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Bangor Revisited: Bishop Benjamin Hoadly and Enlightenment Ecclesiology

Abstract

As a Whig and a latitudinarian, Bishop Benjamin Hoadly of Bangor (1676-1761) was a persistent critic of any and all things Tory. His sermon "The Nature of the Kingdom, or Church, of Christ," preached before King George I in 1717, touched upon the political and theological controversies that followed in the wake of the Glorious Revolution. It also forwarded a radical ecclesiological schema: effectively arguing that the Church of England lacked real moral authority, he advocated for its subsumption under the state's own auspices. An analysis of Hoadly's sermon, as well as his conduct throughout the ensuing Bangorian controversy, will demonstrate that the Enlightenment extremism ascribed to him by some of his contemporaries was a not altogether unfair characterization of his thought.

Keywords

anglican, sermon, bangorian, liberalism, whig

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The decades following the Glorious Revolution saw the Church of England roiled by theological controversy. Parliament's invitation of a non-Anglican monarch to the throne, the continued presence of nonconforming Protestants throughout the nation, and new strains of liberal thought all threw the Church's relationship with the state into question. In 1717 Bishop Benjamin Hoadly of Bangor entered the fray with a sermon that itself became the subject of intense debate. "The Nature of the Kingdom, or Church, of Christ" was more than a distillation of the bishop's Whig politics; its attack on the principle of religious coercion undermined the Church's very existence as a visible institution, and reduced religious authority to the conviction of private judgment. Radically modern in its ecclesiology, Hoadly's sermon illustrates the challenge posed by the English Enlightenment to preliberal ideas in both religion and politics.

Hoadly's reception in the academy has not been warm. Many scholars have either taken the side of his adversaries, pinning much of the blame for the eighteenth-century state's triumph over the Church on his influence, or have treated him only tangentially in relation to the broader issues of his day. Into these camps fall Edwin R. Bingham in the 1940s, political theorist Richard Ashcraft, and early modern historian John Gascoigne, among others.¹ An effort undertaken over the past two decades to rescue Hoadly from his associations with liberalism and from more

¹ William Bradford Gardner, "George Hickes and the Origin of the Bangorian Controversy," *Studies in Philology* 35, no. 1 (1942): 65-78; Edwin R. Bingham, "The Political Apprenticeship of Benjamin Hoadly," *Church History* 16, no. 3 (1947): 154-65; Pedro Thomas Meza, "The Question of Authority in the Church of England, 1689 to 1717," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 42, no. 1 (1973): 63-86; Richard Ashcraft and M.M. Goldsmith, "Locke, Revolution Principles, and the Formation of Whig Ideology," *The Historical Journal* 26, no. 4 (1983): 773-800; John Gascoigne, "The Unity of Church and State Challenged: Responses to Hooker from the Restoration to the Nineteenth-Century Age of Reform," *The Journal of Religious History* 21, no. 1 (1997): 60-79; William C. Watson, "Rethinking the Late Stuart Church: The Extent of Liberal Anglicanism, 1688-1715," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 70, no. 2 (2001): 143-68.

outrageous accusations of deism has sought to call these judgments into question. Susan L. Rutherford, Guglielmo Sanna, and especially William Gibson, Hoadly's first modern biographer, have laid most of the groundwork in this project.² While a more critical account of Hoadly's thought was undoubtedly necessary, the present study proposes a revision of the revision. There are many valuable insights to be gleaned from more recent contributions, but an analysis of "The Nature of the Kingdom" will demonstrate that the conclusions of earlier scholars were, in the main, correct. Insofar as it concerns his sermon's composition and the ensuing Bangorian controversy, it is not without reason that Hoadly has been cast as a radical. After briefly treating the issues that motivated Anglican thinkers between 1688 and 1716, we will see that Hoadly helps us not only to understand the early modern Church of England, but the broader separation of spiritual and temporal authority that accompanied the rise of modern political philosophy.

I. Setting the Scene: Nonjurors and Occasional Conformists

The questions that framed Hoadly's approach intimately linked religion with national politics, and the controversies that most informed "The Nature of the Kingdom" were rooted in the Glorious Revolution. Although it would secure Protestant hegemony on the throne, Parliament's invitation to William of Orange in 1688 precipitated a decades-long rift within the Church of England. In what came to be known as the nonjuring schism, seven Anglican bishops and nearly

² Susan L. Rutherford, "Reformation Principles: The Religious and Political Ideas of Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Northumbria at Newcastle, 2000); Rutherford, "Benjamin Hoadly: Sacramental Tests and Eucharistic Thought in Early-Eighteenth Century England," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 71, no. 4 (2002): 473-97; William Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate: Benjamin Hoadly, 1676-1761* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2004); Guglielmo Sanna, "Latitudinarian Politics and the Shadow of Locke," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 85, no. 2 (2016): 141-63.

four hundred priests refused to recognize the legitimacy of William III after his accession in 1689. These clerics were subsequently dismissed from their sees and parishes and replaced with churchmen loyal to the new regime.³ The nonjurors protested not because they endorsed James II's Roman Catholicism, but because they had already sworn allegiance to a rightfully crowned king. Though they were relatively small in number, the state's deprivation of their positions raised a number of concerns: How could Parliament depose the head of the Church of England, or interfere in a divinely-ordained hierarchy on the basis of political calculation?

George Hickes, a prominent nonjuring bishop, addressed these problems in his *Constitution of the Catholick Church*, published posthumously in 1716. The *Constitution* encapsulated the nonjurors' thick conception of the English Church and its relationship with the state: because James II was the lawful king and head of the Church at the time he was deposed, however odious may have been his popery, Hickes saw it as nothing short of blasphemy to name his successors in the prayers of the liturgy.⁴ In William Gibson's summation, Hickes held that "the Church was immune from the incursions of the State because it was Christ's body on earth, and its ministers were Christ's viceregents, who exercised independent authority over all men."⁵ If Anglican priests were the viceregents of Christ with authority in the earthly as well as the spiritual realm, then the Church could rightly stand above parliamentary dictate. By this logic it was the government, rather than the nonjurors, that had put itself in a state of schism when it deposed the sovereign and his faithful bishops.

³ Meza, "The Question of Authority in the Church of England, 1689 to 1717," 65.

⁴ Gardner, "George Hickes and the Origin of the Bangorian Controversy," 70-71.

⁵ Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate*, 139.

The *Constitution* also expressed the nonjurors' belief in the divine right of kings. For Hickes, "Principles are Principles, that is, they are very Strict and Rigid Things. They are like glass drops, you may easily break them, but you cannot bend them."⁶ Such strict and rigid principles included James I's famous doctrine that the sovereign's authority comes from God and is answerable to God alone, and must therefore be obeyed in all things pertaining to his rule. Adherence to divine right, of course, was not limited to a fringe of High Church schismatics; as the party that championed the prerogatives of the monarchy and the rights of the Church, the Tories also endorsed divine right and the concomitant doctrine of passive obedience. However, their acceptance of the Glorious Revolution demonstrates that their concerns were more political than theological. The nonjurors, on the other hand, would brook no compromise. They added to the Tories' rallying cries of "the Church in danger," a call throughout the early-eighteenth century to defend the Church of England from various political and doctrinal encroachments, but did so from the perspective of a remnant amidst an apostate people.⁷

The nonjurors justified their protest with appeals to Richard Hooker, the Elizabethan theologian who more than a century before them had formulated the theory that "the church and the commonwealth are personally one society."⁸ Hooker's influence proved so pervasive that much of early modern Anglican theology can be viewed as an extended commentary on his thought. Where the nonjurors were innovative with respect to older models of church-state relations was in their emphasis on the episcopacy in Church governance. While Hooker did not accord much importance to the bishops, the nonjurors held to the traditionally Roman Catholic

⁶ Gardner, "George Hickes and the Origin of the Bangorian Controversy," 73.

⁷ Meza, "The Question of Authority in the Church of England, 1689 to 1717," 63.

⁸ Gascoigne, "The Unity of Church and State Challenged," 76.

view that bishops were successors to the apostles and must be obeyed as such.⁹ Their ideal polity, then, would see Parliament and the rightful monarch work in tandem with the episcopate to ensure the peaceable submission of all Englishmen to the Church. Of course, this vision was complicated by the presence of nonconformists, as much in their own day as it had been in Hooker's. Their response was simply to bar non-Anglicans from public life, as it would have been inconceivable to allow heretics and radicals into the institutions that directed ecclesiastical life. This solution was another area of overlap between the nonjuring minority and the Tory mainstream, which was just as committed to enforcing an Anglican social order.

The Tories' willingness to exclude other Protestants from public life manifested itself most clearly during the controversy over occasional conformity. In the first two decades of the eighteenth century, occasional conformity was the habit among some nonconformists of receiving Holy Communion in the Church of England once a year in order to qualify for elected office. It was predictably denounced in nonjuring circles, but took on greater significance when Tories sought to end the practice by strengthening the Test and Corporation Acts in Parliament. Dating from the Restoration, the Acts ensured that officeholders were regular Anglican communicants and were therefore key in maintaining the Hookerian paradigm.¹⁰ Though in the early years of Queen Anne's reign their efforts were blocked by the Whigs, advocates of a strong Parliament and toleration for nonconformists, the Tories still managed to pass the Occasional Conformity Act of 1711 and place office-seeking Protestants under official censure.¹¹

⁹ Gascoigne, "The Unity of Church and State Challenged," 61-62.

¹⁰ Brent S. Sirota "The Occasional Conformity Controversy, Moderation, and the Anglican Critique of Modernity, 1700-1714," *The Historical Journal* 57, no. 1 (2014): 81.

¹¹ Sirota, "The Occasional Conformity Controversy, Moderation, and the Anglican Critique of Modernity, 1700-1714," 104.

It should be noted that the Act of 1711 was widely ignored, with the election of non-Anglicans continuing apace in most locales. Still, the nominal ban on occasional conformity reveals the extent to which Anglican ecclesiology was bound up with political concerns, and highlights a debate over religious toleration that implicated the nation's largest political factions. We have seen the perspective of religious traditionalists embodied in the Tories and the more extreme nonjurors, located on what might anachronistically be called the right; it was left to Benjamin Hoadly, a dedicated Whig and a latitudinarian, to spell out the antithesis to their theology.

II. "The Nature of the Kingdom"

George I, the first king of the House of Hanover, overwhelmingly favored latitudinarians in his episcopal appointments from his accession to the throne in 1714.¹² These clerics' "Broad Church" nomenclature indicates the goals of their intellectual project; also known as "latitude men," they sought to create a more moderate Anglicanism, a less narrow and exclusivist faith than that of the stuffy High Churchmen, and attempted to integrate Enlightenment thought with Christian revelation. Whereas the nonjurors were invariably Tories, the latitudinarians mostly supported the Whigs and by extension religious toleration.¹³ George I's pastoral tastes were a volte-face from those of his Stuart predecessor Queen Anne, who had preferred Tories and High Churchmen, and were certainly a boon to Hoadly. His appointment as Bishop of Bangor in 1715 was a reward for his consistent advocacy of the Whig cause, mostly carried out up to that point in the pages of political pamphlets.

¹² Watson, "Rethinking the Late Stuart Church," 145.

¹³ Rutherford, "Reformation Principles," 22.

Hoadly's erudition and rhetorical skill gained him influential friends surrounding the king, allowing him to preach before His Majesty on a number of occasions and express his views directly to the sovereign.¹⁴ Politicking did not cease with his new position—even as they neared the twilight of their relevance, the nonjuring schism and the occasional conformity controversy were still in the public consciousness when Hoadly took the miter, and he did not waste time in commenting on them. Much in the spirit of his older polemical writings, in 1716 he responded to Hickes' nonjuring manifesto with his *Preservative Against the Principles and Practices of the Nonjurors*, and in the following year he expanded on his treatise in a sermon delivered to the king. Preached on March 31, 1717 in the chapel of St. James's Palace, "The Nature of the Kingdom, or Church, of Christ" did more than rebut the nonjurors and make room for religious toleration: it forwarded a radical conception of the Church and pushed the boundaries of respectable latitudinarianism.

Centered on Christ's words in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world," Hoadly began his sermon with the commonsense observation that a word can often take on a different connotation than its original meaning.¹⁵ Working off this basis, he maintained that the Christian Church originally consisted only of those who recognized Jesus as the Messiah, or who "subjected themselves to Him, as their King, in the affair of Religion;" but now it clearly had much more to its name, with a visible institutional structure and precepts of its own.¹⁶ Hoadly reasoned that if Christ's kingdom is not of this world, then everything this-worldly must be stripped away from his Church in order to make a true account of it. His critique proceeded on

¹⁴ Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate*, 135.

¹⁵ Benjamin Hoadly, "The Nature of the Kingdom, or Church, of Christ" (sermon, St James's Palace, London, March 31, 1717), 3.

¹⁶ Hoadly, "The Nature of the Kingdom," 10.

two main fronts: first, on the role of human authority in mediating Christ's kingship, and secondly, on the role of the commandments in the Christian life.

As for the first subject, Hoadly offered a narrow interpretation of that Sunday's gospel: if Christ is king, then he *alone* is king, the "sole Law-giver to his Subjects, and himself the sole Judge of their Behaviour, in the Affairs of Conscience and Eternal Salvation."¹⁷ In this regard Jesus left no "visible, humane authority," no "Viceregents," no "Interpreters," and no "Judges," for if he had then the kingdom would be said to belong to men rather than to himself.¹⁸ This stands in obvious contrast with Hickee's robust conception of ecclesiastical sanction over both individual souls and society more broadly. Hoadly's denial of the same stemmed not only from his desire to preserve Jesus as the unique head of his Church, but from Christ's own example in the establishment of the moral law. Although it is necessary in "humane Society" for lawgivers to delineate the proper interpretation of the laws they pronounce, Hoadly held that Christ "never interposeth, since his first Promulgation of his Law, either to convey Infallibility... or to assert the true Interpretation of it, amidst the various and contradictory Opinions of Men about it."¹⁹ Such would obviously negate Hoadly's own pretensions to proper scriptural interpretation, but this point went unnoticed.

Having stripped the Church of all jurisdiction in matters of doctrine, Hoadly then spelled out his ideal for the Church's day-to-day affairs. Its lack of authority extended even to the moral life of the individual. Reiterating the absolute sovereignty of Christ over his people, Hoadly criticized those who "erect Tribunals, and exercise a Judgment over the Consciences of Men," or

¹⁷ Hoadly, "The Nature of the Kingdom," 11.

¹⁸ Hoadly, "The Nature of the Kingdom," 11-12.

¹⁹ Hoadly, "The Nature of the Kingdom," 12-13.

who “make any of their own Declarations, or Decisions, to concern and affect the State of Christ’s Subjects, with regard to the Favour of God.”²⁰ Traditional models of the Church’s teaching office, both Catholic and Protestant, have attempted to provide a moral framework whereby a believer can determine whether certain actions put him in a state of enmity or of friendship with God. Hoadly’s sermon was absent of any such notion—the conviction of individual conscience reigned supreme, with no external body able to make pronouncements of sin or virtue. On its face, this seems to betray a certain antinomianism, a despair that man can truly know the moral law. As with his earlier comments on doctrinal interpretation, though, nowhere did Hoadly apply his own standards to himself. He was more than willing to imply that those with claim to spiritual authority were usurpers to Christ’s throne, yet was content to arrogate moral authority to himself.

The second half of the sermon analyzed the nature of the divine law. Hoadly posited that the spiritual nature of the Church must necessarily manifest itself in “the Nature and End of the Laws of Christ,” as well as in those “Rewards and Punishments, which are the Sanctions of [Christ’s] Laws.”²¹ Since the commandments aim at happiness in the next life, Hoadly asserted that they have no relation whatsoever with earthly existence. The examples employed to illustrate this point are of a decidedly political character: just as Christ never interposes in the interpretation of his law, neither does he set “the Offices, or Glories, of this State,” “the pain of Prisons, Banishments, Fines, or any lesser and more Moderate Penalties,” or even “the much lesser Negative Discouragements that belong to Humane Society” within its scope.²² Were the

²⁰ Hoadly, “The Nature of the Kingdom,” 14.

²¹ Hoadly, “The Nature of the Kingdom,” 17.

²² Hoadly, “The Nature of the Kingdom,” 18.

state to take it upon itself to enforce the observance of the commandments, Hoadly again emphasized that Christ's unique authority would be undermined and his will defied.

Here the relevance to the controversy over occasional conformity and the place of non-Anglicans in English society is clear. Aside from his *Preservative* against the nonjurors, the sermon was not Hoadly's first entry into the particulars of the debate. In fact, one of his earliest political pamphlets was a defense of the latitudinarian bishops who had helped defeat an anti-occasional conformity bill in Parliament. Written during the War of Spanish Succession in 1703, he argued that a ban on occasional conformity would alienate the dissenting Protestants whose support was crucial to the nation's conflict with France.²³ No theology was invoked—only geopolitical calculation. The fact that fourteen years later he was able to provide a thirty-page scriptural exegesis to argue for the same principle should not in and of itself speak against Hoadly's sincerity. It does mean, though, that his argument for the illegitimacy of using “the Secular Arm, whenever the Magistrate should become Christian, to enforce [Christ's] Doctrines,” was a sure way to signal his Whig politics before the king.²⁴

The separation of doctrine from governance represents Hoadly's sermon at its most modern, for his conception of law encapsulated the Enlightenment's challenge to classical and medieval thought. Hoadly defined the commandments as “general Appeals” to three things: to the will of God; to God's “Nature, known by the Common Reason of Mankind;” and to “the imitation of that Nature, which must be our Perfection.”²⁵ To modern ears, a basic knowledge of God accessible by unaided human reason would likely be equated with the natural law theory

²³ Bingham, “The Political Apprenticeship of Benjamin Hoadly,” 156.

²⁴ Hoadly, “The Nature of the Kingdom,” 23.

²⁵ Hoadly, “The Nature of the Kingdom,” 17.

formulated by Aristotle and refined by Thomas Aquinas. However, by Hoadly's day the Scientific Revolution had already eroded confidence in Aristotelian physics, according to which an object seeks to attain a certain state so as to fulfil its purpose, rather than blindly obeying universal scientific laws. Consequently, early modern thinkers began to view the nature of things—both physical and metaphysical—with a new set of eyes.

In the eighteenth century, the older idea that creation behaves according to laws immanent within creation itself was replaced by the idea that such laws are an imposition on nature.²⁶ As Leo Strauss rightly noted, the step from a non-teleological natural science to a non-teleological anthropology is a short one indeed.²⁷ Hoadly could therefore identify “the Great End” of the Church and the observance of the commandments as “Happiness, after the short Images of it [are] over here below,” yet declare in the same breath that Christ's laws are “not of this World at all.”²⁸ Though he located man's perfection in the imitation of the divine nature, under the new theory of law this cannot meaningfully be said to be true. The law is in fact arbitrarily imposed, and thus cannot actually bring man to fulfillment—and so could safely be relegated out of this existence. While Hoadly may have spoken the same language as Aquinas, he clearly had something very different in mind.²⁹ His political convictions and his whole conception of the Church can be traced back to these presuppositions.

Hoadly's debt to John Locke, who perhaps more than any other single figure can be credited with forwarding a theory of natural law that renders its own ancient foundations unintelligible, is well documented. For instance, political theorists Richard Ashcraft and M.M.

²⁶ Gascoigne, “The Unity of Church and State Challenged,” 65.

²⁷ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 8.

²⁸ Hoadly, “The Nature of the Kingdom,” 25.

²⁹ Cf. *Summa theologiæ* Ia IIæ, q. 1-5 and q. 90-94.

Goldsmith note that Hoadly defended Lockean thought on just rebellion in a 1705 sermon before the Lord Mayor of London.³⁰ In a treatise from 1708, he also distinguished between the divine sanction of parental authority and the voluntary compact that makes up society, a clear reference to Locke's social contract theory.³¹ All of this corroborated and informed his Whig politics, which would have been impossible outside a contractualist framework. Italian historian Guglielmo Sanna has recently attempted to interpret Hoadly's oeuvre as a commentary on Hooker rather than Locke, but his efforts have been unconvincing. Although Hoadly was undoubtedly as receptive of Hooker as his contemporaries, Sanna has failed to demonstrate whether his political thought really owed more to Hooker than it did to Locke. Moreover, his analysis is entirely silent on "The Nature of the Kingdom" and its affinities with the liberal theories of natural law so important to Locke's epistemology.³²

Hoadly concluded "The Nature of the Kingdom" with a summary of everything he had presented to the congregation. The Church is the kingdom of Christ, who alone is its sovereign and who alone can be said to have legitimate spiritual authority over his subjects, lest men deprive him of any of his kingly right; and all who truly believe in him are his subjects, Anglican and nonconformist alike, so any religious coercion on the part of earthly authorities is contrary to his will. In short, Hoadly articulated precisely the opposite of everything Hickee and his nonjuring confreres stood for. The implications of his sermon were that the Church of England should not be thought of as a visible institution, should exercise epistemic humility in doctrine and discipline, and should leave its affairs in the hands of the state to prevent overzealous men

³⁰ Ashcraft and Goldsmith, "Locke, Revolution Principles, and the Formation of Whig Ideology," 786.

³¹ Bingham, "The Political Apprenticeship of Benjamin Hoadly," 156.

³² See Sanna, "Latitudinarian Politics and the Shadow of Locke."

from persecuting other Christians. In this he critiqued not only the nonjurors and the opponents of occasional conformity, but the whole spirit of the age that preceded him.

III. Controversy and Convocation

Reaction to such a radical indictment was swift. The debate that followed the sermon's publication, carried out in public letters and polemical treatises, came to be known as the Bangorian controversy after Hoadly's episcopal see of Bangor. One of the first responses came in May 1717 from Andrew Snape of Eton College. He argued that Hoadly's denial of the Church's moral authority would open the nation not only to nonconformists, but—perish the thought—to Catholics as well.³³ Snape was no nonjuror, but his reaction linked the twin bugbears of dissent and popery that were already paired in the schismatic mind. Other critics focused on Hoadly's doctrine of sincerity, the idea that beliefs arrived at through the processes of reason should be legitimized simply because they are dearly held.³⁴ Still others noted that an ill-defined sincerity would make the conception of the Church as a visible communion incoherent. Against these charges Hoadly claimed that in both his sermon and his earlier *Preservative*, what he described pertained to the “universal invisible church” rather than the Anglican Church in particular. However, this was not clear from either text, and the fact that he preached “The Nature of the Kingdom” before the head of the Supreme Head of the Church of England himself seems to speak against this explanation.³⁵

³³ Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate*, 152.

³⁴ Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate*, 181-83.

³⁵ Meza, “The Question of Authority in the Church of England, 1689 to 1717,” 84.

Though Sanna's interpretation of Hoadly and Locke has been found wanting, he does offer an important insight: that Hoadly was a "chameleon," who could baldly appeal to Enlightenment theories in the presence of other latitudinarians, and, conversely, to the plain historical truth of Scripture when attempting to persuade a nonbeliever.³⁶ This would explain both his comfort in advancing such an extreme ecclesiology before George I, who was known to be friendly to reason-minded clerics and other avatars of the Enlightenment, and his attempt to backpedal the more questionable portions of his sermon once it came under public scrutiny. It is little wonder why many scholars, even those more sympathetic to Hoadly, have conceded to his adversaries in painting him as unprincipled.³⁷ As historian John Gascoigne has written, Hoadly's position really was one of "thoroughgoing Erastianism," the doctrine of state supremacy over the Church, and his ecclesiology one "with which Hobbes would have found little to dispute."³⁸ His conduct during the Bangorian controversy did little to dispel these impressions.

Like the occasional conformity controversy and the nonjuring schism before it, the Bangorian controversy was tied up with political concerns. The question of convocation, an annual synod of Anglican clerics that met with the opening of every Parliament, came to directly involve Hoadly but had rankled High Churchmen since the Restoration. In 1664, the clergy exchanged the right to levy its own taxes for the right to vote in the House of Commons. Pedro Thomas Meza argues that this agreement "removed one of the remaining vestiges of the medieval concept of the clergy as a separate legal estate." Since the government now saw no financial incentive for the clergy to meet, the Convocation of Canterbury was ceremonially

³⁶ Sanna, "Latitudinarian Politics and the Shadow of Locke," 144.

³⁷ Rutherford, "Reformation Principles," 5.

³⁸ Gascoigne, "The Unity of Church and State Challenged," 63.

opened and then immediately prorogued in almost every Parliament till 1701.³⁹ Even in Hoadly's day, Tories felt that the latitudinarians favored by William III and George I blocked any real debate on matters of doctrine and prevented them from voicing their concerns before a formal deliberative body.

The High Churchmen were not entirely unjustified in their complaint. When the lower house of convocation drafted a bill of censure against Hoadly on May 3, 1717, charging him with the subversion of "all Government and Discipline in the Church of Christ on earth" and the reduction of "His Kingdom to a State of anarchy and Confusion," proceedings were tabled by the latitudinarian Archbishop of Canterbury, William Wake. This led to not just another episode of Tory dissatisfaction; thereafter convocation was consistently prorogued until 1852, leaving the Church of England without a real synod until the first Lambeth Conference in the 1860s. Meza notes that this was undertaken in order to save Hoadly, a favorite of the court, from official reproach. Moreover, the Bangorian controversy came precisely at the same time that Tories attempted to restore convocation as an independent Church court, making Hoadly's claims that he left the authority of the Church of England untouched rather suspect.⁴⁰ His tenor in the sermon and behavior throughout the Bangorian controversy demonstrate that his overriding concern lay with the triumph of Whig politics rather than the interests of the Church he served.

Conclusion: Hoadly and Modernity

Whatever the particulars of his sermon, it is worth stepping back to consider Hoadly's wider aims: in opposing the nonjurors' near-medieval conception of church-state relations, he

³⁹ Meza, "The Question of Authority in the Church of England, 1689 to 1717," 66.

⁴⁰ Meza, "The Question of Authority in the Church of England, 1689 to 1717," 84-85.

advocated for the toleration of religious minorities (or at least Protestant ones), and against the use of coercion in religious matters on the part of the state. For this he might rightly be celebrated today, if for nothing but our own distaste for repressive confessional states. Such is a characteristic that we moderns should be happy to find that we share with Hoadly. However, he was not entirely forthright about the intellectual justification for his vision. Candid among friends but reticent before critics, his latitudinarian logic in “The Nature of the Kingdom” could not be taken to its conclusions without undermining every notion of earthly moral authority, and his Lockean paradigm led him to propose a subservient political role for the Church of England. Even after accounting for partisan bias, it is understandable why his opponents—and why scholars through the late-twentieth century—would hold him up as a particularly extreme representative of Enlightenment thought in the Georgian Church.

Nevertheless, Hoadly enjoyed a long episcopate after the Bangorian controversy, serving in a number of sees across Great Britain until his death in 1760. Always a tireless proponent of Whig causes, his political writings went on to influence the Founding Fathers of the United States, and continue to be cited by American political theorists today.⁴¹ Of course, his career was not without fruit in his native isle. His anticipation of modern rhetoric surrounding religious liberty was paired with his favored status in the Court of St James’s, which in turn subsumed Anglican clerics’ foremost deliberative body under Parliament for a century and a half. Truly a fitting legacy for a man whose thought revealed the depth of liberalism’s rebuke to earlier models of Christian society.

⁴¹ Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate*, 34-37.

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