

BOOK REVIEWS

***The Opening of the Protestant Mind: How Anglo-American Protestants Embraced Religious Liberty*, by Mark Valeri**

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<https://doi.org/10.54669/001c.115326>

Journal of Religion, Culture & Democracy

Mark Valeri. 2023. *The Opening of the Protestant Mind: How Anglo-American Protestants Embraced Religious Liberty*. New York: Oxford University Press.

In *The Opening of the Protestant Mind*, Mark Valeri, a scholar of religion and politics, provides an account of the evolution of Anglo-American thought on the concept of religious liberty. The book is organized into six chronological chapters covering the roughly one-hundred-year period from the restoration of the Stuart monarchy to the first stirrings of the American movement toward independence in 1765. Over the course of this century, Valeri argues, "Anglo-American Protestant views of other religions" changed dramatically, and he emphasizes "the importance of conceptions of moral liberty to that difference" (4). Valeri argues that English Protestants shifted from viewing all "religions outside mainstream Protestantism [as] malevolent and illegitimate—threats to the unity of the kingdom" to "envisioning religious toleration . . . as the means of unity" and finally, to the "valorization of religious communities that endorsed free will and moral reasonableness" (208). These years mark the rise of Britain as an imperial power, and too often in more recent scholarship, have been seen as key to the rise of nationalism and racism as well. Valeri instead demonstrates that "Protestant discourse . . . could at times call into question, or at least buffer imperial and racialized agendas" (10).

Chapter 1 establishes the relatively fraught religious climate of the Stuart period, which Valeri argues led to the equation of confessionalism with national security. Valeri further illustrates this climate in chapter 2 by focusing on English colonists' evangelism of the Native American peoples in New England, which Valeri argues prioritized the adoption of Anglo-style modes of living over adherence to particular religious doctrines. Chapter 3 analyzes the mixed-religious aspect that gave rise to Glorious Revolution and the subsequent emphasis on religious toleration. This leads nicely into chapter 4 on the development of England's empire in the early eighteenth century as one that rested on "a decided separation between revealed religion and public, civil discourse" (130–31). As a result, Anglo-Protestants began to view conversion as a matter of persuasion rather than civilization. In contrast to this approach, as Valeri demonstrates in chapter 5, "Religious ceremonies or evangelistic practices that mirrored institutional Catholicism in the use of force to compel adherence were politically dangerous" (166). The contrast between this

perspective and that of the earlier period is illustrated in chapter 6, which again turns to the mission to the Native American population, albeit this time in the context of the Great Awakening.

From the outset, Valeri acknowledges that the book is situated at the intersection of a panoply of disciplinary literatures in history, religious studies, and political thought, many of which are highly critical of Western and Christian encounters with non-Western, non-Christian religions. Yet he is careful to distinguish his work from that which equates Christian evangelization simply and inevitably with the denigration, debasement, and eventual subordination of other cultures and religions to the alleged detriment of non-white persons. Without denying that religious language was often used to justify evil practices and policies, or that Christians often fail to live up to the moral calling that animates their faith, Valeri recognizes a distinctly anti-Christian bias in much of the literature that has distorted our understanding of the past. By offering a fresh reading of the sources, Valeri illuminates the ways in which the discourse surrounding the public role of religion in the period actually tilts toward a more expansive and capacious attitude toward “non-English” religions and peoples. Although at the beginning of the period Valeri finds in his sources a tendency to regard civil order as dependent on a broadly shared Protestant doctrinal consensus, by the end of the period he studies, he argues that this has been replaced with a more expansive commitment to public virtue and moral liberty. Insofar as he succeeds at demonstrating that Anglo-American Protestantism in the long eighteenth century became more tolerant of religious difference rather than less, Valeri’s work provides a corrective to much of the current scholarship and is to be commended.

One way in which Valeri accomplishes this is through a close reading of the types of non-elite sources often left out of intellectual history. Rather than approach the question of how religious liberty became not only acceptable to but almost inseparable from the mainstream theology of Anglo-American Protestantism from the primary angle of the treatise or even sermon, Valeri draws on a variety of sources, ranging from travel narratives to popular informational texts, such as encyclopedias, “historical dictionaries,” engravings, journals, and conversion narratives. These divergent source materials offer various advantages and disadvantages to the researcher, and for the most part Valeri does a good job of alerting the reader to the necessary considerations based on the intended audience and form of the original source.

Valeri pays close attention to the constitutive role of rhetoric in shaping theological and social norms. He urges us to consider how the meaning of religious and civil doctrines such as religious liberty are often shaped outside of the texts that we traditionally see as articulating and exegeting them. He confronts us not only with the diverse ways theology is framed for particular audiences, but also supplies some evidence of how such audiences responded and even adapted their theology to the places and peoples whom they

encountered as the Anglosphere expanded. Overall, the book admirably engages with the messiness of lived religion, illuminating the knottiness of the *theological* dimensions of empire in the eighteenth century in a way that yet leaves room for an appreciation of the commitment to individual liberty that lies at the heart of the Protestant movement.

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