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JOHN WESLEY AND HISTORY

JEREMY BLACK

ABSTRACT

This article considers John Wesley as a historian through his "Concise History of England." Wesley’s History, which has been neglected by scholars, offers a religious account of history. It adopts a biographical approach while making moral assessments. Wesley focused on monarchy and their personalities while bringing vice and virtue to the forefront. His History has resonances with Bolingbroke’s Toryism. Wesley explores the ‘genius of the nation’ as a factor in conflict and colonial expansion. His interest in overseas military conflicts can be seen as one of the ways in which Tory interest and ideas were maintained.

Keywords: Wesley, History, Reformation, Charles I, Toryism

John Wesley’s History of England is best discussed not in terms of the writings of famous historians who were his contemporaries, notably Edward Gibbon, David Hume, and William Robertson; it is more fruitful to see it as an important instance of the more frequent and populist type of historical publication during the century. The scholarly coverage of Wesley’s lengthy historical work is limited. Aside from a very short piece in 1900 on Wesley’s strong and lengthy defence of the reputation of Mary Queen of Scots, a piece critical of his work as an historian,’ the History has been essentially ignored. Thomas Herbert did little for it by writing in 1940 that ‘as a history his book is of course utterly

This article is the text of the annual Wesley Lecture delivered at Lincoln College, Oxford on 25 May 2016. I am most grateful to Bill Gibson both for his friendly encouragement and for commenting on earlier drafts.

BEAUTY IN CREATION

John Wesley’s Natural Philosophy

DAVID RAINNEY

ABSTRACT

John Wesley’s compendium on natural philosophy is comparable to a second book of revelation about God; the first book is scripture. In light of this, scripture can only function as a hermeneutic for creation; it is not a textbook for the discovery of creation. Wesley used the language of Thomas Aquinas to explain that there is a revealed cause and effect, which leads to a First Cause. With this understanding, creation reveals a beauty that is derivative from God and this type of beauty is an interconnected relationship within all of creation. Because of humanity’s limitation of knowledge, empiricism cannot assume a primary source of knowledge for natural philosophy since it can become a misleading source. Natural philosophy, as a result, remains its own objective source of knowledge.

Keywords: creation, beauty, book of creation, First Cause, empiricism

John Wesley believed that the Christian faith was ‘plain and intelligible’. This conviction he affirmed as he drew to a close his five volumes on natural philosophy. The Trinity was a scriptural objective truth; Christ provided salvation for all humanity and the Holy Spirit was the source of sanctification. For Wesley

A version of this article was presented as the eleventh annual Manchester Wesley Research Centre Lecture, Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, UK, June 2015.

AN EARLY METHODIST REVIVAL IN THE WEST INDIES

Insights from a Neglected Letter of 1774

ROBERT GLEN

ABSTRACT

In 1773, Francis and Mary Gilbert travelled from England to Antigua to visit Francis’s brother, the planter Nathaniel Gilbert III. After the couple arrived, they helped to promote one of the earliest Methodist revivals in the Caribbean. By the time the Gilberts returned to England in 1775, the island’s Methodist membership had increased by more than threefold. Because it was so poorly documented, however, the revival has received little attention. This article presents a full transcription of a manuscript letter on the revival written by Mary Gilbert in August 1774 and discusses the significance of the information it contains.

Keywords: Antigua, Mary Gilbert, Francis Gilbert, revivals, missions

The religious awakening that swept over Antigua from late 1772 to early 1775 was one of the earliest Wesleyan Methodist revivals in the West Indies, and as such, it deserves to be regarded as an event of considerable significance in the history of transatlantic Methodism. Because it was so poorly documented by contemporaries, however, it has been little studied or even noticed. By considering a letter that an English woman, Mary W. L. Gilbert, wrote in the midst of the revival, that neglect can now be remedied. Gilbert’s letter furnishes valuable new information on this religious outpouring and, at the same time, provides additional insights into her notable career, as well as that of her husband, Francis.
A LOCAL STUDY OF THE DYNAMICS
OF WESLEYAN METHODIST REVIVAL IN
NORTH CUMBRIA, 1840–1920

EMMA RACHEL BRAY

ABSTRACT
This article examines the internal dynamics of revival in Wesleyan Methodism in north Cumbria in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It seeks to identify whether those who were converted in specific revivals were drawn from within the existing Methodist community or from outside. In one example, Sunday scholars’ rolls were used in conjunction with an exercise in household penetration to show that momentum for the revival took hold among those already participating on the fringes of a Wesleyan society. It will be argued that revival remained popular in these Cumbrian Methodist societies into the twentieth century.

Keywords: Wesleyan Methodism, revival, Cumbria, Matterdale, Patterdale

Revival may operate in two ways: its effect may be felt beyond the fringes of existing congregations, bringing outsiders in, or it may capture those already participating on the periphery of a religious group, motivating them to take a fuller spiritual role in a congregation with which they have already been loosely involved. Reconstructing the operation of historical revivals, however, is problematic because the dynamics of revival are often opaque; even the occurrence of a revival may not have been referred to specifically in contemporary documents. The challenge for historians is to lay bare the internal dynamics of revival by finding methods to identify the converts and discover whether they came from outside or inside the wider congregation. It has been argued that to comprehend the true nature of revival, focus must be shifted from
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The Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History

The Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History is a research centre of Oxford Brookes University which embodies the relationship between the University and the trustees of the former Westminster College, Oxford. The Centre is home to important resources, including the Wesley Historical Society Library and a number of archive and art collections, including the Methodist Collection of Modern Art. The Centre offers a small number of visiting research fellowships each year to enable scholars to come to Oxford to use its resources. The Centre also has a number of research students working in the broad field of religious history and culture. It also sponsors lectures, conferences, and other research activity. For more information go to: http://history.brookes.ac.uk/Research/Centre-for-Methodism-and-Church-History/ and the Centre's blog: https://ocmch.wordpress.com or contact the Centre's Director, Professor William Gibson: w gibson@brookes.ac.uk
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