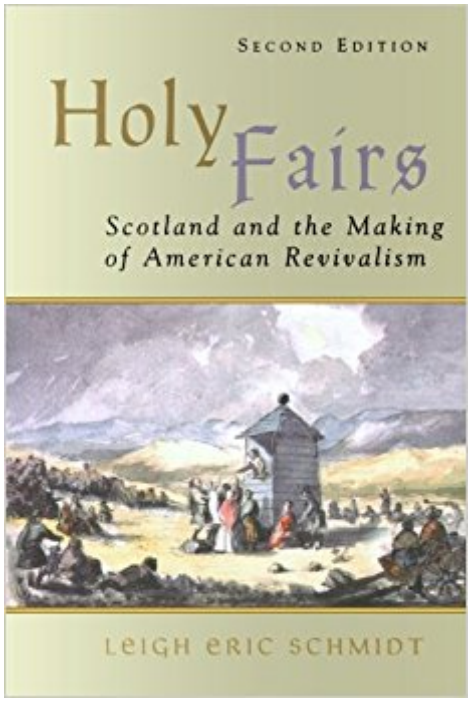
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Holy Fairs: Scotland And The Making Of American Revivalism



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Synopsis

Winner of the Frank S. and Elizabeth D. Brewer Prize of the American Society of Church History, Holy Fairs traces the roots of American camp-meeting revivalism to the communion festivals of early modern Scotland. This new paperback edition of Leigh Eric S

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Customer Reviews

A Professor in the Department of Religion at Princeton University. He is also the author of Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays and Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment.

The meat of this book consists of Eric Schmidt's study of the accounts of the rituals and experiences of 17th and 18th century Scottish Evangelical Presbyterians during the Sacramental season, i.e, the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In this period, the Communion was held only a few times a year. There were a number of ways ministers guarded the solemnity of the celebration particularly by ensuring that only worthy believers partake in the communion. First, they examined communicant candidates by asking relevant questions such as whether or not they had experienced the work of grace in their lives, whether or not they lived a godly life and if they understood the doctrine of faith and the meaning of the sacrament. Second, they preached several sermons even during the preparation week. For example, on Saturday, sermon on the dying love of Christ was preached with further elaboration on who was invited to the feast and who was not. The

list was extensive but there was also a gracious reminder that despite all these sins that one may struggle with, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“all penitent souls, all who were ready to part with their sins and turn their back on the devil, all thirsty panting souls and all poor cloudy believersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• were invited. Here as a sidenote, the Westminster Larger Catechism Question 172 offers some further guidelines:Q.172. May one who doubts of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation come to the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper?"One who doubts of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the sacrament of the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof, and in GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s account has it, if he be dully affected with the apprehension of the want of it and unfeignedly desires to be found in Christ, and to depart from iniquity: in which case (because promises are made and this sacrament is appointed for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians) he is to bewail his unbelief and labor to have his doubts resolved; and so doing, he may and ought to come to the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper that he may be further strengthened."Third, ministers distributed tokens to worthy communicants on the same Saturday to be turned in to the elders the next day during the Communion. On Communion Sunday, ministers fenced the table ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“with awful solemnityÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• debarring all the unqualified. The Ten Commandments were reviewed again with the same exhaustive list of those who fall under the category of the unworthy, while true penitents were invited to come and partake at the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Table. Examples of those who are debarred from partaking include ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“atheists, deniers of the Trinity, enemies of Christ, witches, charmers, warlocks, all who were in compact with the devil, ignorant persons who know no God, worshippers of images, cursers, swearers, tearers of GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s name, all Sabbath breakers, those disobedient to natural parents or civil parents, sinners of the flesh: unclean persons, effeminate, incestuous, persons guilty of bestiality, self-pollution, sodomy, gluttons, drunkards, promiscuous dancers, thieves, robbers, oppressors, cheaters, liars, backbiters, slanderers, covetous persons that cannot be content with their own state and condition,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (p. 109, 111).For communicants or as Schmidt puts it, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“the saints,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• the preparation week began with the preparation Sabbath, namely the Sunday before the Communion Sunday where ministers expounded on the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper, its powers for the worthy and its danger for the unworthy in the morning and afternoon. Wednesday was the day of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“public fast and humiliationÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• where the saints listened to the exposition of the Ten Commandments to facilitate self-examination, confession and repentance. The fast, lasted for 24 hours from sunset on Tuesday to sunset on Wednesday without refreshment. It was a symbol of inward repentance and humiliation, an expression of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“a deep

sense of guilt the saints had for sin, for all that disordered their lives and estranged them from their neighbors and God, for their thanklessness and disobedience, a plain acknowledgement of our unworthiness of the least mercy.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• They were to abstain from ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“worldly labor, discourses and thoughtsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• as well as ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“all bodily delights," in order to ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“discipline the body, placing it more and more in subjection to the soul.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• The focus of this public fast was Christ-centered,"The chastened body was an emblem of the humbled heart. A body that hungered and thirsted suggested a soul that was hungering, thirsting, panting, fainting, almost dying to meet with Christ in the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper. Empty stomachs symbolized empty souls longing to be filled with the bread of life and the cup of salvation" (p.78).It is easy to misunderstand the purpose of the fast, but the saints were reminded that the fast was not an efficacious act that merits GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s grace. The fast was supposed to be a voluntary act of self-humbling before God out of reverence and holy affection to the Lord. Along with confessions of sins, the saints were brought to weeping and mourning for sin because of which Christ had to suffer and die. The saints also attended public singing of Psalms on the same Wednesday and Saturday and the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“public reading of the sacrament.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•In addition to public preparations described above, the saints prepared for the Communion privately through the following activities. Note the preparatory activities that Schmidt lists are similar to the WLC Q.171, How are they that receive the sacrament of the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper to prepare themselves before the come unto it? They that receive the sacrament of the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves: of their being in Christ, of their sins and wants, of the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, repentance, (of their) love to God and the brethren, (of their) charity to all men, forgiving those that have done them wrong, of their desires after Christ, and of their new obedience, and by renewing the exercise of these graces, by serious meditation and fervent prayer," (cf. Schmidt, p.135).First, self-examination consists of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“careful reflection and painful self-awareness through introspection and retrospection.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• The questions they asked themselves were similar to those asked by the ministers. Self-examination questions, perhaps taken from the manual distributed by the ministers include what evidences did they have of saving grace? Did they long for greater conformity to GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s commands? Did they war against lust and backslidings? Did their minds turn regularly to spiritual and heavenly things and away from earthly and sensual ones? Did they express love and affection to their neighbors? Did they have solid doctrinal knowledge, particularly in regard to the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper so that in communing they would show

forth ChristÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s death? Second, personal covenanting is a personal resolution upon realization of oneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s unworthiness to be in the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s presence at the Communion, to renounce sin, accept Christ, dedicate the entire being: head, tongue, eyes, ears, hands and feet to God. These expressions were usually put in written form"ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â|on bended knees in a posture of reverence and humility, the saints took up their pens in the sight of God and bound themselves (and often their families as well) to the Lord. These documents help assure the saints of their worthiness and help them give focus on the difficult and sometimes nebulous task of self-examination," (p.136).Included in this personal covenanting was a moment of profession of faith for the first time, especially for the youths as they embraced Christ according to the Gospel and resolved to live in obedience to God. Regardless of whether one did it for the first time or for the renewal of his or her commitment to the Lord, personal covenanting is ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“a monument that attested to the solemn transaction that had passed between God and the pilgrim soul, a transaction sealed in the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•Third, the saints offered ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“secret prayers,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• that Schmidt describes as ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“incessant day-in and day-out activity with lengthy vigils often lasting all nightÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| long fervent prayers uttered in humility before God.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• This was the moment where the saints often poured out their hearts to God in an extended devotion at an isolated place where the dominant themes were ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“confessions of unworthiness and fervent entreaties for blessings during sacrament.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Fourth, as the saints retired from the world, they focused on spiritual objects. In particular, they meditated on the sufferings of Christ, the nature of sin and atonement and labored to marvel at the sights that accomplished their redemption. Fifth, devotional reading from Scripture was used to aid the meditation, most importantly the passages about the sufferings of Christ. Other readings such as manuals about the nature of the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper, its symbols and actions, the qualification for partaking in them, the dangers of approaching the Table unworthily and the preparation duties were often incorporated as well to supplement the meditation.On Communion Sunday, the saints surrendered the token they received on the previous day to the assisting elders to indicate their qualification. They participated in prayer, Psalm singing and listened to sermon and the Word of Institution in 1 Corinthians 11 and its exposition before partaking in the elements. The Monday after the Communion Sunday was usually an occasion of joyful thanksgiving capping the transition from weeping and mourning for sin that caused the sufferings and death of Christ to joyful praise for his love and redemptive work.The rigorous preparations of these 17th-18th century Christians may seem excessive today, but they are not

something we can completely dismiss. In partaking in the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper we come into GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s presence in a special way. God is gracious to condescend not only to meet us, but also to bless us. The tabernacle in the Old Testament symbolizes not only GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s presence among his people, but also his solidarity with them. To use PoythressÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ words (see Vern S. Poythress, The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991), 11-12),"(God) is majestic and beautiful. But He would not simply remain in heaven and let Israel go its way. He would come right down among them. They were living in tents. He too would be in a tent, side by side with their own tents."Therefore, the tabernacle teaches us the gracious character of God, his accessibility by dwelling among his people and allowing them to draw near to him. On the other hand, it also teaches us that he is holy and inaccessible as we look at the strict requirements where only the high-priest is allowed to enter the Holy of Holies (Hebrews 9:6-7, Leviticus 16:2-34). The penalty for violations of his tabernacle rules is death. This reality teaches Israel that they ought to approach God with holy reverence. Likewise, we ought to keep this attitude in mind when partaking in the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper. We rejoice in his goodness inviting us to his Table in order to bestow abundant blessings for the nourishment of our souls that we may be strengthened and encouraged in our walk with him. Yet proper heart conditions are in order as we consider the solemnity of the occasion, the fact that we come into the presence of a holy God just like Israel did when they approached the tabernacle.Are the preparations done by ministers and the saints that we just reviewed above biblically warranted? While ministers must indeed warn their congregation of the danger of partaking in the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper unworthily as 1 Corinthians 11:28-30 suggests, I canÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t find any biblical support where they need to personally examine individuals. Paul says, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Let a person examine himself,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• so the examination should be done by individual Christians. However, public exposition of the Decalogue, preaching and fasting may be appropriate to facilitate the self-examination process. Likewise, the five devotional exercises are helpful to prepare oneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s heart that he or she may partake worthily.What are the effects of partaking in the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper in the lives of the 17th and 18th century Evangelical Presbyterians that includes the rigorous preparation which is integral to the Communion itself? Schmidt indicates that the preparation itself is often the means God uses to bring the benefits, the blessings associated with the sacrament. These blessings are not merely the graces that MacLeod lists (see Donald MacLeod, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper as a Means of Grace,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Banner of Truth Magazine, 64 (1969): 21-22): assurance of GodÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s love, peace of conscience, impartation of

joy, renewed repentance, resolution and strength to live a holy life but also benefits to the community. Here are some personal journals describing certain individuals' activities and experiences associated with their partaking in the Communion,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“I cannot express the joy with which I was filled in time the Tables were serving, and I could not endure to look down to earth, but looked up, mostly to heaven and thought, I heard Christ speaking to me from thence and saying, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœArise my love, my fair one and come away, and saw him, as it were reaching down his hand and drawing me up to himself, and at the same time, I felt my heart powerfully drawn to him with the cords of love,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (p.120).ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Dedicated the week to extensive prayer, devotion and fasting, meditated on the sufferings of Christ and gained an ever greater sense of her own sinÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â|On Saturday before the sacrament: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœI slept none that night, but went out to the fields for secret prayer.' The morning after her vigil, she wept much during the sermon preceding the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper and at the table she felt much of a hungering and thirsting after ChristÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| On Sabbath morning, the sight of the communion table filed her heart with sadness at the thought of ChristÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s sufferings and with joy at the thought of her near approach to him in this sacrament. When she sat down at the table and the elements were about to be distributed, she burst out into a flood of tears of gratitude and penitence. When she received the cup of the RedeemerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s blood, she believed Christ spoke to her saying, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœMy blood is sufficient to wash away all thy sins.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ She was filled with peace at the knowledge of ChristÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s forgiveness and went from the table convinced of her salvation," (p.119-120).ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Enjoying sweet communion and fellowship with God and had a sweet time as ever I had in my life and thought I could not have a sweeter time in this world. I continued in that frame all the next day and was much refreshed and delighted with what I heard and found in sermons and at the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Table,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (p.137).ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“I went out to the fields by myself for prayer and there falling down, while I was earnestly pleading that the Lord might give me a clearer sight and more affecting sense of the evil of my sins as dishonoring to him, and as the procuring cause of ChristÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s sufferings that ever I had yet got. The Lord was pleased accordingly to give me the desire of my heart in that matter, and more than I asked or could think of. For I then got a most humbling sight and sense of the exceeding sinfulness and hatefulness of sin and I was made to see my sins especially my unbelief as the nails and spear that pierced his hands, feet and side and was made spiritually and in the most evident manner by faith to look as it were through his pierced side into his heart and see it filled with love to me and his love engaging him to undergo all these his bitter

sufferings for me,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (p.138).Schmidt also includes a report detailing the account of a soldier who ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“received faith and went on to seal his salvation at the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s table making on this occasion a personal covenant to lead a godly life. He reported no dramatic experience at the communion, only a solemn and self-made vow to resist all filthiness and pollution of the flesh. In the sacrament he had found moral strength and had been guarded against unbelief. After several years of indifference and immorality, he finally hardened his resolve to resist sin and to lead a godly life,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (p.129).There are internal and external elements in the blessings to the community. The internal one consists of the strengthening of the bonds among Christians in the congregation that includes reconciliation of enemies. In fact, harmony with neighbors was an essential qualification for Communion. When Paul rebukes the Corinthians in I Corinthians 11:17-22, he criticizes the division in the church that has to do with social barrier between the rich and the poor. Proper LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper celebration is supposed result in reducing instead of increasing barriers between the sexes, races and people of different economic standing. The same spiritual benefits - communion with Christ at his table were available to all believers of all walks of life regardless of sex, race and social status, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“All were ChristÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s guests equally at his table.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• The external element of the blessing to the community is displayed in the giving of alms to the poor. Schmidt observes that ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“communion seasons were also high days of charity and mutuality, periods of particular care and concern for the poor of the parish.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Oduyoye acknowledges the positive impacts of the blessings that believers receive during the Communion that are to be extended to their community, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“When we break the bread and drink the wine, we proclaim the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s death till he comes. That proclamation ought to strengthen us to do the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s work till he comes to bring the fullness of the kingdom of God. It should motivate us to plan and execute actions that will constitute Good News to the poor, bring liberty to the captives, freedom to the oppressed, recovery of sight to the blind, and usher in the joyful presence of the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â| Experiencing the self-giving love of Christ in the Eucharist, we are strengthened to go and do likewise,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Mercy Amba Oduyoye, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The Eucharist as Witness,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• International Review of Mission 72:286 (1983): 226.The experiences of personal blessings among these Christians often involved dramatic manifestations such as lapsing into trances, fainting or falling down as if dead, dreaming and seeing visions. Schmidt remarks that during these festal events, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“laypeople often had very direct and overwhelming encounters with the divine.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• However, ministers often hesitated to discuss or include them in their journal

for fear of being charged of enthusiasm and disorder and in order to affirm the rational and scriptural soundness of evangelical spirituality. It may be encouraging to witness what appears to be the power of God at work bestowing graces during the LordÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supper and the rituals surrounding it through these extreme bodily and emotional expressions of joy and repentance. On the other hand, they may intimidate other believers that do not have the same experience, yet are genuinely and positively affected by their participation at the table. Furthermore, how can we be sure whether such expressions are genuine? Another problem is that the imagery often conjured up especially by female believers is that of marriage with Christ which is misleading doctrinally. Scripture depicts marriage relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-32), not between Christ and individual believers. Male believers may not be comfortable relating to the testimonies of female Christians when they see themselves as the bride(s) of Christ experiencing his love through the use of the imagery in Song of Solomon. This marriage imagery may also easily lead to a blasphemous conclusion that Christ has many brides.The lessons learned from the examples of the gracious effects of partaking in the Communion from the 17th and 18th century Christians seem to validate CalvinÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s view of sacraments as a means of grace. They encourage us to be more serious in our preparation not only in order to render the Lord the reverence, holy fear and appreciation due to him as we approach his Table which is for our benefits too, but also as an expression of our longing for him to pour out his blessings in a greater way to sustain us in our pilgrimage in this world and bring glory to him by the testimonies of his goodness in our lives.

To this day, Jimmy Swaggart Ministries in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, hosts an annual event they call "Campmeeting." Though a far cry from the "holy fairs" that emerged in Scotland during the early 1600s, at least in name the gathering in Baton Rouge represents a faint echo of what was, at one time, a powerful tradition. Beginning sometime in the eighteenth century, this tradition made its way to America and, in turn, deeply impacted Protestantism on both sides of the Atlantic.In Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism, historian Leigh Eric Schmidt sets out to provide an extensive history of the regional communion gatherings that were "a critical part of the religious culture of the evangelical Presbyterians" for roughly two centuries in Scotland and a century in America (p. 205). Schmidt says that his goal is simply to understand these events themselves. He compares this to other approaches that seek to identify what caused the revivals or what they generated. He says that his work is about neither causation nor consequence. Instead, it is a sort of "ethnographic history," an exploration of what the revivals meant to their participants and how

attendance at the holy fairs shaped their worlds (6). In the interests of a full description, Schmidt makes use of all sorts of "material evidences" and "disparate disciplines" (7). He wants to find out what the sacramental gatherings were like for average people, even those who were not sympathetic to what was happening. He especially wants to avoid simply reporting the exploits and experiences of the ministers (7).In Chapter 1, a stand-alone history, Schmidt provides a brief description of the early development, basic character, and transatlantic extension of the Presbyterian regional communion gatherings. Regarding their nature, Schmidt writes: "What separated the festal communions from earlier sacraments were such characteristics as outdoor preaching, great concourses of people from an extensive region, long vigils of prayer, powerful experiences of conversion and confirmation, a number of popular ministers cooperating for extended services over three days or more, a seasonal focus on summer, and unusually large numbers of communicants at successive tables" (24).In Chapters 2 and 3, the author changes over from diachronic description to synchronic analysis. Here, he focuses on the experiences that people had before, during, and after the communion gatherings. What was it like to prepare for, travel to, and participate in one of the festal communions? What did the average person actually do? The author succeeds in showing that the communion gatherings realized minister John Livingston's premise that what the Word is to the ear, the Eucharist should be to the eye. Schmidt also reveals, for example, how five spiritual disciplines traditionally associated with participation in the sacramental occasions--self-examination, personal covenanting, secret prayer, meditation, and devotional reading--led up to and generated the kinds of powerful, unforgettable experiences that people wanted to relive year after year.Finally, in Chapter 4, Schmidt describes how the sacramental season fell into disuse during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Why did this happen? Schmidt says that it was the result of mainly two factors: the influence of the Enlightenment, which made the festal communions seem contemptible, and the rise of a capitalist economy, which made them seem wasteful. What these two storms left behind, Victorian standards finished off.

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