



*Negotiating Toleration: Dissent  
and the Hanoverian Succession,  
1714-1760*

**Nigel Aston and  
Benjamin Bankhurst (eds.)**  
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**Review by: Ben Rogers**



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The accession of George I on 1 August 1714 was an important moment in British history. The 1701 Act of Settlement bypassed “James III,” the Jacobite Pretender, and ensured that the succession would pass to the Protestant House of Hanover after Queen Anne had died. Despite the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745, the Hanoverian Succession marked the beginning of a period of dynasty stability. The relationship between the new royal house and the various Protestant dissenting groups within the United Kingdom and Ireland, however, has not been fully explored. The 1701 Act required the Lutheran Hanoverians to convert to the Church of England to accede to the throne. This caused dissenters to have different views of the new royal house that ranged from suspicion, to welcoming the succession as a new age for Britain’s Protestant communities. This collection of essays examines the relationship between the dissenters and the Hanoverians and provides fresh insights into the different dissenting experiences of the new royal house.

The collection is divided into four parts that cover the main themes within its eleven essays. These are: “Dissent and the ‘Deliverance’ of 1714”; “Dissent and the Legacy of the Succession in England”; “Dissent, Social Change, and the Succession in Scotland and Ireland”; and “Dissent and the Succession beyond Britain and Ireland.” The chapters present a valuable contribution to the study of eighteenth-century religious culture. They do not, however, necessarily match the negotiation of toleration that was promised in the book’s title. The reader opens the book expecting it to be a collection of essays that examines how dissenters negotiated the legal parameters that were set by the 1689 Toleration Act in England, or how toleration was practised in the English localities and in Scotland, Ireland, and the colonies. Instead, the collection is structured like an eclectic group of contributions that shows the different relationships between dissenters and the Hanoverians. It broadly, rather than directly, focuses on the issue of religious pluralism and, aside from a few contributions, does not focus on the new approaches to the history of religious toleration that have been recently pioneered by Alexandra Walsham and Benjamin Kaplan. Aside from this weakness, the chapters within the collection provide welcome clarity on the religious dynamics of the succession.

The quality of the essays within the collection varies. Chapter One by W.R. Owens and Chapter Two by James Caudle read like overviews of current scholarship on Defoe and eighteenth-century print culture

(respectively) and do not provide many insightful comments. They are useful, however, in orienting new readers towards eighteenth-century print culture. This contrasts with Chapter Three by G.M Ditchfield, which shows how dissenters welcomed the succession, and the Whig ministry that followed it, as a “new era” for them. This was confirmed in 1719 when the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts, which had been enacted by the previous Tory ministry under Anne, were repealed. Their optimism grew throughout the 1720s and 1730s with the formation of national dissenter organisations that campaigned for the removal of the Test and Corporation Acts. The reluctance of the successive Whig ministries that George I and George II installed to concede this caused the relationship between the dissenters and the Hanoverians to become strained by 1760.

Chapter Four by Andrew Thompson does not present any fresh insights on the politics of monarchy and dissent under the early Hanoverians, but it does provide a thorough political narrative of the events that surrounded the succession. Gabriel Glickman’s excellent chapter successfully uses the new approaches to religious toleration to demonstrate the different strategies that dissenters used to co-exist with Roman Catholics despite their Jacobite sympathies. He shows that dissenters could “get on” with their Catholic neighbours if they did nothing controversial, but this relationship depended on national political shifts, and it was only with the final defeat of Jacobitism in 1746 that these religious relations started to normalise. The theme of normalisation is carried into Nigel Aston’s riveting chapter. Aston shows that the Tories’ cries of “Church in Danger” and support for an Anglican confessional state became less attractive after they were placed in the political wilderness after George I’s accession. This forced some Tories, such as Sir William Wyndham, to reach a rapprochement with the dissenters and accept that their religious rivals were now part of society.

The chapters on Scotland and Ireland provide some of the collection’s best insights. Alasdair Raffe’s chapter shows how the succession caused some ministers and their followers, such as John Hepburn, to break away the established Presbyterian Church of Scotland because they refused to acknowledge a Lutheran convert to the Church of England as their monarch. Similarly, Benjamin Bankhurst’s chapter clearly shows how the attitudes of Ireland’s Anglican establishment towards dissent moved away from a fear of Presbyterian immigration towards a realisation that these groups took their economic skills with them when they emigrated to America later in the eighteenth century.

Chapter Nine, by Matthew Glozier, provides some good insights on the Huguenots who came to reside in Britain after they were expelled from France in 1685. David Parrish takes this transnational theme further in

Chapter Ten; Parrish shows how leading New England dissenters, like Cotton Mather, viewed the succession and its implications for dissent. The final chapter, by Jane Giscombe, takes a similar approach, with Giscombe showing how the devotional works of Isaac Watt, a leading English dissenter, influenced the positive reception of the Hanoverians among dissenters in the American colonies.

Overall, this is a good collection of essays that provides valuable insights into the relationship between religious dissenters and the House of Hanover. The book's title does not match the themes that are addressed in its chapters, and the quality of some of the contributions varies. The collection, however, is a welcome contribution to the study of religious pluralism. It provides fresh insights on how dissenters perceived the Hanoverian Succession and will become essential reading for future scholars of religious pluralism.

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