Introduction

I first encountered Bishop Hoadly whilst I was an undergraduate, and was astonished by the usual accounts of him. A bishop who shamelessly wrote partisan tracts for the government of the day, who didn't even visit his first diocese, who was typical of craven and corrupt bishops in holding four dioceses during his episcopate, and whose theology was sufficiently low to attract the suggestion that he was an agnostic must indeed have been a phenomenon. My attraction to such a reprobate diminished initially as I discovered that, in each case, these claims were untrue or anachronistic. In time, I came to see Hoadly as far from the outrageously colourful knave whose low reputation lit up seminars. The more I encountered Hoadly, the more he seemed to be a conscientious churchman with a consistent and coherent message; a bishop who had been swamped by two centuries and more of invective from High Church sympathisers with the Tory Tractarian cause. The latter had formed the establishment in Church History from the nineteenth century, and had successfully obscured Hoadly as a man and as a churchman. Indeed even such excellent works as G.V. Bennett's *Tory Crisis in Church and State* sustained the position of Hoadly's opponents. All that was left was a view of Hoadly through the lens of his opponents. It was as if I was seeing Charles I through Cromwell's account of him.

Hoadly did himself no favours, of course. Evidence for revising his reputation and work was not easily found. A search of the diocesan record offices at Bangor, Hereford, Salisbury, Winchester and in London turned up hardly any personal papers. It is our misfortune that Hoadly possessed a prodigious memory; he had no need to keep correspondence, and routinely burnt it. Such was Hoadly's memory that during the Bangorian controversy he could repeatedly contradict those opponents who mis-quoted him. And 40 years later, when Fournier attempted to extort £8,000 from him, the elderly Hoadly could recall each meeting and communication he had had with him. This extraordinary memory created a problem

for historians: surviving Hoadly letters are very rare. His son's massive three volume *Life and Works of Benjamin Hoadly*, published in 1773, suggests that the elderly Bishop Hoadly was surprised that his early letters to Lady Sundon had survived, and was 'uneasy' given the fulsome expressions of affection to her they contained. Perhaps therefore Hoadly had also been determined to leave no personal papers behind. The Archive of St Cross College, Winchester, where John Hoadly was the Master, has only recently been saved from the mouldering muniment room and transferred to the Hampshire Record Office. This was the last hope that some of the Bishop's papers might have survived in his son's papers. But it contained none of Bishop Hoadly's correspondence. So, with the exception of the 40 letters to Lady Sundon at the Beinecke Library at Yale University, no significant collection of Hoadly's papers appears to have survived. This has encouraged me, wherever possible, to allow Hoadly to speak for himself and opens me to the charge of over-long quotation. However, let me assure the reader that it was only too painful to have already excised over 20,000 words of Hoadly's from an earlier draft. Hoadly was a prolific writer and, though prone to prolixity, it seems only fair to Hoadly and to the reader that the opportunity to see the man through his writing should be grasped. An anonymous reader for a publisher commented that some material was included 'primarily because sources exist' and this is a fair comment. Original material on and by Hoadly is so rare that I have included much that illuminates his life where it has been possible to track it down.

I have perhaps laid myself open to the common biographer's affliction of having become captivated by my subject. There is no doubt that Hoadly was an extraordinary individual: determined, tenacious, intelligent, ambitious and thoroughly human. The process of writing this book made him more of a hero to me than he had been previously. His emphasis on liberty of conscience, sincerity of belief and the need for harmony between people of differing beliefs are views that are enormously powerful and attractive to the twenty-first century mind. It is difficult therefore not to be anachronistic in bringing these views to bear in writing about Hoadly. This is one of the reasons why I have sought to allow Hoadly's opponents considerable space in this work. They too have a voice that needs to be heard if we are to reach a balanced view of Hoadly.

The other consequence of the absence of Hoadly's papers is that this book is not a biography of Hoadly. Nor is it a detailed theological analysis of his thought, this has been attempted elsewhere and such

a study would need to be three or four times the length of this book.[1] It would also necessitate long trails down the more arcane pathways of early eighteenth century theology. Such a prospect has defeated more than one historian. Henry Hallam, writing his *Constitutional History of England* in the late nineteenth century, felt overwhelmed by the weight of words. He confessed after ploughing through 'forty or fifty tracts and consuming a good many hours on the Bangorian controversy, I should find some difficulty in stating with precision the propositions in the debate.'[2] There have been times when I have shared Hallam's bewilderment. Consequently I have sought to make this book a fresh appreciation of Hoadly's life and work in eighteenth century religion. Hoadly wrote, and stimulated responses in, hundreds of sermons, tracts and poems. It is inconceivable that most English people during his lifetime did not know of him. Sacheverell reputedly sold 40,000 copies of his inflammatory 1709 sermon, and if half a dozen people read each one, his work directly reached over five percent of the population of the country. If this is so, how many more read Hoadly's works, which poured in torrents from the press in the half century after 1703? During the Bangorian debate individual tracts were for the first time routinely printed in their thousands and clearly reached a mass readership. It was not just through a widespread Anglican readership that Hoadly's views reached such a large audience. Dissenting preachers also used his sermons in their own congregations. John Abernethy, at the Wood Street Congregation in Dublin, often read Hoadly's sermon on *The Nature of the Kingdom of Christ*.[3] Henry Grove of Taunton, the leading Dissenter, expounded the work of 'the incomparable Mr Locke, the excellent Bishop of Hereford [Hoadly] and other good hands.'[4]

While I have largely followed a chronological approach in this study of Hoadly, the narrative of his life has been restricted. Chapter One seeks to present the ways in which subsequent writers have treated Hoadly. It is largely the history of the demonising of Hoadly, at least in English history; though in America his radical Whig views have tended to chime in accord with the USA's founding republican ideology. In this respect, Hoadly is one of the yardsticks by which republican America and monarchical Britain can be compared and delineated. Chapter Two traces Hoadly's early life and Puritan influences, including his education. Chapter Three covers the years in which, as a young London parson, Hoadly entered pulpit debates with Atterbury, Calamy and Blackall on comprehension, occasional conformity and the nature of political authority. Chapter Four traces Hoadly's responses to the Sacheverell sermon and to the writing of

the Non-juror Charles Leslie. This was a lean period for Hoadly, in which the Protestant succession seemed most gravely imperilled. Ironically, given the frequency with which Hoadly's sincerity has been impugned, these were the years in which he had the strongest motivation to abandon Latitudinarian Whiggery, but in which he made the most powerful expressions of it. Chapter Five considers the Bangorian sermon and its aftermath. This is a controversy that has overshadowed much of Hoadly's life and thought, and has left us with an unbalanced view of him. For Hoadly the Bangorian debate was only obliquely connected to his primary objective of the comprehension of Dissent in the Church of England. It may be that the sermon for which Hoadly is best known is one that only tangentially informs us of his thought. Chapter Six traces Hoadly's career from Bangor to Winchester, and considers his Britannicus letters. It also gives a flavour of Hoadly the patron and a growing figure at Court. Finally Chapter Seven covers Hoadly at Winchester, where he took the opportunity to give effect to his liberal Anglican aspirations. He also engaged with the issue of the sacrament of Holy Communion, and, as so often before, he pulled down the exaggerated sacerdotal claims of the High Churchmen.

There are two principal themes in this book. First, Hoadly was an Anglican reformer, who stood in the tradition that stretched back through Tenison and Chillingworth to Hooker and Cranmer and forward to Blackburne and Watson. Moreover Hoadly was not the destructive theological and ecclesiastical nihilist that he has been portrayed as. Hoadly the reformer sought to recast the Church of England as a truly national Church that would embrace all Protestants, rather than excluding those who could not conform to restrictive articles, liturgy or priestly dogma. He sought to re-orient the Eucharist to its original Cranmerite commemoration, free from excluding sacramentalist claims. His plans for the Church would have focused faith onto scripture rather than Church teaching and dogma and thereby handed authority to the readers of the Bible. Such a broad Church would have restored Anglicanism to its original conception and stripped away the encrustations of High Church traditions and dogma. The implications of this were that Hoadly sought to reverse the decisions of the Hampton Court and Savoy Conferences, and the unsuccessful attempt at Comprehension in 1689. Perhaps this was too ambitious an objective, and had but a slim chance of success. But Hoadly was nothing if not ambitious for the Church, as he was for his parishioners and himself. But his ambition bore some fruit in the Diocese of Winchester, which became a Latitudinarian enclave

during his episcopate.[5] Perhaps the resistance of the Church of England to the broadening of its boundaries, as Hoadly sought, was a cause of its gradual erosion as the national Church in the eighteenth century. Certainly, unlike Charles Leslie or Francis Atterbury, Hoadly sought to ensure that the Church of England remained erastian, established by law, engaged in religio-politics and wholly identified with the British State at home and abroad.

The second theme of this book is Enlightenment. Hoadly presaged the English Enlightenment. He did so in two ways. He promoted those features of religion that were intrinsically 'enlightened', such as rationalism in matters of faith, sincerity as a cornerstone of belief and the promotion of a society in which the end of religion and politics was the happiness of its people. By its nature, Hoadly's emphasis on the right of the individual to reach a judgement on scripture and on the validity of sincerely held beliefs tended towards equality between men of all classes. And sincerity of belief was predicated on rational judgement rather than wholesale conformity to articles of faith. These were all foundations of the Enlightenment in England. He also added immeasurably to the discourse on the nature and origins of government and authority in Church and State, one of the central intellectual planks of the European and English Enlightenment. Thus Hoadly contributed as much to the foundations of the Enlightenment in England as Locke and Newton. Secondly, Hoadly formed a conduit through which the ideas of Locke and thinkers like Hooker and Descartes entered the mainstream of English religion and politics. While historians have avidly sought evidence of the emergence of Locke's ideas, they have tended to overlook Hoadly.[6] But through Hoadly's enormous readership, eighteenth century English society had contact with the ideas that inspired the Enlightenment.

A claim can be made for Hoadly that draws on the current fashion for historical counter-factualism. It can best be derived from the question, what would have happened without Hoadly? Without Hoadly's consistent and unremitting defence of the Glorious Revolution, the attacks on it by Atterbury, Blackall and Sacheverell would have gained greater purchase. If Hoadly had not challenged the Non-jurors' view of the nature of authority and the legitimacy of resistance, their voices would have added to High Church sacerdotalism. Without the emphasis that Hoadly placed on sincerity and the right of individual judgement religion, and perhaps politics also, would have been constrained and fettered by the weight of institutional authority. Without the Bangorian debate, the High Church accrual of claims to tradition and authority on

behalf of the Church and the priesthood would have gone unchecked. Without Hoadly's *Plain Account of the Lord's Supper*, the eighteenth century Anglican view of the Eucharist would have set an even greater distance between the Church and Dissent. And without Hoadly's example at Winchester, there would have been no illustration of the success the Church could achieve when it converged with Dissent. Perhaps as a consequence Dissent would have grown rather than declined in the years after 1710. There would have been little encouragement for Dissenters like Thomas Secker and Joseph Butler and a host of others to conform to the Church of England.[7] As the Church of England, unrestrained by Hoadly, narrowed its appeal the support it attracted would have diminished, and the intellectual breadth and vitality of the Church would have declined. Deism, Dissent, Methodism and Unitarianism would have faced a weaker, marginalized opponent. In short, Hoadly's achievement within the Church of England was to withstand the narrowing and excluding instincts of High Churchmen and to deny them a trajectory that sharply diverged from moderate Trinitarian Dissent. By Hoadly's death the Church of England was becoming a wide river, embracing many different streams and with the strength to move forward undiminished by the religious weirs and rapids that it faced. Hoadly's great achievement was to ensure that the banks of this river were wide apart. Francis Blackburne, one of Hoadly's successors in the Latitudinarian tradition anticipated this claim. During the debate on the Feather's Tavern Petition in 1771-3, Blackburne wrote that,

> There is a certain sort of men appearing among us at particular intervals, who, when they get a New Testament into their hands, will be telling the world what they find in it, though it is ever so contrary to the *bon ton*. Among others of this disposition may be reckoned . . . Benjamin Hoadly [who] is supposed to have greatly contributed, in his day, to keep the hierarchical maxims of the four last years [of Queen Anne's reign], much in the shade by confronting them with the genuine documents of the sacred writings.

Blackburne pointed out that the Latitudinarian clergy of his own day had built on Hoadly's views.[8] Where would they have been without the challenge that Hoadly made to Sacheverell, Atterbury and others?

Perhaps historians should also consider what might have happened if Hoadly had been even more successful, and had drawn more clergy and bishops to his point of view. There are occasional flashes of evidence of what a full-blooded Hoadleian Church of

England could have become. In the diocese of Bath and Wells, a stronghold of Dissent and nonconformity, from the middle of the eighteenth century heterodox and evangelical clergy were welcomed and found a refuge similar to that offered by Hoadly in the diocese of Winchester.[9] Similarly in the Church in Wales, Methodism remained within the Anglican Church until well after the secession in England; Anglican clergy complemented prayerbook services with Methodist meetings, and it was only when bishops forced their clergy to surrender their involvement with Methodism that the breach occurred in Wales. A Hoadleian Church of England would have embraced these features and would have welcomed them. It would have rejected the exclusivity of bishops like George Lavington of Exeter and provided places of worship for those who in industrial England turned away from the Church.