

***Civil Religion and the Enlightenment in England 1707–1800.* By Ashley Walsh. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2020. xiii + 250 pp. \$115.00 hardcover.**

In *Civil Religion and the Enlightenment in England 1707–1800*, Ashley Walsh provides an illuminatingly incisive, compellingly clear, and engagingly elegant examination of Christian civil religion in England from the works of the Anglican third Earl of Shaftesbury in the early eighteenth century to those of the Unitarian and dissenting Joseph Priestley and Richard Price at its close. Walsh thereby furthers considerably our understanding of the English Enlightenment as having occurred far more through redefinitions of the nature and requirements of religion than through overt skepticism, atheism, or irreligion. Walsh is especially indebted to Mark Goldie, but also draws on the work of scholars such as Richard Tuck, J. G. A. Pocock, and Brian Young, in emphasizing the “mainstream” of thought about civil religion in England and the significance of England’s conservative clerical Enlightenment. Walsh’s account underlines especially the contingent but crucial role of the Church of England as an established church that prioritized the shared rituals of worship and belonging over particular and precise understandings of disputed doctrines of faith as well as strongly emphasized ecclesiology over theology. He does not provide analysis of some of the more radical variants of civil religion examined by Justin Champion and Peg Jacob, including Champion’s brilliant accounts of the esoteric John Toland. Astutely aware of the recent work of political scientists on civil religion, such as that of Ronald Beiner, and beginning the book with discussion of Rousseau’s account of civil religion in the *Social Contract*, Walsh’s *Civil Religion and the Enlightenment* is, nonetheless, a work of densely detailed and meticulous scholarship by a historian concerned with the politics of religion in eighteenth-century England and with “post-secular” scholarship, which takes the place of religion very seriously, rather than the work of a political scientist concerned with excavating the thought of canonical figures in the history of political thought in proleptic accounts of secularization.

Walsh’s analysis unfolds powerfully through a series of perceptive and illuminating case studies of individual thinkers that simultaneously cumulate into a series of compelling variations on crucial Enlightenment themes. Six concise chapters thus provide incisive studies successively of many of the texts of Shaftesbury, Trenchard, Gordon, Bolingbroke, Warburton, Hume, Gibbon, Law, Blackburne, Priestley, and Price and simultaneously analyze the considerable body of argument these authors cumulatively directed against priestcraft, superstition, enthusiasm, and bigotry. Walsh persuasively anatomizes their attempts to define and defend a reasonable and tolerant public religion that placed a high emphasis on virtue, the pastoral, the polite, and the sociable. While he recognizes divergent private commitments and motivations on the part of the authors analyzed—(heterodox) Anglican, Dissenter, Sceptic, or Deist—Walsh stresses that in their published writings these authors favored a public church of simple ritual observance that both minimized the number of doctrines required by Christianity and left to one side insoluble doctrinal debate. Within this largely “latitudinarian” religiosity of the English eighteenth century, a series of seventeenth-century thinkers are shown to have been very influential, most notably Chillingworth, Tillotson, Whichcote, and Locke. The influence of Cicero is also shown to have been significant as polite, sociable established but tolerant religion was supported against “superstition,” High Church persecuting

Anglicanism, the bigotry associated with the Puritanism of the mid-seventeenth century, and the priestcraft identified as having reached its zenith in Roman Catholicism.

This is thus a very powerful and very important book. Its concision is often advantageous in its laser-like focus on the twinned themes of Christian civil religion and the English Enlightenment. But other lenses and a wider geographical ambit could have highlighted some different dimensions of the same story and significant limits to the vision of liberty entailed. Walsh notes that support for a public religion could involve “tactical desire to keep the poor governable” (32); the nature of the eighteenth-century social hierarchy in England, supported by the duties of religious submission, could have been examined. The English focus leaves aside the severe penal regime of eighteenth-century Ireland, established in part by English force of arms amidst condemnations of Catholicism as a superstitious quintessence of intolerant priestcraft by advocates of English civil religion. Walsh notes that the spirit of *doux commerce*, trade, and exchange were depicted by some writers as being solvents of religious conflict, with religion put to the end of worldly civilization, but no account is given of what this “worldly civilization” might have entailed in the eyes of these eighteenth-century authors in a period when the English built a colonial empire and enormous riches for the mother country on the backs of enslaved peoples in English Caribbean and North American colonies; the early eighteenth-century Church of England owned slaves in the Caribbean and proclaimed duties of evangelization but not manumission. In one of the more arresting images in this book, Walsh associates “the mood” created by the authors he studies with the dream that Addison depicted “Mr. Spectator” as experiencing in 1711, of his visiting the Bank of England and seeing in its Great Hall the Act of Uniformity combined with the Act of Toleration, and the friendly apparitions of “Liberty with monarchy at the Right Hand” and “Moderation leading in Religion” (23). This is, indeed, a telling image for understanding the ethos of civil religion in the English Enlightenment. But the consequences of this regime that Addison depicted in the dream involved accumulating piles of gold in the Bank of England, as considerable worldly accumulation was Mr. Spectator’s dream, as it was that of many eighteenth-century English authors. Important as were the advances involved in the support of toleration against persecution advocated in the eighteenth-century English Enlightenment, excellently studied by Walsh, it is also important to recognize that for many subjects of the expanding eighteenth-century English empire, from the poor in England itself through Catholics in Ireland to the enslaved peoples in the Caribbean and in North America, the regime built under the rule of Enlightenment English “civil religion” was not a dream but a nightmare of exploitation and oppression.

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***Edwards the Mentor.* By Rhys S. Bezzant. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. vii + 208 pp. \$74.00 hardcover.**

Part biography, part meditation on the calling and task of mentoring, Bezzant’s new volume on Edwards is as unique as it is insightful. While not attempting a complete