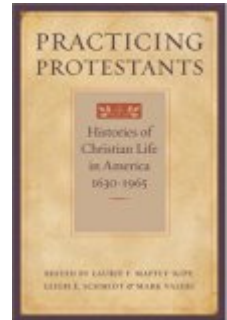


Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Leigh E. Schmidt, Mark Valeri, eds.. *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America 1630-1965*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. x + 363 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8018-8362-0.



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Practicing Protestants is the culminating text from twelve scholars' three-year engagement in a History of American Christian Practice Project. The purpose of this project was to explore the "historical import and theoretical underpinnings of religious practice as a construct" (p. 1). The authors range in academic fields from religion and theology to history and art history, yet their use of various theoretical lenses in a shared conversations produces a cohesive dialogue in which each chapter simultaneously stands alone, yet is highly relatable to the volume as a whole. The text is arranged into chronological, as well as thematic, sections: "Puritan and Evangelical Practice in New England, 1630-1800"; "Mission, Nation, and Christian Practice, 1820-1940"; "Devotional Practices and Modern Predicaments, 1880-1920"; and "Liberal Protestants and Universalizing Practices, 1850-1965."

In their introduction, editors Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Leigh E. Schmidt, and Mark Valeri, describe two central strands of scholarship in the growing field of practice theory. These two strands, often found in opposition to each other, furnish a dia-

logic spectrum on which each author in *Practicing Protestants* can be found. The first strand, that of social theorists of practice, draws on Marxist and Foucauldian theories, among others, to highlight "the intricate exercises of power, the procedures of enforcement, the spaces of negotiation, as well as the subtle tactics of resistance" found in various forms of Protestant religious practice (p. 3). The second strand, that of contemporary theologians, such as Dorothy Bass, and philosophical and ethical reconstructionists, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, offer a differing interpretation. Rather than view Christian practices as "generally hegemonic, with resistance being located in small-scale tactics of getting by or making room, Christian theorists view such regulatory structuring as largely humane, enabling, and supportive." As the editors and authors of this volume intended, the application of these opposing interpretive lenses to the examination of Protestant practice offers rich and varied descriptive and analytical scholarship in which the constructs of power, race, colonialism, class, and gender are held in productive tension with the intentional and

meaningful conception of the Christian way of life (p. 4).

The first section, "Puritan and Evangelical Practice in New England, 1630-1800," examines the practices of Puritan and Evangelical devotional writing and the theological conceptions of forgiveness in the writings and sermons of Jonathan Edwards, and explores the meanings of these behaviors for practitioners, even as the meanings and the behaviors change over time. Mark Valeri's essay, in particular, presents an intriguing picture of Christian forgiveness through the seemingly contradictory framework of Protestant preacher and theologian, Jonathan Edwards.

In the second section, "Mission, Nation and Christian Practice, 1820-1940," the definition of "practice" is widened considerably. Somewhat conventional conceptions of practice are included, such as Protestant evangelical missionary activity in Hawaii from 1820-1860 and the nationalistic practices of the Korean Christian Church, also in Hawaii, in the 1920s and 1930s. The more innovative usage of practice is found in the creative coalescence of Christianity with traditional customs of sagacity and deference in Objiwe culture and the conception of Mission Revival architecture as a physical manifestation of ecumenism in late nineteenth-century California. These chapters offer excellent examples of a social theorist's approach to practice theory, yet with an obvious awareness and sensitivity to the theological end of the spectrum, such as the references to Dorothy Bass's scholarship in David Yoo's work (p. 78).

In section 3, "Devotional Practices and Modern Predicaments, 1880-1920," essays explore the "matrix of intellectual and social changes that compelled further reconsiderations of Christian practice" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (p. 12). Themes range from the practices of acting faith and faith healing to conceptions of sanctification to the changing practice of prayer in modern societies. Among these essays, the additional nuances of gender, such as the par-

ticipation of women in "acting faith," and race, in the intentional bodily discipline practiced by the predominantly African American Church of God in Christ, suggest further layers of theoretical description and analysis (pp. 143, 161).

Section 4, "Liberal Protestants and Universalizing Practices, 1850-1965," explores the ways in which modern Protestants grappled with the challenges of modernity through practice. In "Cosmopolitan Piety: Sympathy, Comparative Religions, and Nineteenth-Century Liberalism," Leigh Schmidt examines the writings and teachings of Thomas Wentworth Higgins, a nineteenth-century Protestant reformer who developed a notion of Christian "sympathy" that predates more recent developments in notions of pluralism. Tisa Wenger's essay on the implementation of choreographed dance, among other elements of pageantry, by Episcopal priest William Norman Guthrie, delineates the advent of the contemporary liturgical dance movement. Finally, Sally Promey contributes a chapter on the emergence of aesthetic "taste cultures" among liberal Protestants from the 1940s to the 1960s, movements by which special committees set about to redefine the aesthetic parameters of religious representation. This chapter is an excellent conclusion to the text as a whole, as Promey offers further extrapolation on the relevance of practice theory to current scholarship. Practice theory reveals a "desire to move away from the historian's customary obsessions with human cognition and texts to consider, in addition, emotion, sensation, and image--to consider, in other words, not simply the things people think in and about religion but also how people live and do religion" (p. 251).

Readers looking for scholarship that represents either social theorist or Christian theological perspectives exclusively may be disappointed by *Practicing Protestants*, although the volume can stand alone in terms of content. Many scholars will appreciate the thoughtful and nuanced engagement between both camps. Throughout the

text as a whole, the authors engage extensively with primary source material and make references to each other's work and their broader conversation partners in practice theory, creating a cohesive and coherent context for each chapter as related to the broader picture of practice theory. *Practicing Protestants* offers a unique perspective into a burgeoning field in American religious history, that of the lived religious lives of American Protestants. This volume will undoubtedly provide a scholarly benchmark from which other historical and theoretical studies in practice theory can be examined.

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