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Recommended Citation

J. William Frost. (1984). "Review Of "The Practice Of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines In Seventeenth-Century New England" By C. E. Hambrick-Stowe". *Pennsylvania Magazine Of History And Biography*. Volume 108, Issue 3. 379-381.

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* by Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe

Review by: J. William Frost

Source: *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 108, No. 3 (Jul., 1984), pp. 379-381

Published by: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20091870>

Accessed: 17-05-2017 14:14 UTC

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"The Origins of 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics': Public Jealousy from the Age of Walpole to the Age of Jackson." In it he resuscitates the eighteenth-century meaning of "jealousy," namely vigilance or suspicion (rather than envy). Hutson shows just how pervasive and symptomatic this world-concept was; links it to political paranoia; and even shows that it could serve as a constructive force. At the start of the eleventh of his *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*, for example, John Dickinson insisted that "a perpetual jealousy respecting liberty is absolutely requisite in all free states" (p. 343). Despite the fact that Hutson comes perilously close to reifying the concept of jealousy (e.g., at p. 370), his learned and thoughtful exegesis—simultaneously a contribution to historiography and to the study of public discourse in the United States—is essential reading for anyone interested in the Enlightenment, American politics, or that burgeoning sub-field, the history of anxiety.

After closing this significant collection of essays, I felt a strong sense of historical discontinuity: how *very* different the colonial era was from our own. Perhaps that is one reason why it has so attracted Morgan and his students. Second, I was also struck by the impossibility of our ever again casually regarding early New England as a monolith. These essays highlight its diversity—yet another reason, perhaps, why we continue to be drawn to it.

Third, and last, I am glad that so gracious a man as Edmund S. Morgan has been blessed by so many fine students as well as a truly "classy" publisher, W.W. Norton. How many commercial publishing houses produce *fest-schriften* at all? With footnotes at the foot of the page? And at a price that seems eminently reasonable by current standards for scholarly books? Morgan's students have been blessed in their modest mentor, and they are twice blessed in their publisher, a gentleman named James Mairs who happens to care about history.

Cornell University

MICHAEL KAMMEN

The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England. By CHARLES E. HAMBRICK-STOWE. (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1982, xvi, 298p. Illustrations, index. \$28.00.)

Books that win the prestigious Jamestown Prize for Early American History deserve our special attention, because a reviewer and reader can assume that they are the products of extensive research and address important issues.

The Practice of Piety will require a reformulation of what a generation of scholars have defined as the essence of New England Puritanism. Hambrick-Stowe argues that the importance of formal theology, logical thinking, and rationalism has been overstated. In his account witchcraft, the Cambridge Synod, half-way covenant, Stoddardism, Indian wars and missions, and Ramusian logic play incidental roles. Even the influences of the success and failure of the English Puritan revolution and the Americanization of religion pale beside a cultural continuity spanning the seventeenth century. American Puritanism emerged, triumphed, and endured as a devotional movement. The discipline of piety, a view of life as a spiritual pilgrimage, constituted the heart of the Puritan world view.

Hambrick-Stowe refocuses attention from the initial conversion, which remains of paramount significance, to what happened afterwards. Puritans believed in a growth in grace after conversion and in their religious exercises sought as a desideratum additional encounters with God. Puritans agreed with John Bunyan whose famous Christian's conversion is presupposed at the beginning of the book and whose pilgrim's progress continued through life to death and salvation. In a Puritan's pilgrimage virtually everything could become a means of grace, and a wide variety of activities could prepare the church member for a continuing religious experience. For the visible saints devotional discipline recapitulated the stages of initial conversion from abasement to ecstasy, and only the renewed assurance of God's election made the encounter different.

Most of *The Practice of Piety* is a rigorous and sensitive examination of the devotional techniques of the Puritans. Considering their aversion to external forms, the New Englanders read and wrote an incredible number of how-to-do-it manuals, personal narratives, and even prayer guides. They engaged in colony-wide rituals: seasonal observances of humiliation and thanksgiving days, election sermons, and renewals of the covenant. Public devotion was manifested in sermons, church liturgy, psalm singing, funerals, marriages, and in preparation for and participation in sacramental observances. Hambrick-Stowe asserts that from the 1630s on the colonists accepted Calvin's version of a real presence in the communion, observed the eucharist frequently, and spent much effort in preparing to partake of the Lord's Supper. For all their emphasis upon communal religion, the colonists allowed—even encouraged—an intense personal piety and mystical rapture attained through such familial and/or solitary devotions as reading scripture, fasting, meditating, journal keeping, praying, and singing. *Practice of Piety* provides the best evocation I have ever read of New Englanders as a worshipping people and makes credible why Puritanism endured throughout the seventeenth century as a powerful religious movement.

Unfortunately, the book also continues the schizophrenic nature of recent

scholarship on New England. Social historians write as though tax lists, economic development, demographic trends, and town history exist in a religious vacuum. Hambrick-Stowe is part of an alternative perspective: a post-Perry Miller tradition which manages to ignore the fundamental issues raised by the non-literary sources. He never discusses the relation of illiteracy to devotion, never deals with the decline in church membership (and attendance?) as affecting piety, never shows why the ministers or journal keepers should be seen as normal New Englanders. In the Preface the author boldly asserts that the distance between theologically trained ministers and the laity "was not wide," but we must accept this insight on faith because little proof is ever offered. And the issue of the laity's theological sophistication goes to the heart of the debate on the nature of Puritanism. For example, Hambrick-Stowe insists that Anne Hutchinson, Perry Miller, and Norman Petit were wrong on the doctrine of preparation because the saints always made a complete break between preparation for conversion (which was a damnable heresy) and preparation in devotion (which was Godly use of means). But both the converted and the not yet awakened participated in the devotional customs used in the colony, church, school, family, and closet. Men, women, and children would need to be theologically astute and existentially consistent to have constantly made the distinction between what was God's initiative and the individual's role. It is easy to see why left-wing opponents charged the Puritans with fostering both works righteousness and Arminianism.

Finally, in spite of attractive format and excellent use of illustrations and poetry, the book remains cumbersome with too many quotations and too much repetition. Since the author did not include a summary at the end, those with neither the time, patience, nor inclination to read the entire work will have to rely on reviews. That is unfortunate, for *The Practice of Piety* is a very important book which should lead to a re-examination of the Puritan impact on the intellectual and religious history of America.

Swarthmore College

J. WILLIAM FROST

Political Leadership in Jefferson's Virginia. By DANIEL P. JORDAN. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983. xiv, 284p. Maps, tables, appendix, index. \$20.00.)

Books about the decline of Virginia always bring to mind the closing scene of *The Cherry Orchard*: the ineffectual survivors of a great political tradition sit around onstage wondering what to do, while from the wings come the sounds of the ax wielded by the more vigorous Jacksonians. Daniel P. Jordan's useful