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## Richard Mather of Dorchester (Book Review)

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literary critics, reviewers, anyone who enjoys poetry will find such activity rewarding.

Of course, hundreds of well-crafted, distinctively Christian poems are also included in this collection. I recommend especially the poems of Richard Baxter, the 37 poetic passages from the Bible, Anne Bradstreet, Thomas Browne, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, John Bunyan, John Byrom, John Calvin, G.K. Chesterton, William Cowper, Richard Crashaw, Fanny Crosby, John Donne, John Dryden, T.S. Eliot, Giles Fletcher, Paul Gerhardt, Reginald Heber, Felicia Hemans, George Herbert, Katherine Tynan Hinkson, G.M. Hopkins, John of Damascus, James Weldon Johnson, John Keble, Martin Luther, George MacDonald, Alice Meynell, John Milton, John Newton, Francis Quarles, Christina Rossetti, Dorothy L. Sayers, Edmund Spenser, Francis Thompson, Thomas Traherne, Henry Vaughan, Isaac Watts, the Wesleys, and Dorothy Clarke Wilson.

The only limitation of this valuable volume is that, necessarily, as a reprint of the 1948 Harper edition, it does not survey the last thirty years of Christian poetry.

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**Richard Mather of Dorchester**, by B.R. Burg. The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky 1976. 207 pages, \$15.95. Reviewed by James A. De Jong, Associate Professor of Theology.

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Although not of the historical stature of John Cotton or Thomas Hooker, Richard Mather was an important first-generation Puritan in the Bay Colony. He wrote several polemical pieces defending the "New England way" of gathering churches. He represented a position on ecclesiastical office and authority that had definite Presbyterian leanings. His criteria for church membership were predicated less on the subjective, regenerative experience than were those of John Cotton. He was instrumental in drafting the Cambridge Platform, formulating the half-way covenant, and reversing the Erastian direction of colonial church-state relations. Mather is worthy of this monograph, therefore, and Professor Burg of the Arizona State University history department has placed us in his debt by producing it.

Two chapters are given to Mather's youth, education, early career, and settlement in New England in the 1630's. The third chapter investigates his coming to terms with and defense of congregationalism. There follows a chapter on Mather's style of ministry. And the last two chapters focus on Mather's mature career in

terms of his role in formulating the Cambridge Platform and the half-way covenant. The Epilogue rounds out Mather's contributions to New England life and religion. Notes, a fine bibliographical essay, and an index follow.

Burg's reconstructive interpretation of Mather's life is in the genre of much current historiography which employs sociological, psychological, and anthropological models. It is patterned on the insights of such men as Erik Erikson and Claude Levi-Strauss. Its character is most evident when Burg explains Mather's conversion as emerging out of an adolescent identity crisis, several shifts in his theological position as rather calculated attempts to gain the acceptance of the ecclesiastical establishment, and tensions between himself and his congregation as a manifestation of differences between an intellectual and the peasant society he served.

The credibility of such a historical (psychological-sociological) methodology in this case is strained by the notable absence of diaries, journals—with the exception of a travel journal that Mather kept on his Atlantic crossing—and letters, which would have brought us a step closer to Mather's motivation. Virtually all his writings were theological. It is unfortunate that Burg does not do more in the way of interpreting Mather from the perspective of the Puritan sense of mystical experience and doctrine of conversion, both of which undoubtedly shaped Mather's anthropology and his motivation more than some of the forces stressed by the twentieth-century models that Burg employs. In short, one wonders whether Burg has shown us the real Richard Mather or whether such a recent biographer as Robert Middlekauff, in his book, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals: 1596-1728* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1971), has not painted a truer portrait.

Burg traces with commendable precision the evolution of major New England theological controversies and Mather's role in them. Deftly and convincingly he disabuses us of the myth of clerical solidarity in New England. Yet, in reaching back for the English roots of New England Puritanism, Burg is less than reliable. Richard Sibbes's doctrine of universal calling, Burg would have us believe, commits him to a position of universal salvation (pages 77, 78, 80). Sibbes's sermons "The Ungodly's Misery" and even "The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax" show how preposterous and inexcusable Burg's interpretation is on this point.

Withal, however, the Burg study is a valuable addition to our understanding of early New England religion.