

Sizer, Sandra S. *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion: The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Revivalism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978. xi + 222 pp. \$15.00.

Although popular hymnody seems an obvious source for a better understanding of mass religion, scholars have given little attention to the nineteenth-century gospel hymns and the revivalism of which they were a part. Sandra Sizer has considerably corrected this deficiency in a work that is essential reading for anyone interested in either American religion or hymnology.

Arguing that the gospel hymns were vehicles for articulating a widespread community defined in terms of feeling, Sizer discusses the verbal structure of the hymns, their place in revival activities, their relationship to the ideology of the popular sentimental novels and revivalism, and finally their meaning within nineteenth-century American culture. She argues that the hymns expressed an ideology of "evangelical domesticity" that solved the problem of order and passion raised by the Second Great Awakening's emphasis upon religious emotion. With the forms of prayer, exhortation, and testimony dominating, the hymns reenacted the revival itself and helped organize the affections. In turn, the revivals, which paralleled periods of political crisis, regarded the nation as a community of feeling that could be purified through an inward religion of intimacy.

In establishing her thesis, Sizer draws principally upon Ira Sankey, James McGranahan, and George C. Stebbins's *Gospel Hymns* as well as memoirs and sermon collections. Concentrating on the text rather than the music of the hymns, she emphasizes the rhetoric, approaching it with the tools of literary criticism and anthropology, particularly in their structuralist perspective. Her argument that the hymns embody an ideology of "evangelical domesticity" depends heavily upon Ann Douglas's analysis of the popular literature of the period in *The Feminization of American Culture*. She recognizes, however, that the evangelical hymns differed from the sentimental novels of liberal Christianity that Douglas studied by projecting the domestic ideal into the social arena rather than keeping it in the private sphere. Nevertheless, the author enumerates a number of what she regards as questionable implications of this rhetoric, particularly its assumption that all people are, in their hearts, essentially the same—"and if they were not they were evil, insane, or otherwise perverted" (p. 137).

Sizer's analysis of gospel hymn rhetoric is soundly based and carefully argued, but important questions remain to be answered. Without an accompanying analysis of popular hymnody prior to 1820, the starting point for this study, we do not know how new was the rhetoric of evangelical domesticity. Although the author compares the gospel hymns

with those of four earlier hymnals, a more extensive examination is needed to clarify the elements of continuity and change.

Also, because the hymns were set to music, which, as Sizer notes, added a further dimension to the organization of emotion, an analysis of their musical settings is necessary for a fuller understanding of these songs. Although this music may have been related to the genteel tradition, as Sizer suggests, it seems more clearly akin to the waltzes, marches, and sentimental songs of the music hall, a connection that contributed to its popularity.

Finally, Sizer's suggestions of the ties between revivalism and the political situation and the contribution that this revivalism made to American civil religion, need further development and documentation. At this point they are provocative speculations that conclude an otherwise thoroughly researched and stimulating book.

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Stannard, David E. *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. x + 236 pp. \$14.95. Paperback (1979), \$3.95.

During the past decade, death has received increasing attention from a number of disciplines, now including history. David E. Stannard of Yale University has chosen the Puritans as a means of beginning the task of examining American perceptions of the life cycle, because their culture "was sufficiently homogeneous for an extended period of time to permit perhaps more responsible generalization than would be possible in most other American cultural settings." The result is a most interesting book.

Stannard begins with a short sketch of Western attitudes toward death up to the Puritans. Although the concept of immortality assuaged the fear of death, the Christian belief in divine judgment encouraged that fear. The tradition of *contemptus mundi*, however, helped relieve inner tensions until it began encountering resistance during the Renaissance. Despite the modernizing trend, the Puritans were intellectually close to the Middle Ages and carried a deep sense of insecurity regarding their individual salvation. Puritan children repeatedly heard that their existence was precarious, their nature depraved, and their salvation uncertain. Puritan adults regarded death as both punishment and reward; their vision of death and attitude toward the process of dying coexisted in a terrible tension.

As the years passed, however, changes took place. The austere funerals that characterized the first generation became more ritualized for their