Proslavery Priest: The Atlantic World of John Lindsay, 1729-1788. B.W. Higman. Kingston: University of West Press, 2011. xv + 334 pp.

During the past few years, the “Atlantic World” paradigm has produced many illuminating insights into the beliefs, behavior, and interactions of the peoples of the early modern worlds of Europe, the Americas, and West Africa. Barry Higman’s compelling study of the Reverend John Lindsay is an example of “Atlantic World” history at its very best.

Born in Scotland in 1729, the highly gifted Lindsay, who received his education at Edinburgh University where he was exposed to the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment, could have entered any profession he wished. He chose to enter the Anglican Church, and spent the early years of his career as a naval chaplain. His voyages took him to Ireland, the Americas, the Caribbean and, in 1758, to West Africa on a military mission, which he detailed in his *Voyage to the Coast of Africa*, published that same year.

Lindsay, who knew firsthand the “Atlantic World” infinitely better than most of his contemporaries, used not only his literary skills but also his talents as an amateur natural scientist and artist to describe this “World” to those contemporaries. By his choice of career, Lindsay would help to both shape and depict the “Atlantic World” of his day. As Higman so eloquently demonstrates, in his turn Lindsay would find himself being shaped by that “World.”

Because of his writings and artwork, Lindsay became reasonably well known in his day and, over the years, he has received some scholarly attention. Yet this is the first full-length biography, a task made all the more difficult by the fact that Lindsay did not leave a significant cache of personal papers. Higman has managed to track down, and make splendid use of, an impressively wide range of other sources that detail the course of Lindsay’s intellectual development. Toward the end of his life he came to defend what a growing number of his British and North American contemporaries, including some Anglican churchmen, had come to regard as indefensible: the racially-based slave systems of the Anglophone “Atlantic World” and the transatlantic slave trade that fuelled them.

As well as taking him to Senegal, Lindsay’s naval career also meant that he had witnessed firsthand the slave societies of Anglophone America. In his writings and artwork, he was far more interested in describing the natural history of those societies than he was in questioning the basis upon

which they were based and continued to flourish. If he had any misgivings about slavery and the slave trade, and there is no firm evidence that he did, then he kept them to himself. Of course, in this respect he was no different from the vast majority of Anglican churchmen. By the late seventeenth century, adopting a stance that persisted through the mid-eighteenth century, the Anglican hierarchy in London had concluded that, provided Christian owners attended to the spiritual and physical needs of their bond-people, slaveholding was perfectly legitimate. It was only in the sense of his perhaps unquestioning acceptance of this position that, for much of his life, Lindsay could be described as a "Proslavery Priest."

For all intents and purposes, Lindsay's conversion from complicity to a by no means easily constructed intellectual defense of slavery began in 1759, when he took up a living in St. Catherine's parish, Jamaica and, three years later, married into a prominent local family. For a while, the intellectually curious Lindsay put his literary and artistic talents to work depicting Jamaica's natural environment in publications destined for the British reading public. But by the mid-1770s he was applying his formidable intellect, and pen, to something else: trying to produce a convincing defense of slavery, an institution which, in a very real sense, he had married into. Lindsay could have remained silent but he chose not to: it was only during the last decade or so of his life that he became not only a proslavery priest, but a vocal proslavery priest.

By 1770, an ever-increasing assault on slavery and the slave trade was being launched on both sides of the Atlantic. Religious and economic arguments were deployed, as were the natural and moral rights arguments favored by the American "Patriots." Two events in particular in the mid-1770s persuaded Lindsay to enter the fray. One was Richard Nisbet's arguably crazed arguments trying to defend slavery, which he easily disposed of. The other, in 1776, was not so much the U.S. Declaration of Independence, with its assertions of equality, as a bloody slave uprising on his very doorstep, in Jamaica.

Lindsay's inherent racism combined with his arguably vested personal interest in the maintenance of slavery in some form to effectively rule out any possibility of his ever adopting an antislavery position. He consulted friends back at Edinburgh University and, in the years before his death in 1788, sought to square the circle by developing the idea of "amelioration," a proslavery argument that quickly became eminent sugar planters' favored

defense of their system and thereby, of course, of their privileged socio-economic status. For a while, at any rate, Jamaican planters had every reason to thank their proslavery priest, John Lindsay: he was indisputably their most influential theorist.

Higman has done a splendid job in using Lindsay as a lens through which to explore various intellectual currents of the eighteenth-century "Atlantic World," and particularly those that by mid-century were beginning to swirl around slavery and the slave trade. Impressively even-handed in his approach, he has produced a persuasive, and beautifully written, study that that will be of enormous interest to general readers and specialists alike for many years to come.

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