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**Imagination and Struggle
Charles Wesley and Christian Practices
(1739–1749)**

**PAPERS PRESENTED
AT
THE NINETEENTH ANNUAL MEETING
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Contributors	3
Introduction	5
<i>S T Kimbrough, Jr.</i>	
Minutes of the 2008 Annual Meeting	9
An Important New Resource for Study of Charles Wesley	13
<i>Randy L. Maddox</i>	
Singularity in Early Methodism	17
<i>Patrick A. Eby</i>	
Charles Wesley and Christian Practices	35
<i>Paul W. Chilcote</i>	
“From Strength to Strength Go On”: Images of Growth in the Hymns of Charles Wesley	49
<i>Charles Edward White</i>	
What Writers of Contemporary Worship Songs Can Learn from Charles Wesley: Reflections and Axioms	65
<i>Lester Ruth</i>	
Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Manuscript Journal	85
<i>Kenneth G. C. Newport</i>	

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Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Manuscript Journal¹

Kenneth G. C. Newport

1. Introduction

According to his more famous brother John, Charles Wesley was a man of many talents of which the least was his ability to write poetry.² This is a view with which few perhaps would today agree, for the writing of poetry, more specifically hymns, is the one thing above all others for which Charles Wesley has been remembered. Anecdotally I am sure that we all recognize that this is the case; and indeed if one were to look Charles up in more or less any one of the many general biographical dictionaries that include an entry on him one will find it repeated often enough: Charles is portrayed as a poet and a hymn-writer; while comparatively little, if any, attention is paid to other aspects of his work. On a more scholarly level too one can find it. Obviously there are exceptions, but in general historians of Methodism in particular and eighteenth-century Church history more widely have painted a picture of Charles that is all too monochrome and Charles's role as the "Sweet Singer of Methodism" has in the past been as unquestioned as his broader significance undeveloped.

The reasons for this lack of full attention being paid to Charles are several and it is not (contrary to what is most commonly said) simply a matter of Charles being in his much more famous brother's shadow; a lesser light, as it were, being outshone by a greater one. No, it is much more complex than that. For example, Gareth Lloyd has shown that Charles Wesley has suffered pretty severely at the hands of his biographers. Charles was, as Lloyd has shown, a contentious figure whose vision for Methodism did not fit all that well with that of those to whom the task of writing up the story of the tradition's origins and ethos fell during the nineteenth century. And as these early historians (who, understandably, were to some extent also apologists), sought to explain Methodism's roots and mark out the new denomination's own space on the ecclesiological map, Charles was a somewhat problematic figure. As a result he was *consciously* sidelined. At least that is Lloyd's argument. The long-term result is that Charles Wesley, a sometimes troublesome individual who fought and in the end lost some important battles for the soul of Methodism (hence the title of Lloyd's book, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity*) has been both sidelined and sanitized by giving him the safe, and indeed inspiring role, of the "Sweet Singer of Methodism."

¹ Some few sections of this article are heavily dependent upon Kenneth G. C. Newport, "Charles Wesley, Warts and All," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 56:4 (2008): 165–188; material has been used here with permission.

² See *Minutes of Conference*, 1.201.

It is in this broad general context that this article presents some thoughts on the subject of “Charles Wesley as Revealed by his Journal.” Readers will of course have spotted an obvious echo in the title of this article: it is now some sixty years ago that Frank Baker first published what is undoubtedly still one of the very best introductions to Charles Wesley, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*;³ that volume was a model of scholarship which gave a real sense of just what else we might be able to discover about Charles on the basis of his prose materials, in that case the letters. Baker set us on the right path. But there is still much to be done on this front.

We are concerned here, however, with Charles’s Manuscript Journal, a text that has relatively recently been published in two volumes by Abingdon Press.⁴ The purpose of this discussion is to give something of a sense of what is in that text, and especially in those sections that were omitted by previous editors, most notably Jackson.

2. The Text⁵

In the introduction to the Abingdon edition there is an authoritative introduction to the text written principally by S T Kimbrough, Jr. With permission, some of that introduction has been heavily utilized here since there seems little to be gained from seeking to revisit the ground already covered by Kimbrough.

The manuscript base for the published text is the single bound volume now catalogued at the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.⁶ The custodial history of this MS is a little uncertain. Thomas Jackson, the first editor of this material, had purchased the volume in 1829, and it was presumably held in his private possession before being placed among the wealth of early Methodist materials in the British Methodist Archives now on permanent deposit in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.

The MSJ itself is “an abstract.” Charles clearly heads it as such on the very first page. This detail ought not to be passed over too lightly. From other evidence it has become plain that Charles was in the habit of writing his journal on separate sheets and often sending those sheets as letters to others in the early Methodist movement, most especially his wife and his brother. Some of those “journal letters,” from which this “extract” has been taken, have survived and are being prepared for publication by Richard P. Heitzenrater.

Interestingly, where there are overlaps between the journal letters and the material in MSJ, it is the text of the journal letters that tends to be fuller. One

³ London: Epworth Press, 1948; revised edition 1995.

⁴ S T Kimbrough, Jr. and Kenneth G. C. Newport, eds. *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.*, 2 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008). Hereinafter *Journal*.

⁵ Sections of what follows are based upon the longer introduction in *Journal*, pp. xvii–xxxi. See that source for more details.

⁶ It is classified as DDCW 10/2.

example will suffice. Consider the entries for Sunday July 7, 1751 in the MSJ and in a journal letter respectively. The visual evidence is sufficient to require no further comment.

Manuscript Journal⁷

Sunday, July 7. Preached out to a numerous congregation, whom I could not look upon without tears. My text was Rev. 3:3: "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent." Out of the abundance of my heart my mouth spake, and called them back to their first love and first works. It was a solemn season of sorrow. The Lord, I trust, knocked at many hearts, which will hear his voice, and open to him again. He stirred up the faithful remnant to pray for their backsliding brethren; and *their prayers* shall not return empty.

Another hour I employed in *earnestly* exhorting the Society to repentance.

Journal Letter

Sunday, July 7. Went to church and heard a very harmless sermon. What was once their one subject, the poor Methodists are now rarely mentioned from their pulpits. *At five*, I preached out *in Wednesbury* to a very numerous congregation whom I could not look upon without tears. My text was Revelation 3:3, "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent." Out of the abundance of my heart my mouth spake, and called them back to their first love and first works. It was a solemn season of sorrow. The Lord, I trust, knocked at many hearts which will hear his voice and open to him again. He stirred up the faithful remnant to pray for their backsliding brethren; and *the prayer of faith* shall not return empty.

Another hour I employed in *strongly* exhorting the society to repentance. And my faith revived: and many, I believe, saw the door of hope opening.

Lodged at Mr E——, who did run well; but the world, that gulf of souls, has now quite swallowed him up. Still he acknowledges the truth and loves the witnesses thereof. O that he might strengthen the things that remain and are ready to die. His wife, sister, and a few neighbours, who had been my hearers at the beginning, seemed a good deal affected, and stirred up again to set their hand to the plough.

⁷ *Journal*, pp. xx–xxi. Used by permission.

This is typical. The journal letters usually contain the longer of the two recensions. The MSJ, then, appears to be Charles's attempt to systematize his journal, to "extract" from the probably literally several hundreds of separate sheets that he had written, what he considered to be important and to produce a running narrative.

The MSJ begins March 1, 1736 and ends November 5, 1756. However, there are some major gaps. For example, the whole of 1742 is missing as are the years 1752–1755, and some of the other material is, to say the least, rather patchy (though on the other hand some sections are very full indeed). The MSJ, then, is at best only a partial record; but it is still a very significant one. The text comes to something like 230,000 words and covers the period from Charles's arrival in America, through his "conversion" experience, to his work for the early Methodist cause in the later 1730s and 1740s. It covers also his marriage in 1749, and, eventually, the start of his much more settled life in Bristol and gradual withdrawal from at least the more punishing aspects of Methodist itinerancy.

In 1849 Thomas Jackson published *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.* Jackson's edition, however, which has served historians of Methodism as "the" definitive text of the journal of Charles Wesley, was a far from perfect one. Most noticeably Jackson made no attempt to decipher Charles Wesley's shorthand sections. This is not the only gap however, for Jackson also omitted some longhand passages from the MSJ, which he thought might have been considered too sensitive, or that might have shown Charles Wesley in a bad light. Actually it is very easy to see Jackson's editorial hand in the MS itself since he has quite literally struck-out in unmistakable pencil those sections that he did not intend to reproduce in his edition of the MS.⁸ A reading of the MS itself will hence quickly bring this to the surface.

Jackson's, however, was not the only attempt to bring this crucial text to publication. Building on this foundational work, early in the twentieth century John Telford began a new edition of Charles Wesley's journal. Volume 1 was published in 1910 under the title, *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A. sometime student of Christ Church, Oxford, The Early Journal, 1736–1739.*⁹ In fact this was the only volume to be printed as Telford was unable to complete the task before his death. Essentially Telford included the same material as Jackson for the years indicated in the title, but concluded on August 27, 1739. The important exception is that Telford's volume included many deciphered shorthand passages from the 1736–1739 section of the journal, though not all of them. For example,

⁸ While this was the first attempt to bring this volume to publication, some of the journal had been in print before. Both Jackson himself and before him Whitehead had included substantial portions of this text in their accounts of Charles's life and work. See John Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley: Late Student of the Christ-church, Oxford, Collected from his Private Journal* (1805) and Thomas Jackson, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, 2 vols. (London: John Mason, 1841).

⁹ London: Hazell, Watson, & Viney, Ltd., 1910. A reprint of the volume was issued in 1977 by the Methodist Reprint Society of Taylors, South Carolina.

passages of crucial importance for the understanding of Charles Wesley's conflict with Colonel Oglethorpe and with two women, Mrs. Welch and Mrs. Hawkins, who accused both men of trying to seduce them, were omitted.

Besides Telford, there is one other author worthy of note here. This is Elijah Hoole, who, in his *Oglethorpe and the Wesleys*,¹⁰ included transcriptions of major portions of the shorthand material for the 1736-Georgia section of the journal. Again, though, not all of the available material was transcribed.

The Abingdon text does now deal with the issue of the missing sections. This is not to say, however, that the text is a perfect one. The shorthand especially has been a problem and in places it has not always been possible to be 100% confident about the transcription (as indicated in the footnotes). Those who have worked with the shorthand know the issues: poorly formed strokes, extreme abbreviation, lack of vowels, etc. It is also the case that Charles has sometimes made mistakes in his journal—places for example where the dating is impossible. Some attempt has been made to sort this problem out, but in the end what we have in the Abingdon edition is a very best and hopefully well-informed guess on some of these issues. Perfection has not been possible. But falling short of it ought not to prevent the publication of what has now with considerable effort finally been achieved. What we now have with the Abingdon edition is, it is to be hoped, something very much approximating the text of what Charles actually wrote, even if it is not 100% accurate. The task may have been rather more troublesome and time consuming that one might at first have imagined. However, we do now have a text upon which, it is realistically hoped, we can rely.

In the remainder of this article some account of Charles Wesley as revealed by his journal is hence presented. We begin with an account of Charles's work as preacher.

3. Preacher¹¹

It has been argued elsewhere that Charles's preaching abilities were considerable and that preaching, no less than poetical composition, was at the very heart of his ministry. Such a remark is made fully cognizant of his work as a Christian poet.¹²

A study of his journal indicates that this was surely the case. In fact the MS indicates that Charles must have preached quite literally thousands of sermons during the course of his life and indeed sometimes his journal is little more than an annotated sermon log. The following extract from 1739 is not untypical.

Saturday, February 10. I expounded to many hundreds at a Society in Beech Lane.

¹⁰ London: R. Needham, 1863; see especially pp. 8–9.

¹¹ Parts of this section are dependent upon Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition with an Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹² Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley*, pp. 28–47.

Sunday, February 11. We prayed for utterance this day. . . . I read prayers, and preached without notes on blind Bartimeus, the Lord being greatly my helper. Let him have all the glory. Returned to pray at Mr Stonehouse's. Miss Crisp asked to be admitted. We had close searching talk, before I expounded to the Society

Tuesday, February 13. Read a letter from Sarah Hurst, pressing me to Oxford, and Cowley (which is now vacant). Quite resigned, I offered myself; opened the book upon those words, "With stammering lips, and with another tongue will he speak to this people" [Is. 28:11]. Thought it a prohibition, yet continued without a will. With Captain Flatman at the Marshalsea; read prayers, and preached from Luke 7:36, the woman washing Christ's feet. The word was with power; all attentive and thankful. Visited Zouberbouler, removed the Fleet.

Wednesday, February 14. Read prayers at Newgate, and preached the law first, and then the gospel. Sang, "Invitation to sinners." All were affected.

Thursday, February 15. Preached again at the Marshalsea. Sent for by an harlot (supposed to be dying), and preached Christ, the friend of sinners, I trust to her heart.

This pattern carries on for page after page. Certainly for the years covered by the journal, and there is other evidence to support it, and, indeed, to suggest that such schedules extended beyond these years, Charles was preaching exceptionally frequently and doing so to fairly substantial numbers with some good results. Indeed, trying to get some sense of just how many sermons are referred to in the journal is not as straightforward as one might imagine. John Tyson has done important work on this and to his count one could add others from other sources. My own resultant document, and it is probably not complete, runs to thirty-five pages with over 1,500 entries. And we should not forget how terse the journal is or how many gaps there are. We can leave aside the detail. On any account this is a picture of a man for whom preaching was a near daily activity, indeed sometimes he preached several times in the course of one single twenty-four hour period. If we take simple statistics as our starting point, then, preaching was very much at the heart of Charles's ministry, at least as far as quantity was concerned.

It is certain, then, that Charles preached with extraordinary frequency. However, other sections of the journal reveal that he thought he was very good at it. Consider, for example, the entry from July 1744, which is typical.

Monday, July 9. Took horse at two, with my friend and companion, Meriton; and acknowledged, the next day, in Bristol, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us" [1 Sam. 7:12].

I was strengthened to preach on, "Let not your hearts be troubled" [John 14:27], and the Lord made me a son of consolation. A cry of distress first, and then of joy, ran through the congregation. Miss Barr, with many others, received the word into their hearts, and sorrow and sighing fled away before it.

It would be very easy indeed to multiply such examples. Indeed, Charles's journal is nothing short of replete with references to the effect that his words had upon the often (so he states) very substantial audiences that had gathered to hear him,

frequently as early as five o'clock in the morning. Thus, for example, on September 10, 1739 Charles records in his journal that he

Preached in the Brick-yard, where I think there could not be less than four thousand. It rained hard, yet none stirred. I spoke with great freedom and power. A woman cried out, and dropped down. I spoke to her at Mrs Norman's, and found she had sunk under the weight of sin.¹³

Six days later Charles preached at Hanham-Mount.

I expounded the Good Samaritan to between three and four thousand, with power. While I was repeating that in Jeremiah, "Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" a woman fell down under the stroke of it. I found afterwards, that the good Samaritan had poured in his oil, and made her whole. Another declared He had then bound up her wounds also. I heard on all sides the sighing of them that were in captivity, and trust more than I know of were set at liberty; for the Lord was among us of a truth.¹⁴

The list goes on. Further citation is unnecessary, for the point has already emerged: according to his own testimony Charles's sermons were able to strike deep into the hearts of his audience. This testimony is confirmed by those, who had heard him preach and witnessed its effects.

With all this activity as recorded in the journal one might have expected to find that rather more of Charles's sermons have survived than appears to be the case. At best we are looking at a corpus of twenty-three and even some of these were copied from other authors (principally his brother). However, the journal holds the key to the problem here too. The reason for the paucity of MSS is simple: the written form of these sermons, it seems, never existed in the first place. This is so since as the Journal makes plain, Charles had early developed the practice of preaching entirely without notes.

In the journal Charles does refer fairly frequently to his practice of opening the Bible and "expounding" the first words upon which he came. Frank Baker (who is in turn quoted favorably by Tyson)¹⁵ has made this point already¹⁶ and evidence from the journal to support Baker's suggestion is not difficult to find. For example the entry for Monday 3 December, 1753 reads:

I was at loss for a subject at five, when I opened the Revelation, and, with fear and trembling, began to expound it. Our Lord was with us of a truth, and comforted our hearts with the blessed hope of his coming to reign before his ancients gloriously.¹⁷

¹³ *Journal*, 1.196.

¹⁴ *Journal*, 1.199.

¹⁵ John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 16.

¹⁶ Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 38.7

¹⁷ This section of the journal is not present in DDCW 10/2. It is taken from the earlier edition of Jackson.

When Charles adopted this policy of *ex tempore* preaching is not absolutely clear, though the journal does give some reasonably clear indication. It is Tyson's suggestion (the same basic point was made by Doughty in 1957)¹⁸ that Charles began to develop the method on or about 15 October 1738 when, writes Charles, "[I] Preached 'the one thing needful' at Islington, and added much extempore."¹⁹ Five days later Charles wrote:

Seeing so few present at St Antholin's, I thought of preaching extempore. Afraid, yet ventured on the promise, "Lo, I am with you always," and spake on justification from Rom. 3 for three quarters of an hour without hesitation. Glory be to God, who keepeth his promise forever.²⁰

As far as can be judged from the very limited evidence available, Tyson's basic point seems correct, though he probably overestimates the extent to which 15 October 1738 was the turning point. In fact the journal indicates that Charles had been "adding much extempore" at least since 11 July of that year, when he "preached faith in Christ to a vast congregation with great boldness, adding much extempore."²¹ Early on, then, Charles seems to have been preaching fairly regularly without notes, or, it seems, even mental preparation. By March 1740 the method seems to be well ingrained, so much so that Charles can describe the act of "premeditating what to preach" as "unusual." He wrote:

I was greatly distracted by an unusual unnecessary premeditating what to preach upon. My late discourses had worked different effects. Some were wounded, some hardened and scandalized above measure. I hear no neuters. The Word had turned them upside down. In the pulpit, I opened the book and found the place where it is written, 'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, &c.' I explained our Lord's prophetic office, and described the persons on whom alone He could perform it. I found as did others that he owned me.²²

The journal appears also to contain references to his first experience of field preaching. Again, quite precisely when Charles first engaged in the activity is not absolutely clear, but the journal indicates that by May 29, 1739 he had, somewhat reluctantly, begun to preach in the open. The entry for that day reads: "Franklyn, a farmer, invited me to preach in his field. I did so, to about 500, on, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' I returned to the house rejoicing."²³

Gill gives this date as that of Charles's first field-preaching, which it may well have been.²⁴ However, the magnitude of this decision by Charles to preach in the

¹⁸ Doughty, "Charles Wesley, Preacher," 264.

¹⁹ *Journal*, 1:149.

²⁰ *Journal*, 1:150.

²¹ *Journal*, 1:136.

²² Charles Wesley to John Wesley March 1740 as quoted in Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 38.

²³ *Journal*, 1:174.

²⁴ Gill, *First Methodist*, p. 13.

open fields and thereby join himself with the work of Whitefield and the other revival preachers should not be underestimated, and the very terse journal entry does not reflect the extent to which, if this was the first occurrence, it represents a radical break with the tradition to which Charles was wedded. This may in fact have been a spur of the moment decision by Charles, driven as he was by circumstance, although he must have been considering the issue for some time before May 29 since, as his journal indicates, he fairly frequently attended George Whitefield in his open-air preaching.²⁵ During the next month the necessity of preaching outside walls and indeed outside the official structures of the Church became even more pressing, and Charles was forced to make a decision. As a Methodist he was finding it not always easy to gain access to a pulpit from which to proclaim his message. This is seen at several points. For example, on May 1, 1739 he reports in his journal how Church-wardens kept guard over the pulpit-stairs and "I was not inclined to fight my way through them."²⁶

The situation deteriorated further. The entry for June 19, 1739 reads

At Lambeth with Mr Piers. His Grace expressly forbade him to let any of us preach in his church – charged us with breach of the canon. I mentioned the Bishop of London's authorising my forcible exclusion. He would not hear me, said he did not dispute. He asked me what call I had. I answered, "A dispensation of the gospel is committed to me." "That is, to St. Paul. But I do not dispute, and will not proceed to excommunication yet." "Your Grace has taught me in your book on Church Government, that a man unjustly excommunicated is not thereby cut off from communion with Christ." "Of that I am the judge." I asked him, if Mr Whitefield's success was not a spiritual sign, and sufficient proof of his call; recommended Gamaliel's advice. He dismissed us—Piers, with kind professions; me, with all the marks of his displeasure.²⁷

As has been shown, Charles had already preached in the open air before this interview at Lambeth. However, the increasingly difficult situation in which the Methodist preachers found themselves seems to have led him fully to consider the advice of Whitefield. Four days later he wrote:

Dined at Mr Stonehouse's. My inward conflict continued. Perceived it was the fear of man; and that, by preaching in the field next Sunday, as G. Whitefield urges me, I shall break down the bridge, and become desperate. Retired, and prayed for particular direction, offering up my friends, my liberty, my life, for Christ's sake and the gospel's. Somewhat less burdened; yet could not be quite easy, till I gave up all.²⁸

It is clear, then, that the decision to preach in the open was not one that Charles took lightly. However, after this entry it becomes increasingly common

²⁵ See for example the entries for April 27, 1739 (Whitefield is preaching in Islington Church yard); April 28, 1739.

²⁶ *Journal*, 1:173.

²⁷ *Journal*, 1:178–179.

²⁸ *Journal*, 1:179.

to find him doing so, and with an apparently easy conscience. For example, he preached to “near ten thousand, by computation” at Moorfields on Sunday, July 8.²⁹ It is at the same time that he preached on Kennington Common.³⁰ By the end of 1739, then, he was frequently preaching in the open.

In summary on this issue, then, it is plain from his journal that Charles Wesley was constantly engaged in the business of preaching. It seems highly probable too that much of this preaching was without notes and often in the open-air. Similarly, although very little of the actual content of his preaching can be reconstructed from the journal accounts, something of its reception can be. Doubtless there were times when things did not go well. However, there is much in this text to support the report of John Nelson who once reported in his diary that Charles had passed briefly through Birstall, six miles outside Wakefield, around Michaelmas (September 29) 1742.³¹ Charles pressed on quickly to Newcastle, but was later to return, and “when Mr. Charles Wesley came back from Newcastle,” wrote Nelson:

the Lord was with him in such a manner that the pillars of hell seemed to tremble; many that were famous for supporting the devil’s kingdom fell to the ground while he was preaching, as if they had been thunderstruck.³²

4. Depressive

We turn now to another aspect of Charles Wesley that comes across in the journal: the fact he seemed reasonably frequently, to put it rather colloquially, to be “down in the dumps.” Whether the evidence is there to suggest a distinct personality trait is open to question and in any case such a judgment would require expertise beyond that here claimed. However, the journal does provide clear evidence of Charles’s depressive bouts, doubts or both regardless of what the reason for the same might be.

Consider for example, the following extract, which is quite severe (and it should be emphasized that similar thoughts cannot be found on every page). The day is Feb. 13, 1743 and Charles has been visiting the condemned in Newgate.

²⁹ *Journal*, 1:181.

³⁰ *Journal*, 1:181.

³¹ Charles’s journal from September 22, 1741 to January 2, 1743 is missing and so this cannot be checked against it. However, where Nelson can be checked he seems generally trustworthy. He records also that he was visited by John Wesley in May 1742, which is confirmed in John’s journal for the period (*BE*, 19.266–7).

³² John Nelson et al., *Wesley’s Veterans*, 7 vols. (London: Charles A. Kelly, 1912) 3.65. The quotation continues:

One day he had preached four times; and one that had been amongst the people all day said at night twenty-two had received forgiveness of their sins that day.

Nelson then goes on to claim that about “four-score” of individuals were added to the number of “true believers” as a result of Charles’s and Mr Graves’ labors. See further W. L. Doughty “Charles Wesley, Preacher,” *London Holborn Quarterly Review* 182(1957): 263–267, 267.

He is able to cheer those who are about to face death; but then conceals other, more personal, thoughts in shorthand.

This was written to a bosom friend: Rather than live in all earthly comfort, I would choose just now to be cast into the sea with a millstone about my neck—but for the fear of something after death. All this day my heart has been rising in expostulation [?] with God, have I not left all to follow him? Have I not chosen for near twenty years³³ to be miserable for want of him, rather than happy in the possession of all things else? For his sake I have suffered reproach, denied myself the gratification of my senses, joy and passion, took up my cross to suffer temptation, been afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, suffered so many things in vain, and at last to perish eternally. Who can forbear asking, wherefore then hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? O that I had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen me?

His judgments are as a great deep, I am lost in them. O that I could think no more!³⁴

This is a bit of a surprising passage in many ways. Charles is clearly thinking it would be better for him to be dead and yet, it seems, worries about what may await him in the afterlife. Of course, Charles is not the only one who has experienced such doubts by any means, but that the same person who could who could write some of those magnificent hymns of praise and confidence could also, and in 1743, write this passage is something about which to wonder, especially so since this is not the only example of such thinking in the journal text.

Consider further also this example from June 1738 (the proximity to Charles's "Day of Pentecost" is surely worth noting). The section is in longhand.

Thursday, June 1. Was troubled today that I could not pray: utterly dead at the sacrament.

Friday, June 2. Still unable to pray; still dead in communicating; full of a cowardly desire of death.

Saturday, June 3. My deadness continued and the next day increased. I rose exceeding heavy and averse to prayer, so that I almost resolved not to go to church, which I had not been able to do till within these two or three days past. When I did go, the prayers and sacrament were exceeding grievous to me, and could not help asking myself, "Where is the difference between what I am now and what I was before believing?" I immediately answered, that if darkness was not like the former darkness, because I was satisfied. There was no guilt in it, because I was assured it would be dispersed; and because, though I could not find I loved God, or feel that he loved me, yet I did and would believe he loved me notwithstanding.

I returned home and lay down with the same load upon me. This Mr Ingham's coming could not alleviate. They sung, but I had no heart to join; much less in public prayers. In the evening Mr Brown, Holland, and others called. I was very averse to coming among them, but forced myself to it, and spent two or three hours in singing, reading, and prayers. This exercise a little revived me; and I found myself much assisted to pray.³⁵

³³ This is transcribed as "hours" in the *Journal*, which is almost certainly in error.

³⁴ *Journal*, 2:341. The entire passage is in shorthand.

³⁵ *Journal*, 1:114.

It seems from the evidence of the journal, then, that Charles's "Day of Pentecost" did not drive all doubts from him. That May 21, 1738 was a turning point is clear, but one should not be unrealistic. The Christian life brings its highs and its lows and Charles was acquainted with both. His "evangelical conversion" was surely a high. Whatever happened that day, and whatever were the reasons for it, the day released for him some of his pent-up spiritual doubts and anxieties. However, and here others may find common ground with Charles, as one swallow does not a summer make, neither does the warmth of one "strange palpitation of heart"³⁶ melt the ice of every spiritual doubt. Baker may have put an alternative view memorably well; but he may yet have been wrong. Commenting on Charles's experience of May 21, 1738, Baker wrote

Henceforth . . . Whitsuntide was always to be a peculiar time of blessing for him. Underlying the choppy surface of his Christian experience were the calm deeps of his new certainty of God's love for him.³⁷

I rather doubt this. I doubt it instinctively but I doubt it also on the basis of the evidence of the journal. And for some, I include myself, Charles's determination to press on with the Christian life in the face of and not in the absence of doubt only enhances rather than diminishes his contemporary relevance.

This same apparently depressive trait in Charles comes once again to the surface as we look at some of the difficulties that Charles faced as he sought to live out in other ways what he considered to be his own calling to the Christian life and to confront other problems. Such problems included, at times, issues that led to disputes, not least with his own brother John (about which more below). For example, it is almost certainly John who is the recipient of the letter that Charles mentions in his journal shorthand entry for February 16 1745:

Saturday, February 16 [1745] In a letter to a friend, wrote "I am often weary and faint; but is there not a cause? The loss of all things and life itself is nothing to loss of a friend. If my burden weighs you down I must communicate no more; but whatever becomes of me the foundation stands sure. Farewell my sorrowful friend, for I know I have infected you, farewell and I long for our meeting in a better world."³⁸

These passages are not unusual in the journal even if the attention that has been paid to them has been relatively slight. Indeed, those who do study the journal will soon discover just how prone Charles seemed to be to out-and-out depressive thoughts and also to somewhat understandable, if sorrow-laden, periods of religious doubt driven by external factors.

³⁶ See *Journal*, 1:106.

³⁷ Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, p. 33.

³⁸ *Journal*, 2:435. The entire passage after the date is in shorthand.

5. Disputes with John

We continue with some further comments relating to aspects of Charles's difficulties as they appear in the journal. Such difficulties came on several fronts: physical persecution,³⁹ ostracism for the sake of the cause,⁴⁰ traveling hardships,⁴¹ difficulties with keeping order among the societies and some individual challenges to such order (for example the incident with the French Prophets in 1739).⁴² Something of this aspect of Charles's life is of course already well-known, but the journal can tell us even more than we might have thought, especially when we consider what Jackson left out. The shorthand sections are again central here.

We noted above one shorthand passage that suggests a difficulty between Charles and John. There is much more in this vein. Consider, predictably, the Grace Murray incident and its aftermath. The story of Charles's quite disgraceful behavior as it relates to his brother's intended marriage to Grace Murray is of course well-known. Gareth Lloyd has given a fairly full account of this whole episode drawing extensively on the letters and it has been dealt with elsewhere.⁴³

There are, however, several shorthand sections in the journal that give further insight into this whole rather sorry and difficult episode. A narrative style may flush this out better than might another.

The year is 1749. It is mid September of that year, possibly the eighteenth of that month, and Charles has just found out about John's intention of marrying Grace Murray. Within two weeks Charles has traveled to Whitehaven in Cumbria where he and his brother John have discussed the planned marriage. From a letter that John wrote to Charles the following day it is plain that the meeting was a difficult one.⁴⁴ It was decided to submit to Vincent Perronet's arbitration, but

... two days later Charles broke his word. Taking advantage of John's temporary absence, he left without warning for the Village of Hindley Hill, where his brother had left his fiancée a week previous.⁴⁵

Here Charles spoke with Murray and persuaded her to go with him to Newcastle to meet, so she thought, John Wesley. In fact it was not John Wesley but John Bennet, to whom Murray had previously been engaged, who was there. On October 3 Murray and Bennet were married, though, as Lloyd says, "neither party were keen to go through with the ceremony and it took all Charles's powers of

³⁹ *Journal*, 2:375–376.

⁴⁰ *Journal*, 2:647.

⁴¹ *Journal*, 2:428.

⁴² *Journal*, 1:156 and n. 122.

⁴³ Gareth Lloyd, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 88–109.

⁴⁴ Lloyd, *Charles Wesley*, pp. 98–99.

⁴⁵ Lloyd, *Charles Wesley*, p. 99.

persuasion before they consented.”⁴⁶ Grace was married and John’s own marriage plans were destroyed.

Following the marriage one or two meetings took place between John, Charles, and a third party to seek a resolution to the situation that had now arisen. Charles picks up the story in his journal, mostly in shorthand. The journal gives Charles’s account of this sad tale; one which has not really been brought fully to the surface before.

Thursday, October 26 [1749]. Visited my house in peace. Heard that my brother was come. Troubled and burdened, yet went to him. No love or joy or comfort in the meeting. No confidence on either side. He did not want to talk with me. Came home and was much comforted in prayer with Perronet and Jones.

Sunday, October 29 [1749] Dead, dead at the sacrament: rode back quite miserable, through [David] Traten’s information that he had seen and been locked up with Grace Bennet; and [he] was still desirous to marry. Mournful discourse with Sally. Lost all strength and heart; weighed down to the earth. Went to talk with him; the effect *παροξυσμός*.⁴⁷

The next day Charles entered the following into his journal (again in shorthand)

Monday October 30 [1749] Sent a sad account to Mr Perronet

Dear Sir

I write out of the fulness of my heart. Last Saturday our friend came hither. I went heavily to see him. He spoke very slightly of the fatal letter, insensible of both his own folly and danger, and of the divine goodness in so miraculously saving him. Yesterday I assisted him at the sacrament, but my mouth was stopped all day, my hands hung down, and my heart fainted ... Forced by his impatience, I had offered him my account of what has lately happened, though I judged it far better to defer it till his passion should be laid and his eyes opened. It had the effect I expected. He denied the whole. “William Shent’s account was all lies. Jane Keith’s was all lies. His only was altogether true. He had been in no fault at all, in no passion or inordinate affection, but had done all things well, and with the utmost calmness and deliberation. He had been no temptation; the church and work in no danger. That was nothing but my needless panic.” As soon as I could recover my astonishment, I told him plainly he was given up to Jewish blindness of heart; that the light which was in him was darkness; that God would overcome; but wherefore should he be smitten and more? I declared I would cover his nakedness as long as I could, and honour him before the people; and if I must at last break with him, would retreat gradually, and hide it from the world. He seemed pleased with the thought of parting, though God knows, as I told him, that I had saved him from a thousand false steps: and still I am persuaded we shall stand or fall together. If he would not foresee the consequence of marrying, I said, he must marry and feel them afterward, while lying at the mercy of the good bishop of

⁴⁶ Lloyd, *Charles Wesley*, p. 99.

⁴⁷ *παροξυσμός* is probably used here by Charles with the negative sense of “a sharp disagreement” or “irritation” though the rather more positive “a stirring up” or a “provoking” or “encouraging,” perhaps in love (cf. Heb 10.24) is also possible. The entire passage after the initial date is in shorthand.

Exeter. What the end of this thing will be only God knoweth, but the cloud at present hanging over us looks very black⁴⁸

One surely gets a sense of the seriousness of the situation and how, it seems, John and Charles are on the brink of separating. However, one more quotation seems in order. The Grace Murray incident is not mentioned explicitly, but John's general mood and Charles's difficulty in coming to terms with it are plain. The extract is again almost entirely in shorthand.

Friday, November 17 [1749]. Had a conference of three days at Ned Perronet's. Old Mr Perronet was present, and well he was, for my brother flew out when contradicted, crying "If he must not have so much authority, he would have none at all." Mr Perronet hardly believed him. I modestly proposed that question "How far is your or my will a law to our preachers." But it was touching a sore place, meddling with the *arcana imperii*.⁴⁹ He showed the utmost uneasiness and impatience, telling me in Greek (on my urging the question) that I should ruin all, and threatening again to run away and live beyond [the] sea. Once more our good old friend humoured and stroked him into tolerable temper. I saw there was no good to be done, and half resolved I would never be at another conference.⁵⁰

There is in fact more of this sort of material in the journal and Charles's own account of the events surrounding the marriage of Grace Murray to John Bennet and the way in which John (quite understandably) reacted are there to see and the bitterness rumbles on for some time.

As we know, Charles's own marriage was a happy one. It would seem on the basis of the journal evidence, however, that even here Charles allowed friction with his brother to make inroads. Over two months later he entered some private thoughts into his journal and, as we would expect, committed such to shorthand script. The entry for February 3, 1750 is as short, sharp and to the point: "she [Sally] miscarried."

It would be easy to pass over the entry lightly. However, for anyone who has suffered the loss of a child through miscarriage (potential father probably less than abortive mother but in either case wounded to an extent not to be underestimated) the underlying thoughts cannot but strike deep. That is understandable. But the air thickens even further. Just how did Charles view his brother, we wonder, in the light of the entry made six days later? The entry is a shorthand copy of letter he sent to Mr Perronet

Sally is slowly recovering her strength after her miscarriage last week. How far it was occasioned by our late affliction I cannot say, but my brother has cast poison into my cup of temporal blessings, and destroyed as far as in him lay all my future usefulness to the Church. Yet still I strive against the stream, and beat the

⁴⁸ *Journal*, 2:583–584. The entire passage after the initial date is in shorthand.

⁴⁹ "State secrets."

⁵⁰ *Journal*, 2:585. The passage beginning with the words "Old Mr Perronet was present" is in shorthand.

air, dragging myself to the work without love or zeal or faith for it. So the poor people here find it, and so it will be if I come to London.

My great comfort is, God does not want me; let him send whom he will send. He hath sworn that the earth shall be full of his glory; and all things person events, whether good or evil shall work together for this end, till the mystery of God is fulfilled.⁵¹ Once I had great zeal and strong desires to be used as an instrument in his work; but I now only desire to rest, stand my lot at the end of the days.⁵²

This is pretty strong stuff. Charles is in effect blaming his brother for his wife's miscarriage and states that he has (thereby?) "cast poison into my cup of temporal blessings." This then spills over into doubt about his own place in the wider plans of God.

One does not want to be too quick to challenge a picture of Charles that many hold dear. There is material in the journal, and we have noted some of it, to show that John and Charles certainly did not always see eye-to-eye. Indeed there were times when the relationship between them was strained in the extreme. However, in the end the breach, as wide as it evidently was at the end of 1749 and the beginning of 1750, did not become a permanent split, and the fact that the relationship between John and Charles did not break down altogether is surely testimony to its underlying strength. Indeed, a recognition of under just what strains this relationship came cannot but do other than cause one to wonder at its survival and stand in awe of its underlying strength.

6. Insights into Personal Life

The journal also provides insights into some aspects of Charles's personal life. Perhaps not surprisingly there is quite a bit of information in shorthand around the time that Charles began to consider marriage. In fact even what looks very much like Charles's proposal is hidden away there. Consider this entry from April 1748, most of which is in shorthand

Sunday, April 3. Through the divine blessing on the tender care of my friends, I recovered so much strength that I read prayers, and gave the Sacrament to the family. At night my dearest Sally, like my guardian angel attended me. In the loving openness of my heart, without premeditation I asked her "if she could trust herself with me for life," and with a noble simplicity she readily answered me "she could."

Monday, April 4. Frightened at what I had said last night, I condemned my own rashness and almost wished I had never disclosed my feelings.⁵³

Despite his initial reservations, the journal indicates clearly that over the next several weeks Charles considered the prospect of marriage to "Sally" Gwynne very carefully. On June 26, 1748 he entered into his journal the shorthand note "today I asked and obtained permission to speak to her mother."⁵⁴

⁵¹ Cf. Rev. 10:7.

⁵² *Journal*, 2:588. The entire passage is in shorthand.

⁵³ *Journal*, 2:527-528. The passage beginning with the words "At night my dearest Sally" is in shorthand, except for the date "Monday, April 4."

⁵⁴ *Journal*, 2:530.

By November Charles's mind seems made up and he speaks to his brother. The (longhand) entry for November 11, 1748 reads

Friday, November 11. My brother and I having promised each other, (as soon as he came from Georgia), that we would neither of us marry, or take any step towards it, without the other's knowledge and consent, today I fairly and fully communicated every thought of my heart. He had proposed three persons to me. S. P., M.W., and S. G.; and entirely approved my choice of the last. We consulted together about every particular, and were of one heart and mind in all things.⁵⁵

Charles had not been duplicitous here, although it does seem that by the time he spoke to his brother on November 11, 1748 his marriage plans were a good deal more advanced than John might have had cause to think. As we have seen, Charles had actually proposed to Sally Gwynne some seven months before this. However, the journal also makes it plain that even before the proposal to Sally, Charles had communicated his "embryo thoughts" of marriage to his brother who had "neither opposed, nor much encouraged" it.⁵⁶

A few days later there is some more shorthand in the journal. Charles's plans are reaching the point whereby he needs to be sure of an income sufficient to support his wife. (On Monday, December 5, 1748, the figure later agreed with Mrs Gwynne was £100 a year.) His first step was to approach John, which he did on Wednesday, November, 16. In his journal for that day he wrote, in shorthand, "Talked with my brother about a provision, in case I married, and he said [that] the church could not afford it. Then I thought, the church did not deserve a gospel minister."⁵⁷ The next day he again wrote in shorthand, "Consulted old Mr Perronet, who thought a few of my particular friends might subscribe what would be sufficient for my maintenance, and offered himself to set the example."⁵⁸

Again we could go on with this sort of material and dig out of the journal, sometimes from the shorthand, little but significant snippets of information that give insight into Charles's living of his Christian life. Snippets like the one that indicates that he took the view that sometimes in his preaching his brother John "misspent his strength in trifles."⁵⁹

But the information can be more than snippets—either in content or extent. For good reason, that being that the material is relatively well-known, we have not here even touched upon the tale told by what is without doubt the most substantial section of the shorthand in the journal, namely the one found in the first several pages. This runs to about four thousand words. It is left others more to explore that section more fully.

⁵⁵ *Journal*, 2:559.

⁵⁶ *Journal*, 2:528.

⁵⁷ *Journal*, 2:599–560.

⁵⁸ *Journal*, 2:560.

⁵⁹ *Journal*, 2:602 (entry for January 13, 1751).

7. Conclusion

In this article I have tried to give some sense of what a study of the MSJ might reveal about Charles Wesley. There is, of course, much more to be said on this matter, but at least the text of that substantial volume is now reasonably secure. When studied in its entirety, however, this substantial volume is a gold mine of information and presents a story of Charles Wesley that goes well beyond the common picture of him as the diligent hymn-writer quietly working away in the attic of number 4 Charles Street, Bristol. Such is clear from the journal and our knowledge of some of the issues discussed briefly here may well be enhanced even further with the publication of the “journal letters.”

What has been outlined, however, is that the journal is able to give us real insight into the life and work of Charles Wesley, and it is not all a story of joy and triumph. As we have seen, there is clear evidence of Charles’s bouts of depression. There is evidence too of his doubts and of his contesting with God; and evidence that he at times questioned his own place in the plan of things and was, at times, not at all sure of his own salvation.

It is plain too that he had his struggles with his own brother and with some others in the early Methodist societies. We have skimmed across the surface of some of this. There is much more to be done, but as we have seen, the shorthand sections of the journal in particular are particularly revealing in this regard.

It is worth asking of course whether anything positive can come from a “warts and all” portrait of Charles Wesley such as been hinted at here. What is to be gained from any identification of what some might think are the more negative aspects of Charles and his relationships (including his relationship with God). Indeed, would such an endeavor be simply an attempt to detract from the status of Charles as one of the great spiritual figures of the eighteenth century—a man whose work has had so profound an effect on others?

Icons do need shattering. However, that is not the purpose of this essay. Rather it is simply an attempt to suggest that while there are those for whom Charles is a man of immense spiritual power and a person to whom some look for guidance, such confidence is not dulled by the sort of detail that the journal supplies. Indeed, the opposite may be true. The Christian journey can at times be a difficult and even lonely one and it is good if on that journey one can find others who can help point out the way. Charles is such a figure, at least he is for me. And in that context I am strengthened by his flaws and faults, his “downs” and his tribulations, almost as much as I am by his “ups.” For all his genius, for all his spiritual power, theological insight, and lack of trepidation in proclaiming the gospel message, the journal reveals that Charles was no stranger to the darker side of Christian existence or to the mess that is sometimes human existence, including difficult relationships even with those that we love. In fact the evidence of the journal is that he knew these things very well. For me this gives him greater

not less importance. It helps me to see him as a more and not a less significant authority as a spiritual mentor and a guide to Christian living. In short, I think that any hagiographical account of Charles does him a disservice and indeed, if I may put it bluntly, short-changes the grace of God.

Yes, Charles Wesley can still speak to us today. And for me at least, I find the portrait of him that comes across in the journal a powerful “counterbalance to”—no let me rather say “context of”—the poetical compositions that show him as one who can himself soar spiritually and help others to do likewise. This “warts and all” portrait of Charles (which is how Cromwell wanted to be painted, you will remember) is, for me at least, a more inspiring one than one of him with a halo. Charles Wesley knew the Christian life; he knew it for its “ups” and its “downs.” And therefore, he is for many, a figure of more than simply historical interest.