

that gave rise to Modernity, the Christian can be pressed to answer the problem 'how do you know God is real' without a circular argument.

Did we solve the original problem? Well, no. But we did see that the problem is worse than we thought. There is a lack of knowledge of God rooted in not seeking and not understanding what is available in general revelation. Times that we assumed were better than the present were just as fraught with this problem. The solution is not simply to turn to revealed religion but instead to show that revealed religion assumes general revelation. The solution is in sound arguments where they are in analytic form or narrative form.

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Samuel Wesley and the Crisis of Tory Piety: 1685–1720, William Gibson, Oxford University Press, 2021 (ISBN 978-0-19-887024-1), x + 235 pp., hb £75

'In or about 1720', writes William Gibson in his conclusion, Samuel Wesley's long-suffering wife Susannah wrote to her brother about her husband. Samuel Wesley (1662–1735) and his brother-in-law had fallen out because of the former's mishandling of a business matter undertaken on his brother-in-law's behalf. '[H]e is one of those', wrote Susannah, 'who Our Saviour saith are not so wise in their generation as the children of men, and if I did not know that almighty Wisdom hath views and ends in fixing the bounds of habitation, which are out of our ken, I should think it a thousand pities that a man of his brightness and rare endowments of learning and useful knowledge in relation to the Church of God should be confined to an obscure corner of the country where his talents are buried'. 'It was not', Gibson wryly observes, 'a ringing endorsement of their married life' (p. 211).

Gibson, the Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Director of the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History at Oxford Brookes University, aims to correct treatments of Samuel Wesley that reduce his importance to his influence on his more famous sons, John and Charles. To achieve this, he returns to a number of key sources and, with great effect, works with several largely neglected manuscript sources, including Wesley's correspondence with William Wake, who as Bishop of Lincoln was a key figure in Wesley's attempts to renew religious life in his Epworth parish. One part of the narrative that Gibson engagingly

unfolds is straightforwardly biographical. Samuel Wesley was a clever man, born in relatively humble circumstances, gifted in theology and poetry; principled, sometimes unbendingly so, who struggled to make headway in a challenging Lincolnshire parish. He was a man who combined remarkable fecundity (Gibson reckons Susannah 'had at least nineteen pregnancies and possibly more', p. 166) with poor household management and who was therefore in constant financial difficulty. Yet while there is plenty of biographical material of intrinsic interest, Gibson aims to make the case that Samuel Wesley's life opens a window into the idea of a 'Long Glorious Revolution'. The social, political, and ecclesiastical upheaval of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688–1689, Gibson argues persuasively, 'was a process that continued well into the eighteenth century': Samuel Wesley's many personal struggles, his family and parish life, prove to be domestic and local instances of national theological and political events, most obviously (as the subtitle makes clear) the waning of Tory influence and the rise of Whig influence on English life.

The book begins with Wesley's decision to conform to the Church of England in 1684 was a decision that set a trajectory for his subsequent theology and political life. Wesley was not the only person raised in a Dissenting family who made the decision to conform, but while some made that decision because it opened up opportunities for professional advancement, Wesley's decision seems rooted in principle. Wesley's disillusionment with the quality of the Dissenting Academies, where he would likely have studied had he not conformed, has been advanced as one explanation on the basis of Wesley's later attack on them. But Gibson shows that Wesley spent three months considering his decision, before concluding that his exclusion from the established Church was groundless. The Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689 occurred at an important juncture in Wesley's life, who swore allegiance to James II before he was made deacon and to William and Mary before he was ordained priest. For Wesley, this was not an easy decision, but the fact that William and Mary were Protestant, and that Mary was as much a Stuart as her deposed brother meant that, once made, there was no looking back. Chapter 2 deals with Wesley's relationship to Oxford University. On the one hand (as his sons would later conclude), the godlessness of the university was irksome; but on the other, his links with the university would become important in later life. Chapter 3 deals with Wesley's desire to renovate the religious life of his parish, including establishing there a local branch of the SPCK. In this case, as in Wesley's work as a poet, in spite of the attempt in the book to deal with Samuel Wesley in his own right, it is not hard to see the influence of his interests and gifts on his sons John and Charles.

In Chapter 4, Gibson examines Wesley's imprisonment for debt for four months in 1705. While true that his large family, poor relationships

in his parish (in one instance it appears someone in his parish may have killed a number of Wesley's cattle in an attempt to drive him out), and poor money management were undoubtedly factors, Gibson convincingly argues that moves to imprison him were politically motivated. Wesley's support for Tory candidates in the election of 1705 almost certainly lay behind the spiteful actions of his Whig creditors in having him arrested. In Chapter 5, the relationship between Wesley, a Lincolnshire parish priest, and his bishop between 1705 and 1712 is explored. In his letters, Wesley oscillates between Uriah Heap-like humility and theologically principled efforts to argue his case, for example, for stricter enforcement of disciplinary measures against Dissenters and against moral turpitude. It was a correspondence that got off on a poor footing (the first letter was from prison – a bad look for a clergyman hoping to impress his new boss). But it is not impossible that Wesley had some influence on Wake, whose later Tory sympathies would make his tenure as Archbishop of Canterbury difficult in an era of Whig ascendancy.

Chapter 6 treats Wesley's relatively prominent role in the Church of England Convocation from 1710 to 1715, during which he resisted, with some temporary success, more Latitudinarian tendencies in his Church. Chapter 7 deals with the marriage of Samuel and Susannah, in which, for a period, Susannah's unwillingness to pray for William III (who as a non-juror, she considered illegitimate as king) led Samuel to make an ill-considered oath to keep from the marriage bed unless she begged for divine pardon for her error. Even, then, in this most intimate space, politics was a powerful presence. A similar political aspect is even present in the book's final chapter, which concerns the haunting of the Epworth Rectory by a 'Jacobite' poltergeist nicknamed 'old Jeffrey', whose activities were apparently especially provoked by prayers for the King. Gibson again embeds this colorful incident in a political context, of Whig-Latitudinarian skepticism towards witchcraft and the supernatural and of corresponding Tory views of the lively reality of the supernatural.

Gibson's highly readable, historically sure-footed and insightful book succeeds in casting light on a neglected period in the history of the Church of England and on the impact on ecclesial and domestic life of the events of the Long Glorious Revolution.

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