



BOOK REVIEW

R. Barry Levis. *Render Unto Caesar: Ecclesiastical Politics in the Reign of Queen Anne*

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Render unto Caesar is part of this century's unlikely revival of Annean studies. Over fifty years ago, Geoffrey Holmes wrote the book on Annean England. *British Politics in the Age of Anne* (1967) was so successful that, for a few decades, it sucked the oxygen out of the scholarship on the early eighteenth century. Holmes painted a picture of Anne's England as fratricidally divided between two political parties: the Whigs and the Tories. The former were urbane and cosmopolitan, and played the role of enthusiastic cheer-leaders for the expansion of the fiscal-military state. Shorn of their "Country oppositionalism"—in the Restoration, being a Whig was synonymous with opposing the Court—they became comfortable with the trappings and ideology of power. The Tories, contrastingly, were a more heterogeneous bunch, encompassing Jacobites, Catholics, minor Anglican clergy, and many of the landed gentry, who could only be disciplined by that master parliamentary tactician, Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford. The Tories were united by an antipathy to the changes wrought by a system of higher taxes, debts, and executive power. In Holmes' paradigm—which is also Levis's paradigm, and any other Annean scholar's paradigm—this party split is the primary fact of Anne's reign, influencing not only legislation, ministries, and foreign policy, but seeping out into British society and literary culture. It is testament to the strength of this depiction that it has spilt out from scholarship and into popular culture, with Yorgos Lanthimos' racy dramatization of Anne's reign (*The Favourite* [2018]) depicting the Queen (Olivia Coleman) dealing with the headaches of a House of Commons riven with Tory/Whig division.

A few factors have triggered the revived attention to Anne's reign. These include: the publication of the exhaustive and fascinating *History of Parliament* series (2006); the digitization of hundreds if not thousands of the period's printed pamphlets; Jürgen Habermas's use of the period as his site for his hugely influential Public Sphere thesis; and, perhaps most pertinently, the analogousness of a period that was forced to radically adapt its political culture to a wave of technological innovations that saturated the market with Fake News. Such has meant that there are means and motive for renewed historiographical attention to the First Age of Party.

Levis cites some of the scholarship that is part of this broader wave, especially the work of Brian Cowan, Joseph Hone, and Robert G. Ingram. These scholars (and others) ask penetrating questions on issues as disparate as the centrality of religion to "secular" politics, the precise nature of the Court's influence over the legislature, and the literal (financial, organizational) structure of the two parties, especially their connections to their parallel Church

of England factions (Whig and Tory; Low- and High-Church). These questions are still being worked through, and Levis' book provides some key clarifications on them.

We glean these clarifications from Levis's riveting narrative. The kaleidoscopically complex politics of Anne's reign makes it well-suited to a chronological structure, and Levis takes on his subject with gusto. In his narrative, he undeniably proves his thesis, namely, that ecclesiastical politics was central to the broader politics of the early eighteenth century. He also provides a clear account of what actually happened, c. 1702–1714, and therefore is of use to students of the period who are looking for a crisp description of Court, Church, and Parliamentary politics in these decades.

Levis is primarily concerned with bridging the gap between the ecclesiastical and political histories of the period. This was a two-way flow: the politics of ecclesiastical appointments, and the political interventions of these appointees from their bishops' palaces and sees. This two-way flow remains underexamined compared with the other facets of Annean politics, although there is the notable exception of the studies done on Gilbert Burnet (1643–1715), who, as well as being Bishop of Salisbury, was one of William III's chief propagandists and political advisors.

Levis's focus is indeed on the clergy who are often outside of traditional accounts. While Levis details the interventions of a broad range of ecclesiastical actors in Anne's reign, his particular point of focus is John Sharp (1645–1714), Anne's Archbishop of York. Levis's interest in Sharp is regularly justified throughout his book, showing the archbishop sending letter after letter, and attending meeting after meeting, to satisfy Queen Anne's thirst for advice. We find him at the center of political affairs from preaching at Anne's coronation (passing over the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Tenison), through to the travails of Harley's ill-fated ministry, his star only fading when party fervor became so high that his "moderation" was of little practical political value.

Outside of the bishops' correspondence, much of Levis's evidence base is the familiar ground of the famous pamphlets that made up the "Rage of Party," spurred from well-understood debates like the Occasional Conformity controversy, and the Sacheverell Riots. These sources will probably never stop attracting scholarly attention, not least because of their remarkable readability: Swift's *Conduct of the Allies*, and many of the others that feature in Levis's book, are pleasures to read centuries later. They have also been shown to be central to literary and political developments of the long eighteenth century. Levis's lens of analysis presents these pamphlets in a fresh perspective. Levis's capacity to do so leaves one wondering what insights these sources will be used for next.