



Salvation in New England: Selections from the Sermons of the First Preachers

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The sermon as crafted by the early New England preachers was the most prominent literary form of its day, yet the earliest Puritan texts have as a rule been available only in rare-book collections. This anthology of sermons of the first generation of preachers fills a serious gap in American literature. The preachers collected here, the most widely published of their time, were among the eighty or more who emigrated to Massachusetts Bay during the 1630s. They are John Cotton of Boston, Thomas Shepard of Cambridge, and Thomas Hooker of Hartford, the three foremost "lights of the western churches," and two eminent colleagues, Peter Bulkeley of Concord and John Davenport, first of New Haven and later of Boston.

The selections are chosen to be representative of the lengthy works from which they are drawn, to reflect the major concerns and styles of the preachers' work as a whole, and to demonstrate the genre of the sermon as developed by the early American Puritans. Not only does this anthology represent an important contribution to literary history, but the sermons also illustrate a doctrine uniquely elaborated in this period—a consistent and emphatic narrative, mythlike in its repetition and heroics, of the progress of the soul from a state of nature to a state of salvation. This theme may be seen as a three-stage-development, although individual sermons may vary. These stages—preparation, vocation, and regeneration—determine the order of the selections.

The editors' introductory material supplies a comprehensive and thorough discussion of the early New England sermons, concentrating on their role, history, structure, style, and subject matter. A separate essay on the texts of the sermons describes the relationship between the early printed versions and their form as delivered in the pulpit. The introduction preceding each selection presents original research on the historical circumstances of the preaching and publication of the work from which the sermon is drawn. The editors have also provided brief biographies of the preachers represented here, an annotated list of recommended background reading, and the most exhaustive checklist available of authoritative editions of the sermons of these five preachers.

This book will be useful to colonial specialists as well as to students of early American literature, religion, and history. The texts are critically edited for readability, with modernized spelling and annotations of unfamiliar phrases and allusions.

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