



Sympathetic Puritans: Calvinist Fellow Feeling in Early New England (Religion in America)

Abram Van Engen

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Revising dominant accounts of Puritanism and challenging the literary history of sentimentalism, *Sympathetic Puritans* argues that a Calvinist theology of sympathy shaped the politics, religion, rhetoric, and literature of early New England. Scholars have often understood and presented sentimentalism as a direct challenge to stern and stoic Puritan forebears; the standard history traces a cult of sensibility back to moral sense philosophy and the Scottish Enlightenment, not Puritan New England. Abram C. Van Engen has unearthed pervasive evidence of sympathy in a large archive of Puritan sermons, treatises, tracts, poems, journals, histories, and captivity narratives. He demonstrates how two types of sympathy -- the active command to fellow-feel (a duty), as well as the passive sign that could indicate salvation (a discovery) -- permeated Puritan society and came to define the very boundaries of English culture, affecting conceptions of community, relations with Native Americans, and the development of American literature. Van Engen re-examines the Antinomian Controversy, conversion narratives, transatlantic relations, Puritan missions, Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative -- and Puritan culture more generally -- through the lens of sympathy. Demonstrating and explicating a Calvinist theology of sympathy in seventeenth-century New England, the book reveals the religious history of a concept that has previously been associated with more secular roots.



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