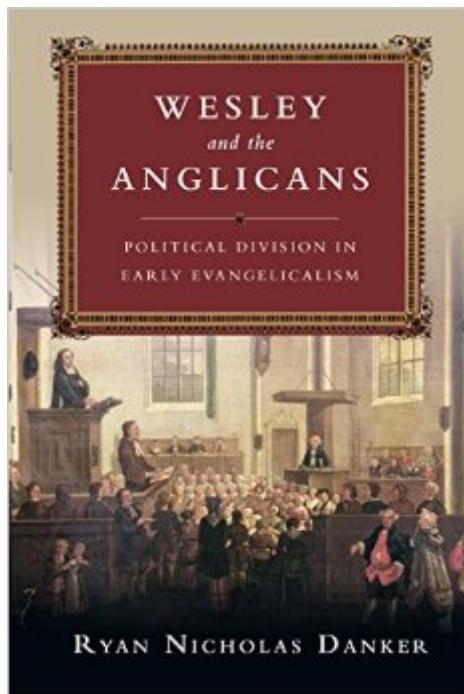


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Wesley And The Anglicans: Political Division In Early Evangelicalism



Synopsis

Why did the Wesleyan Methodists and the Anglican evangelicals divide during the middle of the eighteenth century? Many would argue that the division between them was based narrowly on theological matters, especially predestination and perfection. Ryan Danker suggests, however, that politics was a major factor throughout, driving the Wesleyan Methodists and Anglican evangelicals apart. Methodism was perceived to be linked with the radical and seditious politics of the Cromwellian period. This was a charged claim in a post-Restoration England. Likewise Danker explores the political force of resurgent Tory influence under George III, which exerted more pressure on evangelicals to prove their loyalty to the Establishment. These political realities made it hard for evangelicals in the Church of England to cooperate with Wesley and meant that all their theological debates were politically inflected. Rich in detail, here is a book for all who seek deeper insight into a critical juncture in the development of evangelicalism and early Methodism.

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Customer Reviews

Since I have become a pastor of a federated church, I have tried to develop more knowledge about the function of denominations and their history. By far, my biggest learning curve has been trying to understand the "people called Methodist", even though I am told I was baptized as a Methodist as an infant. In particular, I have tried to understand John Wesley, Methodism's founder, from an impartial perspective. I am fascinated by Wesley's evangelistic fervor, and his ability to combine compassionate ministry with a deep heart for evangelism. On the other hand, Wesley's writings

were so extensive that quoting him becomes a kind of spiritual Rorschach test, with people plucking a quote from Wesley here and there to validate and at times enforce their own point of view. Danker adds a lot to understanding Wesley in a more meaningful way, by understanding his ministry in the context of larger ministry movements taking place in England and the colonies at the time. In Wesley and the Anglicans Dr. Ryan Danker attempts to prove that Wesleyan Methodism's incompatibilities with Anglican Evangelicalism had to do with political ideology as well as theological differences. Wesley's Aldersgate experience puts him in the context of the revivalism of the evangelical moment of his time. His creating a separate structure of organizing believers from the Church of England makes him unique. He was more Anglican than separatists, but by creating a separate structure to disciple persons that worked outside of Anglican control, he was also seen as dangerous by both ecclesiastical and political powers. Throughout his book, Danker develops a new understanding of Wesley from the political currents of the times, and how they were related to religious concerns.

Ryan Nicholas Danker teaches about the history of Christianity and Methodism at Wesley Theological Seminary. Wesley and the Anglicans is about John Wesley's relationship with the Anglican church of England, which was the established church. Danker argues that the split between John Wesley and the Anglican evangelicals in England was largely political rather than theological. According to Danker, Methodism was widely viewed as subversive, and unpleasant memories lingered about the English Civil War, in which religion played a significant role. As the English government under George III cracked down on people deemed to be religious dissidents, evangelicals were pressured to adhere to the Establishment. That contributed to the rupture between Wesley and Anglican evangelicals. Danker acknowledges religious reasons for the disputes among the Wesleys, the Anglicans, and the Anglican evangelicals, for religious convictions had political ramifications. There were Anglicans who feared John Wesley's emphasis on having a conversion experience, thinking that this encouraged Christians to look down on their Anglican spiritual leaders as unconverted. Yet, Wesley's understanding of conversion was influenced by Anglicanism, and he initially saw Methodism as a reformist movement within the Anglican church. But Wesley's vision could not be contained within Anglican confines. Anglicanism divided England up into parishes, and people were to be loyal to their local parish. Wesley, however, viewed the entire world as his parish. Methodist preachers roamed the countryside and were considered to be in competition with the Anglican clergy. Many Anglicans opposed the Methodist preachers serving communion, believing that the church was the body authorized to administer the sacraments.

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