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## “Judging Critically of Divine Providences”: Gilbert Burnet’s *History of the Reformation* and the writing of contingent history

In the midst of the profound political and religious transformation that characterized the Glorious Revolution in England in the 1680s and 1690s, Bishop Gilbert Burnet wrote his multi-volume *History of the Reformation of the Church of England*. Burnet was vital to the development of the settlement of church and state following the ascension of William and Mary to the throne of England, helping form the modern liberal nationalism that we associate with modernity. He is often seen as writing one of the first modern histories, one that had perspective, but which attempted to be evidence and source-based. However, it has been increasingly pointed out that in spite of his attempt to live up to the early Enlightenment ideas regarding evidence, he was also deeply providential.

This paper argues that while Burnet did believe that God worked in and through history in a providential manner, what he meant by that was more nuanced than the providentialist history of the sixteenth century Protestant historians such as John Foxe. Specifically, Burnet had a honed sense of contingency, arguing that things could have (and sometimes should have) gone differently, even in the development of the Protestant movement within England. He had a strong sense of *real politic*, and saw earthly and human causation in much of the events of the Reformation, even though he thought God was working through such weak human vessels and their actions. He overtly contrasted his view with those who thought that God caused everything or that all events were supernatural. In this way, while he was absolutely attempting to give God glory for what He had done in history, and calling attention to His Providence, it is still important to recognize Burnet’s innovation in his shift to evidence-based history, focused on human as well as divine causation.