



HISTORIES OF BRITISH ART

1660-1735 RECONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION

ABSTRACT: PETER FORSAITH

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'Protestantism, piety and portraiture: religion and painting in times of transition'

Not only in art but in the religious life of England, 1660-1735 was a time of transition. The Restoration effectively marked the demise of Puritanism, actualised by the 'Great Ejection' of 1662, while the 1689 'Glorious Revolution' signalled increasing religious toleration. Churchmen became polarised between 'high-church' and 'latitudinarian'. By 1735 had come the first stirrings of the Methodist movement, arguably the most significant Protestant development since the Reformation.

Characterised in the song 'The Vicar of Bray', this transition might be narrated less satirically through the life of Samuel Wesley (1662-1735), the father of John and Charles. Although raised a Puritan, the son and grandson of two clergymen who lost their livings in 1662, Wesley became and remained a high churchman whose views helped to shape emergent Methodism.

This paper will use Wesley as its starting point, to map the transitional process in religion, but centrally focus on two near contemporary and influential texts near the end of the period. Jonathan Richardson, *Two Discourses* (1719) and William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728) will be used to explore similarities and contrasts in painterly and religious perceptions of character and identity. In particular it will consider Richardson's writing 'On Grace and Greatness' and will argue that an understanding of his theory must take full account of the belief systems and religious views which were integral to Richardson and to the society and times in he which lived. Previous commentators have tended to consider this area in terms of purely humanitarian enlightenment thought; this paper will challenge that view.