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Charles Wesley and James Oglethorpe in Georgia

Richard P. Heitzenrater

The story of the Wesleys in Georgia has largely been hijacked by the modern concern with sex. It is no accident that the events there in the mid-1730s have become the main topic of books with such titles as *Take Her, Mr. Wesley* and *Strange Fires*.¹ Sophy Hopkey has become the featured performer, the Wesleys are the failures at both ministering and courting, and the authorities are the bad guys—Thomas Causton a cheating and vindictive magistrate and James Oglethorpe (by association) an ineffective dirty old man.

The general picture of Charles is that he went to Georgia reluctantly (under pressure from his brother John) as Oglethorpe's secretary (for Indian affairs), fell out with his boss over charges and counter-charges of rape and issues of stealing provisions from the colonial storehouse, was ineffective in his attempts to minister to his parishioners in Frederica, became very ill with dysentery, and went home dejected after only five months in the colony.

So it is no surprise that many respected authors virtually ignore Charles Wesley's time in Georgia. Phinizy Spalding, an expert on Oglethorpe, mentions Charles three times in passing, always in connection with John—once by name (John and Charles Wesley) in a short list of who sailed to Georgia on the *Simmonds*, and twice as a duo: "the brothers Wesley" and "the landlubber Wesleys."² Spalding's view of Oglethorpe, though generally appreciative, concludes that his exercise of power was autocratic and arbitrary, in part because the Trustees failed to specify his particular perquisites and powers.³

Henry Rack, an expert on Wesley, summarizes Charles's short visit to America by recounting his tensions with Oglethorpe in a few lines and then simply says, "Charles was so shattered by physical illness and emotional stress that he resigned his post and left for England in July 1736."⁴ Rack encapsulates Oglethorpe's quirkiness in Georgia by saying that, although he often "exasperated" the Trustees by his failure to keep and send accurate accounts of the colony, nevertheless "it is a tribute to his personality that although holding no clearly defined official position in the colony, he was effectively a kind of governor in the early years."⁵

John Wesley virtually ignores the details of his brother's activities in Georgia, except for once when he preached in Cowes, while waiting for the wind to come

¹ John W. Drakeford (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1973); Willie Snow Ethridge (New York: Vanguard Press, 1971).

² Spalding, *Oglethorpe in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 25, 26, 36 (in a 207 pp. book).

³ *Ibid.*, 159. See also Amos A. Ettinger, *James Edward Oglethorpe: Imperial Idealist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936).

⁴ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 2nd ed., (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 116.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

up and carry them westward into the Atlantic, and twice when he was sick: once with a bad headache on the ship (when John mentioned that the sea had not “disordered” him whatsoever), and once in April when he arrived in Frederica and found that Charles had been “exceeding weak” from the flux, but Charles “mended from the hour he saw me.” And on July 26, 1736, John simply says, “My brother and I set out for Charleston, in order to his embarking for England”⁶ and then never mentions him again in his Journal for at least eighteen months.

One person who tried to resurrect Oglethorpe’s reputation in relation to the Wesleys was Elijah Hoole in the mid-nineteenth century.⁷ Writing during the American Civil War, Hoole was especially impressed by Oglethorpe’s antislavery stance in the colony of Georgia (even though it was ultimately a failure), which was supported strongly by the Wesleys. After using some of the shorthand entries in Charles Wesley’s manuscript journal in a dozen pages or so to describe the complexities of the personal relationships, the continually shifting innuendo, the rancorous and inconsistent rumors, and the sometimes nasty conflicts among many characters in this story (especially Oglethorpe and the two contentious women), Hoole mentions that the somewhat naïve Charles returned to England, followed by his brother John the following year. But his next sentence recoups his stance on the relationship: “Mr. Oglethorpe remained a firm and faithful friend of the Wesleys to the close of his eventful and protracted life.” Quite a different picture from what we normally see.

The new edition of Charles Wesley’s journal and some recent scholarship on Oglethorpe and Georgia helps us flesh out this relationship and provide some interesting touchstones for analysis. Of particular interest is a paper by Harvey Jackson on Oglethorpe’s view of the roles of parson and squire within the purview of the Church of England, particularly as applied to the colony of Georgia.⁸

Parson and Squire

James Oglethorpe’s view of the role of the Church in the operation of the government therefore is an important consideration in trying to analyze how and why Charles Wesley functioned as he did in his situation in Georgia. However, that view had been cultivated in the settled environs of the British Isles, not the new

⁶ John Wesley, *Journal & Diaries I*, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 34 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975–), 18:139, 140, 156, 167. On July 25, Charles Wesley had resigned as secretary to Oglethorpe, although the latter tried to dissuade him and assured him he could do his business (to speak to the Board of Trustees, the Board of Trade, and three of Oglethorpe’s friends) in London in three days. See *Manuscript Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, ed. S T Kimbrough, Jr., and Kenneth F. C. Newport, 2 vols. (Nashville: Kingswood, 2008), 1:45. All subsequent page references to this work are cited as *Manuscript Journal* followed by volume and page number.

⁷ *Oglethorpe and the Wesleys in America* (London: Needham, 1863).

⁸ Jackson, “Parson and Squire: James Oglethorpe and the Role of the Anglican Church in Georgia, 1733–1736,” in *Oglethorpe in Perspective: Georgia’s Founder after Two Hundred Years* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989).

colony of Georgia. His view of the priest/parson's role and its relationship to the work of the government was very much an ideal forged in more settled circumstances, within a matrix of well-established legal and societal expectations.

The priest in England (according to what we can derive of Oglethorpe's view) was expected to promote peace and well-being within the community, order and decorum within the church, and harmony among all the inhabitants of the area. The squire, however, was actually in charge of the community, was responsible for making the major decisions as to the operation of the social, economic, and political structure, and was to be supported at all levels by the cohort that provided assistance in these endeavors, which included the parson. The parson, therefore, was expected to be subservient and supportive of the squire at every turn.

As for the squire (seen here as the governing administrators), Oglethorpe felt that he should have as his main goal the implementation of the goals of the colony as stated in the Charter (which he helped write), govern with efficiency and effectiveness, and do all in his power to provide for a smoothly operating community. To this end he was committed and felt like the other administrators should also be focused on that goal.

The colonial charter for Georgia stipulates that "for the greater ease and encouragement of our loving subjects and such others as shall come to inhabit in our said colony . . . there shall be a liberty of conscience allowed in the worship of God, to all persons inhabiting or which shall inhabit or be resident within our said province, and that all such persons, except papists, shall have a free exercise of religion so they be contented with the quiet and peaceable enjoyment of the same, not giving offence or scandal to the government."⁹ Such freedom of religion may, by Oglethorpe's intention, have been designed to be an innocuous blend of religious sensitivities rather than the acceptance of strongly-felt dissenting points of view by a religious establishment. The Wesleys certainly were not likely to agree strictly with either reading, but probably were less inclined to the former bland version of civil religion that seemed to be Oglethorpe's position as embodied in the Charter.

The original invitation to join the Georgia experiment, communicated from Oglethorpe to John Wesley by way of John Burton, was followed by a letter from Burton that outlined the expectations of the Trustees, providing specific suggestions on what circumstances and processes would likely help the people "come better disposed for religious habits."¹⁰ Oglethorpe also talks more about "religion" than he does "spirituality" or "holiness." The parson was expected to turn people away from "licentiousness" toward "righteousness." He points out that "the magistrates will authorize your access to every family," a small indication

⁹ Patrick Tailfer, *A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia* (Charles-Town: P. Timothy, 1741), 16–17.

¹⁰ Burton to JW, Sept. 28, 1735, *Letters I*, in *Works*, 25:435.

that the work of the Church will be directed by the leaders of the colonial government. He points out that the priest will need “patience and prudence as well as piety,” and the bulk of his suggestions emphasize matters of prudence: the commonality of people, mere “babes in the progress of their Christian life,” will need to be fed milk, not strong meat; “labored discourse” should give way to “historical narratives” that convey the “good moral” of the story; and the “nice trial of Christian prudence,” to “become all things to all men” in order to gain some—being placed among “people of various persuasions in religious matters” might provide a great difficulty, so they must focus on what is essential to Christianity, not stressing merely the “circumstantial” or “traditional” or “ordinances of men.” In addition, from a strictly promotional point of view, Burton pointed out one of the Trustees’ great concerns: that if “good men” like the Oxford Methodists would accept the task, then “the pious and charitable [in Great Britain] will be more encouraged to promote this work.”¹¹

In the overall scheme of things, then, the Church and its representatives were expected to be a useful arm of the government, and not present an alternative or competitive view of what life in the colony entailed. The Church was seen as an important department in the state; the parson (Church) was an important factor in supporting the goals of the squire (the State). In strictly administrative terms, this general situation was reinforced on the practical level by the lack of actual episcopal oversight in Georgia—the Bishop of London virtually ignored what was happening there in the 1730s and exercised very little if any hands-on administration.

Georgia

This understanding by Oglethorpe, personal as it may have been, was the framework within which Charles was expected to operate while in Georgia.¹² Whether Oglethorpe’s view could be fully applied to Georgia, that rough and ready colony being hacked out of the wilderness, is yet another question.

As we have said, Oglethorpe was concerned that the leadership of the Church should help promote peace and order within the community. Considering the diverse makeup of the “community” in Georgia, one can only say that such a pre-supposition was idealistic at best and was liable for a terrific test. Nevertheless, he hoped that the priest (parson) would lead a exemplary life (impeccable moral integrity), and do all in his power to help encourage the people to obey the laws (through a forceful ministry, including convincing preaching), and assist in the

¹¹ Burton to JW, Sept. 8, 1735, *ibid.*, 25:435n. The Trustees were constantly concerned about the question of how their decisions and the actions of the priest in Savannah would affect the raising of charitable contributions to support the religious work in the colony. See Robert G. McPherson, *The Journal of the Earl of Egmont* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1962), *passim*.

¹² For the Charter, see Tailfer; for some of Oglethorpe’s views, see especially Harvey Jackson’s article cited above.

fulfillment of the expectations of the colonial administrators, both in England and in Georgia.

One piece of the picture needs to be put in place before we start to analyze what the whole portrays. The government of Georgia was administered on the ground by the local magistrates, justices of the peace, and constables—there is no governor as such at this time. Oglethorpe had not been named officially as governor of Georgia, though as chair of the Georgia Trust, he seems to have personally assumed that role in many instances while in the colony, much to the chagrin of the colonial magistrates in Savannah, such as Thomas Causton. However, the basic decisions that guided the activities of the colony were made by the Board of Trustees, which met in London and consisted of wealthy men who had never visited America—their decisions relied upon slow correspondence from the colony and an array of visitors to fill in the details. James Oglethorpe was in the unique position of being the only Trustee to spend time in Georgia, but technically, as we said, he had no governing authority for the local operation of the colony.

Also, to complicate his own view of the situation that should exist between parson and squire, the Church of England within Georgia was not recognized by the Charter as the established church in the colony. Rather, the constitutive document stipulated that “there shall be a liberty of conscience allowed in the worship of God [and] a free exercise of religion” (except for “papists,” of course). The Church of England in Georgia was technically under the guidance of the Bishop of London, who had responsibilities for all the English colonies in America, but the priest in Savannah was usually recruited by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) and was commissioned (and paid) by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The minister’s assignment, however, was practically speaking determined by the local authorities, which informally included Oglethorpe, for whom Charles functioned as both Secretary for Indian Affairs and an ordained priest. To say that, in the fledgling colony of Georgia, the official lines of authority between the parson and the squire were muddled is to put it mildly.

Oglethorpe had a very definite view that the colony was his own personal domain—that he should determine and appoint the magistrates, that he should consider what was lawful, that he should apply or not apply whatever funds had been appropriated for specific purposes in the colony (such as a church building), that he could increase the prices of the public stores on a personal whim, that his own opinions of the security and safety of the colony were the only reasonable positions, and that his own views were to be appreciated and applied by all the people, from the magistrates on down. The magistrates, however, felt that he was interfering with the “government” of the colony and forced him to acquiesce in certain instances. The SPCK, typified by the Earl of Egmont, was somewhat confused by Oglethorpe’s rather personal and offhand involvement in the operation

of the colony. For instance, they knew that he had notes worth £5,000 but still he kept sending them rather large invoices for purchases that they thought he could pay for by using the notes that he had taken with him.¹³

Thus, on the one hand, Oglethorpe, while complaining that decency and good order were unfortunately not present as the matrix for colonial activities in Georgia as they were in England, also realized that the colony was an experiment of sorts, which required a great deal of arbitrary action on the part of leaders, responding to new circumstances that were not anticipated by the charter, the Trustees, or the administrators. Patrick Tailfer, on the other hand, frequently makes the point that Oglethorpe's personal and arbitrary rule caused confusion and despair among many people. In the preface to his description of the colony, he mentions that "we had daily occasion of seeing our supreme magistrates, who ruled over us with unlimited power, exercising illegal acts of authority, by threatening, imprisonments, and other oppressions; [therefore] any further steps to obtain relief might subject us to the like effects of arbitrary power." He accuses Oglethorpe of implementing many policies to the detriment of the colony, such as forbidding the importation of rum or the use of slaves, restricting the use of the land, and discouraging the development of profit-making ventures. He also says that the governor helped wreak havoc in the colony by wrongly taking upon himself the power of nominating magistrates, appointing justices of the peace, and doing many other things "without ever exhibiting to the people any legal commission or authority for so doing." Tailfer summarizes the condition of the colony in the late 1730s as follows: "her plantations a wild; her towns a desert; her villages in rubbish; her improvements a by-word; and her liberties a jest—an object of pity to friends, and of insult, contempt, and ridicule to enemies."¹⁴

Oglethorpe and some of the colonists thus had similar complaints about the situation in Georgia, but for different reasons. Oglethorpe was somewhat distressed that the laws and administration of the colony were not such as were generally found in England, which made it harder to govern and caused a great deal of confusion; the colonists also complained that one could not anticipate what the laws were or what they might require on any given issue, and therefore resulted in arbitrary determinations by the administrators—making decisions on the fly, so to speak.

This amorphous situation applied to the Church as well, in that canon law, as grounded in the Book of Common Prayer, was not generally the *vade mecum* (handbook) of the parish priests in England. For the Wesleys to be sticklers for the rules already had caused some consternation in Burton, who as we saw had made many specific suggestions on this subject. One can imagine that this reputation for a hard line approach, if implemented in their parish responsibilities by

¹³ See Egmont's *Journal*. Part of that money had been designated to help start building a church, which never happened while the Wesleys were there.

¹⁴ Tailfer, 118.

the Wesleys, would not be well received by the colonists or overly please squire Oglethorpe.

Enter Charles Wesley

Charles had been hastily ordained deacon and priest in two successive weeks by the Bishops of Oxford and London before leaving England in case he was needed to act as a minister in the new colony. Oglethorpe was planning upon laying out a new town south of Savannah as a fortress against rumored Spanish incursions from their territory in Florida, so there was a good chance that Charles might be needed as a religious leader in that location. Although Samuel Quincy was still the parish priest in Savannah when the *Simmonds* set sail with the Wesley brothers aboard, many of the Trustees and SPCK directors were unhappy with Quincy's work in the parish. So it was no surprise that John Wesley, on a ship in the mid-Atlantic, was named in January to succeed Quincy. This action, of course, compromised his expectation of spending a majority of his time ministering to the Indians in the colony. It also had implications for the other two ordained priests on board—Charles Wesley and Benjamin Ingham.

During the crossing, these men of God did what they could to minister to the needs of the people, discovering along the way that their task was not going to be quite as they might have expected. Not only was their own faith sorely tested in the infamous storm in the Atlantic, but they also began to realize that their "parishioners" were not exactly the typical cross section of British society. However, their ministrations on board were not exceptional and their impression of the leader of the Trustees was, if anything, reinforced positively. Ingham notes that Oglethorpe was very selfless in his actions toward the passengers on board the ship during the journey to Georgia, often giving up his bed and cabin to the sick, setting up a hammock for himself. As they approached land, Oglethorpe gathered the heads of families together on more than one occasion to provide what Ingham calls "several excellent and useful instructions relating to their living in Georgia, exhorting them likewise to love God and one another." Oglethorpe was not so much concerned with propagating vital Christianity, as the Wesleys would have interpreted this reiteration of our Lord's Great Commandment, but primarily with promoting peace and stability in the community, or "having the appearance of Christianity."¹⁵ In this endeavor, the role of the parson was crucial. If Oglethorpe had not communicated his views of the parson's role to Charles directly, then John certainly had plenty of opportunities to reinforce the outlines of Oglethorpe's expectations.

Upon their arrival in Savannah, the Wesleys helped the authorities stave some casks of rum which the sailors had brought along among their provisions. This

¹⁵ John Wesley reported to John Burton that Oglethorpe ran a tight ship, having both the power and will to punish any who "openly offended against God or their neighbor, so that we have an appearance at least of Christianity from one of the ship to the other."

action by the Wesleys was a good beginning toward being the good parson under the direction of the squire, since Oglethorpe had directed that the Charter stipulate a total ban on rum and slaves in the colony.

Another early incident reinforces the views that Oglethorpe had concerning the role of the parson. Jackson suggests that the priest's surplice was seen by some, beginning at least in the Puritan revolts of the seventeenth century, as a sign of the priests' subordination to the state.¹⁶ Ingham, in his journal account, is very clear that when the Indians visited them on the ship upon their arrival in Georgia, the ordained priests wore their gowns and cassocks to greet the natives. The next day, after another group of natives had visited them, Oglethorpe requested specifically that the priests also wear their surplices when they took leave of the group.¹⁷ If Oglethorpe viewed this apparel as a symbol of priestly subservience to the state, then his request seems to be at least partially aimed to impress the clergy of that fact. On the other hand, if Oglethorpe simply wanted them to wear their full regalia, he may have intended the show to impress the Indians. There is no hint in the text of Ingham or the Wesleys as to his rationale.

Frederica

Frederica was a distant ninety miles to the south of Savannah, with no easy means of transport between it and Savannah. So it appears that either Charles or his compatriot Benjamin Ingham was intended as a logical person to fulfill the priestly duties there, if need be. On March 9, Oglethorpe laid out the plan of the new town, Frederica, "in a neat and regular method," as one might suspect.¹⁸ Decency and good order in all things was toward the top of his list of goals for the colony.

Ingham was designated and describes his initial days as the first priest at the brand new settlement of Frederica. Upon their arrival on a weekend, he unwittingly embarrassed Oglethorpe by suggesting that Sunday was not a proper day for "shooting," a practice that Oglethorpe had previously supported as worth promoting, since the people were not working on Sunday and this activity would be a valuable means of helping them prepare to meet the Spanish threat.¹⁹ This question will become the basis of a major incident involving Charles Wesley, Ingham's successor at Frederica. Ingham also mentions the building of palmetto houses (bowers), and his own task ("my chief business") of daily visiting the people "to take care of those that were sick and to supply them with the best things we had." Ingham was trying to promote peace and tranquility in the new settlement, in keeping with Oglethorpe's intentions for the parson, but when he

¹⁶ Jackson, 54–55 and fn. 27.

¹⁷ Benjamin Ingham, "MS Journal from Georgia," *Lincolnshire Archives*, 26–27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

“watched narrowly over them and reproved them sharply for their faults,” the settlers cursed him, and his “love and kindness was repaid with hatred and ill will.”²⁰

Although Ingham started out his duties in Frederica, he would soon change his focus and at the end of March move to the northwest of Savannah to develop a working written language by which to communicate with the Indians. From very early in their stay, therefore, the two Wesley brothers would need to help each other out in the two locations, Savannah and Frederica, as they did then for several weeks.

Charles as Parson

Very few people, then or since, have noticed Charles Wesley’s preaching in Georgia. He had been hastily ordained prior to departure and had never preached or written a sermon before. He did not have a stock of sermons upon which to draw. (One might note in passing that he had not yet begun to compose hymns either.) Once on board the ship, he spent a good bit of time writing, according to Ingham, much of which consisted in providing homiletical material for himself—not composing new sermons but copying his brother John’s sermons.²¹ Neither brother apparently saw any problem with this process. He began to test out his new task while they were waiting for fair winds in Cowes, preaching there three or four times in the parish of a close friend. Ingham’s hedging comment on the events is “I believe [the people] were not a little edified by his admonition and exhortation.”²²

When Charles arrived in Frederica on Tuesday, March 9, where he became the priest in charge of the new settlement, he says in his journal, “The first who saluted me on my landing was honest Mr [Benjamin] Ingham, and that with his usual heartiness. Never did I more rejoice at the sight of him, especially when he told me the treatment he has met with for vindicating the Lord’s Day [opposing shooting], such as every minister of Christ must meet with. The people seemed overjoyed to see me. Mr Oglethorpe in particular received me very kindly.”²³ [p. 1]

Charles held services almost immediately on the day of arriving in St. Simon’s Island. At seven, Charles led evening prayers, at which Oglethorpe was present, contrary to reports that he generally did not attend services. The following day, March 10, Charles began his attempts to reconcile (Mrs.) Beata Hawkins and (Mrs.) Anne Welch, unsuccessfully.²⁴ One could say, nevertheless, that Charles

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

²¹ *Ibid.*; *Works*, 18:138.

²² Ingham, “MS Journal,” 15.

²³ *Manuscript Journal*, 1:1. Many subsequent references to this work are noted by page citations in the text.

²⁴ These two women had come with their husbands (Thomas Hawkins, doctor, and John Welch, carpenter) on board the *Simmonds* with the Wesleys and were the source of some of the scandalous rumors that would soon cause a commotion in the colony and tension between Oglethorpe and the Wesleys. See E. Merton Coulter, *A List of the Early Settlers of Georgia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1967), 22, 56.

was indeed trying to create peace and civil order in the community—part of the parson’s job, according to Oglethorpe. The complicating factor, in this instance however, was that the tension between the women was caused in part by Oglethorpe himself and involved the Wesleys, as is well known.

On Thursday, March 11, he again read the Prayer service for about a dozen women, at which he says he read the full service and “expounded the second lesson with some boldness, as I had a few times before” (p. 2). That day, Charles tried to reconcile Mrs. Hawkins and her maid, again unsuccessfully. During the evening, he heard what he calls “the first harsh word from Mr Oglethorpe,” and the following day was surprised by an even “rougher answer in a matter that deserved still greater encouragement” (p. 3).

Ingham mentions that during the last three weeks of March, he and Charles Wesley “had the happiness of undergoing for the truth’s sake the most glorious trial of our whole lives, wherein God enabled us exceedingly to rejoice and also to behave ourselves throughout with undaunted courage and constancy, for which may we ever love and adore him.” The *nota bene* which follows this entry demonstrates, however, that they were not exactly on the same page as Oglethorpe, in terms of the parson taking his directions from the squire: “N.B. The book of God was our support, wherein as our necessity required, we always met with direction, exhortation, and comfort.”²⁵ This distinction in the spring of their action was never fully noticed by Oglethorpe, who was primarily concerned with peace and order in the colony.

Charles reports that he preached “with boldness” on Sunday morning, March 14, to about twenty people (Mr. Oglethorpe was there again) on “Singleness of Intention” (one of his brother’s sermons), but no one else left us any impression of the sermon on that occasion.²⁶ The sermon is a call to have the pure intention of serving God only (you cannot serve two masters, God and mammon), which in itself would not have pleased Oglethorpe (if he had understood the implications), who did not divide church and community (including government) into such starkly competing or differentiated entities. But Charles goes on to explain that “recovering the image of God” in their lives means not only effecting a vital devotional life, but also positively affecting the legal pursuit of one’s business, assuring that one’s refreshments and diversions are appropriate and pleasing in the sight of God, and resulting in conversations that would also be to the glory of God.²⁷ While not saying so directly, such advice would help promote a peaceful and orderly community, which was high on Oglethorpe’s list, not only for the life of the colony but also on the list of things that a good parson should promote.

At this point, Charles was not causing any major problems for Oglethorpe, who reported to the Trustees in a letter of March 16. With regard to his preach-

²⁵ Ingham, “MS Journal,” 33.

²⁶ *Manuscript Journal*, 1:4.

²⁷ Published in John Wesley, *Works*, 4:371–77 (Sermon 148).

ers, he only noted simply, "Mr. Charles Wesley and Mr. Ingham are with me [in Frederica]." ²⁸

The tensions rose, however, as a result of his conversation on March 18 with Mrs. Welch, who disclosed "the mystery of iniquity," as Charles calls it—the supposed sexual misconduct by Oglethorpe, both in England and on shipboard with both her and Mrs. Hawkins. She charged that Mr Oglethorpe is not only "a wicked man and a perfect stranger to righteousness," but also that he tried to persuade her that "righteousness is but a church teaching."²⁹ Although her charges were later admitted to be false, the gist of this comment attributed to Oglethorpe is quite believable, given his general view that all things are not equal and the views of the squire should prevail over those of the Church.

Increasing tensions

After the morning service on Sunday, March 21, however, the bottom began to fall out. More than one person had been arrested for "shooting" on the Lord's Day. Among the apprehended culprits that day (actually shooting during the service) was Dr. Hawkins, husband of Beata Hawkins. He was hopping mad because he was "not a common fellow" (p. 5) and should not be detained, since the people relied upon him for their medical attention. Mrs. Hawkins complicated the matter further by coming into the guard house and firing a pistol, screaming that she too must then be arrested. Charles notes that "she cursed and swore in the utmost transport of passion, threatening to kill the first man that should come near her" (p. 5).

Charles did nothing to exonerate the doctor, who had broken the "law," as Charles understood the situation. At this point, in fact, Charles was convinced that Oglethorpe himself (the source of the fluctuating matter of "law" in many instances) opposed shooting on Sunday. In his journal, Charles notes somewhat questionably his own understanding that "Mr. Oglethorpe had ordered oftener than once that no man should shoot on a Sunday" (p. 5, Mar. 21). Many of the people, however, knowing Oglethorpe's previous stance on the issue, apparently blamed Charles for the doctor's confinement. That afternoon, while Charles was talking with her maid, Catherine, Mrs. Hawkins fell upon him "with the utmost bitterness and scurrility; said she would blow me up and my brother; . . . that I was the cause of her husband's confinement; . . . but she would be revenged and expose my damned hypocrisy, my prayers four times a day by beat of the drum, my intrigue with her maid . . ." (p. 6).

Charles is at the center of all this commotion, since he was felt by some (especially Hawkins himself) to be the culprit behind the arrest. Hawkins wrote a let-

²⁸ Mills Lane, ed., *Colonial Letters, 1733–1743*, in *General Oglethorpe's Georgia* (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1975), 253.

²⁹ *Manuscript Journal*, 1:4. This long entry, describing Oglethorpe's cavorting nature, is one of many that is written in shorthand.

ter protesting his detention, which he says was caused by Charles, or at the very least, was not resolved by Charles, who did not gain Hawkins' immediate release by pointing out that the guards had no authority to act as they did. Charles's response was that he presumed the captain of the guard "understood their own business best" (p. 7). He is here demonstrating the proper response of Oglethorpe's good parson—not interfering in the operation of the civil authorities.

Oglethorpe soon showed up, however, had a hearing on the matter, freed the Hawkines, and reprimanded the officers. In recounting the events, Charles says, "when they were gone, Mr Oglethorpe said [to me that] he was convinced and glad I had had no hand in all this" (p. 10). In Oglethorpe's view, then, Charles had played the role of a good parson. But Wesley is not acting on the same premise that is moving Oglethorpe—he is trusting the situation to God, not to the government. As he noted in his journal, "I need say nothing. God will shortly apply this," and "I can do and suffer all things through Christ strengthening me" (p. 10).

On Wednesday, March 24, Charles says he "was enabled to pray earnestly for my enemies, particularly Mr Oglethorpe, whom I now looked upon as the chief of them." Further, he says that, "doubting whether I should not interpose for the prisoners, I consulted the oracle, and met Jer. 44:16–17, [which] determined me not to meddle with them at all" (p. 9). On the surface, this decision again looks like Charles is acting like a good parson, not meddling with government. The key difference between his approach and Oglethorpe's however, in this instance, is that Charles is taking his authority from the Bible, not the directions of the squire.

The next morning, however, Charles was called out of his hut to Oglethorpe's tent. "He charged me with mutiny and sedition," says Charles, "with stirring up the people to desert the colony" (p. 10). Charles tried to defend himself against this charge by playing to Oglethorpe's main goal. He ended the conversation by "assuring him I had and should still make it my business to promote peace among all" (p. 11).

Later that day, Charles learned that charges of sedition had been brought against him for encouraging people to leave the colony. Charles, the good parson talking to the squire, indicated that these false charges would be squashed (or at least reduced) if Oglethorpe would show the slightest inclination to back his parson (as any good squire should). Oglethorpe did so, Mr. Lawley reduced the charges, and Charles again professed his "desire and resolution of promoting peace and obedience" (p. 12). A similar situation had occurred the previous day, when Mrs. Perkins told Charles that Mrs. Welch told her (and who said there were no grapevines in Frederica), "Mr Oglethorpe dares not punish me" (p. 8). Actually, Oglethorpe could not punish his parson (his subordinate and representative) without injuring his own position of authority.

On the evening of March 26, Oglethorpe came upon Wesley and asked him when Prayers would take place. Charles responded that “I waited his pleasure” (p. 15). Exactly the right answer to please Mr Oglethorpe, the squire. Earlier in the day, Oglethorpe had pressed Charles for the cause of the growing chaos in the colony, where there was supposed to be peace and tranquility. “How else can it be,” said Oglethorpe, “that there should be no love, no meekness, no true religion among the people; but instead of that, mere formal prayers?”³⁰ Charles responded, “As to that, I can answer for them that they have no more of the form of godliness than the power” (p. 14). Notice that Oglethorpe is talking about “true religion,” while Wesley is talking about the “power of godliness.” These concepts had quite different connotations in the minds of the two gentlemen, however, given the different assumptions about the role of the Church between Wesley and Oglethorpe, though perhaps the squire (in particular) and perhaps even the parson were not fully aware of the difference in vocabulary and world-view. For the would-be governor, these differences were inconsequential so long as the practical result was the actual inculcation of order and decency in the colony.

Pressed again by Oglethorpe, Charles responds, analyzing the personal situation between him and Oglethorpe as it has become increasingly apparent to him: “But one argument of my innocence I can give, which will even convince you of it. I know my life is in your hands, and you know that was you to frown upon me, and give the least intimation that it would be agreeable to you, the generality of this wretched people would say or swear anything.” Oglethorpe agreed. Charles went on: “You see that my safety depends on your single opinion of me. Must I not therefore be mad, if I would in such a situation provoke you by disturbing the public peace? Innocence, I know, is not the best protection, but my sure trust is in God” (p. 14).

Charles was here declaring his perception and acknowledgment of the squire/parson relationship as Oglethorpe conceived it, but at the same time protesting that his ultimate authority was God. This impasse, fundamental to Charles and not understood fully by Oglethorpe, could not last long. And it did not.

Concluding events

The relationship between James Oglethorpe and Charles Wesley contained a number of rough spots throughout the spring of 1735 in Georgia, as we have seen (and there are more). But by the beginning of May, Charles sensed that the people realized the main tensions were resolved (p. 29, May 3). Charles was wise enough to fit into Oglethorpe’s view of the parson’s role, primarily in promoting

³⁰ This comment brings to mind Mrs. Hawkins’ earlier comment about Charles having “prayers four times a day by beat of the drum”; see above, p. [16], and *Manuscript Journal*, 10 (Mar. 25), where at 5 a.m. he notes that he “heard the second drum beat for prayers.”

peace and order, such that their different views of the essence of religion was a secondary, if not practically negligible, consideration.

Before the month was out, Oglethorpe was beginning to take John Wesley's advice on a number of issues that concerned the state of the colony, including the methods of complaining about injustices. Oglethorpe's speech to the people in the courthouse included the following advice: "If anyone here has been abused or oppressed by any man, in or out of employment, he has free and full liberty of complaining. Let him deliver in his complaints in writing at my house. I will read them all over by myself, and do every particular man justice" (p. 39). The magistrates, understandably, were exceedingly upset, thinking that Oglethorpe was again usurping their authority and power to govern properly. Oglethorpe was only worried that taking John's advice would ruin the people and "he should never have any to serve him," a continuing fear for his own authority. Charles, however, tried to assure Oglethorpe that "such liberty was the happiest thing that could happen to the colony, and much to be desired by all *good men*" (pp. 39–40). By that point, such words were probably less than meaningful to Oglethorpe, even if he did understand them.

As June rolled around, Charles said that he discovered (from his brother John!) that he would be soon leaving the colony and heading to London. Oglethorpe was beginning to relate more closely to John and to rely upon him for advice. Here and in some other cases, Charles seems to be strangely if not typically passive, which also seems to fit Oglethorpe's view of the good parson. In his last conversation with Charles, Oglethorpe betrays his assumed proprietary hand over of the Church when he made his parting request of Charles: "I would desire you not to let the trustees know your resolution of resigning. There are many hungry fellows ready to catch at the office, and in my absence I cannot put in one of my own choosing. The best I can hope for is an honest Presbyterian, as many of the trustees are such . . . I shall be in England before you leave it. Then you may either put in a deputy or resign."³¹ This request was fully in keeping with Oglethorpe's view of his governing role in the colony and of his relationship with the Church: he as the squire should make the basic decisions regarding the parson, even in the matter of appointment of the Secretary of Indian Affairs who might also act as parson.

When Charles left Georgia the following week, he noted the propriety of the words that concluded the Gospel lesson for the day, from his self-professed primary authority, the Bible: "Arise, let us go hence" (John 14:31). At noon on Monday, July 26, he took his final leave of Georgia, boarded the ship, and commented in his journal entry for the day, "I was surprised that I felt no more joy in leaving such a scene of sorrows" (p. 46).

³¹ *Manuscript Journal*, 1:45. By the following April, Oglethorpe was in England and Charles had still not resigned his position as Secretary of Indian Affairs, which Oglethorpe hoped he would not do, but would continue in the position and appoint a deputy.

His days there certainly had been marked by many interpersonal tensions, continuing physical illness, and difficult working relationships.³² But in the end, his admiration for Oglethorpe seems to have carried him through much of the strife that marked this period. In spite of his ups and downs in this relationship, the good parson in the end was able to say to his boss, *Magis apta tuis tua dona relinquo*,³³ which means, “Sir, to yourself your slighted gifts I leave, Less fit for me to take, than you to give” (p. 45). Charles’s implicit criticism here fits very well the relationship that Oglethorpe had tried to implement in the colony—that the parson was his right-hand man, carrying out the will of the squire (“governor” as he would see himself). Charles is in effect saying, exercise your own gifts, which are suited to you, not me. He came to realize that Oglethorpe’s view of the nature and role of religion was not quite the same as his own, even though they shared the typical Anglican view of decency and order that might help provide stability for a community such as was found in the young colony.

Charles did, in fact, continue to have cordial relations with Oglethorpe, even though the erstwhile parson never returned to the colony of Georgia. Through the whole relationship, Oglethorpe never gave a hint that he understood that their views of “true religion” were radically different. He could tell, however, whether the preacher of religion was having a positive effect on the life of the community. The Colonel, later General, always the squire, certainly in the end appreciated Charles’ attempts to be a good parson while exercising his offices in the colony, if only for less than half a year.

³² On March 16, after spending the whole day writing letters for Oglethorpe, he had noted in his journal, “I would not spend six days more in the same manner for all of Georgia.” *Manuscript Journal*, 1:4.

³³ Cf. Horace, *Epistles*, I.vii.43: *Atride, magis apta tibi tua dona relinquam*.

