

Foreword

This first book-length study of Benjamin Hoadly provides a welcome and much-needed scholarly counterweight to the contemporary interest in Tory, Jacobite, and Nonjuror history. Through a deep, sympathetic, and sustained analysis of Hoadly's thought, we find here a convincing account of the Whig side of the leading debates of late Stuart and early Hanoverian England. Indeed, a measure of William Gibson's achievement is that he not only revives Hoadly's reputation, rendering a compelling portrait of a faithful churchman and a gifted controversialist, he also illumines the political and religious thought of Hoadly's opponents as well; the polemics of Charles Leslie, Francis Atterbury, and Henry Sacheverell are rendered freshly intelligible through Hoadly's mind. Based on the author's extensive reading in manuscript and printed sources – Gibson has examined the relevant manuscripts in some thirty archives – this biography convincingly reintroduces readers to the Whig understanding of the Revolution of 1689, and in keeping with recent scholarship, it demonstrates Hoadly's dependence on John Locke.

As a populariser of Locke, Hoadly disseminated Locke's ideas on religious toleration and civil government, and he thereby contributed to the more widespread acceptance of the right of private judgement and contract theory. But Hoadly grounded liberty of conscience more in the Reformation principle of the unfettered interpretation of Scripture than in natural rights. His was a reasonable Christianity, neither rationalist nor Deist (though he counted Thomas Chubb among his friends), and yet remarkably, he insisted on the value of an established church and the obligation of all Christians to seek unity. In addition to this unusual breadth of vision, Hoadly also made a distinctive contribution to the campaigns of the mid-1730s to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts and his writings later inspired Francis Blackburne in the movement to obtain relief from subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles. Through a nuanced portrayal of shifting political contexts, Gibson convincingly accounts for how Hoadly could change his mind on the necessity of religious tests and at the same time remain

consistent with his political and ecclesiastical principles.

The book also provides new and interesting details about Hoadly's collaborative efforts with such notable figures as Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele. The author puts poetry and portraiture to good use as well: Gibson seems to have found all the allusions to Hoadly in the prose of Jonathan Swift and the verse of Alexander Pope, as well as those in the popular broadsides and the less memorable doggerel of the daily press. Hoadly's friendships with William Hogarth and Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, enliven the text, and Gibson is especially deft in his handling of court connections, as for example, in his account of Hoadly's reception at Blenheim. The author has an excellent ear for the pithy, salient quote that nicely captures the flavour of the era. This is intellectual history at its finest in that Gibson places religious and political ideas in the context of the practice of politics and patronage, family history, social thought – Hoadly understood "the people" as a much broader category than the propertied elites – literature, and international diplomacy.

Now for the first time we have a connected account of Hoadly's own views on the controversies that made him famous (and sent shock waves through the remaining century), from the debate over Convocation, to the Sacheverell affair, to the Bangorian controversy. This study provides a fine treatment of Hoadly's impact on American political and religious thought and the impact which his publications had in Ireland and Switzerland. The book handily sustains the dual thesis that Hoadly was an Enlightenment thinker of considerable distinction and that the central objective in his life was the reuniting of Protestants in England. Hoadly's effort to bring the Dissenters back into the Anglican Church is creatively illustrated by the strategic use to which he put the diocese of Winchester, in Gibson's phrase, a 'latitudinarian miniature'. In brief, Benjamin Hoadly emerges from this important study as a more faithful churchman, a more loyal friend, and a better politician than even the best scholars had previously thought. Hoadly's understanding of the invisible character of the church as a free association of people and the importance of the sincerity of faith imaginatively foreshadowed modern denominationalism and the eventual acceptance of religious pluralism. This book demonstrates that through a distinguished, if controversial career of some sixty years duration, Hoadly was, in Gibson's words, 'the most powerful, popular and prolific Whig writer of the early eighteenth century'.

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