



interpretation of America's religious origins." He begins by portraying the fragile adherence of the laity to Christian beliefs in early modern Europe. The English "astrological physician" William Lilly, for example, saw 4,000 clients a year during the 1640s and cast horoscopes to plan battle strategies for the leaders of Parliament during the Civil War. Anglican clergy used magical amulets. The infamous "village atheist" was still alive and well in 16th- and 17th-century England. All these figures—atheists, heretics, Rosicrucians, alchemists—migrated to this side of the Atlantic, diluting orthodox Christian doctrine with beliefs in supernatural possession, prophetic dreams, and apparitions.

The Puritan zealot Cotton Mather (1663–1728) warned that Christianity was in danger of declining amid the American experiment. Modern historians like Perry Miller and Martin Marty have tended to validate Mather's prophecy, finding in the early Republic both a decline of state religion and the subsequent rise of a romantic, individualistic ethic. Butler, however, claims that in 18th-century America religion turned "establishmentarian rather than dissenting, coercive rather than voluntary, and institutional rather than individualistic."

As the states lost their power to dictate or "coerce" religion, Butler argues, the loss was more than compensated for by the rise of denominational authority: Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists—all proved more effective proselytizers for Christianity than state religion ever had been. And as slavery eradicated the African religions, new Christian sects like the African-Methodist Church sprang up. While in 1780 there had been only 2,500 Christian congregations in America, by 1860 there were 52,000! And these congregations continued to exist side by side with, and be influenced by, Spiritual-

ism, Mormonism, Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, and Freemasonry. Ours was what Butler calls a "unique spiritual hothouse."

During the 1980s, American religious life could seem at times a little odd: a conservative president planning his daily schedule by horoscope; TV evangelists declaring God had spoken to them (and recommended funding); "New Age" religions touting channeling and rebirthing. Butler makes such phenomena seem not faddish but as American as apple pie. Furthermore, Butler shows, this popular religious ferment has proved particularly vital: While less than 10 percent of all West Europeans are church-goers, about 60 percent of all Americans attend public worship regularly.

Contemporary Affairs

THE IRON LADY: A Biography of Margaret Thatcher. By Hugo Young. Farrar. 570 pp. \$25

In 1975 Margaret Thatcher seized the leadership of the Conservative Party before anyone noticed there was anything special about her. Now at least four books and countless newspaper columns have tried to explain the "Iron Lady," "La Passionaria of privilege," and the architect of the "Thatcher Revolution." Yet only Manchester *Guardian* columnist Hugo Young's new biography—fair, superbly written, and analytical—rises above transitory journalism.

Born in 1925, the daughter of a successful greengrocer in Grantham, Margaret Roberts studied chemistry at Oxford. She subsequently held two positions in the world of business she so strongly admires—research chemist for a plastics firm and quality tester for an ice cream and cake-filling manufacturer. Her marriage in 1951 to a wealthy businessman, Dennis Thatcher, allowed her the leisure to read for the Bar and then, in 1959, to stand as a successful Conservative candidate for Parliament.

In the era of "pink Toryism" during the 1960s and early '70s, she blended in rather well. Her "shopkeeper's prejudices" against workers, the Oxbridge elite, and the old fossils in her party went unnoticed as she acquiesced in supporting the welfare state and trade unions. Her parliamentary career, including her years as minister of education (1970–74),

Young characterizes as “politics without policies.” Yet her latent detestation of the welfare state was recognized by the powerful Tory politician Sir Keith Joseph, who backed her and then helped her wrench party leadership away from the ineffectual Edward Heath in 1975.

In 1979, the Labour Government was undermined by strikes and inflationary demands from the trade unions it represented, and Thatcher appealed to a middle class threatened by social upheaval, immigration, and economic decline. She was elected prime minister that year, even though few knew what to expect or think of her, except that she was obviously an anomaly: a woman in a man’s world (though unsympathetic herself to other women’s aspirations); a *petite bourgeoisie* dominating a party known for its aristocratic associations.

Thatcher’s personal style soon became unmistakable—hard-working, strong, and (according to her supporters) straightforward and honest or (in her opponents’ view) bullying and unwilling to compromise. Far from winning the hearts of her countrymen, though, her popularity has often remained remarkably low: Her almost certain electoral defeats were avoided only at the last moment—as a result of the Falklands War in 1982 and of the wars within the Labour opposition in 1987.

But has there been a “Thatcherite revolution”? Young makes clear that on key matters her legacy, if not exactly lady-like, may well be set in iron: Her curbing of trade-union power (her greatest accomplishment, Young judges) and her denationalization of much of industry are policies almost impossible to reverse.

Yet Thatcher has hardly dismantled the big-spending state: Government spending as a percentage of GNP has actually risen during her decade in office. And the rate of economic growth has fared no better than it did during 1968–73, the worst years of what she considers the welfare-state nightmare. Her critics argue that her overly simplistic remedies of free enterprise and a supposedly minimalist state have worked about as well as two as-



pirins. Now it is time to call for a real doctor. Thatcher, however, is not ready to step aside; having outlasted two U.S. presidents, three Russian leaders, and four French prime ministers, she plans, she says, to keep “going on and on and on and on.”

HOW OLD ARE YOU? Age Consciousness in American Culture. By Howard P. Chudacoff. Princeton. 232 pp. \$19.95

Either we try to hide it, or we celebrate it. Ah, age. Sometimes it signals wondrous gains: old enough to go to school (or to get into day care); old enough to wear make-up; old enough to drive, to drink, to vote, to marry. It also signals loss: mid-life crisis, too old to have children, too old to keep working, too old to live alone. Is this preoccupation with age a modern American creation, or has it been in our genes all along?

Chudacoff, a professor of history at Brown University, observes that before 1850, “age distinctions in the United States were blurred . . . Americans had certain concepts about stages of life—youth, adulthood, old age . . . but demarcations between stages were neither distinct nor universally recognized.” People in their 30s were often considered youths, and folks worked until they were physically unable to continue. During the 1820s and 1830s, the American family was an individual’s primary economic, social, and educational reality. People rarely lived alone, and “intergenerational association prevailed over peer-group socialization,” notes Chudacoff in his dry social-science prose. Birthdays were rarely celebrated, and some people had no idea when they were born or how old they were.

Starting in the mid-1800s, however, Americans began to see age as an increasingly indispensable measure of their fellow kind. Chudacoff relates the origins of this preoccupation to the impersonal norms and objective classifications which modern societies implement as they industrialize. American theorists such as Samuel Harrison and Henry Barnard shaped a growing consciousness that the needs of children, adults, and the elderly are not the same. And studies such as psychologist Granville Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence: Its Psychology*