

CHARLES WESLEY AND LADY HUNTINGDON: ERSTWHILE ‘BEST OF FRIENDS’

RANDY L. MADDOX



ABSTRACT

This article explores the intertwined lives of Charles Wesley and Selina (Shirley) Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, highlighting how times of their closest cooperation coincided with periods of tension between Charles and his brother John. It draws on a number of resources only recently available (particularly materials that Charles Wesley recorded in shorthand) to provide a textured account of the warm relationship between these two ‘best of friends’ and the dynamics that led to its demise. In the process it adds insight into shifting currents within the eighteenth-century evangelical revival in England.

Keywords: Christian perfection, lay preachers. Selina (Shirley) Hastings (Countess of Huntingdon), Charles Wesley, John Wesley

This article explores the intertwined lives of Charles Wesley (1707–88) and Selina (Shirley) Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon (1707–91), with attention as relevant to John Wesley (1703–91). While a few studies of Lady Huntingdon and the Wesley brothers have appeared, they devote most of their time to her interactions with John.¹ I have located none focused on her relationship

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1. For example, Francis Fletcher Bretherton, *The Countess of Huntingdon* (London: Epworth, 1940); Lucia Myers, *Lady Huntingdon: Friend of the Wesleys* (Montgomery, AL: Huntingdon College Alumnae Association, 1956); and Esther T. Barker, *Lady Huntingdon, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Maryville, TN: E. T. Barker, 1984), an imaginative narrative

with Charles. This was likely because much of the relevant material was not easily accessible until the last decade or so. As a result, few have recognized that Lady Huntingdon was closer to Charles Wesley than to his brother John from the beginning of their acquaintance; and that Charles viewed Lady Huntingdon as a closer friend and adviser than his brother John for nearly twenty years.

Some material I cite is from Charles Wesley's manuscript journal, a resource covering 1736–56, long known to scholars.² But most of the items I highlight were recorded by Charles in the unique shorthand he learned from John Byrom. Those who published earlier transcriptions of this journal could not decipher his shorthand and omitted these sections. Only in 2008 was an edition issued that included all of the shorthand sections.³ Another source I draw upon are journal letters Charles sent colleagues during his evangelistic tours; while these were later incorporated into his manuscript journal, they contain some details omitted in the latter, and were published only recently.⁴

My largest source for what follows is correspondence between Charles Wesley and Lady Huntingdon. Only a small portion of letters written by Charles Wesley were in print prior to 2013, when the first volume was released of a collection intended to be comprehensive.⁵ No such complete collection of the letters written by Lady Huntingdon has appeared yet, though an important sampling of her letters to leaders in the revival was published in 2006.⁶ This sampling overlooked nearly fifty letters from Lady Huntingdon to Charles Wesley—because the surviving record of these letters is a set of extracts that Charles made in Byrom's shorthand, in a notebook that survives among his

rather than scholarly account. I use the following abbreviations in my notes: Charles Wesley (CW), John Wesley (JW), Lady Huntingdon (LH), and Sarah (Gwynne) Wesley (SGW).

2. A bound volume in CW's hand, held at The Methodist Archive and Research Centre (hereafter cited as MARC), DDCW 10/2. It will be cited as 'CW, MS Journal', giving dates.

3. CW, *The Manuscript Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, ed. S T Kimbrough Jr. and Kenneth G. C. Newport, 2 vols (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2008). An edition that corrects the few errors in the 2008 publication, and adds more extensive annotation, is available online: <https://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives/wesleyan-methodist/cswt-other-cwtexts>. The references to 'CW, MS Journal' can be found in one of these two sources, on the date listed.

4. See CW, *The Journal Letters and Related Biographical Items of The Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, 2nd edn, ed. Randy L. Maddox et al. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2023; available online at the web address in note 3); hereafter cited as CW, *Journal Letters*, ed. Maddox et al.

5. CW, *The Letters of Charles Wesley*, ed. Kenneth G. C. Newport and Gareth Lloyd, 2 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013–21); hereafter cited as CW, *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd. A more complete collection is in press: CW, *The Correspondence of The Rev. Charles Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox, 3 vols (Nashville: Abingdon, 2025–26). CW letters through 1749 will be cited from this collection as CW, *Correspondence*, ed. Maddox.

6. John R. Tyson, with Boyd S. Schlenker, *In the Midst of Early Methodism: Lady Huntingdon and Her Correspondence* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006).

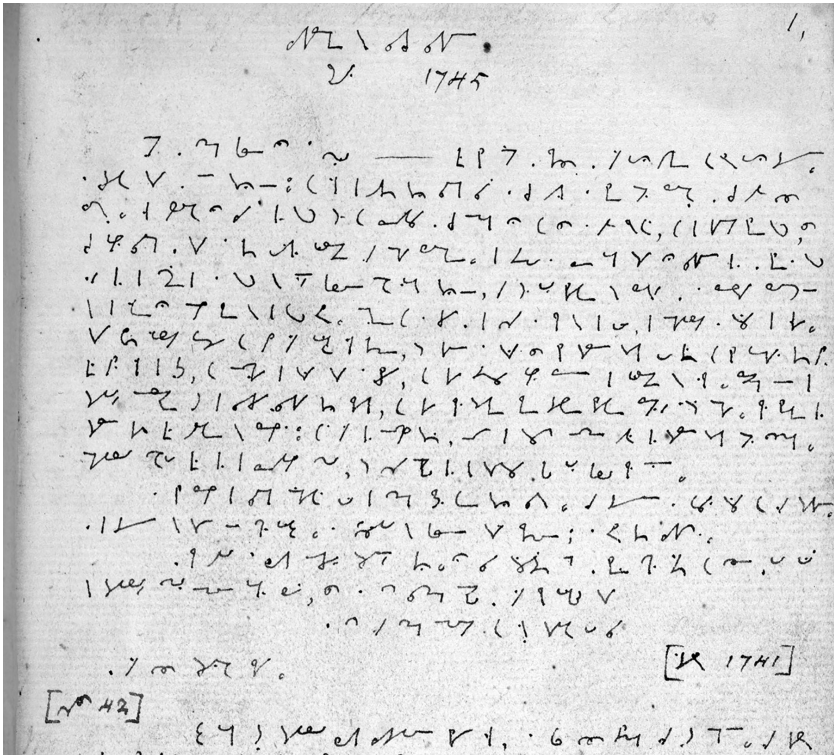


FIGURE 1 The first of Charles Wesley's shorthand summaries of letters from Lady Huntingdon found in a notebook held at the Methodist Archives and Research Centre (reference MA 1977/567). Image provided by The John Rylands Research Institute and Library, The University of Manchester. Material from the Methodist collection deposited at The John Rylands Research Institute and Library is used with the permission of The John Rylands University Librarian and Director of the University of Manchester Library and The Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (The Methodist Church in Britain).

papers ('MS Shorthand Letters').⁷ These additional letters demonstrate that Charles wrote frequently to the Countess, since she often thanks him for his most recent epistle. At the same time, they help explain why only one of Charles's epistles to her up through 1745 survives in longhand, since Lady Huntingdon

7. MARC, MA 1977/567. CW titled the second half of the notebook 'Extracts of Lady Huntingdon Letters / January 1745'. For expansion of the full set of letters in this section see Randy L. Maddox, 'A Shorthand Treasure-Trove: Early Lady Huntingdon Letters to Charles Wesley', *Methodist Review* 12 (2020), 103–67. In this essay I restrict myself to quotations where there is high confidence in the expansion given, without using ([[]]) for each quotation as a reminder that they are expansions.

assured him in one of her replies that she had burned his letter after reading it,⁸ likely at his request. Their correspondence, combined with input from Charles's journal letters and shorthand sections in his manuscript journal, elucidates a series of twists and turns in the relationship of our focal figures.⁹

Initiation and Early Dynamics of Their Relationship

Lady Huntingdon had no known contact with the Wesley family prior to the missionary postings of Charles and John in Georgia. Her initial exposure to the evangelical revival that emerged upon their return to Britain was mediated through a third member of that missionary troupe, Benjamin Ingham. Back in England, Ingham was drawn into the Moravian orbit and helped plant their presence in Yorkshire. Here he proved instrumental to the conversion of Lady Margaret Hastings, a sister of Theophilus Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon, Selina's husband. Lady Margaret in turn introduced Ingham to Lord and Lady Huntingdon during their visit to Ledstone in July 1739, a visit that sparked a 'good work' in Lady Huntingdon that some identify as her conversion.¹⁰

Given their mutual acquaintance with Ingham, Charles Wesley and Lady Huntingdon would have heard of each other by the fall of 1739. But when did they meet? In his biography of Lady Huntingdon, A. C. H. Seymour suggested that during the winter of 1739–40 she 'was a constant attendant at Fetter Lane, and a member of the first Methodist Society formed in that place.'¹¹ This is surely wrong. The current Parliament held a session beginning in mid-November 1739, an event that normally brought Lord and Lady Huntingdon from the north to their London area home (in Enfield Chase), but *she* did not come down that year. Selina was pregnant with their son Henry, who was baptized at Castle Donington, Leicestershire, on 12 December 1739. Lady Huntingdon's correspondence through this winter consistently places her in Donington.

In direct contrast with Seymour, Edwin Welch asserted that there is no evidence of Lady Huntingdon attending the Wesley brothers' society at the Foundery in the early 1740s, nor of her corresponding with the brothers prior to

8. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #13; c. 15 September 1741.

9. Transcriptions of *all* known letters to CW, with the location of surviving holographs, are available at the online site listed in note 3. Readers are encouraged to access them there for the most accurate text and dating.

10. See Margaret Hastings to LH (28 July 1739); Tyson with Schlenker, *In the Midst*, 29.

11. [Aaron Crossley Hobart Seymour], *The Life and Times of Selina Countess of Huntingdon*, 2 vols (London: William Edward Painter, 1839), 1:32–3.

early 1742.¹² The evidence in MS Shorthand Letters revises the second claim. The earliest letter from the Countess therein can be confidently dated to mid-March 1741, offering Charles condolence on the death of his sister Kezia on 9 March.¹³

The exact date that Charles and the Countess first met remains unclear. Since neither Wesley brother travelled to the north of England in the summer or fall of 1740, it would have been possible only after Lord and Lady Huntingdon came down to Enfield Chase prior to the start of another session of Parliament on 18 November. At that time Charles was in Bristol, returning to London only on 25 December, and his manuscript journal skips entirely the first three months of 1741. The most that can be said with confidence is that the two met in London by early 1741.

It is unlikely that Lady Huntingdon began attending preaching services at the Foundery regularly at that point. Her status would have kept her in a Church of England setting for regular worship. Ministerial encounters with the Wesley brothers were typically at her residence. For example, Lady Huntingdon stressed in letters to both brothers the comfort that Charles Wesley ministered to her soul on Easter Sunday, 29 March 1741, calling it one of the happiest days in her life.¹⁴ It is easy to assume she was referring to a sermon preached by Charles, but John preached both the morning and evening services that day at the Foundery. If Charles was preaching, it was likely in the Countess's parlour. But it is just as possible that he was praying and singing with her, since her letter to Charles continued: 'Your prayers I daily feel, and your brother's. Oh the prayer of faith is mighty indeed! A million of thanks for your hymns; I love them extremely.' Like Welch, I have found no clear evidence of Lady Huntingdon at a worship service in the Foundery in 1741–42. Although she did express a desire to 'be as one of the least of these little, little ones that attend upon your societies' in an October 1741 letter, noting that she had tried to attend the Foundery the prior Sunday, but was providentially prevented.¹⁵ Regular attendance by the Countess at worship services officiated by the Wesley brothers can be demonstrated only after John arranged to rent a chapel on West Street, London, in 1743—a consecrated (former Huguenot) building in which the Wesley brothers led worship following the Book of Common Prayer, including the sacrament. A seat was specifically reserved for Lady Huntingdon in this chapel.¹⁶

12. Edwin Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrim: A Reassessment of the Life of the Countess of Huntingdon* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), 49.

13. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #19 (c. 15 March 1741).

14. See LH to JW (2 April 1741), *Wesley Banner* 1 (1849), 45–6; and LH to CW, MS Shorthand Letters, entry #1 (c. 10 April 1741).

15. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #11 (c. 27 October 1741).

16. See JW to Elizabeth Hutton (22 August 1744), in *The Works of John Wesley* (Bicentennial Edition), gen. eds Frank Baker, Richard P. Heitzenrater, and Randy L. Maddox, 35 vols

Charles's ability to minister to Lady Huntingdon on 29 March 1741 owed in part to her prior ministry to him. To trace the situation in question we must rely on John Wesley's *Journal*,¹⁷ since one of its effects was that Charles kept no journal record for (or later elided) January through March of 1741. In late December 1740 John left Charles in charge of their work in London, while he went to address problems among their flock in the Bristol area. Some of their followers in both cities were drawing antinomian implications from the Calvinist notion of unconditional election and/or the English Moravian construal of justification by *faith alone* as requiring 'stillness'. In mid-January 1741 John heard that Charles was inclining toward 'stillness' himself. Hurrying back to London, on Thursday morning, 22 January, John picked up preaching at the Foundery, where Charles had abruptly left off two mornings earlier, saying he did not intend to preach anymore! A week or so later Charles left London for Oxford. But on 12 February John recorded triumphantly, 'My brother returned from Oxford and preached on "the true way of waiting for God," thereby dispelling at once the fears of some and the vain hopes of others, who had confidently affirmed that Mr. Charles Wesley was *still* already and would come to London no more.' By Lady Huntingdon's account, she was 'the instrument in God's hand that had delivered' Charles from the advocates of stillness in London.¹⁸

This is not to say that differences between the two brothers were fully resolved by mid-February. Their divergence concerned not only stillness but some of John's claims about Christian perfection. Charles made the point to John in a letter in late February 1741, objecting to language in the preface John crafted for their 1740 volume of *Hymns and Sacred Poems* in which, according to Charles, 'You spoke not from your own experience; and those on whose experience you built your doctrine are but of yesterday.'¹⁹ While Charles was not questioning the possibility of Christian perfection, he questioned the suggestion it could be attained *quickly* and *early* in one's Christian walk. However, dialogue with Moravians about possible union over the next few weeks, in which Christian perfection was a key topic, led Charles to align with and defend John's emphases. He was soon back on the circuit, declaring 'the *two great truths* of the everlasting gospel: universal redemption and Christian perfection.'²⁰

Charles's recovered emphasis on Christian perfection is likely what Lady Huntingdon welcomed when she discerned from a letter in early April that 'the treasure was found which had only left you for a time.'²¹ In any case, her

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975–83; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984–), 26:113–4; hereafter cited as JW, *Works*, ed. Baker et al.

17. See, particularly, JW, *Journal* ([19] January–12 February 1741), *ibid.* 19:178–81.

18. See LH to JW (24 October 1741), *ibid.* 26:67–8.

19. CW to JW (28 February 1741), CW, *Correspondence*, ed. Maddox, 1:118.

20. CW, MS *Journal* (12 July 1741).

21. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #1 (c. 10 April 1741).

letters make clear that the Countess was drawn to the Wesley brothers in 1741 in significant part because she shared their concern about antinomian extremes in the emerging revival. Her first surviving letter to John (dated 2 April 1741) was hand-delivered by a man who had been ‘a strong predestinarian and is now trying to flay it off’, commending him to John’s care.²² Writing to Charles a couple of months later, the Countess affirmed that Satan’s ‘still devices’ were no longer a challenge to her because ‘short experience of that doctrine will make us believe, as the still ones do, that there is no Christian holiness.’ She added: ‘To declare these truths it seems to me as if you and your brother only are intended for. All have so remarkably fallen that have had any share with you, but I think you will remain his faithful witnesses.’²³

The English Moravians were at the top of those whom the Countess judged in these mid-1741 letters to be ‘remarkably fallen.’ Later that year George Whitefield’s *Letter to the Reverend Mr. John Wesley* was published in England.²⁴ This was Whitefield’s reply to John Wesley’s polemical sermon *Free Grace*, issued in 1739, in which John contended the doctrine of predestination ‘has a manifest tendency to destroy holiness in general.’²⁵ Whitefield’s rebuttal cast emphasis on Christian perfection as the ‘carnal reasoning’ of works-righteousness.²⁶ Faced with this stark contrast, Lady Huntingdon sided at the time with the Wesley brothers. In a letter to John on 19 February 1742, she recounted a meeting with Whitefield in which ‘he held forth above two hours upon the doctrine of election and reprobation.’ When he finished, the Countess told Whitefield that she ‘should be such a loser by his way of thinking’, because she ‘waited and hoped for an absolute deliverance from sin, which he was willing to groan under always.’²⁷ While some point to this letter as evidence that Lady Huntingdon embraced the full Arminian stance of the Wesley brothers at the time, her emphasis was narrower—on a (currently) shared commitment to holiness *in this life*.

Growing Closeness of Their Relationship

Lady Huntingdon’s early letters to John and Charles Wesley address each as ‘dear friend’. In one she insisted that the only persons to whom she was willing to declare God’s blessings in her life were the two brothers.²⁸ And yet,

22. LH to JW (2 April 1741), *Wesley Banner* 1 (1849), 45–6.

23. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #4 (c. July 1741).

24. George Whitefield, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. John Wesley: In Answer to His Sermon entitled Free-Grace* (London: W. Strahan, 1741).

25. JW, Sermon 110, *Free Grace, Works*, ed. Baker et al., 3:544–59; esp. §11 (548).

26. See Whitefield, *Letter*, 19.

27. LH to JW (19 February 1742); Tyson with Schlenker, *In the Midst*, 50.

28. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #5 (August 1741).

one can have favourites among their dear friends. Previous studies assumed that Lady Huntingdon initially leaned more toward John because they knew of more surviving letters between her and John in 1741–42 than between her and Charles. But when the items in MS Shorthand Letters are added to the count, it becomes clear she engaged more with Charles than with John from the beginning. The contents of these new letters underscore this preference. In a letter from mid-April 1741, after mentioning John, Lady Huntingdon told Charles, ‘I feel my heart more open to you, but I cannot tell why. But I love him with great warmth.’²⁹ A couple of months later she suggested a reason: While insisting that ‘I have a most true love for you both’, she noted that ‘my moments are so few with your brother that I cannot open my soul . . . How glad shall I be to see you!’³⁰

The shorthand records of the first two years of their correspondence confirm that Lady Huntingdon opened her soul to Charles, sharing her spiritual joys and struggles, soliciting his prayers, and assuring him of hers. Indeed, she lamented how hard it was to conclude her letters to him on spiritual matters because ‘my soul is drawn out to you always.’³¹

What about Charles in return? Few of his letters to Lady Huntingdon in these years survive, but her replies to those she received suggest that he was not as open. In a letter from mid-September 1741 she reprimanded Charles that she could not offer appropriate prayers for his spiritual deliverance because ‘your heart is not open to me as mine is to you. Something lies at the bottom and torments you.’³² In one of his few surviving letters Charles conceded the point: ‘I have in me what would break any heart but mine . . . that I have no one person upon earth to whom I can open my heart.’³³ His relationship with the Countess was relatively new, needing time for trust to grow.

The many affirmations sprinkled through Lady Huntingdon’s letters in these early years continued to nurture that trust. She encouraged Charles to have ‘that confidence of yourself which I always feel for you.’³⁴ And she repeatedly assured him of the blessings God had bestowed on her through their friendship, once calling Charles the ‘first cause in God’s hand for two years of every spiritual blessing I possess.’³⁵

Perhaps nothing drew Lady Huntingdon and Charles Wesley closer together in these years than sharing a role as instruments in God’s hand for

29. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #12 (c. 17 April 1741).

30. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #4 (c. July 1741).

31. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #14 (c. 8 February 1742).

32. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #13 (c. 15 September 1741).

33. CW to LH (22 August 1742); CW, *Correspondence*, ed. Maddox, 1:130.

34. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #7 (November 1741).

35. LH to CW (c. 10 February 1743).

the spiritual welfare of *others*. Anne Cowper (1713–43) and her sister Frances ('Fanny', 1716–42) lived in East Barnet, Hertfordshire. Shortly after he returned to London from Bristol in September 1741, Charles was instrumental in their evangelical conversion. The sisters were friends of Lord and Lady Huntingdon, so Charles entrusted them to her as their spiritual guide. In a letter to Charles in late October 1741 Lady Huntingdon described them as 'your first fruits of East Barnet'.³⁶ A couple of days later she assured him that 'the Cowpers are in the highest measure of love I have seen', adding, 'the joy I have felt on their account is more than tongue can tell'.³⁷

In early February 1742 Lady Huntingdon took the Cowper sisters with her to Bath, a place she visited for its famed waters when in poor health. Part of the reason for this trip was that Fanny Cowper was ailing. The sisters continued on with Lady Huntingdon to her estate in Donington at the end of that month, and Fanny died there on 27 May. The period from February through May was filled with letters from Lady Huntingdon thanking Charles for his comforting epistles and hymns, updating him on Fanny's health, and finally providing him an account of Fanny's death.³⁸

Like her sister, Anne Cowper considered herself Wesley's 'daughter in the faith' and gave thanks for his support through Fanny's illness.³⁹ After Fanny's death Anne returned to their home in East Barnet. But by May 1743 she too was ill, dying on 7 September. Lady Huntingdon attended Anne in her last weeks. After Anne's death, the Countess wrote Wesley describing the 'peaceful happiness' on Anne's face, and arranged the funeral to give Charles time to arrive in London. Significantly, her letter conveying this information was signed 'Farewell *my best of friends*'.⁴⁰

This heightened affirmation of affection was due to more than Charles's support of Lady Huntingdon through the sufferings of the Cowper sisters. Over this same period, she apparently lost three sons. I say 'apparently' because Charles's shorthand extracts of Lady Huntingdon's letters provide the only known evidence that she had a son subsequent to Henry (1739–58), who suffered from 'fits' and died in November 1742.⁴¹ This loss contributed to health issues that took the Countess back to the Hot Wells at Bristol by January 1743. In early April she was able to return to Enfield Chase, only to witness the death of her

36. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #11 (c. 27 October 1741).

37. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #10 (c. 30 October 1741).

38. Several of these can be found in Tyson with Schlenker, *In the Midst*, 52–7; for the remainder, see MS Shorthand Letters, entries #2, 8, 14–15, 21, 23, 37, 39–40, and 57.

39. See esp., Anne Cowper to CW (2 June 1742).

40. LH to CW (c. 7 September 1743); the phrase in italics is underlined twice in the holograph, likely by CW when reading the letter.

41. See MS Shorthand Letters, entry #3 (11 November 1742).

third-eldest son, Ferdinando (b. 1732), by smallpox on 21 April. Her first letter to Wesley after this loss focused on the 'love unreserved' he had ministered to her soul, which was helping her accept it.⁴² Then, in December 1743, Charles was by Lady Huntingdon's side in London as her second-eldest son, George (b. 1730), succumbed to the same disease.⁴³

Once again, the support that Charles gave Lady Huntingdon was sustained in part by support she was providing to him. The year 1742 was filled with challenges and losses for Charles, so much so that he omitted the entire year in his manuscript journal. In addition to continued struggles against proponents of stillness in London and Bristol, through the first three months Charles was crafting a formal sermon to be delivered at Oxford University on 4 April.⁴⁴ Weeks ahead of this presentation he received assurances of prayer support from Lady Huntingdon and the Cowper sisters.⁴⁵ From the time he delivered the sermon, through the end of May, every spare moment was consumed by concern for Fanny Cowper. Then, on 8 June, Charles suffered the unexpected death of another close friend and supporter, Robert Jones of Fonmon Castle, near Cardiff, Wales. Wesley channelled his grief into an extended elegy that was both a tribute and a biography in verse.⁴⁶ Just as he was wrapping this up, he received a letter from his brother John informing him that their mother Susanna had died on 30 July and would be buried 1 August.⁴⁷ By the time Charles received this news in Bristol the funeral was over. The needs of ministry limited Charles's time to grieve, as he was back labouring in Bristol in mid-August, wishing that he could 'lay down my head and be no more seen.'⁴⁸ Instead he was sent to attend to the nascent work in Newcastle.⁴⁹ The accumulated stress of these events surely contributed to the illness that Lady Huntingdon expressed concern about when she wrote to Charles, assuring him of 'the ardent prayers of your most faithful friend', over the final quarter of the year.⁵⁰

Another major thread through these early years helping bind our focal figures was a sense of partnership in mission. Within months of meeting the

42. LH to CW (c. 22 April 1743).

43. See CW, MS Journal (19 December 1743).

44. The sermon was on Eph. 5:14, and titled by CW 'Awake Thou that Sleepest'. It was published the following year by William Strahan in London.

45. MS Shorthand Letters, entry #61 (24 February 1742).

46. CW, *Elegy on the Death of Robert Jones, Esq. of Fonmon Castle in Glamorganshire, South Wales* (Bristol: Felix Farley, [August] 1742).

47. JW to CW (31 July 1742), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 26:82–3.

48. CW to LH (22 August 1742), CW, *Correspondence*, ed. Maddox, 1:130.

49. See the journal letter covering 23 September–2 October 1742, CW, *Journal Letters*, ed. Maddox et al., 94–112.

50. See MS Shorthand Letters, entry #22 (c. September 1742); and *ibid.* entry #3 (11 November 1742).

Wesley brothers Lady Huntingdon requested that they would consider her as a 'labourer with you' in the Lord's work.⁵¹ John was wary of this request from the beginning, apparently sensing in the Countess too much of his own temperament—some of his associates charged that John would 'have no equal'.⁵² For her part, in July 1743, reflecting on a disagreement with John, Lady Huntingdon insisted, 'I can never bow down to *no* man in an evident untruth, let him think it what he will.'⁵³ This helps explain why her correspondence with the John tailed off dramatically after the first two years.

By contrast, correspondence between Charles Wesley and the Countess at this time makes clear his embrace of her as a co-labourer. One form this took was entrusting the Cowper sisters to Lady Huntingdon. Another was his practice of sending her, from at least October 1741, regular accounts of his ministry (i.e. journal letters), just as he had been doing for some time to his brother.⁵⁴ As her equivalent, the Countess sent Charles frequent updates on the Cowper sisters, up through Fanny's death in May 1742. And after Fanny's death, her first major letter to Charles began: 'I have till this day, since May 22, found no liberty of writing and think if God permit to pursue this method of sending an account of each day to my friend, that once in a fortnight one of the journal letters by this means may reach him.'⁵⁵ The letter proceeded to describe ministry the Countess was undertaking among some poor women near her estate.

The degree to which Lady Huntingdon saw Charles as a co-labourer in ministry is evidenced by a proposal raised in a couple of her journal letters. She mentioned that she had begun praying that God would convince Charles to take a parish near her house at Enfield Chase to assist in turning it (or the surrounding village) into a community holding all things in common, as a nursery for those pursuing Christian holiness.⁵⁶

By the summer of 1743 the various dynamics we have been tracing built such a level of affection and trust between the two that each was ready to pour out their heart to the other. On 5 July, in the midst of Anne Cowper's final illness, Lady Huntingdon wrote freely to Charles of the 'darkness, perplexity, misery'

51. In a letter to CW: MS Shorthand Letters, entry #9 (4 June 1741).

52. See the quote ascribed to Francis Asbury in JW's letter to Beverly Allen (31 October 1789), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 31:130.

53. LH to CW (16 July 1743).

54. The earliest is a letter that has not survived but is mentioned in LH to JW (24 October 1741) (JW, *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 26:67–8). The first surviving example is CW to LH (18 October 1741), MARC, MA 1977/504/2/96 (not in CW, *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd). See also LH's reference to receiving a recent journal letter from CW in her reply of c. 27 May 1743.

55. LH to CW (19 July 1742).

56. See MS Shorthand Letters, entry #20 (c. June 1742); and LH to CW (19 July 1742).

constantly surrounding her, worse than at any time since her conversion, that rendered it impossible for her to pray for anything (even for him!) except God's mercy upon her, the chief of sinners.⁵⁷ That same week Charles, amid renewed struggles with predestinarians and advocates of stillness in London, wrote to Lady Huntingdon, '*my only friend*', to pour out his grief that 'shame, fear, anger, wrath, [and] pride are tearing my soul in pieces' and urging her to pray that God would allow him to die!⁵⁸

Ever prone to work through issues in verse, the day that he wrote to Lady Huntingdon Charles read an extended poem to the society in London that he titled 'Epistle to a Friend'.⁵⁹ Within the epistle it becomes clear that Lady Huntingdon is the assumed recipient, whom Charles addresses as: 'my more than friend' (line 1), 'partner of all my cares' (line 7), 'my best of friends'—second only to Christ (lines 601–3); and 'a friend above all title and esteem' (line 609).

Emerging Theological Divergence

Lady Huntingdon's advice to her 'best of friends' at this time of struggle with still ones and predestinarians was to 'consider them as nothing'.⁶⁰ By 1770 she would be championing predestination—in specific contrast to the Wesley brothers. What facilitated this shift? In her 1742 letter to John Wesley recounting Whitefield's defence of predestination, the Countess noted that the manner and tone of his defence inclined her against the doctrine more than any argument Whitefield posed against it.⁶¹ Thus one prerequisite for coming to question the Arminian stance of her 'best of friends' was for Lady Huntingdon to encounter proponents of Calvinism whose temperament she found more winsome.

Ironically, Charles Wesley introduced the Countess to such a person when he brought Howell Harris to her house on 26 August 1743.⁶² While Harris's rustic Welsh character was quite different from the aristocratic circles in which Lady Huntingdon moved, she was drawn to his ardent preaching style and

57. LH to CW (c. 5 July 1743).

58. CW to LH (9 July 1743), *Correspondence*, ed. Maddox, 1:161–62.

59. See CW, MS Journal (9 July 1743). The full poem is found in MS Shorthand Verse (MARC, MA 1977/565), [11–29].

60. LH to CW (November 1743).

61. LH to JW (19 February 1742); Tyson with Schlenther, *In the Midst*, 50.

62. See Harris's diary for 26 August and 6 September 1743, in Tom Beynon, ed., *Howell Harris, Reformer and Soldier* (Caernarvon: Calvinistic Methodist Historical Society, 1958), 50, 52.

began hosting small gatherings of her friends to hear him. Harris frequently interceded at the time with both his Calvinist Methodist colleagues and the Wesley brothers, challenging caricatures and seeking to improve relations.⁶³ Lady Huntingdon soon began protesting Charles's sharp attacks on Calvinists, warning that he verged on a partisan spirit that threatened the whole revival, and urging him to consider the two groups as both of God, called to different ends.⁶⁴

Harris introduced Lady Huntingdon to James Erskine in May 1744.⁶⁵ Erskine was a Scot of noble birth, who moved in the same social circles as the Countess. He shared her attachment to the revival, having been converted in the early 1740s by George Whitefield.⁶⁶ By the time he met Lady Huntingdon, Erskine was also sitting under the ministry of the Wesley brothers. Over the next few years he and the brothers carried on active correspondence, in which Erskine defended the Calvinist stance on predestination—but stressed that the debate was independent of 'practical Christianity'.⁶⁷

Through the influence of Harris, Erskine, and others, Lady Huntingdon was convinced that Calvinist and Arminian evangelicals could differ on predestination while working together to foster practical Christianity. But Harris and Erskine also conveyed to her their judgment (like Whitefield) that emphasis on *present* Christian perfection was adverse to practical Christianity.⁶⁸ Their influence played a role in her earliest theological divergence from the Wesley brothers.

We noted above Lady Huntingdon's insistence in 1742 that she hoped for an absolute deliverance from sin in this life. Her letters to Charles Wesley over the coming months continued to reflect this hope. Among the clearest examples is a letter in October 1743 where she bemoaned, 'The time will come when I shall be created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works; but oh, the time is not yet come. Pray with me for it.'⁶⁹ The Countess's stark admission of remaining spiritual infirmity, her use of the passive voice in 'being created anew', and her request

63. A good example is the draft of Harris's letter to CW (28 August 1742). See the partial extract in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 17 (1929), 66; hereafter cited as *WHS*.

64. LH to CW (c. 10 February 1743).

65. See James Erskine to Howell Harris (21 May 1744), in Gomer M. Roberts, ed., *Selected Trevecka Letters, 1742–47* (Caernarvon: CMHS, 1956), 140–2.

66. See Whitefield to JW (11 October 1742), in JW, *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 26:87.

67. See Randy L. Maddox, 'Correspondence between James Erskine and John and Charles Wesley', *WHS* 58 (2012), 264–75; esp. 270–1.

68. For Harris, see his letter to CW, written in 1740, *WHS* 17 (1929), 63–5. For Erskine, see Randy L. Maddox, 'James Erskine's Critique of John Wesley on Christian Perfection,' *WHS* 59 (2013), 39–53.

69. LH to CW (25 October 1743).

for Charles to ‘pray with me for it’ are echoes of emphases about Christian perfection prominent in Charles’s hymns at the time, particularly after his renewed emphasis on the doctrine in 1741. The hymns cast Christian perfection as a *full* renewal of our moral character that comes in a *single* experience, subsequent to our conversion, received *unilaterally* and *instantaneously* from God *through prayer*. One of the clearest examples is a hymn titled ‘Prayer for Holiness.’⁷⁰ After having the singer query, ‘Why didst thou my ransom pay, / The work of faith begin?’, Charles leads them to assert that in addition to removing the guilt of sin God will *soon* also remove its power by perfecting them in love. And he has them end with the prayer: ‘Lord, if I on thee believe, / The second gift impart, / With th’ indwelling Spirit give / A new, a loving heart.’ The continuing elusiveness of such an experience is reflected in Lady Huntingdon’s rejection, by June 1747, of ‘sinless perfection and the instantaneous gift of sanctification as the brother Wesleys hold.’⁷¹

Sudden Fracture in Their Relationship

The sharpness with which Lady Huntingdon came to reject instantaneous sanctification was due not only to being surrounded by some who questioned it but being cut off from her former ‘best of friends’, who would have spoken in its favour (though Charles later raised concerns against the emphasis). This sudden fracture in the relationship of our focal figures had little to do with doctrine, something to do with polity, and much to do with conflicts that arise from human pride, insecurity, and spite.

The roots of the fracture trace back to 1744. Thomas Williams, son of a respected family in Wales, was converted under the preaching of Charles Wesley in 1741 and served for a time as an itinerant Methodist preacher. But he became alienated from the Wesley brothers—particularly Charles. In response Williams began to publicize allegations of immoral sexual conduct against Charles, including one by Elizabeth Story, a member of the Foundery society. The details of this episode are available elsewhere.⁷² Our interest is how it impacted Charles’s relationship with the Countess.

70. CW, ‘Prayer for Holiness’, esp. stanzas 6–7, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), 219–21. For other examples, see ‘Hymn on Psalm 51:10’ (30–1); and ‘Pleading the Promise of Sanctification’ (261–4).

71. Howell Harris, diary (9 June 1747), in Tom Beynon, ed., *Howell Harris’s Visits to London* (Aberystwyth: Cambrian News Press, 1960), 145.

72. See Randy L. Maddox and Timothy Underhill, ‘Untwisting the Tangled Web: Charles Wesley and Elizabeth Story’, *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 8 (2016), 175–83.

Wesley first heard of Williams's efforts to cast aspersions on his character on 11 August 1744, and by the following month was being pressed by friends to answer the charges.⁷³ It was natural for him to seek Lady Huntingdon's advice, and he apparently did so on a visit to her Donington Park estate on 12 October, though his journal mentions only that 'a friend' advised him 'to keep silence, and leave the matter to God'.⁷⁴ The next explicit mention of the Countess in Charles's journal is on 26 January 1745, in London, when she conveyed a message from the bishop of London that 'if I would come to him, and declare my innocency touching the scandals, and take the sacrament upon it, he would desire no farther satisfaction, but himself clear me'.⁷⁵

Howell Harris's diary provides a glimpse into developments between the meeting at Donington Park and Lady Huntingdon forwarding the bishop's message. On 20 December 1744 Harris was part of a discussion in London with the Countess (there now with her husband, for Parliament) and James Erskine. They learned that accusations against Charles had reached the bishop of London. Harris recorded that this news shocked Lady Huntingdon lest it 'prejudice all against us'.⁷⁶ Accordingly she approached Edmund Gibson, current bishop of London, seeking to head off the danger. When she did so, she found the bishop amenable to clearing Charles, but he raised another concern. Gibson had just published an attack on Methodists preaching outside of parish churches (in the fields) and without permission of the Church of England priest assigned to the parish.⁷⁷ This helps explain Charles's next encounter with Lady Huntingdon, which he recorded in shorthand in his journal. On 3 January 1745, he 'received a summons from my *friend that was*, with due indifference, yet thought it my duty to go, in justice to my own character'.⁷⁸ At the meeting Lady Huntingdon expressed her concern about the charges of immorality and Wesley declared his innocence. The Countess allowed that she found it difficult to believe the charges, but did not overtly affirm his innocence. In turn, Wesley 'found power to suspend my judgement of her, . . . so as neither to condemn nor justify her'. At that point Lady Huntingdon shifted the conversation to the importance of submitting to episcopal authority in upholding church order (i.e. refraining from field preaching). Charles pushed back, reminding her how those to whom order was entrusted had countenanced mob attacks upon his

73. See, particularly, CW, MS Journal (25 September 1744).

74. *Ibid.* (12 October 1744). LH was at the estate at that time.

75. *Ibid.* (26 January 1745).

76. Howell Harris, diary (20 December 1744), Beynon, ed., *Harris's Visits*, 65–6.

77. Edmund Gibson, *The Case of the Methodists Briefly Stated, More Particularly in the Point of Field-Preaching* (London: Edward Owen, 1744).

78. CW, MS Journal (2 January 1745). CW added emphasis to the past tense at the time he recorded the event in MS Journal.

brother and other Methodist preachers in places like Wednesbury. According to Charles, the Countess then ‘fired, so as to lose all charge of herself’. So he ‘left her, without trouble or regret.’⁷⁹

There is no record of contact between Wesley and Lady Huntingdon over the next three weeks until James Erskine (as her envoy) conveyed the message from the bishop of London. The following day Lady Huntingdon attended Sunday worship at West Street chapel. In a letter to Howell Harris, Erskine stressed that Charles not only preached but presided over the full liturgy, all with the Lord’s blessing, which Erskine took as a sign of divine vindication.⁸⁰ But what Charles recorded of that service (in shorthand) was ‘Our old friend came, as it were, to take her leave of the chapel.’⁸¹

Charles wrote a letter to the bishop of London disavowing fornication with any woman, but he received no answer.⁸² This was likely because Thomas Williams and the women involved had recanted their accusations. But Charles’s vindication did not restore relationship with his ‘friend that was’ because Lady Huntingdon’s heightened concern about conforming to Church of England polity remained to be addressed. Hence the meeting of both Wesley brothers with her on 23 May 1745, which Charles recorded in his journal (again in shorthand):

She urged us (who would believe it?) to confess our fault of preaching the gospel, and to submit to the bishops. We promised we would, as soon as we were convinced of our fault. Upon her talking in that miserable way of breaking order, etc., I owned it was contrary to order my having gone to save those poor outcasts of Newcastle, Cornwall, and Stafford. This drew out all the old nature, and set her pride in a flame. At first I found myself warm. But immediately recovered, and looked upon her and heard her with the proper affection of grief and pity. We shook off the dust of our feet and departed.⁸³

Charles’s disappointment with Lady Huntingdon’s hesitance to embrace his assertion of innocence, combined with this divergence on ecclesial polity, sharply fractured our former ‘best of friends.’ The depth of Charles’s alienation is reflected in his journal account of receiving an invitation in April 1747, mediated by Catherine Edwin, to meet with Lady Huntingdon. Initially he deferred

79. *Ibid.*

80. Erskine to Harris (26–30 January 1745) (MARC, DDPr 1/26), 3.

81. CW, MS Journal (27 January 1744).

82. CW, MS Journal (7 February 1745).

83. CW, MS Journal (23 May 1745).

responding. But eventually, ‘That I might abstain from all appearance of evil, particularly of pride and resentment, I . . . waited upon one who was once my friend. The first that greeted me was faithful Mrs. Motte . . . ; next, Mrs. Edwin; and last, *that person*, at whose desire I sang, prayed, dined, exhorted, talked of the times, and took my leave.’⁸⁴

Preludes to Reconciliation

It would be 1751 before Charles Wesley responded more positively to overtures from Lady Huntingdon to resume their friendship. Developments on both sides set the stage for and shaped the reconciliation that followed.

In a 1785 letter Charles described his relationship with his brother John as being ‘friends’ from childhood and ‘fellow-labourers’ for over fifty years. He went on to say that while their partnership had been dissolved by John’s recent decision to ordain some of his lay preachers, their friendship would continue until death.⁸⁵ Note that Charles did not describe John as his ‘best friend’. Earlier in the letter Charles indicated that their relationship was never fully mutual: John ‘always had the ascendancy over me.’⁸⁶ Even more relevant to our account is that this summary skimmed quietly over two decades when both the partnership and friendship of the brothers were greatly strained.

Charles’s immediate response to the loss of Lady Huntingdon as his ‘best of friends’ was to immerse himself in labour alongside John in the proliferating Methodist societies in England, Wales, and (by 1747) Ireland. In these journeys Charles met Sarah Gwynne (daughter of a Welsh magistrate, Marmaduke Gwynne, who was active in the revival), and the two were married on 8 April 1749, with John presiding over the service. The couple soon settled in Bristol, the hub of Wesleyan Methodism nearest to Sarah’s parents. And Charles became increasingly hesitant to spend extended time away from his family on preaching tours—to John’s chagrin.⁸⁷

Soon John was contemplating marriage as well. The brothers had agreed years earlier not to wed without consulting one another.⁸⁸ Charles consulted John concerning Sarah, and they worked through the few concerns John raised. By contrast, when Charles learned that John intended to marry, he was deeply

84. CW, MS Journal (22 and 27 April 1747); emphasis in original.

85. CW to Thomas Bradbury Chandler (28 April 1785), CW, *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:413.

86. *Ibid.* 412.

87. See JW to CW (c. January 1750), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 31:375–6.

88. See CW, MS Journal (11 November 1748).

alarmed and totally opposed. In part Charles opposed John marrying *at all*, since John had published a tract in 1743 affirming the single life as preferable to marriage for those who dedicate their lives to serving God.⁸⁹ That tract drew criticism from opponents of Methodism and Charles knew these attacks would increase if John now acted contrary to this advice. Charles was also concerned about John's choice of a partner, Grace (Norman) Murray. Charles learned that Grace had also promised to marry John Bennet, a Methodist lay-preacher. This spurred him to intervene. He tried to dissuade his brother from the union. Then, when argument failed, Charles spirited Grace away (while his brother was on a short preaching trip), reunited her with John Bennet, and solemnized their nuptials on 3 October 1749.⁹⁰

John Wesley was devastated by Charles's actions and the loss of a would-be spouse he believed was a match for both life and ministry. In the aftermath he took Sarah (Gwynne) Wesley aside and read her *his* account of Charles's actions,⁹¹ an act that Charles viewed as aimed at creating discord between the couple.⁹² When Sarah's first pregnancy ended in miscarriage a couple of months later, Charles suggested that it was a result of the 'poison' that John had cast into their 'cup of temporal blessing'.⁹³

The resulting alienation between the brothers was palpable. Charles did not attend John's annual Conference with his preachers in March 1750. They met face-to-face that year only for a few days in September in London after Charles acceded to making a preaching tour of the north (which was pre-empted by him being injured the first day on the road).⁹⁴ And while the brothers exchanged ten to twelve letters a year through the 1740s, most with personal comments, the few written in 1750 were strictly informational in nature.

One element of their alienation was John's denial that he had foresworn the possibility of marriage by publishing his 1743 tract. Acting on this conviction, in February 1751 John informed Charles that he would soon be married—this time seeking no consultation, and leaving it to another even to give Charles the name of his intended wife. Charles's response was to mourn 'all the day,

89. JW, *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life* (Bristol: Farley, 1743).

90. For more detailed accounts, see the footnote by Frank Baker in JW, *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 26:380–81; and G. M. Best, *A Tragedy of Errors: The Story of Grace Murray* (Bristol: New Room Publications, 2016), 129–47.

91. JW's account of these events, which includes a long poetic lament, are held in the British Library, Add. MS. 7119; a transcription was published by Augustin Leger, *Wesley's Last Love* (London: Dent, 1910).

92. See CW's letter to Vincent Perronet (4 November 1749), CW, *Correspondence*, ed. Maddox, 1:414–15.

93. *Ibid.* (9 February 1750; included in MS Journal).

94. See CW, MS Journal (13–18 September 1750); and JW, *Journal* (17 September 1750), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 20:362.

and several following ones, under my own and the people's burden.⁹⁵ Unlike Charles's wedding, where John presided over the union, neither Charles nor Sarah were present when John wed Mary (Goldhawk) Vazeille on 18 February 1751.

Charles was aghast at this 'unhappy marriage'. He absented himself again from John's Conference with his preachers in March 1751 in Bristol. But mutual friends like Ebenezer Blackwell prodded Charles to reconcile, and he soon tried. First he called on Mary, his new sister-in-law, and assured her of his acceptance; then brought Mary and his wife Sarah together; and finally met with John to convey a desire for 'entire reconciliation'. While the latter meeting went well, Charles's account of it concluded with the—in retrospect, foreboding—note that John asked Charles to return to full-time work as a travelling preacher, and Charles declined.⁹⁶

Charles was not rejecting ministry in Methodist settings—he remained in London for two months following this meeting to assist in the chapels.⁹⁷ But he was refusing to give John final authority over where he would serve. Charles's actions related to Grace Murray laid bare John's sense of authority in *his* wing of Methodism. At a conference between the brothers in November 1749, mediated by Vincent Perronet, John cast the option as him having either ultimate authority or none at all; of being unquestioned in his judgments or leaving England for North America!⁹⁸ Faced with this alternative, Charles stepped into the background. His refusal in March 1751 reiterated this stance, and left him in need of supportive friends.

Lady Huntingdon found herself in similar straits. Her husband Theophilus died in October 1746. Devastated by this loss, the Countess initially retired from public life.⁹⁹ Over the next two years Howell Harris helped renew her concern for sustaining an evangelical presence in the Church of England.¹⁰⁰ As she stepped back into this role, Harris wrote George Whitefield, encouraging him to return from North America (where he had been for four years) and lend aid.¹⁰¹ On his return in 1748, Whitefield was appointed a chaplain by the Countess. Unfortunately for Harris, it soon became clear that Whitefield did

95. CW, MS Journal (2 February 1751).

96. See CW, MS Journal (17 February–22 March 1751).

97. For the importance of CW's presence, to provide for sacramental worship while JW was away, see Randy L. Maddox, 'A Ministry of Word *and* Table', *Methodist Review* 16 (2024), 23–49.

98. See CW, MS Journal (17 November 1749), another incident recorded in shorthand.

99. See Howell Harris, diary (9 April 1747), Beynon, ed., *Harris's Visits*, 137.

100. See *ibid.* (28 January 1748), 178.

101. See George Whitefield to Harris (27 June 1747), Roberts, *Trevecka Letters (1742–47)*, 223–4.

not view him as an equal (because he was not ordained).¹⁰² In January 1750 Whitefield went further, excluding Harris from preaching at the Tabernacle in London, and effectively expelling him from the Calvinist movement in England.¹⁰³ Then Prince Frederick, son of King George II, died on 31 March 1751. Whitefield's hope of being named a bishop (through influence the Countess had with the prince) died as well, spurring him to embark for another tour of North America.¹⁰⁴ Thus, by mid-1751, the Countess had lost the hands-on assistance of two key Calvinist associates.

But she had not yet abandoned hope for cooperation between the Calvinist and Arminian wings of the revival. In 1748, when Lady Huntingdon appointed Whitefield a chaplain, she also invited John Wesley to preach at her house in Chelsea (with an eye to a similar appointment). John spoke several times in the space of a week, addressing the aristocratic audience in pointed terms; and he 'delivered [his] soul' to the Countess in private.¹⁰⁵ John entrusted the result to God, with no further mention of his possible chaplaincy. This left open the option of reaching out to her former 'best of friends'. And such an overture became easier in March 1751, when Lady Huntingdon purchased a residence in the village of Clifton, just outside of Bristol where Charles and Sarah Wesley resided, as part of turning over the estate at Donington Park to her son Theophilus.

Reconciliation Offsetting Alienation

Lady Huntingdon wasted little time. In late May 1751 Charles was informed by an intermediary that she wanted to meet. On 1 June, 'in the fear of God, and by the advice of my friends' he obliged. By his account, 'she expressed great kindness toward me'; 'my heart was turned back again, and forgot all that is past'; and they 'sealed the reconciliation' in prayer. Two days later Charles took his wife Sarah to meet the Countess, where 'our old friend appeared as such' and was particularly drawn to Sarah. The next evening he told several Methodist friends in Bristol of the renewed relationship.¹⁰⁶ Over the following weeks

102. See Harris, diary (4 January 1750), Beynon, ed., *Harris's Visits*, 256; and Harris's reflections (5 September 1751), *ibid.* 15–6.

103. Cf. David Ceri Jones, et al., *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735–1811* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), 84–7.

104. See *ibid.* 113.

105. See JW to CW (15 September 1748), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 26:330–1.

106. For what follows, see CW, MS Journal (28 May–1 June 1751).

Charles administered the Lord's Supper to a small group at Lady Huntingdon's home, and admitted her and some of her friends to a love feast of the Methodist society in Bristol.¹⁰⁷

During this same month Charles learned that James Wheatley, a Methodist lay preacher serving a nearby circuit, had been accused of sexual impropriety with several women. This incident brought John Wesley and his wife Mary to Bristol, which allowed Charles to introduce his sister-in-law to the Countess, who 'received her with great friendliness'. Lady Huntingdon also lent her support in confronting Wheatley, and hosted a sacramental service in her home that included John and Mary.¹⁰⁸ For a time she likely hoped for closer relationship with *both* Wesley brothers. But two dynamics already at play undermined that possibility.

One dynamic was Charles's growing frustration with the number of lay preachers John was adding to his connexion—many of whom Charles judged unfit for the role. On hearing a sermon in April 1751 by one tradesman John had made a lay preacher, Charles lamented, 'By how many degrees are such preachers worse than none!'¹⁰⁹ The charges against Wheatley two months later brought this to a head. During a visit to Bradford-on-Avon, to interview two women about the charges, Charles took away the licence of another 'worthless, senseless, graceless' lay preacher his brother had approved.¹¹⁰ Over the next two weeks, while the brothers dealt jointly with Wheatley, Charles pressed his concerns on John. John eventually consented to reviewing all the lay preachers over the next months *on the condition* that Charles help by making a tour of the northern circuit of societies, with an eye to the lay preachers.

Charles set out on this tour on 29 June, accompanied by his friend Sarah Perrin. The tour lasted three months, and can be traced through surviving journal letters, the abridged account in his manuscript journal, and other documents.¹¹¹ The key point for our focus is that Charles turned to Lady Huntingdon as an ally. He sent her a letter in mid-August warning that the lay preachers threatened to destroy the work of God and lead Methodists into schism from the Church of England. To head this off, Charles proposed

107. *Ibid.* (21–23 June).

108. *Ibid.* (11, 23, 27 June).

109. See CW, MS Journal (15 April 1751).

110. CW, MS Journal (12 June 1751).

111. See CW, *Journal Letters*, ed. Maddox et al., 304–44; and Richard P. Heitzenrater, 'Purge the Preachers: The Wesleys and Quality Control', in K. G. C. Newport and T. A. Campbell, eds, *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature, and Legacy* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007), 486–514.

sending every preacher John had approved back to their trade, and requiring approval by *both* himself and John of any who served as lay preachers in the future. His goal was to break John's power over the preachers (who were now dependent on John for their living) and 'reduce his authority within due bounds.'¹¹² Unfortunately for Charles, this letter never reached the Countess; it was intercepted and given to his brother. John's eventual direct response was tempered, though it subtly charged Charles with siphoning off funds from societies he had visited.¹¹³ John's more immediate reply, sent through Sarah Perrin, was that he would accept Charles's proposal *only* if Charles would agree to return to itinerating at least a third of each year.¹¹⁴

Charles fulfilled this demand in 1752, spending the first four months in London, then (after time in Bristol with Sally during the birth of their first child) touring through the Methodist societies in Cornwall for a month in the fall.¹¹⁵ He was back in London April–May 1753, serving while John was touring the north. But then Charles declared that God 'broke the yoke' binding him to act in connexion with John, freeing him to preach wherever God led.¹¹⁶ This drew a sharp response from his brother: 'Either act really in connexion with me: or never pretend to it.' At least, John pleaded, 'take counsel with me once or twice a year as to the places where you will labour. . . . I am a better judge in this matter than either Lady Huntingdon, Sally Jones, or any other.'¹¹⁷

John echoed this appeal two weeks later, adding a postscript: 'You told William Briggs that you "never declined going to any place" because my wife was there. I am glad of it. If so, I have hope we may sometime spend a little time together.'¹¹⁸ This points to the second dynamic working against the hope in June 1751 of union between the Countess and *both* Wesley brothers: John's marriage to Mary (Goldhawk) Vazeille was proving unhappy indeed.

Charles spent two days during the June 1751 visit of John and Mary to Bristol seeking to resolve Mary's complaints about his brother.¹¹⁹ Within a year Charles was himself a focus of Mary's ire—accused of turning his wife Sarah into an idol, to whom he sacrificed the support in ministry he should be giving his

112. See CW to LH (4 August 1751); cf. CW, *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 1:322–4 (where it is dated 1752).

113. See JW to CW (4 December 1751), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 26:479–80.

114. See Sarah Perrin to CW (4–6 November 1751).

115. See his letters home from mid-September to mid-October 1752.

116. See CW to LH (15 September 1753), CW, *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 1:336–7.

117. JW to CW (20 October 1753), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 26:526–7. Sarah Perrin was now married to John Jones.

118. JW to CW (31 October 1753), *ibid.* 26:527–9.

119. CW, MS Journal (21–22 June 1751).

brother.¹²⁰ Whatever their legitimacy, Mary's repeated complaints against John fractured their marriage over the coming years.¹²¹ And her animus against Charles drove a wedge between the brothers, particularly when she began contesting the yearly payment of £100 from book proceeds that John had pledged in the marriage agreement between Charles and Sarah.¹²²

Charles's restored relationship with Lady Huntingdon filled this growing gap. He told Sarah that he considered it 'a great blessing from God', in particular 'for your sake that I may leave her *my widow* as a legacy'.¹²³ Yet he was careful for a while (after the intercepted letter of August 1751) about mentioning the relationship overtly, to avoid further provoking John. For example, in a 1752 letter to Sarah where he asked her to convey his love to persons in Bristol, Charles ended the list with '*our worthy friend*—without a name'.¹²⁴ The Countess's frequent letters to Charles over the next few years openly affirmed her friendship.

The freedom from connexion with John that Charles claimed in the summer of 1753 was short-lived. He received word in late November that John was near death. Charles rushed to London to see his brother, only to receive a few days later letters from Lady Huntingdon informing him that his wife Sarah and son John had smallpox, drawing him back to Bristol.¹²⁵ Charles's brother and wife recovered, but his son died. The care shown by the Countess for his family through these events deepened their relationship. The need to assist his brother during John's four-month convalescence in Bristol consumed Charles's time.¹²⁶

When John returned to London in April 1754, Charles reluctantly sent Sarah to stay with her parents, in order to accompany and assist John there. This included dealing once more with James Wheatley. After his expulsion in 1751, Wheatley moved to Norwich and gathered a society which was characterized in local papers as 'Methodist'. The Wesley brothers published a disavowal in December 1753, insisting Wheatley was an 'independent teacher'; and John sent one of his lay preachers to initiate a proper Methodist work.¹²⁷ A few

120. See her 22 May 1752 letter to CW; Randy L. Maddox, 'An "Insolent" Letter', *Methodist History* 61 (2023), 107–15.

121. See Ted Campbell, 'John Wesley's Intimate Disconnections, 1755–1764', *Methodist History* 51 (2013), 185–200.

122. See the letters of Ebenezer Blackwell to CW (22 and 30 January 1753), *WHS* 36 (1967), 76–7.

123. CW to SGW (11 October 1752), CW, *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 1:328.

124. CW to SGW (4 October 1752), *ibid.* 1:327.

125. See the journal letter covering 29 November–11 December 1753 in CW, *Journal Letters*, ed. Maddox et al., 355–64; and LH's letters to CW (1–6 December 1753).

126. See CW to Samuel Lloyd (17 March 1754), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 1:349–50.

127. *Norwich Mercury* (15–22 December 1753), 3.

months later the brothers heard that Wheatley was again charged with sexual improprieties. They made a joint trip to Norwich in early July 1754, and John left Charles there through mid-August to nurture the fledgling Methodist society and defend it from the taint of association with Wheatley.¹²⁸

Charles's apparent return to serving under John's direction a third of each year was rocked in October 1754, when he learned that some of John's lay preachers were offering the Lord's Supper in societies they served.¹²⁹ Charles protested this action to John, who reportedly responded, 'We have in effect ordained already.' John suggested having the preachers obtain licenses under the Act of Toleration, which the two brothers would sign, laying on hands (the sign of ordination) as a formal recognition, and letting all the preachers administer.¹³⁰ Charles rejected this vigorously, and mustered support to head it off at the next Conference, set for Leeds in May 1755. In the face of this pressure, John read a paper at the Leeds Conference arguing it did not (yet) appear either legal or necessary for Methodists to separate from the Church of England, nor for him to appoint (i.e., ordain) persons to preside over the sacraments.¹³¹

By John's account the lay preachers agreed at the 1755 Conference not to administer the sacraments (those who dissented left the connexion), thereby rejecting separation from the Church.¹³² But Charles considered John's paper and comments there an act of 'dissimulation': leaving ordination as a future possibility, and condoning lay administration of the Lord's Supper in 'extraordinary' circumstances.¹³³ Rather than dispute John publicly, Charles left Conference early to John's displeasure, who assumed it was at the behest of Lady Huntingdon.¹³⁴

When Charles left Conference he took along a letter that had come into his possession, which he considered a vindication of his character in the face of abusive behaviour from John's wife Mary. This became another point of contention,

128. See the letters covering 8 July–13 August 1754 in CW, *Journal Letters*, ed. Maddox et al., 365–99; and Elizabeth J. Bellamy, *James Wheatley and Norwich Methodism in the 1750s* (Peterborough: World Methodist Historical Society, 1994).

129. See LH to CW (21 October 1754), informing of a rumour JW had ordained some lay preachers; and CW to Rev. Walter Sellon (29 November 1754), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 1:354.

130. See Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, 2nd edn (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872), 2:202 n. 1.

131. JW's paper can be found in *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 9:567–80; see 572. He published an abridgement in 1758, titled 'Reasons against a Separation from the Church of England', *ibid.* 9:334–42.

132. See JW to CW (20 June 1755), *ibid.* 26:561–3.

133. See CW to LH (9 June 1755), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 383–4.

134. See CW to SGW (9 May 1755), *ibid.* 1:371–2; and CW to LH (22 May 1755), *ibid.* 1:375–6. Cf. JW to Ebenezer Blackwell (29 April 1755), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 26:555.

with John (and allies like Ebenezer Blackwell) demanding its return.¹³⁵ As leverage, they renewed threats to discontinue Charles's annual £100 stipend.¹³⁶ Lady Huntingdon assured Charles that she would cover this loss if necessary, while he assured the Countess that he would shield her from attacks by Mary.¹³⁷ The degree of Charles's alienation from his sister-in-law by this point is evidenced by his practice from 1755 on of referring to her, in letters to his wife Sarah, *sarcastically* as his 'best friend' when describing her provocations.¹³⁸

Letters between the Wesley brothers in the weeks after the 1755 Conference debated whether the lay preachers had been reined in, which Charles doubted. Charles's letters to Lady Huntingdon meanwhile sought her advice and support as he pondered how best to reclaim his freedom from ministering in connexion with John, perhaps by taking a parish.¹³⁹ As an initial step, Charles declined John's request for him to tour the Cornwall circuit that summer because Sarah was due to deliver their second child (though he did come to London in September 1755, after the child had died, to cover while John went to Cornwall).¹⁴⁰

Charles was back in London in December to meet with the bishop of London, likely about a parish appointment.¹⁴¹ While there he was 'surprised' by a visit from John.¹⁴² John may have told Charles about prodding he had received during his tour of Cornwall from moderate Calvinist evangelical clergy like Samuel Walker and Thomas Adam urging a stronger stance against separation from the Church of England.¹⁴³ Or Charles may have learned of this while in London from mid-May through July 1756, covering the chapels while John toured Ireland. In any case Charles decided to try once more to get a firm commitment at the annual Conference scheduled in Bristol in late August. He reached out to Walker for support in this effort.¹⁴⁴ Reporting back to Walker,

135. See CW to SGW (2 May 1755), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 1:370–1; CW to LH (26–27 May 1755), *ibid.* 1:377; and CW to LH (9 June 1755), *ibid.* 1:383–4.

136. See CW to LH (28 July 1755), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 1:392; and CW to Martha (Wesley) Hall (19 June 1756), *ibid.* 1:412.

137. See CW to LH (28 June 1755), Tyson with Schlenther, *In the Midst*, 91; and LH to CW (27 November 1756), MARC, MA 1977/504/1/62 (see transcription online as described in note 9 above).

138. Cf. CW to SGW (9 April 1755; 2 May 1755; 24 September 1757; 8–9 May 1758; 5 June 1759; 5 July 1759; 19 July 1759; 2 March 1760 and 13 April 1760).

139. See CW to LH (9, 11, 28 June 1755), Tyson with Schlenther, *In the Midst*, 89–91.

140. See JW to CW (16 July 1755), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 26:572–3; and CW to LH (28 July 1755), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 1:392–3.

141. See CW to SGW (22 December 1755); cf. *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 1:403.

142. CW to SGW (7–8 December 1755), *ibid.* 1:402.

143. See the letters from Walker (5 September 1755) and Adam (10 October 1755) to JW in *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 26:582–6, 603–4.

144. See CW to Samuel Walker (7–10 August 1756), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 1:414–6.

Charles said the preachers at Conference ‘spoke largely of keeping united to the Church; and there was no dissenting voice’. Buoyed by this reception, Charles added that he had agreed to make another preaching tour through the northern circuits of the Methodist connexion, to ‘confirm the Methodists in the Church.’¹⁴⁵ Charles’s journal letters of this tour, which ran from 17 September to 5 November 1756, are generally positive in tone, though they include scattered notes to John (in shorthand) expressing concern about the anti-Church stance of some of the preachers.¹⁴⁶

More foreboding was a letter Charles sent the day after he returned to Bristol reporting ‘Mrs. John Wesley took her opportunity while my brother was in Ireland of laying hands on my income’ with an eye ‘to set me upon my brother and so occasion a quarrel if not separation.’¹⁴⁷ This dynamic reduced the times the brothers met over the next three years.¹⁴⁸ And it helps account for the lack of surviving correspondence between them from late 1756 to early 1759.

Realigning of Their Relationship

The correspondence between Charles Wesley and Lady Huntingdon continued steadily through the 1750s and into the next decade, with frequent references to one another as ‘friends’. But their relationship realigned slowly, as the Countess assumed the role of ‘peeress’ for the evangelical revival.¹⁴⁹ Initially she used her influence to get evangelical candidates for ministry in the Church of England ordained, at times seeking Charles’s advice.¹⁵⁰ And she sought to foster greater unity among the Calvinist and Arminian wings of the revival. Of particular import was a series of meetings for intercessory prayer she hosted at her home in Chelsea in February 1759, during a threatened invasion by France. These meetings brought the Wesley brothers together with several leading Calvinist evangelicals.¹⁵¹

John Wesley’s presence in these gatherings was made possible in part because he and Mary were in the midst of separating. Charles came to London

145. CW to Samuel Walker (6 September 1756), *ibid.* 1:417–8. See also CW, *Journal Letters*, ed. Maddox et al., 392–4.

146. See *ibid.* 395–415 and the longer account in MS Journal.

147. CW to William Shent (6 November 1756), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:42.

148. Cf. CW to SGW (7 April 1757), *ibid.* 2:43.

149. The best study of this trajectory is Alan Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

150. See LH to CW (c. 25 August 1756); and LH to CW (9 June 1764).

151. See [Seymour], *Huntingdon*, 1:395–96; JW, *Journal* (27 February 1759), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 21:178; and CW to SGW (27 February 1759), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:79.

that February to reconnect with his brother as this unfolded.¹⁵² But the potential for this renewal was curtailed when Charles learned in early 1760 that three lay preachers were again officiating the Lord's Supper at Norwich, and was frustrated by John's ambivalence over halting the practice.¹⁵³ Once again Charles rallied the opposition, including Howell Harris. They were able to persuade John to reassert (albeit, mildly) at the Conference in 1760 that he would not separate from the Church of England or ordain the lay preachers—and to ask them to confine themselves to preaching and evangelism.¹⁵⁴ But by now it was clear to Charles, as he put it in a later letter, 'my brother's first object was the Methodists, and then the Church; my first the Church, and then the Methodists.'¹⁵⁵

In response Charles returned to the background. His name is absent through the 1760s from lists of those appointed in the Methodist connexion. He continued to preach and officiate the sacrament in Methodist settings around Bristol. But a prolonged battle with gout prevented him serving this role in London during John's preaching tours in 1761 and 1762. He came to London the summer of 1763, at his brother's request, to help in dealing with the 'blessing' movement centred there.¹⁵⁶ Charles had observed some excesses in this movement over the previous two years, and was now a vigorous critic of claims that perfection in holiness was a blessing attained instantaneously by a simple act of consecration.¹⁵⁷ John was more open to elements of the movement and this became another point of debate between the brothers.¹⁵⁸

John had to prod Charles to return to London the following summer, since Charles was unhappy with John's arrangement around January 1764 for his (well-educated) lay preacher, John Jones, to be ordained by a purported bishop from Crete, to help serve the chapels in London.¹⁵⁹ Charles never accepted the

152. See the series of letters from CW to JW and SGW through February 1779, *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:72–82.

153. See CW to JW (2 March 1760), *ibid.* 2:109; and (c. 6 March 1760), *ibid.* 2:114.

154. No official *Minutes* of this Conference survive. The most complete and enlightening account is in a manuscript journal of Howell Harris, excerpted in JW, *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 10:289–91.

155. CW to JW (via John Horton) (19 January 1774), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:281–3.

156. See JW to CW (8 February 1763), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 27:318–19. For more on this movement, see David Thomas Stark, "'The Peculiar Doctrine Committed to our Trust': Ideal and Identity in the First Wesleyan Holiness Revival, 1758–1763", PhD diss. (University of Manchester, 2011).

157. See S T Kimbrough Jr., 'Charles Wesley and the Journey of Sanctification', *Evangelical Journal* 16 (1998), 49–75.

158. See CW to LH (16 June 1763), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:154–5; JW to CW (25 May 1764), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 27:369–70; (27 June 1766), *ibid.* 28:23–4; (9 July 1766), *ibid.* 28:29–32; and (27 January 1767), *ibid.* 28:60–1.

159. See JW to CW (1 March 1764), *ibid.* 27:351–2; and A. B. Sackett, 'John Wesley and the Greek Orthodox Bishop', *WHS* 38 (1971–72), 81–8, 97–102.

legitimacy of Jones's ordination.¹⁶⁰ And he showed little sympathy when his brother had to expel some of his other lay preachers a year later for purchasing ordination from the same bishop on their own initiative.¹⁶¹

In the midst of this jangling among the Wesley brothers Lady Huntingdon initiated a new phase of her role in the evangelical revival: building and overseeing chapels. The first was built in 1761 in Brighton, followed shortly after by Ote Hall, and in 1765 the Countess opened an elaborate chapel in Bath.¹⁶² More of her own chapels would follow, and she contributed to the cost of buildings for some prominent Calvinist evangelical preachers. While the latter often registered their sites as dissenting meeting houses under the Toleration Act, the Countess did not (at this time). Neither does it appear she tried to connect her early chapels to the Church of England formally (under the authority of a bishop). While she insisted that those who led worship in these chapels subscribe to the doctrines of the Church of England, and use only the Book of Common Prayer, Lady Huntingdon assumed (as peeress) that she could assign who served them as she saw fit. And in order to have sacramental worship in at least her key chapels on Sunday mornings, she began building a network of evangelicals ordained in the Church of England to serve in long-term or visiting capacities.¹⁶³

Lady Huntingdon's earliest recruits to serve her chapels were Calvinist, suggesting a decline in her concern to foster unity within the revival.¹⁶⁴ Howell Harris stepped forward to champion this cause, particularly during a trip through England in the fall of 1763 that included a visit with the Countess.¹⁶⁵ Spurred by Harris, she hosted a meeting in Bristol on 16 March 1764 of several evangelical Anglican clergy, including John Wesley. She hoped to persuade John to commit to 'a general union founded upon the essential point—namely, faith in Jesus Christ; salvation of sinners by his blood and righteousness—this being the centre of union for all; all other points being left for private consideration'.¹⁶⁶ While John was open to a union of evangelical clergy that allowed diversity concerning predestination, he desired a broader set of agreed fundamental truths; namely, 'original sin and justification by faith, producing inward and outward holiness'.¹⁶⁷ Accordingly he crafted an

160. Cf. JW to CW (9 August 1765), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 27:443–4.

161. See CW's endorsement on JW to CW (11 January 1765), *ibid.* 27:413–4.

162. See Harding, *Connexion*, 48–51.

163. See *ibid.* 53–9.

164. Cf. JW to LH (8 January 1764), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 27:347–8.

165. See Beynon, ed., *Howell Harris, Reformer*, 202–6.

166. See her letter (14 March) to Harris, in Edward Morgan, *Life and Times of Howell Harris* (London: Hughes and Butler, 1852), 236–7.

167. See JW's report on the meeting in *Journal* (16 March 1764), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 21:444.

alternative proposal for union over the next month and sent copies to Lord Dartmouth and Lady Huntingdon.¹⁶⁸ John would push his revised proposal over the next two years, to little avail.¹⁶⁹

In August 1766, when hopes for larger union had collapsed, Lady Huntingdon sponsored a reunion of the Wesley brothers and George Whitefield, and opened her chapels to all three.¹⁷⁰ John preached in her chapel at Bath on 26 August, and offered that he and Charles could serve alternative Sundays in early October.¹⁷¹ The Countess replied with thanks and suggested regular joint meetings of the three clergy with herself to guide the work under her care.¹⁷² There is little evidence that such meetings took place, but John preached at her chapel in Bath three more times over the next three years (officiating the sacrament, if on Sunday morning).¹⁷³

There are no surviving diary or journal records for Charles Wesley during this time, to enable compiling a list. But he was available to minister at the chapel in Bath more often than John because he was in Bristol more. And Charles felt closer to Lady Huntingdon at the time than to his brother—his letter to the Countess after the meeting she hosted between the brothers and Whitefield mentioned his ‘hope for good from our union’, and added: ‘My desire would be to spend my last moments near you.’¹⁷⁴ Accordingly, as Charles reported to a friend, he ‘often served’ the chapel in Bath during his time in Bristol between October 1766 and March 1767.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, he apparently worried what John might think of this frequency, drawing John’s assurance: ‘I won’t complain of your preaching too often at Bath.’¹⁷⁶

Charles’s frequent service at Bath continued. So much so that in May 1768 an associate of Lady Huntingdon informed her of ‘a design which Mr. Charles Wesley has of taking up his residence at Bath, partly with a view of supplying any lack of service at your Ladyship’s chapel. He doth not mean to neglect his

168. JW to Lord Dartmouth (19 April 1764), *ibid.* 27:358–61; and JW to LH (20 April 1764), *ibid.* 27:362.

169. See the discussion in Appendix B of JW, *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 28:665–73.

170. See JW, *Journal* ([21] August 1766), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 22:57; CW to SGW (21 August 1766), CW, *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:193–4.

171. See JW, *Journal* (26 August 1766), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 22:57; and CW to LH (30 August 1766), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:196–7.

172. LH to JW (14 September 1766), *Arminian Magazine* 20 (1797), 304–5.

173. See his *Journal* accounts (5 October 1766), JW, *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 22:63–4 (includes sacrament), (8 March 1767) 22:73, (5 March 1769), 22:172.

174. CW to LH (30 August 1766), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:196–7.

175. See CW to Samuel Lloyd (13–14 February 1767), *ibid.* 2:205–6; and LH’s expression of gratitude in a letter to CW (4 February 1767).

176. JW to CW (12 February 1767), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 28:64.

Bristol friends, but as usual visit Kingswood every other Sunday.¹⁷⁷ Over the next few months the Countess gently, and then more fervently, encouraged this move.¹⁷⁸ Charles decided instead to relocate to London for the benefit of his musical sons. But while still in Bristol, he informed Lady Huntingdon in March 1769 that he had engaged to serve her chapel for two weeks, and had John's encouragement 'to spend as much time as I *can* in Bath'.¹⁷⁹

Such encouragement from John would soon end, due in part to another initiative of Lady Huntingdon: founding a college to train candidates for ministry.¹⁸⁰ The Countess's efforts to build a cadre of ordained evangelicals in the Church of England was increasingly hampered by resistance that evangelical students confronted at university.¹⁸¹ This led her to mention to Charles Wesley in 1764 a desire for a 'nursery' that could equip promising lay preachers in his brother's connexion for potential ordination.¹⁸² John Wesley shared this concern, and when work began in 1768 setting up such an enterprise at Trevecca he referred to it as 'our college'.¹⁸³ While John did not attend the college's opening on 24 August 1768, the preacher for the occasion was George Whitefield, now working cooperatively with the Wesley brothers. John attended and preached during the first anniversary of the opening of Trevecca in 1769.¹⁸⁴ But soon after he began expressing concern about both the proprietary stance Lady Huntingdon had assumed over the college and the inhospitality shown there to some Wesleyan emphases.¹⁸⁵

A pivotal factor in what unfolded over the next year was the loss of George Whitefield's presence. He departed England for another tour of North America in early September 1769 (dying there on 30 September 1770). His moderating voice within Lady Huntingdon's circle was replaced by more strident Calvinists; and John Wesley felt more free to express reservations about Calvinism. Things came to a head at John's annual Conference with his preachers held 7–10 August 1770 in London. One focus of discussion was clarifying how their understanding of soteriology differed from 'Calvinism'.¹⁸⁶ Lady Huntingdon received a

177. John Lloyd to Lady Huntingdon (5 May 1768), Cheshunt Manuscript Collection F1/1424, Westminster College Archives, Cambridge University. CW officiated the sacrament at Kingswood on Sunday during this time; see Maddox, 'Ministry of Word and Table', 30.

178. LH to CW (7 November 1768); and LH to CW (17 December 1768).

179. CW to LH (9 March 1769), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:222–3.

180. See Harding, *Connexion*, 62, 173–232.

181. Cf. Randy L. Maddox, 'Resistance to Methodist Students at St. Edmund Hall, Oxford University', *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 12 (2020), 71–91.

182. See LH to CW (9 June 1764) (MARC, MA 1977/504/1/75).

183. JW to CW (14 May 1768), *Works*, ed. Baker et al., 28:145.

184. See JW, *Journal* (23–24 August 1769), *ibid.* 22:200–1.

185. See esp., JW to Benson (26 December 1769), *ibid.* 28:270.

186. See the concluding section to the *Minutes* of this Conference, JW, *Works*, *ibid.* 10:392–4.

report of the discussion while in progress and sent John word not to make a previously planned trip to Trevecca.¹⁸⁷ John's sarcastic response was: 'I am glad that my not spending a night or two at Trevecca will be no disappointment to anyone.'¹⁸⁸ Thus emerged a controversy that would result in an enduring division between the Arminian and Calvinist wings of the revival.¹⁸⁹

Charles Wesley recognized what was being lost. In a letter to Lady Huntingdon in early December 1770, he lamented how the alliance formed four years earlier between her, himself, his brother John, and George Whitefield had 'come to nothing'. Whitefield was now 'safely landed', while John had given little thought to the alliance 'from that day to this' and was now 'removed an immeasurable distance'. Yet Charles hoped that he and the Countess would remain at peace.¹⁹⁰

Decisive Cooling of Their Relationship

Their peace was soon troubled. On 3 June 1771 Lady Huntingdon sent Charles the first copy of a circular just published under her direction by Walter Shirley, which reproduced the section of the 1770 *Minutes* criticizing Calvinism and called for 'real Protestants' to gather in Bristol in early August, at the same time that John's annual Conference with his preachers would be held there, in order to deliver a rebuttal to that group and call for a formal recantation of the 1770 statement.¹⁹¹ In her accompanying letter the Countess characterized the 1770 statement as 'popery', contrary to the fundamental principles of the Church of England and 'all the Reformed and Protestant churches in the world'. She lamented that Charles would surely 'suffer equal disgrace and universal distrust from the supposed union with [John]'.¹⁹² And she asked Charles to forward the circular to his brother, since she and John were now estranged.

Charles's reaction survives in the endorsement he added at the end of the letter: 'L. HUNTINGDON'S LAST June 3 1771 / unanswered by J.W's brother!' In this debate he stood in *real* union with John. His next surviving letter to his brother included the news that 'our old friend' was now calling John a heretic and apostate.¹⁹³ Charles's chief alliance in this threefold relationship had shifted, never to revert. Accordingly, there is surviving evidence of only one other time

187. Cf. JW to Joseph Benson (21 January 1771), *ibid.* 28:342.

188. JW to LH (10 August 1770), *ibid.* 28:302.

189. For an overview of the emergence of this controversy see *ibid.* 13:222–6.

190. CW to LH (c. 5 December 1770), CW, *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:238.

191. See Walter Shirley, *A Narrative of the Principal Circumstances Relative to the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Late Conference* (Bath: Thomas Mills, 1771), 7–8.

192. LH to CW (8 June 1771; emphasis added).

193. CW to JW (6 July 1771), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:249.

he and Lady Huntingdon corresponded—when she inquired in 1775, in a rather formal letter, about a report that ‘my old friend, your brother’ was quite ill.¹⁹⁴

This final transition was not as abrupt as it might seem. At the time they became ‘best of friends’ Lady Huntingdon expressed no doubt about the orthodoxy of Charles or his brother. As she shifted toward Calvinism, Charles expressed concern at times that she was drawing some of his converts after her.¹⁹⁵ But he remained content as long as she allowed that differences between the Calvinist and Wesleyan wings of the revival did not concern fundamental doctrines, and lent her support to efforts toward greater union between the wings. The letter of June 1771 made clear that this was no longer her stance.

Similarly, one of the things that Charles valued about Lady Huntingdon in the 1750s was her aid in countering his brother’s prioritization of his Methodist connexion over the Church of England, with the resulting potential for separation. As the Countess increasingly assumed the role of ‘peeress’ over her evangelical initiatives through the 1760s, Charles likely sensed her moving toward a stance analogous to that of his brother. And indeed, in March 1783 (a year before John began ordaining lay preachers), Lady Huntingdon would ordain six of her Trevecca students, separating most of her connexion formally from the Church of England.¹⁹⁶

Thus 1771 marked for Charles Wesley not only the decisive cooling of his relationship with a former ‘best of friends’, but the loss of a ‘co-labourer’ in cultivating broadly evangelical renewal *within* the Church of England. Conversely, continuing tensions between Charles and his brother John, particularly around the lay preachers, rendered Charles an increasingly isolated champion of *Church* Methodism over the last years of his life.¹⁹⁷

RANDY L. MADDOX is the William Kellon Quick Professor Emeritus of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies at Duke University. In addition to numerous articles, he is the author of *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*, and the editor of *Aldersgate Reconsidered, Rethinking Wesley’s Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, and several volumes of *The Works of John Wesley*. He is also the General Editor of the Wesley Works Editorial Project.

194. See LH to CW (28 June 1775); CW to LH (2 July 1775; flyleaf of previous); and LH to CW (4 July 1775).

195. See, particularly, CW to SGW (23–24 June 1758), *Letters*, ed. Newport and Lloyd, 2:61.

196. See Harding, *Connexion*, 296–357.

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