmly believed in preaching the moral law. “[There was] a debate between the relative merits of law and the gospel that went back to Luther. Some insisted on preaching law as the means of begetting spiritual life, others opted for the gospel only. Wesley argued for an appropriate balance between them. He proposed that the preacher should begin with the promissory note of the good news of the gospel, then focus on the law as a means of awakening conviction of sin, and finally move to the exposition of the gospel.” William J. Abraham, “Wesley as Preacher,” in Maddox and Vickers, *Companion to JW*, 106.
and what the righteousness which is of faith.”

To exposit the sermon text’s dialogue (“Moses describeth….But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh….But what saith it?”), Wesley homiletically expanded this dialogical pattern. Throughout the discourse, the covenant of works (moral law) and covenant of grace (through faith) alternate in dialogue, “speaking” their requirements to the sermon reader. The contrast was made more emphatic by the “folly” of adhering to the Adamic covenant (moralism) and the “wisdom” of submitting to the faith covenant. A similar theological contrast between the terms “law” and “faith” occurred in The Law Established by Faith, Disc. I and Disc. 2.

Rather than combating moralistic error, however, these discourses addressed the extreme opposite, antinomianism. Wesley again approached the text in an expository manner but, carefully selecting the terms “law” and “faith,” he constructed an artificial antithetical argument not explicit within the text: antinomian “preaching the gospel” versus Scriptural “preaching the law” and the gospel, antinomian preaching of “faith” versus Scriptural preaching of faith and holiness, and past zeal under law versus present (antinomian) lack of zeal under grace. This antithetical pattern displays the incompatibilities between antinomian preaching/teaching and Scriptural teaching, and in Disc. 5 was reinforced by Wesley’s direct identification of “Antinomianism” rather than his usual correction of antinomian errors without using the term. In these three sermons Wesley had to contrast the moral law and faith, not to advocate faith and renounce the moral law, but to explain and defend the proper role of each. The terms “law” and “faith” are not antonyms, but the doctrinal abuses of each term are well-corrected by placing them in antithesis. In doing so,

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61 VI. The Righteousness of Faith, I: 81 (¶4).
Wesley amplified the Pauline argument in a way that was both true to the biblical text and preferable to Wesley’s antithetical homiletic style.

Wesley sometimes sermonically advocated the three General Rules, and applied the Rules quite strictly to class meetings, but in earlier sermons he was critical of the Rules as mere formalism. The entire argument of Disc.13 contrasted the salvific inadequacy of the General Rules with the “righteousness and true holiness” requisite to saving faith. Again, Wesley creatively exposit ed a text by overlaying it with an artificial antithetical sermon design to enhance its quality—in this instance, a General Rules versus saving faith contrast: Public profession and means of grace, doing no harm, and doing good, alone, are building “upon the sand”—but living the beatitudes is building “upon Christ,” therefore, do not build upon the sand of church membership/formalism, doing no harm, the means of grace, or doing good, but upon saving faith exhibited by living the beatitudes. Wesley exposit ed Jesus’ warning that religious activity alone cannot substitute for obedient relationship by framing religious activity in a definable model (the General Rules), and contrasting these with obedient relationship (faith), which is displayed by the Beatitudes (the larger textual context). With this antithetical approach, Wesley’s audience immediately recognizes their alternatives.


64 XXXII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth, I. 4 and III. 4-14.
Antithesis in Chronological Sermons

Though some of Wesley’s sermons included chronological elements quite secondary to his overall homiletic arrangement (for example, in sermon IV), in *The Cure of Evil Speaking* the chronological design was central to an antithetical goal. In one sense, Wesley was simply expositing a chronological text (Mathew 18:15-17), but his sermonic divisions deliberately reflected this chronology, and in each division he reinforced the progression by stating how unlike it was from the other two. Near the *peroratio*, he summarized: “this, and no other, is the third step which we are to take; and that we are to take it in its order after the other two; not before the second, much less the first, unless in some very particular circumstance.” The contrastive pattern, then, resembles: Step one versus steps two and three, step two versus steps one and three, and step three versus steps one and two. Wesley achieved, not merely a chronological exposition of the steps themselves, but an antithesis of each step with the others. This pattern was not within the sermon text, but rather a rhetorical creation of the homilist.

Antithesis through Definition

Mack notes that an essential rhetorical element included in the university curriculum for training in declamation was definition. He reiterates Sanderson’s instruction that, on the basis of definitions, the rhetor can more convincingly make argumentative “distinctions.” Careful preliminary analysis of *SOSO I-IV* confirms that definition was one of Wesley’s consistent rhetorical goals. It is significant, however, that frequently Wesley chose antithesis to define his

65 The divisional phrasing of IV. *Scriptural Christianity* suggests it was chiefly a chronological sermon—Christianity “I. As beginning to exist in individuals: II. As spreading from one to another: III. As covering the earth.” However, the primary antithetical pattern in each of these chronological stages was the absence of religious affections versus the presence of religious affections. See LIV. *The Cure of Evil Speaking*, IV: 100-110.
terms and to frame the sermonic argument according to that definition. Antithesis also allowed him to advocate his correct use of the term against others’ incorrect uses. In the sermons *Catholic Spirit* and *Christian Perfection*, the presence of definitional antithesis spanned each discourse. In the *probatio* Wesley determined to properly define “catholic spirit” by presenting a does not versus does argument pattern. Jehu first exercises a catholic spirit by what he does not ask about Johonadab’s faith, and what he does ask about that faith. Secondly, Johonadab’s response displays a catholic spirit by what it does not mean and by what his response does mean. Therefore, “catholic spirit” is defined by what questions one does not, and does, ask others about their faith, and by how one does not, and does, respond to others’ faith. In *The Repentance of Believers*, Wesley’s *probatio* was concerned to place in antithesis the role of repentance and faith in justification with their “sense not quite the same, nor yet entirely different” in sanctification. In justification, repentance and faith address sinfulness, and guiltiness, and helplessness. In sanctification, the same three inadequacies are addressed, but in a different sense, thus a rhetorical emphasis on parallelism. But it was in division II that Wesley presented his contrastive argument most dramatically. He stated that “repentance and faith exactly answer each other,” that is, in their contrasts they complement one another, which he demonstrated in five alternating antitheses: a) in repentance the believers feel powerless over sin versus by faith they “receive the power of God in Christ”; b) in repentance we “are sensible that we deserve punishment” versus by faith “are conscious” of our Advocate “turning aside all condemnation and punishment”; c) in repentance we have “no help in us” versus by faith there is “grace to help in…time of need”; d) repentance “disclaims” help versus faith “accepts” help; and e) two

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scriptures are summative: “repentance says, ‘Without him I can do nothing’ versus faith says, ‘I can do all things through Christ strengthening me.’” The pace of this alternation lends a highly rhetorical tone, and the exchange simultaneously contrasts the feelings generated by repentance and faith and (ironically) affirms faith’s complementary “answer” to the needs of repentance. The antithesis Wesley here presented was crucial to Methodism’s most distinct doctrine: Christian perfection. Without a proper contrast, the Scriptural doctrine of Christian perfection degenerates into antinomian perfectionism. The overall result was a homiletic argument based on a definitional expansion, in contrast to its more narrow interpretation. *The Repentance of Believers* substantially demonstrated this thesis’ assertion that Wesley’s homiletic use of antithesis achieves multiple goals. It was deliberately constructed for rhetorical effect, yet serves a purpose beyond rhetorical technique or the value of “plain truth”/clarity. Wesley’s commitment to the primary purpose of contrasting Scriptural Christianity with the aberrations of antinomianism prevails.

**Antithesis of Loss of Religious Affections versus Gain of Religious Affections**

Wesley’s rhetorical strategy discussed above, showing antithesis between the feelings of repentance in justification and sanctification, was even more emphasized in the antithetical pattern in *Satan’s Devices*, where he contrasted lost religious affections and gained religious affections.69 While the two sermonic divisions themselves represent an antithesis (Satan’s destructive device of perfectionism versus believers’ defence through Christian perfection), the principal contrast lies in the presence or absence of religious affections. Faith and spiritual fruit are the particular foci of his Satan’s “devices,” thus these must be the foci of the believer’s  

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69 XLI. *On Satan’s Devices*, III: 149-161.
“retort.” Satan “endeavours to destroy” joy, peace, joy and peace, righteousness, faith, hope, hope and love, but believers “may rise the higher” by experiencing greater joy, peace and righteousness, faith, hope, and love. Notice that these are in list form, and it was not uncommon for Wesley’s sermonic sub-points to resemble an annotated list. In the lost religious affections versus gained religious affections sermonic patterns, his listing—then relisting—of these fruits and virtues made his use of antithesis so discernible that the reader easily recognizes the pattern, tends to anticipate it, and was likely to be even more affected by its dynamic.

**Antithesis through the Anglican Hermeneutic and Christian Experience**

It is not surprising that, given Wesley’s frequent use of the three-fold Anglican hermeneutic and Christian experience, and his rhetorical preference for antithesis, he would design sermons which used these four sources in antithetical patterns. His approach was to point out that a doctrine which is supported by the four sources is Scriptural, but any doctrinal notion that does not enjoy their support is questionable at best. He was also suspicious when his doctrinal opponents did not even attempt to support their arguments with Scripture, reason, Christian tradition and faith experience, and claimed that his own doctrinal interpretations are correct because he submitted them to the test of these sources. The companion sermons *The Witness of the Spirit, I* (1746) and *The Witness of the Spirit, II* (1767), display an emphatic antithetical use of the four sources. In the *probatio* of *I*, Wesley argued that assurance of salvation is confirmed by Scripture and reason, the experience of conscience, by reason, and beyond it. In antithesis to assurance is presumption (II. 1-2), which is disconfirmed by Scripture, by Christian tradition, and by lacking

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70 I. 1-II. 6-7. For example, throughout the *Discourses* he re-listed the Beatitudes. In some sermons (I-III, VIII-IX), he even relisted in a chiastic pattern. At times, in the *refutatio* Wesley chronologically re-presented (listed) a few of the *probatio* points dialogically. In the *peroratio* he frequently reviewed the main divisions like an annotated list.
the experience of inward and outward spiritual fruit, an experience difficult to adequately explain since it is a “spiritual” reason, beyond philosophical reason.\(^{71}\) Two antithetical dynamics, then, were at work in the argument of sermon X.: 1) a divisional antithesis between assurance (I) and presumption (II), and 2) the antithesis of the Anglican hermeneutic confirming the former and not confirming the latter. In *The Witness of the Spirit*, I, Wesley suggested that Christian tradition acknowledged “this great evangelical truth” of the doctrine of assurance, and Methodism had “recovered” its rightful emphasis.\(^{72}\) He initially argued from the sermon text (Scripture), then offered a succinct description of how Scripture dynamically interrelates with reason and experience: “[Assurance] is nearly, if not exactly, the same with the testimony of a good conscience toward God; and it is the result of reason, or reflection on what we feel in our souls. Strictly speaking it is a conclusion drawn partly from the word of God, and partly from our own experience.” He proceeded, then, to argue for the doctrine of assurance from the four-fold hermeneutic: The late Bishop of London, Thomas Sherlock represents Church tradition’s recognition of the doctrine, Scripture confirms the doctrine “antecedently to…any reasoning,” and experience then confirms the Scriptural truth of the doctrine. The *refutatio* continues use of the hermeneutic, since objectors point to the abuses of experience, to Scriptures which seem unsupportive of the doctrine, and again to the unreliable nature of experience.\(^{73}\) It must be noted

\(^{71}\) X. *The Witness of the Spirit, I*, I: 140-153 (II. 1-11). Wesley frequently acknowledges the limitations of reason. For a summary, see Oden, *Scriptural Christianity*, 74-76. In characteristic contrastive design, Wesley clarifies in #70 *The Case of Reason Impartially Considered* what reason can do (I. 3-8) and what it cannot do (II. 1-9), *BE* II: 587-600.


\(^{73}\) Because Wesley’s sermons were frequently responsive to current theological skirmishes, his *refutatio* material often represented the impetus for the sermonic theme rather than true “responses” to it. It was only a matter of neoclassical rhetorical form that *refutatio* appeared in the latter portion of the sermon, as a response to the foregoing arguments. In this sermon, it was quite possible that Wesley designed the *probatio* around this four-fold hermeneutic in anticipation of the *refutatio* material, since some Anglican critics of the doctrine of assurance used these four elements.
that, in these two sermons, the Anglican hermeneutic and Christian experience are fully employed to correct the two doctrinal extremes that *SOSO I-IV* specifically addresses—formalism/moralism and antinomianism/enthusiasm. In the *exordium* of XII, he related the threat of these two extremes to a Scriptural understanding of the doctrine of assurance. Wesley was confident not only that the Anglican hermeneutic (plus experience) was a suitable theological corrective to formalism and antinomianism, but also that it generated a considerable antithetical dynamic, and thus was rhetorically effective as well. In *On Sin in Believers*, Wesley addressed in general the topic of perfectionism then argued in the remainder of the sermon the Anglican hermeneutic contrast with perfectionistic teaching. Perfectionism was contrary to Scripture, experience, Christian tradition and reason. In the sermonic summary, he emphasized the four-fold congruence. Immediately following in the *refutatio* section, Wesley addressed perfectionists’ objections in the same pattern, contrasting their teaching with the Anglican hermeneutic and faith experience. He countered their arguments from Scripture, reason, experience, and reason, again. In the fifth and final sermon division, he again summarized that perfectionism’s error was corrected by Scripture, experience, reason and Christian tradition.74

*Antithesis through Categories*

Wesley also sometimes placed two categories in antithesis, extending it rhetorically throughout the sermon. His chosen antithesis may emerge naturally out of the sermon text, but even if it did not he shaped the arguments to his antithetical preference. It was this sharp distinction which formed the thrust of his sermonic argument and the clarity of his final appeal. In *The Almost Christian* the categories of “almost” and “altogether” provided Wesley’s homiletic framework.

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74 XIII. *On Sin in Believers*, I. 181-195 (II–V). Similar uses of the Anglican hermeneutic appeared in sermons XXI and XXXI, which were shaped considerably by the three elements, plus Christian experience.
for the entire sermon.\textsuperscript{75} The progressing description of the “almost” Christian displayed impressive moral attributes and actions. The moral “heathen” is honest and practices justice, truth, and love. The formalist meets, then exceeds, this level of morality by practicing the General Rules with sincerity. This contemporary description of Christianity was so normative that Wesley must rhetorically emphasize his pivot into an alternate description of true faith: “But here it will probably be inquired, Is it possible, that any man living should go so far as this, and nevertheless, be only almost a Christian? What more than this can be implied in the being a Christian altogether?” This transition continued as Wesley briefly acknowledged that he also once thought the traits of the “almost Christian” sufficient for true faith. Just as formalistic religion augmented the standards of heathen morality, the “altogether Christian” definition encompassed “almost Christian” elements, then added the crucial further characteristics of loving God and neighbour, and saving faith. The result was not an incorrect versus correct antithesis between definitions of true Christianity, but an inadequate versus adequate antithesis; “almost” Christianity represents an inadequate faith, and only “altogether” Christianity is the legitimate description of biblical faith. Despite the “altogether” inclusion of the “almost,” the \textit{probatio} argument for their distinction was profound, for inadequate cannot provide salvation and “altogether” faith can. A quite different contrast of categories appears in XXXVI, where at the beginning of the \textit{probatio} Wesley stated, “There are innumerable sorts of enthusiasm.”\textsuperscript{76} It is immediately noticeable that, as he proceeded to describe enthusiasm via three categories, each category is subjected to elements of the Anglican hermeneutic: First are those enthusiasts who have an imagined “faith” (emotion-based conversions, religious zealots, and formalists) versus a

\textsuperscript{75} II. \textit{The Almost Christian}, I: 20-30 (divisions I and II). Outler relates the previous homiletic uses of the “almost/altogether” theme (\textit{BE}, I, 131).

\textsuperscript{76} XXXVI. \textit{The Nature of Enthusiasm}, III: 59-74.
Scriptural and rational faith; second, those with imagined influence of the Spirit (usually antinomians) versus those whose experience suggests to them otherwise and who finally display a “Scriptural, rational” influence of the Spirit; finally, those who shunned the means of grace (usually antinomians) versus those who used the means as Scriptural. (Some feel that those claiming providence are enthusiasts, but Wesley defended this theology, in general.) Therefore, this sermonic argument described enthusiasts’ beliefs and behaviour in antithesis to beliefs and behaviours sanctioned by the Anglican hermeneutic.

**Antithesis through Analogies**

Michael Graves’ analysis of the five key metaphors of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Quaker preaching is indicative of the rich rhetorical analysis possible for sermons of this era. Contrary to those assertions, observed in Chapter One, that Wesley’s sermons were practically bare of rhetorical characteristics, Wesley considerably argued by his favourite form of metaphor: analogy. Whereas metaphors extend rather simply into clusters of entailments, analogies are more complex and better serve argument. Wesley’s analogies are, by far, his most vivid use of antithesis. Like the *probatio* antithetical patterns already examined in this chapter, Wesley tended to extend a chosen analogy across the full length of the sermon. This allowed Wesley to build his sermonic arguments in favour of one ‘side’ of the antithesis and in opposition to the other. John Wesley’s inclusion of his brother Charles’ thoroughly descriptive “Awake, Thou that Sleepest” represents one of the most effective contrastive, extended analogies in the *SOSO I-IV* series: spiritually asleep versus spiritually awakened. The analogy is inherent in the

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78 III. ‘Awake, Thou that Sleepest’, I: 30-44.
sermon text, thus C. Wesley merely expounded it emphatically. Primarily, Wesley’s contrastive description of spiritual sleep was a “darkness” of spiritual understanding versus a light of spiritual understanding. Resulting are secondary descriptions: such darkness means a lack of recognizing spiritual disease versus an awareness of it and its remedy, experiencing chains of bondage versus divine release, lying down in false “peace” versus true “rest,” filth in the inner life versus purity of the Spirit within. Wesley then quoted in staccato at least ten scriptures with direct light/darkness terminology, and a series of Scriptures descriptive of life (in the Spirit) versus spiritual death. Thus the spiritually asleep versus spiritually awakened analogy extended seamlessly throughout the sermon as a persistent descriptive theme. The spiritual disease versus spiritual cure therapeutic analogy, which appeared only secondarily in the above sermon, was the dominant, extended analogy of *The Wilderness State*.79 The wilderness state was described as a disease exhibiting symptoms such as loss of faith, love, joy, peace and power, the cause of which is sin, ignorance and temptation. The available spiritual cure was repentance and understanding. With these came the restoration of “love, peace and joy.” Though this description had much in common with the lost religious affections versus found religious affections pattern discussed earlier in this chapter, the prevailing descriptions in *On Sin in Believers* remained located in the therapeutic analogy. Wesley’s emphasis of the parallel loss and restoration of “faith, love, peace and joy” created homiletic symmetry and strengthened the consistency of the analogy. The guiding analogy of *The Great Assize* was the earthly versus the heavenly court.80 Within a chronological arrangement, Wesley alternated comparison and contrast to apply as many analogous dimensions as possible. Key comparisons introduced in the exordium allowed

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79 I I. *The Wilderness State*, IV: 40-60. On sin as disease, see also: XVII, I. 7; XXV, III. 13; XLIX, III. 3; #80 (*BE*), 17; multiple references in #109 (*BE*) and #122 (*BE*).

continued comparisons in the *probatio*’s chronological summary of the judicial process. Even in
division IV the comparisons continued until the introduction of dramatic contrasts: the large
assembly of Wesley’s sermonic setting versus the innumerable whole of humanity present at the
general judgment; earthly restraints (prison, chains) when awaiting judgment versus the “chains
of darkness” prior to divine judgment; the “one or two facts” examined in the earthly court
versus “all our works” examined in the heavenly court; possible unjust acquittal due to lack of
evidence in the earthly court versus overwhelming evidence of guilt in the heavenly court. It
was the earlier close comparisons in the court analogy which made credible these latter
antithetical arguments. Wesley’s chronological arrangement added a sense of climax to the final
arguments, as well. It is noteworthy that Wesley also alternated comparison and contrast in *The
Great Privilege of those that are Born of God*, which presented an antithetical argument between
ceremonial baptism and regeneration, that is, formalistic “new birth” versus Scriptural new
birth.81 He began by distinguishing these two views of regeneration, but then strengthened the
analogy by very descriptively comparing natural birth with spiritual birth. To exposit the
remainder of the sermon text (“doth not commit sin”), Wesley shifted to a different antithesis:
Believers need not voluntarily sin versus some genuine believers do voluntarily sin. So, in this
sermon, the analogy was supplemented with examples to strengthen Wesley’s antithetical
argument.

**Sermons with Multiple Antitheses**

The current chapter, to this point, has examined sermon-length antitheses, that is, two opposing
principles, categories or images which dominate the sermon in which they appear. Wesley’s

81 XIX *The Great Privileges of those that are Born of God*, II: 31-43 (divisions I and II).
basic rhetorical goal was that one ‘side’ of each antithesis is proven to be Scriptural, and the other side either less Scriptural or unscriptural altogether. It was his task to sufficiently make this argument in the probatio and refutatio movements of the sermon, prior to calling for a decision in the peroratio appeal. Quite often, however, Wesley went beyond a single, sermon-length antithesis and used multiple antitheses within a sermon. In over half of the SOSO I-IV series, he moved from one antithesis to another within the sermon, reinforcing the antithetical pattern. Not only did such diversity allow Wesley more freedom to choose antitheses which fit his argumentative purposes, but to some extent it displayed his purposeful determination to make antithesis the dominant pattern of his homiletic. Sermon I is a typical example of multiple antithesis in the probatio divisions.\(^\text{82}\) It began with a definitional antithesis: Negative definitions of “faith” versus positive definitions of faith; Division two listed the major consequences of sin (guilt, fear, powerlessness) versus the results of, and the virtues gained from, saving faith (divine forgiveness, peace, hope, love, Spirit-power). The refutatio also began with a definitional contrast of “faith” without works versus faith with works, then “faith” produces pride versus faith produces humility, “faith” encourages sin and despair versus faith discourages sin and despair, and a “faith” discomforts versus faith comforts contrast. As with most of SOSO I-IV, the entirety of this sermon’s argument was designed antithetically. Sermon XII is solidly exegetical, but parallel to the flow of the sermon text are multiple antitheses, like worldly confusion about the conscience versus Scriptural clarity about the conscience, sincere godly living versus deceptive worldly living, and the strength of natural wisdom versus the strength of the Spirit’s wisdom.\(^\text{83}\) The final antithetical elements in the probatio are three negative-positive

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\(^{82}\) I. Salvation by Faith, I: 8-20.
definitional contrasts: The source of joy is not human, natural, material, or popular conscience, rather divine; the source of joy is not from an inactive conscience, rather from an enlightened one; the source of joy is not from an insensitive conscience, rather from a sensitive one. Again, it is apparent that this variety of antitheses were not explicit in the sermon text, but are artificially constructed for rhetorical purposes. However, some of Wesley’s sermon texts inherently offered multiple antitheses, and his homiletic treatment deliberately emphasized that language or those images. Earlier discussion of extended antitheses noted that if Wesley encountered a strong thematic contrast he advantageously arranged the sermon around that centrepiece theme or image. In instances when the sermon text itself is rich in antitheses, he preferred to address the text exegetically and to simply reinforce those antitheses for his listener/reader.84

The interrogative arrangement within some of Wesley’s SOSO I-IV sermons does not suggest that interrogative arguments formulate the probatio. Interrogation is, rather, the format of these sermon divisions. The arguments within those divisions maintained Wesley’s preference for antitheses. Within the interrogative arrangement (Why, I; What, II; Whom, III. How, IV) of Sermon V, Wesley offered mixed antitheses as he (non-sequentially) expounded the sermon text.85 In the first division, the contrasts are Adam and Eve’s spiritual life versus their spiritual death, and humanity’s spiritual death versus their spiritual life in Christ—a chiastic

84 This is also clearly displayed in the XXXVII through XXXI cluster, and sermons XXXIII, XXXVII, LIII, and XLVI.
85 V. Justification by Faith, I: 95-109 (Why, I; What, II; Whom, III; How, IV). Again, notice Wesley’s considerable effort to construct an artificial design around this expository sermon. He chose both to re-order the text and to add an extensive sermonic contrastive pattern not inherent to the text, while remaining committed to a basic exegetical approach. This would place Wesley in company with those Established Church homilists whose style was concise but deliberately rhetorical. This style moves beyond “the Puritan ideal” of “the bare ‘Word’ simply explained” to an openness toward artificial means of design. W. Fraser Mitchell, English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson: A Study of Its Literary Aspects (London: SPCK, 1932), 106-109.
pattern, though this may be inadvertent. The second and third divisions present definitional (negative, then positive) antitheses: in essence, justification is not sanctification, not freedom from Satan’s accusations, not freedom from divine judgment, and not being accounted righteousness in Christ, but rather is “pardon…the forgiveness of sins.” The justified are not the godly, but the ungodly. The fourth division (explaining how to be justified) was arranged according to a faith versus works-righteousness antithesis. One is justified by faith versus works/the moral law, by “constant” faith versus “wavering faith,” by faith alone versus works and faith, and by humble faith versus pride. Early in the probatio of sermon XVI, Wesley again (as he did so frequently) presented positive and negative definitional antitheses. The means of grace are “outward signs, words, or actions ordained by God, and appointed for this end, to be ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace” versus the means of grace are not an end in themselves, not intrinsically powerful, and not salvific. The refutatio division then presented an array of antitheses: trusting in the means versus trusting them as means, means are “works” versus means are not “works”, Christ as the only “means of grace” (antinomian terminology) versus simply the means of grace (more proper terminology), “wait” without the means versus “wait” with the means, a “stand still” waiting without the means versus a “marching forward” waiting with the means, being subject to Jewish ordinances versus being subject to Christ’s (means of grace) ordinances. The refutatio of The Reformation of Manners presented an unusually rhetorical tone in its antithetical construction. In this sermon, Wesley emphasized the refutation dialogue via seven repetitions of the phrase,

86 XVI The Means of Grace, I: 232-252 (II. 1; III. 3, 5).
87 Sermons XXXVI Wandering Thoughts and XXXIX The New Birth exhibit similar uses of the interrogative design with multiple contrasts.
88 XLIV The Reformation of Manners, III: 194-196.
“Say not.” He then responded to each of the seven concerns with Scriptural exhortations to assist in the work of the Society. The result was alternating antitheses between common excuses which deter involvement with the Society versus Wesley’s refutation of each excuse.

**Antitheses in Chronological Sermons**

Chronological designs are noticeably infrequent in Wesley’s *Sermons*. In part this reflects that his chosen texts are non-narrative, which tend naturally toward chronology, but even with the narrative text of *Catholic Spirit* his design was textual-topical. Rather, his chronological designs are artificial, and allowed for his preference for antithesis. The memorable adage, “Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can” in *On The Use of Money* is clearly chronological, but in the *probatio* Wesley coupled each of these principles with their opposites to create an antithetical argument: Unethical gaining versus ethical gaining, spending versus saving, keeping versus giving. The result was a chronological arrangement with antitheses to reinforce the prescriptive wisdom of the positive rules. The chronological homiletic arrangement of *The Good Steward* is less memorable but similarly demonstrates multiple antitheses. Chronologically, the sermon addresses our present stewardship, the brief future duration of this stewardship, and the final divine accounting of our stewardship. However, the argument followed antithetical logic rather than the chronological pattern: Using our souls, bodies, possessions and gifts for our will versus for God’s will, stewardship in this life versus accounting for stewardship after this life, in the final judgment, found wise and faithful as a steward versus found foolish as a steward,

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89 LV. *On The Use of Money*, IV: 116-129 (III).
wasting time versus valuing time. The antithetical pattern provided more specific alternatives for personal decision than does the simple chronological arrangement.

**Antitheses in Formal and Informal Refutatio Arguments**

For Mack, the *Homilies* are one of the many sermonic examples of the classical rhetorical *dispositio*, including Cranmer’s use of *refutatio*, or “answers to objections.” *Analysis of antitheses in Wesley’s refutation material must initially distinguish his informal uses of a refutation dynamic from the more overt neo-classical sermonic movement. When an entire sermonic division presents a number of positions/questions and counterarguments/answers, this represents formal refutation, or *refutatio*. The division was recognizably located in the latter portion of the neoclassical *probatio*. This strategic position signals its rhetorical function: to discount the foremost counterarguments which challenge the speaker’s position and remove their viability, increasing the probability of a positive response to the speaker’s *peroratio* appeal. Refutation which functions more informally tends to manifest in one of two categories: isolated refutation or intermittent refutation. *Isolated refutation was marked by a single exchange, that is, Wesley’s presentation of an objector’s position (usually in question form) and his own response/answer. If two or more exchanges occur throughout a sermon, an intermittent pattern developed. A sermon which contains any combination of the above informal and formal uses of refutation displays refutation variety. Such informal, formal, and variety uses of refutation served Wesley’s preferred contrastive patterns, as is demonstrated in the following three sections. Discussing refutation in its formal role is preparatory to an understanding of the*

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92 These are my terms, based on the observable characteristics of refutation in *SOSO I-IV.*
subtleties within its informal uses. The third division of Sermon I exemplified Wesley’s typical neoclassical sermonic *refutatio*.\(^9^3\) It is identified as such both structurally and descriptively, since the *partitio* announces that the final division addresses “How we may answer some Objections.” The entire division provides six objections and Wesley’s refutation of each. Three notable features emerge from this exemplar, and contribute to a broader understanding of Wesley’s consistent antithetical uses of formal refutation in the *Sermons*. First is Wesley’s tendency to initially address his hearer’s most common objections. Notice his opening phrase: “The first usual objection to this is, 1.” Wesley was aware that his congregation of Oxford formalists, with their soteriological emphasis on “good works,” perceived his interpretation of “saving faith” to be a considerable doctrinal threat. Therefore this objection is given primacy. Other formal refutations displayed a similar rule of prioritizing objections according to the foremost and immediate concerns of the audience. Thus the persuasive aim of argument, rather than a logic-centred presentation, is the primary rule of Wesley’s refutation arrangement. Such an arrangement enhanced the antithetical dynamic by emphasizing the most significant differences first.

Second, Wesley carefully answered critics according to their own use of terms. In objection 5, Wesley acknowledged his critics’ accusation that salvation by faith alone is an “uncomfortable doctrine.” Cranmer speaks of faith by grace as a comfortable doctrine, one that is “very full of comfort” according to Article XI, and these are terms with which Wesley’s Oxford audience was conversant.\(^9^4\) Wesley responded to his objectors’ precise ecclesial terms, and by so doing not

\(^9^3\) *Salvation by Faith*, I: 14-19.
only acknowledged his awareness of Established Church tradition but asserted his sermon thesis as compatible with this ecclesial position. It is characteristic that Wesley carefully quoted his opponents’ language (usually in dialogue form), to refute with specificity their exact complaints. Finally, he partially conceded to some objections, acknowledging a valid portion of their argument, before offering his own more nuanced doctrinal position. Wesley’s responses to objections 3 and 4 above, respectively, began with concession. In 3, regarding whether preaching faith alone engenders pride: “We answer, Accidently it may.” He quickly refuted this point when he insisted that justification “by works” was far more culpable in producing pride. The objection of 4 was that salvation by faith alone encourages sinful behaviour, to which he conceded: “Indeed it may and will.” However, Wesley argued that this is not the fault of the doctrine but of the agent whose responsibility it is to nurture humility.

As elements in Wesley’s antithetical homiletic pattern, these refutation features in Sermon I produced several positive implications. First, Wesley’s practice of addressing the most pressing objections early in the formal refutation sections indicated a homiletic aim over a strictly rhetorical one. Homiletic refutation intends to effect pastoral persuasion rather than to prevail in rhetorical debate. Wesley’s practical divinity hoped to assist objectors spiritually (albeit through challenge and conviction) rather than to defeat them ideologically. Also, Wesley’s frequent partial concessions demonstrated that, even in formal refutation, Wesley did not insist on sharp antitheses. He often willingly acknowledges opponents’ valid concerns simultaneous to offering a more Scriptural position. Refutation, for Wesley, was frequently a corrective of misdirected emphasis and a proposal of doctrinal balance. The consistent presence of both formal and informal refutatio material throughout Soso I-IV reinforces this thesis’ claim that the original
intent of most of these sermons is strongly responsive. The “collection” represents specific sermonic responses to the formalistic/moralistic and antinomian theological imbalances circulating during the Evangelical Revival. In other words, refutation is not only a conventional neoclassical movement within Wesley’s individual sermons which facilitates his response to opposing views. More broadly, the common use of both formal and informal refutation further confirmed the larger purpose of Wesley’s Soso I-IV collection of sermons: to respond to the widespread threats of moralistic and antinomian teaching by proving that they are the antithesis of Scriptural Christianity. Therefore, the antithetical material added via refutatio both supplements and reinforces those other antithetical homiletic elements analysed in this thesis. Wesley engaged in refutatio without using the term “objections,” or without placing it directly between the probatio and the peroratio, which is technically the proper dispositio position for refutation material. This occurs in The Scripture Way of Salvation, which began with the question: “And first, how are we justified by faith?” Despite no direct mention of “objections,” this division fulfils the role of refutatio. Similarly, the second sermonic division of The Reformation of Manners does not appear in the proper refutatio placement, but clearly Wesley addressed the relevant objections earlier in the sermon than was expected.

Isolated refutation is the most frequent pattern of refutation discernible in the Soso I-IV material. In these instances, Wesley placed a refutation exchange in the midst of the probatio discussion. The exchange may be brief or lengthy, but was characterized by a single posed

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95 Soso V-VIII (Sermons #54-#151, BE) exhibits considerably fewer formal refutation sections as well as less frequent use of informal refutation. Examples of exceptions are the formal refutation section in #76 (II. 1-16), #101 (II. 6-20) and informal refutation exchanges in #73 (II. 3), #75 (17), #77 (III. 3), #80 (20), #86 (II. 1-6), #87 (II. 5), #88 (10), and #101 (3).

96 Preface, ¶1.


98 XLIV. The Reformation of Manners, III: 191-196.

99 At this juncture, a slight but significant change of terminology occurs in my discussion, from “refutatio” to “refutation.” Refutatio is a technical rhetorical movement within the dispositio. This thesis section, however,
question and Wesley’s answer. In *The Marks of the New Birth* Wesley presented a moralist’s interpretation of 1 Jn. v. 3 that excludes emotion: “But some may possibly ask, does not the apostle say, ‘This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments’?” Wesley then briefly refuted the notion that loving God centres on “outward works” rather than “a disposition of the heart.” This was the sole question-and-answer refutation pattern in XVIII, and therefore a brief, isolated instance. However, some isolated refutations are extended and display two or more exchanges. In *The Lord our Righteousness*, eight paragraphs presented a series of refutations, beginning with: “But perhaps some will object, ‘Nay, but you affirm that faith is imputed to us for righteousness.’” Wesley answered the charge, and allowed for another question: “But is not a believer invested or clothed with the righteousness of Christ?” Wesley briefly answered, and acknowledges another question: “But must not we put off the filthy rags of our own righteousness, before we can put on the spotless righteousness of Christ?” After another answer, Wesley included two more exchanges of moralistic assertions/questions versus his response.

In some cases, Wesley’s refutations are presented neither in full-length divisional clusters nor in single, isolated instances. As in the divisional refutation, there are multiple points to refute, but he stated objections and their answers intermittently throughout the sermon. Rather than to defer and cluster them in a single division, he raised objections and responded to them on a point-by-point basis. *The Law Established by Faith, I* presented an intermittent refutation pattern via two distinctly separate exchanges. In two sermonic divisions, Wesley refuted those antinomians

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describes Wesley’s uses of minor refutation outside of that *dispositio* order, best described simply as refutation. This is true of both isolated and intermittent instances of refutation.


101 This pattern is also evident in Sermons V. (III. 5-6), XL (III. 6) and LI. (III. 12).

102 Wesley, *The Lord Our Righteousness*, 19 (II. 10, II. 11).

103 The same pattern is easily discerned in Sermons VI, VIII, and L.

104 XXXIV. *The Law Established by Faith, Discourse I*, III: 36-38, 39-41, 42-43 (I. 3-5, 9, 12; II. 4-7).
who espoused preaching only the gospel and who claimed that faith without works is sufficient for justification. Each of these refutations contributed only partially to the probatio material within their respective sermonic divisions. Taken together, they reveal Wesley’s homiletic practice of using refutation intermittently throughout the probatio wherever he considered it reinforcing to the immediate sermonic point. This sermon also exemplifies that refutation may address an opposing view in conceptual as well as dialog form. The conceptual appears early: “Their grand plea is this: That preaching the gospel, that is, according to their judgment, the speaking of nothing but the sufferings and merits of Christ, answers all the ends of the law.” The early seven refutations are in dialogue quotation, for example, “If you say, ‘But [Paul] preached Christ in a different manner in his epistles.’ I answer, he did not preach at all; not in that sense wherein we speak.” Some intermittent refutation appeared in a sermon’s latter probatio discussion, the rhetorical location where formal refutatio—when present—was placed. This suggests that even intermittent refutation may have attempted to achieve formal refutation’s role of resolving frequent or weighty objections prior to the summary and appeal of the peroratio. Near the end of the probatio material in The Nature of Enthusiasm, Wesley presented three intermittent exchanges, two in dialog with an enthusiast, and one with a formalist accusing Wesley himself of enthusiasm. With these views refuted, Wesley’s conclusion (peroratio) appealed to each side: formalists should not prematurely brand someone an enthusiast, and an enthusiast should rectify their understanding of revelation and cease fanatical behaviour.\(^\text{105}\) The Nature of Enthusiasm exemplified the potential of intermittent refutation to function similarly to formal refutation near the end of the neoclassical sermon.\(^\text{106}\) The intermittent and formal categories of refutation presented above are not always mutually exclusive. At least two SSO

\(^{105}\) XXXVI. The Nature of Enthusiasm, III: 72-74.

\(^{106}\) XXXIX. Christian Perfection also follows this pattern.
I-IV sermons use a combination of intermittent refutation later reinforced by a divisional series of answered objections. In The Means of Grace, Wesley offered an isolated refutation in both the second and third divisions.\textsuperscript{107} However, he later dedicated all of the fourth division to the formal refutatio. In Disc. 4, intermittent refutations are evident in the first two divisions, and then the whole next division is a formal refutatio.\textsuperscript{108} Apparently Wesley’s homiletic practice was to offer a refutation which matches the apparent “logic” of the objector’s argument. Thus his counterarguments varied from syllogistic form, to an Anglican hermeneutic form, to dialogical conversation.\textsuperscript{109} All of these refutations, by their very nature, are antithetical.

The Antithetical Dynamic in the “Scriptural Christianity” Probatio and Refutatio Arguments of SOSO I-IV: Preliminary Conclusions

Peter Mack’s summary of humanist rhetoric has proven a helpful source for the above discussion of Wesley’s sermonic argumentation. A few preliminary conclusions regarding Wesley’s probatio and refutatio material are now more apparent. They range from general to specific. First, Wesley’s SOSO I-IV probatios and refutatios displayed conventional neoclassical homiletic argumentation. Each sermon submitted to the probatio-refutatio movement within the disposatio. Wesley’s educated eighteenth-century auditor and reader anticipated and immediately recognized this neoclassical form, though few Wesleyan scholars currently acknowledge the influential interplay of this homiletic arrangement and Wesley’s theology. Second, more particular to Wesley’s evangelical and revivalistic agenda for SOSO I-IV was the axial argument of Scriptural Christianity. Regardless of sermonic theme, Wesley claimed that his arguments are Scriptural and primarily constructed them from the sermon text and referential

\textsuperscript{107} XVI. The Means of Grace, I: 238, 240-241.
\textsuperscript{108} XXIII Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Fourth, II: 108-109, 112-113, 115-122 (I. 5; II. 1).
\textsuperscript{109} Three variations are apparent in Disc. 7.
texts, supplemented by the remaining two Anglican hermeneutic elements and Christian experience. *SOSO I-IV* emerged as a collection of revivalistic sermons saturated with the language and logic of the Scriptural analogy of faith. Third, this thesis offers a preliminary list of descriptive terms for observable *probatio* and *refutatio* characteristics, and their interrelation with an antithetical function. Such terminology assists in isolating previously unexamined rhetorical elements within Wesley’s sermonic argumentation, and initially “funds” new research in this direction. For example, Scott Jones has identified five categories that describe Wesley’s use of Scripture: textual, explanatory, definitional, narrative, and semantic.\(^\text{110}\) The above analysis of antithetical patterns in the *probatio* and *refutatio* uses of Scriptural Christianity proposes a refinement of Jones’ discussion, particularly of the explanatory and semantic uses. These antithetical patterns make more obvious the dimension of how Wesley used Scripture explanatorily and semantically. Fourth, the analysis of this chapter confirms that each (and all) of these argumentative approaches serves a common antithetical scheme. The antithetical pattern was consistent throughout his variety of rhetorical approaches. This lends considerable evidence to the claims of this thesis that Wesley, with the deliberateness announced in the *Preface*, shaped his homiletic antithetically. Finally, the contrastive dynamic in these *probatios* and *refutatios* was effective in achieving Wesley’s overarching theological goal of presenting Scriptural Christianity as the corrective of formalistic and antinomian imbalances. It was not accomplished with Scriptural content alone, but by the rhetorical shaping of Wesley’s Scriptural arguments. Analysis confirms that antithesis is the dominant rhetorical dynamic of these arguments, just as it is in the introductory material of the *Sermons* (Chapter Three). The next

\(^{110}\) Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995).
chapter examines to what degree this antithetical homiletic influences the final neoclassical *dispositio* movement (the *peroratio*) within Wesley’s *SOSO I-IV* collection.
CHAPTER FIVE

“PURIFIED FROM EVERY UNHOLY AFFECTION”: WESLEY’S ANTITHETICAL CONCLUSIONS IN SOSO I-IV

And always, it is the ‘application’ on which the whole effort is focused; this makes most of [Wesley’s] sermons intensely personal and practical.¹

The epilogue of a discourse, also named the peroration and conclusion, could, according to classical rhetoric, have two fundamentally different functions. An orator could either use it for...a recapitulation, of his arguments, or he could let it serve for an appeal to the passions of his hearers.²

Methodist theologian Albert Outler correctly observed that John Wesley considered the concluding division of his sermons their chief rhetorical component.³ Wesley stood in his Anglican homiletic tradition when directly referring to the “application” in the concluding sermonic division.⁴ However, his application emphasis did not depend on such a direct reference, and all peroratio material may be broadly considered applicatory in its aim to shift from the foregoing argumentation movement into a final, pointed appeal to the reader. Therefore, in the eighteenth-century neoclassical sermon, the term “application” indicates a variety of peroratio rhetorical material and tasks: self-evaluation, challenge, motivation, inspiration, and pastoral encouragement.

In Wesley’s peroratios, this cluster of persuasive material was best represented by the rhetorical genre of exhortation. Arnold Hunt’s work describes the period of English preaching

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² Rolph Lessenich, Elements of Pulpit Oratory in Eighteenth Century England (1660-1800) (Cologn and Vienna, 1972), 120.
³ Rarely were Wesley’s discourses exclusively applicative, though that sermonic genre was common in the English pulpits of Wesley’s homiletic era (Lessenich, Elements, 89-94). As Chapter Five of this thesis demonstrates, Wesley’s Enlightenment sensibilities and preference for the rhetorical progression of the neoclassical model considered the probatio movement essential to an effective concluding appeal.
⁴ Lessenich, Elements, 110-119.
just prior to Wesley, but revivalism preserved some of the same sermonic characteristics, exhortation among them. Hunt’s comment on the peroratio tone is that “the preacher would raise his voice as he moved towards the emotional climax of the sermon.” Exhortation descriptively encompasses both the prevailing tone of the S O S O I - I V peroratios and the undercurrent of pastoral concern as their larger context. These two rhetorical forces, held in tension, account for the sense of both challenge and care that pervaded the peroratio divisions in the majority of Wesley’s fifty-three “Standard” sermons. Wesley’s exhorting “O” was a common feature which either signalled the beginning of, or reinforced the ongoing appeal of, the peroratio exhortation.

The category of sermonic exhortation also appears to account for Wesley’s deviation from the rule of a peroratio designed solely to summarize for the reader the probatio arguments or to produce in the reader an emotional response. Wesley’s exhortatory approach merged these two rhetorical functions, that is, produced a synthesis in which the sermonic reader was reminded of the probatio arguments then presented with an emotive appeal for the “application” of the doctrine just presented. At some point the emotive appeal was heightened by a pathetic cry, either to repentance or in praise to God. The intensity of the rhetorical pathos varied from sermon to sermon, but the appeal to “heart religion” was consistent. This theological theme also more particularly positions Wesley’s exhortation as evangelical, a characteristic which

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6 The rule indicated by this chapter’s opening quote from Lessenich.
determines both sermonic content and the use of biblical authority in the concluding pathetic (that is, *pathos*-centred) appeals.

The focus of this chapter’s analysis is to determine the extent to which Wesley stylistically designed, in the sermonic *partitio*, an antithetical homiletic to correct the doctrinal imbalances of formalism/moralism and antinomianism. Previous chapters in this thesis demonstrate that antithesis is the dominant rhetorical pattern in the introductory (*exordium/narration, explication/partitio*, Chapter Three) and argumentative (*probatio/refutatio*, Chapter Four) divisions of *SOSO I-IV*, and this chapter maintains that the antithetical emphasis continues into the neoclassical concluding movement (*peroratio*). The present chapter proceeds to first briefly describe these ten recurring *peroratio* elements which, though not formulaic, nevertheless are the dominant features of Wesley’s *peroratio* style. Second, this description includes discussion of the antithetical nature of almost half of these elements, a characteristic which is vital to the claims of this thesis. Then, six non-antithetical elements are briefly described. Fourth, this chapter recognizes that accurate analysis of neoclassical homiletic *peroratios* requires a more holistic estimation of the rhetorical connection between *probatio* and *peroratio*. The latter typically emerges from the former more dynamically than the interactions between other *dispositio* movements, thus each *peroratio* must (to some degree) be evaluated in light of the arguments of the sermon in which it appears. In this sense, the six common *peroratio* features achieve their *peroratio* task differently in some of Wesley’s sermons than in others. This provides the conclusions of the *Sermons* with stable and proven, but flexible, rhetorical patterns. Therefore, our analysis of Wesley’s sermonic conclusions requires reviewing a number of the sermons individually to discern the particular construction and contribution of the *peroratio* movement to *that* discourse. Fifth, and finally, preliminary analysis reveals a rhetorical
crescendo pattern in nearly all of the *SOSO I-IV peroratios*, that is, an increasing rhetorical intensity throughout the sermonic conclusion that climaxes in the thematic cluster of “holiness,” and/or “happiness,” and/or “heaven.” This chapter analyses the role of the nine dominant features in the formation of these rhetorical crescendos (the tenth feature), and evaluates the rhetorical effectiveness of the crescendo design.

**Four Antithetical Pairs of Affections**

An initial analysis reveals four recurring antithetical pairs in the fifty-three sermonic *peroratios* of the series: exhortation to holy versus unholy affections; exhortation to repentance and eternal blessedness versus eternal judgment; exhortation to temporal/daily obedience versus disobedience or laxity; exhortation to self-examination versus no self-reflection and/or selfdeception. To recognize that Wesley, consciously or unconsciously, used one or more of these exhortatory approaches in the *Sermons* assists our understanding of the nature of his homiletic conclusions. Their presence also makes undeniable Wesley’s thorough preference for antithetical sermonic patterns.

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8 Pasquarello helpfully links Wesley’s use of this thematic cluster (holiness, happiness and heaven) to “the tradition of virtue and happiness handed down in the work of Augustine and Aquinas.” Michael Pasquarello III, *John Wesley: A Preaching Life* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), 113.

Holy versus Unholy Affections

Clapper’s survey of Wesley’s uses of religious affection language identifies nine affections to be “sought” by the believer, and six to be “shunned.” The holy affections to be “sought” are: faith, love, hope, peace, joy, meekness/temperance, godly fear, gratitude, and happiness/holiness. The unholy affections to be overcome are: pride, anger, envy, despair, intemperance, and levity.¹⁰ Yet Clapper recognizes secondary affections attached to each of the lists above, such as the godly sorrow and repentance which lead to faith, and possible additions to the “shunned” list includes love of the world, unholy fear, and others.¹¹ The analysis within this chapter presents a slightly different version of these two lists as it considers the rhetorical influences of each affection.¹²

The Affections of Faith, Love, Hope, Peace, Joy, Meekness, Thanksgiving, Holy Fear, and Happiness

Faith, hope and love are a long-practiced rhetorical tripartite in Wesley’s Anglican homiletic tradition. One example is of Donne’s use of the same formula, observed in McCullough’s analysis of Donne in this partial sermon outline: “I. Man’s weakness in general; a. in knowledge;

¹⁰ Gregory S. Clapper, John Wesley on Religious Affections: His views on Experience and Emotion and their Role in the Christian Life and Theology (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1989), 85-89. As stated previously in this thesis, the broad terms “spiritual affections” and “unholy affections” (XVIII Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third, I. 2) are more helpful to this thesis’ discussion than Clapper’s term “religious affections” in the sense that pneumatology was at the heart of Wesley antithetical language. Clapper’s analysis does not explore the homiletic implications of Wesley’s emphasis on the religious affections. In fact, he attempts to deliberately avoid this line of enquiry: “We will not be primarily concerned with how well Wesley himself could evoke or evince any particular emotions, that is, we will not be concerned with judging his effectiveness as a rhetorician, orator or liturgist.” Such a task is difficult, since many of Wesley’s references to religious affections are integral to his homiletical theology, and necessarily rhetorical. Clapper inadvertently points to the rhetoric of religious affection when he acknowledges: “In many places, the affection language Wesley employed in the comment was not necessarily demanded by the content or the intention of the verse under analysis….To say that Wesley used a certain text as an occasion to preach about the affections is not to say that he distorted the text.” In other words, Wesley was rhetorically inserting religious affections to shape his homiletic goals while maintaining hermeneutical integrity.

¹¹ Clapper, Religious Affections, 123. My own analysis will slightly expand Clapper’s lists, but is indebted to his basic categorisations.

¹² Envy, despair, intemperance, and “levity and thoughtlessness” are not major unholy affections within SOSO I-IV, so discussion will not focus on these. Conversely, love of the world and unholy fear do deserve comment.
b. in belief; i. faith; ii. hope; iii. charity; 2. Martha’s weakness in particular; a. in faith; b. in hope; c. in charity."¹³ An emphasis on any one or all of these three virtues is observable in Wesley’s Sermons. Salvation by Faith and The Almost Christian provided a basic description of the role of the affection in faith. Wesley regarded intellectual assent to be one dimension of faith, but constantly challenged the formalist to go beyond this to include the affections—a “full reliance,” a “trust,” a “recumbency” on Christ as “living in us.”¹⁴ This relational trust alters the affections, freeing the believer from emotional guilt and fear, and replacing these with peace, hope and love. Faith (in response to divine love and grace), then, inaugurates and is the “ground of all” other holy affections.¹⁵ Wesley rhetorically emphasized faith’s prominence by giving it primacy in a list or discussion of affections, or building toward it as the portal to all other affections. Faith’s affective dimension, and its mediatory role with the others, was a consistent theme throughout the Sermons, and for this reason is worthy of further future research.

The first and second sermonic divisions of The New Birth offer a sample of Wesley’s use of love as a holy affection.¹⁶ Love is not merely a subjective sentiment or emotion, for it exists objectively as the dominant attribute of God and was an inherent component of humanity’s nature, until “extinguished in his soul” at the Fall. Love between humans was replaced by “pride and self-will”. It is restored, first toward God, when by the new birth the sinner’s eyes recognize God’s “glorious love,” and “the love of the world is changed into the love of God, pride into humility, passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice, into a sincere, tender, disinterested love

¹⁴ I. Salvation by Faith, I: 11.
¹⁵ II. The Almost Christian, I: 26-27 (II. 3-4).
for all mankind. This *imago dei* narrative summary of love lost and restored was a theme woven throughout the *Sermons*, and love trumps faith and hope as the ultimate, eternal affection. However, in the span of *SOSO I-IV* Wesley assigns more rhetorical emphasis to faith than to love, since (as indicated in the above narrative of sermon L) both the realization of divine love and response of love to God and neighbour follow justifying faith.¹⁷

Both *The Wilderness State* and *Heaviness through Manifold Temptations* suggest the role of hope as a religious affection.¹⁸ Again, faith is the portal of all holy affections, including hope: “On this foundation [hope] stands: believing in his name, living by faith in the Son of God, we hope for, we have confident expectation of, the glory which shall be revealed”, and “Indeed our hope cannot but increase in the same proportion with our faith.”¹⁹ Conversely, hope influences faith, for the mystical teaching that “despair” increases faith more than does hope is “idle conceit.” A lack of repentance can render natural hope “vain”.²⁰ The ultimate object of Christian hope is “hope of the glory” of God and “hope full of immortality.” In many of Wesley’s *peroratio* climaxes, hope was affection rhetorically positioned with eternal blessedness or, more dramatically, with the beatific vision.

In *Disc. 3*, Wesley described inner (individual) peace as “‘a fruit of the free, undeserved love and favour of God’” allowing its recipient to “‘enjoy all blessings, spiritual and temporal, all the good things ‘which God hath prepared for them that love him.’”²¹ Such peace-filled

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¹⁷ *Disc. 10*, ¶27. This statement is somewhat opposed to Wynkoop’s thesis that *love* should be considered the solution to the “methodological problem” of interpreting Wesleyan theology. See Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1972). The orb of rhetorical thrust in most of Wesley’s sermons, and certainly in *SOSO I-IV*, is faith.


¹⁹ LII. *On Heaviness through Manifold Temptations*, IV: 74 (IV. 3).


²¹ XXII. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third*, II: 90 (II. 2-7).
“lovers of God” become “peacemakers,” with a broad social agenda. The affection of peace, then, is comprehensive of the other affections. For example, inner peace contains faith, love, and hope, and social peace is “a work of faith” and “labour of love.” Wesley’s rhetorical use of peace in Soso I-IV was most emphatic in his favourite (Romans 14:17) description of the kingdom as “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,” though it appeared prominently in sermons focused on assurance of salvation (VIII-XI) and in those sermons offering pastoral concern (LI, LII).

Joy was the sermonic theme of The Witness of Our Own Spirit, where it was defined negatively (“not…a mere exuberance of spirits, nor a mere blindness of conscience, nor a callousness of conscience”) and positively: [joy] “is that happy peace, that calm satisfaction of spirit which arises from…a testimony of [the believer’s] conscience, and “Christian joy is joy in obedience—joy in loving God and keeping his commandments.”22 Joy, too, is encountered through faith: “We rejoice, through him who liveth in our hearts by faith”, which then motivates joyful “works”. Wesley referred often to enjoying God as one of the chief ends of human existence. Joy’s rhetorical emphasis closely aligns with peace, since it is also a kingdom descriptor (Ro. 14:17) and listed second in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It was the declared or tacit affection in peroratios climaxing with heavenly hope or the beatific vision (for example, The Almost Christian and On Wandering Thoughts).

In Disc. 2 the meek are not simply the apathetic or unemotional, but have a “composure

22 XII The Witness of our own Spirit, I: 178 (¶2, ¶20).
of mind” that is “a calm acquiescence” to God’s will, a “contentedness” with self, and “patience” toward others. It is a “divine temper” governing both the interior and social life. “Christian meekness” “heals,” it “removes,” the “hindrances of true religion” which manifest as “anger, impatience, [and] discontent.” Since this affection is rarely mentioned apart from others and appears at times to be listed (or ‘stacked’) with them, its rhetorical contribution is to reinforce the cumulative effect of the holy affections cluster.

Thanksgiving (gratitude) was central to Wesley’s sermon thesis in *The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God*, where it joins faith, love, prayer, and praise as the spiritual “breath” which the believer returns to God in Christian perfection: “But ‘whosoever is born of God’, while he abideth in faith and love and prayer and in the spirit of thanksgiving, not only ‘doth not’, but ‘cannot’ thus ‘commit sin.’” Since gratitude emerges from faith and love, it ceases when in the believer “the Holy Spirit is grieved; his faith is weakened, and his love grows cold.” When maintained with the other holy affections, the “sacrifice” of thanksgiving contributes to fulfilling perfection. The conclusion of this sermon is representative of Wesley’s exhortation to holy fear: “Let us learn, lastly, to follow that direction of the great Apostle: ‘Be not high-minded, but fear.’ Let us fear sin more than death or hell. Let us have a jealous (though not painful) fear, lest we should lean to our own deceitful hearts.” The foundational though tacit warning in this exhortation to holy fear is the inherent destructiveness of sin and self and its imposition on the

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23 XXI. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Second*, II: 64 (I. 2-4, 6, 7-11, II. 1). Pasquarello notes Wesley’s broad use of holy affections throughout the Sermon on the Mount series. Wesley “read the Sermon on the Mount as an invitation to the way of holiness and happiness through faith in Christ and the Spirit’s gifts and fruits. While the life of true religion requires external expressions such as doctrine, liturgy and discipline, it will also entail internal gifts of faith, hope, joy, love, patience, peace, and goodness.” (Pasquarello, *Preaching Life*, 113).

24 XIX. *The Great Privileges of those that are Born of God*, II: 36, 43 (II. 2, and see III. 3; II. 9, III. 3, 4).
“great privilege” of Christian perfection. As an affection, holy fear is “not painful,” and to be distinguished from unholy fear. Still, its rhetorical force lies in the seriousness of its demands.

It is appropriate to conclude the immediate discussion of holy affections with one of Wesley’s favourite phrases, “holiness and happiness.” “Holiness” is inclusive of the range of affections listed and described above, a composite of holy affections. “Happiness” is the resulting, ultimate affection of holiness, the sum of the other holy affections. In Disc. 8, Wesley summarized their connection: “The light which fills him who has a single eye implies… happiness as well as holiness….And if there be any consolation in Christ [that is, by faith], any comfort of love, any peace…, if any rejoicing…, they all belong to [the believer]….He walketh in the light, rejoicing…praying…giving thanks, enjoying whatever is the will of God.” (Wesley’s emphases). This rhetorically concise phrase represents the core of Wesley’s evangelical message: “holiness of heart and life.”

The Unholy Affections of Pride and Self-Will, Love of the World, Jealousy, Anger, Malice, Hatred, Envy, Resentment, Revenge, Covetousness, and Unholy Fear

Peter Mack reminds us that among the composition exercises in the Elizabethan grammar school were the Progymnasmata, which “strongly promote the idea that the orator can argue on both sides of the case,” for and against. Wesley’s humanist rhetorical training informed him of the power in such rhetorical mirroring. The negative parallel of the phrase “holiness and happiness” is unholliness and unhappiness. “Now be thou pure in heart; purified through faith from every unholy affection, ‘cleansing thyself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness

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25 XXVII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Eighth, II: 192 (I. 5).
in the fear of God.”“

Wesley’s sermons described, not only the attributes, of holiness to embrace, but also (usually in list form) those unholy affections to be avoided.

A single sermon, The Repentance of Believers, focused on the unholy affections, and serves to summarize descriptions of each. Wesley’s thesis was that repentance is necessary to sanctification as well as justification, a repentance of the unholy affections which remain in the believer’s heart. He admits that the new believer, filled with the initial joy of salvation, momentarily feels full release from these unholy affections. However, the old nature soon manifests them, and repentance is necessary. The larger rhetorical theme of Wesley’s descriptions in this division is developing a spiritual self-knowledge (self-awareness) of these unholy affections, which in turn instigates a repentance of them. Two unholy affections from which many others emerge are pride and self-will. The believer is aware that “there is still pride in his heart….He has thought of himself more highly than he ought to think, and…has taken to himself the praise of something he had received, and glorified in it.” Pride encourages him to self-will. “He frequently finds his will more or less exalting itself against the will of God.” Wesley clearly notes that the believer can “feel” pride and “feel” self-will “in his heart,” therefore they are affectional in nature. He used similar affectional language to describe the heart-locus of the love of the world: “But this likewise even true believers are liable to feel in themselves; and every one of them does feel it, more or less, sooner or later, in one branch or another….He will feel again (though perhaps only for a few moments) either ‘the desire of the flesh, or the desire of the eye, or the pride of life.’” Each of these represents “a species of idolatry,” a form of “desire” for earthly attachments rather than spiritual priorities. Throughout

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27 XXXI. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth, III: 15 (III. 11).
28 XIV. The Repentance of Believers, I: 197-198. Each quote in this paragraph is from division I.
the *Sermons*, “desire” was one of Wesley’s choice affectional terms (both for holy and unholy affections). Rhetorically, it signals the discussion of one or more of the affections and evokes a self-reflection within the sermon reader to identify which affections are in her or his own heart.

Next in Wesley’s listing of recommended repentances are “other tempers…as contrary to the love of our neighbour as well as to the love of God”: jealousies, anger, malice, hatred, envy, resentment, revenge and covetousness. Each of these harbour (if not nurture) unloving thoughts and/or actions toward the neighbour, and subtly suggest a narrative of ill will that the possessor of the affections may carry out. The rhetorical significance of these unholy affections is not narrative, however, but in accumulation.29 In this sermon, as in several others, they are listed and categorized to emphasize that there are many potential sins and a number of categories for them (that is, sins of commission, of omission, of the heart, of the actions). Therefore, consistent with Wesley’s thesis, no reader can deny “feeling” at least one or a few of these “tempers” and acknowledge the need for personal repentance. This homiletic goal was reinforced by a listing of the sins as rhetorical questions: “Who does not sometimes feel other tempers or inward motions, which he knows are contrary to brotherly love? If nothing of *malice, hatred, or bitterness*, is there no touch of *envy*?” (Wesley’s emphasis). Eight rhetorical questions appear in this paragraph, inviting the reader to reflect on personal experience with these sins and to respond in repentance. *The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption* also models the role of unholy fear, where it appears as a key word in the sermon text: “Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear” (Ro. 8:15).30 In the “natural” state, the unbeliever has no “fear” of God

29 In the tradition of classical rhetoric, accumulation was the listing of items to amplify their importance. See George Y. Trail. *Rhetorical Terms and Concepts: A Contemporary Glossary* (Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers, 1999), 37.

30 IX. *The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption*, I: 122, 124, 126 (I. 2, II. 7, II. 6, III. 4, see also IV, I. 2).
in the sense of awe and respect, for “He has not understanding enough to fear” but is “totally ignorant of God,” or inwardly maintains, “‘Why should I fear, since God is merciful?’” However, to enter the legal state is to recognize “the loving, the merciful God is also ‘a consuming fire’ and to have ‘fear, sometimes arising to such a height that the poor, guilty soul is terrified with everything.’” The evangelical state dramatically removes all previous unholy fears: “He cannot fear any longer the wrath of God….He cannot fear the devil….He fears not hell” and “has no fear of death.” What remains, for the believer, is that humble sense of godly fear acknowledging God’s rule.\(^{31}\) Most of Wesley’s sermonic rhetorical uses of “fear” emphasized its convicting role in the legal state, that is, as an unholy affection.\(^{32}\)

**The Interdependency of Affections**

Each of the above excerpts from *SO I-IV* descriptions of holy affections indicates an interdynamic that merits explicit remark: the holy affections are interdependent. As has been indicated above, faith is the portal of this interdependency, as Scriptural language indicates: “being filled with peace and joy in believing [that is, faith]” (Ro. 15:13). Wesley constantly echoed these compounds of affections. Abiding in faith and love brings joy, which is a “happy peace.”\(^{33}\) With joy “we gladly fight the good fight of faith” (my emphasis). It is a joy to love, and the meek fix their joy on heaven.\(^{34}\) The full list of holy affections joins in the expansive crescendo of heavenly blessedness: “that all the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ may be found in us—not only ‘love, joy, peace’; but also ‘long-suffering, gentleness, goodness; fidelity,

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\(^{31}\) XLV. *The Good Steward*, III: 211 (I. 3).

\(^{32}\) Clapper finds a greater number of instances of godly fear in Wesley’s *Notes* on the Old and New Testaments.

\(^{33}\) XII. *The Witness of Our Own Spirit*, I: 169 (¶2, and see XVI, 1).

\(^{34}\) XXIX. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Tenth*, II: 222 (¶27); XXI. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Second*, II: 68 (I. 12).
meekness, temperance.’ Pray that all ‘these things may flourish and abound’…till an abundant ‘entrance be ministered unto you into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ!’”

These interdependencies, then, formed the probation arguments of some sermons: faith, hope, and love (Disc. 2); the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit (sermon IV); faith, peace, hope, joy, and love (sermon XIV); no fear, with false joy and peace, then fear without joy and peace, and finally true joy and peace without ‘slavish’ fear (sermon IX). Perhaps the most striking example of a compound of affections was the probation of The Wilderness State, where hope is inextricably interdependent with love, joy, and peace: “In consequence of the loss of faith and love follows, thirdly, loss of joy in the Holy Ghost…And in like manner…, now they are deprived of that ‘hope full of immortality’, and are deprived of the joy it occasioned.” Notice as well that joy produces hope, and vice versa. Therefore, affectional language contributed to Wesley’s neoclassical argumentative task. Wesley’s lists of unholy affections also exhibited patterns of interdependency. With the “sinful fear of man…faith and love [are] proportionately weakened” (Disc 4). Self-will promotes anger (sermon IV). Love of the world leads to hatred of believers (Disc. 3). Such constructions of multiple unholy affections are not unusual. These, and other, instances of the structural uses of affectional language confirm that: a) the affections are not incidental elements of Wesley’s homiletic, but rather a major theological theme; and b) their structural influence considerably shapes the rhetorical arguments and appeals within the Sermons by providing sharp antithesis between holy and unholy affections. This is yet another antithetical pattern, reinforcing the overall antithetical homiletic of the series.

35 XL. On Wandering Thoughts, III: 147 (IV. 8).
36 LI. On The Wilderness State, IV: 41-42 (I. 3).
Clarifying the difference between biblical uses of affectional language and Wesley’s homiletical uses of the same terms reinforces the major claim of this thesis: Wesley was often assembling or reconfiguring Scriptural affectional language to suit the theological and rhetorical purposes of the sermon at hand. Descriptions of holy and unholy affections are, in one sense, primarily biblical. But the biblical text more narrowly supplies a sermon text, from which or for which Wesley the homiletical theologian constructed the necessary neoclassical dispositio material. In Wesley’s case, antithetical designs broadly governed the dispositio movements, and the lists of holy and unholy affections provide rich antithetical material. Therefore, affectional language cannot merely be dismissed as “Wesley’s use of biblical terms,” for in fact he significantly reshaped such language in antithetical designs to suit his homiletic aims.

**Exhortation to Repentance and Eternal Blessedness versus Eternal Judgment**

Wesley’s thoroughly evangelical message included peroratio exhortations to repentance, resulting in divine forgiveness and ultimate eternal blessedness (“heaven”). Antithetically, the refusal to repent leads to divine judgment, personal judgment (“hell”) and sometimes corporate/national judgment. “Take heed thou destroy not thy own soul by pleading they righteousness, more or less. Go as altogether ungodly, guilty, lost, destroyed, deserving and dropping into hell, and…he justifieth the ungodly”; “Let the whole stream of thy thoughts, words, and actions flow from the deepest conviction that thou standest on the edge of the great gulf, thou and all the children of men, just ready to drop in, either into everlasting glory or everlasting burnings”\[^{37}\] As for national judgment: “Whom then shall God send? The famine, the

\[^{37}\] V. *Justification by Faith*, I: 79 (IV. 9); XXXII. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon On the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth*, III: 12, 16.
pestilence (the last messengers of God to a guilty land), or the sword?...Lord, save, or we perish!”

**Exhortation to Temporal/Daily Obedience versus Disobedience or Laxity**

However, Wesley was not content to appeal to future blessedness alone, but often exhorted his sermon reader to temporal, that is daily, holiness. The daily self-discipline of his introspective Holy Club practices remained evident in these sermonic exhortations. Such spiritual devotion stood in antithesis to daily disobedience and spiritual laxity, and precedes the experience of eternal blessedness. “Daily growing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and going on from strength to strength, in resignation, in patience, in humble thankfulness for what ye have attained and for what ye shall, run the race set before you, ‘looking unto Jesus’, till through perfect love ye enter into his glory”; “Let us earnestly ‘work together with him’, by the grace which he is continually giving us…and daily growing in…grace…till we are received into his everlasting kingdom.”

**Exhortation to Self-Examination versus No Self-Reflection and/or Self-Deception**

Another frequent *peroratio* antithetical pair presented to Wesley’s reader was the choice of self-examination versus no self-reflection (leading to self-deception). The term “examine” clearly signals such instances, but other phrases call for the same introspection: “‘Examine yourselves’, therefore….Examine narrowly, for it imports you much”; “I beseech you…that each of you

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38 IV. *Scriptural Christianity*, I: 94 (IV. 11).
39 Wesley draws from a number of theological traditions which emphasize this theme, but of contemporary impact was William Law’s stress on spiritual laxity in *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728).
40 XLI. *On Satan’s Devices*, III: 161 (II. 6); LII. *On Heaviness through Manifold Temptations*, IV: 74 (IV. 4). Other notable examples of this antithetical pair are in XXXV. III. 6, and LIII, III. 4.
would ask in his own heart, ‘Am I of that number?’” 41 At times the exhortation to self-examination was indirect, but identifiable by a succession of rhetorical questions. 42 In the absence of this self-reflection, self-deception flourishes: “Discover thyself, thou poor self-deceiver! 43 “Have you deceived others until you have deceived yourselves also?...You have too long shut your eyes against the light. Open them now, before it is too late.” 44

**Seven Non-Antithetical Common Features**

Added to affections and to the antithetical pairs are at least seven *peroratio* features which may be identified as non-antithetical: *probatio* review, exhortation to prayer, benediction or doxological language, the exhorting “O,” the pathetic “cry,” Scripture accumulation, and the rhetorical crescendo. However, whether these seven elements appear singly or in combinations, Wesley intended that they contribute effectively to the overall *peroratio* movement.

The introduction of the current chapter noted the neoclassical homiletic “rule” of designing a *peroratio* which either summarizes the *probatio* arguments/main points, or elicits an emotional response to the sermon’s reader. Wesley (and seemingly a number of his colleagues in the eighteenth-century Established Church pulpit) unapologetically merged these elements into his sermonic conclusions via exhortation. *The Witness of the Spirit, I* exemplifies how a *probatio* review appears in the *peroratio*. 45 The first three divisions are reviewed at the beginning of the fifth division, and the point-by-point refutation is both listed and discussed in the second division. In the third point of the second division, Wesley’s “inferences” were, in fact, the

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41 IX. *The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption*, I: 130 (IV. 1); II. *The Almost Christian*, I: 28 (II. 7).
42 IV. *Scriptural Christianity*, I: 59-94.
43 X. *The Witness of the Spirit*, I: 150 (II. 8).
44 XXXI. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Twelfth*, II: 266-267 (III. 12, 14).
rhetorical shift into an exhortation which emphasised spiritual fruit (holy affections) and offered a pathetic “cry.” The reason for a probatio review in this sermon’s peroratio was typical: Wesley desired to summarize the reasoned arguments of the probatio in order to strongly link these with the more emotive concluding exhortation.

Wesley infrequently supplied a conclusion with either a call to prayer or his own offered prayer. Disc. I issued a call to prayer beginning with the pathetic cry: “O cry aloud! Spare not! Lift up your voice to him who grasps both time and eternity, for both yourselves and your brethren.” Wesley both summarized the probatio and called the reader to prayer in On Wandering Thoughts: “Rather, let us pray…that ‘all’ these ‘things may work together for our good’; that we may suffer all infirmities of our nature, all the interruptions of men, all the assaults and suggestions of evil spirits, and in all be ‘more than conquerors.’ Let us pray….Pray that….” Wesley offered (that is, himself composed) a concluding prayer of repentance in Scriptural Christianity: “Lord, save, or we perish! Take us out of the mire, that we sink not! O help us against these enemies!” In The Marks of the New Birth he closes with a pastoral prayer that also summarized the probatio. Such rhetorical uses of prayer helped to achieve the principle peroratio aims of emotional appeal and, at times, summary of the probatio arguments.

Rarely did Wesley offer a full, formal benediction in the I-IV sermons. In Disc. 9, a benediction appears in the traditional Trinitarian formula: “Now unto God the Father…; unto God the Son…; unto God the Holy Ghost…: be honour, and praise, and majesty, and dominion, for

\[46\] XX. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First, II: 62.
\[47\] XL. On Wondering Thoughts, III: 146 (IV. 8).
\[48\] IV. Scriptural Christianity, I: 94 (IV. 11).
\[49\] XVIII. The Marks of the New Birth, II: 30 (IV. 6). This paragraph does not appear in the Jackson edition.
ever and ever! Amen!” The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption presents what may be considered a benediction with doxological language, quoting Hebrews 13:20-21: “until the God of peace make thee perfect in every good work…through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever!” The liturgical tone of such benedictions was not Wesley’s preferred SOSP rhetoric.

More prevalent in SOSP I-IV than formal peroratio benedictions are numerous conclusions which display doxological language. Wesley was not alone among Evangelical Revival preachers who maintain “the passionate, affective style of early modern preaching” most strategically in the peroratio, and even more particularly in the final, doxological flourish. In some instances, the term “glory” was emphatic in the ascription, and substituted for a full doxological formula. Wesley directly quoted a Scripture containing the term “glory,” as in The Circumcision of the Heart: “When we…neither think, or speak, or act, to fulfil our ‘own will, but the will of him who sent us’: when whether we ‘eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God.’” “Glory” or “glorify,” however, may be Wesley’s chosen term rather than in a Scriptural quotation. This was exemplified near the final sentence of Awake, Thou that Sleepest: “Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name.” The placement of a benediction or of doxological language in late peroratio sentences is yet another rhetorical contribution to the neoclassical expectation of pathos in sermonic conclusions.

In over half of the sermon peroratios in SOSP I-IV, Wesley placed an exhorting “O.” It appears once or twice in the majority of these sermons, but multiple uses do occur. Charles

50 XXVIII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon upon the Mount, Discourse the Ninth, II: 229 (¶29, and similar in I, III. 90).
51 IX. The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption, I: 139 (IV, 4, and similar in X, 20).
52 Hunt, Art of Hearing, 401.
53 XVII. The Circumcision of the Heart, II: 16 (II. 10).
54 III. Awake, Thou that Sleepest, ’I: 44 (III. 15).
Wesley’s “Awake, Thou that Sleepest” modeled the most emphatic rhetorical use of these exhorting “O”s within the I-IV series: “O God ‘in the midst of wrath remember mercy’!...O may we speedily see the things that make for our peace….‘Turn Thou us, O good Lord…O Lord, look down from heaven’; ‘Help us, O God of our salvation…O deliver us…O deliver us…O let us live…O Lord God of hosts.”55 Though more moderate, John’s one or two exhorting “O”s in a peroratio served the same rhetorical ends, to clearly identify the material as hortatory and to enhance the pathetic tone.

Likewise, in many of Wesley’s sermonic conclusions he inserted a brief pathetic “cry.” It was either the emotional cry of repentance, or the joyful cry of praise. In repentance we “Cry unto him out of the dust,” and continue “crying unto him day and night until we also are delivered.”56 “O cry aloud! Spare not! But…that you may be counted worthy to escape...destruction”57 Typically, the cry of praise is for the assurance of salvation: “and he can continually cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”58 Other praises are expressed as cries: “Let all your bones cry out ‘, ‘My song shall always be of the loving-kindness of the Lord”59 The pathetic cry straightforwardly contributes emotional force to peroratio appeals for repentance and praise.

Wesley’s sermonic texts were saturated with allusions, quotations, and references to Scripture, which is perhaps the single-most obvious trait of his homiletic style. A cursory estimation of this practice may suggest that Wesley was primarily producing Scriptural support for homiletic points and sub-points, and this correctly describes his use of Scripture in the

56 XXXI. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Twelfth, II: 267 (Disc. 12. III. 14); XXXIX. Christian Perfection, III: 131 (II. 29).
57 XX. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First, II: 62 (II. 8).
58 IX. The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption, I: 138 (IV. 3). See also X. II 14.
59 XVI. The Means of Grace, I: 252 (V. 4).
probatio movement. However, given the specific tasks of the peroratio movement, Wesley’s staccato Scripture quotations enhanced a sense of crescendo. The use of Scripture in this way also resembled the classical rhetorical strategy of accumulation which, in this case, is the almost unbroken quotation or allusion of numerous Scriptures. Their collective force either specifically emphasized the concluding sermonic point or in general solidified Scriptural authority for Wesley’s concluding appeal.

Analysis makes apparent that each of the eleven elements, both antithetical and nonantithetical, synergistically funnel into a concluding rhetorical crescendo. No single sermonic peroratio contains all eleven elements, nor is this necessary to produce the desired eleventh element itself, the crescendo. The crescendo often builds in the following manner: Wesley’s language (“practical application”) or tone made clear that an exhortatory division had commenced. One or more of the antithetical pairs, described above, presents two decisive options to the reader, for example self-examination versus self-deception. Wesley appealed for one of the options, and the correct choice likely results in holy affections. Sometimes these choices and resulting affections were summaries of the probatio arguments, but invariably they contained pathos material, including the exhorting “O,” the pathetic “cry,” a prayer, or a benediction/doxological declaration. Evangelical “heart religion” is the general focus of the emotive appeal. The cohesive rhetorical element in all of this peroratio material was Wesley’s Scripture accumulation and tacit appeal to its authority regarding the sermonic theme. The trajectory of these rhetorical components is an expansive crescendo in which the sermonic theme broadens to a grand, perhaps ultimate, end. Wesley offered or declared the fulfilment of a spiritual desire, such as Christian perfection or eternal, heavenly blessing. Rarely does the convergence of these elements appear formulaic, nevertheless analysis confirms that this set of
rhetorical characteristics achieved Wesley’s neoclassical sermonic *peroratio* aims with reliable consistency. The ten dominant rhetorical elements discussed above, and their collective contribution to an expansive crescendo (the eleventh element), reveal a pattern which represents Wesley’s sermonic *peroratio* in the *SOSO I-IV* series. The four antithetical pairs continue the antithetical pattern made apparent throughout the introductory and argumentative movements of the *dispositio*. Even the seven so-called non-contrastive elements heighten reader emotion and thus contrasts with the previous argumentative tone from the decisive and inspirational (expansive crescendo) tone of the conclusion. Wesley thus fulfilled, with some stylistic preference, the basic design of the neoclassical *peroratio* movement: summary and application/exhortation with emotional appeal.

**Peroratio Elements in Expansive Crescendos: An Analysis of Sermons**

The remainder of this chapter demonstrates, in topical fashion, the interaction of the rhetorical elements described above. The eleven elements appear within *SOSO I-IV* intermittently, in a variety of combinations, and create within each sermon a rhetorical dynamic particular to Wesley’s immediate homiletic goal. This chapter does not intend to provide a comprehensive categorization of these dynamics. Rather, it commits to supplying ample analysis of how Wesley consistently used the language of the affections and other rhetorical elements to accomplish: a) his preference for antithetical homiletic material to correct the doctrinal imbalances of formalism/moralism and antinomianism; and b) his fulfilment of the conventional (Anglican) neoclassical sermonic conclusion (*peroratio*).
Wesley’s *The Way to the Kingdom* is identified as a “key” representative sermon of *SOSO I-IV*, thus the use of holy and holy affections in the *peroratio* of this discourse as an apt beginning point for determining their larger significance in the series. Other of Wesley’s common rhetorical elements shaped the conclusion, as well.

*Peroratio* use of the holy and unholy affections is best understood in light of their appearance in the earlier *probatio* movement. The secondary text for this sermon points to two key holy affections: “The kingdom of God is…righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,” (Rom. 14:17), and the entire first division was Wesley’s exposition of this verse. The holy affection of love is “the sum of all true righteousness,” a love which includes faith, hope, and the fruit of the Spirit. These produce “happiness as well as holiness”. Wesley offered combinations of the affections: “happiness…and peace”, a peace which “banishes” the unholy affection of “fear.” There is “joy” and “hope.” The second sermonic division discusses the sinner’s conviction of living “contrary to the Spirit” and the unholy fruit which results. But faith delivers peace from fear, and initiates the experience of joy, hope, and love.

Given this emphasis on the holy affections in the *probatio*, it was not surprising that in Wesley’s single-paragraph sermonic conclusion these affections commenced the expansive crescendo which (first) addressed believers: “This repentance, this faith, this peace, joy, love” unfolds into an ever-expanding “change from glory to glory….hold fast, and follow, till” ultimately “thou attain all the great and precious promises.” Then, he offered an exhortation to

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unbelievers, which was likewise expansive: “And thou who hast not yet known him….God will soon turn thy heaviness into joy….and he will take away thy fears,” and so begins the everwidening experience of “kingdom” life.

The final paragraph also displayed Wesley’s common rhetorical elements of a truncated probatio review, the exhorting “O” (twice), a temporal exhortation (“entrance shall now be ministered unto thee into the kingdom,” and five biblical quotations for Scripture accumulation. Thus this sermon includes five of Wesley’s ten common rhetorical elements, a homiletic mixture which and well-represents the several peroratios for analysis below.

Other Sermons with Dominant Affectional Emphases

*The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption* presented nearly all of the nine rhetorical elements characteristic of Wesley’s peroratio style. Again, an examination of these characteristics as they appear in probatio arguments best ensures accurate analysis of their reappearance in the peroratio.61 The basis of this probatio is the argument that there exist three general spiritual “states”—natural, legal, and evangelical—and that one’s own state may be recognized by comparing the antithetical descriptions of three general spiritual states with one’s personal experience. These descriptions are laden with affectional language. The natural state is characterized by false peace and no fear. It offers a false “kind of joy” and false sense of “liberty.”62 The legal state, however, experiences fear of judgment due to the consciousness of personal sin, “every temper and thought, being only evil continually.” This removes the earlier

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62 Wesley’s use of “Liberty,” or freedom, in this sermon was clearly experiential (thus affectional) rather than conceptual.
illusion of joy, and exposes sins which before were unnoticed: “pride, anger, or evil desire;…self-will, malice, envy, revenge.” This new recognition of sins produces “fear” and “guilt,” and one knows himself to be “in bondage and fear.” The sinner “pants after liberty, power and love”, but is in fear and bondage.” In the evangelical state, the sinner experiences the “love of God,” and a faith which releases him from guilt and fear, securing spiritual “liberty,” “peace,” and “love.” A dramatic affectional shift occurred: “It is by him they are delivered from anger and pride, from all vile and inordinate affections.” Wesley opened the peroratio with the antithetical pair of self-examination versus no self-reflection: “‘Examine yourselves’, therefore…‘whether ye be in the faith.’” The list of rhetorical questions which follows confirms that the “faith” here referred to is not intellectual assent, but a holy affection in synergy with other affections and their counterpart unholy affections: love for God and holy fear versus love of the world, unholy sorrow and fear, and daily spiritual liberty versus continual spiritual bondage.

However, the “mingled” nature of these three states blurs the clear lines of antithesis between holy and unholy affections. That is, “mingled” states produce inconsistent affections: momentary unholy fear, unholy fear with godly hope, no godly fear or love, but “some degree of meekness, patience, temperance, and of many other moral virtues.” Wesley’s concluding exhortation was that “thou who art called by the name of Christ” will “not rest” in the natural or legal state, but completely leave unholy fear for true joy and love. In summation, The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption displayed nine of Wesley’s eleven most common peroratio characteristics. His discussion of “mingled” states served as a probatio review, and he

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63 As in the previous footnote, in most of his sermons Wesley used the term “guilt” experientially, not merely as the theological concept of breaking divine law.
highlighted two of the main antithetical pairs, namely holy versus unholy affections and self-examination versus no self-reflection and/or self-deception. His fourteen Scripture quotations and allusions accomplished Scripture accumulation. A pathetic “cry” was offered in Wesley’s typical appeal for assurance of salvation: “Have you the Spirit of adoption, ever crying, ‘Abba, Father’? Or do you cry unto God ‘out of the belly of hell’?” The exhorting “O” appears three times: “O stand fast in thy glorious liberty….O hast thou dared to name the name of Christ!” and “O ‘prove’ thou ‘what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.’” His temporal exhortation (“Beware thou rest not….but…follow on till thou attain….Now ‘present’ thyself ‘a living sacrifice’…‘hold fast’ by ‘reaching forth’”) also called the reader to prayer, and the holy affection of gratitude, then the peroratio concluded in a flourish of doxological language.

In *The Almost Christian* Wesley presented another somewhat mingled view of religious affections, and in the probatio listed the holy affections which reliably identify one as an authentic “altogether Christian.” Even “heathens,” reasons Wesley, exhibit the virtues of justice, truth, and human love. The moralist displays morality, self-control and self-sacrifice, and religion/means of grace—all with sincerity. In each of these lists, holy affections of love and self-control appear (both, fruit of the Spirit according to Galatians 3:22-23). But “altogether” Christians add a love for God, which “takes up all the affections,” love for neighbour, and a “living…right and true Christian faith.” This faith “‘purifies the heart’…from pride, anger, desire” and “fills it with love” and “joy” amidst persecution. The peroratio then re-presents these “altogether” holy affections in the form of rhetorical questions: “Are you

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64 IV. 1, see also IV. 3. If this reference to “hell” is considered a warning of divine judgment, then this represents the tenth common rhetorical element in this sermon. However, it is more a description of the unholy affections of “sorrow and fear” (IV. 1) than an exhortation to flee divine judgment, thus I do not consider it an eternal blessedness versus eternal judgment antithetical pair.

happy in God? Is he your delight, your crown of rejoicing?...Do you…love…your

neighbour?” Wesley asked if we have peace, rejoice in hope, and have the love of God in our hearts. Therefore the peroratio challenges the reader to self-examination of the holy spiritual affections of faith, love, hope, and joy. These verify that one is an “altogether Christian,” a genuine believer. This sermon demonstrates a somewhat complex use of holy affections, some of which do not point to saving faith and some which do. The analysis of this chapter has established Wesley’s preference for using affection language for antithetical purposes, but in this sermon he deliberately delays revealing the antithesis across the length of the sermon. Wesley’s two uses of the holy affections create an intended tension between the “almost” and the “altogether,” a tension which the peroratio appeals for the reader to resolve by becoming an “altogether” Christian. Meanwhile, the conclusion includes others of Wesley’s common rhetorical peroratio features. Scripture accumulation is achieved by the seventeen Scripture quotations in the final five paragraphs, as well as two pathetic “cry” phrases. In the expansive crescendo is a definable progression from realizing the “almost” status, then desiring and achieving the “altogether” status: “never came thus far?...cry out…until thou knowest”; “May we all thus experience what it is to be not almost only, but altogether Christians!” Rhetorical questions and italics also assist with emphasis and pathos.

Holy and unholy affections were also strongly influential in The Nature of Enthusiasm, and their emphasis in the introductory and argumentative dispositio movements were followed by their inclusion in the peroratio. In the exordium Wesley stated that among the reasons that those with a “religion of the heart” are unfairly charged with enthusiasm is their “talk of

righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost’” (an allusion to Rom. 14:17). Critics “believe that every man is beside himself who says the love of God is shed abroad in his heart…and…has enabled him to rejoice…with joy unspeakable…[as he] walks by faith.” The “world accounts as madness…that happy, holy love of God.” In the probatio Wesley argued that the legitimate enthusiast, by antithesis, experiences pseudo holy affections or truly unholy affections. The newly-“converted” enthusiast senses a “light joy,” but it is mixed with “pride” and “inordinate self-love.” This person only imagines to possess faith. This enthusiast has a “distempered heart.” Another brand of enthusiasm belonged to the formalists, who were unholy rather than holy, love the world rather than God, and were proud rather than humble and passionate instead of gentle. Neither did they have “true faith.” All enthusiasts are “misled by pride.” But the Spirit guides believers, in God’s will, into “unutterable peace” and an “uncommon…measure of his love.” The immediate, “dreadful effect of enthusiasm is pride,” “which dries up the springs of faith and love.” Consequently, he is “daily more rooted and grounded in” the unholy affection of “anger, in every unkind disposition, in every earthy and devilish temper…and] greediness.” In the peroratio Wesley offers, not a full probatio review, but two separate statements which succinctly revisit the centrality of holy affections in the sermon thesis: “You may have much joy; you may have a measure of love, and yet not have living faith”; and, true faith, not “nominal Christianity,” produces righteousness and peace.”69 These descriptions nuance crucial antitheses between holy and unholy affections: the species of inferior joy and love without living faith versus true joy and love from a living faith. Added to this rhetorical influence from affectional language are other elements common to Wesley’s

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68 XXXVI. The Nature of Enthusiasm, III: 64-71.
neoclassical peroratio homiletic style. The exhortatory “O” and pathetic cry appear late in the sermon. The final sentence displays an expansive crescendo beginning with the temporal and unfolding in the eternal: “Thus expect a daily growth in that pure and holy religion….which…is the wisdom and the power of God, the glorious image of the Most High, righteousness and peace, a fountain of living water, springing up into everlasting life!” Less common was Wesley’s use of rhetorical repetition, but here appeared an exhortatory “beware” in each of the final five paragraphs. This simultaneously created a negative-positive antithesis: “Beware you…do not” (negative) versus “let” and “use” (positive). Therefore, the peroratio of XXXVI presents both common, and less common, rhetorical elements.

An interesting emphasis on the capacity for religious affections appears in The Good Steward. Here Wesley presented affections as an aspect of stewardship: “God has entrusted us with our soul (Wesley’s emphasis),….and a train of affections…: love and hatred, joy and sorrow…; desire and aversion, hope and fear.” This was likely the most direct antithetical presentation of holy and unholy affections within SOSO I-IV. However, he allowed for more nuance by suggesting that all affection may be used for divine purposes: “Thus our will is to be wholly given up to him, and all our affections to be regulated as he directs. We are to love and hate, to rejoice and grieve, to desire and shun, to hope and fear, according to the rule which he proscribes.” To hate, grieve, shun, fear—these serve as holy affections if “regulated” by divine guidance. Even death does not remove the capacity for affection, though it releases the deceased from the responsibility inherent in stewardship: “[T]he will, including the affections, will remain in its full vigour…..[I]n separate spirits we have no reason to believe that any of these are

70 XLV. The Good Steward, III: 210-221.
extinguished”; “[O]ur will, our love, hate, and all our affections, remain after the body is dropped off, yet in this respect...we are no longer stewards of them.” Our past stewardship is scrutinized at the final judgment, when “the Judge of all will then inquire: ‘How dids’t thou employ thy...affections?’” Wesley’s peroratio appeal, underscored by Scripture accumulation (seven biblical quotations in the final paragraph), was that stewardship be fulfilled with the holy affections of patience and faith.

Wesley’s “A Paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer” was included in the SOSO II edition of Disc. 6, and technically functions as its conclusion. It did not present a full peroratio review, but did (poetically) summarize the final sermonic division. The paraphrase aptly reinforced the holy affections emphasized within the argumentative section, commending: love, joy, love (again) love and faith, love again, peace and joy, and love a final time. None of these affections directly appears in the Lord’s Prayer, but Wesley earlier suggested in the probatio that the Lord’s Prayer “points out to us all those tempers with which we are to approach God,” thus Wesley supplied them artificially in the paraphrase. Once again, Wesley used his standard peroratio elements but in not formulaic fashion, creatively inserting material he considered effective for the particular discourse conclusion at hand.

In the majority of the holy-unholy affection antitheses in SOSO I-IV, the positive role of holy affections receives major emphasis. However, the introduction and argument movements of A Caution against Bigotry display an unusual emphasis on unholy affections, with lesser attention on the holy affections which are to displace them: Satan “chains...souls down to earth and hell with the chains of their own vile affections.” He binds them down to the earth by love

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71 XXXVII. A Caution against Bigotry, III: 78-91.
of the world, love of money, of pleasure, of praise. And by pride, envy, anger, hate, revenge.”

The ancient Romans displayed similar sins, as did Wesley’s England. However, at conversion the sinner’s “desires are refined, his affections purified.” For the purposes of our current peroratio discussion, it was significant that Wesley characteristically ended the sermon positively, balancing the unholy affections with their counterparts: A bigot shows “anger, contempt, and unkindness” toward someone “not of” his church, rather than “kindness” and “love.” Wesley requested the reader’s self-examination (versus no self-examination and self-deception) with a series of twelve rhetorical questions, and several well-placed italics for emphasis. Exhorting “O”s appear in each of the two final paragraphs, and the entire context of the conclusion is a temporal exhortation to presently “stand clear” and “beware” of bigotry.

The sermons above demonstrate that Wesley ably concluded several SOSO I-IV sermons with an appeal mentioning multiple holy and unholy affections. However, two notable modifications to this pattern are the peroratio interaction of multiple holy affections within a single antithetical pair, or focus on a single holy affection in the peroratio, examples of which the following section provides.

**Holy and Unholy Affections in the Eternal Blessing versus Eternal Punishment Antithetical Pair**

More than in any other SOSO I-IV sermon, *The Great Assize* integrates the lists of holy and unholy affections with the theme of divine judgment, or the eternal blessing versus eternal punishment antithetical pair. This is true within the probatio movement and the peroratio, as well. In the probatio Wesley described the divine discernment of the inner life at the Judgment:

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72 XV. *The Great Assize*, I: 221-231.
“And in that day shall be discovered every inward working of the every human soul: every appetite, passion, inclination, affection, with the various combinations of them, with every temper and disposition that constitute the whole complex character of each individual.” These will be universally revealed to highlight divine perfection. At this revelation, “the righteous” will “rejoice with joy unspeakable.” Wesley more specifically listed those unholy affections exposed “in hell”: “pride, malice, revenge, rage, horror, despair—continually devour” the unrighteous. The peroratio then included a series of contrastive pairs. Each of the five contrastive pairs fit the theme of eternal blessing versus eternal punishment: “perish” versus “everlasting life”; “mercy” versus “justice”; “love” versus “thunder”; “condemn” versus “save”; and “this thy day” versus “his day.” These antitheses heightened Wesley’s evangelical appeal to the reader to avoid divine judgment and receive divine mercy. The appeal also contrasted divine judgment with the holy affections available in repentance: joy, faith, love, holiness, peace, and joy again. This joy is present in the believer at the Second Coming. Other supportive rhetorical elements in XV include: An exhorting “O,” nineteen biblical quotations in the final paragraph which compose a strong Scripture accumulation rhetorical device, and a temporal exhortation (“now, even now”; “in this thy day”; “now give yourselves”) also serving as an expanded crescendo with the Second Coming theme (“it cannot be long”; “in his day…when he cometh.” Added to these are this peroratio’s numerous rhetorical questions and exclamations. Therefore, The Great Assize demonstrates many of the homiletic peroratio elements Wesley used with regularity.
Holy versus Unholy Affections with an Expansive Crescendo on Eternal Blessedness

In Wesley’s all-important 1746 Preface (see Chapter Two), his description of hermeneutical approach was framed within the context of “eternity.” It is the question of eternal destiny that necessitates discovering “the way to heaven.” It is in the Sermons’ perorations that Wesley most frequently returned to this theme for rhetorical force. Disc. 8 is an apt example of how a single common rhetorical element, eternal blessedness, effectively closes the sermon. Again, within the probatio, considerable emphasis is placed on the holy affections of love, joy, peace, hope and faith. None of these enter the concluding appeal, in which Wesley instead focused on the eternal blessedness awaiting the good steward and, by implication, the extreme error of antinomian teaching: “Thus ‘lay up for yourselves a good foundation’, not in the world which now is, but rather ‘for the time to come, that ye may lay hold of eternal life’….‘in the day when every man shall receive his own reward’….‘for that which endureth to everlasting life’….‘Thou by few fleeting years ensure eternity!’…. ‘receive the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!’” The singularity of this appeal makes it no less properly emotional, but the lack of multiple rhetorical elements makes it less representative of Wesley’s peroration style. The same eternal blessedness thematic emphasis carries the concluding exhortation of Self-Denial. In the probatio Wesley linked self-denial with religious affections: inherent within self-denial is “parting with …a foolish desire” or “an inordinate affection”; the unbeliever “hears the word” but a lack of repentance leaves him “full of lust and unholy desires; and he will not part with them” and “deny himself.” The unrepentant “do not attain faith.” Even if one does repent and begin the Christian life in the peace and love of God, but does not deny himself, this results in a

73 Preface, ¶5.
75 LIII. On Self-denial, IV: 93-95.
loss of faith and peace. He gives place “to pride, or anger, or desire; to self-will” and soon has “made shipwreck of the faith.” In the *peroratio* exhortation Wesley chose an expansive crescendo less concerned with the affections and more focused on the eternal blessedness to be expected as a result of daily self-denial. Notice the expansive progression from immediate meditation (“ponder it in your heart”) to lifelong meditation (“remember it to your life’s end”), and daily practice (“enter upon the practice of it….Practice it immediately….Practice it universally, on every one of the thousand occasions which occur in all the circumstances of life. Practice it daily”), to lifelong practice (“without intermission, from the hour you first set your hand to the plough; and perseveringly enduring therein to the end, till your spirit returns to God”). This emphasis on daily and lifelong practice achieved a temporal exhortation against formalism, which over-reacts against antinomianism and threatens the priority of faithful self-denial.

**Holy versus Unholy Affections with an Expansive Crescendo on Love**

Wesley’s prioritization of love above successful rhetorical argument appears in the 1746 *Preface*: “For how far is love, even with many wrong opinions, to be preferred before truth itself without love!” The frequency with which the *Sermons*’ *peroratio* appeals to love’s supremacy, therefore, is not surprising. *Disc. 2* offered an excellent example of Wesley’s use of affections for antithetical purposes, and the resulting expansive crescendo focused on the holy affection of love. In this sermon, Wesley explicated the Beatitudes regarding meekness, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and mercy. Therefore, the sermon text itself focuses on holy affections. The *probatio* is an extended contrast of holy and unholy affections. The holy

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76 *Preface*, ¶10.
77 XXI. *Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Second*, II: 81-82.
affection of meekness “does not destroy but balance the [other] affections….It holds an even scale with regard to anger and sorrow and fear.” It is “tempered …with the love of man as well as the love of God.” In meekness, “even the harsher and more unpleasing passions are applicable to the noblest purposes. Even hate and anger and fear, when engaged against sin, and regulated by faith and love, are as walls and bulwarks to the soul, so that the wicked one cannot approach to hurt it.” “‘Tis evident that this divine temper [meekness] is not only to abide but to increase in us day by day,” to disarm unholy anger and undergird holy patience. Wesley re-establishes the interconnection of holy and unholy affections by reviewing the Beatitudes as a spiritual therapeutic against unholy affections. Poverty of spirit heals pride, and meekness heals unholy anger. “When once these hindrances are removed— these evil diseases of the soul…filling the soul with sickly appetites—the native appetite of a heaven-born spirit returns,” and “righteousness….is every holy and heavenly temper in one.” Righteousness is a “divine appetite” that should “never cease.” However, since Wesley’s exposition on love spanned the lengthy final division of the sermon, mercy (love) is the most emphasized holy affection. Thus, as Wesley entered the peroratio, love was already identified as the greatest “healing” holy affection, and love served as the theme of the expansive crescendo. In antithesis to ancient Christians, hypocritical Christians of the Reformation displayed unholy hatred, a lack of love and peace. Their hypocrisy yielded the unholy affections of envy, jealousy and anger, but peace-making believers always hope for a better witness. Wesley exhorted his reader to allow love its expansive therapeutic progress: “all these things [hatred] shall come to an end”; “They shall all be without spot or blemish.”; God will “fill thy heart with such love to every soul.”; “May thy soul continually overflow with love, swallowing up every unkind and unholy temper, till he calleth thee up into the region of love, there to reign with him for ever and ever!.” A number of
Wesley’s typical rhetorical elements are present in Disc. 2, but the most effective was his general display of antithetical material. First is the antithesis between holy and unholy affections, and the therapeutic metaphor suggests that these contrasts may be “cured.” Wesley’s point that these Christians are hypocrites due to their lack of holy affections was eloquently and succinctly presented in a memorable antithetical sentence: “Yea, what is most dreadful, most to be lamented of all, these Christian churches!—churches…bear the name of Christ, ‘the Prince of Peace’, and wage continual war with each other! Wesley also offered his standard antithesis between heaven and hell. So-called “Christian” armies are “sending each other by thousands, by ten thousands, quick into hell!” Even Protestants “[d]evote each other to the nethermost hell.” He alluded to the millennial kingdom, and to heaven as “the region of love.”

Second, Wesley followed neoclassical peroratio convention by appealing to emotion, even in this brief, single-paragraph conclusion. He began: “For a little while you may say, ‘Woe is me…!’ You may pour out your soul.” The sentences which follow (mostly Scripture accumulation) are punctuated with fourteen exclamation points and five rhetorical questions, which continue to increase the momentum of the pathos-centred appeal.

Third, in this single peroratio paragraph he accumulated a series of twenty-one Scripture quotations and allusions which show the antithesis between current religious conflict with future millennial and heavenly peace. Scripture confirms and condemns the nature of human (especially religious) conflict, and comforts the believer that eternal righteousness and peace will come. Finally, the sum of these elements is an expansive crescendo. Present conflict among so-called Christians (yielding the unholy affections of envy, jealousy, and anger) will one day end, and the ultimate holy affection (love) will characterize the millennial and heavenly future.
Therefore, Wesley constructed the expansive crescendo of Disc. 2 with antithesis (holy versus unholy affections; heaven versus hell), emotion, and Scripture accumulation. These are only four of his ten common *peroratio* elements, but they adequately achieved the “effective” neoclassical sermonic conclusion.

**Holy versus Unholy Affections with an Expansive Crescendo on Faith**

Stephen Gunter has well-charted the considerable confusion generated by Wesley’s lack of rhetorical clarity around the term “faith.” This confusion was more pronounced in those instances when Wesley’s sermonic goal was to correct either formalistic notions of ‘faith’ as doctrinal assent or an antinomian over-emphasis on faith ‘alone.’ Most instances of confusion exist in Wesley’s definition of ‘faith’ within the rather isolated context of a particular sermon. A number of the *SOSO I-IV* sermon *peroratios* crescendo with a singular appeal to authentic or increased faith, and this rhetorical use of faith rings with greater clarity. Wesley’s correction of both formalism and antinomianism in *Justification by Faith* broadly addressed holy and unholy affections within the exordium and *probatio*, but in the *peroratio* narrowed its emphasis to faith. The *exordium* asks: “What peace can there be while our own hearts condemn us?...What solid joy...while ‘the wrath of God abideth on us?’” The *probatio* reminds the reader that unfallen humanity in the “image of God” was “dwelling in love,” with the “law of love…written on his heart,” which made him “holy and happy.” Before the sinner experiences justification, there is “no good thing, no good or truly Christian temper, but…pride, anger, love of the world, the genuine fruits of ‘that carnal mind which is enmity against God.” But, one is justified by

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79 V. *Justification by Faith*, I: 79.
faith, which demands love for God and neighbour. Faith must be received humbly, and is “fitted” for correcting pride. Wesley then entered the peroratio movement already emphasizing faith, and with pathos appeals for the reader’s personal conviction and faith. He added to this appeal the rhetorical elements of Scripture accumulation and an expansive crescendo from “ungodly” to “reconciled to God.” In the final sentences Wesley intensified the crescendo progression through the theme of eternal judgment or blessing, an exhorting “O,” and a reiteration of faith: “Thou who feelest thou art just fit for hell art just fit to advance his glory….O come quickly. Believe.” At least two of Wesley’s sermons emphasizing faith placed this holy affection within the context of spiritual warfare. Linking this single affection with a single metaphor noticeably enhanced the rhetorical strength of the probatio and peroratio movements. Wesley’s thesis of sermon I was that formalism/moralism defines faith incompletely, omitting a personal trust in Christ which secures “saving faith.” The probatio quite frequently alludes to demons, Satan, or spiritual warfare, and Wesley chose this theme for the peroratio. In usual fashion, he linked the concluding theme with other selected common rhetorical elements. Since the sermon thesis relates to the holy affection of faith, Wesley constructed an expansive crescendo wherein faith overcomes the unholy affection of fear of Satan. The expansive crescendo claims that the believer full of faith can engage confidently in spiritual warfare and be (increasingly) victorious: “Thou shalt prevail over him, and subdue him, and overthrow him, and trample him under thy feet. Thou shalt march on under the great Captain of thy salvation, ‘conquering…’ until all thine enemies are destroyed, and ‘death is swallowed up in victory.’” He closed with a formal benediction. Thus, this brief single-paragraph conclusion displays three of the common ten rhetorical elements in Wesley’s peroratio style.
In *On Sin in Believers* Wesley again linked faith to the necessity of spiritual warfare, in this instance to combat the doctrine of sinless perfection. Wesley’s sermon thesis was that both unholy and holy affections, resulting from the old and new nature, reside in the true believer. Wesley chose a secondary sermon text which conveys the reality of this inner spiritual conflict: “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other,” and it is this text which guides the *probatio* and *peroratio* material in the language of spiritual warfare. “Indeed this grand point, that there are two contrary principles in believers…runs through all the Holy Scriptures. Almost all the directions and exhortations therein are founded on this supposition…And they [believers] are exhorted to fight with and conquer these.” A believer’s “old desires, designs, affections, tempers, and conversation” are new, but not “wholly new,” for there are “taints of his former tempers and affections.” Pride and anger may co-exist in the heart with humility and meekness, yet “the believer goes on from strength to strength, conquering and to conquer.” The *peroratio* then pursues an expansive crescendo on the spiritual warfare theme. It opens with a summary of the thesis: “The sum of all is this: there are in every person, even after he is justified, two contrary principles,…‘flesh’…and ‘spirit.’ This doctrine must “shield” the believer, and abandoning it “deprives them of” the holy affection of “faith.” Wesley simultaneously presented a temporal exhortation and call to prayer regarding spiritual warfare: “Let us therefore hold fast…use all diligence in ‘fighting the good fight of faith’….So much the more earnestly let us ‘watch and pray’….‘put on the whole armour….wrestle…withstand.” As with sermon I, the holy affection of faith was the subject of the expansive crescendo, and spiritual warfare was its theme.

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Holy versus Unholy Affections with an Expansive Crescendos on Joy and Gratitude

From the revivalist perspective, the Established Church’s over-caution regarding “enthusiasm” at times encroached upon manifestations of Christian joy. John Heylyn even included “fond…Sentiments” as displays of enthusiasm, let alone mild, extemporaneous expressions of joy in the Holy Spirit.\(^{81}\) In The Witness of Our Own Spirit, I, Wesley began by linking joy properly to other affections.\(^{82}\) In the exordium he asserted that “every true believer” who “abides in faith and love” has joy. He also frequently quoted the tripartite affections in Romans 14:17: “love and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Otherwise, joy is the affectional focus throughout the sermon, and the theme reinforced in the conclusion by via negativa. Joy is not human, but supernatural; blind in conscience, but “sees” by discerning good from evil; a hardened conscience, but is sensitive to sin; achieved by works-righteousness, but by grace. In the affirmative, “Christian joy is joy in obedience—joy in loving God and keeping his commandments.” Within Wesley’s expansive crescendo unfolded an atypical image of spiritual activity: once “dead in sin,” believers are now “alive” and “walking” in grace. They increase the intensity of their spiritual activity as they “run” in spiritual strength, and “‘fight the good fight of faith’.” Even more transformed, they “work the works of God.” Wesley’s image progressed from the soul dead to God, to the very alive soul participating in the divine life. It is unsurprising that those rhetorical elements common to Wesley’s peroratios appear. The eleven


\(^{82}\) XI. The Witness of Our Own Spirit, I: 168-180. This linkage is not artificial, since joy is inseparable from the other spiritual “fruit” (Gal. 5:22-23). Perhaps Wesley would agree with Betz that the Pauline argument in Galatians 5:19-23 is emphatically antithetical, distinguishing “flesh” (vv. 19-21), with “Spirit” (vv. 22-23), but in this sermon he seemed focused on presenting more artificial antitheses in via negativa form. Regarding Betz’ position, see R. Alan Cole, The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 213.
biblical quotations and allusions in the final paragraph display Scripture accumulation, and the final sentences refer to eternal blessing (“eternal life”/“for ever and ever,”) ending in doxological language. *The Witness of Our Own Spirit* again demonstrated Wesley’s ability to insert into the *peroratio* both common material and uncommon patterns. He maintained his antithetical homiletic with the use of the *via negativa*, inserting the typical rhetorical elements of Scripture accumulation and doxological language. However, though spiritual progression was a common theme of Wesley’s expansive crescendos, this particular *peroratio* expansive crescendo presents a pattern of spiritual progression uncommon to his *peroratio* movements. In this same sermon, Wesley argued by using an array of holy and unholy affections, but in the *peroratio* singled out gratitude as the primary affection. Early in the *probatio* he stated: “‘As many as are led by the Spirit of God’ into all holy tempers and actions, ‘they are the sons of God’. 83 The Spirit’s direct witness leaves the mark of love. A believer is “saved from the pain of proud wrath,” continues to “love, rejoice, and delight in God,” and to “love your neighbour ….full of gentleness and long-suffering.” The witness of the Spirit is the “consciousness of having received, in and by the spirit of adoption, the tempers mentioned in the word of God…even a loving heart,” and “humble joy,” “meekness, patience, gentleness, long-suffering.” So it is by the fruit of the Spirit we know we are not deluded about the assurance of salvation. 84 In this particular sermonic *peroratio*, Wesley insisted that gratitude be the primary holy affection through which the three classic virtues are experienced. Faith (“believe”), hope, and love (as well as holiness) are to inspire constant gratitude. This demonstrates that Wesley did not present a consistent hierarchy

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84 It may be generally observed that the term “delusion” was often associated with the Established Church’s concerns of “enthusiasm,” and most frequently appeared in debates about the doctrine of assurance. A more detailed word study of the terms clustered around the doctrine of assurance would be instructive. Edwards briefly notes differences in assurance terminology between Puritans and Scottish/Irish Presbyterians. O.C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004) 428-429.
for holy affections, but any one of them were considered crucial, depending on his sermonic theme and rhetorical aim. Sermon X does display three of the other rhetorical elements common to Wesley’s peroratios. The brief final paragraph contained five biblical quotes, thus Scripture accumulation. The expansive crescendo moves from exhortation to verbal gratitude to behavioural gratitude (for example, temporal exhortation) as evidenced by holiness. The ending exhortation to cleansing establishes an emphatic antitheses: unholy humanity in need of cleansing versus divine holiness and purity. However, the rhetorical role of each of these elements continues to emphasize Wesley’s gratitude theme.

Importantly, the just-mentioned theme of cleansing also served as the peroratio theme and expansive crescendo in Christian Perfection. On the theme of spiritual/heart cleansing, Wesley summons “Moses,” “David,” and “most remarkably…Ezekiel’, then quotes Paul (Phil. 3:13-14) before reinforcing the appeal to cleansing with a pathetic cry. This list of biblical names signals the flow of the expansive crescendo: “since the world began” the divine promise of heart-cleansing comes through the prophetic words of Moses, David, and Ezekiel until “confirmed unto us in the gospel by our blessed Lord and his apostles,” so “‘let us fear lest’” we fail to claim these “so many promises” by crying “unto him day and night till” we experience them (temporal exhortation). The final quotation (Romans 8:28) again presented the progression: “delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.” Therefore the Christian Perfection peroratio unfolds with a strong sense of momentum, originating in the long-past divine promise of heart-cleaning and fulfilled in the present availability of Christian perfection. At times Wesley saw fit to exchange the single affection emphases just discussed for

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singular emphases on one of the other (non-affectional) common rhetorical elements. Among these are *peroratio* crescendos focused on prayer or on doxology, which deserve examination in the following sections.

**Holy versus Unholy Affections with an Expansive Crescendo on Prayer**

It must be acknowledged that not all expansive crescendos contain affectional elements, such as the theme of prayer in *peroratio* material. The conclusion of *On Wandering Thoughts* integrates affectional language, which Wesley used throughout the sermon, with an expansive crescendo on the theme of prayer. Central to one of Wesley’s *probatio* arguments was his assertion that the reason, in part, for sinful wandering thoughts is unholy affections, those “sinful tempers” exhibiting “no faith, pride, anger, revenge, vanity, lust, covetousness…evil tempers.” Thus, “all thoughts which spring from sinful tempers are undoubtedly sinful,” such as revenge, pride, lust, vanity, anger, love of the world, “or…any other unholy temper, passion or affection” lead to sinful thoughts and/or actions. The reality of these “sinful tempers” motivates Wesley’s *peroratio* exhortations to prayer, which served as the theme of the entire conclusion. In a *probatio* review, he insisted that his reader not “expect deliverance” from all wandering thoughts. They are not to pray for “impossibilities and absurdities” to that effect, but prayer is crucial. In expansive crescendo terms, Wesley challenged, “let us pray…that ‘all’ these ‘things may work together for our good’; that we may suffer all infirmities of our nature, all the interruptions of men, all the assaults and suggestions of evil spirits, and in all be ‘more than conquerors’. The call to prayer includes deliverance from “all sin,” a cleansing of ‘all pollution

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of flesh and spirit,’ from every evil temper” and loving God with all heart, mind, soul, and strength.” We must pray that “all the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ may be found in us.” The final sentence encompassed these former prayers into a single expansive prayer: “Pray that all ‘these things may flourish and abound’, may increase in you more and more, till an abundant ‘entrance be ministered unto you in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ!’” The intensity of the prayer required no further rhetorical emphasis through exhorting “O”s or pathetic cries, but Wesley did use Scripture accumulation via the seven biblical quotations in the final paragraph. Also, the repetition of “Let us pray” was rhetorically effective in reemphasizing the peroratio theme.

**Holy versus Unholy Affections with an Expansive Crescendo on Doxology**

The *Circumcision of the Heart* displayed yet another peroratio theme: doxology.87 It was preceded by a solidly affectional probatio based primarily on the classical virtues: “To be more particular, circumcision of the heart implies humility, faith, hope and charity.” Wesley then based each of his probatio subpoints on these holy affections: humility, faith, hope and love. He then asked his reader to self-reflect on each of these virtues of humility, faith, hope, and love. The key sentence regarding affection in the peroratio paragraph is not in a specific probatio review, but a general summary statement: “Let the spirit return to the God that gave it, with the whole train of its affections.” Emphasizing the holy affection of love focused toward God, Wesley launched an expansive crescendo in doxological language: “Be no design, no desire admitted here but what has him for its ultimate object….‘Desire not to live but to praise his

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87 XVII. *The Circumcision of the Heart*, I: 4-16. Doxological emphasis is characteristic even of Whitefield, a less structured neoclassical preacher: “However much the grounds for fear are gone over in [Whitefield’s sermons], the conclusion is always joyful doxology” (Edwards, *History*, 435).
name; let all your thoughts, words, and works tend to his glory….Have a pure intention of heart, a steadfast regard to his glory in all your actions’….when whether we ‘eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God.’” The terms and phrases of this paragraph identify its expansive rhetoric: “sum,” “whole,” “all” (numerous times) “ultimate,” “filled with so entire,” “every” (used in parallel repetitions) “nothing but,” “whatever.”

**Notable Antithetical Peroratios**

After a full list of unholy affections in the *probatio* of The Repentance of Believers, Wesley diminished that emphasis and closed the sermon with perhaps the most emphatic antithetical material within the *SOSO I-IV* series. Reviewing this sermon’s flow of affectional language, antithesis, and other rhetorical elements is instructive in the assessment of Wesley’s homiletic style. He began the *exordium* with that theme: one must not confuse justifying repentance and faith with sanctifying repentance and faith. The new convert soon feels unholy affections: pride, self-will, and idolatry. Idolatry holds an “inordinate affection” for worldly pursuits rather than for the Creator. So within the new believer remain “tempers” contrary to love for God and neighbour: “jealousies,” “covetousness,” “uncharitable conversation,” sinful thoughts, “sins of omission,” and an “utter helplessness” to remove “pride, self-will, love of the world, anger.”

The believer repents of these sins by faith, which “answers” the demands of repentance. Wesley then commenced a *peroratio* highly crafted with those rhetorical elements he most preferred in *SOSO IV*. Wesley designed the *peroratio* as a *probatio* review, but reviewed the argument flow rather than rehearsing the main points based on the sermon text. The beginning of division three reviews the early first divisional argument, and the next part of division three reviews the latter

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88 XIV. The Repentance of Believers, I: 198-213.
argument of the first division. The early part of sermon division four reviews the very end of division one. Latter division four summarizes the entire argument of division two.

Simultaneous with this very thorough *probatio* review was Wesley’s deliberate emphasis with antithesis, not the four general contrasts commonly found in *SOSO I-IV* but those more specific to this sermon’s *probatio*: thinking sin is destroyed versus the contrary experience of sin not “destroyed”; erroneous doctrine as “harmless” versus the “immense harm” of erroneous doctrine; no desire for change versus desire for “farther deliverance”; “darkness” versus “light”; “image” of “brute” and “devil” versus “image of God”; “little concern” for deliverance versus “groan for deliverance”; conviction versus “without this conviction”; Antinomian misuse of phrase “whole Christ, an entire Saviour” versus correct “sense” of the phrase; “against” him versus “obedience” to Christ. This array of contrasts sets the rhetorical tone of the *peroratio*, re-presenting the *probatio* arguments in tighter antithesis than they previously appeared. Meanwhile, Wesley inserted other rhetorical features common to his *peroratio* style. In fact, including the *peroratio* review discussed above, the four-paragraph conclusion includes six of the ten common elements. Faith is the holy affection. Both a pathetic “cry” and doxological language appear in division three. Wesley used Scripture accumulation for authoritative voice, but it is rhetorically overshadowed by his inclusion of three hymn verse quotations (from Charles’ hymns) which lend a heavy poetic quality to the conclusion. Finally, comprehensive terms in the final paragraph create an expansive crescendo: “give him all the glory…‘a whole Christ, an entire Saviour’….fulfilled in a strong and deep sense…swallowed up in him…that he may be all in all.” The final sentence adds to these the use of expansive “every”: “Then, his almighty grace having abolished ‘every high thing which
exalted itself against’ him, every temper, and thought, and word, and work, is ‘brought to the obedience of Christ.’”

Another highly antithetical *peroratio* appears in *The First-fruits of the Spirit.* 89 Again, Wesley re-emphasized in the *peroratio* those key holy and unholy affections used in the *probatio* arguments. In generalities he stated that believers are led “into every holy desire, into every divine and heavenly temper, till every thought which arises in the heart is holiness unto the Lord.” He then offered more specificity. Believers are “filled with faith and with the Holy Ghost…namely, ‘love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance.” These restrain the unholy affections, for believers have “in their breast, no sense of guilt, or dread of the wrath of God…. [N]ot unto fear, unto doubt and racking uncertainty…[but] peace…flowing from a continual sense of his pardoning mercy.” However, the “seeds” of unholy affection remain: “[T]he corruption of nature does still remain, even in those who are children of God by faith; that they have in them the seeds of pride and vanity, of anger, lust and evil desire, yea, sin of every kind, is too plain to be denied,” and believers “maintain a continual war with all sin, with pride, anger, desire.” There is “the deadness and dullness of their affections” and a “guilt on the conscience.” The appeal of the *peroratio* is that, through faith, the believer may experience holy affections and negate unholy affections: “‘Why art thou fearful, O thou of little faith?’…. [A]way with thy fears!”, have “faith.” To those who walk by the flesh, “say not to thy soul, ‘Peace, peace!’ in a false sense of security. To those who walk after the Spirit, “be not afraid” of “pride, self-will, or unbelief,” for “so is his love higher than any of” your sins. “It is thy part patiently to continue in the work of faith, and…love; and in

89 VIII. *The First-fruits of the Spirit,* I: 110-122.
cheerful peace.” Thus this *peroratio* presents at least three antithetical pairs of holy and unholy affections: faith versus fear, love versus fear, and true peace versus false peace. Close analysis confirms that this *peroratio* displays an array of rhetorical elements which fulfil key aims of Wesley’s conventional neoclassical sermon. The content of the conclusion amounts to a *probatio* review. Five exhorting “O”s appear, one for almost every *peroratio* paragraph. Pathetic cries add emotion to the exhortation. Wesley issued a call to prayer (“Let thy continual prayer be). Other antithetical patterns are discernible: involuntary versus voluntary sin; and prayerful sorrow in surprising sin versus prayerlessness in surprising sin. The forty-one biblical quotations in the five-paragraph *peroratio* compose an emphatic sense of Scripture accumulation. The expansive crescendo is accomplished in the pastoral encouragement of the final paragraph, which moves from no “condemnation” in the present, to an increasing experience of love and faith (“more love will bring more faith”), to full sanctification (“sanctify thee wholly, so that thy whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless”). This *peroratio* also presents an unusual pattern of alternating tones, one exhortatory and the other encouraging. Most of the exhortatory material advocates present actions, thus rhetorically it serves as temporal exhortation. Therefore, *The First-fruits of the Spirit* exhibits seven of Wesley’s nine common *peroratio* rhetorical elements. This series of elements forms a dynamic conclusion which effectively and eloquently reinforces the sermon thesis.

*Catholic Spirit* was one of the most fascinating instances of Wesley’s sermonic rhetorical agenda. He even overtly framed it as a direct solution to theological dissention rooted in miscommunication. The sermon text gave little indication of the degree of antithetical material provided in its *probatio* movement and creatively reinforced in its *peroratio*.⁹⁰ Wesley did

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exposit the text, but simultaneously artificially constructed the sermon around the holy affections of faith and love, concluding the discourse with a number of his typical rhetorical elements. The chosen text never mentions the holy affection of love, but the exordium and early probatio emphasize this theme. However, our obligation to love neighbour, and even enemy, encounters “hindrances” which are removed, Wesley claims, by following the principles in the narrative of the text. The heart able to “unite in love” with God and neighbour is one which “walks by faith,” a joyful faith. Irenic love is characterized by “tender affection,” and the love described in I Cor. 13. The narrative of Jehu and Jehonadab thus becomes Jehu’s exemplary display of two foundational holy affections, faith and love. In this sermon, Wesley created an antithetical peroratio appeal to such faith and love. Rather than using any of the common contrastive pairs, he substituted them with via negativa antitheses. Wesley described what a catholic spirit is not, then what it is: it is not latitudinarianism, rather it is solidly doctrinal; it is not practical latitudinarianism, rather it values Scriptural worship; it is not apathetic in conducting worship, rather it uses the means of grace.91 These via negativa “inferences” achieve the recapitulation (for example, probatio review) task of a neoclassical sermon. In the closing two paragraphs, Wesley inserted nine quotes and allusions for Scripture accumulation, the exhorting “O,” and used the metaphor of a race for an expansive crescendo focusing on eternal blessing: “And now run the race which is set before thee, in a royal way of universal love….But keep an even pace, rooted in the faith…grounded in love…till thou art swallowed up in love for ever and ever.” The “race” is an ever-expanding experience of love, into eternity. Therefore, this sermon

91 The rhetorical emphasis of this oft-quoted sermon properly recognizes its firm doctrinal parameters. In the via negativa, Wesley clearly aimed at dismissing latitudinarianism, and only a lack of attention to the rhetorical force of the argument allows for some of the broad—almost universalist—interpretations of this sermon. “His condemnation of latitudinarianism and of unsettled notions of religion is most definite; and the danger of these things is clearly stated.” N. Burwash, Wesley’s Doctrinal Standards (Salem, OH: Schmul, 1988), 390.
demonstrates three important rhetorical elements. First, it revealed Wesley’s homiletic
willingness to artificially impose holy affections into a sermon with a non-affectional text and to
carry that emphasis into the peroratio appeal. Second, the peroratio’s three “inferences” are also
an artificial insertion for the purpose of summarizing the sermon antithetically. Finally, it
showed the eloquent force of an expansive crescendo which takes the central term of the sermon
(love) and pairs it with Wesley’s common peroratio rhetorical element of eternal blessing.92

Wesley’s Antithetical Homiletic in the Soso I-IV Peroratios: Preliminary Conclusions

From the preceding analysis emerge a few preliminary conclusions regarding the peroratio
material in Soso I-IV. Chapter discussion included analysis of holy and unholy affections in the
probatio movement, as well, but this primarily served to supply context to affectional
recurrences in the sermonic peroratios. Therefore the following conclusions remain narrowly
focused on the dynamics of the Soso I-IV peroratio designs, appeals, and effectiveness.

First, the chapter confirms the consistent and central role of the eleven rhetorical elements
preliminarily identified as potentially significant homiletic features. First are four antithetical
affectional pairs: exhortation to holy versus unholy affections; exhortation to repentance and
eternal blessedness versus eternal judgment; exhortation to temporal/daily obedience versus
disobedience or laxity; exhortation to self-examination versus no self-reflection and/or self-
deception. Since these appear intermittently in the probatio movement as well as the peroratio,
chapter discussion noted the rhetorical significance of that interrelationship. Second, six non-

92 Sermons XLIV On The Reformation of Manners (III:185-208) and On the Death of George Whitefield are more
focused on immediate organizational and biographical aims than the doctrinal-oriented content in most Soso I-IV
discourses, yet they demonstrate Wesley’s intent to emphasize the role of holy and unholy affections in the Christian
life as well as continued use of his other preferred rhetorical elements. Again, holy and unholy affections appear in
their probatios and are echoed in the peroratios.
contrastive features pervade the sermon conclusions: probatio review, prayers (offered by Wesley, or a call to prayer for the reader), benediction or doxological language, the exhorting “O,” the pathetic “cry,” and Scripture accumulation. These culminate in the eleventh feature, an expansive crescendo. The eleven elements indeed collectively shape how Wesley preferred to conclude the sermons, and thus may be considered the features of his peroratio style. The majority of these rhetorical elements appear exclusively within the peroratio and serve to further Wesley’s thesis beyond the argumentative movement of the probatio and into the urgent homiletic appeal, the consequential decisional phase.

Second, the foregoing analysis of numerous SOSO I-IV sermon conclusions amply demonstrates the dynamics of these rhetorical elements. The eleven elements appear in an array of combinations suited to the particular rhetorical needs of the sermon at hand, with some peroratios displaying only two or three and others containing up to eight or ten of the elements. This provides the conclusions of Wesley’s sermons with stable and proven, but flexible and creative, rhetorical patterns. Whatever the combination, in each sermon Wesley fulfilled the conventional expectations for the function of a neoclassical Anglican homiletic peroratio, namely, recapitulation and pathos.

Third, and most significant to the present thesis, Wesley used many of these elements antithetically. Beyond the inherent elementary antithesis in any concluding appeal (that is, to present at least two choices for the reader’s consideration), Wesley consistently offered the abovementioned four antithetical pairs which engage the reader with fundamental spiritual decisions. Broadly speaking, to choose the positive of these alternatives is to embrace Scriptural Christianity over the doctrinal imbalances of formalism/moralism and antinomianism. The
rhetorical use of Scripture accumulation ensures that Scriptural authority is inherent in the concluding appeal itself.

Finally, analysis confirms that the *pathos* of these elements, particularly of the holy affections and the rhetorical crescendo, significantly reinforces Wesley’s concluding appeal to the reader. The tone and rhetorical force of the crescendo toward “holiness,” and/or “happiness,” and or “heaven” appear persuasively effective, regardless of the *peroratio’s* length. Never does the reader sense these spiritual goals as unrealistically grandiose, since Scripture accumulation confirms that such divine promises and human potentials are attainable in the power of the Spirit. Tonally, at sermon’s end the reader is left with the simultaneous conviction and inspiration necessary for a personal response toward spiritual transformation.

The three foregoing chapters provide a homiletic analysis of the introductory, argumentative, and concluding movements of Wesley’s *SOSO I-IV* discourses, as well as preliminary conclusions based on identified rhetorical features and their synergistic dynamic. Chapter Seven necessarily develops a series of more substantial conclusions and their confirmation, amending, or rejection of, the overarching thesis proposed in Chapter One.
CHAPTER SIX

THE ANTITHETICAL HOMILETIC OF JOHN WESLEY’S SERMONS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS I-IV: CONCLUSIONS

A unified argument in favour of the thesis statement emerges from the foregoing analyses of the antithetical homiletic within John Wesley’s *Sermons on Several Occasions I-IV*. This final chapter proposes and supports that argument and, in doing so, necessarily summarizes the evaluations of Chapters One through Five. The broader assertions of Chapter One, and the methodological approach presented in Chapter Two, with the preliminary conclusions of Chapters Three through Five, now sustain the thesis statement proper: This thesis conducts an analysis of the neoclassical form and homiletic features in John Wesley’s *Sermons on Several Occasions I-IV* to delineate an antithetical rhetorical pattern intended to correct persistent formalistic and antinomian doctrinal imbalances. It therefore recommends the viability of a “homiletic reading” of *SOSO I-IV*.

Chapter One maintains that Wesley was a conventional eighteenth-century Anglican priest in regard to sermon preparation and style. Placing early hagiographical descriptions aside, the *SOSO I-IV* series, even with its multiple editions, reflects the common features of the early modern published British sermon. Most apparent are the *Sermons’* neoclassical dispositios, consisting of the *exordium/narratio, partitio, probatio, refutatio, and probatio* movements, which provide a well-developed outline, progression, argumentation, and concluding appeal. These rhetorical features contradict those biographers and Wesley scholars who claim the *Sermons* are non-rhetorical “outlines” or “theological reference points,” and instead argue for
Wesley’s intentional, purposeful rhetorical creativity. These same scholars misinterpret, then, the purpose of the Sermons as narrow in scope rather than for a popular reading that expands Wesley’s Evangelical Revival preaching ministry. This thesis suggests that such expansion is even more authentic since the well-ordered dispositio movements likely provided Wesley with the outline for a memoriter style of presentation suitable to his outdoor sermon settings, and therefore the published Sermons supply to a broad readership the content, style and logical flow of his preached sermons.

Clearly displayed in this neoclassical arrangement, however, was Wesley’s most overarching rhetorical characteristic: antithesis. Within the classical rhetorical tradition, and among Wesley’s neoclassical contemporaries, antithesis was recommended as a rhetorical device and was in common use. However, SOSO I-IV was predominately antithetical, and this thesis is the first effort to examine Wesley’s sermonic introductions, arguments, and conclusions to verify, describe and explain the centrality of SOSO’s antithetical themes as a corrective against the imbalanced doctrines of antinomianism and formalism.

No primary source points to this reality more than the 1746 Preface to SOSO I-III. A reappraisal of the 1746 Preface, provided in Chapter Two, suggests that Wesley’s comments largely concerned the rhetorical nature of the series, an interpretation of this preface’s role that is rarely recognized. In fact, the Preface verifies in Wesley’s own hand what Chapter One of the thesis proposes: Wesley deliberately identified this series of Sermons as preached, early Evangelical Revival material; he categorized the Sermons as practical divinity, and suggested they were published for a broad audience; he specifically pointed to the rhetorical strategy of drawing antitheses between the errors of formalism and antinomianism versus the authority of
Scriptural Christianity. The Preface, then, legitimates this thesis’ analysis of the Sermons along these lines.

Since the very language of the Preface invites the reader to look for arguments and rhetorical patterns which serve to “distinguish”—that is, which emphasize the antithesis between—Scriptural Christianity and unscriptural Christianity, Chapters Three through Five analyse the SISO I-IV texts to verify whether Wesley’s sermonic introductions, arguments, and conclusions sufficiently display antithetical characteristics. A survey of SISO I-IV reveals Wesley’s precision in fulfilling his stated Preface goal of distinguishing formalism and antinomianism from Scriptural Christianity. As the chart below demonstrates, the I-IV series reflects his pattern of addressing these dual extremes. Wesley almost evenly divided his correction of these two doctrinal abberations. Though he may have corrected a number of erroneous doctrinal positions in a single sermon, there is often particular emphasis on either formalistic or antinomian teaching. Careful categorization throughout the thesis reveals the presence of a basic antithetical pattern within the neoclassical movement of all but five of the fifty-three sermons of the series:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sermon Title</th>
<th>Basic antithetical pattern</th>
<th>Corrects formalism, and/or antinomianism, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Salvation by Faith</td>
<td>Salvation by works vs. by faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>The Almost Christian</td>
<td>Almost vs. altogether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>“Awake, Thou...”</td>
<td>Spiritual sleep vs. wakefulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Scripturial Christianity</td>
<td>Spirit-fruit vs. no Spirit-Fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Justification by Faith</td>
<td>Justification by faith vs. by works</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 The latter IV sermons deviate from Wesley’s intended contrastive pattern envisioned for Volumes I-III. His editorial aims for IV included some sermons with contrastive characteristics and some miscellany which do not reflect the formalism-antinomianism contrastive pattern.

4 Morality (and once, deism) is listed parenthetically as the particular expression of formalism which Wesley corrected.

5 Specific expressions of antinomianism parenthetically listed here are perfectionism, mysticism, enthusiasm, and sectarianism.

6 As reflected in this list, other doctrinal errors which Wesley addressed are secularism and materialism.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Open Topic</th>
<th>Closing Topic</th>
<th>Form of Antinomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>The Righteousness of Edenic covenant vs. faith covenant</td>
<td>form. (moralism)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>The Way to the... Outward ceremony vs. inward hear</td>
<td>formalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>The First Fruits of Wilful vs. unwilful sin</td>
<td>antinomianism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>The Spirit of Bondage... Spiritual states: natural vs. law vs. grace</td>
<td>form. &amp; antin.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>The Wit. of the Spirit, I Witness vs. presumption</td>
<td>form. &amp; antin.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI</td>
<td>The Wit. of the Spirit, II Witness: false vs. true teaching</td>
<td>form. &amp; antin.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII</td>
<td>The Wit. of Our Own... False joy vs. true joy</td>
<td>antinomianism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII</td>
<td>On Sin in Believers No sin vs. sin in believers</td>
<td>antin. (perfect.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIV</td>
<td>The Repentance of... Justification vs. sanctification</td>
<td>antin. (perfect.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XV</td>
<td>The Great Assize Human vs. divine judgment</td>
<td>none</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVI</td>
<td>The Means of Grace Means of Grace: no use vs. use of</td>
<td>antinomianism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVII</td>
<td>The Circumcision of... Moralism vs. regeneration</td>
<td>form. (moralism)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVIII</td>
<td>The Marks of the... Moralism vs. regeneration</td>
<td>formalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVIX</td>
<td>The Great Privilege... Justification vs. sanctification</td>
<td>antin. (perfect.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XX</td>
<td>Disc. I Beattitudes, ironic antitheses</td>
<td>form. &amp; antin. (perfect)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXI</td>
<td>Disc. II Beattitudes, ironic antitheses</td>
<td>formalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXII</td>
<td>Disc. III Beattitudes, ironic contrasts</td>
<td>formalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIII</td>
<td>Disc. IV Salt vs. tasteless; light vs. darkness</td>
<td>antin. (mysticism)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIV</td>
<td>Disc. V Least vs. greatest in kingdom</td>
<td>ant. (myst.) &amp; form.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXV</td>
<td>Disc. VI Reward vs. no reward; forgive vs. do not forgive</td>
<td>form.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXVI</td>
<td>Disc. VII Undervaluing vs. overvaluing fasting</td>
<td>form &amp; antin.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXVII</td>
<td>Disc. VIII Motives of darkness vs. light</td>
<td>materialism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXVIII</td>
<td>Disc. IX Serving mammon vs. God</td>
<td>materialism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXIX</td>
<td>Disc. X Log vs. speck; pearls vs. swine; closed vs. open; bread vs. stone; fish vs. snake</td>
<td>form. &amp; antin. (enthusiasm)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>Disc. XI Broad vs. narrow gate</td>
<td>secularism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXI</td>
<td>Disc. XII Wolves vs. sheep; good vs. bad fruit</td>
<td>antinomianism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXII</td>
<td>Disc. XIII Enter in vs. cast out; rock vs. sand</td>
<td>formalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXIII</td>
<td>The Original... Rejecting vs. respecting moral law</td>
<td>antinomianism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXIV</td>
<td>The Law...I “Faith” without vs. faith with the moral law</td>
<td>antinomianism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXV</td>
<td>The Law...II Not preaching/teaching vs. preaching/teaching the moral law</td>
<td>antinomianism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXVI</td>
<td>The Nature... Enthusiasm properly vs. improperly so-called</td>
<td>(antin.enthus.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXVII</td>
<td>A Caution Against... “Stop him” vs. “Do not stop him”</td>
<td>sectarianism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXVIII</td>
<td>Catholic Spirit Orthodox disunity vs. orthodox unity</td>
<td>sectarianism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXIX</td>
<td>Christian Perfection Unintentional vs. intentional sin</td>
<td>perfectionism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XL</td>
<td>On Wandering Thoughts Mystical perfectionism vs. Scriptural perfection</td>
<td>perfectionism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XLI</td>
<td>On Satan’s Devices Moralist perfectionism vs. Scriptural perfection</td>
<td>perfectionism</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>On the Reformation of... Social evil vs. social good</td>
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<tr>
<td>XLV</td>
<td>The Good Steward Misuse vs. godly use of souls, bodies, possessions, abilities</td>
<td>none</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>XLVI</td>
<td>The Scripture Way... Faith and salvation: Inaccurate vs. accurate understanding</td>
<td>formalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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As is apparent in the above examples, the antithetical pattern of each sermon may be established by a highly antithetical text, and/or appear in its title, or may be revealed elsewhere within the discourse. Wesley clarified each sermon’s antithesis either early in the sermon (a title antithesis, or an introductory antithesis), throughout the sermon (a thematic antithesis), in the sermon’s main points (a divisional antithesis), or at sermon’s end (an application or conclusion antithesis). Most common is the thematic antithesis developed through homiletic argument over the course of the sermon. However, the antithetical pattern exists not only on the micro level (within the sermon), but on the macro level (between sermons), and across the wider spectrum of S O S O I - I V .

It is within individual sermons, however, that this thesis offers the most compelling proof of S O S O ’ s antithetical nature. First, the exordium material identified, categorized, and analysed in Chapter Three verifies Wesley’s conscious efforts to fulfil the conventional rhetorical tasks of gaining listener attention and interest in the sermonic introduction. It also evidences the quantity of homiletic elements he brought to bear on this task. In varying degrees, he used the sermon text, significance descriptors, ethos perceptions, the propositio or partitio, questions, and emphasis through rhetorical questions, italics, or exclamation marks, to construct a sermonic introduction that is clear, interesting, and focused on the via salutis thematic priority. A significant majority of the exordiums in S O S O I - I V ’ s fifty-three sermons exhibit Wesley’s
preference for antithetical patterns. Such findings do not suggest that Wesley was formulaic in his preparation of *exordia* material, but that he was consistent in his approach and preferred an antithetical dynamic in his sermon introductions. He deliberately shaped introductory material to produce this pattern, but did so with fluidity and creativity rather than through a strict set of repetitious homiletic movements.

Wesley’s antithetical style is further confirmed by the conclusions of Chapter Four, which examined the antithetical homiletic dynamic as it continues to operate within each sermon’s *probatio* and *refutatio* (that is, argumentative) movements. The chapter notes that the *Sermons* display conventional neoclassical homiletic argumentation, but then evidences the extent to which Wesley’s arguments were rhetorical. The sermonic main points are artistically and creatively arranged, even those with expository aims. Wesley used a variety of argumentative approaches (interrogative, chronological, Anglican hermeneutic, definitional, holy and unholy affections), which verifies that these sermons are the product of his rhetorical deliberation, skill and goals as well as his theological knowledge. The chapter more particularly supplies ample evidence that Wesley’s arrangement of these arguments was consistently antithetical. His axial “argument” was the prioritization of Scriptural Christianity, but his specific sermonic arguments were patterned antithetically: Scriptural Christianity versus unscriptural formalistic and antinomian teachings. *SOSO I-IV* emerges as a collection of revivalistic sermons guided by the language and logic of the Scriptural analogy of faith versus the language and “logic” of theological error.
The added contribution of Chapter Four is a preliminary list of descriptive terms for observable *probatio* and *refutatio* characteristics, and their interrelation with an antithetical function. The *probatio* characteristics include indirect appeals to Scriptural Christianity which permeate the *Sermons* with the authoritative language and teaching of Scripture. Also present are eighteen categories of direct appeals to Scriptural Christianity. There is a noticeable group of explanatory sermons, with both extended and multiple antitheses. The former constitute a single antithetical theme which continues throughout the sermon (false teaching versus true teaching, justification versus sanctification, law versus faith, definitional or narrative antitheses), and the latter exhibiting a combination of two or more of the antithetical characteristics listed above (definitional antitheses and narrative antitheses). In yet another category are the descriptive sermons with extended antitheses (for example spiritual disease versus spiritual cure; earthly court versus heavenly court). Regarding the *refutatios*, those displaying formal refutation present a series of common objections to a theological position and Wesley’s Scripturally defensive response. Those best described as informal instances of refutation either do not announce their refutation role or do not appear in the expected *dispositio* position between the *probatio* and the *peroration*. Isolated refutation occurs when a single question-answer exchange appears in the midst of *probatio* discussion. Intermittent refutations are single exchanges appearing multiple times in the course of the sermon. A combination of intermittent and formal refutation allows for dynamic change in homiletic tone. The categories offered here are certainly subject to amendment, extension, or even rejection, but initially they serve as helpful steps toward the categorisation of rhetorical elements present in Wesley’s *probatio* and *refutatio* material.
Chapter Five examined the prevalence of holy and unholy affections in the sermonic perorations (conclusions), and briefly addressed these affections’ recurrences in the probatio arguments, as well. It confirmed the consistent and central role of eleven elements which shape Wesley’s concluding material. These eleven elements appear in an array of combinations suited to the particular rhetorical needs of the sermon at hand, with some perorations displaying only two or three and others containing up to eight or ten of the elements. Within these, Wesley offered four antithetical pairs which engage the reader with fundamental spiritual decisions: exhortation to holy versus unholy affections, exhortation to repentance and eternal blessedness versus eternal judgment, exhortation to temporal/daily obedience versus disobedience or laxity, and exhortation to self-examination versus no self-reflection and/or self-deception. Broadly speaking, to choose the positive of these alternatives is to embrace Scriptural Christianity over the doctrinal imbalances of formalism/moralism and antinomianism. The rhetorical use of Scripture accumulation ensures that Scriptural authority is inherent in the concluding appeal itself. Analysis confirms that the pathos of these elements, particularly of the holy affections and the rhetorical crescendo, significantly reinforce Wesley’s concluding appeal to the reader. The rhetorical force of the crescendo toward “holiness,” and/or “happiness,” and or “heaven” appear persuasively effective, regardless of some of the peroratio’s brief length. The end of the sermon conveys a tone of simultaneous conviction and inspiration necessary for a personal response toward spiritual transformation. This provides the conclusions of Wesley’s sermons with stable and proven, but flexible and creative, rhetorical patterns. Whatever the antithetical combinations, in each sermon Wesley fulfilled the conventional expectations for the function of a neoclassical Anglican homiletic peroratio, namely, recapitulation and pathos. Wesley’s conclusions merge recapitulation and pathetic (emotional) appeal, and frequently reinforced the
probatio emphases on holy versus unholy affections. Also, each of these elements display a continuance of antithetical rhetoric. Recapitulation often re-presented earlier exordial and argumentative antitheses. Wesley’s hortatory pathetic appeals unfolded as expansive crescendos presenting a sharp antithesis between choosing Scriptural Christianity (with resultant blessings) versus passive and disobedient, unscriptural Christianity (with negative consequences). Finally, the predominant holy versus unholy affections sermonic features are inherently antithetical. Therefore, Chapter Five’s discovery, categorization, and analysis of the SOSO I-IV sermon conclusions reinforces the thesis that they contain an antithetical pattern intended to correct persistent formalistic and antinomian doctrinal imbalances, particularly those imbalances which resulted in unholy affections.

SOSO I-IV’s saturation with these antithetical patterns indicates convincingly that both the theological and homiletic thrust of Wesley’s revival preaching was to (positively) advocate orthodox Scriptural Christianity by (negatively) addressing the imbalances of formalism and antinomianism. This thesis’ analysis of the nature of SOSO I-IV suggests that antithesis is indicative of his overall strategy for revival preaching. Wesley insisted in the first sentence of the Preface that these sermons are the “substance” of his early revival preaching. This significant statement must be coupled with this present thesis’ analysis confirming SOSO I-IV’s dominate Scriptural Christianity versus formalism and antinomianism rhetorical pattern. These two facts strongly suggest that this antithetical theme broadly defines Wesley’s revival preaching, and this was the central context in which these sermons, as sermons, must be read. They are not general via salutis sermons, but sermons whose salvation themes directly served the milieu of Wesley’s immediate ministry. This perspective refines the common description of the series as thematically via salutis, including the suggestion that the pattern of I-IV is an alternation
between justification and sanctification. This thesis would locate that alternation more precisely as formalistic and antinomian aberrations of the doctrines of justification and sanctification. Such appears to be the principal theme of Wesley’s revival preaching.

The above interpretation stands in considerable contrast with much Wesley studies scholarship, past and present, which undervalues both the rhetorical nature of homiletical theology and the 1746 Preface’s emphasis on the original antithetical rhetorical mission of SOSO I-IV. The majority of these studies superimpose a standardization “reading” on the series. These approaches de-emphasize the pre-standardization homiletic role of I-IV and indirectly propagate what may appropriately be termed a “standardization effect,” the view that Wesley’s original and primary role for SOSO I-IV was to supply Methodism with doctrinal standards. Such common “readings” are represented in Outler, Rack, and Collins (a revival movement reading), Burwash and Sugden (a regulatory reading), and Oden, Heitzenrater, Baker and Abraham (a Methodist Homilies reading). Other scholars tend to align with one of these interpretive perspectives. In general, demarcations lie between two issues: the degree of intentional standardization and the design for curricular uses. First, several scholars have submitted that the SOSO series must be interpreted as a doctrinal standard for Methodism. The regulatory view of Burwash and Sugden allows that the SOSO series became a theological and thematic standard for Methodist preaching and should be read and studied as such. However, this view retains an appreciation for the sermonic nature of the series, and so is amenable to the homiletic “reading” this thesis recommends. Represented by Oden, Abraham, Baker, and Heintzenrater, the Methodist Homilies perspective argues for Wesley’s full intentionally in producing SOSO as a doctrinal

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standard. In form and function the *Sermons* mirror the *Homilies*. However, this thesis contends that Wesley’s 1746 *Preface* offered no mention of the Methodist movement, its lay preachers, or the Established Church *Homilies*. None of these issues are identified as the purpose of the projected three volumes. Wesley indicated that the reading audience were new and maturing revival converts, not lay preachers in need of homiletic training or Methodists who desire new *Homilies*. Only later, when the *Sermons* became standards, did Wesley require the lay preachers to carry and study them and Methodist meeting houses to implement the doctrines of the published sermons. The revival movement view supported by Outler, Rack, and others represents a fundamental shift in assumptions about the nature and role of the *Sermons*. *SOSO* is interpreted as a deliberate extension of Wesley’s itinerant preaching ministry, intended for a broad and diverse readership. This thesis takes the same position, though Outler and Rack more sharply distinguish the style of Wesley’s itinerant homiletic from his published homiletic. This crucial concurrence between the revival movement “reading” and this thesis is a pre-standardization focus. This perspective dramatically diminishes the standardization effect. It returns to an examination of the *Sermons* original aim: homiletic communication responsive to the immediate climate of the Evangelical Revival. These three “readings” categories confirm that scholars do not present congruent conclusions about the nature and role of Wesley’s *Sermons on Several Occasions*. This thesis in no way suggests that such variant readings are unhelpful, for each respond to their own set of research questions and for that reason have merit. Such readings do provide immense insight for significant research questions regarding the historical, ecclesial, theological, and organizational role of the *SOSO I-IV*. They are best conducted, however, acknowledging that *SOSO I-IV*’s original genre and purpose require a homiletical reading. The point in identifying the variances is that, because the majority of them
do not ask research questions of a rhetorical nature, they do not encourage discovery and analysis of rhetorical characteristics, yield few conclusions regarding SOSO’s rhetoric nature, and some mistakenly dismiss the reality of the Sermons’ key rhetorical aims. Both Wesley studies and early modern British sermon studies are better served by understanding SOSO’s conventional dispositio and Wesley’s reliance on antithesis as the overarching rhetorical pattern throughout every level of these early revival sermons.

This “homiletic reading” emphasizing antithesis also places the Sermons in their proper historical context and allows for Wesley to have preached each sermon to his intended audience, with a tailored theological emphasis. Many of Wesley’s sermonic antitheses are designed for his immediate homiletic need in addressing formalism and antinomianism, not for Wesley to distinguish a personal “fixed” position from all other opposing opinions. It is frequently noted by others that Wesley’s writings primarily responded to a current theological exigency or communal challenge, a notion well-summarized by Gunter: “The emphasis that Wesley underscored depended on the party with which he was engaged in dialogue or against whom he was polemicizing.” As Gunter suggests, The Nature of Enthusiasm, is a profitable example:

Wesley defended himself against the charge of enthusiasm, not by categorically denying it, but by defining the term to suit his purposes. He well knew the accepted definition of an enthusiast as one who ‘pretended to a divine revelation’…[H]e hinged his defence on the word ‘pretended.’….[W]esley contended that the Methodists were not pretenders, for they were truly led and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The rhetorical antithesis this sermon proposes between “proper” versus “improper”

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9 W. Stephen Gunter, The Limits of Love Divine: John Wesley’s Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm (Nashville: Kingswood, 1989), 105. Outler also noted that this sermon was “Wesley’s contribution to this need in these circumstances” (Sermons, I: 446). Outler commented that Wesley wrote The Lord our Righteousness “in response to a pressing need for clarity on a particular point” (Sermons, II:45).
10 Gunter, Limits, 271.
enthusiasts carries little persuasive weight with his formalist opponents. These are antitheses sufficiently convincing to Wesley and those in his movement who felt unfairly labelled as “enthusiasts.”

Even Wesley’s more “ultimate” positions were arrived at via antitheses which he felt he communicated adequately, but which could still, in fact, be unclear to those both within and separate from the revival movement. For example, his early antithesis between works-righteousness versus faith alone stirred considerable controversy with formalists/moralists, and undo boldness from antinomians. Wesley finally arrived at “a definition of faith which did not exclude rational assent, affirmed personal inward certainty of salvation, and maintained a priority for faith in the via salutis—faith working by love.”¹¹ Still, such a definition opened him to charges from both sides. To the moralist, Wesley’s allowance of inward testimony was enthusiastic. To the antinomian, Wesley’s inclusion of works was legalistic. In Wesley’s opinion, his sermons had adequately contrasted the unbiblical teaching of works as synonymous with faith verses the biblical teaching of faith as the basis for doing works.

This thesis’ attention to Wesley’s preferred use of rhetorical antithesis offers another possible explanation for his frequent lack of theological nuance. If, as a homilist, Wesley was consciously composing antithetical material, his choice of archetypal antitheses necessarily excluded nuances. For example, “the righteousness of the law” and “the righteousness of faith” are placed in direct opposition (sermon VI), and the entire sermon was designed to reinforce this antithesis without any effort to propose a general moral standard. It is possible, then, that Wesley’s desire for antithetical material discouraged a homiletic process whereby nuances are inserted into the sermonic flow.

¹¹ Gunter, Limits, 271.
The prevalence of these antithetical patterns in Wesley’s early revival sermons logically leads to the significant question of how conventional the use of rhetorical antithesis was in Wesley’s homiletic culture. In other words, was Wesley’s antithetical homiletic a novelty, or a reasonably common feature within his Anglican tradition and among his pulpit contemporaries? It must be remembered that, since published Anglican sermons served the official (that is, the Homilies) and unofficial role as exemplars of orthodox preaching in Wesley’s era, it is certain that his own style was more influenced by these than by academic preaching manuals (of which there were few). Thus, insight is crucial regarding Wesley’s own use of antithesis, his contemporaries’ use of this rhetorical feature, and whether this homiletic element was normative for the eighteenth-century readership of printed sermons. The chapter analyses of this thesis do not attempt any comparative study of Wesley’s sermonic style and those of his contemporaries, but a brief sampling in Chapter One revealed that in the so-called “long eighteenth century” (the late 1600s to early 1800s) there existed a broad homiletic use of antithetical rhetoric. What is instructive (and impressive) is the degree to which Wesley made this the signature rhetorical characteristic of *SOSO I-IV*, apparently to achieve within every *dispositio* a stark contrast between Scriptural and unscriptural Christianity.

The methodological approach of this thesis should be affirmed for its ability to produce insight regarding the rhetorical nature and purpose of Wesley’s *Sermons*. By choosing to follow the *dispositio* progression for the identification and categorisation antithetical elements, analysis of their dynamics, and proposing preliminary conclusions based on their quantity and quality, the thesis was affirmed. Other methodological improvements will continue to be welcomed, but perhaps this methodological approach is a platform on which to build other rhetorical analyses.
Regarding future research, a number of recommendations also emerge from the major findings of this thesis. First, future research should analyse in what ways Wesley’s homiletic/rhetorical choices shape the presentation of his theology. This thesis hopes to add, to the resurgence of interest in the early modern British sermon, a specific and critical examination of John Wesley’s homiletical theology. The intense pursuit of ‘mining’ theology from Wesley’s *Sermons* in the field of Wesley studies has left unexamined the implications of neoclassical sermonic form and rhetorical constructions upon his theology. A true reclamation of the balance within homiletic theology requires that discovery of rhetorical patterns be united with the theological dimension to produce a holistic understanding of the *Sermons*’ dynamic. More particularly, this thesis analyses the antithetical pattern discernible throughout *SOSO I-IV*—contrasts designed by Wesley to explain his *theological* message. Thus Wesley the homilist chose to contrast certain theological points for the immediate purposes of the particular sermon. In other sermons, he used antithesis to clarify his position further, but only to the extent that the immediate sermon required. Renewed interest in Wesley studies in the past few decades has resulted in a body of scholarship which attempts to accurately configure Wesley’s theology from the disparate sources of his journals and diaries, sermons, essays, letters, and tracts. To that effort, this thesis submits a broader enquiry on how his rhetorical tradition and preferences influence that configuration, such as how the conventional length (spoken and written) of the eighteenth-century plain-style Anglican sermon ‘confined’ its amount of content and the rhetorical characteristics used to convey that content.

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12 A correct rhetorical understanding of Wesley’s sermonic antitheses may benefit interchanges like the Wood/Collins disagreement over to what degree Wesley intends to “distinguish” justification and sanctification in early sermons. See Lawrence W. Wood, “The Need for a Contextual Interpretation of John Wesley’s Sermons,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45 (2010), 262-263.

13 For example, in Sermons X and XI (*The Witness of the Spirit, I and II*).
From the fruitful brief survey of Wesley’s contemporaries’ rhetorical use of antithesis, it is apparent that future research should present comparative studies of Wesley’s antithetical homiletic with other preachers in the Anglican tradition—especially in the “long” eighteenth century (the late 1600s through the early 1800s). The Chapter One discussion of selected preachers whose style influenced Wesley, most of whom stood in Established Church pulpits, points to the potential of this line of enquiry. Both a broader selection of preachers, and a more narrow analysis of their stylistic similarities and differences with Wesley, would supply firmer conclusions about Wesley’s personal rhetorical preferences. Current studies of the early modern sermon are revealing the path forward to such analysis.

The ubiquitous influence of the Anglican hermeneutic on Wesley’s sermonic rhetoric calls for further research. The interrelation between the hermeneutical, theological, and homiletic dimensions of the threefold Anglican hermeneutic (plus the role of experience) was a prominent dynamic within Wesley’s homiletical theology. It was, simultaneously, a well-developed Anglican hermeneutical template, a robust theological position, and a formula for sermonic organization. Its use within Anglicanism was conventional, thus there are an abundance of theological and sermonic sources to be analysed.

While it is glaringly obvious that the Sermon on the Mount Discourses are disproportionately represented in the S O S O I-IV series (and even more so in S O S O I-III), their shaping influence may extend beyond quantity and into the overall framework of the entire series. According to Wesley’s 1746 Preface comments, it is arguable that even before the publication of S O S O I he had a preconception of the contents of entire intended three-volume series. If so, the author’s central placement of the Discourses may suggest its influence within the project. On an editorial level, the prominence of the Discourses in the envisioned S O S O I-III
simply acknowledges their role in his early missionary teaching and revival preaching.

However, this thesis’ analysis directly confirms two other significant observations, and from this a hypothesis may be suggested: a) rhetorically, it is a significant fact that all thirteen of the Sermon on the Mount texts are highly antithetical, either in the alternatives they offer, the principles they teach, and/or the rhetorical images they create; b) thematically, the Discourses’ theological themes are strikingly fitting for Wesley’s declared series purpose of contrasting formalism and antinomianism with Scriptural Christianity. Indirectly, this thesis’ careful rhetorical analysis produces an informed sense of the general flow of SOSO I-IV from which a curious observation emerges: almost all of the other twenty-three (non-Discourse) original SOSO I-III sermons are assembled for publication in a pattern parallel with the thematic scheme Wesley identifies in Matthew 5-7. In Disc. 1, Wesley outlined the thematic progression of the Sermon on the Mount as follows:

This divine discourse, delivered in the most excellent method, every subsequent part illustrating those that precede, is commonly, and not improperly, divided into three principle branches: the first, contained in the fifth [chapter of Matthew],—the second in the sixth,—and the third in the seventh chapter. In the first, the sum of all true religion is laid down in eight particulars, which are explained and guarded against the false glosses of man, in the following parts of the fifth chapter. In the second are rules for that right intention, which we are to preserve in all our outward actions; unmixed with worldly desires, or anxious cares for even the necessities of life. In the third are cautions against the main hindrances of religion, closed with an application of the whole.\footnote{XX. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First, ¶10.}

More broadly, both in the opening and closing Discourses, Wesley identified the series in terms of the via salutis: “And what is it which he is teaching? The Son of God who came from heaven, is here showing us the way to heaven; to the place which he hath prepared for us….He is
teaching us the true way to life everlasting.”

“Our divine Teacher, having declared the whole counsel of God with regard to the way of salvation, and observed the chief hindrances of those who desire to walk therein, now closes the whole with these weighty words….For thus said the Lord, that none may ever conceive there is any other way than this.”

Therefore Wesley, within a via salutis framework, devised three thematic segments for Matthew 5-7. The first segment is Disc. 1 through 5. Disc. 1 through 3 exposit the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:2-12, which constitute “the sum of all true” inward “religion”/holiness. Disc. 4 and 5 address the remainder of the Matthew 5 corrections against the “false glosses of man” regarding inward religion, namely a mysticism which advocates only inward religion. The second segment is Disc. 6 through 9 on Matthew 6, which focuses on “outward” holiness, or the outward marks of religion. The third and final segment is Disc. 10 through 13, concerning the “main hindrances” of both inward and outward holiness/religion. The following chart notes the close thematic association between this pattern and the Sermons published in the original three-volume SOSO:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Segments of Discourses</th>
<th>Thematic Segments Mirrored in Original SOSO I-III</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 5</td>
<td>Inward Holiness: Beatitudes as Via Salutis (Disc. 1-3)</td>
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15 XX. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the First, ¶3.
16 XXXIII. Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Thirteenth, ¶1.
17 Outler suggests that this design appears to be Wesley’s—“a model of his own, both in form and substance” (BE I:467). However, Wesley mentions that the outline of Matthew 5-7 he provides is “commonly” suggested by others (Disc. 1, ¶10).
18 Kinghorn’s description of the segments is helpful: “According to John Wesley’s analysis of the Sermon on the Mount, the fifth chapter of Matthew deals with how…real religion is a matter of the heart….The sixth chapter of Matthew deals with the way Christ’s followers live in the world….Finally, in the seventh chapter of Matthew Jesus discusses the hindrances to holiness.” (Kinghorn, Sermon on the Mount, 240).
19 The following chart, then, represents Sugden’s (British, rather than American) numbering of the Standard Sermons.
Inward Holiness: False Teaching
Mysticism (Disc. 4-5)

Matthew 6

Outward Holiness: Marks of Piety
Mercy and piety: alms and prayer (Disc. 6)
Pietty: Fasting (Disc. 7)
Pietty and mercy: frugality (Disc. 8)
Pietty and mercy: worship and frugality (Disc. 9)

Matthew 7

Hindrances to Holiness
Hypocrisy and Retaliation (Disc. 10)
Worldliness (Disc. 11)
False prophets (Disc. 12)
Spiritual foolishness (Disc. 13)

Outward Holiness: Marks of Piety
Piety—means of grace (XVI)
Piety—humility, faith, hope, love (XVII)
Piety—faith, hope, love (XVIII)
Piety—faith, love, prayer, praise (XIX)
Piety—moral law (XXXIII-XXXV)

A significant research question may be: Since the Discourses were an early focus of Wesley’s teaching and preaching, did he proceed to assemble his revival sermons in the same thematic pattern as the Discourses’?

These conclusions and recommendations are rooted in the central claim of this thesis that careful analysis of John Wesley’s dispositio sermonic material delineates the use of an antithetical homiletic pattern intended to correct persistent formalistic and antinomian doctrinal imbalances which were of practical concern to Wesley’s listeners and readers. The analysis indeed verifies the consistency of this pattern, and a frequency which establishes it as the overarching homiletic characteristic of Soso I-IV, measurable within forty-seven of the fifty-three sermons in the series. These antitheses are sustained by a number of rhetorical features throughout the dispositio which heighten Wesley’s contrastive aim. Ultimately, this shaped the presentation of his theology in a distinctly antithetical manner.
Therefore, it is recommended that a “homiletic reading,” rather than the “standardization reading” prevalent in current Wesleyan scholarship, more accurately identifies the form of John Wesley’s *SOSO I-IV* sermons and, more importantly, reveals the rhetorical dynamic of his theology. This interpretive pursuit more fully connects the contemporary reader of Wesley’s sermons with the purpose, homiletic skill, rhetorical force, and spiritual vitality with which they were originally preached, heard, and read.
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210

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