

Anglican Enlightenment: Orientalism, Religion and Politics in England and Its Empire, 1648–1715 (Review)

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Anglican Enlightenment: Orientalism, Religion and Politics in England and Its Empire, 1648–1715, by William J. Bulman. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. 357. \$82.54. ISBN: 9781107073685.

The Enlightenment, in its traditional, boiled-down form, describes the European intellectual movement that rejected older forms of religion and knowledge in pursuit of rationalism and science. Philosophical in nature, anticlerical in impulse, the Enlightenment was the product of emancipating ideas, the embrace of which led to the production of mature, autonomous individuals. This traditional account of the Enlightenment, viewed as heralding the dawn of secular liberalism, has met resistance from scholars who argue that traditional knowledge and belief frequently proved compatible with new ideas. Recent scholarship has gone a step further in laying down its challenge to the standard view. Current work focuses on the role of media in the period, attending foremost to the articulation and dissemination of ideas rather than to the ideas themselves. Such an approach yields a thicker, more insightful description of the changes occurring in late-seventeenth-century England. Historian William J. Bulman's examination of the Anglican clergyman Lancelot Addison joins this growing body of scholarship. In *Anglican Enlightenment: Orientalism, Religion and Politics in England and Its Empire, 1648–1715*, Bulman argues that the clergyman's life and writings reveal a phase of enlightenment that preceded the latitudinarian, rationalist Anglicanism of the eighteenth century.

The life and writings of Lancelot Addison provide a window onto the shift from late humanist learning to Enlightenment historical scholarship. In this, they yield a narrative that belies the typical association of conformism with coercion. Addison devoted his learning to the project of securing civil peace after the violence of the English Civil War. His work, along with that of other Anglican divines, is notable for demonstrating "the predicament of secularity" in the period (177). In this conception, which Bulman adapts from Charles Taylor, secularity describes a set of conditions under which public religion recognized and responded to an increasingly pluralist context. As Anglican conformists engaged a diverse audience both at home and abroad, they were forced to consider questions such as, "How was it possible to persuade the pious, the impious, the radical, and the orthodox, all at the same time?" (177). *Anglican Enlightenment* argues that such rhetorical predicaments pushed Addison and other Restoration clergy toward scholarly innovation. From the treatise *West Barbary* (1671) and the Islamic history of *The First State of Muhamedism* (1678) to the pastoral care of *The Catechumen* (1690), Addison's works reveal the rhetorical, non-coercive dimension of conformism and, significantly, the global context that shaped it.

Attention to the practices and institutions of Enlightenment media distinguishes *Anglican Enlightenment* as a work of history that yields insights into scholarly methods, literary form, and styles of worship. Bulman's method, which finds precedent in the work of Jonathan Sheehan and Oscar Kenshur, operates on the assumption that tools and practices do not bear any necessary or

essential ideological value in themselves. *The Modest Plea for the Clergy* (1677) attests to the merits of this approach. Addison's treatise employs scholarly methods that predate the deist Matthew Tindal's use of similar tools decades later to attack the clergy: "the freethinkers' tools," Bulman explains, "had not been invented by dissidents, but long cultivated by the establishment" (3). The discussion of toleration provides an additional example. While we typically regard toleration as the key to the progress of liberal democracy, Bulman builds on recent revisionist scholarship to examine toleration as a strategy of governance that "could be championed by adherents of any ideology if the moment seemed right" (210). The tools of argumentation acquired by clergymen from their late humanist training represent one of the central conflicts examined in the book. The humanist curriculum was often singled out as having caused the theological disputes that led to civil war. In the Restoration period, Anglican conformists sought to neutralize the association between rhetoric and violence; however, some, like Addison, remained ambivalent about the value of public engagement. Although he found it necessary to speak out in defense of moral and divine truths, there seemed to be "no obvious way to simultaneously protect the truth and bring peace to church and state" (174). Such was the dilemma of public theology.

Anglican Enlightenment is divided into four thematic sections of two chapters each, comprising Foundations, Culture, Religion, and Politics. This choice of organization at times feels awkward, resulting in a disjointed approach that revisits Addison's works in different contexts. Chapter 1 focuses on Addison's education in the traditional humanist curriculum, which he began during the Civil War and later continued at Oxford during the Interregnum. Addison's humanist education honed his argumentative skills, giving him a powerful set of tools that would lead him into orientalist scholarship. Chapter 2 follows young Addison to the English colony at Tangier after the Restoration, where he served as chaplain and worked as a spy gathering intelligence for the state. In these chapters, Bulman frames Anglican enlightenment as challenging any expected connection between innovation and freedom. "Innovative, scholarly travel writing in this period," he argues, "was in no way dependent upon freedom from the shackles of authority" (59). The cultural and religious diversity that Anglican divines encountered through travel only intensified the conditions of secularity that they met at home. Time spent in North Africa caused Addison and other Englishmen to relativize their own context, with the result that "they began to hammer out a sort of rudimentary social science that allowed them to understand all civilizations on the same terms, so better to manipulate them" (42).

In the next set of chapters, Bulman argues that Anglican conformism in this early phase of the Enlightenment proved innovative rather than reactionary. In chapter 3, the subject is the orientalist scholarship that resulted from Addison's days in the Maghrib. Bulman demonstrates how this work reveals advances in historiography, particularly in relation to the changing norms of credibility. Chapter 4 focuses on the historical study of religion in *The Present State of the Jews* (1675) and *The First State of Muhamedism* (1678). Addison engaged in the study of civil and natural religion in these treatises, in effect working out a comparative study of religion. The most important innovation discussed in this section is Addison's universal theory of religious imposture. As Bulman explains, "by the later seventeenth century, the basic categories of post-Reformation polemic were becoming truly universalized. There was no longer anything inherently Christian about popery, puritanism, or priestcraft, and there was no longer anything inherently European about universal monarchy" (126). For Addison, history revealed that priestcraft was a problem for all civil religions. It was not merely the domain of muftis and

imams but could be found among laypeople as well. Although the charge of priestcraft is typically regarded as the invention of Whig anticlerical writers, Bulman argues that Addison's work takes the novelty out of their challenge to the clergy.

Historical accounts of civil and natural religion aided conformists in responding to the predicament of secularity. In *The First State of Muhamedism*, Addison analyzed Islam as a civil religion that offered numerous parallels to England's recent conflicts. In Addison's depiction, Islamic jihadists looked a lot like some puritans, while the actions of Muhammed mirrored those of Cromwell. However, the study of civil religion suggested multiple, often incompatible, recommendations for how to proceed in the present. For Addison, the answer lay in proper religious instruction. Addison's support for catechizing, found in the tract *The Primitive Institution* (1674), serves Bulman as an example of how conformists advanced their agenda through noncoercive means: "Because it was the only sure way to control men's minds, catechizing young people and their ignorant elders was the linchpin of Anglican Enlightenment" (158). Bulman's phrasing in this passage captures the grudging tension that animated conformists. Anglican elites accepted the conditions of secularity even as they continued to seek control of society. The sixth chapter, on worship, provides an additional angle on this tension, this time in relation to the tracts *An Introduction to the Sacrament* (1682) and *The Catechumen* (1690). In these, Addison found in the sacrificial function of ancient natural religions a means of defending "the media of the Laudian style" (186). As is the case throughout *Anglican Enlightenment*, history again provided an alternative to theological conflict. Whereas arguments for ceremony divided England before the Civil War, enlightened Anglicans fared much better when attempting to advance their Laudian commitments. They achieved a "silent triumph" through efforts such as Addison's search for the universal characteristics of natural religion (177).

The last section of the book situates Addison in the context of political conflict, spanning the period from the Declaration of Indulgence to his appointment as Dean of Lichfield in 1683 and the Trinitarian controversy of the 1690s. While previous chapters focused on Addison's backward-looking gaze, the seventh chapter examines the same set of works in the context of the pressing partisan concerns that often faced the Restoration church. We learn, for instance, how the Declaration of Indulgence prompted his work on catechizing, and how *The Modest Plea for the Clergy* served as his response to the anticlerical rage of the 1670s. The front matter of *The First State of Muhamedism* shows Addison endorsing a skeptical view of the Popish Plot. In this last example, Bulman explains that Addison characteristically used literary form to "elude censure, and discourage open controversy" during the succession crisis (233). Unlike his more disputatious brethren, a group which included the vitriolic Samuel Parker, Addison pursued the path of restraint, opting for a more measured response to conflict. He would go on to reprint and repackage earlier works as a way of contributing to subsequent controversies, such as when he designed the third edition of *The First State of Muhamedism* as part of the Anglican resistance against James II. The treatise that "had once served as a takedown of anti-popery," Bulman explains, "was now being used to skewer a Catholic king" (249). The practice of reprinting provides another testament to how Enlightenment media could be put to different ideological purposes.

The last section, "Politics," offers a more traditional, and some might say more helpful, presentation of Addison's work. But it quickly becomes clear why *Anglican Enlightenment* saves it for last. While partisan context often lends itself to a reductive interpretation of an author's motives, Addison proves a bad fit for existing scholarly narratives of the period, which Bulman

faults for their “Manichean” rigidity (5). An accurate picture of enlightened Anglicanism requires bringing to light the tension, and the irony, to which clergy like Addison remained committed. As Bulman explains, “Anglican pamphleteers and orators never tired of calling for violent disputation and excessive preaching to be replaced by diligent catechizing and humble homilies. Yet by publicly arguing against public argument they partly perpetuated the very dilemma about confronting threats to the church that their interventions were meant to resolve” (164). This irony serves to clarify rather than obscure, as Bulman shows how Addison’s work provides a new perspective on a number of public clashes. The last such conflict, coinciding with Addison’s death in 1703, is the controversy over occasional conformity. Building on recent work by Brent Sirota, Bulman shows how the controversy led Laudian, Tory clergymen like Addison to abandon their public support of limited religious toleration, despite the fact that it had long served as “a rhetorical staple of post-Reformation Protestantism” (279). With the divisions in the church continuing to widen in the aftermath of 1688, this moment represents the demise of enlightened Anglicanism. In response to the challenge of the freethinkers, the high church movement abandoned the historical study of civil and natural religion that had informed so much of Addison’s work, insisting on recognizing the church as a society distinct from the state. During the reign of Queen Anne, the moderation sought by Addison became the focus of dispute.

The book’s final pages attest to the value of *Anglican Enlightenment* for literary scholars as well as historians. Addison’s death brought about the return of Lancelot’s son, Joseph, from his tour of the continent after the completion of his studies. Joseph has proven to be the better known of the two Addisons, due to his authorship of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* papers with Richard Steele. The enlightened Anglicanism of the father, however, offers a significant vantage point for gaining perspective on the son. Bulman concludes the book with the suggestion that Joseph Addison carried on his father’s conformist agenda through the medium of the periodical essay. The moderate sociability that Joseph developed in the *Spectator* essays, he notes, “speak[s] far more to the perfection of pastoral power in secular form than to a triumph for free speech in a literary public sphere” (283). The *Spectator* worked out a form of Whig sociability that, for Bulman, combined freedom and discipline in a way reminiscent of the father’s response to the problem of public theology. The claim is well worth pondering further. With insights like these, *Anglican Enlightenment* should be required reading for anyone willing to wrestle with the complex nature of the Enlightenment and its legacy.