Review


Prayer in early modern England and Scotland was an integral part of domestic piety. The first of a two-volume collection, *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain* explores more private devotional contexts by asking, “how people...prayed when they weren’t in church” (p. 1). This interdisciplinary collection of essays finds a place in the historiography that all too often focuses on religious expression in the public sphere. This historiographical tendency is the result of “more accessible” sources for public devotion (p. 3). By broadening perspectives to include how early modern people adapted and integrated prayer into their daily lives, the authors of this volume investigate more private forms of religious expression in early modern Britain.

A companion to Ian Green’s survey of English domestic piety, Jane E. A. Dawson’s overview of Protestant devotion from the Reformation to the Covenanting Revolution is the standout essay for the Scottish historian. Dawson does an excellent job of illustrating how the lines between public and domestic piety were often blurred by the structure of the Reformed Kirk. For example, her discussion regarding communion and its intensifying effect on private devotion accentuates how the public religious space influenced privately conducted prayer. Moreover, domestic prayers sometimes occurred within the physical building of the church, which attests to the nuanced ways early modern Scots understood their private devotional exercises. The kirk sessions simultaneously contributed to these trends by enforcing “an essential minimum of domestic devotion” (p. 43). Because the underlying goal of the Kirk was to make the home “a domestic seminary” (p. 43) the Kirk maintained a prominent position in the lives of Scottish parishioners. Dawson touches on the social and the political implications of reformed theology in the aftermath of the Scottish Reformation and provides a strong survey of the consequences
these changes had in religious practice. Erica Longfellow deals with similar trends in an English context in her discussion of, what she terms, the “paradigm shift” in perceptions of public and private lives (p. 55). These essays demonstrate the complex understanding of how spaces were conceptualized, and they illustrate that domestic piety in the early modern period frequently included a social component.

Alec Ryrie’s research on the connotations associated with sleep and dreams is an equally compelling chapter. He argues that there was an ambivalence surrounding sleep because of the inability to regulate the unconscious, which made dreams relevant for assessing moral character. Ryrie makes an effort to incorporate Scottish sources into his analysis. Although his evidence comes primarily from English sources, Ryrie’s approach is a particularly innovative and he presents an interesting method for evaluating domestic religious practice.

Another particularly fascinating discussion is Tara Hamling’s assessment of material objects and their importance in prayer. Not only did physical objects in domestic spaces serve to identify the owner as godly, but they also functioned as mnemonic devices to help people remember prayers and as visual prompts to encourage spiritual reflection. Hamling’s essay reminds historians of the importance of material evidence as “a point of access to aspects of domestic and devotional life that would otherwise remain neglected” (p. 162).

The volume also contains papers which take literary and theological approaches, like those written by Micheline White, Jessica Martin, Hannibal Hamlin, and Alison Shell. Kate Narveson and Jeremy Schildt look at the ways people were expected to interact with the Bible. Beth Quitslund’s essay evaluates the evolution of Psalm singing in the English church. These chapters are insightful for English historians, however they largely neglect the Scottish perspective. This is a persistent issue throughout the book (and “British” historiography more broadly). While not the fault of the individual authors in this collection, there is a wider historiographical tendency to concentrate on exploring English examples in volumes of British history at the expense of Scottish and Welsh experiences, which is underscored by the fact that only
one essay in this collection of twelve is dedicated to discussing the Scottish religious experience. It is also somewhat surprising that a significant portion of the sources for this collection are not necessarily domestic in nature, but rather published materials like instructional manuals for how domestic prayer should be practiced.

However these critiques are relatively minor in comparison to the value of addressing these more domestic examples of piety. *Private and Domestic Devotion* offers readers a comprehensive picture of the practical applications of religion in the post-Reformation period. Moreover, the interdisciplinary approach represented here is a beneficial means of accessing the difficult to assess area of lived experience, often in innovative ways.

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