

Render unto Caesar: Ecclesiastical Politics in the Reign of Queen Anne. By R. Barry Leavis. Cambridge, UK: James Clarke & Co, 2022. x + 235pp. £70.00 cloth, £25.00 paper.

One might be struck by the uncharitableness of the brief historiographical introduction to R. Barry Leavis's *Render unto Caesar: Ecclesiastical Politics in the Reign of Queen Anne*. An early footnote lists the dozen or so twentieth-century biographies of Anglican bishops, many of them classics, through which much of our historical understanding of the eighteenth-century Church of England has been conveyed, only to cite their insufficient attention to politics. Another paragraph treating a handful of recent works in the religious history of eighteenth-century Britain suggests that their political coverage proceeded "without much depth" (5). The latter assessment, one supposes, is a matter of opinion to which any scholar is more than entitled. But the former is frankly incredible. One may vigorously dissent from the arguments in the likes of Norman Sykes's studies of William Wake or Edmund Gibson, or Gareth Bennett's *The Tory Crisis in Church and State*, but it would be hard to fault them for their indifference to politics. That Leavis conceives these works as privileging the "diocesan responsibilities" and "intellectual pursuits" (5n) of their subjects—as if either of these spheres was remotely apolitical amidst the rage of party—telegraphs how narrowly gauged the ecclesiastical politics of *Render unto Caesar* are going to be. Leavis's book is largely about *court politics*, specifically the relations between a few prominent prelates, leading ministers, members of parliament, and the Queen herself during Anne's rather tumultuous reign at the beginning of the eighteenth century.


Within those bounds, however, *Render unto Caesar* is an altogether compelling piece of reportage. And the book is a virtually month-by-month chronological account of the various disputes, parliamentary bills, and church preferments that comprised "the ecclesiastical maelstrom" (213) of the reign of Queen Anne. Leavis shrewdly selects John Sharp, archbishop of York, as the focus of his study and, quite often, the audience surrogate amidst the manifold religious and political controversies of the era. Lord Almoner to the Queen and Anne's closest ecclesiastical advisor, Archbishop Sharp (not unlike his friend Robert Harley in civil affairs), embodied the crumbling center of politics during the rage of party. Amidst the set piece ecclesiastical battles of the period—occasional conformity, convocation, the Union with Scotland, the Sacheverell affair, the lay baptism controversy—the moderate tory Sharp generally attempts to occupy a ground beset on both sides by clerical revanchists and whiggish Erastians. Like Anne herself, the archbishop was a conservative rather than a reactionary, trying more than anything to stand still against the immense forces of partisan polarization. And Leavis deploys an impressive wealth of manuscript sources, above all, Sharp's papers in the Gloucester Archives, to document the operations of these pressures on the men and women at the centers of English power.

This approach, it must be said, is not without its liabilities. In adhering to the maneuverings at court, *Render unto Caesar* largely proceeds in the decorous languages of counsel and patronage. We are, to be sure, introduced to fire-eaters like Benjamin Hoadly and Henry Sacheverell, but print culture and the public sphere are more alluded to than visited, and their roles in generating the ideological forces warping the politics at court is not explored. This leaves the actual theological content of ecclesiastical politics in this period strangely opaque. The party labels of High and Low Church are hardly

defined beyond their introductory analogy to the Tory and Whig parties, respectively. But the latter parties were neither entirely stable nor ideologically monolithic in the decades following the Glorious Revolution, and neither were their ecclesiastical counterparts.

For instance, *Render unto Caesar* offers a long excursus in the remote diocese of Carlisle on the 1704 controversy over the installation of Francis Atterbury to the deanery there. The whig bishop William Nicolson demanded that Atterbury recant his alleged aspersions of the royal supremacy during the convocation controversy as a condition of his installation. Atterbury refused, and a stalemate ensued. Leavis focuses on Archbishop Sharp's efforts at mediating the conflict but seems broadly uninterested in the question of whether Atterbury had indeed impugned the supremacy. By any fair reading, Atterbury had surely done so, as had many of his allies in the struggles over convocation. And while Nicolson was perhaps on shaky ground canonically ("grasping at straws," as Leavis has it, 108), he was intellectually astute in pointing out the extent to which high churchmanship in the reign of William and much of that of Anne was frequently arrayed against both crown and miter. As Leavis points out, Anne had on more than one occasion to remind the lower clergy of her ecclesiastical supremacy and "the due subordination of Prebysyers to Bishops" (84). So what, one might ask, was the content of this high churchmanship, paradoxically devoted to the established church but in relentless defiance of its episcopal and royal governors? It was not lost on contemporary observers that Sacheverell's over-the-top divine right royalism flew in the face of his party's steady alienation from the supremacy in the decades since the revolution. These ecclesiological tensions, or even contradictions, might have been profitably considered here.

The religious history of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has indeed, in the last decade or so, begun to push past the old monuments of episcopal biography that had for so long defined the field. But it has done so by engaging with the themes and problems that loom large elsewhere in the wider historiography of Britain in the long eighteenth century: revolution, empire, enlightenment, nationalism, gender, the public sphere. Leavis, by contrast, considers the Church of England through the machinations involved in its governance. *Render unto Caesar* is to be commended for its exceptionally close reading of the personalities at the court of Queen Anne. But one cannot help wondering whether politics, even ecclesiastical politics, is bigger than that.

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***Benjamin Franklin: Cultural Protestant.* By D. G. Hart. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2021. vii + 261 pp. \$41.99 cloth.**

Renowned historian of religion D. G. Hart argues that Benjamin Franklin was a "cultural Protestant," a thesis he describes in a series of biographical vignettes. Scholars, he thinks, have overestimated Franklin as an intellectual or theologian. Rather Franklin was "not a thinker but a tinkerer," indebted to his Protestant roots (9).