

MS Ordinations¹

The finalization of peace with the former American colonies in 1784 ended any pretense that Methodism could remain a movement within the larger Church of England in North America. This reality led John Wesley to take several steps to insure that his Methodist followers across the waters would continue to have access to the full panoply of the means of grace. Most importantly, he took this new situation as warrant for him to act upon his long-held belief, gained from reading Peter King, that presbyters (elders) could ordain in cases of necessity. On 1–2 September 1784, with Thomas Coke and James Creighton (both Anglican elders) assisting, John Wesley ordained two of his lay preachers, Thomas Vasey and Richard Whatcoat—first as deacons, then elders. He then commissioned Coke to serve as superintendent and dispatched the three to serve the North American Methodists.

Charles Wesley had long been a critic of how broadly John used lay preachers, as well as other practices that portended a split from the Church of England.² It is hardly surprising that he took strong exception to John's actions. One product of this exception was an octavo-sized notebook volume that Frank Baker designated MS Ordinations. See as well the closely related items: Assorted Verse on 1784 Ordinations, MS Brothers, and MS Revd. —.

MS Ordinations contains various items in prose as well as ten poems relating to the ordination of Methodist preachers for North America. The poems begin on pp. 1–3 and continue on pp. 136–130 (working backwards in the volume, after flipping it over). We reproduce page breaks, showing the pages as continuous (and indicating original numbering) below. Charles Wesley prefaced the first page with a short quote from William Chillingworth concerning schism. Many of poems are aimed at Dr. Thomas Coke, for the assumed role that he played in persuading John Wesley to perform the ordinations. The poems were apparently written around 1786 (see stanza 2 of the first epigram).

MS Ordinations is part of the collection in the Methodist Archive and Research Centre, accession number MA 1977/157 (in a set of John Wesley papers; JW V.III). The transcription below is provided with permission of the Librarian and Director, The John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester.

¹This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the diligent assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: October 9, 2014.

²See his published “Hymns for the Methodist Preachers” (1760).

Contents

[I.] Epigram	1
II	2
III. <i>Occidit, occidit!</i>	3-4
IV	5
[V.] Epigram	5
VI	6-8
VII	8-9
VIII	9
IX	9-10
X	10

Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants*, p. 272.³

“That a Pretence of Reformation will acquit no man from Schism, we grant very willingly, and therefore say that It concerns every man who separates from any Church-Communion, *even as much as his Salvation is worth*, to look most carefully to it, that the Cause of his Separation be just and necessary.”

[I.]
Epigram.⁴

W[esley] himself and friends betrays,⁵
By his good⁶ sense forsook,
While⁷ suddenly⁸ his hands he lays⁹
On the hot head of¹⁰ C[oke]:
Yet *we* at least¹¹ shoud spare the weak,
His weak Co-evals *We*,
Nor blame an hoary Schismatic,
A Saint of Eighty-three!¹²

³William Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants, a Safe Way of Salvation* (Oxford: Leonard Lichfield, 1638). Wesley has added the emphasis shown in italics.

⁴What appears to be an initial draft of this epigram survives in the hand of Sarah (Gwynne) Wesley among the Adam Clarke Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University. There is also a copy (which spells out the names “Wesley” and “Coke”) in the hand of Charles Wesley’s son Samuel in MARC: DDWF 15/53. Published posthumously in *Representative Verse*, 367; and *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:81.

⁵Duke copy has “betray’d,” giving “betrays” in the margin as an alternative.

⁶Ori., “own.”

⁷DDWF 15/53 and Duke copy begin “When.”

⁸Duke copy had “carelessly”, but struck out and replaced with “suddenly”.

⁹Duke copy has “laid,” giving “lays” in the margin as an alternative.

¹⁰In Duke copy “of” is struck out, and “head” is changed to “headed”.

¹¹Duke copy has “alass”.

¹²John was eighty-one when he performed the first ordinations in 1784, so this poem was likely written in 1786.

II.¹³

C[oke] in his spritely youth for Honor tried
 And fair Preferment—on the Church’s side,
 For Church and King the valiant Champion fought,
 And from the powerful Great a Living sought: [4]
 But sick of hope delay’d,¹⁴ he turn’d¹⁵ his coat,
 Rail’d at “the Antichristian Church,” and wrote;
 Abjur’d his King, on Congress fawn’d so civil,
 And cring’d, and held a candle to the Devil. [8]

Resolving now a nobler Prize to gain,
 The Curate views a Living with disdain:
 On meaner souls her Gifts let Fortune shower
 His Object is Authority and Power; [12]
 A supple Courtier, an obsequious Tool,
 He creeps to climb, and humbly stoops to rule,
 Till curst with his imaginary power
 He swells, a spurious Bishop for an hour [16]
 Destroys a Church, to consequences blind,
 Goes out in smoak,—and leaves his Stink behind.

So when Erostratus,¹⁶ with fruitless aim
 By virtuous Action had aspir’d to fame, [20]
 He chang’d his plan; and better to succeed
 Determin’d by some bold, atrocious Deed:
 Th’ Ambitious Wretch, the daring Felon fir’d
 A Temple thro’ the universe admir’d, [24]
 By sacrilege immortaliz’d his Name,
 And damn’d himself—to everlasting Fame.

¹³Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:86–87.

¹⁴Ori., “~~deferr~~’d.”

¹⁵Ori., “chang’~~d~~.”

¹⁶I.e., Herostratus (of Ephesus), who confessed under torture (356 BCE) that he had set fire to the temple of Artemis to immortalize himself. Cf. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, 2.27.

III.¹⁷
*Occidit, occidit!*¹⁸

- [1.] 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?
- [2.] 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 mounts¹⁹ a Throne.
- [3.] Ah! where are all his Promises and Vows
To spend, and to be spent for Sion's Good,
To gather the lost sheep of Israel's house,
The Outcasts bought by his Redeemer's blood?
- [4.] Who won for God the wandring Souls of men,
Subjecting multitudes to Christ's command,
He shuts his eyes, and scatters them again,
And spreads a thousand Sects throughout the land.
- [5.] The great Restorer of Religion pure,
Ah! why shoud he a meaner style affect
His friends, his principles in death abjure
Head of a Kirk,²⁰ and Leader of a Sect?

*His usual Signature was E.A.P.J.²¹

¹⁷Published posthumously in *Representative Verse*, 368–69; and *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:87–88.

¹⁸“Fallen, fallen!” Horace, *Odes*, 4.iv.70.

¹⁹“Claims” is written beneath “mounts” as an alternative.

²⁰Ori., “~~Founder of Kirks.~~”

²¹These initials stand for *Ecclesiae Anglicanae Presbyter juratus* [or *jurejurando*], “sworn presbyter of the Church of England”; cf. Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 31–32, 348–49.

- [6.] His Charge, departing to the Wolf he leaves,
(For Who so fit to keep the Flock as He?)
And to that fawning Beast unwary gives
“His power, and seat, and great²² authority.”
- [7.] Whate'er of weak, or human in his Plan
Wood, stubble, hay built²³ on the Solid Base,
(His own by-laws, his own inventions vain)
He leaves his furious²⁴ Successor to raze.
- [8.] Secure he now the sacred Pale or' eleaps,
(Taught by audacious C[oke] to slight the guilt)
And with that Besom of destruction sweeps
The Babylon which his own hands had built.
- [9.] How is the Mighty fallen from his height,
His weapons scatter'd, and his buckler lost!
Ah! tell it not in Gath, nor cause delight
And triumph in the proud Philistine Host.
- [10.] Publish it not in Askelon, to make
The world exult in his disastrous End!
Rather let every soul my Grief partake,
And ah! my Father,²⁵ cry, and ah my Friend!
- [11.] The pious Mantle or'e his Dotage spread,
With silent tears his shameful Fall deplore,
And let him sink, forgot, among the dead,
And mention his unhappy name no more.

²²Ori., “much.”

²³Ori., “heap'd.”

²⁴Ori., “headlong.”

²⁵“Brother” is written beneath “Father” as an alternative.

IV.²⁶

Happy America, whose ruinous wars,
Direful calamities, and loss extreme,
One single man, (above man's height) repairs,
In rank sublime, in dignity supreme:
To gain a C[oke] is "ample Compensation"^[27]
For half a million slain, and general Desolation! *

[V.]
Epigram.²⁷

- [1.] So easily are Bishops made
By man's, or woman's whim?
W[esley] his hands on C[oke] hath laid,
But who laid hands on Him?
- [2.] Hands on himself he laid, and *took*
An Apostolic Chair:
And then ordain'd his Creature C[oke]
His Heir and Successor.
- [3.] Episcopalians, now no more
With Presbyterians fight,
But give your needless Contest o're
"Whose Ordination's right."^[28]
- [4.] It matters not, if Both are One,
Or different in degree,
For lo! ye see contain'd in²⁸ John
The whole Presbytery!

*Witness himself in his²⁹ Ordination Sermon at Baltimore, 1784.³⁰

²⁶Published posthumously in *Representative Verse*, 370; and *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:89.

²⁷Published posthumously in *Representative Verse*, 368; and *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:89.

²⁸Ori., "in Prelate."

²⁹Ori., "Witness his."

³⁰Thomas Coke, *Substance of a Sermon Preached at Baltimore ... at the Ordination of the Rev. Francis Asbury to the Office of Superintendent* (London: Paramore, 1785).

VI.³¹

W[esley] beset, assail'd on every side
By his own Sons become the Sons of Pride,
By every argument and every plea
Of Scottish craft, and Irish Flattery, [4]
T' immortalize his name by noblest deeds
By laying hands on their hot giddy heads;
Firm on the Church's ground, and unsubdued
Against their growing multitude he stood, [8]
And nicely managing their hopes and fears,
Held out a siege of more than forty years,
"To found a Church, his modesty declines
"His strength unequal to such vast designs, [12]
"To found a Church a life of care demands,
"And wisdom more than mine, and abler hands:
"The Plan should be to full perfection brought
"By deeper skill, and more extensive thought: [16]
"Be patient then, my sons, that you and I
"May in the Church of England live and die."

He spake: when lo! *the man* appears unsought
"Of deeper skill, and more extensive thought," [20]
Of wisdom to secure the ablest friends
And properest means for compassing his ends;
Resolv'd to reach the top of fortune's wheel,
But skilful³² his ambition to conceal; [24]

³¹Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:90–91.

³²"Careful" is written beneath "skilful" as an alternative.

Bold without fear, or shame, or self-mistrust;
Whate'er his point, it shall be done, and must
By one who runs, and flies, and creeps, and licks the dust. }
Nor reason's aid, nor conscience's he needs [28]
To plant the cabbage with inverted heads,
Implicit, ready at his Patron's call
To pull the Temple down, or burn the Capitol.

Who could so choose an instrument refuse [32]
So versatile, and fit for every ruse,
So forward with his tongue, and feet, and hands
And close-shut eyes, to execute commands:
His merit must be by his foes confest [36]
His total worth—th' Obedience of a beast! *

No marvel he should soon mislead his Guide
And circumvent him on the weaker side.
Who could resist the servile flatterer's skill, [40]
Practis'd on Age, which loves to have its will?
But giving Age its will, and pressing on
The servile flatterer obtain'd his own.
Glory invites, a Mitre is the Prize! [44]
He all his arts, all his manouvres tries;
Argues, and urges him his power to show,
Sooths, and intreats, and will not let³³ him go.

* *Obedientia jumentis*.³⁴

³³Ori., "will let" changed to "will not let."

³⁴I.e., the obedience of a beast of burden.

The Sum of all his importunity [48]
“Ordain yourself, and then lay hands on me!”

Feeble, and self-betray’d, the Prophet hears
The voice of Satan and his messengers;
He faints; he strives against the stream no more, [52]
Lays on his hands (with neither right nor power) }
And yields himself at last their Captive at Fourscore!

VII.³⁵

- [1.] Who can the odd Phenomenon explain? }
A Bishop new, who doth himself ordain,
And hands extends beyond th’ Atlantic main. }
- [2.] Sends his intrepid Suffragan before, }
To found (for Presbyterians to adore)
His Church *Episcopal* at Baltimore! }
- [3.] Tis done! the deed adventurous is done! }
The sword is drawn the civil war begun,
And John at last has pass’d the Rubicon. }
- [4.] A troop of Jeroboam’s priests appears }
For, after a long life³⁶ of fourscore years,
Poor John had Rehoboam’s Counsellors. }

³⁵Published posthumously in *Representative Verse*, 369; and *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:91–92.

³⁶Ori., “length.”

[5.] But you who censure his ductility,
His hoary hairs with *my* compassion see,
And own—Twas Age that made the breach not He. }

VIII.³⁷

W[esley] permits ambitious C[oke] to rule,
Duped by himself, and Tool of his own Tool;
While C[oke] in all his towering hopes succeeds, [4]
By nicest flattery of obsequious deeds
Impatient to revive the good old Cause;
Zealous for all his Patron's rules and laws,
Him he in every favrite trifle apes,
Swears to his words, and puts on all his shapes. [8]
On horseback set, he spurs his fiery steed,
And furiously rides o're the hoary head
Well satisfied in office to appear
Either as Judge, or Executioner, [12]
Minds neither right nor wrong, nor good nor evil
Is rough, or smooth, is insolent or civil, }
On villains fawns, and holds a candle to the devil.

IX.³⁸

Our Champion for a length of years,
Like Samson shorn, has lost his crown:
Th' Uncircumcis'd in heart and ears,
With an old house³⁹ have pull'd him down:

³⁷Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:92.

³⁸Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:92–93.

³⁹Ori., “an house” changed to “an old house.”

They count him now their lawful prize
As taken captive at their will:
His Preachers have put out his eyes
And keep him—grinding at their Mill!

X.⁴⁰

We hear a Romish Founder say
“Cast—not your sins, but—shoes away^[2]”:
Another bids, in whining note,
“Strip off the buttons from thy coat”:
A Third adorns the Sisters shapes
With jackets, and their head with Caps:
But the supreme Reformer cries
“Your Wrists, and Elbows circumcise!”

⁴⁰Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:93. This is apparently Wesley’s adaptation of verse written for an earlier occasion (see *Assorted Looseleaf Manuscript Verse*, p. 36). Its inclusion in this collection highlights Charles’s concern about his brother John’s tendency to independent decisions.