



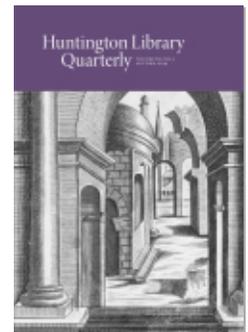
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Reformist Whiggery

Ashley Marshall

Huntington Library Quarterly, Volume 82, Number 3, Autumn 2019, pp. 351-378  
(Article)



Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hlq.2019.0019>

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# Recontextualizing Richard Steele: Bishop Hoadly and Reformist Whiggery

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Ashley Marshall

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**ABSTRACT** Richard Steele's modern reputation is based almost entirely upon his collaboration with Joseph Addison on *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. The "Steele" in whom most scholars are interested is one-half of Addison-and-Steele, and his place in the history of ideas depends on these periodical contributions, as well as on his sentimental drama *The Conscious Lovers*. But Steele belongs in other (religio-political) contexts. This essay focuses on his connection to the controversial bishop Benjamin Hoadly, though this also means putting him in conversation with radical Whigs such as John Toland and Matthew Tindal. Ashley Marshall's underlying argument is that we can appreciate an important dimension of Steele's Whiggery if and only if we restore him to the religio-political contexts in which Hoadly was also operating. **KEYWORDS:** *The Englishman*; *The Crisis*; anticlericalism; Low Church Whigs; Bangorian Controversy; eighteenth-century church reform

❧ **RICHARD STEELE'S MODERN REPUTATION** is based almost entirely upon his collaboration with Joseph Addison on *The Tatler* (1709–11) and *The Spectator* (1711–12, 1714). The "Steele" in whom most scholars are interested is one-half of Addison-and-Steele, an essay-writing team who gently encouraged moral reform, cultivated a distinctly Whig notion of manners and politeness, and systematically disseminated Whig poetry and Whig literary criticism. Steele's place in the history of ideas depends on these periodical contributions, as well as his most celebrated sentimental drama, *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). He has been read alongside Addison and other minor Whig wits and as a friend-turned-adversary outmatched by Jonathan Swift in the late Stuart paper wars.

My contention is that Steele belongs in other contexts and can productively be read alongside not only journalists and poets but also some of the key religio-political controversialists of the early eighteenth century. The main focus of what follows is his connection to Benjamin Hoadly (1676–1761), though this also necessarily requires us to put him in conversation with related figures like John Toland and Matthew Tindal—

great though the differences are between Steele's and Hoadly's ideological profiles and those of the more radical Whigs.<sup>1</sup> Hoadly is best known to modern scholars for his role in inciting the Bangorian Controversy (1717–21), but he was an active and contentious preacher and polemicist in the years preceding that cause célèbre.<sup>2</sup> He was one of the few outspoken Whig clerics, a Low Churchman who stridently defended the Revolution of 1688 against proponents of hereditary rights like Henry Sacheverell and Charles Leslie. He began his career as rector of St. Peter le Poer (1704–16), where he declaimed against passive obedience and nonresistance; arguments about allegiance dominate his production. Among his major publications was *The Measures of Submission to the Civil Magistrate Considered* (1706). By 1709–10, he had become a favorite target of high Tories, including Leslie, whose *Rehearsal* (1704–9) savaged him along with Locke and other dangerous Whig thinkers. In 1716, Hoadly became the bishop of Bangor. In March 1717, he published his enormously divisive sermon, *The Nature of the Kingdom, or Church of Christ*, arguing crucially that

in the Affairs of *Conscience* and *Eternal Salvation* . . . [God] hath . . . left behind Him, no visible, humane *Authority*; no *Vicegerents*, who can be said properly to supply his Place; no *Interpreters*, upon whom his Subjects are absolutely to depend; no *Judges* over the Consciences or Religion of his People.<sup>3</sup>

Hoadly here denies the secular power of the Church to a degree that startled even many of his fellow Low Churchmen. As Andrew Starkie points out, the question behind the Controversy was “How does the church relate to the civil power?” But the issue became, he continues, “not only the authority of the church, but even its very existence as an independent spiritual society.”<sup>4</sup> Starkie's interpretation of Hoadly is notoriously idiosyncratic—antipathetic and at worst inaccurate, too inclined to overstate the degree of Hoadly's unorthodoxy—but his summation of the fundamental

1. There are also important links between Steele and William Hogarth, whose radical Whig ethos connects with Steele's on several significant points; see Ronald Paulson and Ashley Marshall, “Radical Whiggery: William Hogarth and Richard Steele,” in *Hogarth: 50 New Essays*, ed. Bernd Krysmanski (forthcoming). Guglielmo Sanna has recently and rightly challenged the tendency of Hoadly scholars—especially Andrew Starkie—to connect his thinking to that of canonical deists such as Toland, Tindal, and Anthony Collins. See “‘Uprightness of Heart’: The Doctrine of Religious Sincerity in Eighteenth Century Anglican Thought,” *Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture* 4 (2018): 100–123.

2. J. P. Kenyon is absolutely right: the Bangorian Controversy “was only the climax to a career of militant unorthodoxy; and [Hoadly] has never received his due as the most powerful and effective, if not the most original, Whig propagandist of his generation”; *Revolution Principles: The Politics of Party 1689–1720* (Cambridge, 1977), 116.

3. Throughout I quote from the second edition of *The Nature of the Kingdom*; this quotation is at pp. 11–12. All eighteenth-century publications are London unless otherwise noted.

4. Andrew Starkie, *The Church of England and the Bangorian Controversy, 1716–1721* (Woodbridge, U.K., 2007), 122, 51.

questions of the Controversy seems fair. Hoadly (like Steele) sought to raise alarms about “the growing threat to protestantism and to civil and religious liberty from within the church.”<sup>5</sup> From 1721 to 1761, he served as bishop of Hereford, Salisbury, and Winchester, where he continued to write as a Low Church propagandist.

My premise in this essay is that we can appreciate an important dimension of Steele’s Whiggery if and only if we restore him to the religio-political contexts in which Hoadly was also operating. The point is not that the two have identical ideological profiles but that their profiles are similar, and they contributed to the same polemical conversations and debates. We need Hoadly—and Steele’s engagement with the bishop’s works—in order fully to understand Steele’s role in the history of ideas. Steele and Hoadly were, as their biographers routinely note, friends and Whig allies. They were both advocates for religious toleration, defenders of the 1688 Revolution, admirers of William III, and critics of high Tory political philosophy—specifically, of the demands for passive obedience and nonresistance.

Because of the tendency to focus on Addison-and-Steele, however, scholars have not appreciated the extent to which Steele’s career connects with that of Hoadly. Nor have they dealt with the remarkable affinity between their arguments and fixations. Charles A. Knight, Steele’s political biographer, offers sound characterizations of his ideology but does little to connect him with other religio-political philosophers of the time.<sup>6</sup> Hoadly’s modern biographer, William Gibson, alludes en passant to his friendship with Steele and notes, equally briefly, that Steele “championed Hoadly’s views,” but he does not acknowledge the extent of overlap.<sup>7</sup> Reading Steele alongside Hoadly—as his contemporary critics did—not only reveals Steele’s contributions to some of the major religio-political debates of his time. It also allows us to do justice to the radical streak within his thought, which has been almost entirely missed by modern scholars.

Because Steele did not contribute publicly to the Bangorian Controversy, scholars have not placed him in the context of the disputes that emerged (or continued) during that clash. His statements about Catholicism are read as anti-Jacobite and pro-Protestant Succession, which is true enough—but they also connect him to Hoadly (inter alios) and the battle for a reformed Church of England. One major aim of what follows is to highlight that connection. This necessarily requires some

5. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Hoadly, Benjamin (1676–1761), bishop of Winchester,” by Stephen Taylor, last modified January 3, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13375>.

6. Charles A. Knight’s final characterization of Steele’s political character suggests something rather generic: “He was not an original political thinker, but he was *un homme engagé* who thought and wrote about a very wide range of issues from a perspective that was liberal and humane, promoting shared government and religious toleration”; *A Political Biography of Richard Steele* (London, 2009), 241.

7. William Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate: Benjamin Hoadly, 1676–1761* (Cambridge, 2004), 130.

discussion of his arguments in favor of resistance to (popish) absolutism; after an opening section establishing the personal and intertextual relationship between Steele and Hoadly, section 2 will offer a précis of the links between their political theories. My main concern is Steele's contributions to the anticlerical campaign in which Hoadly was involved, and that is the focus of section 3. Section 4 continues this discussion but with a particular focus on the religio-political role of individual reading and on the hermeneutic fight over clerical interpretations of the Bible. Insofar as Steele's religious arguments have been discussed, he has been explained in terms of a rather generic anti-Jacobitism. I argue that this does not do justice to the more positive campaign to which he contributed and in which he was an ally of Hoadly's. Steele's anxieties about popery, like those of other Hoadlian thinkers, led him to criticize the idea of sanctified clerical power, as well as "church authority which is independent of the state, doctrinal uniformity which overrides the claims of individual conscience, and the support of arbitrary, absolutist governments which will enforce all these."<sup>8</sup>

### Friends and Fellow Travelers

When Steele and Hoadly first met is uncertain, but they were quite close at least by 1713–14, and Steele's admiration for Hoadly is well documented. He aligns himself with Hoadly in *The Tatler*, *The Englishman* (1713–14, 1715), and elsewhere. In a 1716 letter, he lavishly extols the bishop: "Virtue with so much ease on Bangor sits / All faults he pardons, though he none commits."<sup>9</sup> In the dedication to his *Apology* of 1714, he credits four friends with reading *The Crisis* in draft and advising on it: Addison, Nicholas Lechmere,<sup>10</sup> a Mr. Minshull, and Hoadly. Of these four he singles out Hoadly: "he has every good Quality, Talent, and Grace, that can adorn a Christian, a Gentleman, and a Divine; and whatever Prejudice may suggest, I think it a great Defence that the Work passed his Hand." Elsewhere in the *Apology*, he praises Hoadly again, as "that learned Advocate for the Episcopacy of the Church and Liberty of the People."<sup>11</sup> Upon receiving the bishop's collected sermons, he tells his friend, "I have read [the book] with greater improvement in the Christian religion than ever I received from any other work" and reflects that a man would have to lack common sense in order to "remain unconverted by this of Mr. Hoadley."<sup>12</sup> On September 17, 1721, Steele records in his journal that he is going "to the L<sup>d</sup> B<sup>p</sup> of Bangor now B<sup>p</sup> of Hereford, with a

8. Starkie, *Church of England*, 103.

9. Steele to Hoadly, November [1616?], *The Correspondence of Richard Steele*, ed. Rae Blanchard (1941; repr., Oxford, 1968), 117.

10. A renowned lawyer with close connections to leading Whig politicians, Lechmere was one of the "parliamentary managers of the case against Sacheverell"; Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, Conn., 2009), 15.

11. *Mr. Steele's Apology for Himself and his Writings*, in *Tracts and Pamphlets by Richard Steele*, ed. Rae Blanchard (1944; repr., New York, 1967), 286, 314.

12. Steele to James Anderson, October 21, 1721, *Correspondence*, 167.

design to leave His Lordship my last will Whereby He is my Executor and Guardian to my Son.”<sup>13</sup> Given the controversial nature of Hoadly’s opinions, even among the Whigs, Steele’s choice of him as guardian for his son is telling.

Steele’s first public defense of Hoadly was in *The Tatler*, numbers 44 and 50 (summer 1709), at which point Hoadly, merely rector of St. Peter le Poer, was battling Offspring Blackall, bishop of Exeter. Blackall had in 1709 preached on “The Divine Institution of Magistracy,” vehemently championing the high Tory principles of passive obedience and nonresistance. In *Some Considerations Humbly Offered to the . . . Lord Bishop of Exeter* (1709), Hoadly rebuked him, challenging his definition of the source of civil authority and contending for a popular basis of power. Blackall’s position also represented a major reversal: his 1705 Accession Day sermon, *The Subjects Duty*, had suggested a nondivine origin for government and authority. *The Subjects Duty* provoked Tory patriarchalists to link Blackall’s “republican schemes” with those of Locke.<sup>14</sup> By 1709, however, Blackall’s High Church sympathies were clear. I will return to the content of the debate between him and Hoadly in the next section but should emphasize one point here: Blackall’s apparent volte-face seems to have raised Hoadly’s (and Steele’s) anxieties, in 1709, that political moderates and even Whigs were shifting to the right. Blackall and his allies—including William Oldisworth, later author of the Tory *Examiner*, which Steele devoted considerable energy to attacking—denounced the presumptuous rector.<sup>15</sup>

As of 1709 Hoadly was gaining a reputation for his quasi-populist sensibilities. Gibson stresses the “inflammatory nature of Hoadly’s image” at this time; by 1710 he would be associated by critics with Defoe, Cromwell, and Satan.<sup>16</sup> Even as early as 1705, an anonymous defender of the High Church addresses Hoadly sharply, observing that “your design is to make your self Popular.”<sup>17</sup> In 1709, such complaints were ubiquitous. The author of *Bess o’ Bedlam’s Love to Her Brother Tom* (1709) marvels at Hoadly’s cheek: “Can *Ben* think that any body will be such a Fool as to believe him before a Bishop? . . . Bishops are the highest Divines, and this Bishop is far from being one of the lowest Churchmen, and therefore *Ben* should have kept his Distance” (2). The author of *Tom of Bedlam’s Answer to . . . Ben Hoadly* (Luke Milbourne?) issues a similar charge, though with broader implications, saying that “the Wheel of State is turn’d about unperceivable to every common Eye” and the notion that “our Sovereign Lords the People should be able to judge of the Mismanagement of it, seems almost as ridiculous as if any inferior Clergy-man should presume to censure a Bishop, and

13. Steele, *Correspondence*, 542.

14. See the anonymous *An Essay upon Government. Wherein the Republican Schemes Reviv’d by Mr. Lock, Dr. Blackal, &c. Are Fairly Consider’d and Refuted* (1705).

15. On Steele’s relentless targeting of *The Examiner*, see Marshall, “Steele’s Rhetorical Duel with the Authors of *The Examiner*,” *Swift Studies* 34 (2019): 67–89.

16. Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate*, 114–15.

17. *A Vindication of the London Clergy, from the Aspersion cast upon them by Mr. Hoadly* (1705), 4.

he one of the first Rank.”<sup>18</sup> Another 1709 critic advises Hoadly that even his supporters think him “dabbling beyond [his] Depth” in behaving as though a “Person, in a private Station” should “take upon him to settle the Rights of Princes, and Kingdoms, and Parliaments, and People.” Hoadly has overstepped, keen “to set giddy People a meddling with old popular Schemes.”<sup>19</sup> As the author of *Tom of Bedlam’s Answer* kvetches, the troublemaking of “a little Parish Priest” has served “to buz into the Ears of the People, that the Government is to be question’d for the Management of those Affairs they judge not proper to reveal to the People” (9, 16). Yet another challenger suggests that Hoadly’s alarming aspiration to “fix” the government “upon the bottom” reflects his desire to “gain Credit with the Vulgar.”<sup>20</sup> Hoadly’s 1709 response to one of his critics is unapologetic: he asserts his right to respond to the bishop “in so Public a manner” on precisely the leveling terms for which his enemies criticize him: “the whole Nation of our *Fellow-Subjects* . . . are all equally concern’d in this *Debate*.”<sup>21</sup>

In *The Tatler*, Steele sides with the lowly rector. This is significant not least because at this time Hoadly had many loud detractors and few public supporters. Steele likens Blackall (and implicitly all preachers of passive obedience) to the puppet master Martin Powell. In number 50, he prints a letter purportedly from Powell to Isaac Bickerstaff, in which the aggrieved mountebank righteously complains:

You are for sowing the Seeds of Sedition and Disobedience among my Puppets, and your Zeal for the (good old) Cause would make you perswade *Punch* to pull the String from his Chops, and not move his Jaw when I have a Mind he should harangue. Now I appeal to all Men, if this is not Contrary to that uncontrollable, unaccountable Dominion, which by the Laws of Nature I exercise over ’em.<sup>22</sup>

Steele’s position, like Hoadly’s, represents a challenge to high Tory authoritarianism. To this subject we will return. The point I wish to make here is that Steele would come to have a reputation for being willing to speak truth to power, and he begins to earn that reputation in summer 1709 with his support of Hoadly. A 1715 critic would disparage Steele as “an *Englishman* who dares write to any Man upon the Face of the *Earth*.”<sup>23</sup> The parallel between that criticism and the charge against Rector Hoadly

18. Luke Milbourne, *Tom of Bedlam’s Answer to His Brother Ben Hoadly, St. Peter’s-Poor Parson, near the Exchange of Principles* (1709; STC T65264), 5–6.

19. *A Letter of Advice, Presented to Mr. Hoadly* (1709), 5, 6, 5.

20. *A Submissive Answer to Mr. Hoadly’s Humble Reply, to My Lord Bishop of Exeter* (1709; STC T18321), 2, 3.

21. *Humble Reply to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Exeter’s Answer* (1709), 4.

22. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Tatler*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1987), 1:357. Steele returns to Powell and Blackall in 115.

23. *Remarks upon the Truth . . . of Sir Richard Steele’s Dedication to the Pope* (1715), sig. A4v.

(who “should have kept his Distance”) is clear. These numbers of *The Tatler* have been read as merely espousing good Whig ideology, as simply and innocuously opposing “arbitrary authority.”<sup>24</sup> Knight emphasizes their comic nature and concludes that “Steele’s puppet-politics connection is an instance of the larger theatre-politics connection that runs through the *Tatler*.”<sup>25</sup> This seems to miss the radical implications of Steele’s allegiance-signaling.

Steele sought Hoadly’s advice on *The Crisis* (January 1714)—a pamphlet asserting the right to resist in extreme circumstances—and the two men also collaborated. Hoadly wrote *An Account of the State of the Roman-Catholick Religion Throughout the World* (May 1715), a sequel to Steele’s *Romish Ecclesiastical History* of the previous year, though it was publicly attached to Steele. Steele probably supplied the preface.<sup>26</sup> The *Account* is fiercely anti-Catholic, of course, reflecting convictions Hoadly and Steele shared: popery threatened the constitution, and the Church of England had to be rescued from those within it tending toward tyrannical authoritarianism. Steele (or Hoadly?) ridicules the idea of papal infallibility and also deprecates the popish strategy of getting the “poor distressed Laity [to] adore the *Men*, who have this Privilege, of Entitling them to God’s Favour, or Debarring them from it” (xxv–xxvi). The preface repeats a line from Steele’s *Romish Ecclesiastical History*: “any Power, affected by Clergymen, above what the Laws of our Country allow them . . . is to me *Popery*.”<sup>27</sup> Contemporary critics of the *Account* target Steele, though one raises the question of authorship and—significantly—connects the piece with the work of Toland, Collins, and Tindal.<sup>28</sup> In the second *Englishman* series (1715), Steele reprints a Hoadly sermon (number 37), and, in number 24, he borrows ideas from Hoadly to denounce Tory patriarchal political theory (though he does not actively work to dismantle a patriarchal understanding of domesticity or a patriarchal model of society). Steele also advertises Hoadly’s works.<sup>29</sup> Readers would have been in no doubt of his sympathies with the radical Low Church cleric.

Steele did not contribute publicly to the Bangorian Controversy. Writing his wife in June 1717, though, he takes sides: “Mr. Hoadly the Bishop of Bangor, has in the sermon for which He is so ill treated, done like an Apostle and asserted the True Dominion established by Our Blessed Saviour.” The following month he concludes triumphantly, “The Contest of the Bishop has ended in the confusion of His

24. Calhoun Winton, *Captain Steele: The Early Career of Richard Steele* (Baltimore, 1964), 113.

25. Knight, *Political Biography*, 64.

26. This is Blanchard’s position (Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 347). Gibson suggests that Steele wrote the *Account* and Hoadly provided the preface, but he does not make a case for thus reversing the attribution made by Steele scholars (*Enlightenment Prelate*, 128).

27. Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 220.

28. *Sir Richard Steele’s Recantation* (1715), 24.

29. Addison and Steele, *The Tatler*, 3:416 (appendix 5).

Adversaries.”<sup>30</sup> Steele’s apparent public silence is not too surprising: as Starkie points out, the “controversy was overwhelmingly clerical in authorship.”<sup>31</sup> In any case, contemporaries evidently knew what Steele’s position would be: Tory critics ascribed to him Hoadly’s own self-defense, the anonymous *D—n of W—r Still the Same* (1720).<sup>32</sup>

Steele and Hoadly were thus linked in the contemporary imagination. One of Steele’s adversaries accused him of choosing “*Hobbs, Lock, Hoadly*” over “the *Laws of God and our Country*.”<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Smedley memorialized both men in his poems. Steele’s allusions and advertisements signaled his allegiance to the scandalous churchman. What, precisely, is the ideological connection between them? Moving beyond generalities—they are fellow Whigs who champion toleration and abhor Catholicism, Jacobitism, and tyranny—what common ground do we find?

### ☞ Vox Populi and “the Bounds of . . . Duty”<sup>34</sup>

In his *Political Biography* of Steele, Knight alludes a half dozen times to Hoadly, but he does not suggest a strong parallel between Steele’s and Hoadly’s political outlook. Putting the two side by side helps us appreciate the nature and degree of Steele’s obsession with issues of power and authority. Scholars take for granted that Hoadly was fixated on the nature and basis of civil authority; so was Steele.

Hoadly’s politics were entirely Whig, and not always moderately so. On the question of resistance, he was unequivocal. His confrontation of Blackall was followed by the publication of *The Original and Institution of Civil Government, Discuss’d* (1710), the fullest and most extensive enunciation of his principles. Writing in response to Leslie and other high Tories, Hoadly refutes the Filmerian theory of patriarchal government, affirms his conviction that in extreme circumstances consent can be withdrawn, and asserts that the collective body of the people has as much right to defend itself against tyranny as an individual has to defend himself against harm. Unlawful authority can and should be resisted: “An *Universal Resistance*, in order to save a *Nation*, and *Posterity*, from *Ruine*, is so far from bordering, or looking towards *Sin*, that it is *Virtue*, and *Honour*” (*LA*, 156). Individuals and collectives have the God-given right to “*Self-Defense*” against “*Misery*, and *Destruction*” (*OI*, xi). Like Locke,<sup>35</sup> Hoadly rejects the notion that “*Parental Power* be . . . the *Foundation of Civil Authority*” (*OI*, 22), denying the biblical authority and legitimacy of any

30. Steele, *Correspondence*, 356, 361.

31. Starkie, *Church of England*, 57.

32. See Steele, *Correspondence*, 118n.

33. *A Letter to Richard Steele, Esq;* (1715), 5.

34. The phrase is Hoadly’s; *A Large Answer to Dr. F. Atterbury’s Charge of Rebellion*, 141, separately paginated and bound with *The Original and Institution of Civil Government, Discuss’d* (1710). The two works will hereafter be referenced as *LA* and *OI* respectively.

35. Though, as H. T. Dickinson has noted, in *The Original and Institution of Civil Government*, Hoadly “concentrated almost entirely on the older contractual theory of Richard Hooker and others rather than on the more radical contract theory of Locke”; *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1977), 73.

patriarchal model of society. The “*Patriarchal Scheme*,” he concludes, “sinks the *Titles* of all *Princes* into *Mere Possession*” (OI, 124).

Hoadly, like Steele, recognizes that the contractual basis of government means that leaders must earn the thoughtful loyalty of their subjects, who are not—contra highflyers—in a state of servitude.

How hard is the fate of *Subjects*, that they must be brought into the *Condition of Slaves*; below the *state of mercenary Servants*, into that of *servitude* properly so called. Many years have not passed since a *certain Writer* . . . boasted that the *Clergy* had been more than once instrumental in removing *yokes*, of all sorts, from the necks of *English* men. But *now*, it seems, the *Yoke of Slavery* it self is not too hard to be brought upon them. (LA, 60)

He is responding here to the rhetoric of those like Blackall, who concluded in his reply to Hoadly, “I do not remember in Scripture any express Allowance, much less Encouragement, given to Slaves to rise up against, or to strike their Masters, and much less to knock them on the Head for publick Good: *i.e.*, to release themselves and their Fellow Servants, from an unreasonable and intolerable Servitude.”<sup>36</sup> Concurring with Blackall, Leslie castigates Hoadly for his dangerous rhetoric: “the Doctrine of *Non-Resistance*, Grounded upon *Kings* having their *Power* from *God*, Against which Mr. *Hoadly* brought the Battery of his *Mob-Sermons*.”<sup>37</sup>

Significantly, Steele’s contribution to the Hoadly-Blackall debate represents his first explicit political theorizing. His earliest published work, *The Christian Hero* (1701), had meditated upon the qualities of a good leader and had insinuated a commitment to contractual ideas about power,<sup>38</sup> but not until the Blackall-as-Powell numbers of *The Tatler* does he explicitly weigh in on topical ideological debates. In *The Tatler* he keeps his hand light, but he would later become more aggressive. Throughout the first series of his *Englishman* of 1713–14, he derogates the highflying commitment to nonresistance. In the dedication to the inflammatory *Crisis* of 1714, Steele accuses the Tories of adhering to “pompous Ideas of Imperial Greatness, and Submission to absolute Emperors,” which leads them to disseminate political ideas “abhorrent from the Laws of this their native Country.”<sup>39</sup> In *The Importance of Dunkirk Consider’d* (1713), he expresses his concern about the misuse of the word

36. Offspring Blackall, *The Lord Bishop of Exeter’s Answer to Mr. Hoadly’s Letter*, 2nd ed. (1709; STC T41207), 54–55.

37. Charles Leslie, *The Good Old Cause, or, Lying in Truth, Being a Second Defence of the Bishop of Sarum* (1710), 29.

38. Caesar is invoked, for example, as “an Eternal Instance [of] how much . . . too Believing those unhappy Princes are, who depend upon the tie of Mens Obligations to `em, without having their Opinions on their side” (Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 22).

39. Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 130.

“Prerogative,” which Tories “use . . . to frighten Men from speaking what they lawfully may upon publick Occurrences.”<sup>40</sup> This is in effect a reminder that subjects’ duty is to the law and the state, and not to the monarch. Steele maintains that to teach “*Passive Obedience*” is to “*Rebel*” against “the whole *Legislature*.”<sup>41</sup>

The battle over passive obedience often becomes a battle over the proper interpretation of St. Paul, whose injunction in Romans 13 the Tories routinely cite to legitimize their commitment to submission. “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God,” and “Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God” (verses 1–2). Hoadly refuses to accept the High Church construal of this scriptural message: “who is not *continually watching* for the Good and Happiness of humane Society, is not the *Governour* whom St. Paul means in this place, or to whom He here presses Obedience.” He denies, wholesale, that St. Paul “speak[s] without *Restriction*,” instead maintaining that “his Reasoning unavoidably implies” such restriction.<sup>42</sup> A 1711 critic took Hoadly to task for his use of St. Paul, his offering “an unauthoriz’d Paraphrase” that turns both St. Peter<sup>43</sup> and St. Paul into “Patrons of a Sovereignty in the People to sit in Judgement on, nay, in some Cases, to dethrone their Sovereign.”<sup>44</sup> In *The Englishman* of February 9, 1714, Steele prints a letter from one “Constant Churchman,” his model of a proper member of and spokesman for a reformed Protestant Church of England. A pious Anglican standing in judgment of his passive-obedience preaching brethren of the cloth, Constant Churchman—echoing Hoadly—mocks too literal a reading of St. Paul’s injunction: “the Quotations of St. Paul must receive reasonable Limitations, as all other Precepts do; and . . . straining them without those, are as gross Abuses of Scripture, as the Pretence of Papists when they plead *This is my Body* for Transubstantiation.”<sup>45</sup>

Steele and Hoadly are co-combatants in this anticlerical campaign, joined in challenging—in their very different ways—the highflying misappropriation of scripture.

40. Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 113.

41. Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 353 (preface to *An Account of the State of the Roman-Catholick Religion*).

42. Hoadly, *The Measures of Submission to the Civil Magistrate Consider’d* (1706), 5, 60.

43. “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governours, as those that are sent by Him” (1 Peter 2:13–14).

44. *Jura Regiæ Majestatis in Anglia: Or, the Rights of the English Monarchy* (1711), 15.

45. *The Englishman: A Political Journal by Richard Steele*, ed. Rae Blanchard (Oxford, 1955), 219. In subsequent references to the first series (1713–14), the issue number will follow the page number, in parentheses; in references to the second series (1715), the issue number will be preceded with *II*. As early as *The Christian Hero*, Steele had shown his interest in St. Paul, whose “clarity of priority and concern for other people” Steele particularly emphasizes. As Knight explains, Steele “narrates Paul’s confrontations with authority: his farewell to the Ephesians, his imprisonment and trial in Jerusalem, his journey to Rome and bravery in adversity” (*Political Biography*, 27).

Their problem with the high Tory reading of St. Paul is that it signals an inhumane and unnatural interpretation of society. As G. V. Bennett rightly observes, Hoadly could not believe that St. Paul had intended to tie “future ages to the absurd proposition that subjects had to give an unlimited submission to evil rulers who sought to deprive them of liberty, property, and religion.” From Hoadly’s point of view, “For Christian preachers to maintain publicly that a ruler had the right to make his subjects miserable was . . . ‘against the Laws of Nature and Reason.’”<sup>46</sup> Natural law, in other words, dictated that subjects had the right—and were naturally compelled—to avoid being miserable.

The opposite—happiness—is a keyword for Hoadly, as well as for Steele. As Gibson points out, for Hoadly power was contingent, and the condition was “that the object of government was the happiness of the people whereas a civil authority that exerted it for evil ends, forfeited its right to authority.”<sup>47</sup> In the preface to a printed 1705 sermon, Hoadly warns of “*Constant, and Publick Endeavours to reduce us to Principles of Slavery,*” committing himself instead to exploring “*that Scheme of Notions, upon which all our hopes of Civil Happiness are founded.*” In the body of the same sermon, he contends that “Prostituting our *Rights, and Liberties* to [the Queen’s] Will . . . would be to give Her only the external Appearance of Grandeur.” On the contrary, “To make our Selves an *Happy People*” will do more to contribute to Anne’s “true Happiness, and Satisfaction.”<sup>48</sup> In *The Measures of Submission to the Civil Magistrate Consider’d* (1706), he defines a legitimate, lawful governor as one who is, as noted above, “*continually watching* for the Good and Happiness of humane Society” (5)—who is, in other words, always acting to preserve and protect subjects’ rights to liberty and property. An ally of Hoadly’s concludes, similarly, “the Christian Religion is only an Obligation on Men to do whatever they count reasonable, whatever they find has a natural Tendency to promote their own Happiness, and that of others, upon the Hopes of Everlasting Life, and the Fears of Everlasting Death.”<sup>49</sup> “Happiness” is in this context a politicized term, part of the vocabulary of resistance. Highfliers who want to contest this argument labor to deny that “the Publick Happiness [is] the *sole* End of Government.”<sup>50</sup>

Steele likewise associates, inextricably, liberty and happiness. At the outset of *The Crisis*, he defines “Liberty” as “the Happiness of Mens living under Laws of their own making by their personal Consent, or that of their Representatives.”<sup>51</sup> In

46. G. V. Bennett, *The Tory Crisis in Church and State, 1688–1730: The Career of Francis Atterbury, Bishop of Rochester* (Oxford, 1975), 106.

47. Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate*, 92–93.

48. Benjamin Hoadly, *A Sermon Preach’d On the Eighth of March, 1704–5. Being the Anniversary Day of Thanksgiving for the Queen’s Accession to the Crown* (1705), preface, 18.

49. *An Answer to a Letter to Mr. Hoadly, Entitled, Faith and Obedience* (1711), 14.

50. *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Liberty of the Subject, and of Subjection to the Supreme Powers. In a Letter to . . . Mr. Hoadly* (1706), 2.

51. Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 137.

*The Englishman* number 3, he maintains that “It is the Happiness of an *Englishman*, that his Property is fenced about with Laws and Privileges, into which no Power can make any IncurSION, except it is encouraged by his own Stupidity or Cowardice” (14). The subtext: English citizens have the freedom and indeed the duty to resist any incursions and to preserve their own God- and nature-given right to live happily. The commonwealthman Toland reasons similarly in *The Art of Governing by Parties* (1701): “the meanest Countryman has his Action and Remedy at Law against the King no less than against any of his Fellow-Subjects,” and “In these and the like Privileges consists a great part of our Happiness.”<sup>52</sup> Or, as Tindal concludes in *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted* (1706): “God by implanting in Man that only innate and inseparable Principle of seeking his own Happiness, and endeavouring to subsist as conveniently as his Nature permits, has given him a Right, or rather has made it his Duty to do all that’s necessary to that End.”<sup>53</sup> For Steele, “The most important Instance of . . . Happiness” is specifically “Liberty of Conscience,”<sup>54</sup> a subject to which we will return. His concept of liberty is positive rather than negative; by natural law, subjects have the right to resist the slavery introduced by authoritarian rule.<sup>55</sup>

Steele and Hoadly go further, arguing not only that the people have the right to resist but also that they have the reasoning capacities to know when a ruler has overstepped. Hoadly is particularly adamant about the stability, wisdom, and civic-mindedness of “the people.” The typical characterization of a fickle mob easily provoked into rebellion by demagogues is one he utterly rejects (as we will see in section 4). For Hoadly, as H. T. Dickinson suggests, “Only the people could decide when their rights and liberties needed to be safeguarded by the ultimate weapon of resistance.”<sup>56</sup> Steele shares the optimism on which such logic depends. In *The Christian Hero*, he concludes humans to be

fram'd for mutual Kindness, good Will and Service, and . . . our Blessed Saviour has been pleased to give us . . . the Command of Loving one another; and the Man that Imbibes that noble Principle is in no Danger of insolently Transgressing against his Fellow Creatures, but will certainly use all the Advantages which he has from Nature and Fortune to the Good and Welfare of others, for whose Benefit . . . he knows he was Created.<sup>57</sup>

52. I quote from the 1757 edition available on Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (3).

53. Matthew Tindal, *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted* (1706), 10.

54. Steele, *The Englishman*, 307 (II.14).

55. Steele’s rejection of slavery has, of course, nothing to do with a commitment to abolition; he simply denies the legitimacy of authoritarian rule over (predominantly male) English subjects.

56. H. T. Dickinson, “Benjamin Hoadly,” *History Today* 25 (1975): 348–55 at 352.

57. Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 55.

Like Steele (and Addison), Hoadly emphasizes sociability, stressing the fact that individuals are “Member[s] of *Society*” and insisting that a man should see “his own particular Good and Happiness, as united and consistent with the *Good* and *Happiness* of Others.”<sup>58</sup> He can empower men to rise up against tyranny because he does not share the Hobbesian view of human nature of (say) Leslie and Swift. He presumes morality and decency. His whole political outlook depends upon man looking out for his fellow men: the public spirit upon which a functional human society depends “is seen in a Constant Regard to the Interest of that *Society*, from which *Our own* cannot be separated: And consists, not in a Neglect of *Our selves*; but in a Regard to *Others*, closely united in the same Common Happiness, or Common Misery, with *Our selves*.”<sup>59</sup> This is directly counter to Charles Leslie’s conviction that man is not only capricious but selfish: “Every Man may withdraw his *Consent*, when he finds it *Prejudicial* to him. This [self-interest] is the certain *Privilege of Nature*,” according to the Whigs.<sup>60</sup>

Leslie mocks Hoadly for his too-sanguine expectations for human behavior. In *The Finishing Stroke* (1711), he features Hoadly as a character whose positions are all portrayed as naive to the point of absurdity. A Tory expresses his alarm that a people empowered by Whig notions of civil liberty will “*Hang* me up at their Pleasure,” and “Hoadly” responds with an idealized version of the collective populace: “*Society* will not do this. They have *Laws* to go by. And they cannot *Hang* you Unjustly, without making a *Precedent* for Themselves, that every Man may be *Hang’d* by the same *Rule*” (131). Leslie’s argument is a familiar one, and polemically useful to the conservative camp: any degree of meaningful civil disobedience leads to anarchy. Elsewhere, Hoadly in turn ridicules that position, denying that it is “impossible to oppose *Princes*, without running into a lawless and ungoverned Condition.”<sup>61</sup> Hoadly consistently defends humanity’s capacity to be community-minded, as does Steele, and for both men that conviction enables them to commit to a Protestant ethos that privileges freedom over institutional control. This freedom, I should note, has limits: Steele is operating within a milieu in which equal rights for women or slaves are anathema, and when he promotes popular political engagement, he does so with a predominantly white male public sphere in mind. Though female voices are represented in *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, and *The Guardian*, Steele unequivocally imagines “separate spheres that construed the military, political, and economic realms as exclusively masculine.”<sup>62</sup>

58. Benjamin Hoadly, *The Nature and Duty of a Public Spirit. A Sermon* (1717; STC T18275), 12.

59. Hoadly, *The Nature and Duty of a Public Spirit*, 17–18.

60. Charles Leslie, *The Finishing Stroke* (1711), 130.

61. Hoadly, *The Measures of Submission*, 79.

62. Shawn Lisa Maurer, *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical* (Stanford, Calif., 1998), 119.

### The Critique of Protestant Popery

Steele rarely figures in discussions of religious and theological controversy, but he was in this realm an ally of Hoadly's in many important respects. Most conclusions about Steele and religion have concerned his rabid anti-Catholicism and fear of the Pretender; Knight pronounces that "Steele's treatments of Catholicism are often modestly ridiculous."<sup>63</sup> But Steele is more than generically anti-Catholic; he joins Hoadly and other Low Church Whigs in reminding Anglican clergymen that they belong to a reformed Protestant Church. They belong, in other words, to a church that cannot claim secular authority or a scriptural mandate to police men's consciences. The critique of clerical authority—a critique of both the premise and the abuse of secular power—had become, by Queen Anne's reign, a foundational part of radical Whig and republican political thought. Writers like Toland and Tindal—as well as John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, anticlerical authors of *Cato's Letters* (1720–23), among other things—challenged the Church's position as sole arbiter and explainer of the scripture and its disrespect for liberty of conscience.

Mark Goldie has reminded us that the "militant anticlericalism" of these years "was grounded in an unfolding tradition of Christian reformism." Anticlericalism was not the language of atheists but of reformist Whigs, those "hostile not to scripture but to theocracy."<sup>64</sup> Steele can be read in the context of this reformist Whiggery. He is dogged and zealous in his championing of "the obvious Truth and Honesty of the Reformed Religion."<sup>65</sup> In the dedication to his *Romish Ecclesiastical History*, describing what he wishes were true rather than what he actually believes has been accomplished, he observes that "our Church . . . is reformed from such [Catholic] Absurdities."<sup>66</sup> For Steele and especially for Hoadly, anti-Catholicism represented a way to criticize High Church authoritarianism by proxy—and this dimension of Steele's argumentation has gone entirely unnoticed. As of 1710, the Tories had secured control of the government and the High Churchmen dominated the convocation, which meant a strong push to realize a highflying agenda. The Tories sought to pass an occasional conformity bill that would make it impossible for nonconformists to hold office, and a schism bill to close down nonconformist schools (Steele's response to the latter is discussed below). The High Church takeover of convocation led to the censuring of Hoadly and other Low Churchmen, and in 1710 the unorthodox (anti-trinitarian) William Whiston was expelled from his professorship at Cambridge. When Hoadly and Steele denounce the abuses in church and state associated with Catholicism, they insinuate that high Anglicans are similarly complicit.

63. Knight, *Political Biography*, 137.

64. Mark Goldie, "Priestcraft and the Birth of Whiggism," in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 1993), 209–31 at 211.

65. Steele, *The Englishman*, 231 (57).

66. Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 219.

Steele and Hoadly use the language of reformism to carry out their critique. Both High Churchmen and Low Churchmen like Hoadly share a commitment to Reformation principles, but they disagree about what those principles were. According to Andrew Starkie,

Hoadleian low churchmen understood the English Reformation to have been carried on by parliament and the crown, to have restored the rights of the laity against the clergy, to have been driven by a liberty of private judgment against enforced dogma, to have been carried on in stages for reasons of political pragmatism, and to be incomplete. High churchmen in contrast held to a Reformation which was effected by the bishops and Convocation, which restored the rights of the bishops and Convocation against the papacy, which was driven by a concern for doctrinal purity, and which was a reform of abuses, in order to conform the church to the purity of its primitive pattern, not a comprehensive restructuring of the church.

From Hoadly's point of view, "the Reformation was an act of the civil power to overthrow the pretences of the clergy to an independent spiritual authority, and thus liberate the people from the yoke of clericalism." His opponents maintained, on the contrary, "that popery was based not on doctrinal constraint, but on doctrinal innovation and error. They argued that an unlimited liberty of private judgment would help the cause of popery in England, as it would weaken the Church of England." Hoadly (and Steele) understood "doctrinal latitude" to be a fundamental value of Protestantism; highflyers understood it to be "potentially popish." High Church writers "sought to neutralize the claims of the Hoadleians that the Reformation legislation had effectively subjected the church to the state," disputing the Hoadleian position that "the function of civil power at the Reformation was to restrain the clergy from imposing their dogmatic strictures on the laity."<sup>67</sup> The point I wish to emphasize here is that what it meant for the Church to be "reformed," in practice, was contested—and Steele takes a side in that contest.

Steele belongs in discussions about not only Hoadly, then, but also Tindal. In *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted*, Tindal had ridiculed the notion that the clergy have "*Independent Power*" (xliii); highlighted the "difference between Political and Paternal Power" (6); defended liberty of conscience against "indispensable Obligation" in religious matters (14); and condemned the popery of power-hungry, ambitious, and persecutory clergymen. "[I]f Men have Governors, Judges, and Umpires for them in Religious Matters," he concludes elsewhere, "either *Hobbism*, or which is

67. Starkie, *Church of England*, 103, 104, 112, 113, 117. Here as elsewhere, Starkie is not particularly sympathetic to Hoadly, but about the essential conflict about the interpretation of the Reformation he is accurate.

worse, *Popery*, is unavoidable.”<sup>68</sup> Tindal sought to expose the clergy’s “itch of Tyrannizing over the Laity,” concluding unequivocally that “the Pulpits ring with nothing so much as Implicit Belief and Obedience.”<sup>69</sup> As we find in Steele, Tindal defends the legality of his apparent defiance of institutional authority: “if Sedition signifies defending the legal Constitution of the Church against the Usurpation of the pretended *Jure Divino* Magistrates, he . . . will never be ashamed to be thought seditious.”<sup>70</sup> There are fundamental theological and political differences between the thought of Steele and Hoadly and that of Tindal or Toland—but they all contribute to the anticlerical campaign of the early eighteenth century.

Hoadly and Steele associate religious compulsion with popish tyranny. Respect for private conscience is a privilege and a responsibility of liberty-loving Protestantism. Hoadly gives primacy to “the prerogative of private, individual judgment in matters of belief.” Though he believes in some degree of “moderate political conformity to the practices of the state religion,” he maintains that “conviction, faith and salvation were private issues between God and the individual.”<sup>71</sup> Gibson describes Hoadly as a “reformer” seeking

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. . . . 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.<sup>72</sup>

Hoadly’s polemical career was driven by his conviction that the people can “RESIST *a growing Tyranny, either in Church, or State*.”<sup>73</sup> Hoadly, as Ronald Paulson points out, “was the ‘latitudinarian’ ecclesiastic invoked later by Hogarth and Fielding as the embodiment of true (for which read *liberal*) Christianity in England, as opposed to priestcraft.”<sup>74</sup> He was at the forefront of an early eighteenth-century heterodox movement, one to which Steele—in his own way—belonged.

68. Matthew Tindal, *A Defence of the Rights of the Christian Church* (1707), 9.

69. Tindal, *Rights of the Christian Church Asserted*, 235, 267.

70. Tindal, *Defence of the Rights of the Christian Church*, 22.

71. Justin Champion, “‘My Kingdom Is Not of This World’: The Politics of Religion after the Revolution,” in *The English Revolution c. 1590–1720: Politics, Religion and Communities*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (Manchester, 2007), 185–202 at 196.

72. Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate*, 14.

73. Hoadly, *Original and Institution of Civil Government*, 193 (appendix).

74. Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth’s Harlot: Sacred Parody in Enlightenment England* (Baltimore, 2003), 71.

Liberty of conscience represents for Steele “the Essence of the Protestant Religion,”<sup>75</sup> and he views the protection of tender consciences as a sine qua non of Protestant nations. He routinely fulminates against the persecutory spirit of too many Tories: “The Protestant and Christian World have been bent down to the Ground, by Antichristian Projects and Plans against *Schism*. Dissenters from us in little Points, which are in themselves indifferent, have been treated like the Enemies of God and Man.”<sup>76</sup> Hoadly shares Steele’s conviction that “the free *Exercise of Religion* [is] necessary to the Happiness of a *govern’d Society*; because as there is no *Tyranny* so odious to *God* as *Tyranny* over the *Conscience*; so there is no *Slavery* so uneasy . . . as a forc’d *Religion*.”<sup>77</sup> Like Locke, both Hoadly and Steele deny the role of institutional compulsion in matters of (Protestant) faith.

Hoadly’s *The Nature of the Kingdom, or Church of Christ* (1717), the sermon that precipitated the Bangorian Controversy, represents the culmination of his arguments about Church authority. They are arguments for which he and Steele (among others) had paved the way. In May 1715 appeared the *Account of the State of the Roman-Catholick Religion*—a collaborative enterprise, in some fashion, of Steele and Hoadly. In Gibson’s telling, Steele’s plan for the project was merely anti-Jacobite, but “Hoadly sought to use his preface to ring alarms . . . about the growing rigidity of the Church of England.” The publication, says Gibson, “was an important turning point for Hoadly,” a prototype of the Bangorian sermon.<sup>78</sup>

While Gibson is too dismissive of Steele’s own anticlericalism, he is correct to see this collaborative moment between Hoadly and Steele as presaging the Bangorian Controversy. In November 1715, near the end of his second *Englishman* series, Steele invokes Hoadly and aligns himself with the bishop, not only with his anti-Jacobitism but also with his indictment of misguided Anglican clergy. In number 37, he quotes one of Hoadly’s sermons at length (“the only sure Way of commending it to the Perusal of all the World”), where the bishop insinuates that persecutory Anglicans are violating both “the Law of Nature, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” which “*hath made Us Free*.” He also denies the secular reach of a spiritual body, and Steele concurs: “the Meanest Vice, and Disgrace of Human Nature [is] a Blind Submission of the Conscience to Man’s Authority, where Man can have no Authority.”<sup>79</sup> Or, as he observes in the dedication to *The Crisis*, “we have a Religion that wants no Assistance from Artifice or Enlargement of Secular Power.”<sup>80</sup>

75. Steele, *The Englishman*, 307 (II.14).

76. Steele, *The Englishman*, 278 (II.6).

77. Benjamin Hoadly, *The Happiness of the Present Establishment, and the Unhappiness of Absolute Monarchy. A Sermon* (1708), 10.

78. Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate*, 128, 129.

79. The parenthetical comes from II.38, the rest from II.37 (Steele, *The Englishman*, 399, 397).

80. Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 132.

Neither the extent nor the precise nature of Steele's anticlerical comments has been appreciated. Calhoun Winton rightly notes Steele's "unqualified support for Hoadly," briefly acknowledging Steele's resistance to the "unwarranted intrusion of ecclesiastical power into the realm of politics." From this point, he suggests more broadly that "Steele's enthusiasm for hierarchies of every sort was draining away."<sup>81</sup> Knight quotes Steele's letter to his wife in support of Hoadly during the Controversy, concluding that his "liberal religious sentiments paralleled his liberal political ones."<sup>82</sup> This neutralizes what was in fact a quite controversial position. Steele here echoes Hoadly, but he had taken a similar stance in January 1714. In *The Englishman*, number 46, in a letter signed by Steele himself, he remarks that, "It is the Glory of the Churches of *England* and *Ireland*, that we of the Laity are left at liberty to judge for our selves, and search the Scriptures for our Duty." But not all clergy are prepared to admit or support this particular "Glory," instead trying to exercise illegitimate control over the consciences of men: "The Clergy, like all other Mortals, weaken the Authority which they really have, by reaching at what they have not."<sup>83</sup> They draw "worldly Power from . . . Scripture" and thereby establish "a wicked and frivolous Superstructure" to raise themselves above the laity.<sup>84</sup> If such "Men can bring their Fellow Subjects to believe they themselves are Independent of the Sovereignty; and that the same Sovereign has an unlimited Power over all others; they are in a very good way of passing their Time very agreeably, and driving, fleecing, and devouring Us their Flock." Steele has nothing but contempt for such "Fury and Nonsense mingled in a Pulpit," insisting that "the Clergy have nothing to say to us concerning Government," properly speaking, "but as other Men have it, from the Laws themselves."<sup>85</sup> In August 1715, he denounces "Ecclesiastical Tyranny" and the whole notion that "The Civil State is subordinate to the Ecclesiastical." Again, his line of reasoning anticipates Hoadly's: the core evil of popery has to do with its enabling the "Usurpation of Power in Secular Matters, and a pretended Superiority to all Ordinances and Establishments among Men, from his Authority who declared his Empire not to be of this World."<sup>86</sup>

In the first *Englishman* series of 1713–14, Steele occasionally includes letters purporting to be from representatives of the Church of England—figures who seem distinctly Hoadleian. Like most other anticlerical writers of this period, Steele

81. Calhoun Winton, *Sir Richard Steele: The Later Career* (Baltimore, 1970), 109–10. Winton alludes half a dozen times to Hoadly, pointing out that Steele regarded him as a man "of sound learning and sound politics" (60). Steele's nineteenth-century biographer, George A. Aitken, is singularly uninterested in his relationship to Hoadly or his position on the issues involved in the Bangorian Controversy. His comments on the Controversy are in volume 2 of *The Life of Richard Steele* (1889; repr., New York, 1968), 134–35.

82. Knight, *Political Biography*, 239.

83. Steele, *The Englishman*, 185–86 (46).

84. Steele, *The Englishman*, 53 (12).

85. Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 226–27.

86. Steele, *The Englishman*, 308, 307 (II.14).

is hardly hostile to the Church or to religious belief, as he frequently reminds us: “Give *me* Leave, who have in all my Words and Actions . . . maintained an inviolable Respect” for the clergy, and so on.<sup>87</sup> His target is ecclesiastical overreach. His “Constant Churchman” is a model citizen, devout and law-abiding, dutiful and conscientious as well as warmly empathetic with his fellow Protestants. In *The Englishman*, first series, number 21, he prints a missive from another godly correspondent who explains that he is himself “in Holy Orders” (89). He praises Steele: “I Have with a great deal of Pleasure observed, that in the Course of your Writings . . . the Clergy of the Church of *England* are your peculiar Favourites. They are indeed a Body of Men set apart to officiate in things sacred, which every wise Man will shew Respect and Regard to” (88). This man of the cloth, however, is adamant about the rightful stance to be adopted by his brethren: “We disown and utterly disclaim all Manner of Power and Jurisdiction over Mens Consciences; and the scandalous Methods the Priests of the Church of *Rome* take to advance their Credit, we esteem and look on as unlawful” (89).

Steele clearly conceives of the possibility of a truly reformed Whig church, one that eschews popery, which by definition involves “the Subversion of all the Rights of Mankind.”<sup>88</sup> The receptions of Steele and Hoadly were, in 1715, awkwardly bound together because of the *Account of the State of the Roman-Catholick Religion*. One critic insists, contra the author of the *Account*, that “there can be no Religion without a Priesthood, [and] no Priesthood without Subordination.”<sup>89</sup> Another grumbles that, “To view the Behaviour of many of our *Congregations* at *Church*, one might think from their Looks and Gestures, they were an Assembly of *Criticks* or *Censors*, not of *Disciples* come to be instructed.”<sup>90</sup> Steele and Hoadly were perceived as encouraging irreverence—partly because they promoted autonomous thought and interpretive agency, even in the reading of scripture.

### Reason, Reading, and the Right to Examine

One of the more striking features of Hoadly’s and Steele’s writing, as we have seen, is the commitment it reflects to politicizing and empowering “the people.” Their adversaries regarded them as dangerously populist, and for good reason. Up to this point, I have focused on their contributions to debates about the basis of political power and

87. Steele, Dedication to *The Crisis, Tracts and Pamphlets*, 129. See also his *Apology*: “I have received several Approbations . . . from Men in Holy Orders, for my concurring with them . . . in the Advancement of Morality, and in beating down that unreasonable Humour which had prevailed with so many Writers to expose their Persons and Profession to the Derision of foolish and wicked Men” (Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 308).

88. Steele, *The Englishman*, 365 (II.29).

89. Sir Richard Steele’s *Recantation*, 9. The author of *Advice from the Shades Below. or; a Letter from Thomas Hobbs . . . to his Brother Benjamin Hoadly* aligns Hobbes and Hoadly as “the Principal of God’s Enemies” and “Implacable Foes to all Government” (14). The Hobbes figure credits Hoadly with working to “have Banish’d from our Island the Doctrine of *Obedience to Civil Powers*” (15).

90. *Brief Reflections on Sir Richard Steele’s Large Dedication to the Pope* (1715), 11.

about individual liberty of conscience. Such debates connected to more fundamentally epistemological battles, and to that subject I wish now to turn.

Though Hoadly's commitment to revealed religion cannot (pace Starkie) be doubted, he evidently saw no contradiction between belief in religion based on divine revelation and the exaltation of human reason. Guglielmo Sanna offers a helpfully nuanced summation of Hoadly's attitude toward individual reason, one worth quoting at length:

Hoadly did not confuse the conventional Protestant position of a right of private judgment in the interpretation of Holy Scripture and acceptance of religious dogmas with either the sectarian-denominational paradigm modelled on illuminating inspiration, or the philosophical viewpoint that all opinions should be formed on the basis of reason independent of any authority—including revelation. . . . "Reason" as invoked by Hoadly was not the reason of Descartes . . . it was rather "rationality" as a simple "faculty of understanding," which in Hoadly's sermons was idealized as an antidote to the two opposite extremes: on the one hand, Catholic "blind submission" to ecclesiastical authority, on the other hand, sectarian insistence on the Augustinian-Calvinistic notion that the Bible could not be understood through normal cognitive processes, but required personal illumination worked by the Holy Spirit upon the believer's mind directly.<sup>91</sup>

Sanna calls our attention to Hoadly's stress on the rational capacities of ordinary citizens. That emphasis on Hoadly's part represents a potent complement to his and Steele's argument about the popular basis of political power. How much interpretive agency do they give to members of the broadly defined public community, vis-à-vis the traditional authorities presuming their right to dictate to that community?

Steele and Hoadly shared a sense of a public-minded community, a citizenship capable of restraint and of the exercise of public spirit. From *The Tatler* on, Steele seems keen to instruct his readers precisely in that direction. They both were accused—justly—of empowering the people to see themselves as guardians of their own society. Throughout his first *Englishman* series, written in opposition to the Tory administration, Steele reminds the authorities of the presence and power of a watchful and righteously disappointed public, emphasizing the need for constant civic surveillance. In various ways, he communicates his belief that English citizens have a "Duty to study Politicks as well as Ethicks or Morals" (37 [8]), and not only to study but to monitor and pass judgment on day-to-day political affairs: "An *Englishman* may speak his Opinion *without Doors* as well as *within Doors*: He may, nay he ought to have a jealous Eye upon the Officers and Servants of his Prince: He may, and he ought to alarm his

91. Sanna, "Uprightness of Heart," 106.

Fellow-Subjects” (75 [18]). Steele is repeatedly censured by his critics for his presumption: he claims the right to dictate policy, and he encourages ordinary (male) citizens that they have a similar right. The author of *The Life of Cato the Censor* (1714) offered a pretty typical reproach, mocking Steele’s sense of his own “Power to call the Greatest to . . . Account” (sig. A2r). The following year, another adversary complained that “every Scribler now has learnt of *St\_\_l* to speak High, and say the Nation *expects it*.”<sup>92</sup>

The crux is that Steele’s connection with Hoadly only strengthens that quasi-populist reading of him. His first public defense of Hoadly, after all, came when the rector decided to take on a bishop, refusing to know his place. In a 1720 pamphlet penned by Hoadly (but ascribed to Steele by contemporaries), the bishop professed, flatly, that “every One has a *Right* to publish his *Thoughts* upon any *proper* Subjects, and in any *proper* Manner, under what Shape He pleases.”<sup>93</sup> Given Steele’s reputation for cultivating precisely this attitude among his readers, the contemporary attribution to him makes perfect sense.

Both Steele and Hoadly were remarkably inclusive, even among Whigs, in their notion of “the people.” Steele routinely acknowledged the rights of, and expressed empathy for, the most ordinary and marginalized.<sup>94</sup> Hoadly, as Gibson notes, was every bit as all-encompassing: he “defined the people as ‘every individual person of what rank and quality soever beside the Supreme Governor,’ an extremely wide definition and one with which many Whigs would have disagreed.”<sup>95</sup> Steele’s critics could well have applied to him the language used, censoriously, for his friend and fellow traveler: Hoadly was disparaged for his “democratical Creed,” and for his desire and attempt to “crown . . . ye mob.”<sup>96</sup> Anonymous opponents scorned Hoadly for his concept of “the SOVEREIGN MOB,” for encouraging citizens to believe that their “Sovereign is [their] Subject.”<sup>97</sup>

Both Steele and Hoadly, each in his own way, challenged the Tory (rhetorical and actual) attitude toward and treatment of “the people.” I have argued elsewhere

92. *Burnet and Bradbury, or the Confederacy of the Press and the Pulpit for the Blood of the Last Ministry* (1715), 19.

93. Benjamin Hoadly, *The D—n of W—r Still the Same* (1720), 110. For the attribution, see Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 635.

94. In his *Apology*, for instance, he offers a poignant judgment of those who exploit the relatively defenseless: “It is Justice due to Human Nature, to signifie to an Offender why he is punished. It is a Justice to inform the meanest Man in Human Society, why he is distinguished from the rest to his Disadvantage” (Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 337). And in the final issue of his last periodical, *The Theatre* (1720), he depicts himself as a representative of ordinary, ill-treated men, asserting that his “powerful unprovok’d Adversaries wanted Wit enough, in their Anger, to reflect, that a generous People have always a Concern for the Oppress’d, and Detestation of Oppressors”; *The Theatre*, ed. John Loftis (Oxford, 1962), 121.

95. Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate*, 93.

96. *A Letter of Advice Presented, to Mr Hoadly*, 6; the latter phrase comes from a manuscript poem, quoted by Gibson (*Enlightenment Prelate*, 108).

97. *Jura Regiæ Majestatis in Anglia*, 10; *Crispin the Cobler’s Confutation of Ben Hoadly* (1711), 4.

that Steele (and Addison), from *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* on, contest the rhetorical relationship between Tory writers (for example, Mr. Examiner, and Leslie in *The Rehearsal*) and their audiences; they offer a warmer, more genial, more inclusive alternative to the distant, chilly, condescending, authoritarian Tory spokesmen prominent in the early eighteenth century.<sup>98</sup> Writing as Mr. Examiner, Swift consistently pathologizes political action on the part of ordinary subjects, disparaging “the Madness of the People.” He takes for granted the opposite of loyalty is rebellion, and he implicitly instructs citizens to leave the business of state to their superiors: “it is certain, that a wise and good Prince will not change his Ministers without very important Reasons; and a good Subject ought to suppose, that in such a Case there are such good Reasons, tho’ he be not apprised of them.”<sup>99</sup> Leslie’s *Rehearsal* reflects contempt for the masses, reading like a handbook on how to breed and maintain submission. Any appeal to or engagement with the populace is tantamount to rebellion, and when he speaks of them, he does so in the third person. Rather than warning them or schooling them in the proper way to behave—as Swift often seems to do—Leslie merely fulminates for the benefit of like-minded readers. For Leslie, subjects are largely irrelevant to the workings of government; he shows little patience for voting or for parliamentary representation. He is inflexible on the point: “The *People* cannot *Derive* their *Authority*. They ever were, and must be in *Subjection*.”<sup>100</sup>

Steele’s authorial presence, in his journalism, is drastically different. *The Englishman* includes an abundance of letters purportedly written to the editor by concerned citizens (including “Richard Steele” himself), encouraging their spokesman to address what he has not yet addressed, to object to happenings and attitudes to which he might not otherwise object. Far more than either *The Tatler* or *The Spectator*, this venture appears to be a “paper for the people,” and this participatory (partly fictional) public drives (or seems to drive) the focus of the periodical. Instead of appealing to polite readers and skeptical interpreters of news, he writes to “civil and political” beings. Every Englishman must “stand by the free Constitution of his Country with his Discourse, with his Pen, and with his Sword,” remembering his right to “speak his Opinion *without Doors* as well as *within Doors*.” Steele here collapses any boundary between private and public protest, appealing to his audience to imagine themselves as part of a public community of free civil discourse.<sup>101</sup> When Steele laments the decline

98. Ashley Marshall, *Political Journalism in London, 1695–1720: Defoe, Swift, Steele, and Their Contemporaries* (Woodbridge, U.K., forthcoming), chap. 6.

99. Swift vs. Mainwaring: “*The Examiner*” and “*The Medley*,” ed. Frank H. Ellis (Oxford, 1985), 180, 83–84.

100. Charles Leslie, *The Rehearsal* 3, no. 28 (July 7, 1708).

101. Steele, *The Englishman*, 75 (18). Erin Mackie’s study of *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, and (among other things) the politics of fashion and taste includes reflections on fashion and the public sphere: *Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in “The Tatler” and “The Spectator”* (Baltimore, 1997), esp. 17–25, 151–53. Mackie’s emphasis is on “how *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* take charge of behavior, attitude, and belief through their manipulation of standards of taste and conduct” (18). In this aesthetic realm, Addison’s and Steele’s papers are committed to “non-

of “a Publick Spirit,” he has in mind a commitment to constant inquiry—hence the barrage of questions by which he models a critical position—and active guardianship of the laws. *The Englishman* is empowering, insisting among other things that England is “the *Capital of Liberty*, where the Property of the meanest Subject is . . . strongly guarded by our Laws.”<sup>102</sup> Steele’s reputation, among contemporaries, for emboldening citizens to question their betters was richly earned.

Hoadly’s writings have a similar effect; he is if anything more explicit and aggressive in his refutation of highflyers’ disdain for their fellow citizens. In *The Foundation of the Present Government Defended* (1710), he alludes to “the *People*,” adding a parenthetical corrective: “(which is not a contemptible Word, signifying only *Coblers* and *Tinkers*, as some make it)” (22). Objecting to the (Swiftian) reduction of the people to an ignorant and unruly rabble is a theme of his longest political treatise, *The Original and Institution of Civil Government, Discuss’d*. Responding to Bishop Atterbury, he scorns his rival’s way of speaking: “the *People*, i.e., saith this *Author*, the *Mobb*” (111). He takes stern exception to Atterbury et al., who justify marginalizing the people by insisting upon their fractiousness. Hoadly repeatedly queries Atterbury’s “Sense of the *People’s* proneness to *Rebellion*, and *Sedition*,” disparaging his adversary as “a Man who . . . thinks [the people] fit for nothing but *Bridles*” (148). He denies the validity of the usual Tory epithets for English subjects—“the *giddy Multitude*” (131) and “the *unlearned Multitude*” (170)—and he goes further, reminding the clergy that they are part of the same “*Governed Society*” that they pretend to govern. The “*Body of Subjects*,” he concludes, “takes in all, even those of the most *Sacred Employment*,” despite Atterbury’s attempt to “confine [the word *people*] to the *Laity*” (129). This is a potent act of leveling: in the secular realm, the esteemed churchmen are no less “governed” than the rabble they so despise. They are all equally subjects and citizens; the clergy have no legitimate basis for dictating proper political behavior or attitudes toward the laity. Significantly, Steele would do something similar in the dedication to *The Crisis*, encouraging the representatives of the Church “to let Mankind see that we have a Clergy who are of the *People*, obedient to the same *Laws*, and zealous not only of the *Supremacy* and *Prerogative* of our *Princes*, but of the *Liberties* of their *Fellow-Subjects*.”<sup>103</sup>

Hoadly is adamant about the rational capacities of ordinary citizens and obsessive in his defense of their right to judge matters without the need for institutional guidance. His insistence that people could determine for themselves when their rights and liberties were being invaded is part of a broader philosophical challenge to dogmatic high Toryism:

exclusivity”; they promote a nonelitist “kind of bourgeois taste,” but in so doing they paradoxically “exclude . . . other ‘more exclusive’ modes of taste” (19–20). The political implications of Mackie’s cultural materialist study are more broadly ideological than specifically partisan, but she highlights Steele’s (and Addison’s) subtle endorsements of an inclusive public sphere.

102. Steele, *The Englishman*, 119 (29), 115 (28).

103. Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 132–33 (emphasis added).

I am now fully persuaded that all this cry about the incapacity of *Subjects* to judge, is in many Men only an Artifice to engross and secure all the Liberty of judging to themselves. For I find they always except themselves. None so free to pass severe Censures upon the Administration of Affairs as they, when their Maxims are not followed. Others indeed are not fit to judge at the very time when they feel themselves Oppressed: but *these* Men are so quick-sighted, they can discover Dangers at a vast distance.<sup>104</sup>

Hoadly, like Steele, emphasizes the people's right to know, to monitor, to inquire. In his *Humble Reply* to Blackall during their 1709 battle, he explains the need for such a "Public" response, and the gist is a kind of public enfranchisement: he highlights "The Importance of the Matter; and this not only to your *Lordship*, or to my self; but to the whole Nation of our *Fellow-Subjects*, who are all equally concern'd in this *Debate*."<sup>105</sup> His nonapology for such treatment signals his disapprobation of his adversaries and recalls Defoe's complaint to Robert Harley about Steele's efforts to ensure that "The Ministry be Bullyed in as Publick a Manner as possible."<sup>106</sup>

The argument about the reasoning capacity of ordinary citizens, of course, has religious and theological implications. Writing in 1720, Hoadly chastises those "Grave Divine[s]" who

tell . . . the *People* that They must not enquire, nor ask *Questions*, because *They*, or *Others*, may possibly come to *think They know* more than They *really know*; and that They had better wrap themselves up in *Ignorance* and *Silence*, for fear they should *Heat* themselves too much with *Thinking*: contrary to the whole Conduct of our *Blessed Lord*, and to all the Maxims of his *Religion*; as well as to a very true Observation, That where-ever there is *most* Liberty of Enquiry, there is *least* Enthusiasm: Or, that *Enthusiasm* is the *Natural Product* of Darkness, and Ignorance.<sup>107</sup>

Hoadly, no more or less than Steele, sharply reminds Anglican clergymen that they belong to a reformed Protestant church, and one essential principle of such a church is its respect for the reason of its members, even in matters of biblical hermeneutics. "[T]he *Reason of Man*," asserts one of Hoadly's anonymous allies, "is the *Voice of*

104. Hoadly, *Measures of Submission*, 175.

105. Benjamin Hoadly, *A Humble Reply to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Exeter's Answer* (1709), 4.

106. *The Letters of Daniel Defoe*, ed. George Harris Healey (Oxford, 1955), 430 (February 19, 1714). Defoe's ca. March 10, 1714, letter to Harley is a lengthy rejoinder to Steele's *Crisis*.

107. Hoadly, *The D—n of W—r Still the Same*, 95.

God.”<sup>108</sup> After admiringly invoking Hoadly in *The Englishman*, Steele adds that the “Honest Use of our Reason” is “the Neglected Gift of God,” and it “alone can render the Religion of a Man *acceptable in his Eyes*” (397–98 [II.37]).

Hoadly fixates on “right reading” carried out by individuals, not dictated to them from above. In his lengthy and highly critical *Letter to the Reverend Dr. Francis Atterbury* (1706), he contests Atterbury’s reading of scripture and offers a rival exegesis. His *Letter* represents not only a refutation but also a model of critical reading, which he performs in a very public way for his readers, demonstrating for them the art of active textual engagement: “the main *Question* is, Whether your *Paraphrase* upon your Text be just, and well-grounded. There are two Parts of it, and, as I think, both very foreign from the *Apostle’s* purpose” (13). He proceeds to detail Atterbury’s misquotations and specious inferences for some thirty pages, concluding, “I hope, I have said enough to engage you to take a second view of this Subject” (45). The second person, officially, is Atterbury, but there is little doubt that Hoadly is also inviting the audience “to take a second view,” not only in this instance but habitually. In *Measures of Submission*, he insists that “it cannot be amiss in Us . . . to examine in what Sense [a particular passage] must be understood” (2). In that sermon as elsewhere, he tends toward the interrogative mode, modeling the art of deconstructive reading. His most extensive work of political theory, the 1710 *Original and Institution of Government*, is one long appeal to the reader to test arguments about duty and submission against the Bible for themselves, encouraging them always to consider “whether any place of *Scripture* hath been, or can be produced” to support the particular positions of Atterbury et al. Throughout that text he animadverts on Atterbury, taking him apart claim by claim and trying him in the court of public opinion, reminding readers, relentlessly, that they are to take an active role in assessing orthodox pulpit rhetoric.<sup>109</sup> Though Hoadly’s arguments echo Tindal’s in some respects, one point of contrast is important: Tindal invokes the reader only rarely, obviously being much less concerned with the act of reading and interpretation than the bishop.

Hoadly operates in the tradition of Locke’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) and Toland’s *Christianity Not Mystrious* (1696), denying the necessity of clerical interpretations of scripture. Hoadly gives primacy to individual perception and self-evidence over the corrupt clergy who profess to be uniquely capable of understanding and applying the wisdom of the Christian gospel. In the *Preservative against the Principles and Practices of the Nonjurors* (1717), he admonishes readers not to depend upon highflying biblical mediators:

It is . . . Your *Duty*, Your *Privilege*, and Your *Interest*, to observe *Those Passages* in the *New Testament*, in which the *Genius*, and *Great Design*,

108. *An Answer to a Letter to Mr. Hoadly*, 14.

109. Hoadly, *Original and Institution of Civil Government*, 47; for his admonishments of readers, see, for example, pp. 80, 85, 190, 196.

of the *Gospel*, is *purposely* express'd. . . . They were written for *You*, and they need no *Interpreter*. Remember always that, *These* being plain, there can be *nothing* intended in any obscurer Passage of *Scripture*, inconsistent, or disagreeable to *These*. (63–64)

Tindal again represents a useful contrast. He too emphasizes the clarity and simplicity of Christianity, but without the obsessive affirmations of the individual's rational capacity that we find in Hoadly's work. Tindal accentuates clerical abuses of power rather than individual autonomy: religion "is plain and easy in it self, as adapted to the Capacity of the Generality of Mankind, the Simple and Unlearned," but it has "been render'd so obscure, perplex'd and intricate, and mixt and blended with so many profound and useless Metaphysical Notions, and abstruse, nice and needless Speculations."<sup>110</sup> Tindal goes nowhere near as far in highlighting the reasoning powers (and liberties) of ordinary individuals.

Hoadly is by contrast ardent in his championing of the rights of English subjects not only as citizens but as Christians and as Christian readers. Throughout his career, he declares "to All Christians their Right to look into the Gospel themselves; to depend upon Christ alone for their Religion; and upon his Final Determination alone, for their Salvation."<sup>111</sup> In *The Nature of the Kingdom*, he demands that Christ is "the sole Law-giver to his Subjects, and himself the sole Judge of their Behaviour, in the Affairs of Conscience and Eternal Salvation" (11). Moreover, "all His Subjects, in what Station soever they may be, are equally Subjects to him" (16). Another Whig clergyman, William Stephens, adopts a similar position: "the first Reformers from Popery taught the People, that they should not suffer themselves to be frighted out of their Senses by the air of a Priestly Authority and Confidence." Instead, they should submit what they read and are told to their own reason, to hold to "a Protestant Rule of interpreting Scripture": to ignore any "Absurd" exegesis and accept only that which "is agreeable to common sense."<sup>112</sup> What Hoadly and Steele do is in this respect different from Tindal, much as their conclusions correspond with his on this particular point.

Steele has much less to say about scriptural exegesis, but he clearly shares Hoadly's values. He writes quite a lot about the critical consumption of (political) texts, most prominently in a short-lived periodical tellingly entitled *The Reader* (1714). His objective in that paper is to expose the pernicious designs and troubling intimations of Tory propaganda—especially *The Examiner*—and to convince readers to consume such texts critically rather than passively. Here as elsewhere, he not

110. Tindal, *Rights of the Christian Church Asserted*, 220–21.

111. Benjamin Hoadly, *A Preservative Against the Principles and Practices of the Non-jurors* (1717), sig. A2r.

112. William Stephens, *A Modest Reply to the Unanswerable Answer to Mr. Hoadly* (1709), 5, 7.

only challenges ideas but also models textual engagement for readers, promoting and demonstrating a kind of deconstructive analysis.

*The Reader* is almost exclusively about party politics, but Steele is not wholly silent in his writings about the relationship between the individual reader and the Bible. I have already quoted his Hoadleian reading of St. Paul in *The Englishman*, where he deems too-literal interpretations to be “gross Abuses of Scripture,” comparable to what he regards as the ridiculous notion of transubstantiation.<sup>113</sup> In his *Letter to a Member of Parliament Concerning the Bill for Preventing the Growth of Schism* (1714), he attacks the proposed Schism Act, which prohibited dissenting teachers from teaching. The *Letter* asserts the human right to education, including for dissenters, and claims that “it is the Characteristick of Protestant Churches to admit with all Candour the Liberty of studying the Scriptures, and consequently of teaching and being taught them.”<sup>114</sup> Steele’s position here reflects not only a commitment to toleration of dissent; it also shows his concern for who has access to, and the right to judge, the word of God.

### Recontextualizing Steele

Hoadly and Steele did not have the same kinds of careers or produce similar oeuvres, but they contributed to many of the same conversations and controversies. Steele’s writings raise questions about the relationship between civil liberty and religious-political obligation. Both men were committed to a Protestant ethos marked by individual freedom from false claims of dominion, in realms political, spiritual, and intellectual. Quoting *The Freethinker*, Justin Champion suggests that “the ‘Protestant principle’ was clearly defined as ‘a right of thinking and judging for my self.’” Granting significant differences between the outputs of Steele, Hoadly, and even more radical figures like Toland, they do all belong to the campaign to restore such “Protestant principles” and to extirpate popish tendencies from the Church, the state, and the intellectual milieu of England. Champion concludes that

The dominance of *de jure divino* discourses, which legitimated both monarchical and ecclesiastical institutions, meant that, almost by default, the starting point for thinking and writing about political power was theological and ecclesiological rather than civic or jurisprudential.<sup>115</sup>

Steele recognized this dynamic, I believe, and he contributed something to the attempt to change it. The tendency to see Steele primarily as part of Addison-and-Steele has

113. Steele, *The Englishman*, 219.

114. Steele, *Tracts and Pamphlets*, 246.

115. Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696–1722* (Manchester, 2003), 157, 248.

severely limited our appreciation of his polemical contributions.<sup>116</sup> He has been almost entirely divorced from the contexts of anticlericalism, church reform, partisan journalism, and radical Whiggery, but to those contexts—as well as others—he most certainly belongs.

The relatively unexplored connection between Steele's polemical works and those of Hoadly raises an important methodological point. For the most part, the early eighteenth-century writers literary critics have canonized are not the same figures as those studied by historians and political theorists. We find occasional overlap in the case of Swift and Defoe, whose political careers get them some attention from those outside of English departments. Toland, Tindal, and Collins sometimes figure in literary scholars' discussions of Swift and Defoe, but for the most part they "belong" to students of politics and history. Literary critics own Steele, historians own Hoadly, and rarely do the twain meet. At least when it comes to the reign of Queen Anne, however, there is little justification for such arbitrary or absolute boundaries: we can learn a great deal from putting together poets and political philosophers, journalists and preachers. Steele, Addison, Swift, and Defoe—like Delariver Manley, John Arbuthnot, Matthew Prior, and Bernard Mandeville—were living and writing in the same rabidly partisan, politicized milieu to which Hoadly, Toland, Tindal, Leslie et al. contributed. Trying to hear the conversations these authors were having with each other and sensitizing ourselves to the language they shared and the implications of that language seems an essential part of recovering and reconstructing the culture of politics in this contentious moment.

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ASHLEY MARSHALL is Professor of English at the University of Nevada, Reno. She is the author of *The Practice of Satire in England, 1658–1770* (2013), *Swift and History: Politics and the English Past* (2015), and *Political Journalism in London, 1695–1720: Defoe, Swift, Steele, and Their Contemporaries* (forthcoming), as well as numerous articles.

116. I have analyzed Steele's canon of periodicals and pamphlets elsewhere, offering some conclusions about the nature of his polemical concerns; see "Radical Steele: Popular Politics and the Limits of Authority," *Journal of British Studies* 58, no. 2 (April 2019): 338–65.