

JOHN WESLEY, E.A.P.J.

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Luke Tyerman, in his *Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*² quotes one of the letters in which Charles Wesley challenged his brother John's right to the title of a true churchman after taking upon himself the episcopal function of ordaining preachers for America: "You cannot settle the succession: you cannot divine how God will settle it. Have the people of _____ given you leave to die E.A.P.J.?" Tyerman adds the footnote: "Four letters, standing for *Ecclesiae Anglicanae Presbyter Johannes*: 'John, presbyter of the Church of England.' Wesley, in early life, sometimes used this signature in writing to his brother."

This little-known aspect of John Wesley's churchmanship is worth studying carefully, if only to clear up some misconceptions. Tyerman was wrong in two respects, the fault of relying too heavily on an apparently unimpeachable authority. He quoted the letter itself from Henry Moore's life of Wesley,³ and quoted accurately enough. The Latin extension of the abbreviation also came from Moore, together with its English translation. Tyerman's statement about Wesley's use of "E.A.P.J." in writing to Charles, however, is much more positive than Moore's tentative suggestion: "This signature, I believe, Mr. John Wesley sometimes used in the early part of life, when writing to his brother." Nor was Moore's note original, being lifted *verbatim* from John Whitehead's biography, a fact which probably escaped Tyerman because it occurs in the section dealing with Charles Wesley.⁴

Did John Wesley in fact sign himself "E.A.P.J." in letters to his brother? Neither Whitehead, Moore, nor Tyerman, in spite of either suggestion or assertion, quotes an example. Nor does one appear in any of the scores of Wesley's letters to his brothers which I have examined.

As a matter of fact one piece of concrete evidence that Wesley used these letters as a signature does exist in a manuscript notebook reserved by Charles Wesley for criticism of John's ordinations.⁵ A footnote to a poem entitled "*Occidit, occidit!*" ["Fallen, Fallen!"] (which we shall

¹This paper was prepared prior to Baker's publication of *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), where the details discussed in the paper are distilled in the text and a footnote (see pp. 31–32, 348–49). Baker's only other comment on this topic, in *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1962), 368 is less developed than in the paper. This suggests the paper was written c. 1965. It remained unpublished at Baker's death, and is found in Box 210 of The Frank Baker Papers, in the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Duke University, Durham, NC.

²Luke Tyerman, *Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley* (1871), 3:523.

³Henry Moore, *Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (1825), 2:359.

⁴John Whitehead, *Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (London, 1793), 1:368.

⁵[This notebook, MS Ordinations, is part of the collection in the Methodist Archive and Research Centre at the John Rylands Library, accession number MA 1977/157 (in a set of John

consider later) reads: “His usual Signature was E.A.P.J.”⁶ It seems unlikely that any of Wesley’s early biographers knew of this evidence, for they had access to the papers of John but not of Charles. The extant correspondence does not support this statement, of course, no more than it supports those of Wesley’s biographers. Yet Charles should have known, and (in spite of Henry Moore’s invective) Whitehead was not often guilty of making unsupported claims. Possibly some of the lost letters did contain such a signature; maybe some will yet turn up. It seems likely, however, that when Whitehead transcribed that letter of Charles Wesley’s he thought to himself: “E.A.P.J.? Surely I’ve seen that before somewhere! Why yes, it must have been on one of Mr. Wesley’s early letters.” If he had known Charles Wesley’s footnote he would have felt confirmed in this view. Yet Charles does not mention letters, only “signature.” A signature can be used for several purposes, and indeed most persons use different signatures for different purposes. This particular signature was certainly used by John Wesley for one particular purpose, but apparently not in correspondence.

Twenty years ago, while examining the many books at Kingswood School which were placed in the library there by Wesley himself I was struck by the strange fact that although vandals had been at work on some, cutting out his signature, others retained not only his unmistakable name, a date, and occasionally a comment on the merits of the volume, but also the strange letters “E.A.P.J.” There are two instances. One is in Jeremy Taylor’s *Ductor Dubitantium, or the Rule of Conscience*, second edition, 1671, where all that the vandal has left is “... P.J. / June 20. 1732 / n. 20.” The other, Charles Daubuz’ *Perpetual Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, removes any doubt, for in slicing out Wesley’s signature (in the generally accepted use of that term) he has left what Charles spoke of as a signature: “E.A.P.J. / Nov. 14. 1733.”⁷

Here is unmistakable evidence of Wesley’s practice, though it is restricted to his early “high church” period. Several questions come to our mind: Is Whitehead’s interpretation of the initials correct? What made Wesley adopt this practice, and description of himself? When and why did he abandon it?

The first question may seem a little fatuous in face of the evidence of two of Wesley’s contemporaries. Certainly both John and Charles Wesley used “Presbyter of the Church of England” in self-description on the title-pages of some of their publications. John Wesley prepared and published nine Latin texts for use in Kingswood School, four in 1748, three in 1749, and two in 1750. Each described the anonymous editor on the title-page as “*Ecclesiae Anglicanae Presbyter*.” Most of the publications which bore his name used the title “Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford” (less rarely, “Oxon.”) with the addition of “Late” after his marriage in 1751. The “presbyter” title never appears after 1750. On the other hand there is probably a subtle rebuke on the title-page of Charles Wesley’s *Epistle* to his brother of 1755, in which he hints that John is in danger of separating from the Church, for Charles describes himself as “Presbyter of the Church of England.” Charles also uses this description on the title-pages of his *Short Hymns*

Wesley papers; JW V.III.)]

⁶[Ibid., p. 3].

⁷[Cf. Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley’s Reading: Evidence in the Kingswood School Archives,” *Methodist History* 41.2 (2003): 49–67.]

on *Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* (1762), and his *Elegy on the late Reverend George Whitefield* (1771).

Clearly the first three initials of “E.A.P.J.” must stand for “*Ecclesiae Anglicanae Presbyter.*” But what about the “J”? “Johannes” fits nicely, of course, and would be my own choice for a neat interpretation—but for the discovery of further evidence in the Methodist Archives at City Road, at Richmond College, Surrey, and at Emory University, Georgia. This new evidence, while proving that at least one detail of the accepted interpretation is wrong, does not help us towards a correct solution of the problem, though it throws at least some light on the source of Wesley’s usage. In the Methodist Archives is a copy of George Fox’s *Journal* printed in 1709, inscribed inside the cover in the hand of Samuel Wesley Jr.: “*E Libris Samuelis Wesley / E.A.P.J. / 1723. / pr. 16s. 3 Vol.*” Richmond College possesses a copy of Dr. James Knight’s *Eight Sermons* (1721) similarly inscribed: “*E Libris Samuelis Wesley / E.A.P.J. / 1726.*” And in the library at Emory University is a slip of paper about 3-1/2” x 2-1/2” which seems to have been originally pasted in a book, though it may in fact be part of an endpaper; this also is inscribed by the elder brother of the Wesleys: “*E Libris / Samuelis Wesley / E.A.P.J. / 1738.*” John Wesley, therefore, seems to have inherited the practice from his elder brother. Charles also used the formula, and a volume of Pascal’s *Lettres Provinciales* (1657) at Richmond College is inscribed inside the cover: “*C. Wesley / E.A.P.I. / Dec. 1. 1756 / Ex dono Revi. Amici / Lindsey.*”

In view of these facts the “J” or “I” (we remember that in Latin usage the letters were interchangeable) cannot stand for “Johannes,” no more than it can stand for “Samuelis” or “Carolus.” What then does it signify? Over a hundred Latin terms are barely possible, which can be reduced to a handful: *immutus* (steadfast), *ingenuus* (worthy), *inscriptus* (entitled), *judicatus* (resolved), *juramento* (by oath), *juratus* (sworn), *jure* (by right), *jurejurando* (sworn), *justus* (proper). Consideration of two incidents in Wesley’s life in the light of the title helps to clarify both the incidents and the title.

In 1734 Samuel Wesley Sr. tried to persuade his son John, or failing him, Charles, to succeed him as rector of Epworth. Both refused, John in a lengthy letter of December 10–19, 1734.⁸ Samuel Wesley Jr. took up the cudgels on behalf of his father, claiming that as an ordained priest John was not free to reject a cure of souls, because this was implied in the ordination vows. Their correspondence during the early months of 1735 is full of logic-chopping, and of mutual accusations (politely expressed) of perjury. The focal point was not the Oath of Supremacy, but the vows made during the bishop’s examination of the candidate for priest’s orders. Although none of the bishop’s questions specifically mentioned a parochial charge, the second, third, fourth, and seventh spoke of a cure of souls. The third was probably the most pertinent to the brothers’ discussion: “Will you then give your faithful diligence, always so to minister the doctrine and Sacraments, and the discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and as this Church and Realm hath received the same according to the commandments of God; so that you may teach the people committed to your cure, and charge with all diligence to keep and observe the same?” To which John Wesley had replied, “I will do so, by the help of the Lord.” On 4th March John wrote that he did not believe that he had engaged himself to a parochial cure at his ordination, but added: “However, I own I am not the

⁸See JW, *Works*, 25:397–409.

proper judge of the oath I then took. It being certain and allowed by all—‘*Verbis in quibus quis jurejurando adigitur, sensum genuinum, ut et obligationem sacramenti et modum et mensuram praestari a mente non praestatis, sed exigentia juramentum.*’”⁹ [I.e., The true meaning of words used in taking an oath, and likewise the manner and extent of the oath’s obligation, depend upon the interpretation of the person administering rather than the one taking the oath.] He had therefore written to Bishop John Potter, who had ordained him, a laconic letter asking a single question: “Whether I had at my ordination engaged myself to undertake the cure of any parish or no?” In quoting Potter’s reply for the benefit of his brother Samuel, John Wesley omitted the passage which showed the bishop’s slight bewilderment: “If I live to see you, I shall be glad to know the grounds of your question, and the full extent of it, and may then be able to return you a more particular answer.” To the question itself, no context being supplied, he answered simply (and this is what John told Samuel) “It doth not seem to me that at your ordination you engaged yourself to undertake the cure of any parish, provided you can, as a clergyman, better serve God and His Church in your present or some other station.”¹⁰ For John this was an official ruling on the meaning of his ordination vows, and one which made it far easier for him to claim a few years later that he looked upon all the world as his parish.¹¹ Yet it seems that he was conscious of at least some new shade of interpretation of his ordination vows—that greatly restricted, if it did not forbid, his use of the title “E.A.P.J.” Clearly his churchmanship was closely linked to his ordination vows, and it would seem natural that the “J” referred in some way to the fact that he was a *sworn* presbyter of the Church of England. It may well be that the “*jurejurando*” of his letter to his brother was the key word familiar to both of them in that title, which need not therefore be specified.

Fifty years later another crisis was upon John Wesley, and his other brother took up where Samuel had left off. Here the story is much better known, though this aspect of it has not (so far as I know) been described. John Wesley’s ordaining of preachers for America was a bitter blow to Charles Wesley, who saw it as yet another slight upon their father, and a declaration that Methodism was an independent sect, no longer a society within the Church. In his *apologia* of September 10, 1784, John Wesley stated that “Lord King’s *Account of the Primitive Church* convinced me many years ago that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain.”¹² It was two months after the event that Charles Wesley heard of it, and for a long time he was in a daze, unable to believe what had happened. Then he began collecting the evidence and writing the letters that might even yet preserve his brother and Methodism for the Church. He took up again the learned answer to King’s work published anonymously by a nonjuror, William Sclater, in 1717. It was entitled *An Original Draught of the Primitive Church ... by a Presbyter of the Church of England*. The copy he used is preserved at

⁹Ibid., 421.

¹⁰Ibid.; the bishop’s letter is given in full in *Wesley Banner* (1851), 70.

¹¹Ibid., 614–17.

¹²John Telford (ed.), *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: Epworth, 1931), 7:238.

Richmond College.¹³ The fly-leaf shows that it had been bought in 1734 by Thomas Winchester of Magdalen College, from whom presumably Wesley had it. In the aftermath of the ordinations Charles took it up, looked at the author's description of himself on the title-page, thought again of the title that he and his brothers had proudly worn, and added his own inscription inside the cover: "Car. Wesley / *olim ex Aedi Christi Alumnus* / E.A.P.J. / 1785." Then "Late Student of Christ-Church, Oxford," which he had used on the title-pages of two of his publications.

It was at this period that Charles Wesley wrote a series of poems castigating his brother for assuming episcopal powers of ordination. In the sight of God this might be no denial of his own ordination vows—though Charles could not accept this—but it was clearly a breach of church discipline. The third poem opened thus:

And is it come to this? and has the Man
On whose Integrity our Church relied,
Betray'd his trust, render'd our boastings vain,
And fal'n a Victim to ambitious Pride?

Whose zeal so long her Hierarchy maintain'd,
Her humble Presbyter, her duteous Son*
Call'd an High-priest, and by Himself Ordain'd,
He glorifies himself, and mounts a Throne.¹⁴

The asterisk at the end of the sixth line leads to Charles Wesley's footnote: "His usual Signature was E.A.P.J." The few sympathizers who were permitted to peruse this manuscript notebook would apparently be expected to understand the significance of the letters. The context clearly suggests that they must connote the obedience and loyalty of a presbyter to the Church of England. I wonder how many people in fact were familiar with this description? Dr. Norman Sykes wrote to me just before his death: "I have not myself come across any example of the use of the letters E.A.P.J. by any other clergyman." If I confess my own ignorance of any other use, therefore, I confess it in good company. Yet I cannot but believe that this "affectation," as Dr. Sykes termed it, was not confined to the Wesley brothers, and that eventually some other examples will turn up.

To them, at any rate, it was an important symbol of their ordination vows of loyalty to their mother church, loyalty that was severely tested by an even higher loyalty, and in John Wesley gave way. This was how Charles Wesley saw it. Another more lengthy poem prompted by the ordinations opens with some words which probably refer to the title which both shared in their youth, but which John had now forsaken:

¹³[This volume is now in the collection of The Methodist Archive and Research Centre; see Randy L. Maddox, "Collection of Books owned by the Charles Wesley Family in The John Rylands University Library." *Bulletin of The John Rylands University Library* 88.2 (2006): 133–77.]

¹⁴MS Ordinations, 3; cf. Baker, *Representative Verse*, 368.

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:

...¹⁵

Their likeness in “name” might refer to the fact that they were brothers, but it seems reasonable to see a reference to their shared title “E.A.P.J.”—i.e., something by which they were deliberately rather than accidentally linked, and a link which could be broken. Charles believed that it had been broken, witness that letter of April 9, 1787 to his brother, with which we opened: “Have the people of _____ given you leave to die E.A.P.J.?” In other words, “You have broken your ordination vows of loyalty to the Anglican Church, and the sacramental needs of the American Methodists will not exonerate you: you are now a Dissenter.”

¹⁵A volume in The Methodist Archive and Research Centre known as “MS Brothers,” 31; cf. Baker, *Representative Verse*, 371.