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of human growth in religion, with a reference to John
and Charles Wesley'*

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Chapter 6: John Wesley



WESLEY PREACHING IN THE FIELDS. (Frontispiece of first edition of Wesley's *Notes on the Old Testament*, 1760.)



6.1 Biographies of Wesley

The early biographies of Wesley varied between triumphalist, hagiographic accounts and critical or even denigrating ones¹. This often reflected the stance of the authors, but it must also have been related to the complexity and the contradictory aspects of the subject. This theme of contradiction and paradox has continued in two more recent biographies; the authors, while more sophisticated and scholarly than their predecessors, remain fascinated by their view that there was something paradoxical about the nature of John Wesley. Richard P. Heitzenrater entitles his first book *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*;² Henry Rack calls his biography 'Reasonable Enthusiast'.³

¹ A summary of the biographies written before 1960 appears in Appendix V

² Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003).

Heitzenrater emphasises that Wesley's ideas are often contradictory and exist together in tension. He points to the frequent use of such epithets as 'radical conservative', 'romantic realist' or 'quiet revolutionary'. Wesley was a scholar, linguist and Oxford don, but saw himself as offering the 'plain truth for plain people'. His religious orientation was 'evangelical' but 'sacramental'; his brother Charles saw him as trying to unite 'the pair so long disjointed, knowledge and vital piety'. Wesley would emphasise one side of an argument with one opponent and the opposite with another. At one moment he would be insistent and meticulous in pressing a point, while at another he would become impatient and dismissive of hair-splitting.⁴ Rack quotes Alexander Knox on his title page: 'I ... think he would have been an enthusiast if he could ... (but) there was a firmness in his intellectual texture which would not bend to illusion'.

Rack also notes the paradoxes in Wesley's life and career: he lived and died in the Church of England but the movement he founded became a separate organisation; he preached that perfection was possible in this life but did not claim it for himself; he emphasised the importance of logic and reason but believed in ghosts and witches in an age of enlightenment; although he was a high-church Tory, he was accused of subversion and of inciting rebellion.⁵ To these could be added other features: while seen as refined, gentle and saintly by many, he was also seen by some as power-hungry and as dependent on power; while orderly, disciplined and immaculate, he was described as mad and urged his followers to be 'scandalous'; he was revered as a loving pastor but could be indifferent or cruel to those near him who were suffering.

As a result of all these contrasts and contradictions, there has grown up an idea of Wesley as 'elusive' or 'enigmatic'. Heitzenrater disparages previous attempts to portray the 'real' Mr. Wesley but goes on to list an vast army of specialists who would be required if this task were to be satisfactorily achieved and he were to be properly understood. He writes, 'the sensitivities and wide-ranging interests requisite to the task of catching the fullness of the elusive Mr. Wesley are considerable...'.⁶ Rack also finds Wesley's '[personal spirituality] difficult to penetrate after 1738'; he describes a smoke-screen created by followers, biographers and Wesley himself, in his journals

³ Rack, (2002)

⁴ Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 32.

⁵ Rack, xiv.

⁶ *The Elusive Mr Wesley*, 394.

and elsewhere.⁷

And yet the 'paradoxical' nature of Wesley appears to have become something of a legend itself; and the idea of an enigma or paradox, as something mysterious, tends to obscure an attempt to make sense of particular ways of human functioning. A closer look at the contradictions suggests that there are few actual paradoxes, and the contradictions can be understood in a variety of ways: for instance, Wesley as a romantic/realist can be seen as a changing response over time (sometimes realist, sometimes romantic). Nevertheless, there are contradictions, and this chapter attempts to understand them psychoanalytically, rather than to respond to them as 'mysterious'. This requires a change of style from the first two parts of the thesis, with (at the beginning) the presentation of a substantial amount of history about Wesley's interactions with others, and with most of the psychoanalytic interpretation postponed to the end of the chapter. This is to avoid two possible hazards: it is important to avoid theoretical speculation without providing adequate evidence; and it is necessary to avoid 'shoe-horning' Wesley into preconceived theories. In an individual therapy, the therapist's knowledge emerges from the patient's account of her day-to-day interactions with the particulars of her life and also her interactions with the therapist. As George Eliot suggested, it is through the ordinary responses to quotidian experience that change occurs rather than through abstract theory,⁸ and it is in these situations that evidence of change, or the lack of it, can be seen.

Every individual is unique, and it is only as patterns emerge from the 'quiddity' of the patients' lives that they may or may not resonate with some aspect of the theoretical framework in the therapist's mind, in a way which allows the theory to be helpful. In this study, by first allowing the evidence to speak for itself, it is hoped that the inappropriate imposition of theory on the subject will be avoided.

It is also hoped to avoid the mere recycling of old legends. Instead Rack's work will be relied on for biographical detail. It has been chosen, firstly, because it attends carefully to the theological, social, historical and political influences on Wesley, while not ignoring the emotional and relationship aspects; and secondly, because Rack has a suspicion of psychological explanations. He includes them, but usually with a caveat about their 'seductiveness' and about the hazards of basing conclusions on inadequate evidence.⁹ His anxieties about the tendencies of

⁷ Rack, xiv-xviii.

⁸ See 2:3.

⁹ Rack, 72.

'psychologists' to make unwarranted claims, while ignoring other factors, are not always overt but are clear from his phraseology: 'for good measure, Moore speculates on the reason for the ecstatic response by people like the Kingswood miners ...'.¹⁰ This biography, with its incorporation of the many non-psychological factors at work on Wesley is employed in this thesis to act as a counter-balance, restraining any 'seduction' to a belief that psychoanalytic understandings undermine or override other influences.

Rack's concern about the use of 'legend' and of speculation is a reminder that the original writings, particularly those such as his letters, which were not written with an eye on publication, are likely to be the most useful sources of information about Wesley's inner experience. The letters and journal have been the main resources for this chapter.

6.2 Wesley's account of his pre-conversion religious life

In Wesley's Journal for 24 May 1738, the day which has traditionally been seen as that of his conversion, when his heart was 'strangely warmed' at a meeting in Aldersgate Street, he wrote an outline of what he then saw as his spiritual progress up to that time. He believed that up to the age of ten, he had not 'sinned away the "washing of the Holy Ghost" which was given [him] in baptism'. Having been 'strictly educated', he then had no understanding of 'inner obedience or holiness' and was 'as ignorant of the true meaning of the law as [he] was of the Gospel of Christ'. During the next six or seven years he was at school. Here there were fewer 'outward restraints' and he was guilty of more 'outward sins, which [he] knew to be such, though they were not scandalous in the eye of the world'. He hoped then to be saved by 'not being so bad as other people', 'having still a kindness for religion' and 'reading the Bible, going to church and saying my prayers'.

During his early years at Oxford, he proceeded in much the same way, with 'short struggles' with sins, but '[no] notion of inner holiness'. He wrote, 'I cannot tell what I hoped to be saved by now, when I was continually sinning against the little light I had, unless by those transient fits of what many divines taught me to call "repentance"'. He described a change in 1725: he was studying à Kempis's *Christian*

¹⁰ Rack, 152.

*Pattern*¹¹ and ‘began to see that religion was seated in the heart and that God’s law extended to all our thoughts, as well as words and actions.’ Though initially he thought à Kempis ‘too strict’, he described setting out on a ‘new life’ from this point. He attended communion weekly, set aside one or two hours daily for religious retirement, examined himself rigorously for sins of ‘thought or deed’, shook off ‘trifling acquaintance’ and exhorted others to follow the same path. Having read William Law’s *Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call*, he was convinced of the ‘exceeding height and breadth and depth of the law of God’. ‘The light flowed so mightily in my soul that everything appeared in a new view’. He decided that he must strive for absolute obedience, ‘And by my *endeavour to keep his whole law*, inward and outward, *to the utmost of my power*, I was persuaded that I should be accepted of him, and that even then I was in a state of salvation’. He launched into a vigorous programme of good works, which included visiting the poor, the sick and those in prison. He ‘abridged [himself] of all superfluities, and many that are called the necessities of life’; practising self-denial, including fasting until ‘[He] apprehended [him]self to be near death’. This was the time when he, his brother Charles and others were part of the ‘Holy Club’. Their aim was to achieve ‘inward holiness’ and to attain the ‘image of God’. However, in spite of his adherence to a regime that seems to have outstripped even his mother’s practices in strictness, at least so far as dangerous fasting was concerned, he derived ‘no comfort, nor any assurance of any kind’. This is his first mention of his lack of any religious feeling associated with his religious practices.¹²

He goes on to mention the influence of a ‘contemplative man’, who convinced him that ‘outward works were nothing’. Ward suggests that this was William Law, whom Wesley had visited for the first time on 3 July 1832.¹³ He wrote that at this time, he accepted this instruction ‘as the words of God,’ but that subsequently he ‘dragg[ed]] on heavily’ with outward works and ‘[his] own righteousness (so zealously inculcated by the mystic writers)’ until he sailed for Georgia in 1735.¹⁴

It was on board ship that he met the Moravians. He recorded that they tried to show him a ‘more excellent way’, which he failed to understand, being ‘too learned and too wise. So that it seemed foolishness to me’. In Georgia, he was ‘still under the

¹¹ *Christian Pattern* is an extract from *The Imitation of Christ*.

¹² BEJ, 18, 242-250.

¹³ BEJ, 18, 244-5, n. 46.

¹⁴ BEJ, 18, 246.

law' but he found himself 'carnal, sold under sin' (Romans 7:14). He struggled to be pure and in the image of God, but he failed miserably, particularly in his relationship with Sophy Hopkey. He was still only 'striving with' (Hebrews 12: 4) and not 'freed from sin' (Romans 9:32): 'Neither had I 'the witness of the Spirit with my spirit'. He wrote that indeed he could not; for he 'sought it not by faith, but (as it were) by the works of the law'.¹⁵

In 1737, he returned to England in a despairing state, with a sense of something missing, a sense of 'uneasiness' which was 'unbelief'. This state will be examined in more detail later, but it is important to note here that it was in this state that he met the Moravian preacher, Peter Böhler. Böhler's assertion that true faith was inseparably attended by 'dominion over sin, and constant peace from a sense of forgiveness', struck Wesley like a 'new Gospel'. He studied scripture and struggled with the veracity of Böhler's claims. Böhler produced three witnesses, who gave convincing testimonies: each emphasised faith as a free gift of God bestowed upon 'every soul who earnestly and perseveringly sought it'. Wesley finally resolved to 'seek it unto the end', by renouncing his dependence on his own works and righteousness, and by using all 'means of grace' and 'continual prayer for this very thing, justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for *me*; a trust in him as *my* Christ, as *my* sole justification, sanctification and redemption.'¹⁶

6.3 The 'Conversion' and its aftermath.

Wesley described how he continued to seek for this 'true faith', '(though with strange indifference, dullness and coldness and unusually deep lapses into sin), until Wednesday, May 24th [1738]'. On that day, as was his custom in the mornings, he opened the Bible at random and found texts suggesting that promises would be fulfilled and that the Kingdom of God might not be far off. He went to St Paul's, where the anthem was 'Out of the depths I cry to Thee', which spoke of the mercy of God and 'plenteous redemption' (Psalm 130: 1-4,7-8). And finally, in the evening, he went 'unwillingly to Aldersgate Street', where he heard Luther's preface to the Romans, which described 'the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ'. He described a sense of his own heart 'strangely warmed' and feeling of being saved, 'I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was

¹⁵ BEJ, 18, 246-7.

¹⁶ BEJ, 18, 248-9.

given to me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death' (Romans 8:2). He went on to describe his almost immediate doubts (which the 'enemy' suggested to him), particularly about the lack of the anticipated joy of conversion and his 'heaviness, because of manifold temptations'. These will be returned to later, but for now it may be noted that by the following Sunday, he was preaching on 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith' (1 John 5:4).¹⁷

In spite of its familiarity, this view of his own spiritual progress by Wesley is outlined here because it was central to his conflict about 'works righteousness' and 'salvation by faith', which preoccupied him persistently from 1738 throughout his life and which reflected his inner struggles. As seen in the last chapter, Moore and Haartman saw Wesley as having found a solution to his spiritual struggles through his 'conversion' and his subsequent religious practices. According to Moore, his identification with Christ and his role as a field preacher accommodated his parents' view of him as 'special'.

Wesley's idea of himself as having a 'special' destiny is a well-established legend but it has been questioned. There was a review in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1784) suggesting that Wesley's near death and rescue from, a rectory fire in 1709 had implications for his subsequent providential rôle, but Wesley himself responded by denying it. He wrote that the idea that he saw himself as wonderfully preserved to accomplish some extraordinary purpose was an 'impression that never existed, is very ingenious, yet is in truth a castle in the air'.¹⁸ But he also wrote in his journal of 9 February 1750, that while leading a watch -night service, 'About eleven o'clock, it came into my mind that this was the very day and hour in which, forty years ago, I was taken out of the flames. I stopped and gave a short account of that wonderful account of providence. The voice of praise and thanksgiving went on high, and great was our rejoicing before the Lord'.¹⁹ From his own account, in the first issue of his *Arminian Magazine*, he was trapped in his room by the fire, and rescued through a window only after the rest of the family had been taken to safety and just before the roof collapsed.²⁰ Susanna later wrote on 17 May 1711, that she intended to be 'more particularly careful for the soul of this child that thou hast so mercifully provided for, than ever I have

¹⁷ BEJ, 18, 249-253.

¹⁸ *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 44-5.

¹⁹ BEJ 20, 320.

been, that I may do my endeavours to instill into his mind the disciplines of thy true religion and virtue'.²¹ Wesley used the metaphor 'A Brand Snatched out of the Fire' (Zechariah 3:2) about himself, on several occasions. For instance, in the context of his relationship with Sophy Hopkey; he wrote in his journal of 7 March 1737 that on being interrupted in her presence before he 'said too much' he was once more snatched as a 'brand out of the fire'.²² Similarly he used the phrase about his 'escape' from the mystics, 'May I praise him who hath snatched me out of this fire likewise, by warning all others that it is set on fire of hell.'²³ While taking care not to assume the truth of the legends about Wesley's providential role, there is thus evidence to confirm that both Wesley and his mother saw his life and work in providential terms and that, in spite of his denials, this was not unconnected with their responses to the fire.

6.4 Persisting difficulties

Although there are difficulties in accepting Moore's identifications of Wesley's images of God with a particular parent²⁴, the paper does illustrate that his early image of God was of a demanding, unforgiving, awful God, and that in 1737 and 1738, through the Moravians, he glimpsed an alternative: a forgiving, loving accepting father. He had a brief personal sense of such a figure in his experience at Aldersgate Street, but he could never quite hold on to it. Moore's paper implies that, following Wesley's shift in his image of God and his finding a new role as a field preacher, he had found a solution for himself psychologically. But a closer reading of Wesley's letters demonstrates that this was not the case and that many struggles continued.

There is evidence that:

- 1) He accepted with great sadness that he could not experience what he preached and he had persisting feelings of emptiness, deadness and a fear of falling into nothing.
- 2) He had to remain rigidly obsessional about his personal appearance, and in his self-examination for evidence of sin; and he had to be constantly active in his work up to the time of his death.
- 3) He was celebrated as a saviour of the souls and pastor to thousands, but he

²⁰ *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 43-44.

²¹ SW, 235.

²² BEJ, 18, 482.

²³ BEJ, 18, 213, n.6 (25/1/1738)

was often lacking in empathy, concern and care, especially for those close to him.

4) His relationships with women were disastrous.

5) There is evidence that in many areas of his functioning he remained rigidly defensive. Although describing himself as a sinner, when referring to his sinfulness his regrets were usually that he had not pushed things far enough, rather than that he had been wrong, and he had elaborate defences against seeing his own hurtfulness.

The evidence for these statements will be outlined, followed by an attempt to show how these features, were either manifestations of his conflicts and dreads, or attempts to deal with them, and hence what they might demonstrate about his inner world.

6.4.1 'More light than warmth'.

In his introduction to the first volume of the Bicentennial Edition of Wesley's letters, Frank Baker remarks on the warmth which is apparent in the letters, with words like 'affectionate' and 'love' occurring on almost every page.²⁵ He quotes a letter from Wesley to Alexander Knox in which he professed that, the longer he knew him, the more he loved him. In the same letter Wesley also quoted his brother Charles, as saying of himself (John), 'it signifies nothing to tell you anything, for whomsoever you once love you will love on through thick and thin'.²⁶ Clearly therefore Wesley saw himself as loving and constant. Baker also quotes Knox on Wesley's 'predilection for the female character', and on his 'peculiar effluence of thought and frankness' to his women correspondents, as evidence of his loving nature.

However, in addition, Baker remarks on a letter to Sarah Crosby (12 June 1766), in which Wesley wrote about a comment made of himself 'that [he] was *so little affected*, at things that would make *me* [the speaker] run mad'.²⁷ This character trait was attributed by the speaker, and by Wesley himself, to 'God's doing', in giving him a temperament which would allow him to carry out his 'peculiar work' and to maintain his authority. Baker suggests that this did not mean that he was without feeling, but that he suppressed it, except with a few chosen friends. On the other hand, Baker is anxious that Wesley should not be seen as a man of dangerously

²⁴See 5:2:2:2.

²⁵ BEL, 25, 8.

²⁶ Telford, vii, 38-40, (18/11/1780).

²⁷ BEL, 25, 8-9.

suppressed emotion, liable to erupt in depression or anger at any time; he quotes Wesley, aged eighty-three, on his even temper, in a letter to Elizabeth Ritchie (24 February 1786): ‘I do not remember to have heard or read anything like my own experience. Almost ever since I can remember I have been led in a peculiar way. I go on in an even line, being very little raised at one time or depressed in another.’ Baker, for whom these qualities were valuable, concludes that this, and his belief in providence, led to the ‘remarkable serenity’ of his letters. For Wesley, however, the problem remained: apart from the instance quoted above, where he explained his lack of disturbance by upsetting events as a useful attribute for his work, he more usually found having more ‘light than warmth’ a trial. Baker quotes only a part of the letter to Elizabeth Ritchie. In it he also wrote about his tendency to be led by reason and the scriptures rather than by ‘impressions’, ‘I am rarely led by impressions, but generally by reason and by Scripture. I see abundantly more than I feel. I want to feel more love and zeal for God’.²⁸ This could be interpreted as suggesting that in Wesley’s ‘abundance of seeing’ he had a feeling of something missing.

Such references to a lack of feeling are not uncommon in Wesley’s writings: His journal of 14 October 1738, five months after his Aldersgate experience records, ‘I cannot find in myself the love of God or Christ. Hence my deadness and wanderings in public prayer. Hence it is that even in the Holy Communion I have rarely any more than a cold attention. Hence when I hear the highest instance of God’s love, my heart is still senseless and unaffected. Yea, at this moment, I feel no more love to him than to one I had never heard of’.²⁹ A month later he wrote to a Moravian friend, Richard Viney, about the beginnings of a revival: ‘The Spirit of the Lord hath already shaken the dry bones, and some of them stand up and live. But I am still dead and cold, having peace indeed, but no love or joy in the Holy Ghost.’³⁰ In a letter to Charles Wesley on 27 Oct. 1766, he wrote:

...I do not feel the wrath of God abiding on me; nor can I believe it does. And yet (this is a mystery) [I do not love God. I never did]. Therefore [I never] believed in the Christian sense of the word. Therefore [I am only an] honest heathen, a proselyte of the Temple, one of *‘those that fear God’* ... But [I never had any] other *‘proof’* of the eternal or invisible world than I have now; and that is [none at all], unless such as fairly shines from reason’s glimmering ray. [I have no] direct witness, I do not say that [I am a child of God], but of

²⁸ Telford, vii, 319

²⁹ BEJ, 19, 18.

³⁰ BEL, 25, 583-3, (22/11/1738).

anything visible or invisible.³¹

In spite of, or perhaps because of, this sense of something lacking, he went on to describe an increase in ‘zeal for the whole work of God’, which he found inexplicable:

‘I am *borne along*. I know not how, that I can’t stand still. I want the world to come to *what I do not know*. Neither am I impelled to this by fear of any kind. I have no more fear than love. Or if I have [any fear, it is not that of falling] into hell but of falling into nothing.³²

The theme of being unable to keep still continued. Of his friend the Rev. John Fletcher, he wrote, ‘I grudge him sitting still; but who can help it? I love ease as well as he does; but I dare not take it while there is another world.’³³

He claimed that he was not afraid of hell, but he had to keep active to fend off some unpleasant affect which he was unable to name or actually feel, but which was experienced as deadness or coldness. He wrote to James Hutton on 16 April 1739, ‘I am still dead and cold, unless while I am speaking’,³⁴ and to Sarah Ryan, a house-keeper at Kingswood School, on 4 Nov. 1758, ‘As to myself, I am still cold and faint, though (as I told you) a little revived since I write freely. Pray that God may at length lift up the hands that hang down and the feeble knees!’³⁵

There is some evidence that the coldness and deadness he was struggling to fend off were associated with depression. In two letters which will be discussed later concerning the end of a relationship, he had difficulty in expressing his feelings directly, but was so despondent and tired that he admitted to wishing that he could die.³⁶ In a third letter, he wrote, ‘For I am a sinner. Therefore it is just if I go heavily all my days’.³⁷ Here he was unable to experience real sadness, grief or anger about his loss; his distress leaked out in a wish to be released from his struggle, and his anger appeared in the likely effects of his letters on those whom he felt had treated him unfairly.

³¹ Telford, v, 16. (27/6/66)

³² Telford, v, 16.

³³ Telford, vii, 272, (2/6/1785).

³⁴ BEL, 25, 633.

³⁵ Telford, iv, 45.

³⁶ BEL, 26, 408. (9/2/1750).

³⁷ BEL, 26, 394. (7/12/49).

At times of less acute emotional crisis, as shown in the letters to James Hutton and Sarah Ryan, he experienced this walled-off aspect of himself as dead or cold, an unpleasant feeling which could only be fended off by activity, particularly preaching, writing or interacting with people.

Any impulses towards suicide would of course be morally repugnant to Wesley and could never be acknowledged or even 'thought', but it is of interest that in a letter he wrote to the Prime Minister, William Pitt, on 6 May 1784, he was uncompromising in his urging the need for the prosecution of 'self-murderers'. He recalled how the bodies of the 'Spartan matrons', among whom there was a 'rage for self-murder', were dragged through the streets naked. This put a stop to the practice at once. He recommended that hanging every self-murderer in chains would have the same effect in England. The virulence of this reaction raises the possibility of an inner pressure not to 'see' self-destructive impulses in himself.³⁸

While Wesley was unable to understand the feeling of deadness he described, and preferred to avoid it, the way he addressed his correspondents in some of his letters suggests that he was addressing a part of himself. This gives some insight into the unconscious associations he made with the unreachable aspect of himself. For instance, as already mentioned, when thinking about his 'escape' from the dangerous attraction of the mystical writers, he associated with it his rescue as a 'brand from the burning'. On 25 March 1772, he replied to Ann Bolton, who had written to him about 'emptiness', which had reminded him of the 'Mystic writers':

They are perpetually talking of 'self-emptiness, self-inanition, self-annihilation' and the like: all very near akin to 'self-contradiction', ...
And I am many times ready to tremble *lest you* should slide into it again, and lest I myself should lead you into it while I tell you (as my manner is) just the thought that rises in my heart.³⁹

This resonates with his fear of 'falling into nothing', and it was this feeling and the deadness and coldness which he had a life-long struggle to fend off. They were the outward manifestation of his feared and walled-off destructiveness, which threatened him with depression, with being overwhelmed by his 'bad objects', and with self-annihilation. His difficulty in experiencing ordinary anger, grief and sadness, which resulted from the walling-off of his feelings, suggests that there would also have been

³⁸ Telford, vii, 236.

³⁹ Telford, v, 313.

difficulty in accessing his loving feelings; and therefore the frequent use of the words 'love' and 'affection' in his letters would have had a different function from that suggested by Baker (this will be explored later in the discussion of Wesley's relationship with women). This picture of a constant struggle with inner destructiveness is far removed from that of his public face, in the frequently quoted passage on Wesley by Alexander Knox, 'His countenance as well as his conversation, expressed an habitual gaiety of heart, which nothing but conscious virtue and innocence could have bestowed. He was in truth, the most perfect specimen of moral happiness which I ever saw.'⁴⁰

6.4.2 Immaculate self-care and self-discipline.

In spite of his small stature (he was five feet three inches tall), Wesley commanded respect and had a powerful influence on others. Abelove suggests that he used his gentility to exact deference. He produces evidence to show that Wesley was fastidious about his appearance and took great pains with his hair. Unlike many men of his time, he did not wear a wig, but his hair was long, smooth, and slightly curled at the ends. There were reports that he looked 'angelic,' and Horace Walpole is said to have commented on the 'little soupçon' of curl in his hair. In addition to his gown, cassock and bands, he wore silk gloves, a gold stick-pin at his breast and large silver buckles on his shoes. Abelove stresses the way he set himself apart from his preachers by giving advice about their dress, which was to be different from his own, and about suitable lifestyles they should adopt.⁴¹ He also suggests that Wesley used his gentility to encourage love from the poor in a variety of ways: he allowed them to get unexpectedly close to him and often stayed in their homes rather than with the gentry; he studied 'physick' and dispensed remedies; he gave away all the money he earned, except that spent on travelling, and this generosity was widely known about. As Abelove points out, he dispensed not only 'physick' and money but 'free grace' to all. The picture Abelove paints of an ascetic figure mixing with all social groups, dispensing help for physical and spiritual needs, gives weight to Moore's assertion that there was some identification with a Christ-like figure.⁴²

⁴⁰ Gordon Rupp, *Just Men: Historical Pieces*, (London: Epworth Press, 1977), 127.

⁴¹ Henry Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire: John Wesley and the Methodists*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 7-15.

⁴² Chapter 5, 14.

During Wesley's time at Oxford, the asceticism, self-examination and rigorous religious observations of the Holy Club were of an extreme kind. Even Susanna Wesley questioned the lengths to which her sons John and Charles went in their methods. She was worried that Charles would develop consumption, and wrote to John (25 October 1732), 'unless you take more care than you do, you'll put the matter beyond dispute in a little time. But take your own way. I have already given you up, as I have some before which once were very dear to me. Charles, though I believe not in a consumption, is in a fine state of health for a man of two or three and twenty, that can't eat a full meal but he must presently throw it up again.'⁴³ The letter ended, 'I must tell ye, Mr. John Wesley, fellow of Lincoln, and Mr. Charles Wesley, Student of Christ Church, that ye are two scrubby travellers, and sink your characters strangely by eating nothing on the road, ...'⁴⁴, to save charges. I wonder you are not ashamed of yourselves, Surely if you but give yourselves leave to think a little, ye will return to a better mind.'

In spite of the failure of these rigorous measures to deliver the feelings of assurance of acceptance by God, and Wesley's deeper realisation of the meaning of justification by faith in 1738, he was never able to relax his efforts to work towards salvation. His efforts became less extreme than those of the Holy Club, but he continued to encourage himself and others urgently towards constant good works, self-examination, frequent use of the means of grace, and periods of religious meditation. As Rack points out, Wesley's review of Methodist history saw the pursuit of inward and outer holiness and the hope of perfection as central.⁴⁵ Like his grandfather, Wesley described this as 'faith working through love', rather than salvation by works, but there remained an insistent, obsessional quality about his own practice which suggested a motivation through fear more than through love. This quality is evident in many of his letters, for instance in one to Sarah Ryan (14 December 1757). After a barrage of questions about her thoughts and prayers and a list of insistent demands as to how she should behave, he warns of the dreadful consequences if she should fall short.⁴⁶ This was the third of three letters written within a month, all in the same vein. Fear was prominent, as were thoughts of falling

⁴³ SW 151-3.

⁴⁴ Here several words were cut out of the letter.

⁴⁵ Rack, 249.

⁴⁶ Telford, iii, 243-4.

into destruction; again it is as if he were addressing his own fears.

He continued to advocate the preaching of both 'faith' and 'works', but there was evidence of his increasingly stressing 'works' again as he grew older. On 4 November 1772, he wrote to Charles Wesley, 'But of all preaching, what is usually called gospel preaching is the most useless, if not the most mischievous; a dull, yea or lively, harangue on the sufferings of Christ or salvation by faith without strongly inculcating holiness. I see more and more clearly that this naturally tends to drive holiness out of the world.'⁴⁷ In the same year, he is reported to have told Charles 'I often cry out, *Vitae me redde priori*. Let me again be an Oxford Methodist! I am often in doubt whether it would not be for the best for me to resume all my Oxford rules, great and small. I did then walk closely with God and redeem the time. But what have I been doing these thirty years?'.⁴⁸ His struggle to feel accepted by God was continuing into his old age. Like his mother, he understood the theology of the atonement and preached it to others, constantly seeking confirmatory evidence of its truth; but for much of the time, it would seem that he was not able to accept that it applied to him.

6.4.3 Saviour of souls and exasperating brother.

6.4.3.1 Saviour of souls

Wesley made a great difference to the lives of a great many people. Thousands came to hear him preach; they felt their faith deepened and they committed themselves to the life and faith he advocated. He was endlessly energetic, travelling, according to Hampson, 'well over 200,000 miles' and preaching over 40,000 sermons'.⁴⁹ He insisted that personal contact was the best way to help people and visited the sick, the dying and those in prison. For those he was unable to reach, he produced 'tracts' suitable for particular situations (e.g. for a condemned prisoner). He had a vast correspondence and a great capacity for remembering the details of people's lives and those of their families. He did not disguise his preference for spending time with the poor over the 'genteel',⁵⁰ and he set up an efficient system of pastoral care within his

⁴⁷ Telford, v, 345.

⁴⁸ Rack, 105.

⁴⁹ J. Hampson, *Memoirs of John Wesley*, III, (Sunderland, 1791), quoted in Rack, 535.

⁵⁰ Rack, 363.

movement, where people met in groups, the 'class meetings'. Their pastoral and spiritual needs were supplied by class leaders, and they were encouraged to share their fears and failings with each other.

Wesley's power to hold people may well have been related to the deference he created, as suggested by Abelow, but it was also inextricable from the social situation of the time. The eighteenth century, with its rapid increase in population, particularly in the urban centres, the beginnings of industrialisation, and with the political divisions associated with the American revolution, challenged the capacities of the systems providing law and order, local government, social welfare, and political and religious organisation. It saw the beginnings of many voluntary organisations and the building of the first hospitals for physical and mental illness. There were strenuous philanthropic efforts aimed at educating the poor, saving their souls, improving their minds and bodies, and curbing disorder.⁵¹ Poverty and debt were rife, unemployment was high, there were high levels of alcohol use, increasing crime levels and disease and mortality levels were high.⁵² This was fertile ground for Wesley's message. His advice to the Methodists was that they should care for 'the hungry, the naked and sick' and 'exhort and reprove those they had dealings with'; rules were laid out regarding appropriate behaviour, including advice about marriage and the use of alcohol.⁵³ In these circumstances, Wesley's message of 'free grace for all', with its hope of a better life in Christ than the earthly one, must have been central to the effect that Wesley had and to the exponential spread of Methodism. However, as Langford points out, Methodism appealed not only to the poor but to the new ruling classes of the mining and manufacturing industries. The 'devout life' was seen as an alternative to the existing system of privilege as well as offering hope to the poor. It is likely that such acceptance by the new ruling classes was important in facilitating the spread of Methodism.⁵⁴ That Wesley was so loved and so powerful personally, however, suggests that there were other elements in his interactions with people.

It has been difficult for scholars who have looked at Wesley as a pastor to avoid seeing his frequent insensitivity and occasional cruelty when dealing with people in trouble. Schmidt, in his *Theological Biography*, does his best to rationalise such behaviour, but even he has to acknowledge that such was the case. He does

⁵¹ Rack, 317.

⁵² Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 146-155.

⁵³ Rack, 442.

however hit on an interesting combination of characteristics in Wesley. After drawing attention to his cruelty on one occasion, he describes his capacity to be amiable; he outlines his meeting with an 'unknown Roman Catholic' in Dublin. Sensitive to the man's beliefs, he drew up a confession of faith, which stressed their 'common sonship with God', rather than their doctrinal divisions. This demonstrated, for Schmidt, 'Wesley's prioritising of his concern for the other's feelings over doctrinal divisions on this occasion'.⁵⁵ Schmidt goes on to suggest that in Wesley, the 'severity and gentleness are one and indivisible'; he links this to a letter from Wesley to a Joseph Cowley on preaching (12 Apr. 1750), where he warned against offering hearers the 'love of God in Jesus Christ over-hastily'; one must first preach the Law with the utmost stringency, so that it 'searched the inmost recesses of the heart with inquisitorial power':

Let the law always prepare the way for the gospel! I scarce ever spoke more earnestly here of the love of God in Christ than last night; but it was after I had been tearing the unawakened to pieces. Go thou and do likewise. 'Tis true that God alone in Christ feeds his children; but even they are to be *guided* as well as fed - yea, and often *physicked* too: and the bulk of our hearers must be purged before they are fed: Else we feed only the disease. Beware of all honey. 'Tis the best extreme; but it is an extreme.⁵⁶

This theme of the need to preach both the law and the gospel, which was linked by that time to his fear of Antinomianism and his disapproval of Moravian preaching, was pursued further in a letter, to an 'anonymous Evangelical layman' (10 December 1751). He wrote that the more people are convinced of their sin, the more it is permissible to include more of the gospel. The dangers of omitting the law from preaching are that 'many of our hearers are still unconvinced' and that 'many who are convinced will heal their wounds only slightly'. After conversion, he believed the law should still be preached, 'but taking particular care to place every part of it in the gospel light, as not only a command but a privilege also, as a branch of the glorious liberty of the sons of God.'⁵⁷ As Schmidt writes, the 'Law should resume its role, but in a new character. Now it speaks as a distinct and concrete possibility of doing good, no longer as an imperious command or as a condemnatory judgement, but as an offer

⁵⁴ Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 252-5.

⁵⁵ Schmidt, vol. 2ii, 129-131.

⁵⁶ BEL 26, 418

⁵⁷ BEL 26, 483

of freedom.’⁵⁸ Wesley knew that in order for wounds to be fully healed, the ‘deep recesses’ had to be engaged with, but this was exactly what Wesley could not do for himself; he was instead left feeling cold, dead or uneasy. But the gospel without the Law, without a deep knowledge of the dark side of the self, felt like a dangerous addiction to Wesley. Around the time of his conversion he had a desperate hope that this could give him the joy and assurance he sought, but he could not delude himself: his uneasiness returned and he continued to stress the need for the Law, which for him offered an alternative hope of dealing with his unreachable hate and destructiveness. He wrote in the same letter to Blackwell:

‘gospel preachers’ so called corrupt their hearers; they vitiate their taste, so that they cannot relish sound doctrine; and spoil their appetite so that they cannot turn it into nourishment; they as it were feed them with sweetmeats, till the genuine wine of the kingdom seems quite insipid to them. They give them cordial upon cordial, which makes them all life and spirit for the present; but meantime their appetite is destroyed, so that they can neither retain or digest the pure milk of the Word ... As soon as that flow of spirit goes off, they are without life, without power, without any strength or vigour of soul; and it is extremely difficult to recover them, because they still cry out, ‘Cordials, cordials!’⁵⁹

There could not be a better description of Kohut’s ‘object hunger’.⁶⁰

In spite of own difficulty in getting in touch with his deep feelings, he seemed capable in *some* situations of reaching others in a deep way. His response to prisoners shows this capacity in a striking way. It also suggests the kind of circumstances in which this capacity was apparent and how they differ from occasions when he was far from empathic. He described daily visits to two condemned prisoners in his journal (12 and 29 March 1740) and of the second he wrote that he visited him till ‘the love of God was shed abroad in his heart;’ he had said to him as he left, ‘He that has now begun his good work in your soul will I doubt not preserve you to the end.’⁶¹ The details of the interaction leading to this final statement are not outlined, but his tract, *A Word to a Condemned Malefactor*, vividly demonstrates the way Wesley would have worked in that situation.⁶² It is a very powerful document, and while it might be viewed as a typical ‘dangling over the pit’ of a hell-fire preacher, it is more than that.

⁵⁸ Schmidt, vol.2ii, 130-1.

⁵⁹ BEL 26, 487-8.

⁶⁰ See 2.4.3

⁶¹ BEJ, 19, 141-2.

⁶² *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 149-52.

It shows a capacity to meet the prisoner exactly where he is; it begins with ‘what a condition you are in! ... no way of escape.. these walls, gates, bars .. cut off all hope’. It continues ‘What is death?’ Death is leaving everyone you love for ever and ‘leaving part of yourself; leaving this body which has accompanied you so long.’ It goes on to ask, ‘How will you stand before God? ... when “without Holiness no man shall see the Lord?”’ He talks of Holiness as purity of heart and mind, ‘You are far from it; far as darkness from light.’ There follows a terrifying list of the prisoner’s failings, ending ‘ You have done evil exceedingly; your sins against God and man are more than the hairs on your head. Insomuch that even the world cannot bear you; the world itself spews you out. Even the men that know not God declare that you are not fit to live upon the earth’. Having identified his fears of imprisonment, his fear of death and his despair about his inner badness, he goes on to urge repentance, offering the hope of escape from damnation and urging the need for belief in ‘Christ as Saviour from sin’. He describes the offer of the love of God being ‘shed abroad in thy heart’ enabling power over sin: ‘This is the faith that worketh through love, the way that leadeth to the Kingdom’. He ends, ‘Trust him alone; love him alone; fear him alone; cleave to him alone; till he shall say to you (as to the dying malefactor of old), “This day shalt thou be with me in paradise”.’

Part of the power of this document, and no doubt of his daily visits, lay in Wesley’s ability to convey an intense sense of giving the prisoner his whole attention and total concern. This enabled him to detail the horror of his inner badness without mincing his words; nothing was glossed over. There is a feeling that he knew exactly what the other was experiencing. He was describing an ‘abject’ state of affairs, the part of the sinner which had to be walled off in himself. Once the ‘sinner’ experienced himself as deeply known in all his badness, but still worth talking to, he could accept the offer of hope offered by the now trusted figure. There was a sense of urgency about Wesley’s message, a life-or-death feeling, which occurred at other times and not only when he was dealing with condemned prisoners, and which put pressure on the other to respond. This same feeling of a life or death struggle recalls that described in Susanna Wesley’s struggle to deal with primitive aggression and sexuality. The dark side for her was death-dealing and this same quality, the same sense of dread, with a desperate need to escape falling into a place of destruction, existed in Wesley.

In the tract, although Wesley was focused on helping the prisoners, the intense

quality of the interaction, the desperation to have the inner badness blotted out by love, suggests that at the same time Wesley was attempting to help himself. He conveyed care and concern for others, which was intense, but he was at the same time addressing and concerned for his own inner badness, which he could not address directly. This would have been experienced by the other as a powerfully helpful intervention.

6.4.3.2 Exasperating brother.

However, there is considerable evidence that in many of Wesley's interactions with others, he had very little awareness of the effect he had on them. While he appeared concerned, and saved souls on a large scale, he often had difficulty empathising with people on a personal level, and could not imagine the hurtful effects of his words. He saw 'reproof' as a necessary part of the process of salvation; but when people did not conform to his preconceived pattern, he lost patience. As Rack mentions, he was most gracious to those who were 'either submissive to his guidance or were in various ways inferior to him'. In addition, he tended to idealise those to whom he formed an attachment, so that they were seen as he wished to see them.⁶³

He was accused by some in his life-time of not keeping friends who disagreed with him. He denied this in a letter to Sarah Ryan (25 March 1764) but a reading of his letters shows that there was often a cooling off of the correspondence after a disagreement.⁶⁴ This is obvious in a letter to Sarah Crosby, who had challenged him about the quality of his own religious experience. He responded with an angry letter, saying he had contemplated not responding at all, but had decided to respond 'without reserve'. After dire warnings to her about having thought badly of him, for which error previously, he believed, God had torn her away from him, he goes on 'Sally beware! Evil is before you!' and he ends the letter, 'I love you the more the more free you are. That is another mistake, that I dislike anyone for plain dealing...'⁶⁵ Nevertheless, there was a diminution of their previously frequent correspondence, with little contact between them over the next nine months.

⁶³ Rack, 542.

⁶⁴ Telford, iv, 232.

⁶⁵ Schmidt, 2(ii), 144.

Wesley's lack of empathy with people close to him is shown most starkly in his response to bereavement. He would, of course, not have seen it as such, but would have seen his words as 'reproofs', necessary for the spiritual good of the bereaved. Intense or prolonged grief was regarded as evidence of too great an attachment to the things of the world, of 'inordinate affection'. His usual pattern was a brief acknowledgement of the loss, followed by a reminder that 'the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away', such as that in a letter to a Mrs. Barton, of 29 July 1777.⁶⁶ This was followed by encouragement to press forward and to avoid the dangers of on-going grief due to 'inordinate affection.' While many would have agreed with his sentiments, few could have responded in painful situations with such a lack of feeling as he showed on some occasions.

The most striking example is in a letter to his sister Martha (17 November 1742).⁶⁷ She had married a clergyman, Westley Hall, who had been unfaithful to her before and after the marriage,⁶⁸ and she had lost nine out of ten children.⁶⁹ In the first brief paragraph he writes, 'I believe the death of your children is a great instance of God's goodness to you. You have often mentioned to me how much of your time they took up. Now that time is restored to you, and you have nothing to do but to serve our Lord without carefulness and without distraction, till you are sanctified in body, soul and spirit.' The second paragraph is concerned with her husband's undesirable association with the 'still brethren' and the third with concern for the state of the 'poor, desolate Church of England'. He ends, 'Mr. Hall has payed me for the books. I don't want any money of you; your love is sufficient.'

Charles Wesley was not unaware of John's attitude to Martha. His journal of April 22, 1751 records: 'Met sister Hall and her son at the Foundery, and received them as kindly as I could. She had been invited by my brother, who left no orders for her reception, nor took any notice afterwards.'⁷⁰

The effect of John Wesley's letters is best seen, not in Martha's response, which is not available, but in a letter from another sister, Emily (24 November 1738). At the time she was struggling with severe poverty, debt and constant ill-

⁶⁶ Telford, vi, 269.

⁶⁷ BEL, 26, 90.

⁶⁸ Schmidt, 2(i), 135.

⁶⁹ Adam Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*, (London: Kershaw, 1823), 527.

⁷⁰ CW, 606.

health, 'in want of common necessities' and selling clothes for bread.⁷¹ She wrote:

Dear brother, Yours I received, and thank you for remembering me, though your letter afforded me small consolation. For God's sake tell me how a distressed woman who expects daily to have her bed taken from under her for rent can consider the state of the churches in Germany. I am ready to give up the ghost with grief.

She listed her afflictions at length, mentioned that her brothers, Samuel and Charles '(God bless 'em)', had helped her financially over previous months and asked that he should remember his love for her and not 'forsake' her. 'Love to your sister in trouble is more pleasing in the sight of God than preaching to a thousand where you have no business.' She claimed that he married her to 'this man', and that as soon as sorrow took hold he left her to it. She went so far as to suggest that if she killed herself, it would be 'justly laid at [his] door'. Unfortunately, the response to this letter was not preserved, but it demonstrates the degree of anger and exasperation that his blindness to others' pain could cause.

Such a response to worldly troubles, particularly bereavement and especially the loss of a child, has to be seen in the context of the eighteenth-century view of providence. The idea that 'the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away' was offered as an explanation, and with the hope of providing comfort at a time of high infant mortality. The other influence on Wesley was his attraction to 'Primitive Christianity' as portrayed in the life of Jean-Baptiste de Renty (1611-49). He read his 'life' while he was in Georgia, and while eventually rejecting the more 'mystical' elements of de Renty's thought, he was impressed that he had achieved a state of holiness, with a 'freedom from the world', and a 'holy unconcern' with worldly matters. Wesley remembered the story of de Renty's reaction to his wife's death, after which, 'he knew such a strange "holy unconcern" at this most severe of human losses that it could only be a demonstration of divine power'.⁷² On 3 January 1791, not long before his death, he reminded Adam Clarke of this story on the death of his child, 'But you startle me when you talk of grieving so much for the death of an infant. This is certainly a proof of inordinate affection; and if you love them thus all your children will die. How did Mr. de Renty behave when he supposed his wife to be dying? This is the

⁷¹ BEL, 25, 589.

⁷² Schmidt, 1, 215.

pattern for a Christian'.⁷³ There is no evidence here of concern overriding doctrinal issues. Although he was greatly influenced by cultural and theological factors, such was the degree of insensitivity in these two examples that it suggests he was unable to comprehend what the pain of deep grief felt like.

These responses to people, in prison, in large crowds, and in his personal life, suggest that in situations which evoked his own needs in some way, he could accurately and powerfully identify a need and address it. This occurred when he was preaching: here people were looking up to him as if to be fed, and *en masse* they lost their own characteristics as individual people; they therefore became ready containers into which could be projected his own need. Because of this projection, his words would have been powerfully affecting. Similarly, people perceived as dependent, 'weaker' or 'inferior', were already seen as needy and therefore were predisposed to receive his projected needy aspects. In these situations, he accurately and helpfully described his own needy or sinful state, and offered the cure which he so desperately sought. However, in situations where the other person asserted a separateness from him by disagreeing with him, or by describing an experience with which he could not identify (e.g. intense grieving), he had to resort to 'doctrinal' responses, such as 'providence', 'inordinate affection' or 'holy unconcern'. These responses were so out-of-tune with the experience of the other, that they were experienced as cruel and insensitive, as indeed they were.

This is very much connected with his sense of feeling cold and dead, referred to previously. When he preached, not only did he see other people having the experience he wished for, thus giving him the reassurance that what he preached was actually possible; but his preaching itself was bringing hope of salvation to his listeners and to himself in them.

6.4.4 Relationships with women

Much has been made in the literature on Wesley of his close relationship with his mother and the inhibiting effect this was likely to have had on his relationships with women. In *An Account of an Amour of John Wesley*, Wesley included a summary of his views on marriage, since childhood, written in an attempt to

⁷³ Telford, viii, 253.

clarify his thoughts.⁷⁴ He wrote that his first objection to marriage from the time he was six or seven years old was, 'Because I should never find such a woman as my father had'. There followed other objections and he then wrote that his first objection was quickly removed, by his finding 'some, though very few women, whom I could not but allow to be the equal to my mother, both in knowledge and piety'. Consciously at least, he had moved on from his relationship with his mother. She did however remain a powerful influence and (as has been shown), he continued to ask her advice and respect her opinion until well into adulthood.

His subsequent relationships with women can only be regarded as disastrous. Writers on both his life and his theology have struggled to reconcile his behaviour towards women with their ideas about his spirituality and the morality he advocated. There is pressure on reading these works to conform to the idea of the total purity of Wesley and of his motivations. Any exploration of underlying sexual elements can be confused, even by the researcher, with a selecting out of salacious material, and can be felt as prurient or even sacrilegious. It is as if it is necessary to be one of two things: a follower of the loved and saintly man, or one of the gossips who accused him of gross moral turpitude. Although for these reasons, it is not easy to be objective, this should not deter from an effort to understand the important sexual pressures on Wesley.

In a recent short biography of Wesley, Waller writes of his letters to women, 'there were no sexual overtones either stated or intended in the letters to these women within the Methodist movement, ...'⁷⁵ And Rack, writing of the accusations of sexual misconduct which were sometimes levelled against Wesley and his preachers, while he acknowledges that his conduct made him an 'easy target', adds 'There is no reason to believe Wesley guilty of anything of this sort: his hesitant approach even to marriage, would of itself make it implausible'. His relationships with female correspondents are described as 'delicate and innocent' and there is nothing 'of erotic mysticism in Wesley's language'.⁷⁶ All of these comments require further examination.

Rack thought that his 'naive optimism' about the possibility of the 'regeneration of dubious characters' and his 'affectionate spiritual correspondence

⁷⁴ *An Account of an Amour of John Wesley*, (London: British Library, Add. MSS 7119,) in *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 167-76.

⁷⁵ Ralph Waller, *John Wesley: A Personal Portrait*, (London: SPCK, 2003), 101.

⁷⁶ Rack, 267-9.

with godly women' was what fuelled the suspicion of his critics.⁷⁷ Schmidt writes of Wesley in the context of his relationship with Ann Bolton, one of his long-term correspondents, 'The austere old man became quite tender towards her ...' as if to exclude any sexual element.⁷⁸ These constraints are likely to have been related to Wesley's own views on sex. Abelow suggests that he disapproved of the Moravians, whom he saw as having too positive a view of sex, and that this was one reason for his separation from them. According to him, Wesley quoted their leader Count Nicolaus Zinzendorf as claiming that 'Jesus had been incarnated man, so that the "Male member" might be sanctified, and born of a woman, so that the female genitals might be made equally 'honourable'. Wesley responded with horror: 'Were ever such words put together from the foundation of the world?''⁷⁹ In addition, Abelow links this attitude to sex with his condemnation of masturbation in *Thoughts on the Sin of Onan*, his preference for celibacy, and his separation of men from women in indoor services and class meetings. He also dramatically suggests that by unconscious attempts to deny his parents' marriage, Wesley 'virtually claimed for himself a virgin birth'. He attributes this theory to the following: Wesley's sending a copy of his mother's portrait at her death to every member of the London bands and arranging a big public funeral for her; his committing her body to be with her 'fathers', without mentioning her husband, as was usual; his inscribing the tombstone, 'Susanna Wesley, the Youngest and Last surviving daughter of Dr. Samuel Annesley', again omitting reference to her husband. But Abelow points out that his unconscious attempts to exclude his father did not quite succeed; when he bought the burial plot, he mistakenly inserted his father's name where his own should have been. This mistake remains in the register and is also carved on a pillar in the cemetery.⁸⁰ All this hardly amounts to evidence that he claimed a virgin birth, but there is a suggestion that he had difficulty thinking of his parents as a sexual couple.

6.4.4.1 The Cotswold Set.

His first contact with women outside his family was as a young man at Oxford. He had gained his first degree and was studying for his MA. He came to know some

⁷⁷ Rack, 267.

⁷⁸ Schmidt, 2(ii), 146.

⁷⁹ John Wesley, *Queries Proposed to the Right Reverend and Right Honourable Count Zinzendorf*, (London, 1755), quoted in Henry Abelow, *The Evangelist of Desire*, (1990), 54.

clergy families in the Cotswolds and particularly the daughters of the families. Between 1725 and 1734, he wrote letters to them and spent holidays with them. His brother Charles was a member of the same group. The surviving letters are to Mary Pendarves (née Granville, a widow) and her sister Ann. It has been suggested that Wesley proposed marriage to one of these women, Sally Kirkham. Only one of Sally Kirkham's letters is still extant, so information about Wesley's relationship with her is available only from his frequent references to her in his letters to the other women and from his mother's and sister Emily's comments. It is known that after her marriage the relationship continued for some time.

The letters from this period were full of youthful exuberance, idyllic days spent in each other's company, mutual love, and aspirations towards self-improvement, increased goodness and holiness. They addressed each other using romantic names from classical literature. Sally Kirkham was 'Varanese', Mary Pendarves 'Aspasia', Charles Wesley 'Araspes' and John Wesley 'Cyrus'; He also had another nick-name, 'Primitive Christianity'. Heitzenrater says that the correspondence with these women and with his family at that time, in addition to describing the Wesleys' life in Oxford, provide 'at a very pure and untarnished level, ... Wesley's concept of the ideal, the true Christian'.⁸⁰ In fact the letters to the women are at times parodies of conventional love-writing, with flowery, rhetorical language and the playful use of proper names (nick-names), in the third person. For instance in the letter from Varanese, (28 August, 1730), she wrote, 'Aspasia ...will soon go to Bath for a few days upon business, if Cyrus designs waiting on her he had better write to her ...'.⁸² There is an assumption of being part of a select and holy group; in the same letter, she rejoices in being able to be alone, being unwilling to spend time with people who have 'little religion, and the redundance of ill-nature, that abounds in the conversation of mankind'. For her, the Wesleys are not as 'gentle in their censures of the mistakes of others as they are severe to themselves, and as they are blind to their own excellencies. Cyrus and Araspes will come into my mind on this occasion, and upon every other when I am thinking of those persons whose principles are not of this world, and whose hope and expectation shall not perish for ever'. Varanese married in 1725. Five years later, Wesley wrote to Mrs. Pendarves bewailing his loss. He had been transcribing her letters and, on 14 August 1730, wrote, 'Not that I was so much

⁸⁰ *The Evangelist of Desire*, 53-59.

⁸¹ *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 57.

⁸² BEL, 25, 248.

pained at seeing my utmost efforts so far surpassed by the slightest touch of another's pen: those [tears] which that observation has often called [forth] were tears of joy'. He then went on to describe the 'soft emotion' with which he glowed while corresponding with Varanese's friend (Mrs. Pendarves).⁸³ In this and subsequent letters, Mrs. Pendarves is valued because she is associated with Varanese: 'I will defer no longer in begging Aspasia to be like my Varanese in one more instance, in continuing to do me the honour and advantage of reading her sentiments when I am not permitted to hear them' (3 October 1730);⁸⁴ and two months later, he wrote of his feelings for her: 'When reflecting on this I can't but observe with pleasure the resemblance between the emotion I then feel and that with which my heart frequently overflowed in the beginning of my intercourse with our dear Varanese' (28 December 1730).⁸⁵ Oblivious of the likely effects of this kind of comparison on the woman involved, he seemed able to use one woman to replace another and to fulfil the same function, making it clear that she was a replacement. Mrs. Pendarves went along with his requests initially but, not surprisingly, she eventually lost interest and failed to answer his letters.⁸⁶

The content of the letters describes the correspondents as closely and lovingly involved with each other, mutually helping each other to achieve holiness and abolish imperfection. While the whole correspondence has something of the quality of a romantic game, these themes constantly recur. One letter, (24-5 November 1730), which includes the following poem is a long eulogy to their friendship, the source of which he attributes to God:

Still shower thine influence from on high,
 Author of friendship's sacred tie!
 Shower thy graces, Holy Dove,
 God of peace and God of love.^{87 88}

By December 1730, Wesley was aware that he had other motives in addition to wanting to 'improve' his women correspondents. 'I perceive another principle is

⁸³ BEL, 25, 247.

⁸⁴ BEL, 25, 251.

⁸⁵ BEL, 25, 262.

⁸⁶ BEL, 25, 389, n.1.

⁸⁷ BEL, 25, 256.

⁸⁸ Wesley's brother Samuel wrote a poem published in 1736, which Wesley might previously have seen. The only difference in Wesley's version is that he substituted 'Author of friendship's sacred tie' for Samuel's 'Author of the nuptial tie' (BEL 25, 256 n1).

interwoven, a desire of recommending myself to their esteem. And if this be a fault I am much to blame.’⁸⁹ In a letter of 5 Apr.1731, having contrasted the spiritual state of Varanese, Aspasia and Selima (Ann Granville) favourably with the ‘bulk of mankind’, he expressed his wish that his mind could unite with theirs ‘in a single instance of humility’.⁹⁰ When Mrs. Pendarves wrote to him about having helped a friend who was depressed, he became very enthusiastic and excited in his praise and appreciation of her, ‘O Aspasia, how amiable do you appear while you are employed in such offices as these! Especially in the eyes of him who seeth more clearly than man seeth! Watch over me too for good, Aspasia.’⁹¹

In his diary of October 1726, Wesley wrote about his relationship with Varanese after her marriage. The entry for 14 October tells of several walks he took with her and her sister, and in it he quotes Varanese on their relationship: ‘You make me less complaisant than I was before, for methinks ’tis almost a sin to prostitute those expressions of tenderness to others which I have at any time applied to you. I can’t think it expedient, nor indeed lawful, to break off that acquaintance which is one of the strongest incentives I have to virtue.’ In the 17 October 1726 entry, she is quoted as saying, ‘I would certainly acquit you if my husband should ever resent our freedom, which I am satisfied he never will.’ Wesley wrote that he ‘Sat with Varanese and Betty till eleven. Leaned on Varanese’s breast and kept both her hands within mine. She said very many obliging things. Betty looked tenderly. Thank God; long-suffering.’⁹²

The letters and diaries suggest that he had a sense of being merged with idealised images of these women, who are almost interchangeable in his mind. They are seen as full of goodness and devoid of imperfections, but exciting and sexual at the same time. It is not surprising that Rack writes of Wesley’s discovering sex, at this time, as the ‘serpent in his Eden’.⁹³ While the participants convinced themselves of the goodness and purity of their relationships, Susanna Wesley had reservations. In a letter of 31 January 1727, she warned, ‘I have many thoughts on the friendship between Varanese and thee, and the more I think of it, the less I approve it. The tree is known by its fruits, but not always by its blossoms; what blooms beautifully sometimes bears a bitter fruit ...’. She also warned that the reason many do not attain

⁸⁹ BEL, 25, 262 (28/12/30).

⁹⁰ BEL, 25, 275.

⁹¹ BEL, 25, 315. (28 September, 1731).

⁹² From the early diaries, printed in *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 56.

to the kingdom of heaven is because ‘there is some Delilah, some one beloved vice, they will not part with’.⁹⁴ In this last warning, about a ‘darling sin’, she was quoting her father.⁹⁵

Sister Emily could also be relied upon to get to the nub of the matter. Wesley had written accusing her of ‘making the world [her] God’. On 13 August 1735, she wrote engaging with all the points of his argument, agreeing that God’s will should take precedence over worldly desires but stating that:

that wise and good Being who formed us and gave us these bodies with their several desires and tendencies, never designed to take away our liberty so far as to deny all subordinate love to the creature ... And herein you yourself speak as one that is guilty. Had you not lost your dear Mrs. Chapone [Varanese], where had your love been fixed? On heaven I hope, principally, but a large share too had been hers; you would not have been so spiritualised, something of this lower world would have had part of your heart, wise as you are. But being deprived of her, there went all hope of worldly happiness. And now the mind, which is an active principle, losing its aim here, has fixed on its Maker; for happiness will ever be the end that all rational beings will aim at, and when disappointed in one thing will soon fix on another.⁹⁶

Rack discusses Harrison’s theory, which uses this letter as evidence, that Wesley’s disappointment in love influenced his decision to become ordained;⁹⁷ Rack disputes it on the grounds that dates are not consonant with this idea, but admits that the dates could be wrong.⁹⁸ Whether or not this was the case, what Emily was rightly pointing out was that motivation is always complicated, that Wesley was failing to see when his actions were affected by human love or loss, and that love for God can easily be confused or conflated with feelings stirred up by human relationships.

What then was happening in these relationships within the Cotswold Group? They were probably not unlike those in many other little coteries which appeared in middle-class society in the eighteenth century, where women held court and were flattered by young men, and where they experimented with intellectual ideas. However, the effect on Wesley was significant; when he was part of this group, he was searching for a deeper faith; his grandfather had preached on the ‘devotion of the heart’ and he would have heard that theme repeated in his mother’s teaching. He was

⁹³ Rack, 78.

⁹⁴ BEL, 25, 210.

⁹⁵ Samuel Annesley, *A Supplement to the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate* (1676), 14-5.

⁹⁶ BEL, 25, 431.

⁹⁷ G.E. Harrison, *Son to Susanna*, (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1937).

⁹⁸ Rack, 70-71.

reading Law and à Kempis and beginning his fierce struggle in the Holy Club towards inward and outward purity, so that he might feel accepted by God. However, as will be seen in the letters to his mother, any associated *feeling* of acceptance was absent; and although at this stage he did not use the words he came to use later, *coldness* and *deadness*, the lack of feeling he reported to his mother expressed the same sense of something lacking.

With the Cotswold women, it was different. In this situation, he did indeed feel *something*. The erotic nature of the discourse suggests that what he felt was sexual and this was detected by his mother and sister. The women were idealised: that is, he projected all his own goodness into them and into his absolutely good God, ‘author of friendship’s sacred tie’; the talk was of human and divine love which were indistinguishable, so that he felt merged in a loving union with the women and God. That he could feel *something* made him feel more alive, and even exhilarated; by merging with this merged idealised object, he could partake of its goodness and feel accepted; he was on the side of the angels and not the ‘bulk of mankind’. This almost intoxicated state felt *so* good, that the fact that he was breaking marital boundaries and putting himself in compromising positions was barely noticeable; it felt entirely full of goodness and God, rather than transgressive. The more full of goodness the women seemed (as in Aspasia’s care of her friend), the more full of goodness and the more alive he felt; hence his excitement. This state of affairs could only continue while he could convince himself that the sexual feeling was something other than it was. While it is difficult to imagine that he did not at some level recognise his excitement as having a sexual element, he had constantly to stress, to himself and the women, that the relationships were based on the pure love of friendship. In a letter to Mrs. Pendarves (5 April 1731), he wrote of his own feeling on reading her letters, ‘When thy heart burns within thee at her words, is it not the warmth of life, of virtue? Do they not inspire some degree of the purity and softness of the heart from which they came?’⁹⁹

As the relationships cooled he felt angry, let down, and more separate. This is shown in his reply to Mrs. Pendarves, when she wrote to him in July 1734, after not responding to many of his previous letters. Her failure to write may have been connected to his being ‘ridiculed’ for his Oxford practices, which she mentioned to

⁹⁹ BEL, 25, 274.

her sister at the time.¹⁰⁰ Wesley's letter is an angry one though couched in terms of his sorrow that he was unable to help her, 'Experience has shown how far my power is short of my will. For a time I flattered myself with the pleasing hope [of helping], I grow more and more ashamed of having indulged it'. Her failure to write had deprived him of pleasure but 'as it was one [a pleasure] I had no title to but your goodness, to withdraw it was no injustice'. While expressing solicitude, he let her know that he found her wanting and not full of love as he had hoped; he made no effort to continue the correspondence. The anger and disillusionment resulted in his feeling more separate from her, no longer merged; she was now denigrated rather than idealised. Once this had happened the experience could be viewed more objectively, the sexual feelings less disguisable as loving friendship and therefore seen for what they were; in terms of Wesley's response to Zinzendorf on the subject of sex, they would be full of 'horror'. He was left to his own devices again; and how this felt and perhaps something of what lay behind it, is movingly shown in an earlier exchange of letters with his mother.

Susanna's letter of 21 February 1732 described what the Eucharist meant to her. It is one of those letters in which she was 'led away' by the 'vast subject' of Christ's incarnation, suffering and passion, the wonder and incomprehensibility of the atonement and the mystery of the divine institution. It is an emotional torrent, full of exclamation marks and worthy of Dr. Annesley.¹⁰¹

Wesley replied agreeing with her account but added, 'Mr. Morgan and my brother were affected as they ought by the observations you made on that glorious subject. But though my understanding 'approved what was excellent', yet my heart did not feel it. Why was this ...?'¹⁰² He went on to speculate why this might be, and listed all the religious practices he had used to try to induce the feeling he sought, asking 'what shall I do to make these blessings effectual?' He said, 'Ever since you was with child with me you have renounced the world' and concludes that perhaps a similar renunciation would also help him. He then touchingly asked her to pray for him, to hold him in her mind before God: 'If you can spare me only that little part of Thursday evening which you formerly bestowed upon me in another manner, I doubt not but it would be as useful now for *correcting my heart* as it was then for *forming my judgements*' (my italics). He continued with his fears that he would not reach

¹⁰⁰ BEL, 25, 389, n.1, 390.

¹⁰¹ SW, 148-50.

¹⁰² BEL, 25, 327-30.

perfection before he died, and ended by taking his mother to task for ‘one cause of uneasiness in your behaviour to me. You have said you love me too well, and would strive to love me less. Now this it is I complain of.’ She had said that because she was soon to die, she must let go of worldly attachments. He agreed, but asserted that he was not merely a perishable worldly thing. He wrote, ‘If you think me “sick unto death”, love me the more, and you will then more fervently pray for me that I may be healed.’ He was worried about her dying and ended, ‘if you should die ... Yet a little while, and if you return not to me, you will certainly be overtaken by your dutiful and affectionate son.’

This was a cry from the heart, quite unlike his rhetoric about love to the Cotswold women. He had identified that, for his heart to be ‘correct’, she would have had to attend to him individually, and his only memory of this was the Thursday night session, as a child with her. He was also aware that his early experience of her formed his ‘judgement’ and not his ‘heart’. He was asking for attention in ‘another manner’, not just because he was now an adult, but in a manner that attended to the heart, and not merely to the judgement. He reproached her for putting doctrine, the need to abandon worldly attachments in order to approach God, before her love for him. His relating this back to his early experience suggests that it was an old and familiar pattern. He clearly identified it with his damaged ‘heart’, his ‘something missing’ which he later called ‘coldness’ or ‘deadness’.

When he left for Georgia, in 1735, he hoped to escape from women whom, by then, he was denigrating and seeing as a dangerous threat. Although the interactions with the Cotswold set formed only a brief episode in his life, the insights they give into his wish to merge with women as idealised objects, and the way sexual excitement could make him feel more alive, help an understanding of his subsequent relationships with women.

6.4.4.2 Sophy Hopkey.

From 1725 onwards, Wesley had written in his diary about ‘unclean thoughts’ and his means of avoiding them by avoiding ‘idleness, freedom with women and high-seasoned meats’, and of his fears that he may have ‘loved women or company more than God’.¹⁰³ On leaving Oxford for Georgia in October 1735, he wrote to John Burton

¹⁰³ Rack, 72.

that his main motive for going was to save his own soul, towards which end he hoped to remove himself from temptation.¹⁰⁴

Wesley's phantasy of going to Georgia was of going to an uncorrupted and primitive land, where he would remain celibate and devote himself entirely to preaching to the 'simple' heathen. He imagined them as noble savages with no comments to 'construe away the text and no philosophy to corrupt it, no sensuous, covetous, ambitious expounders to soften its unpleasing truths.' They would be willing to learn and, in their simple way, would be able to judge whether what he preached was of God. By this means, he hoped that he would learn the purity of faith and be converted himself, so that God would employ him 'both to strengthen [his] brethren and to preach his name to the gentiles, that the very ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God.'¹⁰⁵

What awaited him was quite different. He found himself ministering not to the Indians, but to the colonial community in Savannah. This was during the Trusteeship period, prior to Georgia's becoming a Crown colony in 1752. According to Rack, the community consisted of the 'worthy poor', indentured servants and self-financed settlers from England or the Carolinas.¹⁰⁶ Georgia did not fulfill the expectations of it as a haven from temptation. His relationship with Sophy Hopkey brought into focus all his ambivalence about sex and marriage; she eventually married someone else, and he finally left there in a despairing state.

Wesley met Sophy Hopkey in Savannah in March 1736. She was the seventeen-year-old niece of a Savannah shopkeeper. Wesley's account of their relationship was not published in her lifetime, and, according to Heitzenrater, was probably written for close friends and family.¹⁰⁷ The relevant period, from March 1736 to March 1737 is covered in the manuscript journal.¹⁰⁸

Wesley's biographers have found this relationship difficult to disentangle and understand. Schmidt, whose *Theological Biography* was written before the manuscript journals were available, saw the conflicts arising in the relationship in Wesley's terms. Sophy Hopkey was a temptation to be resisted in the cause of his celibacy and his mission to the Indians. Through bringing him to humiliation and despair, God 'cured him of all trust in man'. Schmidt saw this as the beginnings of a real understanding of

¹⁰⁴ BEL, 25, 439-40.

¹⁰⁵ BEL, 25,441.

¹⁰⁶ Rack, 107.

¹⁰⁷ *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, (2003), 78.

the 'sequence: sin, conflict, justification, Faith'.¹⁰⁹

Contemporary and other early biographers concentrated on whether or not Wesley had proposed to Sophy Hopkey.¹¹⁰ Hampson (1791) and Whitehead (1796) suggested that he had proposed, been rejected, and had punished her by not allowing her to attend communion. Moore, on the other hand, having had the advantage of talking to Wesley as an old man, insisted that he had 'never determined on marriage' (Moore, 1824)¹¹¹. Rack points out the difference between Wesley's early account, which is sympathetic to Sophy Hopkey, and a later one, produced in case he was taken to court, in which she is portrayed as 'morally dubious' and in which he saw himself as a much abused pastor.¹¹²

Rack faithfully reports what was said by Wesley and Hopkey during their relationship, and as with Schmidt, the emphasis is on what was said rather than on what was done. He does note, however, that Wesley was in a 'turmoil of mind' and that on one occasion he had been 'betrayed by his feelings into a proposal or perhaps worse'. He acknowledges Sophy Hopkey's bewilderment at his blowing hot and cold, at his scruples, and at the oppression of his 'asceticism and intellectualism'. Overall he describes his behaviour as 'naïve and unwise.' He sees them both as victims of Wesley's 'impossible expectations of the perfect Christian combined with the perfect wife, which also conflicted with his notions of clerical celibacy and perhaps his underlying uneasiness about marital intimacy.' He draws attention to a tendency of Wesley to involve himself in triangular relationships (there was always a rival), as shown in his relationships with Sally Kirkham, Sophy Hopkey and, later, Grace Murray, commenting that this repetition is suggestive that 'the roots of the problem [lay] in Wesley's personality'.¹¹³

The whole story of the Sophy Hopkey episode has often been told and is too long and complicated to repeat here, but there are two aspects which appear to have been ignored or played down in previous accounts, including Wesley's. The first is the gross disparity between Wesley's actions and his words, when seen from Sophy Hopkey's perspective, and the second is the likely effects of this disparity. It would have affected her behaviour towards him and this in turn would have affected his

¹⁰⁸ BEJ, 18, 365f.

¹⁰⁹ Schmidt 1, 208-212.

¹¹⁰ Rack, 124-5.

¹¹¹ See appendix for early biographies.

¹¹² Rack, 124-5.

¹¹³ Rack, 129-30.

responses to her. The focus previously has understandably been on Wesley: particularly on what he said, and on how this affected his view of himself in relation to God. For the object of his attentions, whatever Wesley's internal conflict, the contradiction between the intentions and feelings conveyed verbally and those conveyed through non-verbal behaviour must have induced great feelings of confusion, if not of being mad. The extent of this is not conveyed by Rack's idea of her bewilderment at his blowing hot and cold, though this was part of it.

The power differential in the relationship was considerable. Wesley was older and superior to Sophy Hopkey in intellect and status, and his role was that of her pastor and teacher. From his first account, while beginning with an intention to have 'no intimacy with any woman in America', on 13 March 1736 he found himself talking to Sophy Hopkey about 'inward holiness', as part of a plan to speak to every communicant weekly. He claimed to have disliked her 'reserved manner' at first, but said he was persuaded by others to help her with her problems, regarding a previous relationship with a 'notorious villain'; he was deeply affected by her tearful distress and began to see her every two to three days. He wrote that he was careful to 'speak only on things pertaining to God'; but one day at the end of July, after talking for sometime 'I took her hand and, before we parted, kissed her'. He wrote, 'And from this time I fear there was a mixture in my intention, though I was not soon sensible of it.'¹¹⁴

His account indicates that, two weeks later, others were urging him to spend time with Sophy Hopkey because of her distress about her former suitor, and because 'none but he' could comfort her. He agreed and told her he believed that God had committed her to his charge: 'therefore in all my intercourse with her [I told her] I should look upon her as one of my sisters, and omit nothing in my power which might be conducive to her giving herself up to God. I was both pleased and surprised with the good sense, piety and gratitude of her reply'. Having previously kissed her, he was trying to turn the relationship back into one as between siblings, but at the same time stressing her importance to him and thus causing confusion in her mind. He then listed the religious books that he had read and explained to her, and recorded that he had accepted her offer to sit at his bedside when he developed a fever. She had said 'If Mr. Wesley dies, I shall lose the only friend I ever had in the world.' and he wrote that 'She desired me the next day, if it [the fever] returned, to send immediately. I did

¹¹⁴ BEJ, 18, 365-7.

so, and she instantly came, sat by my bed, read several prayers and prepared whatever I wanted with a diligence, care and tenderness not to be expressed.¹¹⁵ Taking into account the difference in their situations, all this was a very powerful way of making her feel singled out and of special significance to him. It is not surprising that from this time, as the evidence in Wesley's account shows, she wanted a different relationship from that of teacher and pupil. If he was absent, she became 'scarce a shadow of what she was when [he] left her',¹¹⁶ and she provoked him to declare himself in various ways. For instance, on one occasion, she told him she could no longer struggle to fulfil his religious expectations of her. He wrote that all her religious resolutions had 'vanished away' and 'to complete her destruction, she was resolved to return to England.' He read to her from Law's *Serious Call* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and begged her to pray, all without success. It was only when he 'pressed her on the head of friendship', that she responded. She burst into tears and said, 'Now my resolutions begin to stagger.'¹¹⁷ By threatening to leave, she had managed to elicit some evidence of his feelings for her.

This pattern repeated itself throughout the year of their relationship and was particularly evident in Wesley's account of the week-long boat journey they made together from Frederica to Savannah in October 1736. Wesley rationalised his decision to travel with her by noting that James Oglethorpe, the governor of Georgia had suggested it, and that he also felt protected by his 'desire and design to live a single life' and by Sophy Hopkey's intention to live singly (she had once announced that if she could not marry her previous suitor, she would not marry at all).¹¹⁸ A boat crew was with them, but Wesley wrote that they spent four nights in the open air, sleeping on the ground beside a fire where 'none but the All-seeing Eye observed us'; 'To him alone be praise that we both withheld from anything that the world counts as evil'. But he had doubts about these sentiments and quoted St. Cyprian, resorting to Latin; 'Certe ipse complexus, ipsa confabulatio et osculatio, quantum dedecoris et criminis confitetur!' [Assuredly the fact of lying together, embracing and kissing, constitutes a confession of unseemly misbehaviour.'].¹¹⁹

Interestingly, neither Rack, nor Heitzenrater quotes the Latin passage, though Heitzenrater does quote large parts of this journal entry. Schmidt writes that Sophy

¹¹⁵ BEJ, 18, 408-9.

¹¹⁶ BEJ, 18, 430.

¹¹⁷ BEJ, 18, 433.

¹¹⁸ BEJ, 18, 435.

Hopkey was extremely depressed, and this observation would seem to stem from Wesley's description of her the following morning.¹²⁰ He asked, as they were crossing the Doby Sound, in a high wind on a rough sea, whether or not she was afraid to die. She replied, 'No I don't desire to live any longer. O that God would let me go now! Then I should be at rest. In this world I expect nothing but misery.'¹²¹ This sounds more like an angry outburst from a confused, exasperated and possibly sea-sick adolescent, than evidence of severe depression; and this is confirmed by Wesley's description of her subsequent behaviour, when he was 'amazed' by her perfect demeanour, her patient suffering of discomfort and particularly the mixture in her of 'seriousness and sweetness'. This last was one of his favourite attributes in a woman. The calm did not last long; when he asked her how far she considered herself engaged to her previous suitor, she answered provocatively, 'I have promised either to marry him or to marry no one at all'.¹²² Wesley, as the 'expression of a sudden wish', said 'Miss Sophy, I should think myself happy if I was to spend my life with you'. Bursting into tears, she said, 'I am every way unhappy. I won't have Tommy for he is a bad man. And I can have none else'. She suggested they should avoid talking about marriage and he agreed. Again, on this occasion she succeeded in provoking him to express his feelings, but remained confused by his contradictory messages.

Having described the return to Savannah, the journal continues with a long account of Sophy's idealised qualities: there is no guile in her; she is all stillness and attention; she is content with bread and water, patient of heat or cold; is mild, gentle, long-suffering, sympathetic, tender, compassionate and possessed of every other possible virtue. At this point he began to be 'much afraid' and unsure how long he could sustain his intention to be celibate. Nevertheless, he continued to spend long periods of time with her, teaching her French and reading about and discussing religious matters. However, sometimes he could 'not avoid using some familiarity or other which was not needful'. 'Sometimes I put my arm around her waist, sometimes took her by the hand, and sometimes kissed her'. In order to 'put a short stop' to this, he told her he was worried his behaviour might lead her to doubt his sincerity, and that he would now speak to her, not as a lover, but a friend', and that he would never touch

¹¹⁹ BEJ, 18, 436.

¹²⁰ Schmidt, 1, 197.

¹²¹ BEJ, 18, 436.

¹²² BEJ, 18, 438.

her again. This resolution lasted for ten days.¹²³ This cycle of spending time with her, showing physical affection, responding to provocation to express his feelings, and then resolving to have a platonic relationship, occurred repeatedly.

After a similar episode in February 1737, after he had told her that he had resolved, if he married at all, not to do so until after he had 'been among the Indians', she responded by saying that she no longer needed to learn French and that she would no longer come to his house.¹²⁴ When he visited her a week later, he found her 'in such a temper as [he] never saw her before, sharp, fretful and disputatious'. She then 'awaked as out of sleep' and told him she had been very ill, 'scarce in her senses' and hoped he would attribute her behaviour to her illness.¹²⁵

It is not surprising that shortly after this, she told him she was about to marry a Mr. Williamson; but even here she gave him an opportunity to intervene, 'Sir, I have given my consent - unless you have anything to object'. Wesley wondered whether he was being provoked, whether this 'was not artifice, merely designed to quicken me'. Although he was miserable at the thought of her marrying somebody else, he found that he could not prevent it by marrying her himself. He continued to seek her out repeatedly, they cried together, and she gave numerous hints of her feelings for him and opportunities to declare himself. He was in a state of turmoil:

'Tis hard to describe the complication of passion and tumult of thought which I then felt. Fear of her approaching misery and tender pity; grief at my own loss; love shooting through all the recesses of my soul, and sharpening every thought and passion. Underneath was a faint desire to do and suffer the will of God; which joined to my doubt that the proposal would not be accepted, was strong enough to prevent my saying, (what I wonder to this hour I did not say), Miss Sophy will you marry me?'¹²⁶

In another conversation, they were interrupted just before he 'said too much', and, once reprieved, he wrote that felt he was once more 'snatched as a brand from the burning.'¹²⁷ Her intending husband, eventually put a stop to the meetings, telling Wesley that after they had met previously, 'she would neither eat nor speak for two hours, but was crying continually, and in such agony she was fit for nothing'.¹²⁸

¹²³ BEJ, 18, 442.

¹²⁴ BEJ, 18, 472.

¹²⁵ BEJ, 18, 474.

¹²⁶ BEJ, 18, 484-5.

¹²⁷ BEJ, 18, 482.

On 8 March 1737, when the engagement to Williamson was formalised, Wesley described several hours of agitation and distress. He wrote that he had never previously had such a feeling: 'God let loose my inordinate affection upon me, and the poison thereof drank up my spirit. I was as stupid as if but half awake, and yet in the sharpest pain I ever felt. ... I was weary of the world, of light, of life'. He tried to pray but was unable to: 'Then indeed the snares of death were about me; the pains of hell overtook me. Yet I struggled for life, and though I had neither words nor thoughts, I lifted my eyes to the Prince that is highly exalted, and supplied the place of them, as I could, 'with groanings, which cannot be uttered' [Rom 8: 26]. And about four o'clock he so far took the cup from me that I drank so deeply of it no more'.¹²⁹

On 10 April, Wesley heard from a servant who had been close to Sophy Hopkey that she had been associating with Williamson for some months before she announced her intentions to marry.¹³⁰ He was angry: he felt that he had been deceived and that she had acted without consulting him. For these failings, for failing to attend communion over a period, and finally for failing to inform him when she did intend to attend, he excluded her from communion; and she was turned away on 7 August.¹³¹ Prior to this however he had remonstrated with her about her behaviour. She had been angry and protested her innocence. He also wrote her what he described as a 'mild and friendly' letter, outlining her faults including 'guile' and 'deliberate dissimulation', 'O how fallen! How changed! Surely there was a time when in Miss Sophy's lips there was no guile'. Four days later she had a miscarriage; this was attributed by her aunt to the 'chiding' she had received, and to the 'unkind letter'. Wesley reported the miscarriage in his journal but made no further comment.¹³²

As with the Cotswold group, Wesley here was involved in a relationship in which he felt merged with an idealised good object, where the content of the conversation was the love and goodness of God; his goodness was projected into Sophy Hopkey and he encouraged her to grow and become more perfect through his teaching. She was 'eminently teachable', struggled to fulfil his expectations, and let him know that he was indispensable to her. 'You showed yourself my friend indeed at a time when no one else would have afforded me any more than common pity'.¹³³ All

¹²⁸ BEJ, 18, 487.

¹²⁹ BEJ, 18, 486

¹³⁰ BEJ, 18, 497.

¹³¹ BEJ, 18, 534.

¹³² BEJ, 18, 521-6.

¹³³ BEJ, 18, 477.

of this would have tended to promote a sense of union. Such was the sense of partaking, through his merged state, of intermingled human and divine love, that he felt full of goodness, and at the same time enlivened by his sexual feelings. As a result of this almost intoxicating mix, again he disregarded the proprieties and put himself in compromising situations. Also in this merged state, he could identify with Sophy Hopkey in distress because she was part of him, and he expressed sorrow for her grief; but she could not be seen as a person in her own right, only as a reflection of his own ideals. He was sexually attracted to her, but this intense attraction was felt as equally intensely dangerous. When reprieved from it he felt like a brand snatched from the fire, and fire for him must have had particularly terrifying associations with his own death and destruction. Schmidt writes about this conflict about his sexuality, as did Wesley, in terms of his decision to be celibate, but the events described raise the question as to whether celibacy was used as a protection from a fear that a consummated sexual relationship would result in the loss or destruction of himself. The idea of it appeared utterly desirable, but also utterly lethal, and this would have led to his confusing, ambivalent behaviour.

His reaction to Sophy Hopkey's acting against his approval, without his knowledge or control, in other words asserting her separateness from him, resulted in the almost unbearable feelings he described. There was a feeling of being abandoned and torn apart from his merged state with Sophy and temporarily with God. God 'let[ting] loose his inordinate affection' on him, so that the poison drank up his spirit, suggests that he felt overwhelmed and poisoned by the anger and hate at being abandoned. A merger with an idealised object prevents the experiencing of any anger, envy or hatred within the relationship.¹³⁴ However, having been forcibly separated, he was left, full of devouring need, anger and hatred, 'the pains of Hell'. Eventually having looked up 'with groanings that cannot be uttered' he managed to feel that his other good object, God, was restored to him. Once he became angry and felt separate from Sophy Hopkey, she was then denigrated and there was an absence of real concern for her.

6.4.4.3 Grace Murray

¹³⁴ Herbert Rosenfeld, *Impasse and Interpretation*, (London/New York: Tavistock Publications, 1987), 21-3.

As Rack points out, there are similarities between Wesley's relationship with Grace Murray during 1748-9, and that with Sophy Hopkey.¹³⁵ He intended to marry Grace Murray, but delayed and hesitated, prevaricating about his priorities. After a long and complicated series of events, she too married another man. However, there were also significant differences. Although, it involved a similar idealisation and involvement in a triangular situation, Wesley was older (45) and his views on marriage had changed. Wesley clearly indicated his intention to marry Grace Murray by going so far as to take part in a ceremony of formal espousal, an espousal 'de Praesenti'.¹³⁶

The letter to his Charles (25 September 1749), already quoted, which outlined his objections to marriage from his youth up, also detailed the reasons for his change of heart. While he had previously taken to heart St. Paul's words in Corinthians 7: 32-3, that an unmarried man could more fully devote himself to God, he now quoted Hebrews 13:4, 'The bed is undefiled, and no necessary hindrance to the highest perfection'. This and Bishop Beveridge's *Codex Consiliorum* resulted in a change of mind, and he felt it was 'much better to marry than to burn'.¹³⁷

The letter continued with his reasons for wanting to marry Grace Murray and the ways in which he thought she would be good for him. She was a widow, in her thirties, and very involved in pastoral care within the Methodist movement. It is clear that he knew her well: she was house-keeper in the Orphan House in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He saw her as a defence '(under God) against unholy desires and inordinate affections - which I never did entirely conquer for six months together before my intercourse with her'. He also thought he would be guarded against 'inordinate affection of women'; they would have less 'hope of success' and his conversations with them would be 'more sparing'.

Despite this account being entirely about his own needs, and about her qualities as they were useful to him, there is evidence that he somewhat was more in touch with his real situation than he had been in Georgia. However, some elements of the description of how he saw Grace Murray fitting into his life suggest a quite striking grandiosity. Having written about the amazing 'fruits of her labours' and recounted how many people had received remission of sins in the groups she had led, he wrote:

¹³⁵ Rack, 258.

¹³⁶ *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 167.

¹³⁷ BEL, 26, 380-7.

I particularly insist on this. If ever I have a wife, she ought to be the most useful woman in the kingdom- not barely one who probably *may* be so (I could not be content to run such a hazard) but one that is undeniably so. Now, show me the woman in England or Ireland, who has already done as much good as GM. I will say more. Show me one in all the English annals whom God hath employed in so high a degree! I might say, in all the history of the Church, from the death of our Lord to this day. This is no hyperbole ... who is so proper to be my wife?

Here she had become an extension of him, not a person in her own right. In the same letter, he dismissed all objections that might be raised to the match: that she was low-born; that she had been his servant; that she had already travelled with him, giving rise to gossip; and that she was already engaged to another (John Bennett). After many complicated to-ings and fro-ings, and encouraged by Charles Wesley, who thought that a marriage between Grace Murray and his brother would destroy the Methodist movement, she married Bennet. Wesley's consultations with others, his hesitations and delays, ensured that she, like Sophy Hopkey, married somebody else.¹³⁸ Here other factors were influential, such as Charles's determined opposition and Grace Murray's ambivalence, but had he been determined, and had he not had a certain ambivalence of his own, he could have overridden both of these, as his subsequent marriage to Mary Vazeille demonstrated.

The relationship with Grace Murray showed evidence of a greater capacity than previously to understand the kind of woman who would be helpful to him personally and in his work. However, his idealisation of her and his grandiose claims for her goodness, of which, because he felt merged with her, he could partake, demonstrate that the same dynamic was operating as previously. In spite of his protestations of devoted love and his belief that she would be a perfect wife, his ambivalence asserted itself and the marriage did not occur. It seems that he was not as convinced as he thought he was, that the 'bed was undefiled' and that even marriage did not protect from the pit of fire he associated with fornication.

As with the Cotswold women and with Sophie Hopkey, his difficulty expressing his grief and anger about these events, was evident in two letters he wrote to Grace Murray¹³⁹ and John Bennet¹⁴⁰ subsequently. He clearly *was* very angry, although the letter to Grace Murray is superficially solicitous. He managed to make her feel uncomfortable by ensuring that she knew he was in a state of mind in which

¹³⁸ Rack, 261.

¹³⁹ BEL, 26, 408,(9/2/50)

he had had ideas about wanting to die: 'God forbid that I should cease to pray for you as long as I am in the body. This morning my eyes were filled with tears of joy, from a hope that my time here is short. Many times in the day I commend you to God. May his grace supply all your wants!'

6.4.4.4 Mary Vazeille

In February 1751, Wesley told his brother Charles that he was resolved to marry.¹⁴¹ His marriage may have been in an attempt to quash rumour-mongering about him, which was rife. Usually, he did not respond to such rumours, but on this occasion, the last straw seems to have been the repetition by the Bishop of Exeter, of a story about Wesley's having tried to seduce a maid in an inn at Mitchel. Wesley attempted to exonerate himself, but the rumour was repeated in print.¹⁴² Soon after this, he precipitately married Mary Vazeille, whom he hardly knew. Unlike Grace Murray, she was not steeped in Methodism, nor did she share his priorities. She was the widow of a wealthy London merchant with two sons and two daughters, and to prevent speculation about his being a fortune-hunter, Wesley settled her £10,000 property on her and the children.¹⁴³ He had informed Charles at the very last minute, so that it was impossible for him to interfere. Charles was 'thunderstruck', and wrote in his journal, '[I] groaned under my own and other people's burden. I could eat no pleasant food. nor preach, nor rest, either by night or by day.'¹⁴⁴ Charles had met Mary Vazeille previously and referred to her as 'a woman of sorrowful spirit'.¹⁴⁵

The early letters between Wesley and his wife were affectionate, but from the beginning he was very insistent in urging her to become involved in good works. They married in February 1751, and on 11 March he wrote with a list of demands, among which were, 'Do you neglect none of your temporal business? Have you wrote to Spain? And sold your jewels? ... Do not you forget the poor? Have you visited prison?'.¹⁴⁶

Wesley continued with his travelling and was absent a great deal. She tried accompanying him initially, but found it too arduous. As the marriage progressed, she

¹⁴⁰ BEL, 26, 392 (11/11/1749)

¹⁴¹ CW, 602.

¹⁴² *The Evangelist of Desire*, 36.

¹⁴³ Rack, 265.

¹⁴⁴ CW, II, 602.

¹⁴⁵ Rack, 264-5.

became increasingly suspicious of his activities, accusing him of involvement with other women, and even of adultery. She opened his letters (he had originally given permission for her to do this), using the contents to embarrass him and to demonstrate the truth of her accusations. Rack writes of her 'pathological jealousy, suspicion and uncontrollable rage,' and quotes Hampson's biography, which tells of Mrs. Wesley having been interrupted, 'foaming with rage, with her husband on the floor, and some hair in her hand, torn out by the roots'.¹⁴⁷ Rack concludes, having made all the allowances he can, that she was of 'jealous and possessive temperament', easily spilling over into 'mental instability, tinged with sexual jealousy'. But he admits that though she was 'constitutionally neurotic', Wesley was the 'worst possible partner for her', and that his attempts to explain his point of view and calm her down reduced her to 'helpless fury'.

There was a great deal of unhappiness; the problems became increasingly serious, until eventually she left him. There were reconciliations and further separations, until a final separation was confirmed in his last letter to her in October 1778. When she died and was buried in 1781, he was not aware of it till several days later.

Three brief comments in Wesley's journal shed light on his feelings about his marriage and his attitude to his wife:

1) Having married Mrs. Vazeille, he was reported in 'an apology' to the London Society as saying that he 'took up his cross, and married'.¹⁴⁸

2) The Journal entry for 31 January 1754 makes a brief mention of his wife returning to the bedside of her dying son, who later died. There is no evidence that Wesley thought it necessary to support her at this time.¹⁴⁹

3) In August 1768, having heard his wife was dangerously ill, he took a chaise from Bristol to London to see her and arrived at one o'clock in the morning. He wrote, 'Finding the fever had turned, and the danger over, about two I set out again, and in the afternoon came (not at all tired) to Bristol'.¹⁵⁰

These examples suggest that he looked on his wife as an unavoidable burden he was responsible for, but that she did not occupy his thoughts for longer than he could help. A diagnosis of 'pathological jealousy', hinted at by Rack, depends on a

¹⁴⁶ BEL, 26, 451.

¹⁴⁷ Rack, 266-7.

¹⁴⁸ CW, II, 603.

¹⁴⁹ Waller, John Wesley, 100, BEJ 20, 484.

variety of factors and implies a *delusional* belief that a partner is being unfaithful. It often involves some of the behaviour reported of Mrs. Wesley, such as the opening of letters, the searching for evidence and the outbursts of rage, sometimes even murderous rage. However, before applying this label it is important to have some knowledge of the behaviour of the partner, and also to add that the fact that a person is pathologically jealous does not exclude infidelity on the part of the partner. Before commenting further on this diagnosis, therefore, it is necessary to examine Wesley's relationships with other women in the Methodist movement.

6.4.4.5 Correspondence with Women

In addition to the relationships discussed, Wesley was in contact with many other women and with some of these he maintained a correspondence over a long period of time. Schmidt dated these letters from 1757,¹⁵¹ but there is evidence that they began before he married. A letter to James Hutton (14 May 1739), mentions a Miss S. Burdock, and Baker notes that at least eighteen letters were exchanged between Wesley and Burdock between June and October of that year.¹⁵² As Baker also points out, most of the women were single, separated or widowed, and 'usually his correspondence with those who were single dried up after they married, whether through motives of prudence or courtesy.'¹⁵³ According to Schmidt, there were fourteen correspondents, from whom letters are available; the longest correspondence lasted thirty-two years, but usually they lasted from ten to fifteen years.¹⁵⁴

Much of the content of the letters concerned the work the women did in the society, and their spiritual progress. Wesley was tireless in his interest: he had a vast capacity for remembering details of their situations, and his efforts to encourage them and exhort them to greater works of goodness never flagged. 'Perfection' was a constant theme, as he urged them towards inner and outer holiness. Schmidt has written about these letters as an important part of Wesley's pastoral work, which included 'earnest and lively discussion about the spiritual foundations and external life-forms of the Methodist movement,' and he suggests that '[p]ersonal matters took second place to objective questions and tasks, but without them being completely

¹⁵⁰ BEJ 22, 152 (14/8/1768)

¹⁵¹ Schmidt, 2(ii), 142.

¹⁵² BEL, 25, 69 and n.6.

¹⁵³ BEL, 25, 86.

suppressed'.¹⁵⁵ To examine the form of the letters, the style, the language, and the patterns they follow, is not to ignore or diminish this conscious attempt to teach and offer pastoral care; nor is it to fail to acknowledge its usefulness. It is an attempt to understand any other functions these relationships might have performed for Wesley in helping to maintain his mental equilibrium. There is a vast correspondence, and it is possible to give only a few examples to demonstrate a pattern repeated over and over again.

Most of the women were in their late 'teens or twenties, though of course several of his long term correspondents were growing older, as he was. He was not immune to feminine beauty or 'comeliness', but was particularly attracted by what he called 'sweet seriousness', where 'seriousness' had the older meaning of being concerned with religious matters. He liked simple 'puritan' dress. To Ann Bolton (12 August 1770), he ended, 'The spirit of your last letter engages me much. I dearly love seriousness and sweetness mixed together'.¹⁵⁶ And to Mary Bishop, who ran one of the Methodist schools (21 May 1781), he expressed anxiety that, in some of the children in another of their schools, some of the 'simplicity' had been lost, that '[m]ore of the world seems to be crept in'. He wanted 'good breeding' to be preserved without affectation.¹⁵⁷ He exhorted her to, 'Make such Christians as Miranda¹⁵⁸... Let it be said of the young women you educate, Grace was in all her steps, heaven in her eye, / In all her gestures sanctity and love).¹⁵⁹ It was this combination of grace, gentility, seriousness, simplicity, purity and lack of affectation, that he found irresistible.

As in the other relationships, there was a strong element of idealisation, particularly at the beginning of a correspondence. Even at the age of 84, he wrote to Hetty Rogers (12 October 1787) of a young woman he had recently met in the Channel Islands: 'Jane Bisson I saw every day. She is nineteen years old, about the size of Miss Ritchie, and has a peculiar mixture of seriousness, sprightliness, and sweetness, both in her looks and behaviour. Wherever we were, she was the servant of all. I think she exceeds Madame Guyon in deep communion with God.'¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ Schmidt, 2(ii), 142

¹⁵⁵ Schmidt, 2(ii), 145

¹⁵⁶ Telford v, 197.

¹⁵⁷ Telford vii, 62-3.

¹⁵⁸ Miranda was the subject of Chapter vii of Law's *Serious Call*. Described by Telford as 'A Sober reasonable Christian' (Tel. vii, 63)

¹⁵⁹ From Milton's *Paradise Lost*, viii. 488-9. 'In every gesture dignity and love' (Telford vii, 63)

¹⁶⁰ Telford, viii, 18

Wesley's image of these women was often that they were vulnerable, small (even infantile), in need of protection and dependent on God's care and forgiveness, but also on him; the language he used established and maintained the relationship in these terms. For instance, he wrote to a 'Miss March' (11 November 1760), 'I believe I understand your state better than you do yourself. Do not perplex yourself at all about what you call it. ... Certainly you do need more faith; for you are a sickly, tender plant'.¹⁶¹ And to Ann Bolton (21 December 1770), 'But you need to be nursed like a little child. Therefore write soon and freely to ...'.¹⁶²

The promotion of this image of weakness and vulnerability, together with his encouragement of 'openness' and the assurance he gave of confidentiality, all tended to foster dependency. As he wrote, in his second letter to Mary Stokes (4 April 1771), 'There is a sweetness and friendliness in your spirit, which is exceeding agreeable to me. And you have an openness withal which makes it the more pleasing. Let nothing rob you of this; ... Only know to whom you speak and then you cannot be too free. Open the window in your breast. I pray never be afraid of writing too large letters: you must not measure yours by mine; for I have a little more business than you ... Your weakness and tenderness of constitution, without great care, may prove a snare to you.'¹⁶³

The dependence on Wesley is conflated with his urging his 'needy' correspondents to depend on Christ for their help and succour. For instance, he wrote to Elizabeth Briggs (31 May 1771), 'as yet you are but a little child, just a babe in the pure love of Christ. As a little child, hang upon Him, and simply expect a supply of all your wants. In this respect reasoning profits you nothing; it is just the opposite to believing, whereby you hearken to the inward voice, which says, 'Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.'¹⁶⁴

The imagery often had an erotic quality, as it did in this letter. It was evident in his letters to Ann Loxdale, whom he met in March 1781. In his first letter, he says she reminds him of 'Miss Ritchie', and that they both 'breathe the same spirit'. That such comparisons occurred frequently suggests there was a commonality in the role they fulfilled for Wesley, similar to the interchangeability of the Cotswold women. Also in the first letter, he wrote, 'Your heart is toward mine as mine is toward thee:

¹⁶¹ Telford iv, 109.

¹⁶² Telford v, 216.

¹⁶³ Telford v, 236.

¹⁶⁴ Telford v, 254-5.

there need be no reserve between us. I hope you will always “think aloud” whenever you speak or write to me’¹⁶⁵ Having written a second letter, mainly about the hazards of reading the mystics, and referring her to his own *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*,¹⁶⁶ in a third letter (14 July, 1781), which first counselled her about a ‘nervous illness’, he ended, ‘You remind me of what occurred when my dear Hetty Roe first mentioned you to me. I almost wondered I should feel so much regard for one I had never seen! But I can taste your spirit, and rejoice to find that you are so near.’¹⁶⁷ In March, when she was struggling in what he calls the ‘furnace of adversity’, he wrote, ‘You say, ‘I do not know whither I am going’. I will tell you whither. You are going the straight way to be swallowed up in God ...’.¹⁶⁸

There are many other examples, but four will suffice:

1) to Ann Bolton (25 October 1772), ‘I long to have you more and more deeply penetrated by humble, gentle, patient love’;¹⁶⁹

2) to Jane Bisson (17 December 1787), ‘I have great union of spirit with you ... What you speak of your communion with Him comforts and warms my heart. I love to hear or read any part of your experience.... I want to be more acquainted with you and to know everything wherein I can serve you’;¹⁷⁰

3) to Jane Bisson (20 February 1788), ‘There is something in your spirit that does me good, that softens and quickens me too: but at the same time that melancholy thought occurs, that it is doubtful I shall ever have the satisfaction of taking you by the hand again.’ This letter continued with warnings that, in all her innocence, she could never avoid ‘censure’ but she could rely on ‘one Friend that never fails and is always near. ‘What a comfort it is that He is about your bed and about your path, still laying His hand upon you. Does he speak to you in dreams and visions of the night? or wholly in your waking hours? I love to hear and read your experience of his goodness’;¹⁷¹

4) his first response to Miss S. Burdock, whom he later refers to as ‘Sally’ or ‘Suky’, when he first met her following a religious meeting in Bristol in 1739. ‘About six thousand were at Rose Green, where I was desired by a young woman to go into her chariot, whom I found quite awakened, and longing for Christ, after having been

¹⁶⁵ Telford vii, 53.

¹⁶⁶ Telford vii, 66-7.

¹⁶⁷ Telford vii, 73-4.

¹⁶⁸ Telford vii, 113.

¹⁶⁹ Telford v, 342.

¹⁷⁰ Telford viii, 26-7.

for some time the finest, gayest thing in Bristol.’ According to Baker, many letters were exchanged between them that summer, in one of which she wrote, ‘I believe I love you as well as I do papa.’ She asked him to keep the correspondence secret and to return her letters, in case her parents found them, or he was suddenly ‘taken away’. Baker notes that she was subsequently forbidden to associate with a woman at whose house she had occasionally met Wesley. She was not allowed to ‘consort with Methodists’, but it is not clear whether this was on religious or other grounds; there was a sense that it was thought that Wesley was not a good influence on her.¹⁷²

In the early stages of the correspondence with these women, there was usually a sense of excitement: Wesley wrote frequently, urging them to tell him their worries and stressing the confidential nature of the exchange. He emphasised their ‘sameness’, nearness, and unity, and their special significance to him; he showed evidence of agitation if they showed signs of ‘cooling’ towards him, or towards God. Both at the beginning, and if their letters became less frequent, he would include a long list of questions, urging introspection and encouraging confidences.

An example of his persistent questioning and his fear of ‘cooling’, can be found in a letter to Hetty Roe (16 September 1776), ‘As I did not receive yours of August 28 before my return from Cornwall, I was beginning to grow a little apprehensive lest your love was growing cold’. He was reassured by a further letter, but after discussing practical Methodist matters, he went on with a stream of questions: ‘Do you feel no intermission in your happiness in Him? Does He ‘bid you even in sleep go on’? What do you usually dream of? Do you never find any lowness of spirits? Is there never any time that hangs upon your hands? How is your health? Are you entirely free of your cough and the pain in your side? You see how inquisitive I am, because everything relating to *you* nearly concerns *me*. I once thought I could not be well acquainted with one till many years had elapsed. And yet I am as well acquainted with you as if I had known you from infancy. ... You are *now* my joy and comfort.’¹⁷³

The way Wesley himself viewed his reactions is seen in a letter to Miss March, which showed how he lost his sense of separateness: ‘When I speak or write to you, I have you before my eyes, but, generally speaking, I do not think of myself at all. I do not think whether I am wise or foolish, knowing or ignorant; but I see you aiming at

¹⁷¹ Telford viii, 38.

¹⁷² BEL 25,649,n.4.

¹⁷³ Telford vi, 231-2.

glory and immortality'.¹⁷⁴ However, there is some suggestion that he thought he might be on dangerous territory. 'I speak of myself very little to any one, were it only for fear of hurting *them*. I have found exceeding few that could bear it; so that I am constrained to repress my natural openness. I scarce find any temptation from any *thing* in the world; my danger is from *persons*. Oh for a heart to praise my God,/ A heart from sin set free!'¹⁷⁵

It seems also that one of his brothers (probably Charles) had some concerns about his effect on women. In one of John Wesley's letters to Mary Bosanquet (26 March 1770), he wrote, 'You need a steady guide, and one that knows you well. If my brother had not given Mrs. Gaussen that fatal advice, "to keep from me", she would not have fallen into the hands of others.'¹⁷⁶

Before trying to make sense of his relationships with women using psychoanalytic theory, it is necessary to look at a variety of psychological defences Wesley used in order to help him to deal with the conflicts and feelings which disturbed him.

6.4.5 Psychological defences.

6.4.5.1 Blotting out destructiveness.

John Wesley was preoccupied with self-examination and with striving for perfection. But, as Schmidt pointed out, when he attempted to examine his own failings, particularly at times of crisis (for example in his relationship with Grace Murray), he saw his fault not as having done something wrong, but as 'only and solely in his not having pursued his course to its logical conclusion'. He thought he had let his love for Grace Murray and John Bennet blind him to the fact that they were deceiving him. In his relations with members of the movement, he blamed himself for 'not being severe enough, rather than for being too gentle'.¹⁷⁷

He had a capacity to blot out instances when he had been hurtful to others. This is well seen in his account of his feelings on the return journey from Georgia. In an account he prepared for possible future court proceedings, his deep fears about his

¹⁷⁴ Telford v, 193. (6/7/1770).

¹⁷⁵ Telford vii, 19. (To Sarah Crosby, 11/4/1780).

¹⁷⁶ Telford v, 187.

¹⁷⁷ Schmidt, 2(ii), 171.

own aggression are heard in the mouths of his accusers in Georgia, The account reads, as that of a 'long-suffering, ill-used servant of God ... who has been misled by the wiles of a beautiful young woman'. In it Wesley wrote, '[an] account given of me to all company was that I was "a sly hypocrite, a seducer, a betrayer of my trust, an egregious lyer and dissembler, an endeavourer to alienate the affections of married women from their husbands"'. There were more extreme accusations, including that of "murderer of poor infants by plunging into cold water"; and Wesley believed he was seen as 'in a word, such a monster, "that the people would rather die than suffer him to go on thus"'.¹⁷⁸ These nightmarish accusations must have resonated with his own deep fears about himself; but he was unable to make any conscious connection between them and his own hurtfulness, and they were dismissed as unthinkable or absurd.

He was not untouched by such fears of his own destructiveness, however, and his journal account of his feelings six days after embarking on his voyage home described a state of distress, with depressed mood, agitation and anxiety. He found the 'unaccountable apprehensions of I know not what danger (the wind being small and the sea smooth), which had been upon me for several days, increase, I cried earnestly for help, and it pleased God as in a moment to restore peace to my soul.' He gained a temporary peace through prayer, but concluded that, 'whoever is uneasy on any account (bodily pain excepted) carries in himself his own conviction that he is so far an unbeliever.'¹⁷⁹ Five days later, he felt 'sorrowful and very heavy', though unable to give a reason for it, and he felt 'utterly unwilling' to instruct the people on the boat as he usually did. In the evening he did manage to teach one of the cabin-boys and felt 'much easier'.¹⁸⁰ A week later, he was chastising himself for lack of faith, forgetfulness of God except at times when he feared death, and pride in previously believing that he could gain holiness through his own efforts. Having gone to Georgia to save his soul and convert the heathen, he now felt farther than ever from being a Christian, instead feeling 'much nearer that mystery of Satan'. He then described being saved from being 'sunk wholly' by reading St. Cyprian's words, 'O my soul, come not thou into their secret! 'Stand thou in the good old paths'.¹⁸¹ This inspired him to preach again; and having resolved to preach, his 'spirit revived'. He

¹⁷⁸ *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 86.

¹⁷⁹ BEJ 18, 207.

¹⁸⁰ BEJ 18, 207.

¹⁸¹ BEJ 18, 209.

wrote that ‘from this day I had no more of that fearfulness and heaviness which before almost continually weighed me down’.

In this way he was rescued from a state of spiritual depression, which he called being ‘in orco’ (in the infernal regions). He argued against those (the mystics), who would advocate his continuing to struggle in the ‘infernal regions’ as a way of achieving spiritual growth, those who would suggest that this recovery, ‘this unseasonable relief was a curse, not a blessing’. He described those in favour of this ‘wretched hypothesis’ (the advocacy of remaining ‘in orco’), as blasphemers against the ‘good gift of God’.¹⁸² And yet four days later, as they approached Land’s End, he was praying for his deliverance from his fear of death and again he was lamenting his unconverted state: ‘I went to America to convert the Indians, but Oh! who shall convert me?’ and.¹⁸³ On 29 January, when Lizard Point was in view, he wrote that he had ‘fallen short of the glory of God; my whole heart is corrupt and abominable, ... I am a child of wrath, an heir of hell; ... having the sentence of death in my heart, and having nothing *in* or *of* myself to plead, I have no hope, but that of being justified freely “through the redemption that is in Jesus”’.¹⁸⁴

6.4.5.2 Sin ‘absorbed in and through speech’

He had labelled his inner badness ‘corruption and abomination’, and cried out for it to be purged by the ‘fire that never shall be quenched’.¹⁸⁵ He hoped for this, but could not accept that it could happen; he could only blot out the agitation it caused him by activity and preaching. Although his dark side could be labelled in this way, the actual hurt he had caused others by his behaviour could not be faced. Alongside his uneasiness, depression, and prayers for redemption, went his self-justification that Sophy Hopkey was deceitful and ungrateful. To address her miscarriage, and his own behaviour in Georgia, would have been to confront his fears relating to his sexuality and his destructive or even murderous anger and hatred, and this could not be borne.

In order for it to be manageable, his dark side, labelled ‘corruption and abomination’, had to be converted into a more ‘acceptable’ sin. His fear and agitation were attributed to his belief that he was ‘so far an unbeliever’; and rather than dwell

¹⁸² BEJ 18, 210-1.

¹⁸³ 24 Jan. 1738, BE 18, 211.

¹⁸⁴ BEJ 18, 215.

¹⁸⁵ BEJ 18, 215.

on the actual nature of the 'corruption and abomination', he could deal with his unbelief by reverting to the 'good old paths'. In Kristevan terms, 'sin is what is absorbed - in and through speech' and the 'abject' is not adequately elaborated.

6.4.5.3 'Good old paths'

The 'good old paths' for him, as for Susanna Wesley, were working, teaching, strict religious observance, and self-examination, all aimed at increasing faith and holiness. Like most people, they were both less uncomfortable with atomistic sins, voluntary transgressions, which there was a possibility of conquering through their own efforts, than with the idea of inner destructiveness. The former also offered some distraction from the latter. Yet there was an acute sense of, and fear of, being overwhelmed by the dark side at times of crisis, as on the return from Georgia. It was manifested by agitation, unease or heaviness and depression.

There were aspects of the 'good old paths' which were essential for Wesley in shoring up his image of himself as acceptable, in the face of his fears of his internal badness. He was not only active, but powerfully active. A large part of his ministry involved offering advice, cures for physical illness, money to the poor, and the hope of salvation. These would have confirmed his sense of his own goodness. Abelove's work has also demonstrated a variety of techniques he used which made him feel and appear special. In his letters to women and in all his dealings with the Methodist societies, Wesley's sense of his own indispensability, his need to know the minutiae of events and the need to keep control of individuals, groups, and the movement itself, is obvious. There is a sense of omnipotence, a feeling that without his intervention people or groups would not reach their full potential, or would come to grief. As a result, he was criticised by some for his ambition and accused of being dependent on power.¹⁸⁶

6.4.5.4 Biblical references

Kallstadt has written of Wesley's use of biblical material to resolve conflicts and to help preserve his self-esteem. He points out his use of the Bible in an intellectual, polemical way. For instance, during the Oxford period, when he was criticised for

¹⁸⁶ Rack, 536-7.

eccentricity, intolerance and excessive strictness, he preached his sermon on the 'Circumcision of the Heart'. In it he indirectly attacked his critics: 'And circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not that of men, but of God' (Rom 2:29). At the same time as implicitly calling into question the adequacies of his critics' practices, he portrayed one who was 'circumcised of the heart' as appearing foolish before the world, but 'satisfied to await his praise on the coming of Christ', thus proving to his own satisfaction that his way was the right one.¹⁸⁷

Kallstad also describes Wesley's way of reducing 'cognitive dissonance' by identifying himself with a biblical model. This confirmed his belief in providence, giving him a sense of meaning, and of being in the right.¹⁸⁸ One of the examples concerns an occasion when Wesley was feeling much criticised over his relationship with Sophy Hopkey. In the morning and evening services he chose two lessons which allowed him to identify himself first with Naboth, persecuted by two evil men who bore witness against him, and in the evening with the prophet Micaiah, who felt hated and said only what God ordered him to say, and had to face a possible prison sentence. In his journal, Wesley drew attention to the relevance of these figures to his own predicament.¹⁸⁹

6.4.5.5 Serving others

He had a useful capacity, which allowed him to believe that underlying all his motives was a desire to serve others. His brother Samuel forcibly pointed out to him the dubiousness of this assumption, in a response to a long letter from Wesley which outlined his reasons for refusing to go to Epworth as curate to help his father, who was ill. He wanted to stay in Oxford, where he believed he could best become as 'holy' as possible, so that he could 'most promote holiness in others'; he was sure there was 'no place under heaven so fit for [his] improvement as Oxford'. Samuel saw it as Wesley's duty to please his parents and wrote, with little hope of any effect, 'why do I write? For a plain reason, it is my duty, if I can to please and profit my father and mother ... I judge [your] every proposition flatly false, except that of your being

¹⁸⁷ Thorvald Kallstad, *John Wesley and the Bible: A Psychological Study*, (Uppsala: Uppsala University, Doctoral Dissertation, 1974), 97.

¹⁸⁸ Kallstad, *John Wesley and the Bible*, 103.

¹⁸⁹ Kallstad, *John Wesley and the Bible*, 198-90.

assured ... I see your love to yourself but your love to your neighbour I do not see ...'. He accused him of neglecting his priestly calling: 'It is not a college, it is not an university, it is the *order of the Church* according to which you were called'.¹⁹⁰

6.4.5.6 On the side of right

Once decided upon an action, there was little that would deter him and at times he seemed oblivious to risk. This was obvious in his dealings with the two Morgan brothers, students from Ireland, whom he supervised in Oxford. The older brother was a member of the Holy Club. He became involved in their ascetic practices and eventually became psychotic and died. It is not clear whether the religious practices were the cause of his deterioration. Wesley was blamed by many for his death; but he had a correspondence with the student's father, Richard Morgan Snr., and in spite of Morgan's anxieties, he was persuaded to entrust his younger son to Wesley's care. While being aware of events concerning the older son, and having read a detailed account of the psychotic breakdown from his father, Wesley was unwilling to consider that he had had any role in the matter; he used the same intrusive methods in his attempts to 'save the soul' of the younger son in spite of repeated warnings from the father and the Rector of Lincoln College.¹⁹¹ This episode demonstrates Wesley's need to stick rigidly to his own methods, which he saw as being on the side of 'right', and his inability to contemplate any ambiguity in himself, even (or especially) in the face of quite frightening evidence to the contrary.

6.4.5.7 Dealing with coldness/deadness

For much of Wesley's quotidian existence, he experienced a pervading sense of inner deadness, or coldness, and at times had a fear of falling into nothingness. Any unacceptable feelings, such as destructive anger or hatred, had to be kept out of consciousness, but this could not be achieved without an associated repression of pleasant feelings, such as joy. As a rule he did not respond to events with intense joy or sadness. He had a sense of something missing. Because it was so unpleasant, he would have been driven to get rid of it in various ways.

¹⁹⁰ BEL 25, 410-1. (25/12/1734).

¹⁹¹ BEL 25, 357. (Letter from Morgan, 22/11/1733).

1) He attempted to gain a feeling of aliveness by preaching and offering salvation to others. This allowed him to witness the experience of others and he saw this as evidence that they (and he) could be forgiven and acceptable to God.

2) Through his interactions with women, with whom there was no possibility of a sexual relationship, he could also feel alive. The erotic excitement temporarily blotted out the deadness. However where there was a risk of marriage, with the prospect of full sexual intercourse, his ambivalence manifested itself. There was a powerful wish for sexual contact, but an equally powerful fear of it. The fear had associations with being burned, which for Wesley meant death and loss of himself.

The marriage to Mary Vazeille quickly deteriorated, and this has been attributed by some biographers of Wesley to his wife's 'delusional jealousy'. An alternative view would be that her jealous, 'crazy' behaviour was related to three factors:

1) she sensed accurately the erotic content of Wesley's letters to women;

2) his explanations, which indeed were true *for him*, conflicted with her more accurate interpretations of his letters. This led to her feeling confused, doubting her own judgement, and hence feeling and behaving like a 'mad' woman. He wrote her a long letter, giving a detailed account of his view of the marriage, including what he saw as her unreasonable, unacceptable behaviour, and his long-suffering patience. He offered her forgiveness and reconciliation: 'I love you still, and am as clean of other women as the day I was born. At length know *me*, know *yourself*. Your enemy I cannot be; let me be your friend. Suspect me no more; provoke me no more. Do not any more contend for mastery, for power, money, or praise. Be content to be a private, insignificant person, known and loved by God and me.'¹⁹² Over this same period, he was continuing to write to his many women correspondents and clearly believed that any unease she might have had about the letters, was unreasonable;

3) she was a widow with children and had therefore experienced sex within marriage. Wesley's anxiety about sex raises the question as to whether the marriage was consummated. If it was not, this would clearly have added to her suspicions.

These pressures could well have caused her to doubt her own instincts, to feel confused or mad, to be consumed by impotent fury, and to behave in a 'crazy' fashion. This, however, is different from suffering from the psychotic illness known as 'morbid

¹⁹² Telford vi, 102. (15 /7/1774).

jealousy'. Whatever, Mary Vazeille's psychopathology, Wesley succeeded in locating all the disturbance in her, at least to his own satisfaction.

Many of the defences described above persisted throughout Wesley's life, though there was evidence that with age, Wesley's defensiveness softened in some respects. This was reflected in his changing ideas about salvation and his introduction of the concept of an 'almost Christian'. These theological aspects will be discussed in chapter 8.

6.5 How does the psychoanalytic theory help to understand Wesley's struggles?

The struggles described by Greven resulting from 'evangelical nurture' and from being part of a large family, would undoubtedly have been important in the lives of all the Wesley children, and of Susanna herself. There would however have been specific differences in each child's experience.

At this distance there can be little information about the specifics of John Wesley's very early interactions with his parents, and it is possible only to draw the fragments together to suggest a possible coherent picture. The information already examined about Susanna's family of origin, beliefs, emotional make-up, marriage and educational methods gives clues about her likely influence and that of her husband and her father on John. It is known that John was said by his father to be precociously reasonable and thoughtful, and there is evidence that his mother had hopes that he would fulfil a special providential role in doing God's work. The observations of Wesley's personality as an adult, his beliefs and his relationships with others, when examined in the light of some of the psychoanalytical ideas already discussed, shed light on a man who was often seen as full of contradictions and paradoxes.

Kohut describes the earliest merged state with the mother as one of idealisation: 'I am perfect, you are perfect, I am part of you.'¹⁹³ This state has to be renounced, through a slow 'disillusionment', through 'optimal frustration' by a 'good-enough mother', if the individual is to develop normally.¹⁹⁴ If the disillusionment is

¹⁹³ Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, (New York: International Humanities Press, 1971), 27 and see 2.4.3.

¹⁹⁴ D.W. Winnicott, *The Maturing Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, (London : Karnac, 1990), 145, and see 2.4.3.

too rapid, the mother cannot be renounced and mourned, so that subsequently the individual repeatedly attempts to repeat or rectify the early mother/child experience instead of moving to new relationships. Wesley's recurrent engaging in relationships with women whom he saw as perfect and with whom he could feel merged, suggests that these were attempts to recreate the archaic relationship. It suggests that something happened so that his disillusionment, his 'disappointment', was too rapid for him to bear, and that too much independence was expected of him too quickly. Instead of being able to internalise the function of a 'good-enough mother', which would have enabled him to care for, or 'mother' himself, he was driven to find external substitutes; this was suggestive of Kohut's 'object hunger'. This lack of internal structure, often results in a persistent sense of futility, emptiness and depression, which is sometimes associated with a confident or arrogant, but rigid and brittle, crust. There is sometimes an 'aura of charisma' but a vulnerability to narcissistic injury.¹⁹⁵ This picture is not inconsistent with the one that Wesley presents.

The use of paranoid/schizoid mechanisms, described by Klein, as a way of dealing with unmanageable feelings, has been outlined in chapter 2. The fear of inner destructiveness results in aggressive, devouring impulses being projected, and this projection leaves the ego feeling 'empty, weak and impoverished'. In healthy development, a move to the 'depressive position' involves an integration of the loving and hating aspects of the object and the self, with the withdrawing of projections. A failure to achieve this results in the persistence of the use of projection, a lack of toleration of ambiguity in the self and others, an acting out of duty according to rules rather than out of concern for the other, a tendency to polarise into good and evil, and the use of omnipotent defences. There is difficulty relating to people, as separate individuals, rather than to fulfill a need. The individual is moralistic, rather than moral.

Evidence has been given that Wesley showed many of the features of 'paranoid/schizoid' functioning in his relationships. His feelings were walled off from his grandiose, 'special', omnipotent self, or projected on to others, and this was necessary to maintain his self-esteem. Of particular note in this context was his capacity to substitute one woman for another, who fulfilled the same function for him, both in the Cotswold group and among his women correspondents. There has been considerable evidence in this examination of his forming 'merged' relationships, and

¹⁹⁵ Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, 17.

his idealisation or denigration of others.

A further manifestation of a failure of individuals to reach the depressive position is their difficulty in using symbols helpfully as a source of growth. For Ricoeur, it requires an initial acceptance of what the symbol offers, followed by thought and interpretation of the meaning. He contrasts this process with the presupposing of a meaning already there. The 'enigma' must be preserved. Myths must be accepted, interpreted, and reflected upon, so that the interpretation is 'taught by the enigma' in the bringing out of meaning.¹⁹⁶ Kristeva has suggested that the suffering wounded Christ might be used in this way to symbolise the traumatic separation of the child from the archaic relationship with the mother, thus helping the individual to negotiate the process. In Wesley's case, the evidence suggests that in his unconscious identification with Christ and other biblical figures, he did not use them as transforming objects, as offering a space within which to recognise himself, but as ways of confirming or justifying his actions; what he was doing was part of God's plan and therefore righteous. By seeing himself as Naboth, when he felt persecuted, he did not have to explore why he might be being criticised. He identified with, or *became*, the object; the biblical figure did not act as a separate symbol to be thought about, interpreted or seen beyond.

The suggested difficulty Wesley had in negotiating the separation from the early mother/child relationship can be seen also in Kristevan terms. This gives some insight into his ambivalence about his sexuality. For Kristeva, at the beginning of the process of separation, there is, in the child, a loss of omnipotence and a sense of emptiness and fragility. The idealising identification with the 'father of individual prehistory' is a support here in facilitating the child's move into the world of language. There is an intense attraction back to the merged bliss of the first relationship, but an equally intense fear of being sucked back into maternal chaos and meaninglessness. The boundary between mother and child at the point of separation is the 'abject', and is associated with ideas of flesh, filth, defilement and death. As Jonte-Pace comments, Kristeva associates 'woman' with death, with religion, and with absence, but she notes that this is far from a new idea. She quotes Tertullian, writing of women in the third century: 'Do you not know that each of you is Eve? ... You are the devil's gateway .. On account of your desert, that is, death, even the son of

¹⁹⁶ Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection" in eds. C.E.Reagan and D.Stewart, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, (Boston: Beacon Press), 1978,47.

God had to die.’ Jonte-Pace examines the work of four analysts (Freud, Winnicott, Lacan and Kristeva), all of whom she believes make a link between woman and religion, which she believes is based on an ‘underlying notion of absence’: ‘the unnameable Absence of non-being is “named ‘woman,”” a move that gives Absence a name, decreasing our terror of it, but simultaneously associates woman with the unnameable, increasing our terror of her.’¹⁹⁷ The fear of the terrifying woman becomes a screen for the terror at the absence of the mother, felt as death. And yet, as Crownfield suggests, this terror of the woman and the abject, which has come to symbolise absence or death, is for Kristeva a further mask which covers what she calls ‘the zero of subjectivity’. ‘It is the necessity to represent nothingness as *something else* in order to maintain the cover over the *central void* that founds the abjection of mother’.¹⁹⁸ As has been shown, Wesley’s sense of his mother’s absence from him was acute and more than he could easily bear, so that a smooth negotiation of his separation from her, which should have been facilitated by an adequate, loving, accepting paternal function, would not have been easy for him. Wesley found himself at the mercy, on the one hand, of his fears of falling into nothing, covered but represented by the chaotic, devouring mother, and evoked by the prospect of sex; and on the other hand of the Oedipal father, of words and laws. The powerful attraction of sexual union terrified him and was associated with fears of destruction of himself in death. It is not clear whether he ever risked a sexual relationship, but he was certainly reassured by ‘pure’ women in puritan dress, who were ‘serious’ in religion and simultaneously inaccessible sexually. The ‘good old paths’ represented a retreat to the safety of an identification with, and obedience to, the Oedipal father.

He would have been helped if had he been able to hold on to and internalise what Kristeva sees as the Christian symbolism of agape. Agape as ‘unconditional love’, she suggests, offers a ‘spiritual enactment’ of the archaic love of the pre-Oedipal period. This is overflowing of divine love in response to feelings of loss and emptiness, induced by the mother’s loving the ‘not-I’. In fact this was what Wesley was desperate for and thought for a moment he had found in 1738 in Aldersgate Street; but he had to keep his feelings walled off. He continued to be denied access to his own loving aspects, his own joy and God’s forgiveness. He was unable to relinquish his own omnipotence and his fear of God as a punishing parent.

¹⁹⁷ Diane Jonte-Pace, “Situating Kristeva Differently”, in ed, David Crownfield, *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva*, 14-5.

¹⁹⁸ David Crownfield, “Intertext I”, in *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva*, (1994), 25.

McDougall writes movingly about conflicts and deficits in early relationships with parents, which give rise to confusion and mental pain and which the individual attempts to deal with by 'erotic' solutions of one kind or another. She sees them as attempts, in difficult circumstances, to preserve the individual's sexual and personal identity: 'It is the mother who first names the erogenous zones for her children, communicating, in manifold ways, the libidinal and narcissistic investment or counter investment that these zones - and their associated functions - are to receive. The very existence of certain organs and bodily functions can be virtually denied in some families. Because of her own inner distress about zonal investments and sexual prohibitions, a mother may readily transmit to her children a body-image that is fragile, alienated, devoid of eroticism or even mutilated.'¹⁹⁹ A mother can either enhance or inhibit a baby's 'motility, emotional liveliness, intelligence, sensuality and bodily erogenuity.'²⁰⁰ A failure to enhance these attributes results in a lack of responsiveness in the relevant area. Susanna Wesley's ideas relating to the 'corrupt body' could well have had relevance here. It is possible that Susanna Wesley passed on to her son at a very early stage, in her handling of him, something of her attitude to the 'corrupt body'; and/or she conveyed to him her fears of excessive or uncontrolled emotions. If such were the case, neither his sense of himself as a potent sexual being, nor his emotional liveliness, would have been enhanced. His fear of sexual contact, which meant falling into chaos and death, together with his lack of liveliness and potency, would have been likely to lead to another solution, which would preserve his sexual identity and self-esteem.

Joyce McDougall writes about perverse eroticised solutions to early conflicts, and so far as is known, Wesley did not engage in perverse sexual acts of this kind; he did however engage in relationships repeatedly, and over most of his adult life, with young women, with whom he kept up correspondences, with an erotic and compulsive quality to them. It is possible therefore that similar dynamics to those described by McDougall, were underlying them. She writes of an absence of a reassuring parental object (Kristeva's 'father of individual pre-history' or Winnicott's 'good enough mother'). This, she suggests (as do Kohut and Winnicott), prevents the 'integration of structural identifications' and instead, 'narcissistic needs and fears predominate'. She

¹⁹⁹ Joyce McDougall, *The Many Faces of Eros*, (London: Free Association Books, 1995), 180.

²⁰⁰ McDougall, *The Many Faces of Eros*, 186.

writes. 'When sexual desire arouses terror, this lack of essential introject leaves a vacuum, so to speak, for the creation of a *sexually addictive solution* to the psychic conflict and mental pain'. Such compulsive activity is usually experienced as good because it blots out unpleasant feelings such as anxiety and guilt, or sometimes unacceptable or dangerous pleasant ones.²⁰¹ Wesley experienced his relationships with women as 'good', while being oblivious to his breaking of boundaries.

McDougall also describes the use of erotic solutions to avoid conflicts about adult sexual or love relationships, severe anxiety or depression, with feelings of inner death, or a fear of disintegration, loss of identity, or facing a void. Because this kind of solution can give only temporary relief, it has to be repeated and the illusion of omnipotent control is maintained.²⁰²

The erotic excitement in Wesley's relationships with young women who were inaccessible gave him a sense of aliveness. By 'flirting' with sex he could repeatedly reassure himself that he was potent and effective, but the actual characteristics of the situation kept him safe. Of course, consciously, he saw his interventions in these women's lives as motivated entirely by Christian love and pastoral care, as do most of his commentators.

McDougall sees erotic mechanisms as 'repairing rifts in the fabric of sexual and subjective identity, as well as protecting the introjected objects from the subjects hatred and destructiveness'.²⁰³ She writes about children who feel destroyed by their early success. They are so precocious and independent that they miss out on caring appropriate for a child of their age. She writes of an analysand, who described himself as nothing but an 'adjective'. He was always a 'dirty boy' or a 'clever boy', never just a boy. This left him with a sense of not existing, of feeling that he merely fulfilled a role for his parents. He did not feel recognised and remained a *beggar* for attention. He fulfilled the role expected of him, but at great sexual and social cost.²⁰⁴ This is reminiscent of the serious, precocious little Wesley, who later had to ask his mother to hold him in her mind before God once a week.

McDougall suggests that when the child does not have an established image of the parents as a sexual couple, as Wesley seems not to have had, then 'when there is no fantasy of the father's penis playing a libidinally and narcissistically enhancing role

²⁰¹ *The Many Faces of Eros*, 184.

²⁰² *The Many Faces of Eros*, 187-90.

²⁰³ *The Many Faces of Eros*, 213.

²⁰⁴ *The Many Faces of Eros*, 205-8.

in the mother's life, the mental representation of the mother's sex (which she transmits to her child) becomes that of a limitless void. The child runs the risk of projecting into this void all the off-shoots of infantile megalomania, without encountering any obstacle. The fantasy of the mother's inner space then appears constantly enticing yet at the same time terrifying'.²⁰⁵ If such were the case for Wesley, the terror of being lost in the meaningless chaos of the maternal matrix would have been intensified, as would the likelihood of its being evoked or intensified by the possibility of sexual intercourse in later life.

Each child in the Wesley family would have been affected differently by their order of birth. This, as well as and the constitutional characteristics of each child would have evoked a particular response from the parents. By the time John was born, eight children had died.²⁰⁶ The length of time of survival is not known for four of these, so it is possible that they were stillbirths. Two survived for a year, one lived for a month and one a day. At a time of high infant, child and maternal mortality, there would have been a widespread fear of losing a child and fear for the safety of the mother during childbirth. Having lost so many children, the fear of death for the Wesleys could never have been far away, both during Susanna's confinements and during the infancy of each child; but there are some factors which could have affected John Wesley particularly.

He was born thirteen years after his brother Samuel and was the first male child to survive after him. A girl (Susanna) born one year after Samuel, survived for one year. She was followed by Emily, who lived into old age. Male twins were then born and it is thought that one survived for a month and the other for a year. The twins were followed by three girls, who all lived into adulthood. There then followed a bleak period between 1698 and 1703. During these years the Wesleys lost another baby (sex unknown) and two sets of twins. The first set of twins were male (John and Benjamin); the second, a boy and a girl (John Benjamin and Anne). Following the reconciliation after the parents' temporary separation, and ten months after the death of these twins, John Wesley was conceived.²⁰⁷ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as sometimes still happens, it was common practice to name a child after a previous child who had died, and it is likely that this reflected an attempt to ameliorate the loss by replacing the dead child.

²⁰⁵ Joyce McDougall, *Theatres of the Body*, (London: Free Association Books, 1989), 45.

²⁰⁶ See table 1, appendix VI

²⁰⁷ SW, 8.

The term 'replacement child' has usually been used to describe a child who was conceived within six months of the death of a previous one. However, the crucial element is not the actual time which elapses, but whether the mother has succeeded in grieving adequately for the lost baby before becoming pregnant again. It is difficult for mourning to continue during a further pregnancy.²⁰⁸ Before having John, Susanna had repeatedly conceived very quickly after losing a child; the effect of losing five babies in the years before his birth is hard to imagine. It seems very unlikely that she could have grieved successfully for each child separately. The sex of the babies is likely to have been important in her hopes for, and expectations of, John. Although she had lost two daughters, three had survived; but she had lost five, or perhaps six sons. The naming of three consecutive boys 'John' suggests that there was some hope that each could replace the others. When John Wesley arrived he was the first male child for thirteen years, and the first to follow the five or six male babies who were lost. It is likely that he would have had to cope with some of the difficulties which can afflict a replacement child.

Thistlethwaite writes about the effects of incomplete mourning on the mother/child interaction.²⁰⁹ She describes how in the early stages of mourning, the loss is denied, and parts of the self are projected into the lost object, as a way of holding onto it. The ego is depleted and is not restored until mourning is completed, by the taking back of the projections, and the letting go of the external lost object. If another pregnancy interferes with this process, the mother's ego remains in a depleted state, so that her unresolved grief adversely affects her relationship with the new baby.

Adverse effects on 'replacement children', noted by Poznauski, are as follows: when the lost child is idealized by the parents, as commonly occurs, there is pressure in the 'replacement child' to live up to unrealistic expectations; the child has difficulty establishing his or her own identity.²¹⁰ Sabbadini also describes an impairment of the sense of identity and difficulty in dealing with the 'expectations, projections and displacements of the dead child'. The child is treated, 'more as an embodiment of a memory than a person in its own right'.²¹¹ Lewis and Bourne suggest an increased

²⁰⁸ J. Rowe, R. Clyman, C.Green, J. Haight, and L. Ataide, "Follow-up of families who experience perinatal death", *Paediatrics*, 62, 1978,166-170.

²⁰⁹ H.Thistlethwaite, "The replacement child as writer" in *Sibling Relationships*, ed. Prophecy Coles, (London/New York: Karnac, 2006), 125.

²¹⁰ E.O.Poznauski, "The Replacement Child", *Behavioural Paediatrics*. 81: 6, (1972), 1190-1193.

²¹¹ A.Sabbadini, "The Replacement Child", *Contemporary Analysis*, 24:4, (1988), 528-547.

vulnerability to confused identity, sexual difficulty, disturbances of ambition and achievement, and a persistent sense of ‘nameless’ guilt, which they compare to ‘survivor’s guilt’.²¹²

While the ‘replacement child’ is perceived as particularly desired, loved and precious, the ‘ghost’ of the previous child or children can distort the individual and exclusive relationship between the child and its mother. Many authors, for instance Stern, Mahler, Brazelton, and Fraiberg, have written of the need for a meaningful and consistent emotional response from the mother, and for a close attunement between the mother and child, if the child is to develop an adequate sense of identity²¹³.

If the mother is not closely attuned to this particular baby, and there is confusion caused by the dead baby’s presence in her mind, there is likely to be a failure of containment.²¹⁴ Britton has written about the effects of such a failure. One is that the infant’s ‘as yet unformulated fear of death’, a fear which according to Klein, is the earliest of primitive fears, is not contained and metabolized and becomes for the child a ‘nameless dread’. Instead of being made less frightening, it acquires a more terrifying quality. He quotes Bion:

[when] the projection is not accepted by the mother the infant feels that its fear of dying is stripped of such meaning as it has. It therefore reintjects, not a fear of death made tolerable, but a nameless dread.²¹⁵

Britton writes that when the infant’s projections are distorted by the mother’s preoccupying phantasies, (as they would be in unresolved grief for a dead baby), instead of being made tolerable, ‘the uncomprehended is made incomprehensible’. He compares this ‘nameless dread’ to Freud’s *fear of the id* and describes it as a ‘fear of being overwhelmed by uncontained, untransformed, psychic elements or of living in the aftermath of annihilation’.²¹⁶ This resonates with Wesley’s fear of falling into nothing and his need to wall off this chaotic area of nameless dread. The contents of

²¹² E.Lewis, and S.Bourne, *Pregnancy after Stillbirth or Neonatal Death: Psychological Risks and Management* in ed. Joan Raphael-Leff, *Spilt Milk*, (London: Institute of Psychoanalysis, 2000),55-6.

²¹³ Daniel Stern, *The First Relationship. Mother and Child*, (London: Fontana, 1977); M. Mahler, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, (New York: International Universities Press, 1975); T.B.Brazelton, and B.G.Cramer, *The Earliest Relationship*, (London/New York: Karnac, 1991); E. Fraiberg, *Clinical Studies in Infant Mental Health: The First Year of Life*, (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

²¹⁴ See 3.3.2Chapter 3, 4-5.

²¹⁵ W.R.Bion, “A Theory of Thinking”, *Second Thoughts*, (New York: Jason Aronson, 1967), 116, in Ronald Britton, *Belief and Imagination*, (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), 56

this walled-off space remain unsymbolised.

Britton also suggests, drawing on Bion, that such a failure of containment is experienced not only as a failure but as an attack on the child's link with the mother as a good object. In these circumstances, in order, to preserve the mother as a good object in the child's mind, the child has to deny the failure and attribute it to a third force. The child then creates, in phantasy, a force outside the couple which is hostile, and which is felt as threatening the mother/child link. Britton writes that 'in the Oedipal situation the hostile force becomes equated with the father'. In such a situation, in the child's phantasy, any linking together of the parents would feel catastrophic, as it would 'reconstitute the mother as a non-receptive, malignantly misunderstanding maternal object'.²¹⁷ It is possible that Wesley's difficulty in seeing his parents as a sexual couple was related to fears of such a mental catastrophe for him, if his parents came together in his mind. However, the need to keep them apart had the disadvantages described by McDougall and outlined above: that the mother's inner space became, for him, an enticing but terrifying void.

In describing the encounter between the unconscious of the baby and of the mother, Kohon stresses the *activity* of both participants and also the effects of the meanings already established in the minds of those relating to the baby. He describes an 'unconscious implanting of enigmatic verbal and non-verbal messages in the primitive body-ego of the infant – messages derived from the adult's sexuality'. The child is immersed in the desires, histories and personal myths of those around him and discovers that 'prior to his birth, he has been existing in the mind of others; he has been given a name, has become part of a myth determined by others' desires.'²¹⁸ He emphasizes the need for the baby to be recognised as a unique self, and quotes a passage from a novel by A.S.Byatt, *Still Life*, where she beautifully describes, a mother who is in love with her new-born son, but who recognizes him as a separate and unique person:

There was her body, quiet, used, resting; there was her mind, free, clear, shining; there was the boy and his eyes, seeing what? And ecstasy. Things would hurt when this light dimmed. The boy would change. But now in the sun she recognized him, and recognized that she did not know, and had never seen him, and loved him, in the bright new air with a simplicity she had never

²¹⁶ Britton, *Belief and Imagination*, 54-56.

²¹⁷ Britton, *Belief and Imagination*, 53-4.

²¹⁸ Gregorio Kohon, "Love in a time of madness" in *Love and its Vicissitudes* by A. Green and G. Kohon, (London/New York: Routledge, 2005),65-67.

expected to know. 'You,' she said to him, skin for the first time on skin in the outside air, which was warm and shining, 'you'.²¹⁹

It is this loving way of seeing the baby as 'you', that allows the child to develop a sense of himself as a person in his own right. When the mother's view of the baby is distorted by her preoccupations, the confusion is conveyed to the child and he is left with a sense of loss and insecurity. As Mollon suggests, if there is a mismatch, where the child feels misunderstood and where feelings and distress are not contained, this results in feelings of shame, helplessness and rage in the child.²²⁰

While nobody can know the details of the mother/child interaction at this distance, the loss of so many male children prior to Wesley's birth, his naming and the lack of time between pregnancies for adequate grieving, point to the strong possibility that he would have had to struggle with some of the hazards associated with being a 'replacement child'. If this were so, the resulting 'unmetabolized' fears resulting in feelings of 'nameless dread' and the associated shame, helplessness and rage, would have felt unmanageable and potentially overwhelming. In addition, though it is not clear at what stage Susanna came to believe that John Wesley was destined by divine providence for a 'special' role, it is clear that the idea either appeared or was reinforced by his late rescue from the fire, when he was aged six. This could only have added to her difficulty in relating to him as a unique self, as 'you'.

The information about his way of relating to others suggests that his feelings had to be firmly walled off, leaving him with a sense of deadness; and this would indeed have been one way of dealing with 'unmetabolized' dread, rage and shame. The need to keep his parents apart in his mind would have led to his fear of falling into nothing or into a frightening, chaotic void, and it would be expected that this fear would particularly have been provoked by the threat of sexual intercourse. The 'abject' had to be so firmly walled off, that it was not accessible for symbolisation, and therefore could not be brought into dialogue with the 'symbolic'. He was left with his sense of inner deadness and powerlessness and with uncertainty about his sexual identity. His destructiveness felt so bad that he could not bear to face it fully, but instead experienced a nameless dread, a fear of falling into nothing. He dared not rest, 'while there [was] another world'.²²¹

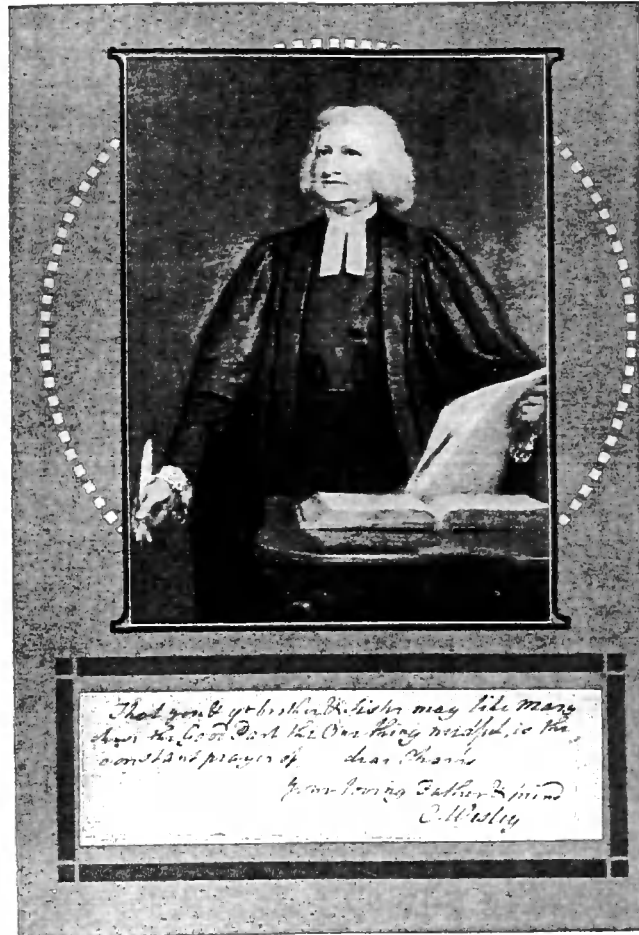
²¹⁹ A.S. Byatt, *Still Life*, (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 100-1.

²²⁰ P. Mollon, "Narcissistic Vulnerability and the Fragile Self", *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 59, (1986), 317-324.

²²¹ Telford vii, 273 (2/6/1785).

The lack of a combined parental object also has implications for the capacity for creativity and may have affected the difference in that capacity between John and Charles Wesley. This will be discussed when the function of Charles's creativity in maintaining his mental equilibrium is explored.

Chapter 7: Charles Wesley



CHARLES WESLEY.
(From the painting by J. W. L. Forster.)
FACSIMILE OF CHARLES WESLEY'S HANDWRITING IN 1782.

7.1 Sources

Baker¹ and Newport² point out the difficulties of attempting to write an adequate biography of Charles Wesley based on currently available information. He was born in 1707, four years after John, and kept a journal from 1729; but the only extracts published later were from the period 1736-56, a relatively short period of his life.³ While his journal has the advantage that it was never intended to be published, and therefore probably reflects his feelings more accurately than one intended for publication, there are large gaps in it which limit its usefulness. Newport comments

¹ Frank E. Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, (Revised edition, London: Epworth Press, 1995), 2.

² K.G.C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7-11.

on the omissions in the Jackson edition of the journal, suggesting that Jackson's motives were related either to a lack of knowledge of shorthand or to an attempt to protect Wesley by omitting 'sensitive' or 'indelicate' passages. Whatever the reason, the omissions would inevitably result in a distortion of the resulting picture of his personality. Newport suggests that these shortcomings cannot be supplemented by the work of Telford, Culley, Hoole and Brose, because of remaining gaps and the fact that the Jackson version is the only edition to extend beyond 1739.⁴

There are similar difficulties with the letters. Jackson included some of Wesley's 'correspondence and poetry' but only forty of the one hundred and six published letters were dated, one wrongly.⁵ This means that it is often difficult accurately to relate the thoughts, reactions and emotional responses to particular events. There are 600 letters in the John Rylands University Library at Manchester, prepared for publication by Baker, but so far unpublished. According to Shepherd these refer to 'mundane matters' and are of limited value⁶; but, drawing on his work on these letters, Baker has written a valuable brief portrait of Charles Wesley.⁷ Newport is as pessimistic about the value of the published letters as he is about the journal, referring again to Jackson's 'editorial scissors'.

The state of the sermons does not help. Few of them have been published. Newport identifies twenty-three sermons as Charles's, suggesting that most were written by him, but that some were produced by editing and copying John's material.⁸ Early in his career, as was not an uncommon practice at the time, he would sometimes read John's sermons. Later, from 1738, he increasingly 'expounded' rather than 'preached'. The term 'expounding' was used by Charles Wesley to refer to a spontaneous, 'extempore' exposition of a biblical text, with little reference to written notes. This resulted in a lack of written sermon material.⁹ A further limitation to the use of sermons for the present purpose is that, as public utterances, they would not necessarily reflect his underlying feelings and state of mind at the time.

Best has recently written a new biography, which brings together a great deal

³ Thomas Jackson, *The Journal of Charles Wesley*, (1849; Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1980).

⁴ Newport, *Sermons*, 9-11.

⁵ Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 1.

⁶ N.T. Shepherd, "Charles Wesley and the Doctrine of the Atonement", (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 1999), 15.

⁷ Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, (1995).

⁸ Newport, *Sermons*, 71.

of material about Charles Wesley and usefully sets his life in its political and social context, but he has been limited by the gaps in the journal and the letters, and he has not always been clear in differentiating fact from legend.¹⁰ The overall situation has been improved by a recent study by the Methodist Archivist of the John Rylands Library, Manchester, who has used his familiarity with previously unused primary documents to inform his work,¹¹ and by the new edition of Charles Wesley's journal, which incorporates previously unpublished shorthand papers.¹²

Overall there is much less available material about Charles than there is about John. As a result of the inadequacies of the other sources, much that has previously been written about Charles Wesley has been based on his hymns. These will form a crucial part of the argument, but the journal and letters have also been important sources for this chapter, in order that a more subjective view of his experience can be elucidated. While there is no attempt here to write a biography, nevertheless the caveats pointed out by Newport have to be taken into account when interpreting the material, and these will affect the firmness of any conclusions drawn.

7.2 Early influences.

The family, religious and political influences which are common to the Wesley brothers have been outlined. Here, the likely individual influences on Charles are discussed.

Two years after John Wesley was born Susanna Wesley had another son who lived only for a day, followed a year later, by a daughter, Martha, who lived into old age, and another year later by Charles. It is thought that a further set of twins were born two years later, of whom only one, Kezia, survived.¹³ John was still a small boy of four when his brother Charles was born, and as has been shown, it is likely that he had fulfilled any parental longing for a male child. Although a further son was lost, between John and Charles, this loss was followed by the birth of a live baby girl

⁹ John R. Tyson, ed., *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 14.

¹⁰ Gary Best, *Charles Wesley: A Biography*, (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2006).

¹¹ Gareth Lloyd, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹² S.T. Kimbrough and Kenneth G.C. Newport, *The Manuscript Journals of The Reverend Charles Wesley M.A.*, I and II, (Nashville: Kingswood Books). [Abbreviation: CW].

¹³ SW, 8.

before Charles's birth. So that, unlike the bleak period with its multiple infant deaths prior to John's birth, and although Susanna had lost one other child, she had subsequently successfully delivered and was caring for a healthy baby girl when Charles was born. Susanna was therefore less likely to have been preoccupied with previously lost children or to be struggling with unresolved grief than she had been at the time of John's birth. As a result, she would have more emotionally available to relate to her new baby as a unique individual, rather than confusing him with a previous child and more capable of acting as container for his unmanageable feelings. If this were the case, Charles would have been less vulnerable to the problems associated with being a 'replacement child'. If Susanna was able to function better as a container for Charles than she had for John, he was less likely to have experienced her as 'attacking' and therefore less likely to have need of the defensive manoeuvre, described by Britton. This was aimed at preserving her as a good object by projecting all the hostility into the father.¹⁴ Consequently, there would have been less need to deny any link between the parents. The suggestion was that the avoidance of this parental link meant that John had difficulty seeing his parents as a sexual couple, with the possibility that his mother's inner space had become for him an enticing but terrifying void. Charles would have been less at risk of this; and if, as a result, he could hold an image of a good, sexual parental couple in his mind, there would have been other benefits for him, related to his creativity.

According to both Tyson¹⁵ and Best,¹⁶ Charles was born two months prematurely. Best writes, '[Susanna] wrapped him up in soft wool until the time he should have been born and for those weeks he neither cried nor opened his eyes.'¹⁷ On this basis, it is likely that he received a great deal of close and careful attention from his mother at that stage. Tyson suggests that this began a 'pattern of frailty and illness throughout his life', and while there is no reason why prematurity alone should lead to ongoing physical vulnerability, it is possible that it led his parents to see him as fragile, which in turn would affect their handling of him in childhood and beyond.

Both brothers had the four older sisters, as possible extra 'maternal' supports; and for Charles, as the younger of the two brothers, it is likely that John was an

¹⁴Ronald Britton, *Belief and Imagination*, (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), 53-4. See also 6.5.

¹⁵Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, 3.

¹⁶Best, *Charles Wesley: A Biography*, 14.

¹⁷Neither Tyson nor Best provides the source of this information.

important figure. Silverstone has written about the ways in which ‘in the search for containment and care, siblings can nurture and care for each other in a lively and vital way’. They can provide ‘love and sustenance’ and ‘withstand ruthless use’. They can be a source of nurturing and a reassurance that inner hatred is not lethal, and also a testing ground for boundaries and for learning to manage incestuous wishes.¹⁸

While little can be known about how the brothers related to each other in childhood, there were numerous episodes in their adult lives when they became extremely angry with each other. The same pattern was played out repeatedly and was therefore likely to have been one familiar from childhood. Charles would become overtly angry and would make sure John was aware of his feelings, while John would assume the moral high ground and become more domineering or would tend to withdraw. During these arguments, Charles would become very despondent, as he wrote in a letter (13 December 1749), when John was insisting that he intended to marry: ‘He has brought down my strength, and I am next to useless. For when I preach, which is seldom, my word is without power or life. My spirit is that of the whole people. All are faint and weary. All seem on the brink of desperation’.¹⁹ However, no matter how profound the disagreement, it was always followed by a reconciliation.

This sequence is demonstrated in Charles’s poems written in 1784 in response to John’s ordaining three preachers to minister to the Methodists in America. The episode was part of Charles’s long campaign to ensure that the Methodist Society remained within the Church of England. For him, such an ordination meant separation. His anger is reflected in his verses:

W[esley] himself and friends betrays,
By his own good sense forsook,
While suddenly his hands he lays
On the hot head of C[oke]:

Yet *we* at least shou’d spare the weak,
His weak Co-evals *We*,
Nor blame a hoary Schismatic,
A Saint of Eighty-three!²⁰

¹⁸ Jennifer Silverstone, “Siblings”, in ed. Prophecy Coles, *Sibling Relationships*, (London: Karnac, 2006) 243–4.

¹⁹ CW, 586.

²⁰ Charles Wesley, MS “Ordinations I”, in ed. Frank Baker, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*,

and the well known lines:

So easily are Bishops made
By man's, or woman's whim?
W[esley] his hands on C[oke] hath laid,
But who laid hands on Him?²¹

However, in another poem of that year, which is a prayer for John Wesley and the Methodist people, he remembered the strong bond between them from their infancy, which survived their differences and in which he described them as 'true yokefellows'.

Happy the days, when Charles and John
By nature and by grace were One
The same in office as in name,
Their judgment and their will the same:
True Yokefellows, they join'd to draw
The galling burthen of the Law

In infancy their hopes and fears,
In youth, and in their riper years
Their hearts were to each other known
Attun'd in perfect Unison....²²

For much of their lives, there was a sense of a deep attachment of Charles to John, which helped them to weather many crises.

The extent of John's early influence over him was clearly shown by Charles's reluctant agreement to become ordained and to go with him to Georgia. In a letter to Dr. Chandler written 1785, he wrote about this influence:

But my brother who always had the ascendent over me, persuaded me to accompany him and Mr. Oglethorpe to Georgia. I exceedingly dreaded entering into Holy Orders: but he overruled me here also, and I was ordained Deacon by the Bishop of Oxford, ...²³

(London: Epworth Press, 1962), 367.

²¹ Charles Wesley, MS "Ordinations 5", in Baker, *Representative Verse*, 368

²² Charles Wesley, MS "Brothers" in Baker, *Representative Verse*, 371.

A previously unpublished letter quoted by Baker, which he tentatively dated 1751, similarly expresses Charles's apprehension about his brother's power and authority. In writing about lay preachers, Charles proposed that they should not give up their trade. Charles was concerned that, if they became financially dependent on John Wesley, the extent of his authority over them would not be kept 'in due bounds'. He believed that this financial independence would also act as 'guard against that rashness and credulity of his, which has kept me in awe and bondage for many years. Therefore I shall insist on their working as the one point, the single condition, of my acting in concert with him. Because without this I can trust neither them or him.'²⁴

In spite of many irritations and Charles's uneasiness about the degree of John's influence, it is clear that he admired John and relied on him to solve problems and to resolve difficult situations. There is convincing evidence of a loving relationship and of pain on separation: in Oxford, in 1728, he learned that John was going to be working as a curate in Lincolnshire for two years, and that they would be separated. According to Baker, this separation led Charles to write his first known poetry, which included:

Nor yet from my dim eyes THY form retires!
(The cold empty starving grate before me makes me add this disconsolate
line:)
Nor cheering image of thine absent fires.²⁵

Charles also wrote in his journal (28 March 1739) of an episode when he was fearful that John would be killed by his enemies if he travelled to Bristol. John was persuaded to stay for one night but left the following day. Charles wrote, 'The next day he set out, commended by us to the grace of God. He left a blessing behind. I desired to die with him.'²⁶

Three events resulted in disagreements with John which upset Charles Wesley profoundly: John's plan to marry Grace Murray; his marriage to Mrs. Vazeille; and his decision to ordain preachers. The last dispute, which resulted in friction and conflict over a long period, provoked Charles to attack him angrily in verse and by letter. Late in 1784, he wrote to John, 'What foul slanderers those (enthusiasts?) are!

²³ Charles Wesley, MSS letter in ed. Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, 59.

²⁴ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 85.

²⁵ *Charles Wesley as Revealed in His Letters*, 9.

²⁶ CW 169.

How have they for three score years said (John Wesley was?) a Papist: and lo he turns out to be a presbyterian!’²⁷; on July 27 1786, he wrote ‘I believe you have been too hasty in ordaining. I believe God left you to yourself in that matter, as He left Hezekiah - to show you the secret pride in your heart.’²⁸ Writing to Henry Durbin, who had informed him of the three ordinations in September 1784, he impugned John Wesley’s integrity, ‘I trust I shall be able, like you, to leave behind me the name of an honest man. Which with all his sophistry he can never do ... I call you ... to witness that I have had no hand in this infamous ordination.’²⁹

But this was not the whole story. As Baker points out, he remained inextricably involved with John, and in spite of his words the partnership did not end. He continued to preach and to try to restrain John from further ordinations, and he attended a further Methodist Conference. In spite of his anger and the irreconcilable difference between them, he wrote in the letter to Dr Chandler (28 April 1785), ‘Thus our Partnership here is dissolved but not our friendship. I have taken him for better or worse, till death do us part; or rather, re-unite us in love inseparable’.³⁰

In Silverstone’s terms, John was a sibling who could withstand ruthless use. Charles could risk attacking him and knew he would survive; this would have been an important reassurance for him that his hatred was not lethal.³¹ The importance of this is shown in the degree of desperation in the periods before they were reconciled. It is less likely that Charles served the same purpose for John; as has been shown, he had more difficulty expressing his deep feelings. They had to be kept walled off, and his anger leaked out in ways of which he was barely aware.

Several authors have commented on the supportive role played by their elder brother Samuel for both brothers, and particularly for Charles. Samuel was sent to Westminster School one year after John’s birth. He would have been at home, as a boy of thirteen, only for the first year of his John’s life.³² Nothing is known about how much contact there was between the two or about how significant a figure he was for John at that stage, but by the time Charles was born, Samuel was away at school.

²⁷ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 135. The editing is Baker’s.

²⁸ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 140.

²⁹ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 135.

³⁰ Charles Wesley, MSS letter, in Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, 60.

³¹ Jennifer Silverstone, “Siblings”, in Coles, *Sibling Relationships*, 244.

³² Adam Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*, (London: J. and T. Clarke, 1823), 363.

John was sent to Charterhouse School at the age of eleven,³³ while Charles, aged eight, went to Westminster School, where he had free board and lodging as a King's scholar, and became captain of the school.³⁴ Their experience of boarding school, in an age of strict discipline, would have been quite different. Although Charles had the disadvantage of leaving home at a younger age, Westminster was the school at which his brother Samuel taught, and Samuel became a 'sort of foster-father' and 'his home became Charles's'.³⁵ In a letter of 28 April 1785, Charles wrote, 'At eight years old, in 1716, I was sent by my father to Westminster School, and placed under the care of my eldest brother Samuel, a strict churchman, who brought me up in his own principles'.³⁶ His 'own principles' involved a strict adherence to High Anglicanism and a passionate interest in and love of the classics and of poetry.³⁷ Seventeen years older than Charles, Samuel had taken Holy Orders and was a reliable and dutiful son, who supported his parents and his brothers and sisters, financially and emotionally, as far as he was able; Clarke quotes a grateful letter from his father, acknowledging all his care and generosity.³⁸ His presence at Westminster must have greatly ameliorated Charles's school experience, and Samuel was clearly an important 'paternal' support. When Charles was in trouble in Georgia, he confided in Samuel, questioning his faith and whether or not he should have been ordained. Samuel wrote that he should 'never spare unburdening [himself]' to him and that, while in general it was wrong to start something and not finish it, he was sure that Charles's 'coming back to England [would] not be looking back from the plough', as he would still be able to exercise his ministry.³⁹ This was unlike the usual demands that Charles would have experienced at home, which always involved taking the most difficult path. Here Samuel clearly showed Charles that his concern for him could override his strict principles. Charles continued to confide in him, mainly by letter, until Samuel's death, aged 49. Such 'paternal' support particularly at the time of separation from home, for a child whose own father was unpredictable and often absent, was a significant advantage of which John Wesley was deprived.

³³ Rack, 58.

³⁴ Lloyd, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity*, 23.

³⁵ Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, 5.

³⁶ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 7.

³⁷ Clarke writes of Samuel's recognition as a poet by Swift and Pope (*Memoirs of the Wesley Family*, 364-366, 395, 435-456).

³⁸ Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*, 462.

For Susanna Wesley, John had been chosen and preserved by God for his special purpose. She had also written to her son Samuel, at the age of fourteen, 'I am concerned for you, who were even before your birth dedicated to the service of the altar, that you may be an ornament of the Church of which you are a member and be instrumental ... in bringing many souls to heaven'.⁴⁰ She impressed on all her children the necessity of a life totally dedicated to God's purpose and the need to prepare themselves for a life of doing God's work, but there is no evidence that Charles was subjected to the extra pressure of being specially chosen.

In summary, there would have been many differences in the influences on the psychological development of the two brothers in early childhood, some very subtle and some more obvious. These can never be known about in detail, but four emerge from the available material and seem important: 1) it is possible that as a premature baby, Charles had extra attention as an infant and, if he was considered fragile, that demands on him were less severe; 2) he had extra paternal support from Samuel from childhood into adult life; 3) in spite of his ambivalent feelings about John, and their sometimes prolonged periods of dispute, John appears to have served as a loved, admired and resilient model and support for him; and 4) unlike John, he did not have to face the hazards of being a 'replacement child' or of being seen as having a special destiny.

7.3 Pre-conversion Experience.

When Charles first went up to Oxford, he enjoyed his social life and was not particularly preoccupied with religion. He later wrote, 'My first year in college was lost in diversions'.⁴¹ When he was urged by John to be more serious about it, his reply was 'What! would you have me be a saint all at once?' and then he would, 'hear no more'.⁴² In 1728, there was a change, possibly related to a failed love-affair. He began to write about his previous 'lethargy' and his 'former state of insensibility'. He attributed the change to John's and his mother's influence. A letter to John (5 May 1729), was full of anxious introspection regarding his spiritual state; he wrote about

³⁹ *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*, 391.

⁴⁰ SW, 48.

⁴¹ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 14.

⁴² *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 10.

how he was organising his life around religious activities and striving not to waste a minute: 'I'm assured, if I have no business of my own, the Devil will soon find some'.⁴³ In the same letter, in response to John's raising the subject, he described needing a remedy for his 'coldness'. However, he appears to be using this word in a different sense from John's. Charles wrote that having been 'utterly inattentive at public prayers' for thirteen years, he could not expect to find a warmth he had never known, 'at his first seeking'. He then continued with a description of receiving the Sacrament without being properly prepared, and of being surprised that he felt 'greater warmth than usual'. For John, as has been shown, 'coldness' was sometimes used in this sense, but often reflected a more persistent state of the absence of feeling.

It is clear from reading the letters and journals of both brothers, that they shared the intense fear and horror of inner badness, of 'the world, the flesh and the devil', which had been a life-and-death struggle for their mother. Charles continued his struggle to gain salvation, through serious study, the avoidance of women, carrying out good works and receiving the Sacrament frequently; in 1728 he joined with a group of like-minded friends to form the 'Holy Club'. There must have been a noticeable change in his demeanour resulting from the change to a more serious life, which was commented on when he went to stay with his brother Samuel. Charles wrote to John, 'They wonder here I'm so strangely dull (as indeed mirth and I have shook hands and parted), and at the same time pay the compliment of saying I grow extremely like you'.⁴⁴ This last comment seems not to have been ironic, as there were many other expressions at that time of his wish to agree with John or to be like him, though Tyson suggests that Samuel's comment would have been 'no compliment', as he had 'shaped Charles in his own image'.⁴⁵ But Charles wrote to John, 'Tis through your means I believe, God will establish what He has begun in me, and there is no one person I would so willingly have to be the instrument of good to me as you'.⁴⁶ On John's return to Oxford, it was assumed that John would take over the leadership of the Holy Club. Charles deferred to John as the natural leader, although he was as rigorous as John in leading the ascetic life. But, like John, he failed to find any sense of being acceptable to God by these methods.

⁴³ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 10-13.

⁴⁴ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 16.

⁴⁵ Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, 5.

⁴⁶ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 10.

When he left England, under pressure from John, he wrote a letter to 'Varanese' and 'Selima' (two of the 'Cotswold Set'), while on board ship, which showed his state of mind at the time. There was misery that all his efforts had failed and a fluctuating hope that service in the New World would bring some relief. What is striking is the rapidity with which his mental state changed: as Baker describes, it shifted from despair (he regretted that he had survived the crossing), to enthusiastic religious exaltation, to self-denigration and envy of John's 'devotion' to God, to 'an interval of ease' and hope that God could save him. The last section was written nine days after the first three:

I still groan under the intolerable weight of inherent misery! If I have never repented of my undertaking, it is because I could hope for nothing better in England - or Paradise. Go where I will, I carry my Hell about me. ...

I cannot follow my own advice, but yet I advise you - Give God your hearts ... Think of nothing else. See nothing else. To love God, and to be beloved by him is enough. I cannot myself account for the strange expansion of heart which I feel in the midst of my wishes for your welfare.

[John] is indeed devoted. But I cannot bear to think of his happiness, and find a preposterous sort of joy that I am going to be removed from the sight of it. Could I hide myself too ...

I look with horror back on the desperate spirit that dictated the words above, but let them stand, as the naked picture of a soul which can never know reserve to you. ... God is able to save, to the uttermost, to break my bonds in sunder, and bring deliverance to the captive! ... For I am come to a crisis. The work I see immediately before me is the care of fifty poor families (alas for them that they should be so cared for!), some few of whom are not far from the Kingdom of God. Among these I shall be either converted or LOST.⁴⁷

Like John, he had met a group of Moravian missionaries on board ship, and was impressed by their lack of fear during storms, and their calmness in the face of death, but he seems to have been disinclined at that stage to look at their different way to salvation, with its stress on salvation through the blood of Christ. He clung to his intention to struggle on towards 'perfection' through his own desperate efforts.⁴⁸

His troubles in Georgia have been well documented and will not be repeated in

⁴⁷ MSS letters, 5 and 14 February 1736 in *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 22-3.

⁴⁸ Best, *Charles Wesley: A Biography*, 60-1.

detail here. His stay there was a difficult experience for him. There were malicious rumours of sexual misconduct, which Oglethorpe, the Governor of the colony and his employer, initially believed. He charged Charles with ‘mutiny and sedition’.⁴⁹ Charles was finally exonerated and he and Oglethorpe were reconciled; but he was never popular with his parishioners. Best suggests that one reason for this might have been that, ‘at least half the sermons he preached had been written for him by his brother’, and that they stressed God’s vengeance rather than his love. This would have been the last thing the struggling colonists would have wanted to hear, for their life was difficult enough.⁵⁰ Best does not outline his evidence for this suggestion and it seems more likely that Charles’s High Church formality and his inexperience and naivety in relating to people, and in dealing with rumour and gossip were at the root of his unpopularity. This is suggested by two comments of Oglethorpe: the journal records a conversation with Oglethorpe (26 March 1736), in which he said, in response to a question from Charles about why he (Charles) should be blamed for all ‘the mischief’: ‘How else can it be? that there should be no love, no meekness, no true religion among the people; but instead of that, mere formal prayers?’⁵¹ And when Charles Wesley was leaving Georgia, Oglethorpe told him, ‘You are of a sociable temper, and would find in a married state the difficulties of working out your salvation exceedingly lessened, and your helps as much increased.’⁵² All the evidence suggests that Charles was not guilty of the accusations made against him; but he was ostracised by the community and deprived of the ordinary physical necessities of life by Oglethorpe for a time. As often happened when he was unhappy, he became physically ill with the ‘flux’ and a fever, and it became clear that the only safe course was for him to return to England. Oglethorpe legitimated this return by using him as a bearer of dispatches to the Georgia Trustees.⁵³

7.4 ‘Conversion’ experience

He was depressed on going to Georgia. But on his return, his mental state was even

⁴⁹CW 20,

⁵⁰ Best, *Charles Wesley: A Biography*, 64.

⁵¹CW 14.

⁵² CW 46.

⁵³*Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 26.

more despairing. He had not only failed in his efforts to work towards salvation, had his hopes dashed that he would be saved through Christian service in his ministry, but also he was in a severely debilitated physical state. Best quotes a verse he wrote at the time, which shows that he saw himself as a whited sepulchre. He had failed to live up to his own expectations in Georgia and felt that the extent of his failure had been disguised:

A goodly formal saint
I long appeared in sight;
By self and Satan taught to paint
My tomb, my nature, white:
The Pharisee within
Still undisturb'd remain'd;
The strong man, arm'd with guilt of sin,
Safe in his palace reign'd.⁵⁴

He remained ill, but for some months he hoped to return to Georgia. He wrote to John, 'The fiery furnace, I trust, will purify me; and if emptied of myself, I would defy the world and the devil to hurt me' but he was told by his doctors that this would result in his 'certain death'.⁵⁵

It was in this state of mind that Charles came under the influence of the Moravians, and particularly Böhler. His mind was ripe for Böhler's teaching of salvation by grace through faith. On 24 February 1738, the journal records, in a letter to his brother Samuel, that he was suffering from toothache, enough to 'separate soul from body'. He had just been treated for pleurisy; his doctor had expected to find him dead at the second visit, and he had been violently medicated and bled three times.⁵⁶ Böhler visited him during this illness. He prayed for his recovery 'with a strange confidence'. He asked if he hoped to be saved and why. Charles replied, 'Because I have used my best endeavours to serve God'. Böhler shook his head and said nothing, 'I thought him uncharitable, saying in my heart, "What are not my endeavours a sufficient ground of hope? Would he rob me of my endeavours? I have nothing else to trust to"'.⁵⁷ Throughout April 1738, there were disputes about whether or not conversion could be instantaneous or gradual, with John (now returned from Georgia)

⁵⁴ "The Backslider", PW II, 114-8, quoted in Best, *Charles Wesley*, 74.

⁵⁵ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 30-1.

⁵⁶ CW 98.

arguing for the former and Charles for the latter. Charles then became ill again, and the bleeding was repeated. Again Böhler was authoritative and influential:

In the morning Dr. Cockburn came to see me; and a better physician, Peter Böhler, whom God had detained in England for my good. He stood by my bedside, and prayed over me, that now at least I might see the divine intention, in this and my late illness. I immediately thought it might be that I should again consider Böhler's doctrine of faith; examine myself whether I was in *the faith*; and if I was not, never cease seeking and longing after it, till I attained it.⁵⁸

This is one of many examples of Charles's interpreting illness as a sign of God's disapproval.

For the first three weeks of May 1738, he was convinced that he did not have a faith in the Gospel: 'In the afternoon I seemed deeply sensible of my misery, in being without Christ'.⁵⁹ He spent all his time praying, reading scripture and discussing religion. On 17 May, having read 'Luther on the Galatians', he found Luther 'nobly full of faith' and was astounded that he should ever have thought the doctrine of 'justification by faith alone' a new doctrine:

From this time I endeavoured to ground as many of our friends as came in this fundamental truth, salvation by faith alone, not an idle, dead faith, but a faith which works by love, and is necessarily productive of all good works and holiness.⁶⁰

He then 'laboured and waited and prayed, to feel "who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*"' and finally gained an assurance, from reading Luther, that God would 'finish the work'. Then he 'slept in peace'.

There was intense pressure on him to undergo a 'converting' experience: he was staying in the house of a Mr. Bray, 'a poor ignorant mechanic, who [knew] nothing but Christ'.⁶¹ He was very ill with breathlessness and pain, and required medical attention. He was surrounded by people who had experienced conversion, one of

⁵⁷ CW 97.

⁵⁸ CW100, (28 April 1838).

⁵⁹ CW103.

⁶⁰ CW 104.

⁶¹ CW 101

whom told him he would not rise from his bed until he believed, and more than once he 'received the sacrament; but not Christ'.⁶² There were further Bible readings which indicated to him that he could expect to experience 'healing' faith. On 21 May, from his bed, he heard a voice, which he took to be that of Mr. Bray's sister, saying, 'In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise, and believe, and thou shalt be healed of all thine infirmities!' It was confirmed that it was indeed her voice, that she had had a dream of opening a door when somebody knocked, and finding Jesus there. She had wakened up in fear, felt uneasy throughout the day, and then had a religious experience in evening prayers. Charles wrote that she felt 'enlarged in love and prayer for all mankind, and commanded to go and assure me from Christ of my recovery, soul and body'. She was encouraged by her brother to carry out this command; and after Charles heard her words, he searched the scripture for confirmation that they were from God. He found several confirming texts and then gained a sense of peace: his 'temper' was 'mistrust of my own great, but before unknown, weakness.' He wrote, 'I saw that by faith I stood; by the continual support of faith, which kept me from falling, though of myself I am ever sinking into sin. I went to bed still sensible of my own weakness (I humbly hope to be more and more so), yet confident of Christ's protection'.⁶³ On going to sleep, he dreamt of facing two devils, one under his feet and the other facing him, but they 'faded, and sunk, and vanished away' when he told them he belonged to Christ.⁶⁴

He describes subsequently struggling against Satan. He believed Satan was discouraging him from writing hymns or proclaiming his faith, accusing him of pride, but he finished what is known as the conversion hymn nevertheless. At the sacrament four days later (25 May 1738), he had a further experience:

in the prayer of consecration I saw, by the eye of faith, or rather had a glimpse of Christ's broken, mangled body, as taking down from the cross. Still I could not observe the prayer, but only repeat with tears, "O Love, Love!" At the same time, I felt great peace and joy; and assurance of feeling more when it is best.⁶⁵

Following these experiences, his health improved. He was energised to write

⁶²CW 104, (19 May 1738).

⁶³ CW 106-8.

⁶⁴ CW108.

more hymns and preach sermons; he had a strong urge to share his experience as widely as possible. This was the beginning of his ministry; but like John, he could not rest securely in a place of peace and joy, but continued to sink into periods of despondency.

7.5 Character and Relationships

The information from the journals and letters about Charles Wesley's relationships sheds significant light on his character. So do the opinions of those who were close to him. The opinions on his personality by biographers and other authors are less useful, though one or two have been repeated several times, and are in danger of being regarded as fact. Newton quotes Rack who writes that 'he seems almost a manic-depressive personality', and both of them, and others, suggest that John resembled his mother in being more calm, rational and intellectual, while Charles, like his father, was passionate, poetic, and subject to mood swings. Rack sees Charles as of 'less robust constitution' than John and writes, 'this may help to account for his later vacillations of behaviour'⁶⁶

The evidence suggests that there is an element of truth in this 'head' versus 'heart' contrast, and John appeared to think so; he wrote a letter to Charles, urging that they should cooperate better together, 'If I am (in some sense) the head and you the heart, may it not be said, 'the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint?'.⁶⁷ On another occasion, acknowledging Charles's gift for powerful preaching, he wrote, encouraging him to preach instantaneous full redemption: 'in connection I beat you, but in strong pointed sentences you beat me.'⁶⁸ However, the situation is more complex than these dichotomies and the apparent parental resemblances suggest; they should be questioned, as should Rack's implication that the more overtly emotional brother was in some sense less psychologically sound.

Nothing could be more different from John Wesley's 'going along in an even line' than Charles's mood changes. His experience of the rapidity of these has already

⁶⁵ CW 111.

⁶⁶ Rack, 252, in John A. Newton, "John and Charles Wesley: Brothers in Arms", *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society*, 2, (1998), 11-12,20.

⁶⁷Telford, iv, 322, (28 February 1766)

been shown in the letter he wrote on the way to Georgia; in the space of the letter, his mood shifted markedly (in response, on this occasion, to what he was writing). This changeability was also seen in an episode during which he felt that God had left him in 'desertion'. One minute, he was 'weak and faint in mind', with no strength and wanting to be released from his ministry, while the next, having found a sign from God in the Scriptures, he was preaching 'with power'. He described children, soldiers and others shouting and roaring, 'the enemy raged exceedingly... I never felt such power before ... I saw God had great work to do among us by Satan's opposition. I lifted up my voice like a trumpet, and in a few minutes drove him out of the field.'⁶⁹

There are many instances of his mood being depressed, of his feeling inadequate to his task, and of his wanting to escape from his responsibility. In a letter to George Whitefield, just over a year after his conversion, he wrote: 'I am continually tempted to leave off preaching and hide myself, like J. Hutchins. I should then be freer from temptation and at leisure to attend to my own improvement. God continues to work *by* me but not *in* me, that I can perceive. Do not reckon on me, my brother, in the work that God is doing; for I cannot expect He should long employ one who is ever longing and murmuring to be discharged.'⁷⁰ Equally common are instances of his mood lifting often from preaching, reading, talking to friends, or helping somebody in need, and usually when his attention has been brought back to the Gospel message. In his journal, (6 August 1738), he wrote, 'I preached at Islington and gave the cup. In the afternoon I read prayers in a church in London, and preached again. I was faint, and full of pain when I began; but my work quite cured me.'⁷¹ His descriptions of his mood swinging from despondency to elation continued after his conversion experience, so it is clear that that experience did not result in his moods being stabilized. However, there was a difference in the way in which he felt, which he was able to describe.

Only ten days after his conversion experience he describes an episode of depression and deadness. It is quoted here at length, because it clearly describes an alteration which was crucial to his future experience, and which enabled him to deal with further episodes of depression. On 1 June 1738 he wrote that he 'could not pray,

⁶⁸ Telford, v, 16, (27 June 1766)

⁶⁹ CW 199, (16 September 1739).

⁷⁰ CW 183, (10 August 1739).

⁷¹ CW 142.

being utterly dead to the sacrament'. The following day, he was 'still unable to pray; still dead in communicating; full of cowardly desire of death'. For two more days, the deadness, heaviness and aversion to prayer continued, and he went to church, where 'the prayers and sacraments were exceeding grievous to [him]'. He wrote that he could not help asking himself:

"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.*⁷² (My italics)

He then wrote of helping a Mr. Brown with his faith, praying, singing and discussing with others, and 'opening the Bible'. They 'praised God, to the confirmation of my faith. The weight was quite taken off'. This confirmed for him that the best cure for being 'cast down' and 'most unable to help ourselves', was to 'labour ... for our neighbour'.⁷³

When the 'weight was quite taken off', he became enthusiastic, energised, his health improved, and he began preaching 'faith in Christ'. This improvement in mood continued into June 1738: he discussed his experience wherever he went and urged others to share it. To those of the same mind, this was a great time of rejoicing, but the reaction of Mrs. Delamotte, a friend who was not of his opinion, suggests that his excitement and insistence could be overwhelming. She accused him of 'seducing' her children in her absence, and when he reiterated his experience of 'instantaneous faith', 'she started up, said she could not bear it and ran out of the house.'⁷⁴ The evidence suggests that he suffered from marked mood swings, with excitement which was sometimes marked enough to irritate other people, but there is little to point to a manic-depressive (bipolar) illness. So far as is known, his mood changes never interfered with his ability to function or to form relationships. In fact, Charles's access to his feelings resulted in his being able to be compassionate towards people in distress and to relate in a loving way to his wife and family.

⁷² CW 114.

⁷³ CW115.

⁷⁴CW 125, (26 June 1738).

7.5.1 Man of the heart - Benefits

7.5.1.1 Pastoral Care

Although Charles Wesley is remembered mainly as a hymn-writer, and tends to be stereotyped as preferring to mix with the aristocracy and middle- and upper-class Methodists, rather than the poor,⁷⁵ his journal contradicts this. It includes many instances which demonstrate his work as an effective pastor; he regularly ministered to the sick, the dying, the mentally ill,⁷⁶ and to prisoners. He did indeed mix with the aristocracy, particularly in order to ensure that his musically gifted sons received the necessary teaching and opportunities to perform, but much of his ministry was with the poor.

Only one example of his pastoral work will be described, but it is one which gives a great deal of information about his character. Tyson's has transcribed hitherto unpublished material, including shorthand sections, from a fragment of manuscript found separate from the main journal manuscript transcribed by Kimbrough and Newport, and combined it with published material. It is now possible to follow in detail the events of early December 1753.⁷⁷

At this time he was caring for a John Hutchinson, who was clearly in a very disturbed, if not psychotic, state. They were together in Bath, when Charles was informed that John Wesley was close to death, and that if he wanted to see him alive, he should go immediately to London. Afraid to leave Hutchinson alone because of his disturbed mental state, he took him with him, arriving on 1 December 1753, after two days of travelling. By this time John Wesley was beginning to recover. There was a transient improvement in Hutchinson's condition, but each night of their stay Charles had to ensure that his agitated 'patient', as he called him, was in a safe place. On 4 December, Charles received a letter informing him that his wife had contracted 'confluent' (i.e. dangerously severe) smallpox; he was afraid she would die and felt he

⁷⁵Richard P. Heitzenrater, "Charles Wesley and the Methodist tradition" in ed, S.T. Kimbrough, *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1992), 185.

⁷⁶ He wrote a letter to his wife Sally, describing a visit to William Cowper, ('in the madhouse'), who had 'not spoken for four months'. Jackson, II, 188.

⁷⁷ Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, 325-332. (Transcription from shorthand in italics).

must get to her as soon as possible. Again he felt he had no option but to take Hutchinson with him. There followed three days of torment - '*as in hell*'. Having been told he would not be able to stay at Charles's house, where there was only a bed for Charles, and where his wife was ill, Hutchinson '*flew into an outrageous passion*'. Charles wrote, '*My flesh shrank at taking him, a miserable comforter to me in my lowest distress; yet I durst not leave him in such condition, a sure prey to Satan. The lightest consequence of his stay in London ... is bodily death. I therefore tried again to pacify him*'. Hutchinson was wavering as to whether or not he would make the journey to Bristol, and having begun it, he constantly tried to leave the coach and return to London. He was verbally abusive and physically violent when Charles was with him, but '*affrighted at [Charles's] absence*'. When they stayed overnight at Marlborough there was more violence:

*I ordered a bed to myself in another chamber. He followed me in a transport of rage, laid hold of me and began dragging me back to his room. I did not follow readily; which made him roar as if possessed, and drew all the family to us. Had I put forth my strength he could not have prevailed but I was afraid to hurt him, and therefore let him drag me through a long gallery to his chamber. Then he locked me in. The servants without were frightened, fearing murder, and broke open the door. He made me sit down and I allowed him an hour to cool, then he fell on his knees and begged my pardon for the violence he had offered me and for so exposing himself and me. I said all that I could to soothe him and then betook me to rest in [the] other room.
(5 December 1753)*

The journal for the following day reports that, 'He [Hutchinson] had been sorely tempted in the night to cut his throat'. The journey continued with further outbursts of rage, and '*relapses into his strange madness*', but finally Hutchinson was gratefully delivered to his sister, and Charles had to be revived with 'a cordial' and taken home in Lady Huntingdon's coach.

This episode shows a man of extraordinary resilience, who was able to think about another's needs at a time when he would have been very anxious about his brother and then his wife. He saw the illness as Satan using Hutchinson as a messenger to 'buffet him', but he recognised Hutchinson's need for him in spite of the abuse and aggression, and courageously tolerated his behaviour without retaliating. Charles persevered, largely alone, ensuring that he was safely looked after, for what must have felt like an eternity. There is no suggestion that he saw this as a 'saintly'

action, or that he was ‘preening’ himself because of his worthiness; he was well aware that he would rather not be doing it, but merely saw it as necessary, and therefore, that his own comfort and peace had to take second place. There are many other examples of his care for the dying, for condemned prisoners, and for the sick, which show the same capacity for empathy. He often wrote to the bereaved, and while he held the same beliefs about mourning as John Wesley, that there should be a limit to grieving, he would not introduce this thought until he had first acknowledged and sympathised with the mourner’s pain.⁷⁸

His capacity for empathy, for putting himself in another’s shoes, is demonstrated in the way he speaks in the voice of a woman in labour in one of his poems, ‘For a woman in travail’. This must have been an unusual poem for a man to write in the eighteenth century, as it would be even today:

Whisper to my listening soul,
Wilt Thou not my strength renew,
Nature’s fears and pangs control,
And bring Thy handmaid through?⁷⁹

7.5.1.2 Family Relationships

Some aspects of his relationship with his brothers have already been discussed. There is evidence in the journal that he also maintained contact with his sisters, was supportive to them in their troubles, and was concerned about their religious struggles. He wrote affectionately about ‘[p]oor sister Hetty’. ‘Little of that time [in London] did I lose, being with her almost continually. I could envy myself the deal of pleasure I had crowded within that small space’.⁸⁰ He was present during her last illness, in which, like her mother, she was struggling to believe she was acceptable to God. He was compassionate and reassuring on another occasion: ‘Prayed by my sister Wright, a gracious, tender, troubling soul; a bruised reed, which the Lord will not break ... very near the haven ... yet still in darkness, and fears, against hope believing in hope ... a few minutes after her spirit was set at liberty... Had sweet fellowship with her in

⁷⁸*Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 123.

⁷⁹PW, vii, Hymn LIII, p.60

explaining at the chapel those solemn words: “Thy sun shall go down no more, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting spirit, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended”... All seemed partakers of my sorrow and my joy.⁸¹

As a young man, he had a brief relationship with an actress, Molly, which, according to a letter to John, resulted in his becoming more discriminating about women: ‘I shall be far less addicted to gallantry, and doing what sister Nutty said you did - liking women merely for being women ... but enough of her - I’ll blot my brain and paper no longer with her’.⁸² He was also part of the ‘Cotswold Set’, and clearly enjoyed their company, so much so that he wrote to John in 1729 saying he dare not go to Stanton Harcourt without John, ‘for I take it strong pleasure would be dangerous to one in my unconfirmed condition.’⁸³ The letter already quoted, to ‘Varanese’ and ‘Selima’, written on board ship, does not have the extravagance of John’s letters to them; but he was depressed at the time, and in the absence of other letters, no conclusions can be drawn about his relationships with these women. The fact that he did not marry for twenty years after his involvement with the ‘Cotswold Set’, suggests that, as for John, for Charles also they represented something of the ‘serpent in Eden’.

When he did marry, in April 1749, it was only after a great deal of doubt and soul-searching. He was sure of his feelings for Sally Gwynne, but required confirmation from John and many other Methodists that this was the right thing to do, for himself, for Sally, and for the Methodist society. He was very hesitant and diffident, not sure that he was good enough, writing to Sally, urging her not to ‘expect too much! I am a man of like passions - compassed about with infirmities, weak in faith, and wanting in all things’.⁸⁴ However, his later letters to Sally and the evidence from the journal suggest that, once married, the relationship gave him a close confidante (he described her as ‘his best friend’) and the security of feeling loved. In spite of the trials due to his itinerant ministry, his ill-health, and their loss of five children out of eight, there is nothing which suggests that they ever ceased to be emotionally close and mutually supportive. While he was not slow to give advice

⁸⁰ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 8.

⁸¹ CW, 589-91. (5-21 March 1750).

⁸² *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 12.

⁸³ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 15-6.

regarding the upbringing of the children, he nevertheless respected her opinion as to what was best for them: they acted together as a parental couple. For instance, in a letter of 11 April 1760, when he was hoping that she could come to stay in London, where he was working, he wrote, 'You will not mistake my tenderness for indifference. The greatest earthly blessing I could obtain, were a sight of you and the children; but I should buy it too dear, if you came unwillingly. Therefore do as you find best in your own heart. Come with Charley, or without him, or not at all. Your will I shall receive as the will of Providence.'⁸⁵ These expressions of longing for her company, of wanting to be at home with his family, became stronger as he grew older, and less inclined to continue his itineracy.

There are many letters which show his intense interest and involvement in the care of the children. He wanted to know about their progress in detail, wrote poems about their struggles, including teething problems, and was intimately concerned about their health and education. Like John he recommended his mother's methods, urging Sally to adhere to 'Locke's rules' which were the 'whole secret of education'; but he clearly found it difficult to be as consistent and severe as the rules suggested. He thought his son Charley was so easy to manage that he need not be 'chastis[ed] too severely'.⁸⁶ One of his *Hymns for the use of Families* (1767), shows that he believed there were dangers, in being both too lenient and too severe. He writes first about parents who overindulge their children:

The proud with ranker pride they fill,
Heighten their worst disease,
And fondly soothe the stubborn will
To tenfold stubbornness. ...

Down a broad easy way they glide
To endless misery,
And curse their doting parent's pride
To all eternity.

He then describes those at the other 'merciless' extreme:

⁸⁴ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 60-66.

⁸⁵ Thomas Jackson, *The Journal of Charles Wesley*, II, 234.

⁸⁶ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, (1995), 109.

They vent their passion's furious heat
In stern tyrannic sway,
Their children as their beasts they treat,
And force the slaves to' obey.

With notions fraught, the Stoics sour
Pursue their rigid plan,
In weakness look for perfect power,
In babes the strength of man; ...

Harass'd by long domestic war
With scarce a truce between,
Their children's tender minds abhor,
The' *Egyptian* discipline;
They quite throw off the yoke severe,
O'er nature's wilds to rove,
And hate the objects of their fear
Whom they could never love.⁸⁷

While he himself had not managed to 'throw off the yoke', he provides a clear picture here of how 'evangelical nurture' results in a level of anger and hatred which is difficult to manage. Yet his daughter Sally wrote of her father:

*So kind and amiable a character in domestic life can scarcely be imagined. The tenderness he showed in every weakness, and the sympathy in every pain, would fill sheets to describe. But I am not writing his eulogy; only I must add, with so warm a temper, he was never heard to speak an angry word to a servant, or known to strike a child in anger; and he knew no guile.*⁸⁸

7.5.2 Man of the Heart - Disadvantages

In addition to having to *suffer* his episodes of depression, the fact that he was so emotional meant that, as his daughter Sally recognised, he also had to struggle at times to control his anger - 'the old man'. Sometimes this would erupt in action, as when he left the 1755 Methodist Conference early, in protest that it had not been definite enough in prohibiting Methodist preachers from administering communion.⁸⁹ Similarly, when he became angry about John's intention to marry Grace Murray, he

⁸⁷ PW vii, Hymn lxii, p.74-5.

⁸⁸Richard Watson, *The Life of John Wesley*, (London, 1831), 410.

acted impulsively and intervened in a way which may have been destructive to some extent of John's future happiness; certainly it affected his own future relationship with John.

At other times he would lose his temper and frighten people by his loss of control. Best quotes John Cennick, a leading lay-worker, who was a Calvinist and became involved with Charles in an argument about 'election': 'Charles fell into a violent passion and affrighted all the table, and rising from the table, he said he would go directly and preach against me, and he accordingly did.'⁹⁰

On other occasions his anger would appear in his forceful verbal or written confrontations, as in his arguments with John over the question of ordination. Like John, while he was not physically violent, he had a 'biting' wit, with a ready use of irony, sarcasm and ridicule. This sarcastic tone is captured in a letter to his wife. He was writing about John's wife, whom he disliked and found impossible to deal with: 'I met my good angel and sister. I have done her honour before the people, and behaved (though I say it) very much like a gentleman; only that I took a French leave this morning, that is, left Leeds, without telling either her or her husband.'⁹¹ Lloyd stresses the volatile, aggressive and impulsive aspects of his personality.⁹²

After Charles's death, his wife wrote that he 'seemed formed by nature to repose in the bosom of his family. Tender, indulgent, kind, as a brother, a husband, a father, and a master'; but she also noted that his patience and meekness were 'neither the effect of temperament or reason, but of divine principles'. She stressed humility as his 'most striking excellence' and noted, that while, like John, he could respect and be fully reconciled with his enemies, unlike John, he 'could not replace his confidence where he had experienced treachery'.⁹³ While this account, coming from his wife, may well be biased, as may his daughter's, they were the people closest to him, and it is of interest that both were aware that, although kind and gentle, he had to struggle with altogether different internal impulses.

⁸⁹ Best, *Charles Wesley: A Biography*, 239.

⁹⁰ Best, *Charles Wesley: A Biography*, 146.

⁹¹ Jackson, , II, letter, xxxiv, 202.

⁹² Lloyd, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity*, 100-2.

⁹³ A Remembrance of Charles Wesley by Sarah Wesley, published in Charles Wesley, *Sermons of the Late Charles Wesley*, (London: Baldwin, Craddock and Joy, 1816), xxxii-xxxiv, quoted in Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, 9.

7.5.3 Man of Reason

Charles Wesley was an emotional man. It is this is the aspect of his personality which is usually contrasted with John's more rational and intellectual character. But this is a simplification. The evidence shows that Charles was capable of being analytical, sceptical, diplomatic, and of acting with common-sense for a great deal of the time.

7.5.3.1 Reason and discrimination

Samuel Johnson wrote about John Wesley's susceptibility to believe in the supernatural, but thought that Charles was a more 'stationary' man, and less gullible.⁹⁴ When he preached, he was particularly careful not to accept all bizarre behaviour in his listeners as evidence of divine intervention: on 10 January 1739, he wrote in his journal, 'We had some discourse about agitations; no signs of grace, in my humble opinion';⁹⁵ on 22 April 1739, 'Talked with the Count [Zinzendorf] about motions, visions, dreams and was confirmed in my dislike to them';⁹⁶ and on 24 May 1739, 'I believe not every spirit, nor any till I have tried it by the fruits and the written word.'⁹⁷ While he believed that many could be 'struck down, both soul and body, into the depth of distress', he dealt with those he considered to be blaspheming ('by 'mimic[king] the spirit of God'), by a method of which modern behavioural psychologists would be proud. They were moved to a corner of the room or taken outside, where they could not be seen, and were then ignored: 'A girl, as she began to cry out, I ordered to be carried out. Her convulsion was so violent as to take away the use of her limbs, till they laid her and left her without the door. She immediately found her legs and walked off.' For Charles, fits and convulsions were devices of Satan, which interfered with his work.⁹⁸

He could be diplomatic. The journal describes his response, when asked to

⁹⁴James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), II, 224, quoted in John A. Newton, "John and Charles Wesley: Brothers in Arms", *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society*, 2, (1998), 11.

⁹⁵CW 158.

⁹⁶CW 171

⁹⁷CW 171.

⁹⁸ CW 350-1 (4 and 15 June 1743).

reprove Howel Harris in public for preaching predestination: 'I smiled at Satan's imprudence, but turned aside the question with mildness, and thanks to the proposer ... I quashed all farther importunity by declaring, " I am unwilling to speak of my brother Howel Harris, because, when I begin, I know not how to leave off, and should say so much good of him as some of you could not bear".'⁹⁹

Although he often persisted with his preaching and travelling in dangerous situations, there were times when common-sense prevailed. At a time when both he and John had suffered violence and been pelted with dirt and stones, he concluded in his journal, that they should take more care about where to preach, and 'wait upon God': '[A] false courage, which is a fear of shame, may otherwise betray us into unnecessary dangers. ... To seek redress by law, unless we are very sure of obtaining it, is only to discover our own weakness, and irritate our opposers.'¹⁰⁰

Although he was often impulsive and easily emotionally involved with people, he did not flinch from imposing on the lay preachers the necessary standards of education, morality and preaching. Similarly, if it were thought necessary to expel a member from the society, he was able to do it, but not without misgivings: 'I was forced to cut off a rotten member. But I felt such love and pity at the time, as humbled me into dust. It was as if one criminal was made to execute another.'¹⁰¹

7.5.3.2 Dependency and conformity

While he was impulsive and driven by emotion, he was far from being a revolutionary. There was a lack of confidence in himself and his own opinions. He had a tendency to rely on others (particularly as a young man), he worried about the 'proprieties', and he had a preference for the 'status quo'. The lack of confidence in himself and his opinions has been shown in his anxieties prior to his marriage. His tendency to rely on others has been discussed by Edwards, who saw the two main contenders for his allegiance as John and their elder brother Samuel. Samuel, as a High Churchman, was distressed by their open air preaching, which he described to his mother as a 'spreading delusion'. Having been heavily influenced by Samuel as a

⁹⁹CW 289, (18 November 1740).

¹⁰⁰CW 386-7, (8 February 1744).

¹⁰¹ CW 273, (16 July 1740).

boy, Charles deferred to John at Oxford and in the early days of their ministry; but Edwards contends that Samuel's influence prevailed in the end, in Charles's insistence that no action should be taken, which might lead to separation from the Church.¹⁰² Certainly he was passionate, throughout his adult life, about the need to stay in the Established Church, and may have been influenced in this by Samuel and his father; but later in his life, he had made these beliefs his own and defended them vigorously.

Lloyd emphasises Charles's dependence on John and their sibling rivalry. He suggests that both brothers struggled with feelings of loss when faced with the prospect of the other marrying, with each feeling betrayed by the other. He also suggests that John was replaced in Charles's life by his wife Sally, on whom he was later dependant, and he hints that John's plans to marry and his conversion, soon after Charles's, was not unconnected with the rivalry between them.¹⁰³ He sees the disagreements over their marriages as resulting in a fundamental change in nature of their relationship, so that Charles's attitude to the possibility of Methodist ordinations and separation from the Church of England is seen as a *consequence* of his loss of trust in and sense of betrayal by John, rather than a cause of dispute. As evidence he cites Charles's subsequent preoccupation with loyalty and a need to 'keep faith' with the Church was a manifestation of the failure to keep faith in the relationship.¹⁰⁴ This is open to question. While their disputes and rivalry would undoubtedly have been factors in the ways they felt and behaved, there would have been others. For instance, Charles's own love for and loyalty to the Church and the influence of his father and brother Samuel would have affected his attitude to separation. To contend that Charles's attitude to the Church, and his apparently happy and long-lasting relationship with his wife, an important and healthy aspect of his life, were a response to a breach of trust between the brothers is to give that breach too much weight. It would seem more likely that these were further episodes of disagreement in which the brothers engaged with the ferocity to which they were accustomed. Charles could be 'hateful' to John when they disagreed, while John retaliated in his stubborn, less dramatic way, but these were continuing features of a strong bond, which the evidence

¹⁰² Maldwyn Edwards, *Sons to Samuel*, (London: Epworth Press, 1961), 33-7.

¹⁰³ Lloyd, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity*, 101-3.

¹⁰⁴ *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity*, 131-2, 147.

suggests persisted throughout their lives. The relationship with John was complicated and intense, and like most sibling relationships had to struggle to contain strong feelings of love and hate.

Charles's response to John's intention to marry Grace Murray was in part an objection to the discrepancy in social class between them and the deleterious effect he thought this would have on Methodism. Another of his *Hymns for the use of Families* shows that he considered that the inequalities of the social hierarchy were fixed, and that they had to be managed rather than changed.¹⁰⁵

7.5.4 Dealing with feelings.

The overall picture of Charles is a complex one. He was a man of intense feeling and, as with John, there were many contradictory elements. The next section looks at some aspects of his personality, and at some of the techniques that he used to manage his feelings. It will examine those qualities and techniques that would have contributed to his ability to relate to people empathically and kindly, as described by his wife and daughter, and to his gaining the reputation of being a 'man made for friendship';¹⁰⁶ and to his abilities as a preacher and pastor. It will also consider any defensive behaviours or symptoms, which may have made life more uncomfortable for him.

7.5.4.1 Confiding

In addition to being able to experience and acknowledge feelings of sadness, anger and exhilaration, he was able to share his feelings with his wife. His letters suggest that he trusted her enough to let her know about feelings he was embarrassed about or ashamed of, whether they were trivial or serious. For instance, in writing to her about his preaching, he confessed, 'To any but you I durst not tell how strangely I was carried out, for fear of pride'¹⁰⁷ Such intimacy would have reduced the level of tension he had to deal with.

¹⁰⁵ PW ii, hymn cxlii, p.169-170.

¹⁰⁶ Frederick Gill, *Charles Wesley the First Methodist*, (London: Epworth Press, 1964), 38.

¹⁰⁷ 15 May, (year unknown), Jackson, II, 179

7.5.4.2 Writing

His poems and hymns helped him to deal with his feelings, for instance in coping with loss. Intellectually at least, his beliefs about death coincided with those of John and Susanna Wesley: that God's will must not be questioned and that there should be rejoicing that the loved one was welcomed into paradise. However, having lost their first child John (Jacky), aged sixteen months, he wrote several hymns about the dying and death of children, and they served two functions for him. Firstly, they included an outpouring of searing grief:

Yet nature *will* repeat her moan,
And fondly cry, 'My son, my son!'...

Turn from him, turn, officious thought!
Officious thought presents again
The thousand little acts he wrought,
Which wound my heart with soothing pain:
His looks, his winning gestures rise,
His waving hands and laughing eyes!

Those waving hands no more shall move,
Those laughing eyes shall smile no more:
He cannot now engage our love
With sweet insinuating power,
Our weak unguarded hearts ensnare,
And rival his Creator here.¹⁰⁸

Secondly, the verses were a space in which he could externalise and wrestle with his conflicting responses to his loss. In some he manages with great difficulty to resign himself to what he sees as God's omniscient will, providing what is ultimately best for the child:

But shall sinful man complain,
Stripp'd by the Divine decree?
Dares our impious grief arraign
Heaven's tremendous majesty?
Rather let us meekly own
All is right which God has done.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ "On the death of a child", in PW vi, Hymn xx, p.253.

In Hymn lxi of *Hymns for the use of Families*, he goes so far as praying for the death of a child, if God, in his prescient wisdom, can foresee a life of ‘misery and vice’. The hymn ends:

Hear Thy Spirit’s cry within
A poor earthly parent’s breast,
Save a helpless babe from sin,
Snatch him now to endless rest.¹¹⁰

On the other hand, in Hymn xcix, in which the subject is ‘we’, where he movingly intercedes for himself and his wife, he asks forgiveness for praying that a sick child might live, but then in the third verse manages to write:

Prostrate before Thy mercy-seat
We ask; but would our will submit,
Whene’er Thy sovereign will remove
The child, whom next to Thee we love.

He struggles through the next five verses, oscillating between praying for the ‘faith of *Abraham*’, and praying for the child not to die:

Ah, do not now our child require:
Or taking whom Thy mercy gave,
Indulge *us* with a common grave.

Finally, in this hymn (unusually), he cannot manage to resign himself to the child’s death, and throws himself on Christ’s mercy; it ends:

Father, aright we cannot pray -
But Jesus reads the troubled breast -
O let His bowels speak the rest!¹¹¹

Here his grief overpowered what he believed would have been the right response, but he was able to trust that Christ could ‘read the troubled breast’ and forgive the grieving parents; it is difficult to imagine John Wesley ending a hymn in

¹⁰⁹ *PW*, vii, hymn lxxii, p.83.

¹¹⁰ *PW* vii, hymn lxi, p.70.

¹¹¹ *PW* vii, hymn xcix, p.118-9.

such a way.

7.5.4.3 Confrontation

There is evidence that Charles was able to face his destructiveness more directly than his brother could. He used the same conventional vocabulary to describe the human sinful state - the corrupt body, worldliness, self-love, inbred sin, blind or dead in sin, heart of stone, the old Adam, etc.- but there was no sense that these terms were abstract labels or that what they represented could be suddenly be got rid of. That he related them intimately to instances in his life when he felt he had been destructive in his relationships is shown by an incident reported in a letter to a friend, recounted in his journal. The entry for 17 December 1744 records that he had 'innocently brought such a burden on [his] friends, especially one' and that he could not 'conceive it possible that this trouble will be wholly removed *here*'.¹¹² The text suggests that he had caused somebody (possibly the Countess of Huntingdon, a good friend at the time) to be angry and upset. He wrote: '[God] has likewise given me to love others with a pure love; particularly one person, from whom I never expect or desire any further communication of good, than I do from my mother [now dead], or spirits of just men made perfect. And, however Providence may work, I mean never more to see *that person* ... till we meet at the judgement seat'. He also wrote a hymn at that time, in which he *felt* his 'shame' and 'dishonour' and recognised that while free from 'outward vice', 'Inwardly, like other men,/ Wholly born in sin I am'. The hymn continued with a plea for God's righteous judgement and his love.¹¹³ Two months later there is another letter to a 'friend': 'The loss of all things and life itself is nothing to the 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.'¹¹⁴ It is not at all clear what has happened between these friends but there is no doubt Charles's 'sinfulness' to him is real, serious and to be owned. It had to be judged and was too appalling to be faced all at once:

¹¹² CW 431.

¹¹³ Jackson, , I, 390-1.

¹¹⁴ CW 435, (16 February 1745).

Show me, as my soul can bear,
The depth of inbred sin;
All the unbelief declare,
The pride that lurks within;¹¹⁵

7.5.4.4 Self-love

But Charles also saw the need for self-love. In August 1786, he wrote to his son Charles, 'Self-love is not in itself sinful. There is a right and just self-love, which sets a man upon securing his only true (that is, his eternal) happiness'.¹¹⁶ The combination of self-love and knowledge of a capacity for destructiveness, meant that Charles developed a degree of tolerance for ambivalence in himself and others. His hate and anger were, for the most part, owned rather than projected into others.

7.5.4.5 Work

Charles became aware that activity, particularly preaching, made him feel better. In a letter, probably written around 1764-6, he wrote, 'My work, I know very well keeps me alive, more than it wears me out'¹¹⁷ and, as already mentioned, his journal of 6 August 1738 records that when he started preaching, he was 'faint and full of pain ... but [his] work quite cured [him]'.¹¹⁸ Though less than John's, the amount of travelling and preaching he did was prodigious by normal standards. He persisted in travelling in dreadful weather conditions; on 18 November 1744, he walked to Sunderland and back from Newcastle in 'hail and snow', so violent that at times, he could neither 'walk nor stand'.¹¹⁹ Similarly, he wrote around nine thousand hymns, many while he was travelling on horse-back. Watson explains this 'compulsive hymn-writing' over many years, in terms of the impossibility of writing a single hymn which could adequately describe the mystery of redemption. Because of the limitations of language, no hymn on the subject could ever be complete, there could never be a place to end, and so he was driven to offer more incomplete, 'non-answers', to help to

¹¹⁵ PW II, 263.

¹¹⁶ Jackson, II, letter xcvi, 275.

¹¹⁷ Jackson, II, letter lxix, 246.

¹¹⁸ CW 142.

explain the nature of the mystery.¹²⁰ This is likely to be part of the explanation for his massive output, but his persistence also has a ‘compulsive’ quality to it. It is possible that hymn-writing was one aspect of his need to work, in order to feel better, partly, as described above, by externalising his conflicts and expressing emotion, but also as a reparative activity, driven by unconscious guilt.

According to Newport, Charles Wesley, like John, preached mainly in the ‘plain style’; but at times his sermons included features of the rhetorical tradition, with more ornate language, play on words, the inclusion of Greek quotations, and references to the Homilies and Articles of the Church of England.¹²¹ However, the most outstanding feature of his preaching as recorded in his journal, was the passionate outpouring of emotion it involved. After his conversion experience, he increasingly preached without notes and often on a random text from the Bible, and, as Baker comments, ‘one of his greatest thrills and greatest temptations was that of feeling a crowd responding to his own emotions’. In August 1739:

In this amphitheatre they stood, deeply attentive, while I called upon them in Christ’s words, ‘Come unto me, all that are weary’. The tears of many testified that they were ready to enter into that rest. God enabled me to lift up my voice like a trumpet, so that all distinctly heard me.¹²²

In his journal of 7 August 1739, he wrote of his success in preaching and of the guilt that accompanied it: ‘Too well pleased with my success, which brought upon me the buffetings of Satan.’¹²³

He would become so carried away with emotion, that his sermons were often very long, and at times he felt so transported by his feelings that his words were ‘not his own’. Baker quotes a letter of Charles to John, describing his experience of preaching on Easter Day 1740. He thought the Moravian teaching on ‘stillness’ was a dangerous one, but had resolved to say nothing controversial on this occasion, ‘but God ordered it better. He led me, I know not how, in ipsam aciem et certamen. How

¹¹⁹ CW 428.

¹²⁰ J.R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 222-3.

¹²¹ K.G.C. Newport, *Sermons*, 44-5.

¹²² *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 36.

¹²³ CW 183.

or where it came in I cannot conceive, but my mouth was opened, and the Spirit gave me utterance as I never before experienced.’¹²⁴ On 13 August 1744, he wrote, ‘Enlarged in the Castle on our Lord’s lamentation over Jerusalem, and many wept, because they knew the time of *their* visitation. In the Society I was borne as on eagle’s wings. All were partakers of my faith and joy.’¹²⁵

Charles Wesley was not only a passionate preacher; he was also very much aware of his power over people. His journal of 18 March 1740 tells how he was able to calm hostile rioters:

Preached at the usual place from Isaiah 11[:6], ‘The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb’, etc. Set my eyes on the man that had been violent with me on Sunday, and testified my love. He thanked me, and seemed melted.¹²⁶

Although Charles is celebrated mainly for his role as a hymn-writer, and although he was even more reluctant initially than John was to preach in the open air, his preaching formed an important and effective part of his ministry. Although he did not match John’s extraordinary levels of activity, he nevertheless preached energetically and frequently throughout most of his life.

7.5.4.6 Bodily Suffering.

Charles Wesley’s journal made clear that before the ‘conversion’ he suffered significant bouts of depression, with guilt, and wished that he could die. He also would become physically ill under stress, as in Georgia; as Britton has outlined, when unconscious elements are uncontained, or ‘untransformed’, they are ‘otherwise expelled in psychosomatic phenomena, action, or hallucinosis’.¹²⁷

When Charles did not deal with upsetting affects consciously, they would manifest themselves physically. Dr. Whitehead, one of Charles Wesley’s friends, who was also one of his medical advisors, wrote an account of his death, and he described him as having had ‘a weak body, and a poor state of health, during the greater part of

¹²⁴ *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 40.

¹²⁵ CW 417-8.

¹²⁶ CW 224-5.

¹²⁷ Ronald Britton, *Sex, Death and the Superego: Experiences in Psychoanalysis*, (London/New York: Karnac, 2003), 78.

his life'.¹²⁸ There were frequent episodes of illness and his journal describes his having suffered from 'fevers', or the 'flux', or 'pleurisy', and a variety of symptoms such as headaches, weakness and pains on many occasions. It is possible to relate some of the episodes of illness to times when he was under emotional pressure, such as the time in Georgia, and the period of spiritual turmoil prior to his conversion; but there is not always a clear association. As has been seen, the episodes themselves were often severe enough to provoke his doctors to drastic treatments, which could only have exacerbated his weakness. His journal of 6 August 1740 describes the beginning of a fever, which lasted almost two weeks, throughout which time his doctor attended 'constantly' and 'bled' him. There was little hope that he would survive but he began to recover when Jesus 'touched [his] hand and rebuked the fever'. It took him a further two weeks to return slowly to normal but he 'had little use of [his] legs and none of [his] head'. There were rumours that he had died. He saw such 'visitations' of illness as God's way of chastising him, and wrote that, after this episode, he was 'more desirous and able to pray, more afraid of sin, more earnestly longing for deliverance, and the fullness of Christian salvation.'¹²⁹

As he grew older, he appears to have developed an accepting, even affectionate relationship with his frail and unpredictable body. In a letter to his wife he describes a journey on horseback: 'I crept on singing or making hymns, till I got unawares to Canterbury. ... Tomorrow I go to Margate, and should willingly bestow a fortnight there on my crazy carcass; but I must officiate at Spittlefields on Sunday next.'¹³⁰ Ten years before his death, he was writing to his wife, 'I creep along the streets, tottering over the grave. My strength seems to abate daily, perhaps through my long walks.'¹³¹

7.5.4.7 Primitive defences

Charles was not immune from using the more primitive mechanisms which would have been prevalent at the time and which John and Susanna Wesley also used. God's

¹²⁸Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, 480.

¹²⁹CW 276-7.

¹³⁰Jackson, II, letter xlvi, 214.

¹³¹Jackson, II, letter xciii, 270.

providence and ultimate beneficence were invoked to explain painful events; illness and suffering were seen as chastening. Persecution was seen in terms of a struggle against Satan, and while he was able to tolerate ambivalence in some areas, here all badness was seen as residing in those who disagreed or who were 'messengers of Satan'. Like John, at times he used identification with a Biblical character as evidence that he was on the side of right, and random opening of the Bible to find texts to confirm religious experience or the rightness of decisions.

7.6 Charles Wesley - poet

Kristeva has privileged art and poetry over religion in their capacity to promote a dialogue between the semiotic and the symbolic, and to symbolise unconscious phantasies, which she regards as vital to mental flexibility and growth. Although she has written extensively about the ways in which religious imagery can be used to promote mental stability, the kind of modern religion, which she describes as concentrating on a 'transcendental ideal', is seen as 'overreach[ing] its deepest roots' and 'forget[ting] that it rumbles over emptiness'.¹³² It is interesting to look at Charles Wesley's expression of his religious beliefs in his verse, from the point of view of estimating whether the symbolism used does in fact 'overreach its deepest roots'.

Over recent years Wesley's hymns have been examined as poetry by literary critics. Davie has reservations about the poetic quality of some of Wesley's hymns, but writes that 'Charles Wesley sounds notes that are outside the range, or outside the intentions, of any other sacred poet in English'.¹³³ Psychoanalytic theory suggests that an artist is someone who can access phantasies and urges repressed in the unconscious and express them in a symbolised form acceptable to the superego: Meltzer has written that a creative genius is one who 'permits his own internal objects to give him new ideas - even if he does not understand them or cannot use them: his function is to receive them, and he possesses the art of transmitting them.'¹³⁴ Kris's work has

¹³² See 3;4:2:5.

¹³³ Donald Davie, *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 69.

¹³⁴ Donald Meltzer, "Creativity and the Countertransference," in *The Vale of Soul-making*, ed. Meg Harris Williams, (London/New York: Karnac, 2005), 175.

already been referred to;¹³⁵ he describes a ‘regression in the service of the ego’, which he sees as a mature capacity of the ego to be in touch with, control and use creatively, more primitive unconscious elements of the psyche. Fairbairn, Klein and Segal would see creative activity as an attempt to deal with guilt and anxiety, which has resulted from early destructive phantasies towards the love-objects. For them, compensatory phantasies of restitution, aimed at preserving the threatened object, are the basis of creative activity.¹³⁶ In Fairbairn’s words, ‘art work enables the ego to convert phantasies unacceptable to the superego into positive tributes to its authority and so to relieve the tension existing between the ego and superego’.¹³⁷ Using this theory, which involves restoration of the object, Fairbairn sees the success or failure of art as linked to its capacity to ‘represent restitution’ both for the artist and the observer or reader. If there is what he describes as ‘over-symbolisation’, the art work is too remote from the destruction it attempts to symbolise, to evoke it, while if there is ‘under-symbolisation’ the sense of destruction is too powerful to tolerate. He sees both ‘unconscious destructive urges and a restored object .. [as] necessary to aesthetics’.¹³⁸ This distinction between over- and under-symbolisation will be important in looking at John Wesley’s response to some of his brother’s hymns.

Others see art as less associated repressed destructive urges but as offering a ‘place to be’ for aspects of the self, which have been repudiated and repressed because they have not been adequately contained by the maternal response. Art in this case represents a restoration of the self rather than of the object.¹³⁹

It must be left to others to assess the literary merit of Charles Wesley’s poems and hymns; Dale, Baker, Beckerlegge, Davie, Watson and others, have acknowledged his importance as a writer of sacred poetry.¹⁴⁰ If his work succeeds as poetry, as this

¹³⁵ See 2:5.

¹³⁶ Graham S. Clarke, *Personal Relations Theory: Fairbairn, Macmurray and Suttie*, (London/New York: Routledge, 2006) 93.

¹³⁷ W.R.D. Fairbairn, “Prolegomena to a psychology of art”, *British Journal of Psychology*, 28, (1938), 301, quoted in Clarke, *Personal Relations Theory*, 93.

¹³⁸ Clarke, *Personal Relations Theory*, 96.

¹³⁹ Clarke, *Personal Relations Theory*, 102-3.

¹⁴⁰ James Dale, “The Literary Setting of Wesley’s Hymns” and “Literary Characteristics of the Hymns” in eds. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists. The Works of John Wesley, vol. vii* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Baker, *Representative Verse*; Oliver A. Beckerlegge, “Charles Wesley’s Poetical Corpus” in ed. S.T. Kimbrough, *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian*. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1992); Donald Davie, *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

suggests, then it would appear that he was able to symbolise unconscious elements in a way which was helpful to himself and his readers. In Kristeva's terms, this would be understood in terms of accessing the semiotic, and symbolising it rather than 'overreaching' it.¹⁴¹

As critics have examined Wesley's hymns and poems, it has become clear that there are many aspects of both their form and content which would promote a permeability between the semiotic and symbolic, and so tend to allow a 'writing of the unnameable'¹⁴² and facilitate the symbolisation of unconscious phantasy in religious imagery for the singers.

Davie describes Charles Wesley as a 'poet of vehement feeling', and notes that when compared with most other eighteenth-century hymn writers, there is a 'steep rise in the emotional temperature assumed or exacted of us as readers (or as singers)'; he comments that a few others are equally 'fervent'. But Davie also interestingly notes that often the powerful effect of the hymns is achieved by their insistence on 'strong and muscular thought'; so that it is not the *feelings* but the intellectual capacities which are stretched to the limit. In some of the concepts expressed, it is the 'energies of human Reason' which are pushed as far as they can go towards understanding what is beyond words - 'the unperceivable and illogical':¹⁴³

Emptied of His majesty,
Of His dazzling glories shorn,
Being's Source *begins to be*,
And God himself is born!¹⁴⁴

Davie describes Wesley's very precise use of words, often in a way which includes a more ancient meaning; he also describes the introduction of 'cheapened expressions' in a way which makes them 'taut and definite':

His adorable will
Let us gladly fulfil,
And our talents improve
By the patience of hope, and the labour of love.¹⁴⁵

1993); J.R. Watson, *The English Hymn*.

¹⁴¹See 3:4:2:5.

¹⁴²Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity*, 179.

¹⁴³Davie, *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England*, 57-58.

¹⁴⁴PW iv, 108.

He stresses that this intellectual emphasis and strength ‘does not dessicate the emotions but strengthens them’.¹⁴⁶

Davie’s description of Wesley’s writing as ‘pushing reason as far as it can go’ to express what is inconceivable and beyond words, is reminiscent of the use of language of mediaeval, mystic theologians towards God, what Turner described as ‘this characteristic apophatic self-subverting utterance’. At this point, words have reached their limit and such an ‘utterance’ is disturbing, leading to silence, uncertainty, and a state of not knowing.¹⁴⁷ There are many other elements in Wesley’s hymns to disturb and to threaten the boundary between the symbolic and the semiotic. A great deal has been written about the rhetorical devices he uses in his verse. It abounds in paradox, oxymoron and irony, all of which demand vigorous thought and can lead to a sense of uncertainty and questioning. This pushing of language to the limit also brings a sense of aliveness and the possibility of change. Such a state of openness and receptivity is also similar to that described by Bion, a state of becoming *at one* with what is beyond knowing in any other way.¹⁴⁸

Frost¹⁴⁹ shows how Wesley’s eucharistic hymns celebrate the sacrament as ‘bringing us into the closest possible graced intimacy with the reality of the cross’; he stresses the way Wesley enjoyed using the paradoxes involved to bring alive its mystery: Christ’s love is in his self-emptying, but ‘precisely because the very love which *is* God is in the self-emptying, the self-emptying is a manifestation of the Godhead. But it is an unveiling of it in veiling. The love unveils itself in the veiling of self-emptying’. The sacrament is as near as we can get to knowing God’s love but such love can only be borne when covered in the sacramental veil. Christ’s sacrifice is the veil for God’s self-giving love, symbolised or ‘unveiled’ in the sacrament but bearable only through the sacramental veil: ‘The graced closeness thus itself becomes an unveiling of what is veiled and a veiling of what is unveiled’. He draws attention to Wesley’s ability to concentrate and condense images into single phrases or words, using ambiguous meanings, or juxtaposing contrasting or paradoxical concepts to

¹⁴⁵PW vi, 14.

¹⁴⁶*The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England*, 76-9.

¹⁴⁷ See 4:2

¹⁴⁸ See 1:3

¹⁴⁹Francis Frost, “the Eucharistic Hymns of Charles Wesley: The Self-Emptying of Glory of God”,

expand spiritual insights; for instance, the bringing together of the transcendent and the quotidian, and the abstract and the material, in 'immortal food'. He quotes two verses that include some of these paradoxical concepts - the visible invisible and the unveiled veiled:

Th' eternal God from heaven came down,
The King of Glory dropp'd His crown,
And veil'd His majesty;
Emptied of all but love He came;
Jesus, I call Thee by the name
Thy pity bore for me.¹⁵⁰

But wait to see our Heavenly King
To see the great invisible
Without a Sacramental Veil,
With all his Robes of Glory on.¹⁵¹

Davie also draws attention to Wesley's capacity to express ideas with 'poignant simplicity', with a sudden change from complicated, elaborate language to simple, so that the plain statement appears vigorous and direct, and arrests the reader.¹⁵² At times Wesley invented words: in describing his response to the invitation to share in God's Kingdom, he wrote, 'Implung'd in the chrystal abyss,/And lost in an ocean of God'. As Baker, comments, 'nothing but the biggest word would do for the rapturous climax'.¹⁵³

Kimbrough comments that Wesley brings his poetic imagination to bear on Holy Scripture and theology and sets them in a 'symphonic language of many keys'. He explains that he is using 'imagination' here to mean 'the capacity of the whole person to penetrate the reality and to express creatively what has been encountered'.¹⁵⁴ This is another way of expressing how the poet facilitates the interpenetration of the semiotic and the symbolic.

Wesley's hymns are full of allusions to the Bible and overflow with biblical

Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society, 2,(1995), 87-92.

¹⁵⁰ PW iv, 120.

¹⁵¹ PW iv, 120-2.

¹⁵² Donald Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse*, (London: Routledge, 1967), 72-3.

¹⁵³ Frank Baker, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*, (1962), xxi.

¹⁵⁴ S.T. Kimbrough, "Charles Wesley and Biblical Interpretation", in ed. S.T. Kimbrough, *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1992), 113, 136.

metaphors, but they also draw on Greek and Latin texts and English poets such as Milton and Herbert. They therefore stir the memory and resonate on many levels. Davie points out Wesley's frequent 'inconspicuous reference to ... a hallowed canon, classical or scriptural'. It was possible for the references to be inconspicuous, because the readers or singers in his time would have been knowledgeable about Scripture. Davie gives what he describes as a 'crude example', but it demonstrates how the use of scriptural reference opens up the singer to the semiotic:

Expand Thy wings, prolific Dove,
 Brood o'er our nature's night,
 On our disorder'd spirits move,
 And let there now be light.¹⁵⁵

As Davie suggests, the Holy Ghost is portrayed in terms of the Creative Spirit in Genesis, so that the urbane, understated word 'disordered', contrasts with the 'vast image of primeval chaos'.¹⁵⁶ This arresting contrast highlights the indescribable extent of the chaos in the depths of the psyche.

Davie's description of how Wesley enlivens dead words and metaphors, and forces the reader to 're-define meanings' through his use of 'contrast, antithesis, [and] juxtaposition', is reminiscent of Kristeva's 'resensitising of language'. She describes one who attempts to 'write the impossible', and describes as a 'stylist', one who 'sound[s] a dissonance within the thetic, paternal function of language' by 'tampering with vocabulary and syntax'. She quotes Celine: 'Style is a way of doing violence to sentences ... of having them slightly fly off the handle and thus making the reader displace his meaning. But ever so slightly! Oh, ever so slightly!'¹⁵⁷

Yet for all this emphasis on reason and the manipulation of language, Wesley remains a poet of 'vehement emotion', and the semiotic is evoked in poetry, not only by 'tampering with vocabulary and syntax', but by the use of language evocative of the body and of blissful or painful feeling. A reading of Wesley's hymns suggests that far from his symbolism 'overreaching its deepest roots', there is material which can be interpreted as symbolising archaic dynamics and phantasies, and demonstrating that Wesley's religion, as expressed in his hymns, by no means forgets its bodily and

¹⁵⁵PW i, 239.

¹⁵⁶ Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse*, 74-6.

affective roots.

Kristeva's understanding of the dynamics of love in the archaic triangle were discussed in chapter 3. Such very early experiences are evoked by sounds and rhythms and also by bodily images: oral images of tasting, feeding, satiety and devouring; images of blissful union, killing, woundedness, brokenness, messiness and of bodily fluids; and images of touching and bodily contact. There is an abundance of such images in Wesley's hymns. The hymns relating to the believer's identification with Christ in his suffering are full of such images. There is space for only a few examples out of a vast number of such hymns:

Father, see the Victim slain,
Jesus Christ, the just, the good,
Offer'd up for guilty man'
Pouring out his precious blood;
Him, and then the sinner see,
Look through Jesu's wounds on me.¹⁵⁸

Another eucharistic hymn has extreme imagery, but it demonstrates that Wesley was not fearful of primitive bodily images; it includes images of drinking in something good, purple blood, and of identifying with Christ as he is welcomed and strengthened by the loving God:

Now, even now, we all plunge in,
And drink the purple wave;
This is the antidote of sin,
'Tis this our souls shall save:
With the life of Jesus fed,
Lo! From strength to strength we rise,
Followed by our Rock and led
To meet Him in the skies.¹⁵⁹

And a verse full of murderousness:

O what a killing thought is this,
A sword to pierce the faithful heart!
Our sins have slain the Prince of Peace;
Our sins which caused his mortal smart

¹⁵⁷ PH, 203,239, quoted in Taylor, *Altarity*, 179.

¹⁵⁸ PW iii, 304-5.

¹⁵⁹ PW iii, 235-6.

With him we vow to crucify;
Our sins which murdered God shall die!¹⁶⁰

Kristeva's archaic triad is evoked by the emphasis on an identification with Christ's suffering and, through God's agape, a sharing in his resurrection and the receiving of a name. These images evoke the suffering of the separated child, who through the identification with the 'imaginary father' is supported in its introduction to the realm of the symbolic. The vivid imagery of blood and wounds ('Look through Jesu's wounds on me') recalls Merleau-Ponty's description of the body as a 'gaping wound'. The bodiliness, or 'carnality' of human existence, and the 'holeyness or gappiness' of the human body, which is like an open tube, neither interior nor exterior, where subjectivity and objectivity intersect, create a 'cleavage in the subject that faults self-consciousness'.¹⁶¹ Such 'carnality' preserves an openness to what is other - in Kristevan terms, it enables an intersection between the semiotic and the symbolic.

According to Kristeva, in some religions, the 'abject', as sin, is 'displaced' and 'absorbed into speech' and 'I repent of my sins', becomes the 'very site of spiritualisation'; the abject is thus not 'elaborated'. Because it is not adequately symbolised, the subject is left with the unsymbolised 'abject', a 'fearsome ineradicable evil', an 'inexorable carnal reminder'.¹⁶² Through his use of carnal imagery of brokenness, woundedness, sickness and suffering Charles Wesley symbolises and 'elaborates', rather than 'overreaches' Kristeva's 'abject'. In this way, the hymns symbolise what Tillich was describing, when he wrote of God's participation '*in our existential situation of disruption*'. Through the death of Christ, 'Divine removal of our guilt and punishment is not accomplished by overlooking their depth but by entering into them in love, so deeply as to transform us'.¹⁶³

T.B. Shepherd writes of Charles's poetry as showing a wide 'psychological description and penetrating analysis of the emotional states of man ... the longings, the prayers, the backslidings, the repentance, the sense of sin, the raptures, the ecstasies, and the peace and joy of the believer ... he brought into English verse the

¹⁶⁰ *PW iii*, 316-7.

¹⁶¹ Taylor, *Altarity*, 69.

¹⁶² See 3:4:2:5

¹⁶³ David H. Kelsey, "Paul Tillich" in *Modern Theologians*, ed. David F. Ford, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 93-4.

note of *rapture* perhaps more than any other poet'. He describes his frequent use of metaphors which express ideas of vast spaciousness to convey the idea of salvation for all - boundless, fathomless, overflowing oceans of water, and fire, rising higher and higher, 'giving light to the feast with joy ineffable, bliss-transporting, triumphs and dazzling raptures'.¹⁶⁴ N.T. Shepherd also emphasises the importance of Charles Wesley's 'mysticism', and points out the frequent use of images of unity with God and ecstasy in His presence, which appear in the hymns.¹⁶⁵

Watson quotes the third verse of Charles Wesley's hymn 'Come Holy Ghost, all quickening fire' (Hymns and Sacred poems (1739)):

Eager for thee I ask and pant
 So strong, the principle divine
 Carries me out with sweet constraint
 Till all my hallowed soul is thine
 Plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea,
 And lost in thy immensity.¹⁶⁶

He points out the image of being swept out by a tide and the use of Shakespeare's 'love's sweet constraint' to describe 'a joyful sense of being helplessly in the power of a benevolent force', before being 'lost' in God, the 'deepest sea'.¹⁶⁷ This merging with a benevolent force is reminiscent of the idealised merging with Kristeva's 'imaginary father', very different from the oppressive 'evangelical' parent. Here, through a 'regression in the service of the ego', Charles Wesley appears to be allowing his internal objects to act as a muse, supplying ideas which are structured in his poetry and offered to others.¹⁶⁸

In the last chapter, mention was made of John Wesley's dislike of the sexual imagery used in a religious context by the Moravians. In his journal (6 September 1742), he referred to reports from believers, of sensations of Christ's blood being poured over them and of its bringing peace and joy. He wrote that he could not deny that some of these experiences might be from God, but mainly he attributed them to

¹⁶⁴T.B. Shepherd, *Methodism and the Literature of the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Epworth Press, 1940), 106-116.

¹⁶⁵ N.T. Shepherd, "Charles Wesley and the Doctrine of the Atonement", 21, 223.

¹⁶⁶ PW, i, 164.

¹⁶⁷ Watson, *The English Hymn*, p14.

¹⁶⁸ See 3.3.2

the ‘mere empty dreams of an heated imagination’.¹⁶⁹ He had also preached a sermon that year against the Moravian over-emphasis on blood and wounds.¹⁷⁰ There is evidence that he had longings to let go of his controlling ego and experience a primitive merging, in that he published and sang those hymns of Charles’s which expressed these longings, but he struggled with anything too visceral. While he translated German hymns and adapted poems ‘of fervour and inward piety’, which included the language of love, and images of boundless heights and abysses, he disliked sentimentality and wanted to avoid what he described as ‘every fondling expression’.¹⁷¹ In Fairbairn’s terms, so far as John was concerned the unconscious phantasies were under-symbolised and he was confronted too directly with his primitive feelings. For similar reasons, he edited Charles’s hymns omitting anything he considered ‘namby-pambical’ (meaning baby-talk), such as *dear*, or *lover*, when addressing the Deity.¹⁷² For instance, he omitted a reference to the infant Jesus:

A child of man,
In length a span,
Who fills both earth and heaven.¹⁷³

So it is likely that, as Davie suggests, he would have difficulty with the idea of ‘the God Incarnate sucking at a human nipple’:¹⁷⁴

Our God ever blest,
With oxen doth rest,
Is nurst by his Creature and hangs at the breast’¹⁷⁵

Out of such a vast output of hymns, it is to be expected that some of the poorer ones would be maudlin, sentimental or gruesome, but in most of them, Charles Wesley is able to make extensive use of ‘carnal’ language and imagery of merging and union, while retaining a sense of balance. Manning writes of one of his most ‘mystical’ hymns, that ‘nothing short of inspiration keeps the daring emotion sane and

¹⁶⁹BEJ 296 (6/9/1742)

¹⁷⁰N.T. Shepherd, “Charles Wesley and the Doctrine of the Atonement”, 111-2.

¹⁷¹Watson, *The English Hymn*, 206-13.

¹⁷²Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, 24-26.

¹⁷³PW iv, 112.

¹⁷⁴Davie, *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England*, 60-1.

¹⁷⁵PW iv, 122.

reverent and orthodox',¹⁷⁶ while Davie believes that he is saved from 'mawkishness' by his use of paradox: the baby, the size of a man's hand, spans earth and heaven. Davie also suggests that by using what others have described as 'vulgar' language and being literal-minded, for instance about messy, suckling babies, he could draw out the real implications of the Incarnation. A description which avoided such realities would, in fact, be more coy or mawkish.¹⁷⁷ The use of paradox, as well as the other rhetorical devices, avoid mawkishness, and the structure of the poem itself offers a framework to contain the bodily images and the images of merging. In Kristevan terms, by these means the better hymns achieve a balance between the semiotic and the symbolic.

7.7 Psychoanalytic aspects

John Wesley had a difficult struggle to stay in touch with a good, forgiving image of God by 'practising the presence', and had frequent need to resort to obsessional defences. Charles, who had had more access to potentially good objects in his early life, and who may well have experienced his mother as more emotionally available to him than John, appears to have had less of a struggle than John to remain in touch with his good objects. It is clear from his journal that after the conversion, he had a capacity to tolerate ambivalence in himself and others. He was more in touch with his feelings than John was, and could feel both joy and sadness. From the examination of his relationships, it is clear that he had the capacity for concern and empathy for those close to him, which John lacked.

There is not enough information about how Charles related to his siblings and friends prior to his conversion to make a useful comparison with his later relationships, nor is there enough information to deduce whether or not his capacity for feeling changed. If he related to other people in the same way both before and afterwards, then this would suggest that he had always been less dominated by his bad internal objects than John was. If there was a change on conversion, this too would tend to indicate that he had not been so much in the grip of his bad internal objects as to prevent change. It has been demonstrated that subsequently his episodes of depression had a different quality. Although he continued to have doubts about his

¹⁷⁶Bernard Lord Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts*, (1942), 29.

¹⁷⁷*The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England*, (1993), 60-3.

love for God, he was assured that God loved him and that he was relieved of guilt. An entry in his journal would also tend to confirm that there was some internal shift, this time regarding impulses to do with voraciousness and greed. Five days after his conversion experience he wrote, 'I dined with great liberty of spirit, being amazed to find my old enemy intemperance so suddenly subdued that I have almost forgot I was ever in bondage to him'.¹⁷⁸ It is not clear how long this 'liberty' persisted and it could well have been associated with a transient mood change.

Charles Wesley is best known for the hymns he wrote after 1738, when his productivity increased exponentially, and it is tempting to conclude simply that his conversion increased his creativity. However, as Baker has written, '[he] did not leap forth as a ready-made poet immediately after his conversion: rather his genius was transmuted to a nobler subject and a more lyrical medium.'¹⁷⁹ There is evidence that when he was at Oxford, he translated Virgil and knew the works by heart, and Baker speculates that he 'versified purple passages from the major classical poets', as he did from the scriptures later, but none of this versification survives. That he did 'versify' is clear from John Wesley's account, given to Henry Moore, of Charles's bursting into his room, 'full of the muse', in a 'fine frenzy', disturbing all John's tidy arrangements, reciting some poetry and then leaving.¹⁸⁰ He was writing poetry before his conversion and Beckerlegge concludes that, had he not had that experience, 'no doubt [he] would have written masses of facile verse, numbering him among the best of the minor poets in English literature', but he became a 'sacred poet *par excellence*'.¹⁸¹

Nobody can say what he would have become, but there does appear to have been a striking change, and his writing the hymn 'Where shall my wond'ring Soul begin?' in the days after the conversion, does suggest a recognition of a new state of affairs internally. Beckerlegge attributes this to 'deep religious emotion', but it can also be described in terms of an increase in creativity, resulting from an integration of internal objects, with an increase in inner stability and ego-strength; this is required to allow the regression to the more inaccessible parts of the personality, and the expression of them, which are necessary to the poet.¹⁸² Milner has written about the

¹⁷⁸ CW 112.

¹⁷⁹ Baker, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*, 258.

¹⁸⁰ *Representative Verse*, xii.

¹⁸¹ Beckerlegge, "Charles Wesley's Poetical Corpus", (1992), 32.

¹⁸² Margaret Arden, *Midwifery of the Soul*, (New York/ London: Free Association Books, 1998), 87.

monsters in the depths, the Behemoths and Leviathans, as the source of creative energy, and the need for a capacity to oscillate between the surface and the depths.¹⁸³

As discussed, several authors including Klein, Bion, Meltzer, Harris Williams and McDougall have written of the need for a degree of integration of internal objects and of aspects of the self in order for an individual to be creative, both in the sense of being open and flexible in responding to new experiences and ideas, and as applying to artistic creativity. An internal combined object (in which paternal and maternal elements, not necessarily aligned with the external parental figures, masculine and feminine elements, and loving and hating aspects of relationships are integrated), is developed and becomes a resource or Muse, on which an artist can rely.

The foregrounding of a God of *unconditional* and *forgiving* love, which John and Charles Wesley found in Luther, would have evoked the maternal, womanly aspect of God, which contrasted with the prohibiting critical God of the Law. From the increase in his creativity, it seems likely that Charles had achieved some integration of these aspects of the Deity; that this allowed some integration of conflicting aspects of himself, so that that in a deeper way than before, Christ could now represent for him a judge *and* advocate - a common theme in his hymns. Harris Williams writes of the integration of the maternal and paternal elements into the 'combined object', as described by Klein, and equates it with Freud's idea of the 'primal scene': 'Melanie Klein recognized its essential connection with the sexual relation of the internal parents, as a 'powerful' object in its emotional evocativeness; but she also saw in it a quality not visible in the external parents - namely, its mystery and creativity, its essential privacy and perhaps sacredness.'¹⁸⁴ For John Wesley, as has been shown, such a linking of the parents together in sexual intercourse was likely to have felt like a mental catastrophe for him, and this would therefore have militated against integration for him.

The fact of Charles Wesley's increased creativity does support the supposition that his conversion facilitated a process of integration. Among his range of internal objects were the classical and contemporary authors he knew so well, and their work

¹⁸³ Marion Milner, *The Suppressed Madness of Sane Men*, (Hove/New York: Brunner - Routledge, 1987), 195.

¹⁸⁴ Donald Meltzer, "Foreword" in ed. Meg Harris Williams, *The Vale of Soul-Making*, (2005), xvi.

was integrated into the myth and symbolism of his hymns. As a result of the integration of his good and bad objects, there would have been an increase in ego-strength, so that he felt safer to access unconscious phantasies.

Nobody ever achieves a full integration of her internal objects, and there is evidence that Charles Wesley continued to struggle with unsymbolised and unintegrated parts of himself: he continued to become sick when he was under physical or mental pressure; he often had to resort to working harder to fend off his persisting bouts of depression; and he never had complete control of his temper. Although his hymn-writing was likely to have been a positive benefit of his integrating experience, and although it would also have offered a continuing opportunity for further integration for himself and others (through his capacity to symbolise archaic experience), there was a residual compulsiveness about it, which reflected an ongoing struggle.

Charles Wesley was able to use Christian symbolism to achieve some integration. He was able to enjoy mutually satisfying relations with others and his creativity was freed up. In Kristevan terms, the imagery and form of his hymns demonstrate his capacity to symbolise unconscious phantasy and to hold a tension between conflicting feelings and between the symbolic and the semiotic. This is not to suggest that such creativity is necessary for this kind of integration to occur in an individual, but it is fortunate that in Charles Wesley's case, his hymns provide evidence of the process. The process occurring in others would be through a similar response to Christian symbolism, possibly facilitated by hymns such as those of Charles Wesley, which would be manifested in other subjective or objective changes.

Chapter 8: Theological differences

8.1 A theological clash?

Meissner's call for research aimed at understanding the level of interaction between the 'influence of a particular modality' in a religious tradition, and the developmental needs of the individual,¹ is responded to here by comparing the relationships of John and Charles Wesley to their beliefs.

It is sometimes said that what John Wesley said in prose was condensed by Charles Wesley and said more elegantly in his hymns, with more effect, particularly when set to music. This implies that they were in total agreement theologically. Certainly, their names appear together on the title pages of *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1739, 1740, 1742, and *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, 1745. The Preface of the last-named book was extracted by John Wesley from Daniel Brevint's *Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice*, 1673, and Rattenbury uses this as evidence that they were in total agreement about the doctrines involved. Rattenbury attributes most, if not all the hymns to Charles Wesley, and writes that 'Charles Wesley gives Brevint wings, and adds very significantly the confirmation of Methodist experience to Brevint's doctrine.' He can find no 'theological clash whatever' between Brevint's prose and Wesley's verse.²

Rattenbury's eloquent rhetoric conceals differences in belief and emphasis, as well as in emotional response to religious events, which are evident elsewhere. Of particular relevance to Meissner's question are the Wesleys' different responses to five modalities, which will be considered here: their conversion experiences, 'mysticism', Christian perfection, the meaning of suffering, and the Trinity. Their interactions with these elements are outlined, together with the likely influences of their particular psychological needs, as understood from the last two chapters.

¹See 1:4:1

²J.Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*, (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 12-3.

8.2 Conversion experiences

The effect of the 'evangelical nurture' to which both John and Charles Wesley were subjected has repeatedly been referred to, and it has become clear that they both struggled with fears of inner destructiveness prior to their conversion experiences. At Oxford, both used ascetic practices to try to gain inner and outer purity. Charles's starving and vomiting, referred to in Susanna Wesley's letter,³ suggest that he was considerably disturbed during that time. Haartman describes oral sadism (greed, envy, voraciousness and destruction), as the 'diabolical hallmarks of carnality' and the 'repressed underside of evangelical nurture'. Starving and vomiting act out opposite impulses: John Wesley saw fasting as a way of averting the wrath of God⁴ and so it could have been felt as an act of atonement, by a denial of the child's wilfulness.⁵ It is possible that Charles resorted to this means as one way of dealing with underlying voraciousness and aggression. Evidence has been presented of his difficulty in managing his anger.

Both brothers found themselves in a state of turmoil prior to their conversion experiences, having failed to find a sense of acceptance by God through their own efforts. Both were aware of their failures and 'sinfulness', but, as has been shown, Charles was more able than John to relate the concept of sinfulness to his own capacity to hurt others. Both were in a mental state similar to that which they induced in their listeners by preaching the Law, a state of 'induced mourning'. In Haartman's terms, they were in a state of desolation, in a position which recreated their childhood experience, symbolised in religious terms as Hell (separated from the parent/God, through their own sin) and as the Fall (the parent/God withholding love from a wilful child). They were in the grip of the critical superego and they were ripe for Böhler's intervention. The split parental image, resulting from excessive demands and lack of containment, was projected into their image of God, so that the punitive, wrathful God often obscured any loving aspects.⁶ Like John, Charles believed that change was not possible unless the believer became aware of his sinfulness. They both preached to

³ See 6:4:2

⁴ BES, I, 601, (Sermon 27)

⁵ Keith Haartman, *Watching and Praying: Personality Transformation in Eighteenth Century Methodism*, (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2004), 72-3.

⁶ Haartman, *Watching and Praying*, 27-9.

induce this ‘necessary’ state in their listeners. In his journal of 4 June 1740, Charles wrote, ‘I only *invited* them to Christ. But I am more and more persuaded that the law has its use, and Moses must bring us to Christ. The promises to the unawaked are pearls before swine. First the hammer must break the rocks, then we *may* preach Christ crucified’.⁷

While they were in this state of ‘desolation’, Böhler offered a God of love, and an opportunity to cease striving and identify with an ideal, loving, forgiving object. According to Haartman, with this foregrounding of a loving object offered, the subject feels safe enough to examine the extent of his/her own badness. The symbolism involved ‘magnetises unconscious memories, feelings and fantasies. They are both drawn into consciousness and given a coherent medium for thoughtful elaboration beyond the limited and rigid meanings assigned by the infantile source’.⁸ There is an opportunity for an integration of the split images of God, and for an integration of the good and bad objects, which represented the split parental figures.

As previously described, the offering of a God of love also evokes Kristeva’s description of the archaic triangle. In Crownfield’s interpretation of Kristeva, he writes: ‘In this image the Christian God marks the clearing of a space for triadic subjectivity.... This affirmation of subject-being, this fusion of semiotic and symbolic identity, is founded in the mythic Third Party, and it imagines and discursively sustains a subject-space open to love, to another, to others and relationships, and the possibility of love of neighbour and even of enemy’.⁹

Melanie Klein believed that, in infancy, the ‘badness’ of the bad internal object is compounded by projection into it of the child’s own ‘badness’. The withdrawal of these projections becomes possible as unconscious anger becomes conscious and is owned (as described in these conversion experiences). This allows more contact with loving aspects of the superego figures, the ‘internal sources of aspiration and inspiration (what Freud called the ego-ideal)’.¹⁰ The degree of difficulty an individual has in achieving this kind of integration of his or her split internal objects, would depend on the degree to which the inner world was dominated by

⁷CW 264.

⁸ Haartman, *Watching and Praying*, 81.

⁹David Crownfield, “The Sublimation of Narcissism” in ed. Crownfield, *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva*, 59-60.

¹⁰ Donald Meltzer, “Foreword” in ed. Meg Harris Williams, *The Vale of Soul-making*, xv.

rejecting or exciting ('bad') objects. The greater the sway of these objects, the more difficulty there would be in holding on to a forgiving image of God and in developing a self-soothing internal structure. However, if this kind of integration does occur in the 'conversion' experience and in subsequent struggles with disappointments, a shift to Klein's 'depressive' functioning, or Kristeva's 'triadic subjectivity' can occur.

John Wesley's experience has been seen as a prime example of an instantaneous transformation and the point at which a great change occurred in his life, but, as has been shown, he was unable to experience the joy he had anticipated, and many doubts remained subsequently. What is usually remembered is that he described his heart as 'strangely warmed' and felt an assurance that 'He had taken away my sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death'.¹¹ Newton's question about this description is apposite. He asks, 'Was he merely saying that this experience simply heightened feelings he had known before - that is, they were strange in a manner of degree, rather than of kind? Or does 'strangely' imply that here was a radically new experience of powerful religious feeling, which shook him to the depths, precisely because he had not experienced the like before?'¹² I would suggest that John Wesley's struggle with 'deadness' and 'coldness' is relevant here and that the words he heard from Luther's preface to the Romans were important: 'Faith is a divine work in us, which changes us and makes us newly born of God, and kills the old Adam, makes us completely different men in heart, disposition, mind and every power, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. O faith is a lively, creative, active, powerful thing, so that it is impossible that it should not continually do good works. It does not even ask if good works are to be done, but before anyone asks it is done.'¹³ Power is referred to twice here, and there is an offer of liveliness, spontaneity and of a new start. It is an offer of becoming alive, of being made powerful, and relieved of the unbearable burden of sin. It must have felt as if the words were meant specially for him; they defined exactly what he needed; they spoke to his dead, powerless, 'uncorrected heart', offering a reworking of his early experience.

This sense of being addressed and recognised at a deep level would indeed have been a 'new' experience that shook him. At the same time, he was in a situation

¹¹24 May 1738, BEJ 18, 249-50.

¹² John A. Newton, "John and Charles Wesley: Brothers in Arms", in eds. K.G.C. Newport and Ted A. Campbell, *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and Legacy*, (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2007), 62.

where his brother had just had a 'conversion' experience, and he was surrounded by people who were waiting for it to happen to him. This new feeling was identified as the expected change, but he quickly questioned it. He was worried because he felt no joy. He had been moved because his deep needs had been addressed so accurately, but the feeling of assurance did not last. His fears about his unconscious hate and anger were so strong that they had to remain walled off, and he could not sustain, for more than a brief period, a belief that he was acceptable to God. His doubts remained and so he could not feel joyful. The central deadness continued and he had to preach constantly to reassure himself, through his own words and others' experience, that such a wiping away of 'corruptions and abominations' was possible. He saw it in others but he could not feel it, and he could not feel it because the feeling part of him had to remain walled off.

While he desperately wanted to believe in an entirely loving God/parent, the evidence suggests that he could not let go of his 'ancient' belief that his badness was the cause of parental wrath. God's wrath had to be placated through Christ's sacrifice. A loving God would forgive others, whatever their crime, but not someone as destructive as he felt he was. His bad objects were too powerful. In this respect, his experience was like that of his mother. While teaching justification and sanctification by faith, he could not believe it for himself. Occasionally he grasped it briefly, but it repeatedly slipped away from him, and his emphasis on the need for good works continued throughout his life. Cell¹⁴ postulates what Rack describes as a 'startling' synthesis of the Catholic ethic of holiness and the Protestant ethic of grace, in Wesley, but it is this conjunction which reflected the struggle that he had in dealing with his dark side. His difficulty in believing in the God of agape meant that although he desperately hoped that he could be saved instantly by faith, he could not allow the symbolism of salvation by faith to reach his dark side: for him, in Kristeva's words, the symbolism 'overreached its deepest source' and had forgotten that it 'rumbled over emptiness'. He could not allow the symbolism of the wounded Christ fully to evoke the true nature of his 'abject'. This was labelled 'corrupt and abominable'; but then by the use of the various defences described, the extent of the destructiveness was not fully faced. By dint of much listening to Böhler, seeing witnesses, reading the

¹³ WA German Bible, pp.7, 9-10 in Schmidt, 263.

¹⁴ G.C.Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*, (London: Holt, 1935), 360-1, n.45, in Rack, 157.

Bible and praying, in the hope of achieving justification, he felt moved by Luther's words, which spoke directly to his condition, and he identified this emotional reaction as his 'conversion'. But he connected the symbolism only to the label and not to his own depths. He did not feel joy, nor did he experience a lasting assurance of acceptance. The previous examination of his adult relationships did not show a great deal of evidence of concern for others, or for the toleration of ambivalence (features of Klein's 'depressive' functioning and Kristeva's 'triadic subjectivity'), which would have suggested increased integration. He could not sustain a triadic balance in the face of the dyadic alternatives; his fear of the abject encouraged a dyadic merger with the Law of the Father.

In this sense, Wesley, who helped thousands to use the symbolism of the atonement in a way which transformed their lives, could not help himself. He had to make do with the 'good old paths'. He struggled on with great perseverance, as his mother had done; and, as Rack suggests, he grew to accept his lack of direct *experience* of acceptance with more tranquillity as he got older, accepting that this was how God had chosen to deal with him.¹⁵

On the other hand, although he too was not free from doubt or periods of depression after his 'conversion', Charles Wesley described a clear change: '... the darkness was not the former darkness, ... there was no guilt in it ... though I could not find that I loved God or feel that he loved me, yet I did and would believe he loved me notwithstanding'.¹⁶ He could more easily believe in a God of love and forgiveness, and tolerate the presence of a third party, so that he gained a space offering 'triadic subjectivity'. This was reflected in his capacity to relate to others as whole people, to show concern, and to be more creative, which is evidence of 'depressive' functioning. The theory would suggest that Charles's response was possible because the original balance of good and bad internal objects in his inner world was more advantageous for him than it was for John.

¹⁵ Rack, 549.

¹⁶CW, 114, (3 June 1738).

8.3 Mysticism

As already discussed, in the ‘mystical theology’ of the fifteenth century and before, the whole of religious practice was considered ‘mystical’, particularly the Eucharist.¹⁷ John Wesley used the term ‘mystical’ in a more modern sense, to mean that which required a retirement from the world, in order to develop ‘inner holiness’, and which was concerned with the ‘experiencing self’ in relation to God’s presence or in union with God.

Both brothers were strongly influenced by William Law, and their reading included the writings of the mystics. Rack presents evidence that John Wesley was acquainted with Malebranche, Poiret, Scougal, Madame Bourignon, à Kempis, de Renty, Scupoli, Ephrem Syrus, ‘Macarius the Egyptian’, Tauler, Molinos and the *Theologia Germanica*.¹⁸ What Charles had read is less clear, but he would have had access to à Kempis, Pascal and Scupoli, who were studied by his mother. In addition, the reading of the Holy Club included the work of the Early Church Fathers, ‘from Ignatius to Athanasius’,¹⁹ and Roman Catholic devotional authors, such as Tauler, Bourignon, Guyon, de Renty and Malebranche.²⁰

Nevertheless, in the preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), John outlined his objections to the ‘mystic divines’. They were aimed at those who emphasised ‘the inner light’ over the Scriptures, the sacraments, and service to others, particularly the Moravians, whom he called the ‘still brethren’. The preface included his opinion that a cultivation of holiness of heart was a form of ‘works righteousness’, and that those he called ‘holy solitaries’, whom he thought self-absorbed, could never demonstrate ‘[f]aith working by love[which] is the length, breadth, depth and height of Christian perfection’. Charles would have agreed with him. For him ‘true stillness’ involved activity: ‘Hence I magnified the love of Christian ordinances, exhorting those who wait for salvation to be as clay in the hand of the potter, by stirring themselves up to lay hold on the Lord. God gave me much freedom to explain that most active, vigorous, restless thing: true

¹⁷ See 4:3

¹⁸ Rack, 101-2.

¹⁹ N.T. Shepherd, *Charles Wesley and the Doctrine of the Atonement*, 200.

²⁰ Teresa Berger, “Charles Wesley and Roman Catholicism” in ed. S.T. Kimbrough, *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books 1992), 205-6.

stillness.’²¹ Although both described *mystics* as the enemy of true religion, Charles’s complaints were mainly aimed at the ‘still brethren’ and those Methodists who were tempted to join them. While Charles did not *advocate* a withdrawal from other people or from religious practices, he was less uncomfortable than John with these other aspects of ‘mysticism’. Both were concerned about the dangers of discouraging people from attending communion and were worried about the ‘spectre of Antinomianism’.²² But John also had deeper reservations and ambivalence. These can be demonstrated, in his extreme personal reaction to his old mentor, William Law, and in his response to some of Law’s ideas.

Wesley associated Law (whom he met in 1732) with the mystics. Law had introduced him to the writings of the mystics and had given him a copy of *Theologica Germanica*.²³ A letter written to Law, in 1738, is instructive. It was written just before the Aldersgate experience. It was angry, unreasonable, and arrogant. He accused Law of failing to teach him about salvation by faith as the free gift of God and of failing to tell him that he ‘had not faith’. He tactlessly suggested that this failure was because Law himself lacked faith. The letter also contained a report of an interview between Böhler and Law, in which Law was accused of ‘silence’ on the subject of faith in Christ and of speaking of ‘mystical matters’. Wesley said that Böhler regarded him as being as in a ‘dangerous’ state.²⁴

This elicited a surprised and ironic response from Law, who insisted that in many conversations with Wesley, he had never avoided the subject. He wrote, ‘you never was with me for half an hour without my being large upon that very doctrine which you make me totally silent and ignorant of.’²⁵

In Georgia Wesley had read the biographies of Lopez and de Renty, and although fascinated by them he had reacted against them. For Wesley, the mystics offered an opportunity to explore deeper aspects of himself, which he would have found threatening. He had his sights set on Böhler’s quicker, less disturbing solution, but at the same time, his angry letter to Law suggests that he had some inkling that it

²¹ CW 323-324.

²² J. Brazier Green, *John Wesley and William Law*, (London: Epworth Press, 1945), 180-4.

²³ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People called Methodists*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 52.

²⁴ BEL 25, 54, (15 May 1738).

was the deeper parts of himself that he needed to investigate if he was to be healed. Law was venturing where he needed to go but where he could not risk going. The idea that he was profoundly disturbed by Law and his beliefs is reinforced by another vituperative open letter he wrote almost twenty years later in January 1756.

As Green points out, John Wesley was seen by Methodist historians as a child of his age, who saw mysticism as the enemy of reason; he distrusted it because of its appeal to feeling, and its use of 'fondling and amorous, and irreverent language and symbolism', but also because he believed that it advocated a doctrine of union with God which robbed man of his personality.²⁶ While intellectually this may have been his view, Wesley nevertheless translated German hymns which contained passionate images of love and union, and published his brother Charles's hymns, albeit with some editing of the 'fondling language'. While attacking mysticism, he advocated piety and 'devotion of the heart', and his preaching often provoked powerful emotional reactions with conviction of 'assurance', which are hard to differentiate from mystical descriptions of the certainty offered by the 'inner light'.²⁷ He did not dismiss these emotional reactions, but assessed them over the longer term by their 'fruits'.

These mixed and contradictory reactions of Wesley's suggest a great deal of ambivalence towards Law's ideas, particularly those concerning union with God, the wrath of God, and salvation through Christ's sacrifice. The fascination and attraction for him of the idea of merging with an all loving (non-wrathful) God, was evident in the hymns he translated or sanctioned, and in his provoking of 'blissful' states in others, which he could only observe. At the same time, his fear was evident in his blistering attacks on Law, who was perceived as the embodiment of these notions. Such ambivalence would seem to demonstrate an important underlying conflict in him. It mirrors the ambivalence previously described in a sexual context: his fear and fascination with the maternal chora, attractive as a source of merging and bliss, but also abhorrence of the maternal abject, with a threat of loss of control, of structure, of meaning; and ultimately, for him, a loss of self, an annihilation.

²⁵ BEL 25, 543, (19 May 1738).

²⁶ H.B. Workman in eds W.J. Townsend, H.B. Workman, G. Eayrs, *A New History of Methodism*, I, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), 55.

²⁷ Green, *John Wesley and William Law*, 192.

Unlike John, but like his mother, Charles believed that on occasions, God chose to withdraw from a believer, in order to make more vivid to him the extent and seriousness of sin. When he was 'in desertion', he was reassured by Isaiah 54:7, 'For a small moment have I *forsaken thee*, but with great mercies will I gather thee...' .²⁸ For Charles these 'dark night of the soul' experiences came from God and were vital for self-knowledge, while John attributed them to man's withdrawal from God (a recreation of the early experience of the sinful child and withholding parent). Charles could hold on to a sense of God's goodness towards him, even while feeling temporarily abandoned (the withdrawal was for his own good), while for John the idea of God's withdrawal was unthinkable. It is possible that John rejected the idea of God's withdrawal intellectually, as incompatible with a loving God, but it is also possible that it reflected his difficulty in holding on to his internalised good objects; the idea of God's withdrawal meant for him a permanent abandonment - a possibility he could not contemplate. Difficulty in internalising a 'good-enough' mother, as seems likely to have been the case for John, interferes with the development of 'object constancy', so that an exaggerated fear of abandonment persists. So that the idea of God's withdrawal would have been particularly threatening for him.

Charles's hymns show that he was more comfortable with 'mystical' aspects of his faith; they abound in physical, or 'carnal' metaphors, which evoke Kristeva's 'abject', and they are passionate, with metaphors of 'boundlessness' and union. They concentrate on the experience of the presence of God, of closeness or union with Christ, of being filled up with Christ or lost in Christ, often expressed in terms of bliss or ecstasy:

Swells my soul to compass Thee,
Gasp in thee to live and move;
Filled with all the Deity,
All immersed and lost in love!²⁹

In his willingness to tolerate a state of 'unknowing' and his capacity to enter into, and describe, experiences of closeness or unity with Christ or God, Charles was closer to a 'mystical' approach to religion than John. Tyson notes that John was not convinced

²⁸ CW 199 (16 September 1739).

²⁹ PW, I, 149 quoted in Shepherd, *Charles Wesley and the Doctrine of the Atonement*, 21.

that he ‘got the “poison” of mysticism out of his system’. In a letter he wrote that because ‘some of the later hymns savour a little of Mysticism, I have rather corrected or expunged them’; but I have no thought at all of printing them.³⁰

8.4 Perfection

John Wesley’s ideas about perfection were modified after his 1738 experience, though he claimed in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1767)³¹ that they had not changed since 1725, when he was influenced by Law’s *Serious Call*, à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ* and Taylor’s *Holy Living and Holy Dying*.³² Rack notes that his experiences, in Aldersgate Street and subsequently, led him to change what was originally a ‘simple notion of justification, new birth, assurance and sanctification, all achieved in a moment’ to a belief in a more gradual process, through several stages and ‘culminating in the gift of perfection’. He became aware that not only he, but many of those who claimed instantaneous perfection following ‘conversion’, continued to be tempted and to succumb. Justification then came to be seen as a ‘door’ to a process through which perfection could gradually be achieved, just before death, and the concept of ‘perfection’ itself became complicated.

Firstly, for John perfection did not in fact involve being perfect in the customary sense of the word; it meant loving God with one’s whole heart, mind, soul and strength. Secondly, ‘perfection’ still allowed for the presence of ‘infirmities and temptations’. Thirdly, there were two types of sin: one which was conscious and which therefore could be resisted, once ‘domination over sin’ had been acquired on conversion. This was ‘a voluntary transgression of a known law which it is our power to obey’; the second type was a falling short of the perfect law of God. When such sin was unconscious, it could not therefore act as a barrier between the ‘two-way flow of love’ between Christ and the believer. Perfection, which eliminated this second kind of sin, could be achieved only after death. The first kind of ‘voluntary transgression’ was what he concentrated on in his elucidation of perfection.³³

³⁰ TEL viii,122, quoted in ed. John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley : A Reader*,7.

³¹ BES, II, 97-124.

³² Rack, 396-7.

For Charles, the concept of 'perfection' posed fewer problems. He saw it as attained more gradually but as the rooting out of all sin, including inbred or unconscious sin, and a restitution of the 'image of God'. It was achievable only on the threshold of death. John wrote to him on 9 July 1764, "Where are the perfect ones?" I verily believe there are none upon earth, none dwelling in the body. I cordially assent to [Whitefield's] opinion that there is *no such perfection* as you describe - at least I never met an instance of it; and I doubt I never shall. Therefore I think to set perfection so *high* is effectually to renounce it ...'.³⁴ Although John attempted to reach a compromise, it is clear from Charles's hymns that Charles's view did not change.³⁵

The degree of psychological integration experienced by the two brothers is reflected in their view on this subject of Christian perfection. Charles, who achieved more acceptance of his inner destructiveness, saw that dealing with this destructiveness would be a constant and gradual struggle throughout life. This struggle was with every kind of sin, including 'deep-rooted' sin; John, whose destructiveness had to be kept walled off, desperately hoped for and insisted on the possibility of instantaneous perfection, but saw the chances of gaining it, as possible, only if it concerned 'voluntary 'sins''. His doctrine of perfection clearly outlined his internal predicament: it was as if he was aware at some level that there was an unreachable area inside himself, which he was powerless to alter. His doctrine included a second type of sin (unconscious, inbred or original sin), which he believed could not come between man and God, and could be wiped out only after death.

There is evidence that John could look more kindly on himself as he grew older, and that there was more of a sense of being in a relationship of acceptance with God. In the early years after the Aldersgate experience, John distinguished between 'almost' and 'real' Christians. The former were morally scrupulous, valued the sacraments and saw their main priority as the service of God, but they had not had an experience of 'saving faith'. 'Real' Christians, on the other hand, felt an assurance that they were justified, born again, and sanctified. The latter were saved through

³³ Rack, 399.

³⁴ TEL, V, 19.

³⁵ Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, 392.

their faith, while the former remained 'heirs of Hell'.³⁶ However, in 1754 he wrote, in *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, of those who were doing their best to serve God, in spite of their not having 'saving faith'. Of these, 'servants', rather than 'sons' of God, he wrote, '*But in every every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness ... is accepted of him - through Christ, though he knows him not ... He is in the favour of God, whether enjoying his written word and ordinances or not.*'³⁷ He extended this acceptance by God to 'almost' Christians, and he amended his original 1738 journal entry, in which he had written, 'I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God.' In 1774/5 he inserted, 'I am not sure about this.'³⁸ Tyson distinguishes this *acceptance* of 'almost' Christians from justification, and salvation by 'works', and sees it as evidence of the development of Wesley's belief in 'degrees of faith'. 'Justification' and 'acceptance' are not the same. His doubts and lack of lasting assurance about his own status as 'son' or 'servant' persisted, but he came to the view that, although a 'servant of God' still serves in fear and anxiety, he is at least accepted without knowing it. A 'son' on the other hand is justified, experiencing a sense of freedom from guilt and a relationship of love and confidence with God.

8.5 Suffering

In the light of Charles's physical suffering, it is not surprising that images of sickness and suffering are important in Charles Wesley's theology and in his hymns. This was apparent in four ways:

Firstly, he often used the healing of sickness by a physician as a metaphor for the redemption from sin by Jesus Christ. This must have been a familiar idea to him from other poets and hymn writers; it was also a metaphor used by his mother. She wrote to him on 19 October 1738, saying, 'Jesus is the only physician of souls, his blood the only salve that can heal a wounded conscience'.³⁹ The idea of blood as a

³⁶ Tyson, "John Wesley's Conversion at Aldersgate", in eds. K.J. Collins and John R. Tyson, *Conversion in the Wesleyan tradition*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 33.

³⁷ Tyson, "John Wesley's Conversion at Aldersgate", 35.

³⁸ Tyson, "John Wesley's Conversion at Aldersgate", 36-7.

³⁹SW 174.

salve or balm, based on Hebrews 4:15, describes the priestly function of a Christ who *is touched by our 'infirmities'*:

We have not an High-Priest above
Unmoved by what we suffer here:
In tenderest sympathy of love
He shares our pain, and grief, and fear,
Wounded with every wounded soul,
He bleeds the balm that makes us whole.⁴⁰

Secondly, he uses the image of the suffering Christ as a source of strength and comfort. In one of the poems for a 'woman in travail' he vividly describes a woman in labour gaining comfort from an image of Christ's suffering, with which she can identify:

Before her weary eyes display
The bed where her Redeemer lay,
A Lamb transfixed and torn. ...
O let Thy grief dry up her tears
And while Thy mangled form appears,
Thy visage marr'd with blood,
Let trouble, fear and torture cease,
And all her happy soul confess
Her saviour and her God.⁴¹

Thirdly, for Charles Wesley an identification with Christ's suffering, an imitation of Christ's self-emptying and his life as servant to others, was the way a Christian, seeking redemption had to live. Shepherd demonstrates that there is much in the hymns to confirm that he understood Christ in conventional terms as priest and substitute, and the crucifixion as a victory and a ransom, but in addition to Christ as 'substitute' there is evidence of Christ as 'representative'. That is, that he suffered 'on our account' and not 'in our stead'. He quotes Irenaeus, on the doctrine of 'recapitulation', to which the idea of God as representative is linked, 'one Lord Jesus Christ who came in fulfilment of God's comprehensive design, and recapitulates all things into himself...'. Within this process, by identifying with Christ, and particularly with his suffering, by following the *via dolorosa*, the believer becomes like Christ.

⁴⁰PW, xiii, hymn 3271, 126.

⁴¹PW, vii, hymn lviii, p.66.

This experience of being united with Christ in his suffering appears regularly in Wesley's hymns.⁴² For instance in:

Soar we now where Christ has led,
Following our exalted head;
Made like him, like him we rise;
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies!⁴³

The believer's identification with Christ's agony and abandonment was seen by Kristeva as a use of Christian symbolism to 'sublimate' the loneliness of the infant at the point of first separation from the mother: 'Christ abandoned, Christ in hell, is of course a sign that God shares the condition of the sinner'.⁴⁴

Fourthly, Charles Wesley saw suffering itself as one of the means of becoming perfect. It is possible that this enabled him to make sense of and tolerate his physical weaknesses more easily, and here he differed from John who was generally healthy. In one of his *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* (1762), Charles wrote:

A rebel to this present hour!
Yet now for all Thy mercies power
I ask with contrite sighs
To end my sin, but not my pain:
I would lament till death,* and then
Rejoice in paradise.⁴⁵

Here, John Wesley has added 'God forbid!'. There are other examples of John's irritated editing, which are inserted when suffering as a means of purification appears in the hymns. This difference from Charles reflects the attitude of each of them to his own body. Charles had learned to live with his physical weakness, while John had to maintain an active, 'healthy', but brittle shield, to protect him from his feelings of emptiness, deadness and weakness.

⁴²Shepherd, *Charles Wesley and the Doctrine of the Atonement*, 69-70.

⁴³HP 193, verse 4

⁴⁴IBL, 41.

⁴⁵PW ix, Hymn 319, p.100.

8.6 Trinity

There is no doubt that, as an Anglican priest, John Wesley's theology was Trinitarian. When he was very ill on the night before he died, he was singing, 'To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,/ Who sweetly all agree'.⁴⁶ His sermon on 'The New Creation' (1785), describes the goal of Christian life:

And to crown all there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his son Jesus Christ, through the spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of the creatures in him!⁴⁷

The writings of both the Wesleys on the Trinity have to be seen against the cultural background of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: as Vickers suggests, the increasing emphasis on reason at that time led to the view that 'faith' involved assenting to 'intelligible propositions' (*assensus*), rather than a personal trust in God (*fiducia*). As a result, there was pressure on theologians to demonstrate that the doctrine of the Trinity was intelligible, and compatible with 'Aristotelian, Cartesian or Lockean conceptions of personhood and reason'. Many attempts were made, and almost all of them were concerned with the *immanent* Trinity (e.g. Stillingfleet, Locke and Tillotson). They were challenged by the Socinians who criticised the doctrine as unintelligible.⁴⁸

Unlike his predecessors, John Wesley's beliefs on the Trinity, as clearly outlined in his letter of 18 July 1749, 'To a Roman Catholic',⁴⁹ are expressed in terms of the *economic* Trinity; he outlines the roles of the three persons of the Trinity in the process of salvation, but does not speculate about the relationships between them in the eternal divine. He was suspicious of metaphysical speculation, and in a letter to Mary Bishop (17 April 1776), warned against it, referring her to Charles's hymns,

⁴⁶ Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 331.

⁴⁷ BES 2, 510.

⁴⁸ Jason E. Vickers, "Charles Wesley and the Revival of the Doctrine of the Trinity: A Methodist Contribution to Modern Theology" in *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and Legacy*, (2007), 278-82.

⁴⁹ *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 192.

which he suggested showed, instead of speculation, the effect of the Trinity on ‘our hearts and lives’.⁵⁰

Only one published sermon by John Wesley on the Trinity still exists. In his introduction to it, Outler writes that it is the only extended written comment on this doctrine. However, the text (1 John 5:7, ‘There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one’) is recorded as having been used in his oral preaching twenty-three times, suggesting that it was a favourite topic.⁵¹ In the extant sermon, Wesley bases his belief in the ‘fact’ of the Trinity on scripture and tradition; he acknowledges the controversy about the authenticity of the text but concludes with Bengalius that it is indeed scriptural. Most of the sermon is spent encouraging his listeners to be content to accept the ‘fact’ of the Trinity. He gives many analogies in which ‘mysterious’ facts are believed as a matter of course: the sun resting or moving in the heavens, the flowing of light across a room from a candle, the existence of earth, air, souls and bodies, all these ‘facts’ are accepted in spite of the lack of knowledge of *how* they are possible. He says ‘the mystery lies in the *manner* of it’ and not in the fact itself; the Trinity should similarly be accepted as ‘fact’:

‘The word was made flesh’. I believe this fact There is no mystery in it; but as to the *manner*, *how* he was made flesh, wherein the mystery lies, I know nothing about it; I believe nothing about it. It is no more the object of my faith than it is my understanding.⁵²

The immanent Trinity was not to be speculated about but to be accepted as an unknowable mystery. While Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and their relationships with human beings, permeate John Wesley’s thought, and while he makes reference to the Three-in-One, overall there is little explication of the diversity in unity of the immanent Trinity or its meaning or implications for believers.

⁵⁰ Vickers, “Charles Wesley and the Revival of the Doctrine of the Trinity” in *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and Legacy*, 278.

⁵¹ BES II, 373-85.

⁵² BES II, 384.

Charles Wesley's understanding also starts from the economic Trinity, but he makes no separation between it and the immanent Trinity.⁵³ Vickers outlines the growth of Charles's understanding of the Trinity as shown in his sermons, in which his understanding of the Holy Spirit becomes increasingly complex, until he develops a 'robust doctrine of the economic Trinity'. He compares Basil of Caesarea with Wesley, suggesting that Wesley has much in common with fourth-century thought on the Trinity.⁵⁴ For both, knowledge of God is through the Spirit and the Son and is a personal relationship; it is a 'sapiential' knowledge.⁵⁵

This link with early Orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is most evident in the collection of *Hymns on the Trinity* (1767). Charles Wesley produced it after reading William Jones's *The Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity* (1756) and he set out what Jones had written in the form of hymns. While, as Allchin has suggested, these hymns are not always his best poetry,⁵⁶ they put forward the doctrines in doxological and poetic form; it is in these hymns that Charles's understanding of the immanent as well as the economic Trinity is most clearly demonstrated. Campbell, like Vickers and other scholars, has emphasised the affinity of the doctrines expressed in these hymns and those of the early Church Fathers. He points out that Wesley does not flinch from introducing the technicalities of Trinitarian doctrine into his hymns. For instance, he uses 'nature' for 'substance' or 'ousia', 'persons', 'Jehovah ELOHIM' (with the plural ending to convey the plurality of divine persons), and includes the concept of co-eternality, all in one verse :

Hail Father, Son, and Spirit, great
 Before the birth of time,
 Inthroned in everlasting state
 Jehovah ELOHIM!
 A mystical plurality
 We in the Godhead own,
 Adoring One in Persons Three
 And Three in Nature One.⁵⁷

⁵³ Vickers, "Charles Wesley and the Revival of the Doctrine of the Trinity" 288.

⁵⁴ Vickers, "Charles Wesley and the Revival of the Doctrine of the Trinity" 283-7

⁵⁵ See 2:2

⁵⁶ A.M.Allchin, "The Trinity in the Teaching of Charles Wesley: A Study in Eighteenth Century Orthodoxy?", *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society*, 4,(1997), 73.

⁵⁷ PW vii, hymn lxxxvii, p.266, quoted in Ted A. Campbell, "Charles Wesley: *Theologos*" in *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and Legacy*, (2007),267.

and includes the *filioque* clause:

Our hearts are then convinc'd indeed
That Christ is with the Father one;
The Spirit doth from both proceed
Attests the Co-eternal Son;⁵⁸

Campbell comments that, 'surprisingly', Wesley outlines the concept of *perichoresis* (mutual indwelling): that all the interactions between God *ad extra*, involve all the persons of the Trinity together:

God from hence, the God supreme
We one and many know:
Every act that flows from Him
Doth from Three persons flow:⁵⁹

Its appearance in Wesley's hymns is surprising because, while *perichoresis* is a concept of the early Greek theologians, it has tended to be a preoccupation of twentieth century, rather than eighteenth-century theologians.

Unlike the Anglican divines, who tried to understand the immanent Trinity intellectually, in order to convince the rationalists of the day, and unlike his brother, who discouraged 'speculation', Charles intertwined the immanent and the economic in his poetry. There is no attempt to produce a systematic theology: the concepts appear in a doxological setting of praise and prayer. They are embedded in metaphor and poetic imagery, and structured by the form of the poetry. By all of these means, Wesley evokes affective as well as cognitive responses in the reader or singer. Kimbrough has written about the 'verbal icons' in Wesley's hymns, which he sees as acting like visual icons in the Orthodox tradition, 'as windows through which to glimpse the way of holiness, to interpret faith and practice, to celebrate the saints, to explore the mystery of God and to approach God'.⁶⁰ In this way Wesley's words could

⁵⁸PW vii, hymn lxiii, p. 248-9.

⁵⁹PW vii, hymn xcix, p.273, quoted in Campbell, "Charles Wesley: Theologos", 267.

⁶⁰S.T.Kimbrough, "Charles Wesley and a Window to the East" in *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and Legacy*, 170.

be seen as bringing to life for the believer, the '*allegoria amoris*' which is the Trinitarian narrative of the incarnation.⁶¹

The interlacing of the economic and the immanent prefigures elements of the thought of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theologians on the Trinity. Charles Wesley's knowledge of the immanent Trinity, like that of Karl Barth, was gained from what he learned of the economic Trinity: they were not separate, but, while the economic was noetic, the immanent had priority.⁶² Similarly, as for Rahner,⁶³ the economic was the immanent and the immanent was the economic, and for La Cugna,⁶⁴ the two could not be addressed separately. However, unlike the last two authors, who have been criticised by some for 'collapsing' the immanent Trinity into the economic and thus seen as compromising the 'freedom' of God, for Wesley the immanent comprises more than the economic, although the two are not separate. While he includes technicalities of doctrine, he preserves the mysterious, apophatic element of the immanent Trinity; for him, it is more than has been revealed through the *actions* of the Three Persons⁶⁵ There are many hymns which describe the incomprehensibility and mystery of God. This example is from those quoted by Vickers:

Beyond our utmost thought,
And reason's proudest flight,
We comprehend him not
Nor grasp the infinite,
But worship in the Mystic Three
One God to all eternity.⁶⁶

It has been shown, using Ward's work,⁶⁷ how Kristeva's understanding of the dynamics of love in the archaic triangle can be used to enrich the Christian understanding of the dynamics of kenotic Trinitarian love, and also how the

⁶¹See Ward 4.5.2.

⁶²Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 48.

⁶³Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans, Joseph Donceel, (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 22.

⁶⁴Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 224.

⁶⁵Vickers, "The Revival of the Doctrine of the Trinity", 291.

⁶⁶PW vii, Hymn xli, p. 338.

⁶⁷See 4:5:2.

Trinitarian triangle and Kristeva's triangle can be helpfully juxtaposed. There are some emphases in Charles Wesley intertwining of the economic and immanent Trinity, which make these comparisons particularly apt.

8.6.1 The dynamics of love

Love is the essential element required for the nourishment of the infant in Kristeva's understanding of early development in the archaic triangle, and in Ward's '*allegoria amoris*'. Similarly, for Charles Wesley the dynamics of love in the Trinity are central to the process of salvation. His hymns recount how, through the Incarnation, humanity becomes involved in the intra-trinitarian love. The perichoresis, in love of the persons of the Trinity, also comes to 'dwell' in the believer, who is the 'made divine':

The Father, Son and Spirit dwell
By faith in all his saints below,
And then in love unspeakable
The glorious Trinity we know
Created after God to shine,
Filled with his plenitude divine.⁶⁸

One of Charles Wesley's best known hymns elucidates the same theme; although it is not from the collection of hymns on the Trinity, it is based on the Trinity and it also strongly emphasises the centrality of love, erotic, kenotic and agapeic:

Love Divine, all Loves excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling
All thy faithful mercies crown;
Jesu Thou art all Compassion,
Pure unbounded Love Thou art,
Visit us with thy Salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O Breathe thy loving Spirit
Into every troubled Breast,
Let us all in Thee inherit,
Let us find that Second Rest:

⁶⁸PW vii, hymn cxxix, 293.

Take away the Power of sinning,
Alpha and Omega be,
End of Faith as its beginning,
Set our Hearts at Liberty.

Come Almighty to deliver,
Let us all thy Life receive,
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more thy Temples leave ...⁶⁹

God is 'Almighty', but also 'Love Divine', Christ is 'pure unbounded love' and the Spirit is a 'loving Spirit'. Although human 'eros' is hidden in this hymn, its imagery is found throughout. The hymn is a transformation of Dryden's libretto in Purcell's *King Arthur*, in which Christ, dwelling in the human heart, 'supersedes' Venus, who left Cyprus and came to dwell in the 'Fairest Isle' (Britain) which was full of sexual love and pleasure.⁷⁰ In the 1780 *Collection of Hymns*, John Wesley omitted the second verse, and this omission has been attributed to his objection to the line 'Take away our power of sinning'. As Baker points out, this line suggests an extreme view of Christian perfection, which Charles Wesley himself was 'scathing' about in his later poems. However, to leave it out was to disrupt the Trinitarian structure of the hymn. A simpler amendment would have left this intact: the contemporary and friend of the Wesleys, John Fletcher, suggested 'take away the love of sinning.'⁷¹ John Wesley's omission suggests that the Trinitarian nature of the hymn was less crucial for him than it was for Charles. Similarly, in the 1780 *Collection*, in the second line of the third verse, 'life' became 'grace', evoking the saving grace of Jesus Christ, rather than the 'life' of the Holy Trinity.

In a further example, the agapeic accepting love of the 'imaginary father' of Kristeva's archaic triangle is mirrored in the forgiving, accepting love of God:

Thy causeless unexhausted love,
Unmerited and free,
Delights our evil to remove,
And help our misery;
Thou waitest to be gracious still,
Thou dost with sinners bear,

⁶⁹PW iv, 219-20.

⁷⁰ Watson, *The English Hymn*, 247.

⁷¹ Baker, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*, 95, n.1.

That sav'd, we may thy goodness feel,
And all thy grace declare.⁷²

These hymns express ideas which are very close to what Moltmann calls the 'Open Trinity'. For him, 'perichoresis' includes an 'intimate indwelling and complete interpenetration of the persons in one another' and an understanding of that 'Trinitarian unity which goes out beyond the doctrine of persons and their relations: by virtue of their eternal love, the divine persons exist so intimately with one another, for one another and in one another that they constitute themselves in a unique, incomparable and complete unity'.⁷³ In Moltmann's view, the relationality of the three persons 'seeks the inclusion of creation', it 'invites participation'. In Wesley the idea of the 'indwelling' of the believer by God as three persons, the believer as 'temple of the Triune God', appears repeatedly.⁷⁴ In both Kristevan theory and Wesley's understanding of the Trinity, the search for meaning and identity are mediated by love in a triadic setting.

8.6.2 Kenosis

Kristeva parallels the separation of the child from the mother with the passion of Christ. The ensuing sense of loss, of depression and mourning, is described by Ward as a 'kenotic economy'.⁷⁵ It precedes the gaining of language and the 'dawn of psychic life',⁷⁶ just as it precedes the Resurrection. Reconciliation with divine love in the Trinity is reached only at the far side of kenosis and dispossession.

As in Kristeva's work, kenosis is an important theme in Wesley's hymns, as Kimbrough demonstrates in his comparison of the poetry of Ephrem the Syrian and Wesley's *Hymns on the Nativity*.⁷⁷ He shows how in Wesley it is through the mystery of God's kenosis (God as poor, humbled, or a 'stranger'), 'our God contracted to a

⁷²PW, ix, 55.

⁷³Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden, (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 86. quoted in Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*. (2004), 81-2.

⁷⁴Kimbrough, "Charles Wesley and a Window to the East", 177.

⁷⁵ Graham Ward, "Kenosis and Naming", in ed. Paul Heelas, *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 246.

⁷⁶I BL 41.

span,/Incomprehensibly made man', that the believer can participate in the life of the divine:

Made flesh for our sake,
that we might partake
the nature divine
and again in his image, his holiness shine.⁷⁸

Wesley's hymns referring to the believers being united with Christ in his suffering, his *via dolorosa*, have already been discussed. These emphases on kenosis, dispossession and suffering as intrinsic to the search for meaning and identity resonate with the Kristevan narrative.

8.6.3 Triadic Relating

In this thesis there have been many references to the presence of a 'third' party within relationships, and the way in which this provides the space for reflection, thought and creativity. The growth of Charles's understanding of the Trinity as shown in his sermons, and his fascination with it as shown in his *Hymns on the Trinity*, show that he experienced his relationship to God as with God as Three-in-One and not as only with each of the separate Persons. This, as a triadic, rather than a dyadic relationship, would offer the possibility of balance, in Kristevan terms between the semiotic and the symbolic, a balance which has been shown to be evident in his hymns.

8.6.4 Plurality in unity.

Charles Wesley focussed on the plurality as well as the unity of Trinitarian life. He subscribed to the traditional belief that human beings were in the image of the Triune God:

The Spirit is Life, we know and feel
Who life to us imparts;
And God doth in three persons dwell

⁷⁷S.T.Kimbrough, "Kenosis in the Nativity Hymns of Ephram the Syrian and Charles Wesley" in ed. S.T.Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 265-2.

⁷⁸PW iv, 113-4.

For ever in our hearts:
Our life is One: a Trinity
In Unity we love,
And gladly die from earth, to see
His face unveiled above.⁷⁹

To be in the image of a Triune God has implications for relationships and for living in the world. The plurality in unity of the Trinity, spanning time and space, and eternity, when mapped on to human relationships, allows for separateness, distinctiveness and identity, but also for mutual erotic, kenotic and agapeic loving in relationships. Charles Wesley's incorporation of the 'perichoretic unity of the triune God', and the participation in it of human beings, portrays, in Moltmann's words, 'a social, inviting, integrating, unifying, and thus world-open community'.⁸⁰ Such a community allows for the encompassing of diversity in unity.

When John Wesley published the 1780 *Collection*, he was selective about which hymns on the Trinity he included. As has been shown, his omissions and alterations led to less emphasis on the Trinity than on salvation. As Campbell remarks, the hymns included were associated with 'the Christian experience of the 'way of salvation', while more complex, 'explicit and sustained material' was omitted. Campbell suggests that he could have been 'presupposing the Trinitarian devotion of the Book of Common Prayer';⁸¹ but, judging from the sentiments expressed in his sermon on the Trinity, it is also likely that he would have regarded such material as approaching worrying 'speculation'. His relative lack of engagement with the internal relationships within the Trinity would be consistent with the previous exploration of his relationships, where there was little room for the presence of a 'third' party.

⁷⁹PW vii, hymn cxxiii, p.290.

⁸⁰Jürgen Moltmann, "An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology" in ed. M. Douglas Meeks, *Trinity, Community and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000), 117.

⁸¹ Campbell, "Charles Wesley: *Theologos*", 273-4.

8.7 The influence of psychological needs

In each of the five modalities, John and Charles Wesley faced the same opportunities for relating to religious 'objects'. The observations made suggest that each of them reacted in a way which was influenced by his psychological needs.

In their 'conversion' experiences, John had more difficulty than Charles in believing that God could be loving and forgiving to *him*. He was more in the grip of his 'bad' internal objects. In Kristevan terms, his responses to all five modalities were affected by his need to avoid the pull of the restitution of the mother/child dyad, the 'abject', which fascinated but terrified him. His primitive desires and fears had to be walled off, and he resisted provocation by notions that invoked them (such as 'involuntary sin', illness and weakness, passionate union, carnality and 'fondling,' boundlessness and lack of structure). These would have raised fears of losing control and of falling into nothing.

John's terror of the 'abject' and his difficulty in accommodating a 'third' in relationships, meant that in response to religious doctrine such as the Trinity and the God of agape, which symbolise the 'archaic triangle' and 'clear a space for triadic subjectivity',⁸² he had difficulty sustaining a 'symbolic/semiotic' balance. He tended to retreat or 'collapse' into a dyadic relationship with the Law of the (Oedipal) Father, which involved sticking to rules and striving to be perfect. This meant that, for him, the Christian symbolism involved was less helpful than it was for Charles in achieving integration of his 'dark side', with its attendant possibilities for growth.

The boundary between what was unconscious and what was conscious appears to have been more permeable in Charles Wesley. His 'dark side' was less terrifying, and his ability to acknowledge his destructiveness and weakness was greater. This meant that, in writing his poetry, he could 'regress in the service of the ego',⁸³ access his internal objects and express unconscious material symbolically. More balance and interlacing of Kristeva's 'symbolic' and 'semiotic' were possible, as desire for merging, and the 'abject', were symbolised and accommodated. Rather than being

⁸² Crownfield, "The Sublimation of Narcissism", in *Body/Tex in Julia Kristeva* ed. Crownfield, (1992), 59.

⁸³ See 2:5.

left as an 'inexorable carnal reminder',⁸⁴ as they were for John, there was evidence of integration. Not only was Charles's ability to tolerate a 'third' seen in his response to the doctrine of the Trinity and the God of agape, it was also apparent in his use of poetry as a 'third', between subject and object, which created a place for reflection and self-expression. He appears to have been more able than John, to use and profit from the same Christian symbols.

8:8 Understanding the difference

One way of portraying the difference between the brothers is in terms of their response to the suffering implicit in the mental structures and defences they were heir to, as children of 'evangelical nurture' and in their response to life experiences. Harris Williams draws on Keats's distinction between life as a 'vale of tears' and a 'vale of soul making', and on Sophocles's Oedipus plays, as a study of the potential of suffering to cause 'entombment' or 'creativity'. She compares these distinctions to Bion's description of two different responses to mental pain. The first response is one in which the pain results in symptoms or repetitive action rather than being *felt* or suffered and it is 'non-developmental' - John walled off his pain and survived through repetitive activity.

The second response is to *suffer* the 'tension of conflicting emotions in the face of new knowledge'.⁸⁵ Using Bion, Harris Williams describes an emotional experience as a poetic marriage of contrary emotions - love and hate - that may be ... 'almost unbearable'. It can result either in 'pain' or 'suffering'. 'Pain causes symptoms, whereas, suffering, if it can be undergone, is accompanied or followed by the revelation of meaning'. She writes that that in order to bear this tension, there must be 'an act of faith in which the support of selfhood ... is abandoned in favour of total dependence on the internal object'. 'Internal object' here refers to the 'combined object', which becomes a poet's muse.⁸⁶ Charles seemed able to relate in this way to his combined internal object.

⁸⁴PH 120.

⁸⁵ Meg Harris Williams, *The Vale of Soul-Making*, 104.

⁸⁶ *The Vale of Soul-Making*, 192.

John Wesley's threatening internal objects were so harsh and critical that his response to mental pain was one of 'entombing' them, staying healthy and working compulsively. Charles's use of semiotic resonances in his hymns was experienced as 'undersymbolised,' and resulted in too violent a confrontation for John with the destructive and sexual aspects of himself. He continued in the grip of his 'bad' objects until his old age, being identified with them in his strict demands on himself and others. He understood intellectually what would have helped him, but had to make strenuous and unrelenting efforts to maintain his memory of a loving father, while the image of a punitive father constantly reasserted itself. Nevertheless, through his intellectual conviction that redemption was available for all, he was able to help thousands of others to experience it and (at least by the end of his life), he had begun to feel that even a 'servant' could be acceptable to God.

The contrasts seen in the responses of the two brothers to the religious doctrines to which they both subscribed would tend to support the idea that the degree of change is very likely to relate inversely to the degree of domination of the internal world by its 'bad internal objects', and directly to the extent to which an individual can engage with the religious symbolism involved, as representing their unconscious phantasies.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

In this thesis, some distance has been travelled from the two apparently unconnected observations which provoked it:

- 1) For some patients in psychotherapy, it is often only through a very intense struggle in the negative transference that change can occur;
- 2) Some sincere Christians mean well, and can justify their actions, while acting in a very 'unchristian' fashion.

It was noted at the beginning that the two were linked, in that they both related to difficulty accessing unconscious content, but through this study, the connection has been explored more fully and fleshed out. For some people the 'dark side' (their unconscious shame, rage, helplessness and destructiveness) is felt to be so unbearable, unmanageable and dangerous that it cannot be confronted directly. Defensive strategies, sometimes including religious rationalisations, and/or a rigid 'walling off' from consciousness have to be employed against it. It has become clearer, from the two case-histories described, why such individuals, those whom Kristeva would describe in contemporary society as suffering from 'new maladies of the soul', require psychoanalytic methods which can fully engage with the negative aspects of the relationship with the therapist. The contribution of the 'nameless dreads', associated with their hidden feelings and phantasies, to the 'life-and-death' quality of the struggles to understand them, have become apparent.

9.1 'Metaphoric identification'

This psychoanalytical examination of religion according to Kleinian, post-Kleinian and Kristevan theory has highlighted elements that are less evident when it is studied through more traditional, developmental methods of study; those which rely heavily on the ego-psychology and self-psychology schools of psychoanalysis.

The theories used in this thesis provide several important emphases: the 'splitness' of the self rather than the 'autonomous ego'; an 'intersubjectivity' between therapist and patient, with awareness of non-verbal and non-cognitive ways of knowing; unconscious motivation and the struggle with unconscious negative feelings; the place of value and paradox; and the importance of symbolisation in the

making of meaning out of unconscious content. These emphases, and particularly Kristevan theory, enrich and deepen the understanding of an individual response to religious symbols.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Kristeva seeks, in her exegeses of religious texts, their ‘more sensual and even salvific face.’¹ She draws out parallels between complex and multiple meanings of Christian narratives and the believer’s struggles with unconscious phantasies, drives and affects. Both are narratives of erotic and agapaic love, of loss, of separation, of the body, of the ‘abject’, and of the search for meaning. Love is central to her thought; she unearths a ‘metaphor of love’, which ‘is what fills discourse with meaning.’²

Kristeva describes the bond that any religion establishes between the divinity and its believers as ‘an identification’.³ Such a relationship is comparable to the relationship of the child with the ‘imaginary father’; it facilitates a way of ‘knowing’, rather than an ‘acquiring of knowledge’ about the divine and about the self. It is a being ‘grasped by’ rather than a ‘grasping after’ truth.⁴ This identification is described as a ‘metaphoric’ identification, and metaphor in Kristevan theory is ‘the linguistic search for *jouissance*, for articulating that *archaic Thing* (that sublime space which cannot be articulated). It is the reaching after the unnameable, the absent ...’⁵ Kristeva’s ‘amatory identification’ has a ‘heterogeneous, drive-affected dimension’, loaded with ‘something pre-verbal, or even non-representable that needs to be deciphered while taking into account the more precise articulations of discourse.’⁶ It illuminates Ricoeur’s archeological hermeneutics as well as progressive ones.⁷

Kristeva’s subject is a split subject, ‘mortal and speaking’, semiotic and symbolic, word and flesh. When she writes of religion as inadequate as a symboliser of the ‘abject’, she is writing of a religion which ‘founds itself on a transcendental ideal’,⁸ where God is an ideal heavenly power. Her God of agape would have more in

¹ Cleo McNelly Kearns, “Art and Religious Discourse in Aquinas and Kristeva,” in Crownfield ed. *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva*, 111. See also 4.3

² Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis and Modernity*, 69.

³ TL, 143.

⁴ Graham Ward, “Kenosis and naming: beyond analogy and towards *allegoria amoris*” in Heelas ed. *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, 253 and Scleiermacher 4.4.2.2

⁵ Kathleen O’Grady, “The Pun or the Eucharist?: Eco and Kristeva on the Consummate Model for the Metaphoric Process”. *Literature and Theology*, 11: 1 (1997), 104.

⁶ TL, 29.

⁷ See 4.5.4

⁸ Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva*, 73.

common with Moltmann's God, who is love, who is 'an event ... the event of Golgotha, the event of the love of the Son and the grief of the Father, from which the Spirit who opens up the future and creates life in fact derives.' This is a God of an unconditional love, who takes on himself grief at the contradiction in men and does not angrily suppress this contradiction.⁹ In Charles Wesley's words:

He left his Father's throne above
(So free, so infinite his grace!),
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.¹⁰

The emphasis in Kristeva is on the need for a dialogue between symbolic and semiotic, and between the word and the flesh, rather than a dialectic; this dialogue too is embodied in Charles Wesley's hymns.

In the bringing together of psychoanalytic and Christian ideas in parallels such as these, it is hoped that in this study, a kind of 'metaphoric identification' has taken place, so that, not only has knowledge cognitively been acquired but some things have also become 'sapientially known'.

9.2 Triadic openness.

Crownfield calls for an 'imaginary, erotic, open, optional Christianity', one which can provide 'triadic openness against narcissistic alternatives.'¹¹ Kristeva turns to art, poetry and psychoanalysis for these alternatives to narcissism, but she is aware of their limitations: that not everybody can be an artist or writer; that an 'interlocutor' is necessary; and that there is a need for interactions within a community. As McNelly Kearns points out, Kristeva, wants to avoid a return to religion, 'this dangerous *pharmakon*' as a solution. Nevertheless, Kristeva's work enlarges the understanding of the integrating function of Christian symbolism. Thus in McNelly Kearns's words, she 'partially rehabilitates' religion. And McNelly Kearns 'rehabilitates' it further, using Kristeva's ideas, while acknowledging that she goes beyond Kristeva's brief.

⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, (London: SCM Press, 2001) 255-257.

¹⁰ Hildebrandt and Beckerlegge, eds. *A Collection of Hymns*, 232, (no.193).

¹¹ David R. Crownfield, "The Sublimation of Narcissism in Christian Love and Faith", in Crownfield ed., *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva*, 63. See also Chapter 3, 18.

For one element in justifying this extension, she turns to Kristeva's thought on the need for a 'third', the 'father of individual prehistory', as having religious implications, and as relating to the issue of community. But McNelly Kearns also writes that, 'Without the refining fire of psychoanalysis and *écriture*, religion, theology and even prayer will all too often remain unreconstructed tools of imposition, repression and terror, leaving no room at all for art, for the body, for the sound of other voices, or for that opening of new psychic and imaginative spaces by which we make room for the numinous in our language and lives.'¹² The use of Kristeva in this study, also 'beyond her brief', has tended to reinforce this message. It has tended to confirm that when space exists for imagination and mental freedom, in the presence of a 'third', there is more opportunity for creativity and growth. It also supports the possibility of finding such spaces in a religious context.

9.3 Symbolising the 'abject'.

The exploration of Charles Wesley's hymns compels a further questioning of Kristeva's reservations about the capacity of Christianity to symbolise the pain, loss, emptiness, and separation of the 'abject'. In *Powers of Horror*, she details the 'codification' of the 'abject' as 'sin'. She writes of such a 'subjectified abject', not only as holding the 'keys that open the doors to Morality and Knowledge', but also, as Beardsworth suggests, as 'equally open[ing] up the path to the inquisition', or to 'super-ego spirituality'.¹³ The 'abject' as 'sin' becomes displaced rather than elaborated. This kind of 'codification' is reminiscent of the way sin is dealt with in some fundamentalist/revivalist movements as described by Percy.¹⁴

In Charles Wesley's hymns there are corporeal metaphors of brokenness and woundedness, metaphors of suffering and death, and of merging and ecstasy. The poetic writing has many of the features Kristeva would require of *écriture*, which allow the semiotic to erupt into the symbolic. The 'abject' is not merely set aside and 'codified' as 'sin' but is elaborated and held in dialogue with the 'symbolic' elements; the polluted, broken elements interlace with the loving saving ones. The 'abject' here

¹² McNelly Kearns, "Art and Religious Discourse", 117-120.

¹³ Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva*, 138-9.

¹⁴ See 4.4.1.2

cannot be described as an unapproachable 'inexorable carnal reminder.'¹⁵

I am all unclean, unclean,
Thy purity I want;
My whole heart is sick of sin,
And my whole heart is faint!
Full of putrifying sores,
Of bruises, and of wounds, my soul
Looks up to Jesus, help implores,
And gasps to be made whole.¹⁶

As well as symbolising the abject, the prominence of love has been seen in Charles Wesley's hymns; the symbolic and the semiotic, and love, loss and pain, have been brought together in a doxological healing way.

9.4 Classification of forms of religion.

Yet the imaginative spaces within which Charles Wesley created his hymns were found in the context of early Methodism, which for many meant a relationship with an anthropomorphic idealized God, the polarising of good and evil, and rigid certainties and demands. According to traditional theory, such a form of religion would be expected to promote dependency, infantilism and dyadic relating, and to be conducive to closure and defensiveness. However, Charles's 'triadic' response, as understood in this thesis, undermines the view that forms of religion can usefully be classified in this way as 'mature' or 'immature'.

The different responses of the two brothers to their beliefs and the degree of integration that occurred in each, has been shown to be inextricably linked with their pre-existing mental structure. Meissner¹⁷ called for more research relating to the form of interaction with a particular religious modality and the developmental needs of the individual. The evidence from the examples in this study at least, suggests an important correlation between the two.

There were opportunities for triadic openness which Charles was able to exploit. He was able, through the use of image and metaphor, to 'sublimate'

¹⁵ PH, 120.

¹⁶ Hildebrandt and Beckerlegge, *A Collection of Hymns*, 212 (no.105).

¹⁷ Chapter 1, 16.

unconscious phantasy and affect. This would have tended not only to increase integration in his own inner world, but to have offered this opportunity to the singers of his hymns. He achieved some symbolic/semiotic balance in his hymns, as his grandfather Dr. Annesley had done in his sermons.

John had more of a struggle. So great was his fear of the 'abject', and his difficulty in holding on to a loving forgiving father, that he often retreated to a dyadic position in relation to the 'law of the Father'. Semiotic resonances in Charles's hymns were experienced as 'undersymbolised', and resulted in too violent a confrontation for John with the destructive and sexual aspects of himself. He continued in the grip of his 'bad' objects until his old age, being identified with them in his strict demands on himself and others. While he longed for, and feared, mystic or sexual merging, and felt vicariously gratified when others responded to his preaching with ecstatic experiences, he himself felt safer with the 'good old ways'. This dilemma was similar to that of his mother: she flicked between the dyadic merging of her 'lucid intervals', and her rigid rule keeping.

These differences have a bearing on St. Thomas Aquinas's question on the relationship between grace and nature, raised previously.¹⁸ This is, I believe, a theological question that is too big for this study even to attempt to answer. The differences between the brothers would imply that '*gracia praesupponit naturam*', in that Charles, whose pre-existing inner world had more integration, was able to secure more change. However, John was able to treat himself more kindly as he aged: he had begun to feel that even a 'servant' could be acceptable to God. In addition, he died beloved by thousands, whose lives had been given meaning, comfort and hope, in spite of his woundedness. Neither he, nor his brother, his mother or his grandfather claimed Christian perfection in this life, and John believed that it was only after death that 'inbred sin' could be dealt with. Based on this belief, '*gracia perficit naturam*', suggesting a reciprocal relationship.

9.5 'The stranger within'

In the Introduction reference was made to Carette's description of psychoanalysts as tending to sanction private, individualistic, non-anthropomorphic religions. Carette particularly notes that the emphases in ego-psychology and self-psychology tend to

situate change in a private space. This he describes as a 'political order of the study of religion' which he calls an 'order of the same'. He is disturbed that these theorists are innocent of the political and economic influences within their own discourses, and have a need to *know* and to control.¹⁹

While no psychoanalytic discourses escape his censure, there are some, those that emphasise the split self and the drives, phantasies and affects of the unconscious, which he believes are more aware of these other influences, and which approach the status of 'the order of the other'. The emphases already highlighted in the psychoanalytic theory used in this study are similar to those he outlines for this group.

The 'knowing and 'controlling' that Carette describes is called 'domestication' by Hyman.²⁰ He questions whether Freud's project is to domesticate the 'uncanny', and suggests that both psychoanalysis and religion exist at the boundary of heteronomy and domestication, the same and the other. He also writes that if 'full priority' is given to the 'domestication of the divine', the ultimate result would be the dissolution of the object of religion and its replacement by an idol. In psychoanalysis a similar 'domestication' would result in the 'sovereignty of the ego'. Kristeva's symbolic/semiotic dialogue can be seen as a balance between heteronomy and domestication.

Kristeva has written extensively on politics and ethics, and while she is concerned with the individual psyche, she is equally concerned with social identity. Her book, *Strangers to Ourselves*, analyses political identity and difference. For her, the awareness and acceptance of the 'stranger within' has ethical and political implications, 'The ethics of psychoanalysis implies a politics: it would involve a cosmopolitanism of a sort that, cutting across governments, economies, and markets, might work for a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of its unconscious - desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible. ... On the basis of an erotic, death-bearing unconscious, the uncanny strangeness ... sets the difference within us in its most bewildering shape and presents it as the ultimate condition of our

¹⁸ Chapter 2, 18.

¹⁹ Jeremy Carette, *Religion and Critical Psychology*, (London and New York; Routledge, 2007), 209-210.

²⁰ Gavin Hyman, "Religion and psychoanalytic thought: A Contemporary evaluation", *Theology*, January/February, 2008, 3-11.

being *with* others.’²¹ I would suggest, that to apply her ideas to the study of religion, is, in Carrette’s terms, of the ‘order of the other’.

Kristeva’s symbolic/semiotic dialogue and the ethical implications of her ‘stranger within’ for the community, has resonances with the ways in which Charles Wesley portrays the ‘plurality in unity’ of the Trinity, and its implications for the community. By juxtaposing them, there is a mutual enrichment: the unconscious resonances of ‘plurality in unity’ are elucidated and the capacity of Christian symbolism to ‘symbolise’ or ‘sublimate’ the semiotic becomes evident. This is one example which demonstrates the potential of the project of this study, in bringing together the two discourses as an ‘order of the other’; it insists on an openness to difference and the o(O)ther, and a toleration of not knowing.

Chapter 2 was concerned with a ‘search for goodness’, which involved responsibility to the self and individual aspiration, as well as behaviour towards others.²² The juxtaposition of the two discourses in a way which elucidates the unconscious resonances of Christian symbolism can be a potent enabler of the individual’s ‘search for the good’. For Kristeva the bringing together of the ‘symbolic’ and the ‘semiotic’ is a healing and integrating process. There emerges, as Beattie suggests, a vision and language of healing and redemption: ‘It shows how we might reconcile ourselves to mourning without sacrifice, to separation without alienation, to difference without division.’²³

Kristeva has said that psychoanalysis ‘asserts the end of “codes” but also [asserts] the permanence of love as a builder of spoken spaces.’²⁴ This thesis has attempted to explore the spoken spaces built by love in psychotherapy and religion. The Wesley brothers were creatures of their time, and neither their grandfather’s Calvinism nor early Methodism would usually be described as ‘imaginary, erotic, open, optional’ forms of Christianity. For neither of the brothers, nor their parents or grandparents, could Christianity ever have been optional, but this study has shown that Charles Wesley at least (and possibly his grandfather Annesley) was able to engage with its imaginary, open and even erotic aspects.

²¹ Julia Kristeva, “Strangers to Ourselves”, in Kelly Oliver, ed., *The Portable Kristeva*, 290.

²² Dale S. Wright, “Human Responsibility and the Mandala”, *Literature and Theology*, 18: 3, (2004), 317.

²³ Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 287.

But although I have endeavoured to set out the evidence as fully and fairly as possible, in the end it is only one narrative: it is merely *a* story.²⁵ There can never be a definitive version.

²⁴ TL, 382.

²⁵ Robert Bellah, "Young Man Luther: A Comment" in eds. D.Capps, W.H.Capps and M.G. Bradford, *Encounter with Erikson*, (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977) 29.

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Appendix I: Theory and empirical research relating to the assessment of religious experience.

1. 'Best Explanation'

Bagger¹ insists that when examining religious experience, it is necessary to arrive at what he calls the 'best explanation' for it, according to the knowledge base and predominating values of its time. The 'best explanation' is very variable between different eras and cultures. By pushing his argument to its limit, he arrives at the conclusion that no contemporary 'supernatural' explanations can be justified, as any 'anomaly' which can not currently be understood to have a natural explanation will eventually be explicable in these terms. This is to return to what William James described as 'medical materialism'² and it not claims too much for the future of scientific investigation but it assumes that an explanation at one level of understanding cannot co-exist with one on another level. Nevertheless, Bagger's thesis is a reminder of the need, when examining historical or current religious experience, to attempt to reconcile the understandings of those experiences with the knowledge and values which were current at the time of the experience.

2. The Influence of Language

Accounts which concentrate on 'pure experience' without taking into account background historical, cultural, social and religious factors are omitting vital influences. In addition, a failure to recognise that the language used in attempts to describe experiences (e.g. the use of words such as ineffable and paradox), may well in fact encourage others to repeat the experience and therefore are not merely explanation. In other words, such omissions or failures to acknowledge subtle influences, can consciously or unconsciously lead to accounts of experience being used as apologetic, and as protective of previously held beliefs, while ostensibly being portrayed as sources of new revelation.³

3. Health or pathology

Many surveys have been carried out of reported religious experiences or other episodes of altered mind/body perceptions which attempt to differentiate religious experiences from others in terms of evidence of health or pathology, and in terms of their long-term effects, their 'fruits'. These are not psychoanalytically-orientated studies but some have a bearing on this work. They have been summarised by Beit-Hallahmi and Argyll.⁴

¹Matthew C. Bagger, *Religious Experience, Justification and History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 138-9.

²William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, (London/New York: Routledge, 2002).

³J. Brockmeier, "Ineffable Experience", *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2002, 9, 79-95; Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, (Berkeley, L.A./London: Harper and Rowe, 1985); Matthew C. Bagger, *Religious Experience, Justification and History*, (1999).

⁴B. Beit-Hallahmi and M. Argyll, *The psychology of Religious Behaviour, Belief and Experience*, (London: Routledge, 1997)

Gabbard compared 'out-of-the-body' experiences attributed to a religious source, to similar phenomena attributed to a pathological cause (e.g. depersonalisation, autoscopic phenomena, schizophrenic body distortions). He concluded that the first group was a separate, non-pathological group, in which awareness of reality and identity remained high throughout, and in which the experiences were felt as integrating and transforming. He concluded that, if they were due to regression, then 'it was certainly a regression in the service of the ego'.⁵

Hood found that a group of people who had religious experiences were found to have a higher 'ego strength', than those who did not, suggesting that those who were able temporarily to let go of their sense of self and their ego functioning were more psychologically healthy than those who dare not risk it.⁶

4. Predisposing causes.

It is well known that conversion experiences tend to occur when the subject is in a state of uncertainty, stress or confusion. Spilka and McIntosh found that only certain kinds of stress tend to predispose to religious experience. These are associated with 'a sense of sin, depression and sadness, fear and dread and crisis of meaning and the experience led to 'feelings of being forgiven' or that 'God was in charge'. They found that the lower the sense of personal mastery, the higher the likelihood that the experience would be attributed to God.⁷

⁵G. Gabbard, "Differential Diagnosis of Altered Mind/Body Perception", *Psychiatry*, (1982) 45:4, 367.

⁶Ralph W. Hood, "Psychological strength and the report of intense religious experience", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, (1974), 13, 65-71.

⁷B. Spilka and D.N. McIntosh, "Attribution Theory and Religious Experience" in ed. R.W. Hood, *Handbook of Religious Experience: Theory and Practice*, (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious education Press.

Appendix II - The Wesley ancestors.

1. John Wesley (Snr)- John and Charles Wesley's paternal grandfather

Whitehead's summary of Calamy's views⁸ on the character of John Wesley (Snr) :

1. Mr. Wesley appears to have made himself master of controverted points in which he differed from the established Church; and to have made up his opinions from a conviction of their truth. 2. He shows an ingenuous mind, free from low cunning, in the open avowal of his sentiments to the Bishop. 3. He appears to have been remarkably conscientious in all his conduct, and a zealous promoter of genuine piety in himself and others. 4. He discovered great firmness of mind, and an unshaken attachment to his principles in the midst of the most unchristian persecution, and a train of accumulated evils which he suffered on that account.....[these features] shew a mind elevated far above the common level, even of those who have had the advantages of an academical education.⁹

2. Dr. Samuel Annesley- Maternal grandfather

Samuel Annesley's grandfather was the Secretary of State and Vice-Treasurer of Ireland in the reign of Charles I and his cousin was the Earl of Anglesea.¹⁰ Annesley received a BA degree from Queen's College, Oxford in 1639 and married Mary Hill in 1641. Under a scheme introduced by the House of Commons, lecturers could be employed to lecture weekly in churches where the incumbent was not carrying out his obligation to preach three times a week. The House of Commons journal for December 1642 records that Samuel Annesley should be appointed in this capacity in Chatham near Rochester. That appointment coincided with the beginning of the Civil War.¹¹

Throughout the forty years during which Annesley preached (1642-1682), the country was divided between those who supported the Crown and wished to retain the Prayer Book and those who supported Parliament, and, wanted totally Protestant church worship and more lay influence in church government. It was this division which culminated in the Civil War. Underlying this debate about religious practice and church organisation was the theological argument based on the Arminian/Calvinist controversy, and it has been argued by Wallace that the rise of Arminianism was an important contributing factor. It was associated in the public mind with 'popery' and resulted in a split within those who held Calvinist beliefs, so that prior to the Civil War, three main Protestant groups existed: The Laudian Arminians, the 'Episcopal Calvinists', who formed a substantial part of the Church of England, and those Calvinist Puritans who remained independent. Presbyterians were to be found in the second and third groups. The 'Episcopal Calvinists' retained a belief in the

⁸E. Calamy, *An Account of the Ministers who were ejected or Silenced after the restoration in 1661* (London: 1713)

⁹Adam Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*, (London: Printed by J. and T. Clarke, 1823) 48.

¹⁰Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*, 234.

¹¹Betty I. Young, "Sources for the Annesley Family", *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 45, (1985), 49.

importance of piety and the theology of predestinarian grace, and like the independents were labelled 'Puritan' in a derogatory fashion by the Arminians.¹²

From the beginning of the Long Parliament in 1640, Laud and the Arminians lost ground and there was pressure for a Scottish Presbyterian style of church government. Parliament, keen to enlist Scottish support in their struggle against the Crown, presented the 'Solemn League and Covenant', which was intended to 'root out popery and prelacy', to the Westminster Assembly of Divines. After prolonged debate, a plan for a network of church assemblies was agreed and its implementation was begun by Parliament in 1646. It was a only a compromise with the Scottish system, and was described as 'lame' by Robert Baillie, one of the Scottish clerical commissioners of the Assembly. John Milton, however, as an Independent Puritan wanted more independence for local congregations and wrote that 'new PRESBYTER is but old PRIEST writ large'. Parliament equivocated and never achieved a full implementation of the compromise system. Annesley preached his Fast-day sermon to Parliament in July 1648 and in December that year, 140 MPs were excluded leaving the 'rump' parliament. The execution of Charles I followed in January 1649. His murder appalled the Presbyterians, and caused a split between them and the Independents. Annesley remained in the Presbyterian group who were fundamentally loyal to the Crown, but supported a Government which could maintain stability. He remained within the Established Church at this time, when Cromwell was in favour of a united national church and less concerned with denomination and patterns of worship than with the 'godliness' and competence of the clergy.¹³

Annesley was evicted in 1662 and Baxter included him in his list of Nonconformists:

But some good rose out of all these Evils: The Churches being burned, and the Parish Ministers gone (for want of places and maintenance) the *Nonconformists* were now more resolved than ever, to preach till they were imprisoned.....[They] did keep their Meetings very openly, and prepared large Rooms, and some of them plain Chappels, with Pulpits, Seats, and Galleries for the reception of as many as would come.'¹⁴

Yet further divisions appeared among the Presbyterians. These became obvious in their responses to the Five-Mile Act of 1665. This Act was an attempt to weaken the influence of the dissenting ministers: it required that they should either take an oath swearing to make no attempt to alter government in Church or State or remain at least five miles from any 'corporate town' or place where they had been ministers. Bolam describes how some of the more senior Presbyterians assumed the Act to mean only that they should not attempt to change government by *illegal* means. They therefore took the oath and became known as the 'Dons'. The others, who were a younger group including Annesley, refused the oath, demonstrating their willingness to break the law by holding conventicles; they became known as the 'Ducklings', presumably because of their willingness to plunge into deep illegal waters. The Ducklings also

¹²Dewey D. Wallace Jr., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

¹³C.G. Bolam, J. Goring, and H.L.Short, *The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968), 41-45.

¹⁴Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, iii, (London: Matthew Sylvester, 1696) 19.

tended to have more extreme Calvinist views.¹⁵ These groupings significantly affected future hopes of the comprehension of the Presbyterians within the Church, and Annesley remained a leader of the group which saw comprehension as unlikely and therefore pressed for toleration; in this respect he was close to the Independents. This extreme and determined stance gave him public prominence. There is some evidence that he became less extreme in his later years.

¹⁵C.G. Bolam, et al., *The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism*, 87.103.

Appendix III - Susanna Wesley's Journal in Context

Susanna Wesley's journal included accounts of her religious meditations, thoughts and experiences, of her meticulous self-examination, and of her seeking and at times finding divine guidance and inspiration. She was not unique in the 17th century, in keeping such a journal. Mendelson examined 23 diaries of 17th century women, three quarters of which have a devotional content and a half of which were initiated for 'spiritual purposes'. It is difficult to know what proportion of the total number of diaries written this represents and whether the sample accurately reflects the amount of religious material in journals more generally. It is possible that some were selectively destroyed because of 'unacceptable' subject matter or because the idea of female piety was popular with editors. Mendelson comments on the selectiveness in the contents of the diaries themselves. There is an emphasis on the role of providence in averting disaster and an increase of the frequency of prayers reported at times of anxiety. More ordinary or pleasant experiences and religious lapses tend to be left out¹⁶. The women in Mendelson's group gave detailed accounts of the good and bad aspects of their marriages and of their own and other women's confinements. The diaries were 'filled with desperate appeals to heaven for the recovery of their sick children, and with moving elegies on their deaths'. They tended to blame their own sins and to pray for fortitude. They paint a picture of childbirth as a shared female experience, rather than a 'purely individual trauma'

Susanna was in this tradition. She fits the profile of many of the women in Mendelson's group, who were the patronesses, wives or daughters of clergymen. However, she omits direct insights into her marital relationship, and any details of her experiences of pregnancy, and of the births and losses of her children. Instead, there was great emphasis on self-examination and failure to reach the required standards. Unlike the other women, she concentrated on lapses rather than excluded them and exhorted herself to a stoical acceptance of 'affliction'.

Although she did not describe intimate, personal tragedies in detail, the journal was used to make sense of the catastrophes in her life and to try to understand the role of providence, both at times of disaster, and when she had cause to be grateful. In general it was a valued chronicle of her spiritual journey. Observations on her own life are written in the second person singular, providing some distance and detachment from which to assess her progress.

¹⁶S.H. Mendelson, "Stuart Women's Diaries and Occasional Memeoirs" in ed. M. Prior, *Women in English Society, 1500-1800*, (London/New York: Methuan, 1985) 185-9, 197.

Appendix IV - Susanna Wesley's child-rearing methods in context

There was no lack of advice to parents in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, for those well enough educated to read it. It has been suggested that Susanna followed John Locke's methods and she had certainly read Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.¹⁷ Wallace points out 'echoes' of Locke in her writings, suggesting that she may also have been one of the early readers of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, but this is not certain. She does make reference to prescribed 'rules' but there were other Puritan manuals to which she may have been referring, e.g. Gouge's *Of Domestic Duties*.¹⁸ Gouge advocated education to increase the child's chances of salvation, but suggested that demands should be tailored to the age and temperament of the child. There is a debate among scholars of child-rearing practices of this period, about the effect of a belief in original sin on methods used. Stone suggests that such a belief would have an effect on parental behaviour by increasing the pressure to 'break the child's will'. It increased the likelihood that the parent would use 'a combination of physical force and moral manipulation'.¹⁹

Pollack is a severe critic of Stone's work and, with other reviewers, questions the picture he paints of individual parents conforming strictly to the norms of a particular group culture in the 17th and 18th century. She examined 496 diaries and autobiographies of the 16th and 17th centuries and found that, while manuals and advice were available to parents at the time, and while they might have read them, parents were more affected by the nature of their individual relationship with their child, than by current theory. She also disputes Stone's claim that the parents' belief in original sin affected their behaviour, particularly as regards physical punishment, citing psychological evidence disputing the association between attitude and behaviour more generally. She found little evidence of parents wishing to 'break the will of their child'.²⁰ The evidence from Susanna Wesley's writings would challenge this view and is more in line with Stone's account; like Wallace, Stone has likened Susanna's methods to those of Locke.

Locke attacked the idea of original sin, and by the 18th century the idea of childhood innocence began to emerge. The child began to be seen as a *tabula rasa* on to which the desired image could be imprinted. This would have been a central issue over which Susanna would have disagreed with Locke. Like her, he did however emphasise the need for the parent to be responsible for the proper educational and training of the child, without which the child would be irreparably damaged. In spite of his objections to original sin, he thought that imperfections should be weeded out, that bad habits should be abolished and the will rendered 'supple'; as part of this, he went so far as to recommend cold bathing out of doors.²¹ Both their methods involved strictness, insistence on obedience, and total control of the child, but also consistency and support.

¹⁷Charles Wallace Jr, *The Complete Writings of Susanna Wesley* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), 223, 368.

¹⁸W. Gouge, *Of Domestic Duties*, (London: John Haviland, 1662).

¹⁹Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 294.

²⁰Linda Pollack, *Forgotten Children: Parent Child Relationships from 1500-1990*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 102-119.

²¹*Forgotten Children*, 122-4, 172.

Appendix V - Early Biographies of John Wesley according to Heitzenrater²²

Accounts of John Wesley's life and work began to appear soon after his death. His early biographers (J. Hampson, *Memoirs of the Late Reverend John Wesley*, 1791, John Whitehead, *Life of Rev. John Wesley*, vol. I, 1793, vol. II, 1796, and Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, *Life of the Rev. John Wesley*, 1792) and Alexander Knox, who wrote an essay published by Southey in 1843, all knew him as an old man. Their accounts were affected by their involvement in the controversies prevailing towards the end of Wesley's life. Hampson had left Methodism after he and his father had not been included by Wesley as one of the 'legal hundred', who formed the 'Conference', the body which was to govern Methodism. He was therefore understandably critical of Wesley, particularly of what he regarded as his ambition, his use of 'arbitrary power', his lack of judgement, and his unsound doctrine.²³ A version more acceptable to Methodists was commissioned by the executors of Wesley's estate; he had bequeathed manuscripts to Coke and Moore (both Methodist preachers) and Whitehead (first a preacher and later Wesley's medical advisor), and they were to produce an 'authentic narrative'. After a great deal of internal wrangling, Coke and Moore produced what Heitzenrater called a 'prolonged eulogy', in 1792. Whitehead, who by then was in sole possession of the manuscripts, produced the first volume of his biography in 1793 and volume II in 1796.²⁴ In the early nineteenth century, Southey produced his *Life of Wesley* (1820). This was a very critical account, again seeing Wesley as ambitious but also as self-contradictory, credulous and dangerous. Heitzenrater points out that Southey was a thorough researcher, had 'literary polish', and a gift for using language guaranteed to irritate the Methodists. He accused Wesley of using the 'physic of intolerant discipline', of having the 'self-sufficiency of fancied inspiration' and talked of the 'paroxysms of the disease that Methodism excited'.²⁵ In response, Conference requested a further biography from Adam Clarke. He was assisted by Henry Moore, and it was in fact Moore who eventually produced his *Life of the Rev. John Wesley* in 1824-5. This included new material from manuscripts and personal memories of Wesley but he also included unacknowledged material from Whitehead and Hampson. Overall, it portrayed Wesley much more favourably.²⁶

According to Heitzenrater, Richard Watson's biography commissioned by Conference in 1831 secured Wesley's image in the hands of the 'establishment Methodists' and Tyerman²⁷, in his 'monumental biography', while stating his intention to present the 'unvarnished facts' and let the vast source material speak for itself, could not risk being selective in Wesley's favour, and was 'able to overlook almost every fault he has set forth in three volumes'. This more apologetic, hagiographic view of Wesley became the fashionable one in the last decades of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century. Telford's *Life of John Wesley* (1886) became the standard

²² Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 345-386

²³ *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 351.

²⁴ *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 350-5.

²⁵ *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 357-8.

²⁶ Rack, 537.

²⁷ L. Tyerman, *Life and Times of John Wesley*, (London, 1872)

biography for Methodist preachers, and the 'reverent affection' for Wesley continued in the five volume biography of John S. Simon published in 1921.²⁸

Heitzenrater's review of Wesley studies in the twentieth century describes a shift from reiterations of the familiar story of Wesley to a concentration on the associated theological and political controversies: Halévy's work on a possible role for Wesley in reducing the risk of a revolution in England;²⁹ Augustin Léger's controversial view of the timing of Wesley's conversion;³⁰ Piette's similar view and his understanding of Methodism in a wider framework;³¹ and finally, Cell's work³² on the place of Wesley's theology in the light of historic theologies, in which he concluded that Wesley arrived at 'a necessary synthesis of the Protestant ethic of grace with the Catholic ethic of holiness'. Schmidt's *A Theological Biography* which explored the German pietist influence on Wesley appeared in 1953-66.

²⁸ *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 366-74.

²⁹ Elie Halévy, "La Naissance du Methodisme en Angleterre", *Revue de Paris*, (1906) 13, 519-539.

³⁰ Augustin Léger, *La Jeunesse de Wesley*, (Paris: Hachette, 1910).

³¹ A. Piette, *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism*, (English edition, E.T. Sheen and Ward: London, 1938).

³² G.C. Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*, (London: Henry Holt, 1935,) 361.

Appendix VI: The Wesley Family of Epworth¹

Susanna and Samuel Wesley's Children

Child's name	Date of Birth	Date Baptised	Age at death
Samuel	10/2/1690		49
Susanna	?	31/3/1692	1
Emilia (Emily)	31/12/1692?	13/1/1693	79?
Annesley		3/12/1694	1month?
Jedidiah		3/12/1694	1
Susanna (Suki)	c. 1695	?	69?
Mary (Molly)	c. 1696	?	38?
Mehetabel (Hetty)	c. 1697-8	?	53?
? unknown	c. 1698	?	?
John (Jacky)	16/5/1699	?	?
Benjamin	16/5/1699	?	?
John Benjamin	17/5/1701	31/5/1701	6 months
Anne (Nancy)	17/5/1701	31/5/1701	?
John	17/6/1703	3/7/1703	87
[son]	29/5/1705?	?	1 day
Martha (Patty)	c. 1706	?	85
Charles	18/12/1707	29/12/1707	80
?unknown	Mar. 1709?	?	?
Kezia (Kezzy)	Mar. 1709?	?	30?



¹From Frank Baker, "Investigating Wesley Family Traditions" *Methodist History*, 26:3, (1988),162.