



Benjamin Franklin and the Zealous Presbyterians

Melvin H. Buxbaum

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Two sides of Franklin are presented in this book: on one hand, the promoter conveying positive images of himself and his nation as models of toleration; on the other, the polemicist inveighing against alleged offenses of the colonial American Calvinist Establishments (he called them all Presbyterian). Franklin, the Enlightenment Deist, is shown in his pre-1776 years as consistently mistrustful of Presbyterian zeal, and deeply involved in the overt religious-political hostility among Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Quakers. After a prologue describing the religious cross-currents during Franklin's lifetime, the opening chapter contrasts the bland persona of the Autobiography with the 'inveterate rhetorician,' showing how Franklin invented favorable images of himself and of his country because both were 'vulnerable to attack and needed the corrective of good publicity.' The heart of the book is an account of Franklin's half century of controversy with the Calvinists- first with the Establishment in his native Boston, later with the largely Presbyterian minorities in the Pennsylvania and New Jersey legislatures- culminating not with a showdown but rather with a reconciliation as his disillusionment about the mother country stirred his own patriotic zeal.

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