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AMERICAN ICARUS: IMAGINING MILLENNIAL BENEVOLENCE, 1814-1851

Maskell, Caleb Joseph David

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AMERICAN ICARUS: IMAGINING MILLENNIAL BENEVOLENCE, 1814-1851

Caleb Joseph David Maskell

A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Between 1816 and 1834, evangelical Protestant societies for national Christianization burgeoned in the United States. Collectively known as the "Benevolent Empire" or the "evangelical United Front," it was an unlikely moment for this coalition of elite-led societies to emerge. The years after the War of 1812 were characterized by a political mood of anti-elitist democratization among white citizens, seemingly an uncongenial environment for elite projects of national social engineering.

This dissertation shows how the "formalist evangelical" managers of these societies developed an ideology of millennial anticipation, enabling them to thrive in this democratizing moment. They reimagined the popular American evangelical doctrine of the millennium – a theology of gradual social improvement prior to a thousand-year earthly reign of Christ – casting their societies in the role of instrumental improvers. This metahistorical logic appealed to their optimistic, democratic cultural moment, while simultaneously narrating their elite organizations as essential to its flourishing. In the first three chapters I draw on diverse sources to examine how organizations like the American Bible Society, the American Tract Society, the American Colonization Society, and the New York Sunday-School Union framed their existence via this ideology of imminent millennial anticipation, and performed it through ritualized celebrations at New York's Anniversary Week.

In Chapter Three I show how this ideology was radically challenged in 1834 when the new, interracial American Anti-Slavery Society publicly argued that its "benevolent" millennial vision was fundamentally organized around white supremacy. Critiquing the American Colonization Society, they argued that national Christianization really meant establishing *white Christian America* – a reckoning moment for the Benevolent Empire.

Against the background of this abolitionist challenge, millennial malaise began to take hold among formalist evangelicals in the 1830s. It became necessary to construct alternative millennialisms that tethered evangelical metahistorical self-consciousness to concrete historicity. In my final chapters, I look at three individuals who undertook this constructive work. I explore Joseph Emerson and Ralph Emerson, ecclesial teachers who tried to reconcile millennial hope with the ambiguities of history. Finally, I investigate Sylvester Graham's millennial body reforms, which substituted temporal millennial anticipation with a rigorous program for this-worldly embodiment of heaven on earth.

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Beyond his father's lead: all the wide sky
Was there to tempt him as he steered toward heaven.
Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VIII: 223-225

Longing on a large scale is what makes history.
Don DeLillo, *Underworld*

Introduction

Recall the myth of the fall of Icarus.[1] For many years, Daedalus, a peerless craftsman, had been imprisoned on the island of Crete within a labyrinth of his own invention. Daedalus had designed the labyrinth with such intricacy that, once a person entered its winding ways and countless corridors, there was almost no chance of ever finding an exit. Pining to return to his homeland, Daedalus hatched a plan to escape the island and its labyrinth, along with his young son Icarus. He fashioned for each of them a pair of wings, made of wooden frames with rows of feathers, attached by wax to the edges. It was wondrous work, endowing them with the power of flight – but there was a vulnerability. As Daedalus fitted the wings onto Icarus, he warned his son: "Take care to fly a middle course, for if you dip too low, the waves will weight your wings with thick saltwater, and if you fly too high, the flames of heaven will burn them from your sides." With that, they took off, ascending above the walls of the labyrinth, away from the island that had been their prison. Out across the open water, they were free. Their homeland was within reach.

Tragically, as he flew, Icarus became intoxicated by this new technology that offered him freedom from his former constraints and power to overcome the perspectival limits of ordinary human life. He soared higher and higher. "Beyond his father's lead," Ovid wrote, "all the wide sky was there to tempt him as he steered toward heaven." As he drew closer to the sun, the wax on his wings melted, the feathers came loose, and he plummeted back to earth. Icarus drowned in the ocean, "his lips still calling out his father's name."

[1] My account of the Icarus myth is adapted from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Horace Gregory (New York: Penguin, 1960), 219-222, Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 176-178, and Apollodorus, *The Library: Book 3.10-End. Epitome*, trans. J. G. Frazer, vol. II (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 139-140.

This dissertation tells an American Icarus story. It is a drama, played out on the stage of national religious and political life in the first half of the nineteenth century, that emplots one Protestant community's attempt to escape from the labyrinthine constraints of historical circumstance through the strategic, albeit sincere, deployment of the Christian doctrine of the coming millennium. This escape from history, as in the Icarus myth, was doomed from the start by technological limitations and, more importantly, by the hubris of the ideology that drove it.

In the story that follows, the Icarus figure is not a single individual but rather a loose confederacy of elite white male Protestants who believed that they were called and equipped by God to administrate a technical infrastructure that would facilitate the moral and spiritual development of the young United States. These men were all what I will call "formalist evangelicals," descendants of the established churches of Europe and the colonies, mostly settled in the northeast.[2] In the main, formalist evangelicals combined an unapologetically class-stratified social elitism with Calvinistic convictions about the radical corruption of human nature – a potent amalgam that rendered them certain of the fact that the burgeoning white-man's-democracy of the early republic would lead in short order to moral chaos. The democratic tendency toward moral chaos was the chief worry of the cabal of moral administrators who populate the pages of this narrative. They were convinced that it was their God-given

[2] Curtis Johnson was the first scholar to develop the distinction between "formalist" and "anti-formalist" evangelicals. The distinction was subsequently borrowed and developed by such scholars as George Rawlyk, Jeanne Halgren Kilde, Mark Noll, and Jay Riley Case. I explicitly develop a much more fulsome account of the identity of formalist evangelicals in my first chapter, and continue to refine it throughout the dissertation. See Curtis D. Johnson, *Redeeming America: Evangelicals and the Road to Civil War* (Chicago, IL: I.R. Dee, 1993); George A. Rawlyk, *Canada Fire: Radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775-1812* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's Press - MQUP, 1994); Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Jay Riley Case, *An Unpredictable Gospel: American Evangelicals and World Christianity, 1812-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

responsibility to preserve American society against its dangers by establishing stabilizing institutions that would Christianize the young nation, rendering it a culture of godly order, a "self-disciplined Righteous Republic" that could be mapped within the bounds of Christendom.[3]

Their national Christianization campaign began with the founding of the paradigm-setting American Bible Society (ABS) in 1816. Between 1816 and 1826, essentially the same group of formalist evangelical administrators enabled the founding of a welter of self-consciously national organizations for Christianizing the United States, the most prominent among them, apart from the flagship ABS, being the American Education Society (1816), the American Colonization Society (1817), the American Sunday-School Union (1824), the American Tract Society (1825), and the American Home Missionary Society (1826).[4] Known collectively to historians as the "Benevolent Empire" or the "evangelical United Front," each organization had a part to play in the same broad mission of converting and civilizing the nation, effectively administrating one or another *means* – for example, the universal supply of Bibles or a nationwide network of Sunday schools – that would serve to effect moral and spiritual change at national scale.[5]

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[3] Johnson, *Redeeming America*, 7. Cf. Jonathan D. Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of the Post-Revolutionary New England Clergy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[4] The one consequential, self-consciously national society founded before 1816 was the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), founded in Massachusetts in 1810. However, in its early years, the ABCFM was much more regional and grassroots in character than it would later become, in spite of the aspirations of its founders to establish a global missionary sending agency that would export what Emily Conroy-Krutz calls "Christian Imperialism" around the world. See Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015). On the overlap between the administrators of the various societies, see Charles I. Foster, *An Errand Of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 146 and 121-155, *passim* and Michael P. Young, *Bearing Witness Against Sin: The Evangelical Birth of the American Social Movement* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 65-85.

[5] The first use of the term "Benevolent Empire" to describe these institutions is found in Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse: 1830-1844* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1933). The term "evangelical United Front" has echoes in 19th century newspapers, but was distilled in scholarship by Charles I. Foster, *An Errand Of Mercy.*

To state the obvious, there were a great many technical challenges to surmount when undertaking such projects in an era when the basic infrastructures of commerce, communication, and government were still very much in development.[6] But, prior to the question of the technical challenges lay a broader question concerning the total vision of the work. How would its story be told? How could these formalist evangelical administrators narrate their work to the public?

This was no small concern. As I show in detail in Chapter One, 1816 was a politically unlikely moment to witness a rising tide of formalist evangelical institutions. In the wake of American victory in the War of 1812, a pivotal moment of political empowerment for the anti-formalist Democratic-Republican national leadership, strong currents of anti-elite, anti-centralizing, centrifugal sentiments began to circulate. Historian John Higham memorably captured the zeitgeist in his classic article on the "boundlessness" of the period:

> "After 1815, most of the limits that Americans had assumed would forever enclose the scope of their endeavors seemed to melt away. The limits of ascribed status yielded to an egalitarian celebration of the self-made man. The limits of history dissolved into an ecstatic dedication to the future. The limits of reason were metamorphosed into the infinite possibilities of knowledge and the intuitive truths of the heart…The limits of nature itself receded in a new dynamic world picture overflowing with vitality and undergoing endless growth."[7]

This was not a cultural moment in which an elite-led, centralizing project of national theopolitical engineering would sell itself, especially not one based precisely upon deep suspicion of the intuitions of the *vox populi*. The public was becoming increasingly allergic to anything that smacked of the once-naturalized old-world hierarchies of imperial aristocracy,

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[6] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 31-43.

[7] John Higham, "'From Boundlessness to Consolidation': The Transformation of American Culture, 1848-1860," in *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 153.

whether in politics, religion, or anything else.[8] In order to make legible national projects of formalist evangelical reform, a new narrative frame was required.

Our Icarian subjects found the solution to their political problem by developing a rhetoric of an *imminent national millennial dawn*. Here are three representative examples of this new rhetoric. "Little did we think, a few years ago, that we should enjoy the noble privilege…[of] filling the earth with the knowledge of the Lord," declared a New Hampshire representative of the American Bible Society, reflecting on the first anniversary of the establishment of the ABS in 1817, but *now* "the privilege *is* ours. Many of our ancestors have longed and prayed for the Millennial Glory of Zion. *We live to behold its rising dawn*."[9] At the establishment of the New York Sunday School Union, which would become the largest and most influential auxiliary of the national American Sunday-School Union, Secretary Eleazar Lord reminded the organizers in 1817 to "go on [their] way rejoicing, [not denying themselves] the anticipation that Sunday Schools…*will* hold their ascendent rank among the *means which are to usher in the day of millennial light, and universal righteousness and peace*."[10] In reflecting on the first year of the work of the American Tract Society, S. V. S. Wilder, the president of the society, bluntly asked, "Do we not *already* see the breaking twilight of the millennial morn? Are not the evangelical institutions which characterize the present age propitious tokens of its coming?"[11]

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[8] For some excellent new scholarship on the complexities of this development, see Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 232-234 and *passim*; Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 176-207; Sam W. Haynes, *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

[9] *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the American Bible Society* (New York: J. Seymour, 1817), 53. Emphasis mine.

[10] *First Report of the New-York Sunday School Union* (New York: J. Seymour, 1817), 18. Emphasis mine.

[11] *Records from the Life of S. V. S. Wilder* (New York: American Tract Society, 1865), 243. Emphasis mine.

Examples of rhetoric like this can be multiplied *ad infinitum* from sources describing the work of the organizations of the Benevolent Empire in the decades between 1815 and 1834. To validate their enterprises in the post-war years, formalist evangelicals trumpeted the dawning of a millennium which either *had* arrived or had *all but* arrived due to the work of their national benevolent societies. Rather than inveighing against the public from their elite vantage point, demanding an ethical return to the former righteous ways of the old world, they instead declared, beginning in 1816, that they saw another world coming – the millennial dawn was imminently breaking over the United States, catalyzed by and contingent upon their benevolent work.

Our American Icarus took flight upon the ideological wings of this appropriation and reconception of American millennial hope, soaring for nearly twenty years and drawing ever closer in its abundant rhetoric to the dawning of the millennial day. In 1834, however, the American millennial metahistory by which the formalist evangelical administrators of the Benevolent Empire had framed its work was radically challenged by the concrete facticity of its own tolerance of and complicity with slavery. By its work, and indeed its very existence, the newly-formed American Anti-Slavery Society called into ironic question the theopolitical self-understanding of the managers of the Benevolent Empire and prefigured the need for another reconception of American millennial identity as a whole.

The Classical Evangelical Millennial Paradigm

To understand the radical nature of the appropriation of American millennial self-consciousness begun by the founders of the American Bible Society in 1816 and perpetually reinforced thereafter by the other organizations of the Benevolent Empire, it is necessary to

consider it in the context of the tradition of "middle-distance" millennialism that had been characteristic of American evangelicalism for the better part of a century.

In the earliest years of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther had become convinced, along with many other Protestant leaders, that the Last Days prophesied in the book of Revelation were unfolding before their eyes on the stage of European Christendom.[12] In the face of the bloody internecine conflict between the forces of the papal Antichrist and the Protestant faithful, as well as the persistent incursions of armies of infidel Turks from the east, he felt sure that he could see within biblical prophecy clear textual signs that located his present historical moment within the teleological narrative arc of Christian eschatology. Christ must soon return, ending human time and "rescuing his flock" from this tribulation.[13] This widely shared apocalyptic conviction bred a climate of historical pessimism among orthodox Protestants in Europe in the sixteenth century. Frameworks of Christian social hope were "restricted to what *God* would do at the end of time."[14] Neither Christianizing the structures of government, nor even mass evangelism, seemed appropriate or attainable in these days of final judgment, when time trembled, disintegrating, on the brink of eternity. But time persisted, and Protestantism with it. To both chagrin and relief, the European reformers came to believe that Luther had got it wrong – they were trapped within the labyrinth of history.

By the seventeenth century, it had become clear that the fruit of the Reformation would not be an immediate apocalyptic end of the world, but rather the beginning of a new era of

[12] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 129–130, 154, 183; Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 16–24.
[13] W. R. Ward, *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670-1789* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23.
[14] David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Vancouver, Canada: Regent College Publishing, 1990), 60–61. Emphasis added.

Christian experience – characterized, among other things, by the emergence of evangelicalism.[15] The emergent welter of European and American evangelicals all professed a desire to live in accordance with scripture, worked out in the context of Christian communities of piety and industry that were normed by the narratives and tropes of the Bible. With great diversity and creativity, this efflorescence of evangelical communities jostled to establish practical expressions of ecclesiastical and political life that would accommodate and nurture their religious convictions.[16] In the anglophone world, as projects of Christian nation-building and the "long-term reform" of the church began to take root and flourish, the pessimistic apocalyptic immediatism of the early Reformation was gradually replaced by a new theory of Christian time.[17]

By the eighteenth century, this new theory of time had become dominant among evangelical Protestants. The long-expected events of the Last Days were neither rejected nor forgotten but rather postponed, put off into what historian W. R. Ward has called the "middle distance."[18] In this "middle-distance" formulation, God had used the Reformation, as evangelical theologian Jonathan Edwards explained it, to *begin* a glorious revival of the Church, dealing a decisive blow to the gospel-obfuscating forces of the papal antichrist which had kept the church in ignorant subjection for centuries.[19] God's purpose in the Reformation was not to facilitate a one-time apocalyptic event but rather to initiate a new phase in God's ongoing process of world-

[15] For the best account of the early coalescence of evangelical Protestantism in the wake of the Reformation in global perspective, see W. R. Ward, *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670-1789* (Cambridge University Press, 2006
[16] Mark A. Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 8, 12–14.
[17] Ward, *Early Evangelicalism*, 32.
[18] Ibid., 4, 32, and passim.
[19] Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, ed. John F. Wilson, vol. 9, Yale Works of Jonathan Edwards (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 421–422, and 417-429, passim. Hereafter *WJE* 9.

historical redemption. This process would culminate, Edwards thought, not with the escape of the Church from the tribulations of the world, but rather with the transformation of the world by the universalization of the knowledge of God through the mediating agency of the Church.[20]

In theological perspective, this theory of time came to be known as millennialism. Generally speaking, the millennial dawn – often also referred to as the coming of the "Latter Day Glory" – was understood a moment of worldwide *epistemic renovation.* When knowledge of God had thoroughly permeated the Earth, in a manner widely prophesied in the Old Testament in favorite evangelical passages like Habakkuk 2:14[21] and Jeremiah 31:33-34,[22] then the millennium had dawned. The period in question was named the "millennium" because it was correlated to a scene in Revelation 20:2 when Satan's ability to deceive the world ceases for a thousand-year period. Immediately following a lengthy and vivid description of the destruction of the earthly Antichrist and its "great city Babylon" under the wrath of God's judgment, the author of Revelation recounted the following scene:

> "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. *And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years … that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a season…*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them … the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast … and *they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years*. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."[23]

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[20] See Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
[21] "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." Habakkuk 2:14, KJV.
[22] "After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts … They shall *all know me*, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord." Jeremiah 31:33-34, KJV.
[23] Revelation 20:1-5, KJV. Emphasis mine.

These few verses – epic, laconic, opaque – were the Biblical foundation of the doctrine. Far from resolving theological questions, their mysterious narrative multiplied them. In what way had Satan deceived the nations? What would be the concrete effects of Satan's binding and the suspension of that deception? What did it mean, *practically*, that, after the destruction of Babylon, the saints would reign with Christ for a thousand years, administering God's justice on earth? Would the beginning of the millennium coincide with the *bodily* return of Christ to earth, such that all events prior to that return were colored by God's wrathful, violent war against Babylon? Or would Christ's bodily return come after Satan was again loosed – *following* the millennium – such that the reign of the saints should be anticipated as a season of geopolitical righteousness catalyzed by the victory of the Church over the world? And so on.

In spite of the thicket of interpretative questions raised by the doctrine of the millennium, millennial *practices* nonetheless generated much hope among anglophone Christians in the eighteenth century, for straightforward reasons. The promised millennium speaks of a coming time in which Christians would no longer be oppressed by a world shrouded in satanic deception but rather would rule, vindicated, over a world filled for the first time with the knowledge of the glory of God. In the millennium, Christians would no longer struggle to maintain God's righteousness amidst a world that opposed it, but rather would preside, unopposed, over the establishment of God's righteousness throughout the earth.

The primary evangelical practice associated with millennial discourse in the eighteenth-century American colonies was revivalism, and the most well-known revival of all was the so-called "Little Awakening" of 1734-5 in Northampton, Massachusetts, where Jonathan Edwards was the pastor. The "Little Awakening" – and Edwards himself – became internationally famous

among evangelicals because Edwards wrote a book about it, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprizing Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton.*[24] In it, he described the fact that, in Northampton under his pastorate, spiritual concerns suddenly began "to prevail abundantly in the town, till in a very little time it became universal … among old and young, and from the highest to the lowest. All seemed to be seized with a deep concern about their eternal salvation … no one family that I know of and scarcely a person has been exempt."[25]

In a matter of weeks, hundreds of people had been newly converted, and hundreds more who were already converted had found their faith reawakened. What made evangelicals sit up and take notice of this was Edwards's account of what he called the revival's "universality."[26] It affected everyone. As Edwards put it, God was taking matters "into His own hands," and accomplishing as much "in a day or two" as could be done "in a year … in ordinary times."[27] Edwards described the Little Awakening as a moment in which the experience of quotidian time, usually regulated by rhythms of commerce, industry, and worldly business, were suddenly being regulated by popular awareness of the presence of God.

"Earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world became universal in all parts of the town.… All the conversation in all companies and upon all occasions was upon these things only, unless so much as was necessary for people, carrying on their ordinary secular business.… [This was] the *reverse* of what commonly is: religion was with all sorts the great concern, and the world was a thing only by the bye."[28]

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[24] Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprizing Work of God: In the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, ... In a Letter to the Revd. Dr. Benjamin Colman ... Written by the Revd. Mr. Edwards, ... and Published, with a Large Preface, by Dr. Watts and Dr. Guyse* (London: John Oswald, 1737).
[25] Jonathan Edwards*, The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen, vol. 4, Yale Works of Jonathan Edwards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972*),*101. Hereafter *WJE* 4.
[26] George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004),160-162.
[27] *WJE* 4, 159.
[28] *WJE* 4, 149-150.

The authority of the coming kingdom of God was being actively held up as both the ultimate *telos* of human labor and the present ethical standard by which human beings should order their secular lives.

This picture of universal encounter with God resulting in epistemic transformation and rewriting the script of secular life was a climactic manifestation of precisely the type of redemptive work in Protestant culture that had captured evangelical hearts since the mid-seventeenth century.[29] Both head and heart were involved, combining the preaching of what Edwards's publishers called the "common plain Protestant doctrine of the Reformation" with widespread reported experiences of spiritual conversion and personal transformation among those who experienced it.[30] It was lost on no one that the universality Edwards reported bore striking resemblance to the conditions described in such scriptures as Jeremiah 31:33-34 that were understood to prophesy the millennial dawn. Edwards himself was more than willing to entertain the thought, writing in 1742, in the wake of the "Great Awakening," another massive wave of evangelical revivals that had affected hundreds of thousands of people, and rocked colonial life:

"'Tis not unlikely that this work of God's Spirit, that is so extraordinary and wonderful is the dawning, or at least a prelude, of that glorious work of God, so often foretold in Scripture, which in the process and issue of it shall renew the world of mankind.… *We can't reasonably think otherwise than that the beginning of this great work of God must be near. And there are many things that make it probable that this work will begin in America*…. [The prophesied 'new world'] is probably now discovered, that the new and most glorious state of God's church on earth might commence there; that God might in it begin a new world in a spiritual respect, when he creates the new heavens and the new earth."[31]

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[29] On the emergence of such an evangelicalism in the context of 17th-century Northern European pietism, see Ward, *Early Evangelicalism*, 24-69.
[30] Isaac Watts and John Guyse, Preface to the First Edition of *Faithful Narrative* (1737) in *WJE* 4, 132; W. R. Ward, *Early Evangelicalism*, 4, and *passim*.
[31] *WJE* 4, 353-354, 358.

Between the 1740s and the end of the century, this notion began to permeate American evangelical consciousness. H. Richard Niebuhr wrote that, of all the efforts to explain where the "millenarian tendency" of American Christianity originated, "revivals seem above all to have made it the common and vital possession of American Christians. They brought the remote [millennial] possibility very near."[32]

This heightened millennial consciousness provoked by circumstances in which the spiritual work of "a year in ordinary times" was accomplished in "a day or two" of revival presented both a confirmation and a challenge to "middle-distance" evangelical eschatology. On the one hand, it seemed to confirm that the millennial dawn *was* approaching. Evangelicals, writes W. R. Ward, characteristically sought to "accumulate archives which … support[ed] their view of history," archives the revivals provided *par excellence*. On the other, it challenged the theological temperance of the middle-distance way, opening speculation about whether what was happening *now* in American social and political context might not be *especially* significant to the millennial dawn.[33]

For the first time, the state of "Christian America" *qua* the nation suddenly took on profound eschatological significance. In the late eighteenth century, as the United States came into being, some evangelicals, especially those from denominations with a history of legal establishment, began to ask whether there might be national measures that a Christian society could take – socially or politically – to *hasten* the millennial dawn through forming their nation in righteousness. Were there political conditions, for example, that would be more conducive to

[32] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 143.
[33] On the importance of the experience of the "*now*" to eighteenth century evangelicals, see D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism: True Religion in a Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 60-68.

spreading abroad the universal knowledge of God? Could theopolitical forms of social engineering bring about a republic of righteousness that would be pleasing to God, pushing Americans closer to the millennial destiny that Edwards and his generation foresaw nearly a century earlier? Would not the arrival of the millennium be hastened by a systematic process of co-laboring with God, undertaken by nationally-minded Christian leaders, to build managerial institutions that would serve to Christianize the nation by creating infrastructures for disseminating the knowledge of God among the public? Was the millennial dawn perhaps even *contingent* upon such projects?

Three Core Arguments

These, of course, were the questions that the formalist evangelical administrators of the national organizations of the Benevolent Empire aimed to answer in the affirmative. They saw fit, in their moment, to radically efface the "middle-distance" millennium in favor of a much more immediate vision, for reasons of both eschatological anticipation *and* political survival.

The first core argument of my dissertation is that the emergence of these millennial institutions in the immediate wake of the Treaty of Ghent, beginning with the American Bible Society in 1816, is no coincidence. In the freighted political climate of the post-war years, when the question of national identity was being hotly contested – and when the Federalist Party, which counted so many formalist evangelicals in its ranks, was rapidly declining – the deployment of millennial rhetoric enabled formalist evangelicals to make an inclusive, democratic bid for ongoing theopolitical agency in a political moment that was otherwise leaving them behind. Their metahistorical logic of millennial anticipation through voluntary benevolent work allowed them to appeal to the optimistic boundless quasi-populism of the political moment

in the white-man's-democracy, while at the same time inscribing themselves and their organizations as essential to the fabric of that moment. The managers of the Benevolent Empire wrote themselves a place in contemporary American history by way of millennial metahistory. They were the administrators of the millennial "proxy nation" that would, in this season of dramatic political change, call the nation to become "in reality … what it already [was] in principle."[34] All prior salvation history had led to this moment, when, if only respectable Americans would do their Christian duty by supporting benevolent societies, the United States would soon be Christianized, heralding the dawn of millennial righteousness nationwide.

Here we see one of the great vulnerabilities latent in their Icarian flight. As the formalist evangelical administrators of the national societies of the Benevolent Empire sought to escape the constraints of their present historical moment by strategically out-narrating it via millennial metahistory, they took the burden of history off of God's providential shoulders and laid it squarely on their own. In their view, their work had become -- under the providence of God, needless to say – irreducible to the trajectory of salvation history. Under their management, time itself was "advancing to [its] final issue," as the American Tract Society put it. In other words, the work of the Benevolent Empire was irreducibly instrumental to the millennial dawn, a necessary condition for the unfolding of God's present eschatological plans for the world. Their mission was *already visibly succeeding*, and would soon be completed – after which the end would come. Thus, they took it upon themselves to sail towards heaven, intoxicated by their

[34] John L. Brooke, "Cultures of Nationalism, Movements of Reform, and the Composite-Federal Polity: From Revolutionary Settlement to Antebellum Crisis," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 20; Andrew F. Walls, "The Evangelical Revival, the Missionary Movement, and Africa," in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 82.

millennial imaginings, confident that their divinely-appointed labors in eschatological instrumentality would be rewarded. Sailing above the labyrinthine constraints and complexities of concrete historicity, they chose instead to adopt a millennial metanarrative that allowed them to invent a vision of the righteous nation that they wanted, as well as their irreducible, managerial role in it. The only proviso, of course, was that it had to work. On this point, the fate of the whole scheme hung in the balance.

The second core argument of my dissertation is that the efforts towards linear millennial improvement by the organizations of the Benevolent Empire were called into radical and consequential question in 1834, when the newly-founded American Anti-Slavery Society publicly insisted that their national vision was fundamentally racialized. For the managers of the Benevolent Empire, "Christian America" meant *white Christian America*, and the national millennial dawn a day of perfected *white nationalism.*

From 1815-1834, the national millennial institutions of the Benevolent Empire burgeoned, rhetorically and financially. But in the urgency of the push for "Christian America" that underwrote their establishment – a push for unity in the cause of Christianization among respectable citizens – the abundant faith commitment to millennial metahistory that formalist evangelicals exhibited demanded an equal devotion to turning a blind eye to the sin of race-based slavery that was, by definition, baked into any proposal for national unity in the early republic. While this issue was made abundantly present by African-American formalist evangelical leaders from the first, it came to a head among white evangelical formalists in 1834 with the appearance of the American Anti-Slavery Society on the national scene at New York's Anniversary Week – exposing the naivete of the pristine national millennial optimism that had characterized the first two decades of the formalist push for benevolent evangelical moral

reform. The racism embedded at the very core of United States culture left formalist evangelicals facing a choice between the norms of the nation and the norms of the gospel. Given the premise of their founding – a bid for ongoing formalist evangelical existence in a burgeoning democracy that was straining to leave the vestiges of the old order behind – this was an impossible dilemma. Thus, the formalist evangelical Icarus began the freefall that reached climactic proportions in the Civil War, and whose denouement is arguably still being felt today, if indeed we are, in 2019, bearing witness to the final expiration of "white Christian America."[35]

The third core argument of my dissertation is that, by the 1830s, a "millennial malaise" had begun to take hold within the formalist evangelical fold. It was becoming less and less tenable by that time to hold forth high-flung speculations and large promises concerning the eschatological tempo of the contemporary moment. While this malaise was not initiated by the controversy over anti-millennial institutional racism that began to engulf the national organizations of the Benevolent Empire in 1834, it was certainly exacerbated by it. This moment was at once disjunctive and productive for formalist evangelicals, amplifying unease with instrumental millennialism of the sort that characterized the first two decades of the Benevolent Empire, and producing several new strands of imaginative reorientation of the doctrine of the millennium *within* formalist evangelical culture. In my final two chapters, I offer two thickly described examples of formalist evangelicals who did such reorienting work, revealing both their problematic relationship to the instrumental millennialism of the 1810s and 1820s and their creative responses to it.

[35] Cf. Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016).

Chapter Outlines

The approach that I take to tracing this story is periodic, and mostly chronological. I develop a narrative of the ideology and performance of millennial goals among national societies through three major moments: the founding of the American Bible Society (1814-1816), the burgeoning of New York's Anniversary Week and founding of the American Tract Society (1825-1826), and the undermining crisis precipitated by the American Anti-Slavery Society (1834). In the wake of the events of 1834, I consider in the final two chapters the lives and careers of three millennial educators who worked extensively to frame formalist millennial benevolence in a less Icarian manner. In the first three chapters, my sources are primarily speeches, published reports, newspaper articles, and letters that allow me to analyze the public millennial rhetoric and discursive communities that underwrote these theopolitical projects. Placed in the context of broader studies of the period, and taken seriously as ideologically and theologically intentional frameworks, these sources are extremely revealing. The leadership of these institutions was male-dominated to the core, and my sources bear that out in an almost painful way. The arena of formalist evangelical ideology was, as Bruce Dorsey has argued, a highly gendered space, policed by a particular understanding of reforming masculinity, in spite of the fact that many of the most effective supporters of these national societies were women.[36] By contrast, there is a significant concern from the earliest emergence of national benevolent societies about questions of race and slavery, which I trace in detail in Chapter Three.

Chapter One narrates the establishment of the ideology of the Benevolent Empire in the period immediately following the War of 1812. The vehicles I examine as representative indices

[36] Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

of the development and embodiment of this ideology are the American Bible Society, undoubtedly the pacesetting institution of national formalist evangelical Christianization, and the *Religious Intelligencer*, one of the oldest and longest-running formalist evangelical newspapers, both established in 1816. This chapter sets the stage for the rest of the project by laying out the millennial cultural aspirations of the Benevolent Empire in their originary form, against the backdrop of the backward-looking jeremiadic formalist culture that preceded them. It also elaborates the challenges faced by evangelical formalists in the new political moment in which they found themselves.

Following Chapter One's articulation of the eschatological ideology of the Benevolent Empire, Chapter Two examines the *performance* of this ideology, focusing on the drama of the Anniversary Week celebrations in New York City in 1825 and 1826. I offer a close and contextual reading of the pageantry of the New York Sunday School Union parade, as well as the bold performances tied to the founding of the American Tract Society, ten years after the founding of the American Bible Society – an organization after which the Tract Society modeled itself, while also trying to compensate for its failures. The contribution of the story told in the first two chapters to the larger arc of my narrative is to show how formalist evangelicals attempted to inhabit time and space, expressing their eschatological aspirations through institution building.

In Chapter Three, I look at the turbulence precipitated at Anniversary Week in 1834, when the abolitionist American Anti-Slavery Society appeared on the scene demanding evangelical adherence to immediate abolitionism *on millennial terms*. Then, in order to set the appearance of the AASS in context, I assess the founding of the American Colonization Society,

as well as the abundant resistance to the colonization project by prominent African-American leaders – themselves mostly formalist and mostly evangelical. This chapter brings the ironies and the tragedies inherent in the Benevolent Project into sharper focus. What began with abundant eschatological hope in 1816 had, by 1834, been seized by tension, dissent, and ultimately open violence.

The events of 1834 demonstrated the necessity of a rethinking of the aims and practices of formalist millennial evangelicalism, a rethinking which I illustrate in my final chapters. Chapter Four centers on two brothers, Rev. Ralph Emerson, professor of Ecclesiastical History at Andover Theological Seminary, and his older brother Rev. Joseph Emerson, a prominent education reformer. Both men were New England Congregational ministers, formalist evangelicals deeply imbued by the convictions and practices of the Benevolent Empire from its earliest days. Both vividly embodied the momentum and impulses of benevolent millennialism, while at the same adding something critically new. Whereas the majority of evangelical millennialism focused on conversion and social improvement, Joseph Emerson sought to apply his energies towards the development of a *pedagogical* strategy for observing the world and training its teachers. For him, the millennium would dawn through the increase of the true knowledge of God's world – it was better gradually *taught* than caught in conversion. Similarly, while Ralph Emerson embraced millennial metahistory and its ultimate theological claims, he also insisted on tethering his metahistorical commitments to the concrete facticity of the history of the church, with both positive and negative consequences.

Chapter Five examines another example of the reinvention of millennial impulses through a close look at the body reforms of Sylvester Graham. Like the Emerson brothers,

Graham was a scion of formalist evangelical benevolence. The son of an evangelical revivalist pastor and military chaplain, and trained for ministry at Williams College, Graham began his career as a fundraiser for the American Sunday School Union. Deeply devoted to the promise of the coming millennium in history, he became skeptical over time of the otherworldliness of typical millennial hopes. This dissatisfaction quickly led him to attenuate his faith in millennial intervention and replace it with a more this-worldly concrete program of discipleship through bodily discipline. Here, too, in the wake of the millennial malaise of the 1830s, we see a another searching attempt to reinvent eschatological theory and practice *within* the scope of formalist evangelicalism.

Four Primary Scholarly Contributions

I aim to make four primary scholarly contributions over the course of these arguments. First and most of all, the whole force of this dissertation is intended to foster attunement to the significance of millennial ideology to the imagination of formalist evangelical benevolence in this period. Surprisingly few studies of the subject have attended to it, in spite of the ubiquity of millennial talk during the period. Charles I. Foster's seminal and still influential work, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837*, observes the presence of millennialism only to exoticize and pathologize it. Elias Boudinot, for example, was motivated to early benevolent work "with religious zeal of a rather feverish, millennial variety," while the desire for global evangelism was a "climb[ing] fever of world conquest" which "assumed an

increasingly millennial character" as evangelicals sought its accomplishment.[37] For Foster, formalist evangelical millennialism is something of an irrational embarrassment, epiphenomenal to benevolent enterprise.

While more recent studies of formalist evangelical benevolence tend to be less condescending toward the religious ideologies of their subjects, they nonetheless have little to say about the role of millennial imagination in its establishment. Generally the theme is ignored completely, or mentioned – as if its meaning and use is obvious – and then left without much further development.[38] At some level, this relative neglect is understandable. It may seem to scholars pursuing other interests that matters of millennial ideology were sufficiently addressed by the wave of earlier studies by the likes of Ernest Tuveson, Nathan Hatch, and Ruth Bloch, that sought a grand correlation between "post-millennial" religious hopes and optimistic projects of American nation-building.[39] I hope this study reveals that a revisitation of millennial questions is highly generative for a richer interpretation of the period.

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[37] Foster, *Errand of Mercy*, 109, 218.

[38] There are a great many prominent examples of this approach. Some of the best and most relevant scholarship that does this includes Lincoln A. Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation: A History of Conversion in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011); John L. Brooke, "Cultures of Nationalism, Movements of Reform, and the Composite-Federal Polity: From Revolutionary Settlement to Antebellum Crisis," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 1–33; Michael P. Young, *Bearing Witness Against Sin: The Evangelical Birth of the American Social Movement* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Kathleen D. McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

[39] Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968), Nathan O. Hatch, "The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America: New England Clergymen, War with France, and the Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1974): 407–30; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977); Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary*

There are notable exceptions to the trend in American religious historiography of naming the significance of millennialism and then failing to examine it further, including James Bratt's "The Reorientation of American Protestantism, 1835-1845," David Paul Nord's *Faith In Reading*, Sam Haselby's *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, and (to a limited extent) Amanda Porterfield's *Conceived In Doubt.*[40] While I quibble with elements of each of their readings, all three of these studies demonstrate the value of taking seriously the significance of millennial ideology for the development of the identity of formalist evangelical Protestantism – and, in turn, for the identity of the nation as a whole – in the first half of the nineteenth century.

I contend that millennial ideology was utterly central to the rise, burgeoning, and crisis of formalist evangelical benevolence. First and foremost, I claim that it was a turn to millennial self-narration and away from apocalyptic jeremiad that gave rhetorical traction to the efforts of the American Bible Society in 1816, setting the pace for the work of future national societies in the years that followed. Furthermore, it was millennial aspiration and millennial logic that gave coherence to the rise and performance of the Benevolent Empire in the 1820s, and it was in millennial categories that its vulnerabilities were interpreted in the 1830s and beyond. Considerations of the social initiatives of formalist evangelicals in this period must take stock of their eschatological posture, rooted in their millennial ideology, in order to properly account for them, in their power and in their weakness.

Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[40] James D. Bratt, "The Reorientation of American Protestantism, 1835-1845," *Church History* 67, no. 1 (March 1, 1998): 52–82; David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

The second scholarly contribution that my dissertation makes can be stated much more briefly. I offer thickly descriptive readings of several instances of the public performance of millennial identity by national benevolent societies at their annual meetings. As far as I know, there is no other recent work that has paid this type of analytic attention to what was actually going on at Anniversary Week in New York City. These readings provide a valuable and fresh lens for envisioning the idealized aspirations of formalist evangelical benevolence, as well as exposing ways that these performances were designed to draw the public into habits of millennial self-perception.

Thirdly, my dissertation shows that alongside the form of improving millennialism that empowered the national societies of the Benevolent Empire, there emerged in the 1820s and 1830 a variety of alternative millennialisms that operated in deliberate contrasting or covalent relationship to it. I offer various clear examples of these. In Chapter Three, we encounter David Walker's self-consciously black millennialism, which uses, in several places in his *Appeal*, the classical rhetorical form of a white benevolent articulation of millennial ends. The difference that makes a difference, of course, is Walker's insistence that the aspiration of formalist evangelical benevolence to see the world converted can only happen through the full agency of black people. Anything less would only yield God's judgment. In Chapter Four, we examine the systematic historical millennialism of Joseph and Ralph Emerson, who heartily approve of formalist evangelical benevolent impulses, but seek to establish them not on national terms but rather on ecclesial and personal ones. In Chapter Five, Sylvester Graham offers a striking example of an organicist millennialism, which he explicitly seeks to root not in talk about the pregnancy of "the times" but rather in the millennial potential unlocked by bringing human behaviors into

correspondence with the laws of heaven. These alternative millennialisms serve both to show the significance of the long shadow of the millennialism advanced by the organizations of the Benevolent Empire and to demonstrate the way that the concept of the millennium had colonized the formalist evangelical mind in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Finally, there are, of course, acute normative implications that can be drawn from this study concerning the social consequences of such earnest entanglement in an anticipatory – and thus at some level, by definition, a metaphorically imaginative – theological construct. The attempt to establish a social infrastructure for the gradual realization of a biblical metaphor for the Christian perfection of society demands bold and unwavering conviction of such a pristine, heavenly calling that it all but guarantees blindness to corruption in its practical outworking. This is what happens when, intoxicated with potentiality and longing for apotheosis, a community flies toward the face of the sun under the power of its own instrumental ingenuity. The innocence of the project is its own undoing.[41] For the most part, I have left these implications implicit, hoping that the historical narrative will speak for itself.

[41] I use "innocence" here in the same sense that James Baldwin does in his essay "My Dungeon Shook: Letter To My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation," among many of his other texts. He writes: "It is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime." Conviction of cultural innocence, in fact, is for Baldwin an almost certain indication of historical complicity in evil. "[White Americans] are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it.… [T]hese innocent people have no other hope." James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International, 1993), 5-6, 8.

Chapter One

'An Empire In Every Heart':
Conceiving The Millennial Future In An Æra of Peace, 1814-1816

Introduction: "The Times Are Pregnant"

The announcement, addressed simply "TO THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES," was portentous, almost gnostic in tone. "*Every person of observation has remarked that the times are pregnant with great events*," it declared, courting the attention of every reader who sensed – or wanted to sense – that the world was in the throes of transformation, straining beyond the constraints of its past towards some new condition. "The political world," it went on, "has undergone changes stupendous, unexpected, and calculated to inspire thoughtful men with the most boding anticipations…The cause [of these anticipations] is to be sought in that Providence which adapts, with wonderful exactitude, means to ends; and the object is too plain to be mistaken by those who carry a sense of religion into their speculations upon *the present and future condition of our afflicted race*."[42]

So began the "Address To The People Of The United States," the founding manifesto of the American Bible Society (ABS). Drafted by Rev. John Mitchell Mason, the Presbyterian provost of New York's Columbia College, and ratified on May 11, 1816 by the gathered delegates at the inaugural ABS Convention in New York City, the "Address" was to make a public argument for the "nature and objects" of the fledgling society. It was to explain the story of *what* the ABS intended and *why* it should come into existence at that particular moment in time.[43]

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[42] American Bible Society, *Constitution of the American Bible Society, Formed By A Convention of Delegates...Together With Their Address To The People Of The United States* (New York: G. F. Hopkins, 1816), 13.
[43] Ibid, 5; Henry Otis Dwight, *The Centennial History of the American Bible Society*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 27.

Explaining *what* the ABS intended was quite simple. As the first two articles of its Constitution made clear, the "sole object" of the society was "to encourage a wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures without note or comment…throughout the United States and their territories," and, "according to its ability…to other countries, whether Christian, Mahometan, or Pagan."[44] The ABS would accomplish this goal by establishing a technically advanced printing and distribution operation, based in New York City, for efficiently and cheaply "diffusing the oracles of God" throughout the United States, "carry[ing] the light of instruction into the dominions of ignorance; and the balm of joy to the soul of anguish."[45] The founders of the ABS admitted no whiff of doubt that those "fellow-citizens, fellow-Christians" who knew what was best for the young nation in these pregnant times would "join in…sacred covenant" behind this "enterprize of...grandeur and glory," until, as Israel's prophets had foretold of the eschaton, the "earth be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea!"[46] What friend of "truth…piety [and] evangelical effort" could possibly oppose it?[47]

Explaining *why* the ABS should come into being – in that way and in that moment – required a little more argumentation. In view of such a grand and unimpeachable object as the universal circulation of the Protestant Bible, "the *only* question," averred the managers of the ABS, was whether that object "can best be obtained by a national Society, or by independent associations in friendly understanding and correspondence."[48] This question was not new. Since 1808, the United States had been swept up in what David Paul Nord has called a "wave of

[44] American Bible Society, *Constitution*, 9.
[45] Ibid., 15.
[46] Ibid., 18-20. The scriptural citation is a contextual paraphrase of Isaiah 11:9 (KJV). See also Habakkuk 2:14.
[47] Ibid., 15.
[48] Ibid., 16. Emphasis mine.

enthusiasm for charity Bible work."[49] Between 1808 and 1816, more than a hundred local and regional Bible societies had been founded between Vermont and Louisiana, all with the intention of providing a copy of the Bible to any family or individual that did not have one.[50] The oft-named vision shared by these independent societies was to foster a "universal circulation" of "that precious Book which is able to make them wise unto salvation."[51] However, there was no centralizing technical infrastructure in place to achieve this universal vision, but only the friendly affirmation of their shared goals. For all but the very largest local societies, "missionary labor traditionally ended at the town line," and even among those well-funded local societies with trans-local ambitions, like the Philadelphia Bible Society or the Massachusetts Bible Society, there had been strong resistance to prior proposals of centralization.[52] Why, they asked was it necessary to form a centralized *national* Bible society when there were already so many local Bible societies operating effectively throughout the country? Would not a national society create competitive "jealousies" among like-minded Christians while also diluting the limited resources of time, energy, and money available to do the work? Would not a national society inevitably foist irrelevant, and perhaps even harmful, unilateral national policies upon sensitive local circumstances which were best addressed by local agencies? Questions like these, pointedly posed by influential local societies, had undermined a nationalization proposal put forward by Federalist statesman and evangelical *éminence grise* Elias Boudinot in 1815 – just a year before

[49] Nord, *Faith in* Reading, 42.
[50] Peter Wosh, *Spreading The Word: The Bible Business in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 64.
[51] Connecticut Bible Society (1808) in Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 47; Newark Bible Society, "Circular (January 1816)," *Christian Monitor*, February 24, 1816
[52] Wosh, *Spreading The Word*, 64; John Fea, *The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13-16.

the managers of the fledgling American Bible Society decided to make the pitch a second time. Why did they think the public interest would be different a year later?

Practically, the proposal of the ABS managers was no different. "Concentrated action," their *Address* declared, "is powerful action. The same powers, when applied in a common direction, will produce results impossible to their divided and partial exercise…Unity of a great system combines energy of effect with economy of means."[53] This was an argument from production efficiency – a compelling enough account of wise managerial tactics, but virtually identical to the argument put forward by Elias Boudinot the year prior, when the three largest local Bible societies, based in Philadelphia, New York, and Massachusetts, had withheld their support. In 1816, of the three, only Philadelphia abstained. Why?

The decisive reason for this new momentum lay not in an appeal to mere efficiency but in the need to bring substantive moral coherence to then-emerging articulations of American national identity – a need ostensibly perceived in 1816 by those "persons of observation" to whom the ABS *Address* appealed. "A national object unites national feeling and concurrence," the *Address* declared.[54] The ABS was to be just such an object, a moral initiative that like-minded, benevolent Americans with money to spare could support *as Americans*: "fellow-citizens, fellow-Christians." In so doing, they would foster *national* unity in sentiment and in action around the cause of Christ. The Bible cause would no longer be constrained by the "local feelings, party prejudices, [and] sectarian jealousies" that had militated against the efficiencies and sentiments of nationalization.[55] Rather, all Americans devoted to it would act in one another's spiritual interests, whether they were geographic neighbors or not. The managers of the

[53] American Bible Society, *Constitution*, 16-17.
[54] Ibid., 16-17.
[55] Ibid., 17.

ABS were calling Americans to decenter the provincial tactility of their localism in the interest of seeing the nation as a whole, organized and experienced by the techniques of "accelerated motion and augmented vigour" that characterized the ABS's nationwide evangelical "system of happiness."[56] Here was an invitation to a *new way of seeing* Christian citizenship. Like Icarus ascending on wax-wings above the labyrinthine constraints of his provincial imprisonment, determined to fly to a home he has never known, the ABS called Americans to adopt an eschatological God's-eye view of a future national moral coherence that they would make possible through their present benevolent action.[57]

In turn, establishing this cause as an act of national spiritual unity would clarify the theopolitical identity of the United States on the world stage: "the Catholick efforts of a country, thus harmonized [by a central, national system], give her a place in the moral convention of the world."[58] At last, having established a coherent, eminently practical locus of national moral

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[56] Ibid., *Constitution*, 20. In her analysis of the short story "Alice Doane's Appeal" by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Lauren Berlant writes that "history is made vital not by a narrative gloss on a temporal event, but rather by an experience of transformation that unhinges temporal, material, and sexual knowledge, and re-forms these dislocations into the unity of the simulacrum or the spectacle. This is the American utopian promise: by disrupting the subject's local affiliations and self-centeredness, national identity confers on the collective subject an indivisible and immortal body, and vice versa." It strikes me that something very much like this is going on as the managers of the ABS try to conjure a benevolent Christian moral center at the imagined heart of American citizenship. See Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 49.

[57] In conceiving of the archetypal white evangelical benevolent imagination as an Icarian perspective that "sees the whole," the strategies it affords elite cartographers of space and time, as well as the vulnerabilities to which it exposes them, I am drawing some inspiration from the work of Michel de Certeau, in particular *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 29-44, 91-110, and *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 147-205. The pedagogical strategies of Enlightenment modernity, de Certeau asserts in *The Writing of History*, often contain within themselves "an internal contradiction which mak[e them] at once *precede* the masses [they] dominate (but which remain foreign to it), and *wait for* the essence hidden within the people to be revealed in a 'transparent' society…It colonizes, to be sure, but it is also an eschatological quest: it *awaits the coming* of the confirmation and the effectivity of what it already asserts." (174)

[58] American Bible Society, *Constitution*, 17.

identity in the ABS, the United States would, as the ABS managers imagined it, begin to lay hold of its appointed spiritual agency in the interest of the coming eschatological kingdom of God. Via the vehicle of a national Bible society, the people of the United States would be "enable[d] to act directly upon the universal plans of happiness which are now pervading the nations," participating, under God's providential superintendence, in the Christianization and civilization of their burgeoning country.[59]

These proposals concerning American national identity were made all the more timely by the arrival of a sudden and unfamiliar peace the year prior. After more than a decade of war in the North Atlantic, the Treaty of Ghent had ended the War of 1812, and the exile of Napoleon had at last concluded the Napoleonic Wars. The long-standing status quo of conflict with and among the great powers of Europe, as well as internecine domestic conflict about how the United States should engage this state of war, had come to an abrupt halt, opening what the ABS managers read as a moment of peculiar fecundity in national eschatological narrative:

> "The world is at peace!...The most Heavenly charity treads close upon the march of conflict and blood!...The voice of mercy succeeds to the clarion of battle, and calls the nations from enmity to love!...Is it possible that you should not see, in this state of human things, a mighty motion of Divine Providence?"[60]

Peace had come, and with it the infrastructure of the millennial dawn – if only the people of the United States would embrace it.

Formalist Imaginings

As this confident eschatological speculation about the spiritual identity and future of the nation should suggest, the delegates who gathered to found the ABS in 1816 were social elites,

[59] Ibid., 17.
[60] Ibid., 18–19.

drawn from the high-flung empyrean of established evangelical Protestantism. Lewis Saum has observed, in an assiduous revision of many classic historical accounts that characterize 'typical' American rhetoric in the first half of the nineteenth century as "drunk on the millennium…brimming [with providential] optimism and hope," virtually all talk about millennial eschatology and the particular providence of God in the period was elite discourse, reserved for those with the leisure or expertise to speculate.[61] "Very likely," Saum trenchantly opines, "men with the amiable awareness of having some control of their own destiny could more readily wax confident about God's intentions."[62] The ABS delegates conform perfectly to Saum's characterization. As one chronicler of their meeting observed, "*all* [present were] distinguished in some direction," wielding significant influence in their various spheres of religion and society.[63] Some were prominent divines, like Congregational revivalist Lyman Beecher, Presbyterian pastor Gardiner Spring, and theologians Nathaniel William Taylor and John H. Rice. Present in even greater numbers were dozens of esteemed laymen, including jurists like William Jay and Joseph Hornblower, scientists Valentine Mott and John Griscom, and writers and educators including Eliphalet Nott and James Fenimore Cooper.[64]

While the group imagined itself to represent the nation as a whole, it was in fact quite homogeneous. All present were white and male. All but four delegates were from north of the Mason-Dixon line. Most importantly, while there was some denominational diversity, the group was overwhelmingly drawn from the leading lights of what scholars have called "formalist" denominations – those Protestants who owned historic roots in the structures of both European

[61] Lewis O. Saum, *The Popular Mood of Pre-Civil War America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 73.
[62] Lewis O. Saum, "Providence in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America," *Indiana Magazine of History* 72, no. 4 (1976): 317.
[63] Dwight, *Centennial History*, 22.
[64] American Bible Society, *Constitution and Address*, 3–5.

Protestant Christendom and colonial America.[65] Chiefly Congregationalists in New England, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Dutch Reformed in the Middle and Southern states, formalist Protestants maintained, throughout the early national period, what scholars have described as "custodial" and "proprietary instincts" toward the nation that were characteristic of their ecclesiastical antecedents.[66] Formalist Protestant leaders imagined an America in which the "main ordering principles" of civil society in politics, education, family structures, personal morality, and more were *sourced by* and *derived from* the visible, respected, stable, orthodox ecclesiastical institutions *they* helped to lead.[67]

This meant (to make perhaps an obvious point) that they imagined their roles as wielders of cultural power to be *God*-given – their elite positions and benevolent efforts were gifts from Providence to the communities over which they had influence. It is this self-perception, of course, that made the cultural homogeneity a non-issue in their eyes when it came to legislating the spiritual future of the nation. They were simply playing the elite institutional role that God had assigned them.

It also meant (to make perhaps an even more obvious point) that formalists were allergic to what they perceived as disorder in society, which they equated with immorality. Just as formalists took themselves to be working *for* Christianization, so also they were working *against* social chaos – combating that fertile seedbed for sin by developing institutions that shadowed forth the moral government of God.[68] God had given them the power and the mandate to

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[65] Johnson, *Redeeming America,* 7 and passim; Noll, *America's God*, 175–76, 193–202.
[66] Jonathan J. Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 5, 142; Noll, *America's God*, 176.
[67] Mark A. Noll, "Reconsidering Christendom?," in *The Future of Christian Learning: An Evangelical and Catholic Dialogue*, ed. Thomas Albert Howard (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 31, 36–37.
[68] There is a vast literature touching on this theme. Among the most interesting of the newer works are Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety*; Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*; Kyle G. Volk, *Moral Minorities and*

construct religious institutions that would use all available forms of influence to convert and civilize the young nation, enabling it to develop within the order of Christendom.

Politically, it is not at all surprising, then, that formalist Christians found "natural allies" in the Federalist party.[69] The party of George Washington, John Adams, and Alexander Hamilton, Federalists were, as historian Gordon Wood describes them, in favor "of government, of hierarchy, and of law and order."[70] Chiefly rooted in the northeast and the cities of the seaboard which traded extensively with Great Britain, the anglophilic Federalists supported the creation of strong, centralized institutions of government and society, run by qualified elites on a more or less British parliamentary model, that would provide order and stability for the good of the whole populace.[71] This inclination toward stable, centralized infrastructure applied as much in religion as it did in politics, law, economics, or the military, with Federalist politicians honoring and defending "traditional expressions of corporate religiosity, including proclaiming fast and thanksgiving days…nurturing ties with prominent denominations," and maintaining the position that proper public religion was necessary for maintaining a virtuous citizenry.[72] Almost to a person, the formalist founders of the ABS held Federalist political sympathies – a fact that will come to bear great interpretative significance as we explore how the ABS became a thriving national institution in a nation that decisively rejected Federalist politics after the War of 1812.

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the Making of American Democracy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*; David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Sassi, *Republic of Righteousness*.

[69] Noll, *America's* God, 176.

[70] Gordon S. Wood, *Friends Divided: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 290.

[71] Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety*, 4; Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Anchor, 2012), 110–11.

[72] Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety* , 6.

And the ABS *certainly* thrived. Its establishment in 1816 met with broad-based support among middle and upper-middle class white evangelical men and women, immediately in New York City but quickly all over the country. During its first year of operation, nearly a thousand people gave money in support of the ABS, and forty-one auxiliary societies were officially established as partners in the work. Eighteen of those auxiliaries were "female societies," several of which – including the New York Female Auxiliary Bible Society, founded just hours after the ABS on May 11, 1816 – were exceptionally effective in raising funds, selling Bibles, and establishing cooperative relationships between local churches and the headquarters of the national society.[73] Within the year, the society had set up several expensive stereotype presses in lower Manhattan. By 1822, it had built a permanent, four-floor facility at 72 Nassau Street, which warehoused 100,000 Bibles and enabled a greatly expanded printing operation. By 1829, the ABS had the capacity to print and distribute a stunning 600,000 Bibles per year.[74]

Even more significant than the early success of the ABS's *prima facie* goal of Bible production, however, was the fact that it set the pace for so many other interdenominational national evangelical societies to follow in its wake. Its founding, as one historian has observed, "marked the true launching point of the Evangelical united front in the United States…open[ing] a pattern of social organization which spread…with great rapidity and vigor…forming the nucleus of each successive national enterprise."[75] The imaginative self-understanding and institutional infrastructure that underwrote it established a pathbreaking paradigm for organized benevolence that shaped "a new era of national voluntary organizations, the so-called Age of

[73] McCarthy, *American Creed*, 54–60; John Fea, *The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 56–57; Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism*, 175–76, 27–29; Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 42.
[74] Fea, *The Bible* Cause, 30–31.
[75] Foster, *An Errand Of Mercy*, 115, 146.

Reform."[76] Within a decade of its founding, scores of similar interdenominational societies for promoting tract publication, domestic evangelism, urban Sunday Schools, training for formalist ministers, the suppression of various vices, and many more such causes, had been established on the pattern of the ABS.[77]

The American Bible Society was the organization that set the pace for this epoch-making explosion of national benevolence which would define the face of formalist evangelical culture for two decades, and profoundly influence it for even longer. This chapter is an exploration and exposition of what made that possible. The answer, I think, has everything to do with the way that the founders of the ABS saw the theopolitical necessity of making an *imaginative* shift – alongside a concomitant *rhetorical* shift – in their approach to their mission and social influence. They abandoned earlier attempts on the part of formalists to convert and Christianize America via backward-looking apocalyptic harangue that had chastised Americans for their cultural *disorder* and lamented the fact that the young nation had burst the bounds of its orderly colonial *past* for which formalists so often held nostalgia. Instead, they took the temperature of the political times in the post-war period, and shifted to an optimistic, maieutic posture in which they positioned their Bible-production work as central to custodially midwifing the coming, open-ended, providential *order* of the nation's new millennial *future*.

To begin to see clearly how this worked, it is necessary to set the stage in 1815, with the massive shift in American social and political identity catalyzed by the end of the War of 1812.

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[76] Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 63.

[77] The best aggregation of data currently available on these societies remains Foster, *An Errand Of* Mercy, 275–79. Foster's calculation is that the government spent $3,585,534.67 on internal improvements like communications, roads, bridges, etc., while the benevolent societies spent $2,813,550.02 over the same period to advance their various improving causes. See Foster, 121.

1815: "Peace! Peace! Peace!"

When news of the end of the War of 1812 first broke on American shores on February 11, 1815, a wintry Saturday evening in New York City, Samuel Goodrich, an entrepreneur from Ridgefield, Connecticut, was taking in a concert in the elegant Assembly Room at the City-Hotel on Broadway. Just before nine o'clock, the music was interrupted by a commotion on the street below. All of a sudden, Goodrich recalled, "the door of the concert-room was thrown open, and in rushed a man all breathless with excitement."[78] The man, probably American diplomat Henry Carroll, "mounted on a table, and swinging a white handkerchief aloft, cried out 'Peace! Peace! Peace!'"[79] Carroll and his party had just docked in Manhattan on the British warship HMS *Favourite*, bearing word that, on Christmas Eve past, a treaty between Great Britain and the United States had been signed in the Belgian city of Ghent.[80] After giving some interviews with the city newspapers, Carroll was to set out post-haste for Washington with the official copy of the treaty for ratification by the Senate.[81] For all intents and purposes, the war was over.

The startled concertgoers leapt to their feet and spilled out of the hotel onto Broadway's cobbled pavement, where they were absorbed into a burgeoning "living sea of shouting, rejoicing people."[82] Within twenty minutes of the announcement, tens of thousands of New Yorkers thronged the streets, bearing torches aloft "in gay and gorgeous procession," and chanting aloud "A Peace! A Peace!"[83] For almost four hours, the crowd roiled and cheered and marched from

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[78] Samuel Griswold Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Own Story* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1864), 146.
[79] Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Own Story*, 146.
[80] "Peace," *New York Evening Post*, February 14, 1815; Henry Clay, *The Papers of Henry Clay: The Rising Statesman, 1815-1820*, ed. James F. Hopkins and Mary W. M. Hargreaves, vol. 2 (University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 4; Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 299–300.
[81] "Peace," *New York Evening Post*; Clay, *The Papers of Henry Clay*, vol. 2, 4; Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 299–300; "Glorious News!," *Commercial Advertiser*, February 12, 1815, Extra edition.
[82] Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Own Story*, 146.
[83] "Peace," *New York Evening Post*.

Houston Street to the Battery, from Trinity Church to the Five Points, in what one newspaper judged to be the city's greatest celebration since the announcement of American independence.[84] Three years of rancorous political discord over the war between President James Madison's "War Hawk" Democratic majority who dominated the politics of the middle and southern states, and the anglophilic anti-war Federalist minority who controlled the northeast, seemed to fade in the face of the fervent promise of the opening national future. "We were all Democrats — all Federalists!" Goodrich recalled, "Old enemies rushed into each other's arms: every house was in a revel: every heart seemed melted by joy."[85] After midnight, when the evening's jubilations died down, the streets of lower Manhattan were illuminated by a glow of soft light, thrown from the candles left burning in every window.[86]

From New York, peace celebrations "broke out" nationwide.[87] Express messengers rode overnight in all directions, carrying hastily printed handbills that declared the news.[88] On Monday, revelers reeled all along Boston's shipping wharves as the captains of the city's merchant ships, long handicapped by the British naval blockade of eastern ports, hoisted their flags once again.[89] On Tuesday, Henry Carroll arrived in Washington with the treaty, throwing the city – which had been sacked by British troops just six months earlier – into a paroxysm of rebuilding, beginning with a coat of whitewash for the fire-damaged White House.[90] The following week, a whimsical milliner in Charleston, South Carolina began to hawk "Peace

[84] Ibid.
[85] Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Own Story*, 146. See also Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 19–20; Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 65–66.
[86] "Peace," *New York Evening Post*.
[87] Walter A. McDougall, *Freedom Just Around the Corner: A New American History, 1585-1828* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 419.
[88] Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 433.
[89] "Glad Tidings," *New England Palladium and Commercial Advertiser*, February 14, 1815.
[90] Howe, *What Hath God* Wrought, 71.

hats…just received from New York," while the city's papers confirmed at last the long-rumored news in block headlines: "Peace Certain."[91] Over the ensuing days and weeks, as the good news was proclaimed in cities, towns, and villages from maritime New England to the plantation South, shopkeepers closed their stores, schoolteachers cancelled classes, politicians gave speeches, and churches rang their bells, as citizens filled the streets with "cries of rejoicing…a perfect gale of merriment."[92]

The Political Meaning of the Peace

Why did the citizenry rejoice in February of 1815? What was the cause of this nationwide eruption of self-assured euphoria? The answer is not as straightforward as one might expect. These celebrations were, for example, generally *not* expressions of relief that the privations of war had come to an end, and *even less* were they declarations that the stated objects of the war had been achieved. In fact, the war had not yielded *any* territorial gains achieved for the United States. The Treaty of Ghent – a "damned bad treaty" in the words of lead peace negotiator Henry Clay – simply returned the United States and Great Britain to *status quo ante bellum*.[93] As a slew of acid editorials in Federalist anti-war newspapers immediately observed, the government had not obtained at Ghent "one single avowed object for which they involved the country in this

[91] "Peace Hats," *Charleston City Gazette*, February 22, 1815; "The Peace Rumor," *Charleston City Gazette*, February 20, 1815; "Peace Certain," *Charleston City Gazette*, February 22, 1815.
[92] Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Own Story*, 147; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 71–72; Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 433n128. For context, see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 294-302 and passim.
[93] Henry Clay, quoted in John Quincy Adams' diary, December 14, 1814, Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott & Company, 1874), 118; See also Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 299. It bears noting that a return to peace with Great Britain meant a return to untrammeled American conquest of the Native Americans in the West, whose cause of resistance to United States imperialism the British had taken up as a strategic interest during the war, but thereafter abandoned.

bloody and expensive war."[94] Neither were the celebrations much fueled by enthusiasm for the greatness of American military exploits. While there were some highlights, most notably General Andrew Jackson's unlikely victory over a far superior British force at the Battle of New Orleans, America's prosecution of the war was characterized by what one military historian has described as "considerable bungling and mismanagement," ending essentially as a stalemate.[95] Another historian has described the path of the war as "largely a series of disasters for the United States" with very public "military debacles" and "disgraceful defeat[s]" featured throughout.[96] Neither, finally, were the celebrations rooted in the economic spoils of war. While markets did experience a "sudden and shocking change" for the better when peace was announced, the war years been so economically punishing for the United States that the market rebound at the announcement of peace is best understood as a signal that the conditions for *potential* future economic viability had returned – prosperity was a future hope, not a present reality.[97]

In light of these dismal ambivalences, then, why the nationwide expressions of exuberant joy in 1815? Why did this moment, as historians have often observed, inaugurate an epochal shift in the political and social imagination of the United States that would "shape the nation's

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[94] "Peace." *New York Evening Post.*
[95] Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 2–3.
[96] Matthew Dennis, "Reflections on a Bicentennial: The War of 1812 in American Public Memory," *Early American Studies* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 275–76.
[97] "Some Effects of the News of Peace," *New York Evening Post*, February 21, 1815; William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (New York: Verso Books, 2011), 196–199; Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 230–260. Extraordinary war taxes, combined with the devaluation of currency, the scarcity of credit, and the strangulation of shipping by the British naval blockade, brought the nation to the brink of bankruptcy by 1814. The effect, particularly in northern coastal areas, was devastating, reducing some local economies to a barter system. (Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Own Story*, 146.) Such effects contributed substantially to the ferment of sectional political unrest during the war. (Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 73.) There were certainly developments in and improvements to the mercantile and manufacturing infrastructure of the middle states during the war years, largely because Americans were forced to manufacture goods that they could no longer reliably import. The economic conditions established during the war set the stage for the rise of the laissez-faire manufacturing culture that would carry the nation to civil war. (Williams, *Contours of American History*, 264-338.)

self-image" for decades to come?[98] The answer is beguilingly simple, though its simplicity must not belie its symbolic significance for the development of American national identity: the advent of peace established the *certain fact* of the American future once and for all in popular imagination. The successful prosecution of the war was a profound injection of confidence in America's national identity. Threat to this identity, in the form of British incursions on national sovereignty had led to the war in the first place. For weeks, Democratic-Republican newspapers trumpeted the fact that America had beaten a proud and powerful enemy in Great Britain. Though the "damned bad treaty" led only to status quo ante bellum, the conclusion of the war left no doubt that the United States was a free and independent nation – standing on its own two feet. To quote Henry Adams's monumental early history of the period, before the War of 1812, "nothing in the future of the American Union was regarded as settled," but after the peace of Ghent was declared, "*for the first time, Americans ceased to doubt the path they were to follow*" toward "a single nationality, wholly American."[99]

The effacement of doubt was, however, just the first step in bringing definition to this national identity, casting light on the path ahead. Since 1792, the politics of the United States had been increasingly riven by an opprobrious party-political factionalism between the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans – a factionalism that cast a long shadow of doubt over the possibility of maintaining union at all.[100] In 1792, the Federalists were the ruling party. Indeed, as Gordon Wood points out, statesmen like then-President George Washington and then-Vice

[98] McDougall, *Freedom Just Around the Corner*, 419-420; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2006), 175–178; Higham, "'From Boundlessness to Consolidation': The Transformation of American Culture, 1848-1860," 153–157; Williams, *Contours of American History*, 192–203; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 71–89, among many others.
[99] Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America, 1801-1817*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 219–20. Emphasis mine.
[100] McDougall, *Freedom Just Around the Corner*, 423.

President John Adams did not even consider themselves representatives of a party – rather, "they were the government, the administration," trying to establish and properly govern the young republic.[101] It was in controversy about precisely *how* their administration should govern that the Democratic-Republican party emerged, led by Thomas Jefferson.

While this is not the place to fully account for the complex emergence of the First Party System, a few critical details bear mentioning. First, Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party developed in parallel with the increasing definition of Federalist identity. The two parties came into being through contest and mutual counter-definition. Second, one crucial axis in this process of development was the question of America's relation to Britain and the revolution in France. Jefferson was decidedly anglophobic. He feared that Federalist institutionalism was leading the nation backward towards the monarchy whose yoke it had only just thrown off. The Federalists, he thought, did not believe Americans capable of self-government. In parallel to Jefferson's anglophobia, the Federalists became increasingly anglophilic. Britain was, for them, both the country that had birthed the new American nation, the source and model for elite-led institutions that guaranteed good governance and social stability, and a fellow in the Protestant cause. For Jefferson, in contrast, *France* was America's proper companion in liberty. He considered the French Revolution the most important political event in the history of the modern world. Unsurprisingly, the Federalists feared this Jeffersonian position amounted to Jacobinism and irreligion. Each party, then, thought of the other as in thrall to a foreign power – the Federalists to Britain and the Democratic-Republicans to France. Third, as these other points suggest, the Democratic-Republicans were populists, while the Federalists were elitists. The former trusted

[101] Wood, *Friends Divided*, 264.

the people to govern themselves, the latter thought (elite-led) institutions were the core of a functioning society.

By the presidential election of 1800, an opprobrious contest in which the incumbent Federalist candidate John Adams and his Democratic-Republican rival Thomas Jefferson smeared one another with political half-truths and personal calumnies, the political culture of the First Party System in the United States had ossified into bitter and anxious "ritual combat" between the two parties about the way the nation should be governed.[102] Each party accused the other of having policies that betrayed the values of the young republic and would surely lead to its undoing. Significantly, these accusations were not just party-political, but approached apocalyptic in tone.[103]

Over a decade later, just such a partisan debate had led to the declaration of war in 1812, in relation to the looming economic and military presence of Great Britain in the North Atlantic. Over several years prior, the British military had accrued a long list of provocations and offenses against the territorial sovereignty of the United States: the repeated impressment of American sailors and the seizure of American cargo at sea by the British Navy, the provision of arms to Native Americans in contested western territories, and so on.[104] The already anglophobic Democratic-Republicans majority in Congress, led by Virginian James Madison and Kentuckian Henry Clay, took this evidence as proof that Britain aimed to "recolonize" the United States,

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[102] Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, 49, and 48-77 passim. The way that the young nation was haunted by doubt about its future is a major theme of Porterfield's important book. For Sacvan Bercovitch's classic analysis of early national anxiety, useful in parallel to Porterfield, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 132–75.

[103] See, for instance, Gordon Wood's characterization of the Federalist response to the XYZ affair and Amanda Porterfield's assessment of the vehement rhetoric of Jedidiah Morse: Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 242; Porterfield, *Conceived In* Doubt, 158–59, 201–2.

[104] For a succinct account of the road to war, see Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 15–27.

clawing the nation back, violation by violation, into its former posture of colonial subservience.[105] To the party that espoused the Jeffersonian ideal of the American citizen as an honorable, independent, self-sufficient yeoman farmer, tolerating such actions would bring "shame and indelible disgrace" on the nation.[106] Resisting Great Britain's arrogant imperialism was thus a matter of sacred national honor, a casting off of the revenant shackles of the British colonial past and an affirmation of confidence in American capacity for self-defense and self-government.[107] The war was *necessary*, a "second war for independence."[108]

By contrast, the generally anglophilic Federalist opposition, a minority in Congress but the ruling political bloc in the northeastern states, howled in anger and disbelief at talk of war. Heirs of the Puritan establishment, with an abiding faith in the stabilizing effects of elite-led institutions for governing an unruly society – a faith inherited from the British – they decried the war as an act of "inconceivable folly and desperation" by hotheaded politicians who had "not 'first counted the cost'" of their actions.[109] Not only would the war be economically punishing, politically lacerating, and probably unwinnable (given the then-shoddy state of the American armed forces), it would also further rupture relationship with "the nation from which we are descended…and the bulwark of the religion we profess."[110] To the Federalists, Britain was less

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[105] On "recolonization," see Hickey, 27, 40, 47.
[106] Henry Clay to Congress in 1812, quoted in Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, 178.
[107] For fascinating analyses of the quasi-religious power of the concept of "sacred honor" in this period, see Porterfield, 176–193; Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 117.
[108] This was a common Democratic-Republican characterization of the politics of the war. See, for example, Samuel R. Brown, *An Authentic History of the Second War for Independence, Comprising Details of the Military and Naval Operations from the Commencement to the Close of the Recent War, Etc.* (Auburn, NY: J. G. Hathaway, 1815).
[109] "Address of the Massachusetts House" (June 26, 1812) and "Declaration of Connecticut Assembly" (August 25, 1812) cited in Hickey, *The War of* 1812, 49. Notice how the Connecticut Assembly co-opts the authority of biblical rhetoric against their opponents, invoking Jesus's characterization of unwise managers who are unable to complete the tasks they undertake in Luke 11:28, KJV.
[110] Gov. Caleb Strong, *A Proclamation, for a Day of Public Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer* (Boston, MA: Russell & Cutler, 1812); For more on these themes, see Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety*, 70-92, and passim.

an oppressor than an older brother in Christendom, a model of the kind of cultural ideals and institutions toward which the United States must look, backward across the Atlantic, for its moral and political development. While the British encroachments on American sovereignty did need to be addressed, war was *not* the way to do so. If anything threatened the future of the young republic, it was, Federalists thought, the war itself.

So, from the first, the war was not just a military conflict with a foreign power but a domestic referendum on two competing visions of the national future, one of which was indexed to the fiery assertion of national honor and independence, and the other of which was indexed to the commonsensical establishment of national stability, even if that meant acknowledging some dependency of the United States on its former colonizers. To the Federalists, the Democratic-Republicans were saber-rattling Jacobins who did not understand the subtleties of diplomacy, infrastructure, and cultural inheritance necessary to lead a nation. To the Democratic-Republicans, the Federalists were weak, subservient, and even traitorous to the cause of American liberty.

As the war took its toll, in much the way that the Federalist Jeremiahs had predicted it would, they loudly advocated making peace with Britain, at the cost of losing face militarily, and even at the cost of letting go of the ideal of total independence from Britain's colonial power. Some disgruntled Federalists actually floated the idea at the Hartford Convention in 1814 that New England could make a separate peace with Great Britain, to alleviate the crushing economic hardship and demonstrate their loyalty to their mother country.[111] In the opposite spirit, the Democratic-Republicans insisted throughout the conflict that Britain *must* be resisted until it

[111] These radical plans were not accepted by the Federalist moderates who dominated the convention, but the very fact that they were aired gives a sense of the orientation of the party. See Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 261-283.

yielded, in order to preserve the free and independent future of the young nation. The stakes of this cultural referendum could not have been higher – it was winner take all.

Thus, when news of the Treaty of Ghent reached American shores on Feb 11th, 1815 – causing exuberant citizens to party in the streets *en masse*, receiving the "damned bad treaty" as a defeat for Britain and a victory for the insurgent underdog United States – it struck a decisive note in American national politics. Military stalemate and weak treaty notwithstanding, the mere fact that United States had established an "honorable peace with a powerful and arrogant enemy," was received by the public as a great national triumph.[112] The plucky American David had once again vanquished the British Goliath, establishing the legitimacy, strength, and providential destiny of their independent republic, over against its colonial past.[113]

The simple fact that the United States had not surrendered, as the Federalists had proposed, seemed to vindicate the Democratic-Republican vision of a national future independent in form and function from Great Britain. James Madison, then the Secretary of War wrote in a letter to the Senate that "it had been said that our Union, and system of government, would not bear such a trial," but "the result has proved [just the opposite]…Our Union has gained strength…we have acquired a character and a rank among other nations, which we did not enjoy before…We cannot go back. The spirit of the nation forbids it."[114] Newspapers nationwide swelled with optimistic nationalistic prose. "Peace…finds us covered in glory," declared the

[112] "Americans! Rejoice!," *National Intelligencer*, February 16, 1815.
[113] Nicole Eustace, *1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 238n5, 238n7; Brown, *An Authentic History of the Second War for Independence.* On providence in the period, see Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 166–72. Guyatt categorizes the post-Ghent providential rhetoric as what he calls "historical providentialism," or "the belief that God imagined a special role for certain nations in improving the world and tailored their history to prepare them for the achievement of this mission" (Guyatt, *Providence,* 6).
[114] James Monroe, "To The Military Committee Of The Senate, February 22, 1815," in *The Writings of James Monroe*, ed. Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, vol. 5 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1901), 321–22.

Richmond Enquirer, another Democratic paper, "elevated in the scale of nations, enlightened by experience. The native stamina of a young and free people will now shoot forth into greater luxuriance…the sun never shone upon a people whose destinies promise to be grander."[115]

Twenty years of divisive partisan political culture that traded on apocalyptic doubt about the future of the nation was banished. As Daniel Walker Howe has perceptively put it, it was not just the British military, but *the past itself* that was defeated in 1815.[116] The white American public felt empowered to forget what lay behind, tainted as it had been by the specter of ongoing European colonialism and internecine political strife, and instead press forward into their national destiny.[117] American diplomat Albert Gallatin observed that since the war, "national feelings and character" had been "renewed and reinstated" among the citizenry with a vigor not seen since the Revolution. Americans, he thought, "are *more* Americans; they feel and act more as a nation."[118] It was a galvanizing moment, an outpouring of what John Higham famously called a "spirit of boundlessness," a "restless…aggressive…centrifugal" force, empowering a vigorous assault on long-assumed limits.[119] "The limits of ascribed status yielded to an egalitarian celebration of the self-made man…The limits of reason were metamorphosed into the infinite possibilities of knowledge and the intuitive truths of the heart…The limits of history dissolved into an ecstatic dedication to the future."[120]

Part and parcel with the defeat of the past and the concomitant ecstasy of futurity was the rapid collapse of the Federalist party itself. Associated with anglophilic affections and backward-

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[115] "Peace!," *The Enquirer* (Richmond, VA), February 18, 1815.
[116] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 18.
[117] For a classic and generative account of this, see Higham, "Boundlessness," 153–57; See also Dennis, "Reflections on a Bicentennial: The War of 1812 in American Public Memory," 300.
[118] Albert Gallatin to Matthew Lyon, May 7, 1816, printed in Henry Adams, *The Life of Albert Gallatin* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott, 1879), 560. Emphases mine.
[119] Higham, "Boundlessness," 153.
[120] Ibid.

looking, tradition-bound social habits that were now clearly out of step with American identity – if not downright traitorous – the Federalists had no future as a party in the post-war era.[121] "Federalists, rejoice!" crowed the *National Intelligencer*, "Rejoice that your opposition has been unavailing in checking the measures of your government, and that…your plots and counter-plots have not arrested the march of the Republic to the heights of fame and glory."[122] They were defeated in a landslide in the election of 1816, never even bothering to convene to formally nominate a presidential candidate.

New Formalist Strategies in the "Era of Good Feelings"

There could be no doubt that the post-war national political agenda belonged to the Democratic-Republicans, whose rhetoric of can-do optimism and political independence offered a framework of energetic populism to the citizenry. Widely characterized in the press as a new "Era of Good Feelings," many had faith that political rancor and economic sectionalism would now be left behind, simply because the prospects of the young nation now seemed so bright, its possibilities so vast.[123]

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[121] "Americans! Rejoice!" *National Intelligencer*; See also, Dennis, "Reflections on a Bicentennial," 275–78, 280–84; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 70–73; Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 299.
[122] "Americans! Rejoice!," *National Intelligencer*.
[123] The phrase "Era of Good Feelings" was first coined by the popular Boston Federalist newspaper, the *Columbian Centinel*, as the headline of its report on an 1817 dinner in which the newly elected President James Monroe, a Democratic-Republican, was warmly fêted by his political opponent, former President John Adams. See "Era of Good Feelings," *Columbian Centinel* (Boston, MA), July 12, 1817. The phrase stuck. Within weeks, it had been repurposed dozens of times by newspapers up and down the coast to describe the tenor of the times. On this phenomenon and its effects, see Eustace, *1812*, 238n7. On the economic effects of the peace, see Williams, *The Contours of American History*, 196–97; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 92–93. It would take exactly one presidential election cycle to prove the hoped-for end of political rancor to be a pipe dream. As several historians have noted, the presence of "good feelings" in the Era of Good Feelings is harder to discern the harder you look. See for example Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 181-217; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 211-245; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 186.

This was the sentiment that newly elected President James Monroe invoked in his 1817 inaugural address. Monroe spoke of Americans as "one great family with a common interest" who had exorcised "discord" from their land – a process powerfully aided by the arrival of what amounted to a single-party system.[124] The government of the United States was now "near…perfection," he gushed – "we have no essential improvement to make" but must only "persevere…under the favor of a gracious providence, to attain the high destiny which seems to await us."[125]

But, as formalists were all too aware, in spite of this exuberant, popular faith in America's providential prospects, "near perfection" was not in fact perfection. As Daniel Walker Howe has observed in his magisterial history of the period, the United States after 1815 "was still an open-ended experiment, mostly potential rather than actuality."[126] Similarly, John Brooke notes that in this period, the "nation was more imagined than governed; it was less a nation of laws than a nation in sentiment and imagination, and even that national imagining was thin."[127] While all seemed to agree that the United States was operating under the care of God's providence, the particular forms emergent from that providential superintendence remained troublingly unclear. As Nicholas Guyatt has shown, post-war optimism thinly veiled no small amount of "anxiety about the *meaning* of American development" in this period.[128] Surely God was at work, but what was God doing? How was God calling Americans to move beyond the mere embrace of political liberty and seemingly endless territory to become an orderly community that produced the benevolent social goods befitting a Christian nation?

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[124] James Monroe, "First Inaugural Address; March 4, 1817," The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, accessed August 29, 2017, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/monroe1.asp.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 19.
[127] Brooke, "Cultures of Nationalism," 11.
[128] Guyatt, *Providence*, 171. Emphasis mine.

As formalist Protestant leaders saw it, answers to these types of questions were not best discerned, *sui generis*, by the democratic voice of the people. These *were*, however, precisely the types of questions that had long occupied their attention. With their custodial, proprietary sense of responsibility for national religious identity formation, formalists felt God had given them elite leadership capacity precisely so that they could establish effective social structures that aimed to achieve exactly these ends. But in the post-Federalist era, anything that smacked of the centralization of power in the hands of elites for the engineering and formation of the public good was held in suspicion as a retrograde betrayal of the values of Democratic self-government. Thus formalist leaders were, in 1816, confronting what Walter McDougall calls an "existential dilemma." They had either to "discard genteel notions of ordered liberty and *surrender* to popular passions" – and in so doing give up their sense of theopolitical vocation – "or else they must somehow *indulge* populist democratic yearnings while in fact governing through dispassionate compromise."[129]

Was this possible? What manner of compromise could sufficiently invite democratic participation while also enabling meaningful moral governance? Could the formalist Protestant sense of custodial responsibility for the religious condition of the young republic also be accepted as fully American in the post-Ghent era? The answer to the last question is of course a resounding Yes. We have already noted the startling profusion and efficacy of institutional efforts for national evangelical benevolence in the twenty years after the founding of the ABS – efforts that not only flourished but also retained a strong and influential managerial sensibility, resulting in two decades of what Jonathan Den Hartog has aptly named "the Federalization of American Christianity," *pace* Nathan Hatch.[130] But what made this accommodation possible?

[129] McDougall, *Freedom Just Around the Corner*, 424.
[130] Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety*, 8, 17, 204.

Examining the efforts of formalist evangelical leaders to engineer the nationwide distribution of Bibles in the years before and after the Treaty of Ghent suggests that much of their success lay in their strategic re-narration of American eschatological identity. As we will see, prior to the war, the most prominent formalist evangelical approach to addressing the paucity of Bibles in the United States – then their bellwether issue for evangelical social morality – was to deploy apocalyptic jeremiads designed to shame and terrify the public about the dismal state of the nation's future. On such a reading, the nation's growing population was in a disgraceful state of declension due to the lack of Bibles, disorderly wandering in the wilderness of sin. In turn, it was incumbent upon those Christians who had proper understanding of good moral order to call their wayward brethren back.

After the war, however, with the collapse of Federalist-inflected political possibilities, formalist evangelicals significantly changed their approach. Rather than offering the chastisement of insecure elites to a democratic populace who weren't having any of it, they instead offered to the public *a millennial "reading strategy" for their own historical moment*.[131] They sought to harness the centrifugal democratic energies burgeoning in the post-Ghent moment by both developing a bold eschatological metanarrative that accounted for the emergence of those energies and building institutions – paradigmatically the ABS – that visibly mediated and perpetually reiterated that metanarrative. The substance of the metanarrative was

[131] I owe the term "reading strategy for history" to Cathy Gutierrez, "The Millennium and Narrative Closure," in *War in Heaven/Heaven on Earth: Theories of the Apocalyptic*, ed. Stephen D. O'Leary and Glen S. McGhee (London: Equinox, 2014), 47. It bears mentioning that I think that my observation of this transition may shed some light on what Sam Haselby seeks to define as the new literary genre of "national evangelism." He wants to hold this genre in contrast with the jeremiad, as classically defined by Sacvan Bercovitch. However, as I will argue below, I do not think that Samuel J. Mills turns much at all away from the backward-looking form of jeremiadic rhetoric – quite the contrary in fact. See Haselby, *Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, 230.

the advent of the millennial dawn – that long cherished evangelical hope – which, they argued, was in their moment flickering perceptibly over an emergent global Christendom. As the United States underwent its present energetic expansion, its democratic citizenry was destined – by supporting formalist evangelical institutions – to play a galvanizing role in the coalescence of that millennial internationale that would, in turn, be instrumental in ushering in the *eschaton*.

There are two elements of this strategy that are particularly important to notice at this point. At the ideological level, it "harnesses" the democratic energies of the post-Ghent moment, in both senses of the word. On the one hand, the formalist ideological framework is parasitic, deriving all its explanatory power from the new national conditions of "boundlessness" that the United States seemed to be experiencing in 1816. This, of course, implies an *affirmation* of a mode of Christian citizenship being exhibited by those who have come together in "unanimity…across the multiplied divisions that exist in this country," united around the Bible cause.[132] As we will see, this enthusiasm for inter-sectional Christian nationalism will become a massive liability for the formalist program as the question of slavery looms ever larger over the next two decades. On the other hand, the formalist ideological framework also aims to circumscribe the same boundlessness, offering an explanation for its quotidian expressions that far out-narrates them – emplotting the social and political enthusiasms for "white man's democracy" within a divine, world-historical drama.

At the practical level, by building ostensibly national participatory institutions that mediated this theopolitical ideology, formalist evangelicals were attempting to "make manifest"

[132] *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York and Others...at the Request of the Board of Managers of the American Bible Society* (New York: J. Seymour, 1816), 9.

their vision of the identity and destiny of the United States in the "daily lives of citizens."[133] As Benjamin Park has recently argued, the varieties of nationalism in the United States in the first three decades of the nineteenth century originated in relatively local discursive communities which put forth their visions of imagined national union through sets of concrete institutional practices that *they* practiced, and named "American."[134] When relatively homogenous groups of mostly northeastern formalist evangelical white men gathered in New York to establish "national" institutions – first and foremost the "American" Bible Society – they were not simply envisioning an elite-managed, efficient structure for distributing Bibles across the broadening geography of the United States. Rather, they were naturalizing a particular "religious form of national belonging…a free expression of communal obedience…that struck at the heart of what [they believed] 'America' actually meant."[135] When millennially-inflected national institutions like the ABS called all American citizens to participate together in national work of eschatological significance, they were naming the terms for national unity – American "sameness" in relation to a shared institutional mission.[136] Simultaneously, they were stabilizing that *national* mission, in all its contingency and uncertainty, by tethering it to the unchanging supernatural order of God's salvation-history.[137]

The theory and practice of this millennial reading of history, offering a coherent theopolitical account of the American present in 1816 while containing within it the seeds of a glorified American future state, was as rhetorically shrewd as it was faith-filled. It also, of

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[133] Johann Neem, "Civil Society and American Nationalism, 1776-1865," in *Politics and Partnerships: The Role of Voluntary Associations in America's Political Past and Present*, ed. Elisabeth S. Clemens and Doug Guthrie (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 36-41.
[134] Benjamin E. Park, *American Nationalisms: Imagining Union in the Age of Revolutions, 1783–1833* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[135] Park, *American Nationalisms*, 76, 86.
[136] Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 55.
[137] Douglass, *How Institutions Think*, 48, and 45-67 *passim.*

course, provided a compelling apologia for formalist evangelical initiatives in a democratizing age. Centralized national societies with expert managers were necessary in order to "set forward a system of happiness" that would allow Americans "the delight of seeing the wilderness turned into a fruitful field, by the blessing of God."[138] In order for the nation to enter into its destiny as a vehicle advancing millennial anticipation, voluntary democratic participation was essential, but so, they claimed, was their elite leadership.

Three archives from 1814 to 1816 cast light on the momentum surrounding the founding of the ABS, and with it the post-war paradigm of the formalist evangelical imaginary, illustrating the transition to a presentist, near-dawning millennialism. The first archive, developed during the war years, consists primarily of letters compiled in reports made by Samuel J. Mills, a formalist missionary from New England who was sent to the frontier twice during the War of 1812, tasked to assess its moral and religious state. These reports, and Mills' subsequent agitation for their findings, were credited by several contemporaries as being catalytic to the process of founding the ABS. The second archive – some of which we have already encountered – follows directly from the first, consisting of addresses presented at the founding public meetings of the ABS in 1816. The difference in tone and appeal between these materials and the pre-Ghent Mills materials is striking, especially given the continuity between Mills's convictions about the mission of Christian American citizens and the convictions of the ABS. Finally, we will consider materials from the establishing documents and early issues of the *Religious Intelligencer*, a New Haven-based weekly news magazine, founded between 1815 and 1816, that became one of the chief mouthpieces of formalist evangelical millennial ideology.

[138] American Bible Society, *Constitution*, 20.

"Scenes of Wide-Spreading Desolation": The Apocalypse of Samuel J. Mills

In the summer of 1815, Samuel J. Mills returned home to his beloved New England after a yearlong exploratory trek through "that part of the United States which lies west of the Allegany Mountains."[139] For the second time in three years, the thirty-two year old Congregationalist missionary had been sponsored by a consortium of northeastern evangelical mission societies to go west and report back on the "moral and religious state" of the nation's frontier.[140]

The son of a respected Connecticut New Light minister, educated at both Williams College and Andover Seminary, Mills was a well-born scion of the New England formalist evangelical establishment.[141] He harbored an enthusiastic affection for his native ground — "this land of Christian privileges" — with its stable, moral social order, shot through with the sanctifying "delight[s]" of "Sabbaths…sermons, and sacraments."[142] But Mills was no homebody; quite the opposite, in fact. Since his college days, he had been, as an admiring contemporary put it, "roused to purposes of active benevolence," seized by a passionate desire to

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[139] Samuel John Mills and Daniel Smith, *Report of a Missionary Tour through That Part of the United States Which Lies West of the Allegany Mountains* (Andover, MA: Flagg and Gould, 1815); Gardiner Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 2nd ed. (New York: J. Leavitt, and J.P. Haven, 1829), 59–87.
[140] His first journey, of which John Schermerhorn was the primary leader, was jointly sponsored by the Massachusetts Missionary Society and the Connecticut Missionary Society in 1813-1814. His second journey was primarily sponsored by the Massachusetts Missionary Society, the Philadelphia Bible Society, and the Philadelphia Missions Society, with other sources solicited for smaller contributions. See Mills and Smith, *Report of a Missionary Tour*, 3, 5–7; John Freeman Schermerhorn and Samuel John Mills, *A Correct View of That Part of the United States Which Lies West of the Allegany Mountains, with Regard to Religion and Morals* (Hartford, CT: P. B. Gleason, 1814), 2; Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 60–61, 70–71.
[141] Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 3–4, 9–44; William Buell Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit: Trinitarian Congregational*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857), 566–72; William Buell Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit: Trinitarian Congregational*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857), 672–77; Christine Leigh Heyrman, *American Apostles: When Evangelicals Entered the World of Islam* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 20–24, 40–43. On revival in Torringford, see Samuel Mills, Sr., "Revival of Religion in Torringford," in *The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*, ed. James Cogswell, et al., vol. 1 (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1800), 27–28.
[142] Mills and Smith, *Report of a Missionary Tour*, 47, 21.

export the cultural gifts of New England Christendom — "good order…religion…and morality" — to places that did not yet enjoy them.[143]

While this passion was initially directed toward overseas missions, by 1812, Mills had begun to turn his attention to the interior of the United States. By then, thousands of American citizens, mostly poor, were each leaving behind the well-established social and economic networks of the eastern seaboard for the relative isolation of the frontier, chasing the promise of cheap land and the new economic opportunity it afforded.[144] While the new opportunities afforded by the frontier were real — indeed, crucial to the economic future of the republic — Mills was acutely aware that in order to lay hold of them, multiplied thousands of Americans were, in effect, migrating outside the relatively stable bounds of East Coast Christendom into a dangerously formless religious culture – nothing like his beloved New England. What the emigrant stood to gain in worldly wealth would, he was certain, be worth nothing to them if they lost their souls in the process. The work was urgent and the stakes were high. The proper conditions of Christendom must be expanded westward — and quickly — if the United States was to avoid spiritual disaster and become the civilized Christian nation that earlier generations intended.

Filled with zeal to address this national dilemma, Mills ventured forth twice – first in 1812 and again in 1814 – to map the ragged moral and religious geography of the national

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[143] Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 9; Mills and Smith, *Report of a Missionary Tour*, 21, 29. This work of cultural export was the primary focus of Mills' life. Before his untimely death at sea off the coast of Liberia in 1818, aged 35, he had been centrally involved in establishing the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810), the American Bible Society (1816), and the American Colonization Society (1816-7), as well as a secret society of evangelical students in western Massachusetts known as The Brethren who had pledged their lives to missionary work. Many of these were Williams College students who had been involved in the lionized "Haystack Prayer Meeting" of 1806. See also Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*; Haselby, *Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, 228–33; Heyrman, *American Apostles*, 19-43.

[144] Howe, *What Hath God* Wrought, 41–43, 52, 125–31, 136–42.

frontier, taking stock of what was and imagining what could be.[145] All along his fifteen-hundred mile outbound journey west to Pittsburgh through Cincinnati and onward down the Ohio and Mississippi River Valleys to New Orleans, he gathered analytic data, counting the number of suitable churches and ministers, assessing the accessibility of Protestant print media, and evaluating the spiritual condition of the locals. He also talked to hundreds of frontier locals, laypeople and leaders alike, demonstrating what one scholar has called his singular "genius for networking and organizing" in the interest of future goals.[146] In the unruly clusters of settlers now visible, he reflected, "we behold the germs of future cities. The village, that now contains nothing but log cabins, will soon become the dwelling place of thousands. And those thousands may *all* be favorably affected by the early establishment of religious institutions," akin to those that had so shaped New England two centuries earlier.[147]

Though Mills professed great hope for the establishment of the conditions of Christendom on the national frontier, however, he was also unflinching in his portrayal of its dire present circumstances. The tone of his report was decidedly apocalyptic. While he presented the report that he published upon his return east in the summer of 1815 as a "sober" and "unexaggerated" picture of the religious state of the frontier – "the result of much inquiry and patient examination" – he nonetheless produced what one contemporary described as a "heart-rending" exposé of the "nakedness of the land."[148] "Never will the impression be erased from our hearts, that has been made by beholding...scenes of wide-spreading desolation," Mills declared.

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[145] On Mills as a New England moral geographer see Amy DeRogatis, *Moral Geography: Maps, Missionaries, and the American Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 152–56 and passim.
[146] Heyrman, *American Apostles*, 20. Sam Haselby claims that Mills was "considered the best-known fundraiser of the time." See Haselby, *Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, 228.
[147] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 21.
[148] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 47; Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 60.

"The whole country, from Lake Erie to the gulf of Mexico, is as the valley of the shadow of death. Darkness rests upon it."[149] Just over the mountains, west of the orderly Christianized towns and cities of the east, Mills depicted a domain of moral chaos. Everywhere he went, he bore perpetual witness to "extremely deplorable...morals," religious "indifference," spiritual "error," and "stupidity" among the population.[150] Scandalizing vices like gambling, intemperance, Sabbath-breaking, and profanity were unchecked facts of life.[151]

The presenting reason for the moral and religious debasement of the frontier was, to Mills, a matter of common sense. At a basic level, frontier people lacked *access* to the gospel — and how could anyone expect otherwise in an environment in which stabilizing formalist evangelical institutions were so woefully underdeveloped? To be crystal clear, Mills left no doubt that it was *formalist* institutions that he wanted to see. While he came across many Baptist and Methodist preachers ("often exceedingly illiterate") on his travels, as well as Roman Catholic priests among "every species of heretics," there were precious few missionaries devoted to the orderly combination of broadly Calvinistic "orthodoxy and vital godliness" that would guard people from spiritual error and establish communal structures for stably inculcating the norms of Christian civilization.[152] While this paucity of missionaries was lamentable, however, Mills did not think that greatly increasing their number was a viable short-term measure for alleviating the frontier's "deplorable state of...awful gloom."[153] It would simply take too long.

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[149] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 47.
[150] See, for example, Mills and Smith, *Report*, 29, 9, 24–25, 27, 55.
[151] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 24, 29, 54.
[152] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 17, 19. See also extended accounts on 18-22 and 54.
[153] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 47. The numbers of missionaries presently available were too few to make a meaningful, rapid dent in shaping the moral geography of the frontier. Mills did publish one lengthy letter (see Mills and Smith, *Report,* 15-22) that he wrote to his friend Dr. Samuel Worcester, Corresponding Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, in which he made a case for missionaries to be sent to the frontier. But it is clear from the full scope of Mills' report that he considered sending missionaries to be a "long game" strategy, whereas sending Bibles was the immediate, necessary

What *would* make an immediate difference though, Mills repeatedly contended, was access to Bibles. If only "the sacred volume" was "circulat[ed] among the people," he asserted, "we may reasonably expect" that many will "derive from [it]...moral and religious instruction."[154] Steeped in the almost totemic rationalism of common-sense Biblical interpretation, he saw this as a question of epistemic cause and effect.[155] In an illuminating passage, Mills explained that the reason "the Sabbath is generally profaned" was that people "seem to not *know* that the Lord hath said, *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*."[156] Just by having *access* to the Bible, he averred, people would read it, apprehend its divine truth, and be delivered of their spiritual ignorance and moral disorder. After all, he wrote, these people were not "strangers and foreigners" but "members of the same civil community with us," displaced New Englanders whose "eyes…constantly look[ed] towards the East" to provide religious sustenance.[157] He met many "persons who were very anxious to obtain the Scriptures," and brooked no doubt that they were hungry to conform their lives to the standards of divine revelation, were they only afforded the means.[158] But everywhere he travelled, there were no Bibles to be had. This "dreadful famine of the written...word of God" was, Mills argued, the crux of the spiritual crisis facing the frontier, and, by extension, the whole nation.[159] "The people perish," he fulminated in the language of the prophet Hosea, "for lack of knowledge."[160]

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measure that he emphasized again and again.

[154] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 26.

[155] E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 174. Much has been written on the shaping significance of Baconian inductive methods, filtered through Scottish "common-sense" philosophy, to American epistemological practices in this period. For an introductory orientation to the significance of this way of apprehending the world for antebellum American religion and American politics, see Noll, *America's God*, 91–113, 233–238; and Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*, 21–38.

[156] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 44.

[157] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 21.

[158] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 27.

[159] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 20.

[160] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 24. For the biblical allusion, see Hosea 4:6 (KJV).

While the hundreds of local Bible societies in the east had been laboring to ameliorate this issue for seven years at the time Mills composed this dark prophecy, they were hobbled from the start by the fact that the demand for Bibles at the *local* level so far outstripped the capacity of even the best funded and best equipped societies to supply it. "The deficiency of Bibles has been found to be much greater than expected," reported the pioneering Philadelphia Bible Society in 1809, after one year of operation, such that "the whole of the funds in the possession of the Society, could be profitably expended in supplying the wants of this city alone."[161] In the end, after nearly a decade of Bible fever, all the local Bible societies throughout the United States had only produced and distributed 150,000 Bibles, which were mostly absorbed by people in their immediate vicinity.[162]

By contrast, Mills conservatively calculated as he concluded his report that no fewer than 76,000 Bibles, more than half the total number produced in the prior seven years, were *immediately* necessary on the frontier — and that number was growing constantly on the rising tides of westward emigration.[163] At present, he noted in frustration, the total number of Bibles being sent west annually was less even than "the yearly *increase* of the destitute...[while] the original number remains unsupplied."[164] Furthermore, he reminded his readers, the numerically larger problem of Bible supply among the poor in the swelling cities of the east — the felt need that had prompted their Bible fever in the first place — was still unaddressed. "*Half a million of Bibles* are necessary to supply [all] the destitute" in the United States, he lamented, and that number too was growing as the nation grew.[165] Absent some radical intervention, the present

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[161] *First Report of the Bible Society Established At Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, PA: Fry & Kammerer, 1809), 8-9.
[162] Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 45–52.
[163] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 47.
[164] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 47.
[165] It is unclear how Mills arrived at this number. However, Rev. Gardiner Spring, his first biographer,

moral anarchy of the frontier was nothing less than an index of the spiritual trajectory of the American religious future.

In the final paragraph of his report, Mills turned to the question of what was to be done. In rising prophetic cadence, he prescribed a solution to his evangelical readers that was as enchantingly simple as it was intensely demanding. The Bible crisis on the frontier *and* in the cities of the east was, he wrote, "a foul blot on our national character," a deep discredit to the religious identity of the young republic.[166] And it was, in turn, at the *national* level that a response was demanded – *"Christian America* must arise and wipe it away,*"* he inveighed.[167] After a decade of well-intentioned "exertions," all the efforts of local Bible societies had proven "scattered and feeble…by no means adequate to the accomplishment of the object."[168] What was necessary, Mills declared, was the formation of a "National Institution" that accepted responsibility on behalf of all American Christians for supplying the entire United States with the word of God.[169]

Mills of course knew that his proposal to bring the production and distribution of bibles in the United States under the aegis of a single institution with a national scope was an audacious challenge to the status quo. He was likely well aware that Elias Boudinot's 1815 proposal of such a plan was presently foundering in Philadelphia and Massachusetts. However, to Mills, the miserable state of the frontier made nationalization not just attractive but imperative. American

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notes an uncited 1817 report on the state of religion in large American cities which claimed that no fewer than 178,000 people in the cities of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston, cumulatively, were without access to the gospel. See Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 104.

[166] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 47.

[167] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 47. Emphasis mine. This is the earliest use of the term "Christian America" that I have ever seen. However, it begins to be used thereafter, typically in reference to one or another benevolent effort.

[168] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 47.

[169] Mills and Smith, Report, 47.

evangelicals *had* to begin to think and act as a *national* collective*,* understanding themselves as a practically reified body politic — Christian America. In such a framework, the problems of the frontier were neither distant problems of the howling wilderness west of the Alleghenies nor problems to be addressed through local benevolence. Rather they were national problems that demanded a national solution. If there was any substance to the notion that the young republic was a Christian nation, it was high time to find the collective will to act like one. The alternatives were an apocalyptic moral crisis among the un-Christianized on the frontier and in the swelling cities of the east or a return to dependence upon the nation with which the United States was presently at war. If American Christians could not themselves solve this problem, Mills concluded in an acid parting shot, they should abandon the pretense of independence and make "application…to the British and Foreign Bible Society for help."[170]

Mills' report was nothing if not an archetypal "Federalist jeremiad" as classically described by Sacvan Bercovitch.[171] He insisted that the only way for America's revolutionary progress to continue was through a reaffirmation of the authority structures that had previously governed American social order – and in particular the order of Puritan Christendom. Mills' jeremiad looked resolutely backward — historically to the righteousness of earlier generations and geographically to "the land of Christian privileges" — as a means of "berating the present generation for deviating from the past in order to prod it forward" toward a righteous future.[172] Mills sought to promote "consensus through anxiety" about intergenerational decline, "supporting the system by calling attention to its current dysfunctions" – made visible by its divergence from a prior condition – in order to stir rededication to the God-given American

[170] Mills and Smith, *Report*, 47.
[171] Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 134.
[172] Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 136; Mills and Smith, *Report*, 47.

cause of "the happy union of liberty and order" through the development of Christianizing institutions.[173]

Furthermore, in deploying this apocalyptic jeremiad, Mills reveals that this archetypally American rhetoric is also in deep continuity with the social rhetoric of his formalist evangelical antecedents, on both sides of the Atlantic. Andrew Walls writes that historic formalist evangelicalism was a "religion of *protest* against a Christian society that was not Christian enough…both Christian and unbelieving."[174] Such evangelicalism "assumes Christendom," and its legatees work to "bring [their] nation in reality to what it already [is] in principle."[175] Mills' elite jeremiadic protest against the spiritual conditions on the frontier captures this approach perfectly. Like so many of his fellow New England clergy, he imagined the nation founded in God's special providence on a Christian covenantal principle – New England writ large – and now in 1815, he believed it was his job to cajole, harangue, and prophesy doom until that principle became reality.[176]

The evangelical public arose in response to Mills' urgent call.[177] For several months after its initial publication, excerpts of Mills' report appeared with acclamation in evangelical newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets up and down the eastern seaboard. The New England minister and editor Jedidiah Morse was first to do this, serializing much of the report in May and June of 1815 in *The Panoplist*, alongside an essay enjoining his readers to remember their "duty of supporting the very important enterprises" that Mills was commending.[178] The *Christian*

[173] Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 136–37.
[174] Walls, "Evangelical Revival," 81.
[175] Walls, "Evangelical Revival," 81-82.
[176] Park, *American Nationalisms*, 88-89 and 69-112, *passim.*
[177] Dwight, *Centennial History*, 13–15; Fea, *The Bible Cause*, 16; Thomas H. Kiker, "The Relationship between Samuel J. Mills Jr. and the Influence of the Second Great Awakening on Missions and Evangelism" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 146–47.
[178] Jedidiah Morse, ed., "Massachusetts Missionary Society," in *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine*,

Monitor of Richmond, Virginia published large sections of it, citing its "importance, and…the deep interest which every member of society ought to take in its subject."[179] The Directors of the Newark (N.J.) Bible Society excerpted much of it in a public circular, declaring its subject "the most interesting and important [cause] that can possibly occupy the rational and enlightened mind," and calling upon the "benevolent Public" to digest it and then "arise in their might as a strong man out of sleep…to rescue the thousands of their brethren, perishing…for want of [the] blessed Gospel."[180]

Alongside this attention in print, Mills himself — a truly tireless organizer — was on the road between New York and Washington D.C. throughout the second half of 1815, speaking to "men of influence" about the "wisdom and practicability" of his proposal.[181] One of the "men of influence" in Mills' frenetic orbit was Boudinot.[182] Bolstered by the public response to Mills' report, Boudinot decided to circulate a second proposal in January of 1816, essentially calling for the same thing he had unsuccessfully mooted a year earlier.[183] Yet again he proposed a May meeting to be attended by delegates from all the different local bible societies in the United States – this time in New York City, not Philadelphia – where a co-operative society for "the efficient distribution of the Holy Scriptures…throughout the U[nited] States" could be debated, constituted, and established.[184] Such a plan, Boudinot noted, with no small satisfaction, now

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vol. 11 (Boston, MA: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1815), 224-233, 273-284.

[179] Newark Bible Society, *"Circular (January 1816)," Christian Monitor* (Richmond, VA), February 24, 1816.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 88.

[182] Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 89–90. John Fea's account rightly maintains (*contra* Haselby, *Origins*, 228) that we do not know if Boudinot and Mills ever met. However, contemporary accounts of the formation of the ABS, like that of Gardiner Spring, make clear that their social worlds were constantly overlapping.

[183] Fea, *The Bible Cause*, 13–17; Elias Boudinot, *To The Several Bible Societies in the United States of America* (n.p., 1816).

[184] Boudinot, *To The Several Bible Societies.*

"seems at present to be the general wish of the friends of Revealed Truth…A brighter day appears now to have dawned on our Western Hemisphere."[185] And we already know the rest – the delegates gathered, in a spirit of (relative) unanimity, and formed the national society for which Mills had called. Mills reportedly sat in the back of the assembly room in New York's City Hall with "a look of heavenly delight on his countenance" as the new Constitution of the American Bible Society (ABS) was read aloud and unanimously approved.[186]

Was Mills' report responsible for catalyzing this new moment for American formalist evangelicals in which unity became possible around a paradigm-setting national Bible institution? Certainly, in part. No less a figure than Lyman Beecher, looking back in retrospect, extolled Mills as "the primary agent in this movement," the John the Baptist of the ABS who "by personal conversation…with thousands of the most influential men all over our nation…[he] prepared the way for a harmonious concurrence in favor of organization."[187]

For all of Mills' significance, however, the *marked* difference in tone between his 1815 apocalyptic jeremiad concerning the frontier and the American future and the optimistic millennial rhetoric by which formalist evangelicals begin to narrate that future to the public in 1816 suggests that a more fundamental imaginative shift was taking place, one that may ultimately have made the significance of Mills' report, and his call for nationalization, much more legible. One of the clearest early sites where this imaginative shift toward a soon-dawning millennium can be seen is in the founding documents of the *Religious Intelligencer*, one of a

[185] Ibid.
[186] Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 92; Dwight, *Centennial History*, 24; Fea, *The Bible Cause*, 20.
[187] William Peter Strickland, *History of the American Bible Society* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1849) 26.

handful of the first nationally-minded, interdenominational American religious newspapers that were coming into existence in 1816.[188]

"The Æra of Peace": The *Religious Intelligencer* and the Dawning Millennium

In the late autumn of 1815, Deacon Nathan Whiting, a respected lay leader of the First Church (Congregational) in New Haven, Connecticut – a bastion of formalist evangelical leadership – wrote to several of New England's most prominent evangelical divines, among them Yale president Timothy Dwight, moral reformer and revivalist Lyman Beecher, and pastor-theologian Nathaniel William Taylor.[189] Enclosed within each letter was a draft prospectus for the *Religious Intelligencer*, a newspaper to be published in New Haven that Whiting proposed to produce, and for which he sought their endorsements. The *Intelligencer* would chronicle contemporary events, domestic and international, that were relevant to "the extension and glory

[188] The three major nationally-minded, (relatively) interdenominational religious newspapers that appeared in 1816, each with an interest in news about the "advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom" on earth, were the *Boston Recorder* (Boston: January 1816), the *Christian Herald* (New York: March 1816), and the *Religious Intelligencer* (New Haven: June 1816). Preceding these in the arena of religious news were a handful of smaller, more short-lived papers which either aspired only to local reach or had limited interdenominational interest, such as Elias Smith's *Herald of Christian Liberty* (1808), Philadelphia's *Religious Remembrancer* (1813), and the *Chillicothe Weekly Recorder* (1814), among others. Which periodical was "the first" has periodically been a matter of debate among historians since the 1850s. See Hollis Read, *The Hand of God In History, Or, Divine Providence Historically Illustrated in the Extension and Establishment of Christianity*, vol 2 (Hartford, CT: H. E. Robins, 1857), 26; Louis Benson, D. D., "The First Religious Newspaper," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* IV, no. 2 (June 1907): 51–61; Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1873), 289-305. However, there has been little reflection upon the question of *why* three of the major national-minded religious newspapers appeared within six months of one another in the first half of 1816. The only study I have seen that has gestured in the direction of the question is an unpublished dissertation by Howard Eikenberry Jensen, "The Rise of Religious Journalism in the United States" (University of Chicago, 1920), 119-145.

[189] Nathan Whiting, "Prospectus of the Religious Intelligencer: A Weekly Paper, to Be Published in New-Haven" (New Haven, CT, 1816), Connecticut Historical Society; "Nathan Whiting" in William Allen, *The American Biographical Dictionary: Containing an Account of the Lives, Characters, and Writings of the Most Eminent Persons Deceased in North America from Its First Settlement* (Boston: J.P. Jewett, 1857), 852; H. C. Kingsley et al., ed., *Leonard Bacon: Pastor of the First Church in New* Haven (Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1882), 79.

of the REDEEMER's KINGDOM," planting them firmly in the consciousness of the "Christian public" on a weekly basis.[190] In the prospectus, Whiting laid out his case that such a periodical was *necessary* in their particular moment – living and leading as they did in a time of epochal significance for the church and, thus, for the whole world.

"The ÆRA of REVOLUTIONS…is past," he wrote, using block capitals to emphasize his conviction, "by the blessing of God, never to return." Now, he continued, "a new and very different æra appears now to be opening: the ÆRA OF PEACE."[191] As we have observed above, it had indeed been a banner year for peacemaking in the arena of North Atlantic geopolitics that governed Whiting's vision of the world. But Whiting's sense of the *meaning* of this "æra of peace" – "new and very different" from times past – soared far beyond mere geopolitics to the realm of salvation-history. He was convinced that the recent spate of political peacemaking was best understood as a "sign of the times," prophetically prefigured in the Bible and signaling a moment pregnant with eschatological promise. "An universal peace throughout the earth…was the glorious harbinger of the birth of the Messiah," he recalled, "and we know from the *sure word of Prophecy* that *wars shall cease to the ends of the earth*, at the dawning of the latter day glory." [192] In 1815, Whiting's world was literally undergoing an eschatological transition into a qualitatively different moment than that of the years prior. The coming of geopolitical peace was nothing less to him than a known element of a divinely-ordered, biblically prophesied narrative, the historical vestibule through which the world would pass on its sure trajectory of spiritual improvement unto the dawning of the millennium, culminating in the long-expected establishment of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

[190] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[191] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[192] Whiting, "Prospectus."

Whiting offered his friends several compelling empirical reasons to view their contemporary moment through the lens of this eschatological narrative. Chief among them was the rapid dissemination of print bibles worldwide, largely through the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS). The BFBS, he observed, was "publishing the WORD of LIFE in every human language and bestowing it on every human family…with a success almost miraculous." Kings, queens, czars, khans, and shahs – Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim – were all, with a level of cooperation once unimaginable, "lending their wealth and their influence to the universal diffusion of the word of God," through the instrumentality of the British Bible enterprise. On the rising tide of peace in a modernizing world, it seemed that the ancient vision of the prophet Habakkuk was being fulfilled: the whole earth was being filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.[193]

On the domestic front, Whiting also perceived a divinely inspired increase in missionary spirit. American "exertions now made to educate missionaries and…support missions" were unprecedented, he exuberantly claimed, "outrun[ning] all examples."[194] Due to the work of organizations like the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), founded in 1810 and funded by private donations, more missionaries were being sent from the United States than ever before. What was more, they were returning with stories of triumph, established by the sovereign will of God for this historical moment. "To the Missionaries of this day, GOD is saying…'Go ye swift messengers to the nations'…[while] also saying to the nations of men – 'All ye inhabitants of the earth! Look ye, when I lift up an ensign on the mountains! Hear ye, when I blow the trumpet!!"[195]

[193] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[194] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[195] Whiting, "Prospectus."

Finally, Whiting averred that, of late, "GOD in very deed, has been present…in many of our churches," provoking conversions and calling Christians to action on behalf of the Kingdom of God. "The influences of the HOLY SPIRIT have been poured out [upon] Colleges, Academies…Schools [and] congregations…to an extent which the American church probably never before witnessed," he wrote, "and *His people*, in great multitudes, have been *willing in this day of His power.*" [196]

In the midst of all this unprecedented evangelical success, however, one problem loomed very large to Whiting, and it was to this problem that he aimed to draw the attention of his distinguished correspondents. As these events of Christian victory unfolded, they generated an "unusually large and interesting…mass of Religious intelligence" – written reports of revivals, missionary successes, and burgeoning efforts for organized benevolence.[197] However, while such reports "constantly flow[ed] out upon the world," they flowed "in scattered streams…nowhere collected into a common reservoir."[198] As a consequence, only a small group of "favoured individuals" were able to see clearly the marvelous, eschatologically significant moment in which they lived.[199] Most American Christians did not have eyes to see that the United States was trembling on the verge of the millennial dawn – recall here Lewis Saum's assessment that millennial discourse was, by definition, elite discourse. To Whiting, this was not merely regrettable, but was in fact a problem for Christian discipleship in the young republic, as it was awareness of the things God was doing at this pivot-point in salvation-history, the opening of the Æra of Peace that would "animate the prayers, enliven the zeal, and enlarge the liberality

[196] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[197] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[198] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[199] Whiting, "Prospectus."

of Christians" nationwide.[200] If only people could develop a millennial awareness concerning their contemporary moment, they would see that "that even now, the night is far spent, and, with anxious eyes, begin to watch for the morning."[201]

It was *precisely* this problem that Whiting proposed to address with the *Religious Intelligencer.* So comprehensive and so interesting that "some subscribers [need] take no other paper," he envisioned the newspaper as a primary vehicle in the formation of millennial consciousness.[202] "If indeed the triumph of the CHURCH is near," he asked, "is it not proper that the SIGNS OF THE TIMES should be known, and marked, by Christians? Is not proper that at least one newspaper should be occupied with news of the prosperity of the church?"[203] From the outset, he saw it as being not regional but national in scope, accessible via "Post-rider…Stage or Steamboat to any place in the United States."[204] In step with this national accessibility, he intended it to be resolutely devoid of regional bias, reporting only factual "intelligence," remaining free from "party politics," admitting "no advertisements…into its pages," and relating events "without reference to the wants of any particular place or district, or the views of any theological or ecclesiastical party."[205] The *Religious Intelligencer* would be an institution that practiced a mode of *national* identity formation, in a thoroughly millennial mode.[206] Untainted by internecine sectarianism or sectionalism, it would present the proceedings of "the various

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[200] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[201] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[202] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[203] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[204] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[205] Whiting, "Prospectus"; Nathan Whiting, "The Religious Intelligencer," in *Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 18 (New Haven, CT: Nathan Whiting, 1833), 15-16. On Whiting's attempts to stay free of denominational and regional partisanship in the interest of providing millennial intelligence, see Jensen, "The Rise of Religious Journalism,"120-121, 142. Jensen observes that while he is relatively successful in his attempts to publish the evangelical news without note or comment, his New England Congregational roots are clearly detectable, especially when handling news about Methodists and Episcopalians.
[206] Park, *American Nationalisms*, 10-16; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (New York: Verso, 2016), 37-46.

ecclesiastical bodies…religious, moral, and charitable societies…and the earliest accounts of *Revivals of Religion*" in the United States, along with the work of evangelical missionary and publication societies in Europe.[207]

The recipients of Whiting's proposal for the *Religious Intelligencer* proved deeply sympathetic, both to his exuberant eschatological anticipation and to his conviction that the American moment they inhabited demanded a new form of empirical narration. Glowing endorsements were quickly forthcoming. "The plan of this publication…is in my opinion excellent," wrote Timothy Dwight.[208] "The period [in which we presently live] is momentous and wonderful, [more deserving of such a newspaper] than any other [period] which has existed since the Reformation, if not since the days of the Apostles."[209] Lyman Beecher went even further in praising the wisdom and timeliness of Whiting's narrative agenda.

> "Unless we belie every prediction of the Bible, and shut our eyes to all the signs of the present time, we must believe that a new and most blessed Æra has commenced; that efforts unknown before are to be made to evangelize the world – attended by a success utterly unparalleled…The ordinary vehicles of religious intelligence cannot communicate these wonders. The Newspaper is the appropriate vehicle…May the thousand presses of our land which have groaned to spread the tidings of war, lend their voluntary aid to tranquilize and cheer the hearts of men, by announcing the triumphs of the Redeemer."[210]

In early 1816, on the strength of such endorsements, Whiting began to solicit subscriptions for the *Religious Intelligencer* at the rate of three dollars per year. By May, he had gathered enough funds to go to press for the first time, and by July, he had secured twenty-eight sales and

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[207] Whiting, "Prospectus."
[208] Timothy Dwight to Nathan Whiting, "Recommendation of the Religious Intelligencer," January 5, 1816, in Whiting, *Prospectus.*
[209] Timothy Dwight to Nathan Whiting, "Recommendation of the Religious Intelligencer," January 5, 1816, in Whiting, *Prospectus.*
[210] Lyman Beecher to Nathan Whiting, "Recommendation of the Religions Intelligencer," January 6, 1816, in Whiting, "Prospectus."

distribution agents from Boston to New Orleans, establishing stable income and "extensive circulation" for would be a more than twenty year run for the pioneering religious magazine.[211]

The first issue, dated June 1, 1816, consisted of sixteen pages of articles, double-columned, under a simple, block capital masthead, below which Whiting printed the angelic phrase that would remain the motto of the enterprise for twenty-one years: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy."[212] The articles were organized in three categories. The first, "Foreign Intelligence," described the business of Bible societies in Britain, Germany, Hungary, and Sweden. The second, "Domestic Intelligence," offered a lengthy description of the founding of the ABS three weeks prior, as well as narratives of revivals in Connecticut and Virginia, and a report on the visit of four native Hawaiians to Connecticut – focusing on their pagan religiosity, their "native conscientiousness," and their ongoing training for Christian missions. These two categories would remain consistent for the life of the newspaper.

The third category was temporary, consisting of ten introductory articles – one at the beginning of each of the first ten issues – intended to frame the mission of the *Intelligencer*. "The Editor," Whiting wrote, "at the request of some of his subscribers, engaged, in the Introductory Number, to publish a few articles of Religious Intelligence, of a retrospective nature, in order to bring his readers acquainted with the present state of the Religious world."[213] What followed (in

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[211] Nathan Whiting, ed., *Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 1, 22 vols. (New Haven, CT: Nathan Whiting, 1817), 32; Nathan Whiting, ed., *Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 2, 22 vols. (New Haven, CT: Nathan Whiting, 1818), 836. The *Religious Intelligencer* ran from 1816-1837, with Whiting at the editorial helm until 1835.

[212] Luke 2:10 (KJV). Like the angel who announced the news of Christ's nativity – news on which the history of the world would pivot – so also did Whiting intend that the *Religious Intelligencer* would offer announcements, week in and week out, of the action of God in the contemporary United States. Americans would read these announcements, and be empowered in turn to narrate their own lives and the life of their nation as existing on the cutting edge of the trajectory of God's eschatological plan for the salvation of the world.

[213] Whiting, *Religious Intelligencer,* vol. 1, 1.

ten parts) was entitled "a brief Historical View of the Progress of the Gospel, in different nations, since its first Promulgation" – essentially a potted history of Christendom, from the apostolic age to the present day.

Very little of the specific content of this history is of interest to our analysis. The big picture, however, is very telling. Whiting included this ten-part, eighteen-hundred-year synoptic overview of the development of the Christian world at the launch of the *Intelligencer* because he wanted to signal to his readers the continuity between the apostolic age, the relentless progress of the gospel in the world, and the present day. This sense of the continuity of salvation-history is essential to the project that Whiting was trying to develop with the *Religious Intelligencer*. American Christians needed to be brought up to speed on the meaning of their contemporary moment.

Juxtaposing apostolic history and reports about Bible societies and revival meetings, Whiting is developing a millennial reading strategy for his contemporary American moment. He is offering to his readership a sweeping sense of the Christian past but, more importantly, a data-rich, portentous sense of the Christian American present and future that they could use, forming and informing their way of seeing the world in 1816 in a millennial frame. Paul Ricoeur has argued that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence."[214] In theoretical terms, this is precisely what Whiting intends. He wants to hold up the news of the events of their time, while also consistently signaling the millennial narrative conditions that make that time meaningful. He seeks to accomplish what Charles Williams calls the "conversion

[214] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 52.

of time," the baptism of the quotidian in the optimistic spirit of the millennial dawn, by the gracious means of newsprint.[215]

After all, for Whiting, this was the *summum bonum* of God's providential work. Human history, in all its contingency and volition, was a matrix in which God was sovereignly realizing the prophetic Christian narrative of redemption of the world in which "the kingdom of the world…become[s] the kingdom of…Christ."[216] It was thus that the coming of political peace in the North Atlantic could function as nothing less than a *figura* of the dawning "Æra of Peace," shadowing forth the work of God in the world, and properly understood "in immediate vertical connection to the divine order that encompasses it."[217] While the political peace was a coherent historical phenomenon in and of itself, Whiting believed that it was only the supervenient ordering effect of God's kingdom coming in the midst of the contingency of history that both unveiled and preserved its *meaning*. In the same way, each issue of the *Religious Intelligencer* – channeling streams of raw data about the current events in the church in the United States and around the world – was intended to reveal the daily experience of American Christians in the midst of a dynamic, world-historically significant story. It seeks to portray, in weekly periods, the infrastructure of the millennial Christianization of the United States, establishing what philosopher Etienne Souriau calls "*prerogative moments*," facilitated experiences of reflection that capture a sense of temporal dynamism, signaling backwards and forwards to the "long

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[215] Charles Williams, *The Descent of the Dove: A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church* (London: Longmans Green, 1939), 21, and 9-31, *passim.*
[216] Revelation 11:15, KJV.
[217] Erich Auerbach, "Figural Art In The Middle Ages," in *Dante Alighieri*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), 34. On the operations of the figural imagination, see Auerbach, "Figural Art," 25-36. On figuralism and national identity, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 22-25. As Anderson points out, such imagination must always already militate against what Walter Benjamin calls 'empty time.' For the formalist millennialist, there can be no such thing. In a sense, then, we might consider formalist retrenchment against the post-Ghent democratic insurgency as a mode of time-keeping.

unfolding of continuous action" of the story preceding and following – in this case the ongoing action of God, who is bringing history to its improved millennial state.[218]

From both scripture prophecy and his historical experience, Whiting knew that the "womb of futurity" was full.[219] For him, just as for the founders of the ABS, the times were pregnant with great events, events whose *eschatological* meaning circumscribed, exceeded, and out-narrated the striking political reordering of the post-Ghent political moment in which American Christians found themselves. It was critical, above all, to learn to discern and narrate the millennial spiritual realities manifesting in the news of the day, intently watching the immediate present for signs of the "dawning of the latter-day glory."[220] Whiting's *Religious Intelligencer* existed to make that mode of observation a part of the reflexive consciousness of the Christian public. The Æra of Peace required it. "A weekly publication has a peculiar advantage and influence on the public mind," he wrote in the "Preface" to the first bound annual volume of the *Religious Intelligencer* in June 1817.[221]

> "Knowing that [particular] means, in themselves inconsiderable, have often accomplished the greatest objects; and that a continual dropping will wear the rock, over which the broad stream will flow without making an impression…[I hope]…by collecting and exhibiting to [my] readers an account of the mighty works which God is now performing in the world, to be made instrumental in animating Christians to greater zeal in the cause of religion."[222]

The *Religious Intelligencer*, then, was an intentional instrument of formalist public pedagogy, a spiritual "Diary or Register" designed to form the public mind, through perpetual repetition, to embrace millennial eyes to see their historical moment in eschatological perspective.

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[218] Etienne Souriau, "Time In The Plastic Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 7 (1949): 299; John Barnett Brough, "Plastic Time: Time and the Visual Arts," in *The Many Faces of Time*, ed. John Barnett Brough and Lester Embree (Boston: Springer, 2000), 299, and *passim.*
[219] Nathan Whiting, "Preface," in *Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT, 1817).
[220] Nathan Whiting, "Preface," in *Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT, 1817).
[221] Nathan Whiting, "Preface," in *Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT, 1817).
[222] Nathan Whiting, "Preface," in *Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT, 1817).

Facing the title page of the first bound volume of the *Religious Intelligencer* is a printed diagram, designed by New Haven engravers Nathaniel and Simeon S. Jocelyn. Entitled a "CHRONOLOGICAL CHART, Exhibiting the Rise and Progress of CHRISTIANITY and MAHOMETANISM throughout the World, to the Close of the XVIIIth Century," it is divided on the horizonal axis into eighteen equal columns, representing the eighteen hundred-year periods between the birth of Christ and the year 1800. On the vertical axis are inscribed rows denoting the regions of the world, in North Atlantic perspective. The four major groupings – Europe, Asia, Africa, and America – each contain within them an assortment of semi-geographical subcategories: e.g. France, Russia, Persia, India Beyond The Ganges, Tartary, Egypt, Nubia and Abyssinia, Zangnebar, Greenland, United States, New Grenada, and (a telling catch-all in the America category) Native Tribes and Unconquered Countries, among numerous others. Each of the rows is filled in with bars of three distinct colors. White indicates the dominance of Christianity, grey the dominance of Mahometanism, and black "the continuance of Paganism."

The effect of the chart is quite visually striking. At the birth of Christ, all is pitch black. Looking rightward across time, the viewer has a distinct aesthetic experience contemplating each of the major groupings. In the Europe group, one sees by the year 800 a dramatic whitening of the chart – a visual representation of the dawning of the light of the gospel over the continent. In the Asia group, there are very promising early washes of white in the sections that represent the modern Middle East which are overtaken by looming greys, representing the rise of Islam. South

Figure 1: Simeon S. Jocelyn and Nathaniel Jocelyn, “CHRONOLOGICAL CHART, Exhibiting the Rise and Progress of CHRISTIANITY and MAHOMETANISM throughout the World, to the Close of the XVIIIth Century,” in *Religious Intelligencer*, ed. Nathan Whiting, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Nathan Whiting, 1817).

and East Asia, as well as the great majority of Africa – save for "Nubia and Abyssinia," which have a bold white line – remain submerged in pagan blackness. Lastly, in the America group, the first 1500 years are also thick darkness, but the advent of Europeans, all of a sudden, white sections gradually appear, becoming a striking bar of white by 1750 – visually comparable only to the state of Europe. In the reader's recent past, the Americas are seen to be *radically* changing.

This chart captures *in nuce* the pedagogical strategy of the *Religious Intelligencer.* Whiting and his engravers are portraying the history of the modern world as a story of a contest for global Christianization – visually ordering the past around this narrative.[223] The most striking elements of the image, the spaces that most draw the eye, are the broad white spaces which show that for the past hundred years or so, America and Europe have all but fully entered into the clear light of Christianization. They are, demonstrably and in contrast to the rest of the world, in the vanguard of the progress of Christendom, proleptically embodying the future state that will one day overtake the entire world, the millennial glory that all will experience before the return of Christ to reign over redeemed humanity at the end of all things.

The goal of the *Religious Intelligencer* is first to establish awareness in its readers of the remarkable reality that the United States is a forerunner in the global spread of Christendom, and subsequently to call those readers to "greater zeal" concerning the causes of Christ, knowing as they now do with an evidence-based confidence that the kingdom of Christ was *already* coming in their midst. The American future was millennial, and the American present was always already in relation to that millennium. While there was no certainty on the specific timeline of

[223] Susan Schulten, *Mapping the Nation: History and Cartography in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 11 and 11-40 *passim*. On cartographies of global Christendom and missionary impulses in this period, see also Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism.* Conroy-Krutz's category of distinctly "Christian" imperialism is helpful for understanding the mentality of formalist evangelicals in relation to global mission.

the millennial dawn, it was increasingly clear, according to the pedagogy of the *Religious Intelligencer*, that the time had come to labor with confident exertion and look with attentive expectation for the dawning of the latter-day glory in the "wonderful manner in which God has poured out his Spirit" in revivals and – above all – "the growing prosperity of benevolent Institutions." [224]

"An Empire In Every Heart": The Public Narrative of the ABS

At the same moment that Deacon Nathan Whiting was developing this strategy for public metahistorical pedagogy in the cause of the millennium, the Board of Managers of the fledgling American Bible Society was calling into existence the first major American institution of national evangelical benevolence on essentially the same terms. On Sunday, May 12, 1816, representatives of the ABS circulated an invitation to a public meeting concerning their new organization around all the churches in New York City, to be held the following day at City-Hall. Two justices of the New York State Supreme Court would be in attendance, and Jacob Radcliff, the mayor of New York City, would preside.[225] In a remarkable show of interest and support, more than a thousand New Yorkers turned out. At the meeting, the newly-minted ABS Constitution and "Address To The People Of The United States" (which we examined above) were read aloud and approved by the crowd. Upon the approval of these documents, George Griffin, a renowned New York lawyer and an esteemed Presbyterian layman, rose to move a formal resolution that the gathered public "will cheerfully support this great National

[224] Nathan Whiting, "Preface," in *Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT, 1817).
[225] Fea, *The Bible Cause*, 29; Dwight, *Centennial History*, 30; *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York and Others...at the Request of the Board of Managers of the American Bible Society* (New York: J. Seymour, 1816), 3.

Institution."[226] After being seconded by Peter Augustus Jay, an interdenominationalist Episcopalian and prominent Federalist politician, son of former Chief Justice of United States John Jay, both men offered speeches in support of it.[227] These speeches, constituting the major recorded addresses to the public about the ABS founding, read like an institutional operationalization of the themes that animated Whiting's millennial pedagogy.

First, Griffin and Jay both saw that a new era of peace was dawning in the world, a peace with eschatological significance. While "the vials of God's wrath have been pouring on the nations" by means of war and conflict, Griffin declared, citing the account of the end times in the Book of Revelation, those which have "lately rung with the clangour of arms, are now [being] filled with Societies for the promulgation of the Gospel of peace," declared Griffin.[228] Their assessments of God's activity in the wake of peace went well beyond the generic expressions of God's providential care for the nation that had followed the conclusion of the War of 1812.[229] Griffin and Jay did not merely affirm divine ordering of the post-Ghent political condition of the United States, domestically and on the world stage, but rather offered a re-narration of it. Jay, the arch-Federalist whose party-political career had been radically threatened by the Democratic upsurge in 1815, observed that not only had the long season of war come to an end, but the very "thirst for military glory" was waning.[230] Shrewdly, he pointed out that both military and political victory were only *proximate* goals in the era of peace, faded glories in light of the glorious work that God was now provoking among the nations. New conditions had begun to

[226] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 4.
[227] Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety*, 167-185; Kyle T. Bulthuis, *Four Steeples Over the City Streets: Religion and Society in New York's Early Republic Congregations* (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 125-127.
[228] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 7.
[229] Guyatt, *Providence*, 170-172.
[230] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 12-13.

obtain, in which desire for the "triumphant march" and the "blood-stained banner" had been replaced a desire for "glory which is pure and enduring…that fadeth not away" – namely the glory of advancing social righteousness.

Second, as both Griffin and Jay framed it, the clear sign of God's new work in the world in their present moment and the key to advancing social righteousness was (perhaps not unexpectedly) a systematic return to the efforts for the promulgation of the gospel through benevolent enterprise, specifically through Bible societies. As wars have come to an end, Griffin observed, "the Bible has re-commenced its triumphs. This tree of heaven's planting has stood and strengthened amidst the prostration of thrones, and the concussion of empire. *The apostolic age is returning.*"[231] Here again was a bold re-narrating claim, framing the ABS as participating in a God-ordained, world-historical resurrection of the original saving mission of the church, which had lain dormant for centuries under the deadening influence of anti-democratic ecclesiasticism, principally that of the Roman Catholic church.[232] While the Reformation had begun this resurrection process, the chief sign to date of the return of apostolic zeal was the institutional "majesty of the British and Foreign Bible Society…the brightest star in the constellation of modern improvements," having distributed "a million and a half volumes of the word of life."[233] Now the formalist evangelical leaders of the United States were making a parallel move in founding the ABS. The American moment was an *apostolic* moment. "Shall we alone be idle?" asked Jay, "Shall we sit with folded arms, spectators of [European] efforts?"[234] Of course not – Americans should not and would not do that. While "our efforts in the great cause of diffusing Christianity…have hitherto been puny…[because they were] separately made,

[231] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 6-7.
[232] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 4, 11.
[233] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 7.
[234] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 12.

and were therefore feeble," now that a *national* institution had been established, there was a much more powerful "common centre in which we can unite…a cause in which all can join."[235] Quite the opposite of the call for anti-institutional apostolic primitivism that had begun to emerge in this period, this was an explicit bid for American apostolic social engineering – the Federalization of American Christianity.[236] Bible societies were providing the technical infrastructure by which apostolic evangelization could take place again by the providential power of God.[237] Notably, all that was necessary to effectively accomplish this apostolic goal was production and distribution of the texts themselves. The promise of the moment was that national evangelization would be done *not* primarily by contact with clergy, but by instrumental contact with the Bible itself. To simply distribute the Bible was to disseminate evangelistic technology. "The Bible is the *best* of missionaries," Jay rejoiced, endowing the text with almost magical powers. "It will reach where no preacher can penetrate…it will reprove, alarm, advise, console…when no passion interferes to drown its voice. Of these missionaries thousands may be sent abroad, and…we may reasonably hope for an abundant harvest."[238] Via the work of the ABS, the Bible would suffuse the ambient background atmosphere of this new American moment, calling people to conversion, alone, through encounter with the ubiquitous text.[239] Bible societies were technical instruments, secular means of the production of millennial goals.

Finally, the effect of these benevolent enterprises would be to turn the wheels of

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[235] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 9-10.
[236] Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 90-92; Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety*, 8, 17, 204.
[237] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 6.
[238] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 13-14.
[239] Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*, 49-118, *passim.* See also Caleb J. D. Maskell, "Secularism, Synthesis, and Antebellum Evangelical Self-Understanding," *Church History* 84, no. 3 (September 2015): 616–620.

providential history, accelerating the trajectory of American culture toward the long-expected millennial dawn, perhaps in short order. "Amazing volume!" Griffin gushed. "Give this Bible an empire in every heart, and the prevalence of crime and misery would yield to the universal diffusion of millennial glory."[240] Jay was slightly more circumspect, offering that while he had no privileged perspective on the "dim veil of prophecy," he was certain that "if the predictions which foretel a millennial period of happiness on earth, are ever to be literally fulfilled, it can only be by the accomplishment of another prophecy, that 'the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.'"[241] The work of the ABS, then, was millennial work. While it could not quite "trigger" the millennial dawn, it could more or less effectively accomplish goals that were part and parcel of the millennial imaginary.

Griffin and Jay imagined the work of formalist evangelical benevolent societies to be establishing voluntary infrastructure for "Christian America" to express national unity and millennial aspiration. A properly-functioning ABS would provide practical techniques for saturating the collective consciousness of the inhabitants of the United States "with the knowledge of the glory of God," thereby fulfilling Biblical prophecy and, in the process, fixing the place of the young nation next to Britain on the map of modern Christendom.[242] "This auspicious era has now arrived," Griffith rejoiced:

> "The last week has witnessed an august assemblage of the fathers of the American Churches, of every denomination, convened in this metropolis from all parts of the country, not to brandish the sword of religious controversy, but to unite with one heart, in laying the foundation of the majestic superstructure of the American Bible Society…Our country has long stood forth the rival of England in commerce and in arms; let her not be left behind in the glorious career of evangelizing the world." [243]

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[240] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 6.
[241] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 14-15.
[242] Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 62.
[243] American Bible Society, *Proceedings of a Meeting of the Citizens of New-York,* 8.

This is a far cry from the apocalyptic jeremiad of Samuel J. Mills. While there is certainly continuity between Mills' appeal and the formation of the society, the founding of the ABS came with a sense of destiny, of certainty, and of pragmatic optimism. Local provincialism had lost its hold in light of this burgeoning national eschatological self-consciousness – in the Æra of Peace, the millennial dawn felt close enough to be grasped.

An ancillary benefit of all this was that the founders of the ABS laid out a clear theopolitical rationale for their own role. The very formalist evangelical leaders whose ongoing public utility had been called into radical question a year before, in the post-Ghent Democratic watershed moment, had responded by writing themselves a big public job description. They were to be the engineers and administrators of the nation's eschatological technologies.

Conclusion: From Hope To Anticipation

The articulations of a renewed millennial reading strategy for history from Nathan Whiting and the ABS leadership are indicative of both a startling moment of significant theopolitical ingenuity and an important concomitant development in formalist evangelical thought concerning national benevolent enterprise in this period. In ideological perspective, what this chapter reveals is a subtle but important shift from *hope* to *anticipation* concerning the millennial dawn.

Hope and anticipation are, according to Christian theological ethicist Oliver O'Donovan's helpful framework, the two primary ways of perceiving the future: "anticipation [is] founded on the present," while "hope [is] founded on promise."[244] Anticipation "teases out a

[244] Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, vol. 1, Ethics as Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 121.

future that lurks within the present…as a rational unfolding of immanent possibilities."[245] Hope, on the other hand, is rooted in conviction about the *promise* of the future, located outside the realm of what is immanent or appears imminent. "Promise speaks of what is far beyond the horizon of anticipation. The assurances it offers are not to be had on the basis of the present…Imperspicuous in every respect except in the finality of its justice, the promise threatens us, to the extent we rely on anticipations, with nothing but disappointment and frustration. Yet in denying…speculative assurance…promise allows hope to be born, and through hope opens the way to agency," the agency of faith beyond what is seen.[246]

Historically, the tension between hope and anticipation has been both productive and problematic for Christians in the evangelical tradition. Evangelical Christianity is always already an historical faith. As W. R. Ward writes, from the earliest days of the movement in seventeenth-century pietism, evangelical Christians had "sought their legitimation in the hand of God in history," contributing to the world not "a confession of faith for public discussion" but rather "an accumulat[ion] of archives" that would support their retrospective discernment of where the Spirit of God seemed to be working in the world, in their communities, in the wider church, and in the political arena.[247] History mattered to evangelicals, because of their biblical providential conviction that God intervenes in and supervenes upon human history for a redemptive purpose, guiding history in a more-or-less linear fashion that will ultimately conclude in the *eschaton*, the end of all things.[248] Many evangelicals had experienced this intervention at a personal existential level, encountering God in conversion or some other form of heart transformation. As such,

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[245] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 122.
[246] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 123.
[247] W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2; Oliver O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, vol. 3, Ethics as Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 96-97.
[248] Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 43.

broad-scale speculation about the purposes of God in world history – especially how close the world was to the Last Days, and what the most recent revival or war had to do with it, in biblical perspective – was a wildly exciting prospect, not to mention an unsettling one.

In order to make life livable, then, evangelical leaders on both sides of the Atlantic began, by the eighteenth century, to proactively postpone the *eschaton* in their theological imagination, "putting off the Last Days into the middle distance."[249] This "middle-distancing" of eschatological realities allowed evangelicals to speculate about the providential significance of historical events, while keeping themselves a stable presence in society. Middle-distance eschatology afforded evangelicals a "lever on conscience," emphasizing the connection between the renewal of the church and the *improvement*, rather than the *end*, of the world. The Last Things were an imaginative horizon, not a goal – close enough to be ethically motivating, but far enough away that they did not become a disproportionate or disabling preoccupation. Bringing them ultimately from the future into the present was God's prerogative.

Within O'Donovan's binary for imagining ideologies of the future, then, the chastity of a classical middle-distance evangelical eschatology would locate desire for the millennial dawn squarely in the realm of hope, not anticipation. In a middle-distance frame, the millennial dawn was always already a *promise* that God would bring to reality. Any speculation about its arrival based on unusual historical circumstances had to remain just that: speculation.

In the examples of the founding of the *Religious Intelligencer* and the ABS, this classical middle-distance posture towards the *eschaton* begins to give way to the articulation of a new framework. Whiting, Griffin, Jay, and others describe the dawning of the millennial day in a manner that suggests it should be *anticipated* as a "rational unfolding of immanent possibilities,"

[249] Ward, *Early Evangelicalism*, 32, and *passim.*

rather than hoped for as something beyond the horizon. They are not only *reading* the signs of the times, they are attempting to establish them, through vehicles of organized evangelical benevolence designed to improve the United States and allow its future to be read through a self-consciously millennial lens.

The pragmatic benefits of such a shift in eschatological self-understanding were huge in 1816, as it made available a powerful narrative of their *raison d'etre* in an era of burgeoning democratic sentiment, an era when old-style formalist theopolitics had become untenable. Furthermore, the shift is subtle. None of the formalists are contriving elaborate biblical models to mathematically prove the infrastructure of the end of days, as the likes of William Miller would in the 1830s and 40s. Nor are any of them claiming special revelation. Indeed, in his speech to the ABS, Peter Jay explicitly disavowed that thought, publicly owning that he had no more insight into the millennial dawn than anyone else. What is happening, though, is the formalist development of managerial technologies that aim to *instrumentalize* millennial conditions. They do not wish to inaugurate the millennium – that was God's job. They just think they can make its inauguration *possible*.

In this sense, by insistently advancing this millennial reading strategy for history, the formalist evangelical leaders seeking to improve the nation by building and managing benevolent infrastructures are *practically attempting to shoulder some of the burden of providential history* in national context. What was, in the middle-distance frame, reserved for the agency of God has become, in 1816, the province of benevolent enterprise. As Whiting put it, in the Æra of Peace, when the nation was increasingly caught up in converting revivals and carried toward ever-

improving civilization on the rising tides of benevolence, "may we not hope that even now, the night is far spent, and, with anxious eyes, begin to watch for the morning?"[250]

While the rhetoric of theological anticipation is very empowering in the short run, in the longer run, there were significant risks associated with it. Simply put, these eschatological instruments had to work – the millennial reading strategy had to make sense. When millennial promises are made, in a framework of anticipation, it is necessary that that anticipation correspond in some reasonable timeframe to experiential reality, lest the whole imaginative infrastructure be undermined.

As formalist evangelicals ascended above their precarious political position in the post-Ghent era by adopting an Icarian god's-eye-view of salvation history, purporting to see anticipatory glimmers of the millennial dawn and constructing benevolent institutions that promised to make good on that anticipation, it became necessary that concrete millennial conditions should soon obtain. Otherwise, the American Icarus would fall.

[250] Whiting, "Prospectus."

Chapter Two

'What Means This Large Assembly?': Performing the Millennial Future, 1825-1826

Introduction: "Train Up A Child In The Way He Should Go"

In the middle of the afternoon on Tuesday, May 9th, 1826, nearly six thousand New York City Sunday school children, scrubbed clean and "clad with great neatness," congregated in the elegant, tree-lined park in front of Manhattan's imposing City Hall.[251] Hundreds of their teachers were also on hand, shepherding them into a precisely regulated formation "previously designated in a diagram."[252] By three o'clock, all the students and teachers stood on parade beneath more than sixty fluttering, numbered banners, embroidered with biblical aphorisms like "Thou Art The Guide of My Youth," "Train Up A Child In The Way He Should Go," and "The Truth Shall Make You Free."[253]

The occasion for this striking assembly was the tenth anniversary celebration of the New York Sunday School Union (NYSSU). Founded in 1816 by many of the same New York formalist elites who founded the ABS that same year, the mission of the NYSSU was to establish and support weekly Sunday schools throughout New York City for the instruction of children in the overlapping magisteria of literacy, civility, and Christian faith.[254] In its first public report in 1817, the NYSSU Executive Committee observed that a great many of the city's "poor children"

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[251] "Sunday School Union," *Commercial Advertiser*, May 10, 1826.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid. For contemporary statistics on the scale of New York's Sunday School class system, see *Second Report of the American Sunday School Union* (Philadelphia: I. Ashmead & Co., 1826). The reports of banner slogans are drawn from an 1825 account of the NYSSU parade, but it seems reasonable to assume that they were similar in 1826. Cf. "New York Sunday School," *New York Spectator*, May 11, 1825.
[254] *Constitution of the New York Sunday School Union Society* (New York: New York Sunday School Union, 1816), 2–4; *Proceedings at the First Quarterly Meeting of the New York Sunday-School Union* (New York: J. Seymour, 1816), 10; Isaac Ferris, *Semi-Centennial Memorial Discourse of the New-York Sunday-School Union: Delivered on the Evening of the 25th February, 1866, in the Reformed Dutch Church* (New York: J.A. Gray & Green Printers, 1866), 15-24.

were being raised in circumstances of "ignorance and deprivation…nursed in the lap of irreligion, and educated by examples of iniquity."[255] The committee perceived that New York City was facing a rapidly expanding, double-barreled crisis of moral dissipation and low rates of Christian conversion among its poor youth, emergent from a paucity of "pious and well-regulated famil[ies]," as well as the relatively weak state of publicly funded general education.[256] Left unchecked, this crisis would, over time, gradually but inexorably deform the moral and spiritual future of the city, dragging it further under "the dominion of vice and ignorance."[257]

The NYSSU sought to respond to this crisis by establishing a system for moral counter-formation, a means of structured pedagogy by which the city's youth could, in one integrated experience, be taught to read, taught their civic duty, and called to evangelical conversion – the eternally-consequential spiritual linchpin that held fast the framework of their temporal ethical responsibilities. As Richard Varick, the political and religious eminence who served as the first president of the NYSSU, expressed it, the organization sought to "teach…the knowledge of letters" in order that students might be "ground[ed] in the first principles of the doctrines of Christ," and, in so doing, to educate students in a Christian way of being in the world, "reclaiming them from bad habits, and…instructing them in all the relative duties of life."[258] By

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[255] *First Report of the New-York Sunday School Union* (New York: J. Seymour, 1817), 5.
[256] Boylan, *Sunday* School, 19–20. See also, the representative speeches in the *First Report of the New-York Sunday School Union*, 33–43.
[257] *First Report of the New-York Sunday School Union*, 13.
[258] *Proceedings at the First Quarterly Meeting of the New York Sunday-School Union*, 8. Richard Varick was an archetypal patrician leader of the post-1815 movement toward national benevolence among formalist evangelicals. The mayor of New York City from 1789-1801, he was not only the founding president of the New York Sunday School Union but also a founder of the American Bible Society who would go on to be the president of the ABS from 1828-1831. Varick's statement making explicit the correlation between literacy education and religious indoctrination clearly identifies the NYSSU with what Anne Boylan has termed the second wave of American Sunday schools, emergent in the years after the War of 1812, rising with the tide of formalist evangelical social engineering projects on the model of the ABS. The massive growth and popularity of these evangelical Sunday schools, which aimed to prioritize Christian knowledge and Christian conversion above all other formational goals, so outpaced the earlier, literacy-focused, ecumenical "First Day" societies that, by 1819, the latter had "all but

teaching students to read English using biblical and doctrinal texts, Varick anticipated "repeated opportunities [for] instilling the word of life in their young and uninformed, but susceptible minds."[259] The NYSSU conceived of its work as operating simultaneously on two levels: commonwealth and faith. NYSSU teachers would "have the honour…of raising up healthful members for our commonwealth," and, at the same time, "well-instructed professors of the pure, and undefiled, and unsophisticated religion of our blessed Lord and Redeemer" could turn students "from the paths of error and vice to those of never ending peace and bliss."[260] All this was, of course, a pitch-perfect encapsulation of formalist evangelical instincts for institutionalizing efforts toward Christianization.

While refraining from explicit eschatological speculation, all the reporters present at the 1826 parade bore witness to the moral fruit of the NYSSU's efforts. The thousands of NYSSU students standing on parade "with the utmost regularity" gave overwhelming proof that the project was working to form more polite, docile citizens.[261] Astonished at the civilized propriety of the crowd of "poor children," they wrote of it as "abundantly visible" evidence of "the salutary influences" of Sunday school education: "How sedate, how orderly, and how cleanly do they appear!...Contrast their appearance and conduct with what both were ten years since…What a wonderful difference do we behold!"[262]

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disappeared." On this important phenomenon, see Boylan, *Sunday School*, 8–10, 20 and Chapter 1, *passim*. On Richard Varick, see Paul Cushman, *Richard Varick, A Forgotten Founding Father: Revolutionary War Soldier, Federalist Politician, and Mayor of New York* (Amherst, MA: Modern Memoirs, 2010); Strickland, *History of the American Bible Society*; Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[259] *Proceedings at the First Quarterly Meeting of the New York Sunday-School Union*, 9.

[260] *First Report of the New-York Sunday School Union*, 9–10.

[261] "New York Sunday School Union," *The American* (New York, NY), May 10, 1826.

[262] "Sunday School Union" *Commercial Advertiser*. Cf. "New York Sunday School Union," in *Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 11 (New Haven, CT: Nathan Whiting, 1826), 810.

At the stroke of three o'clock, all six thousand of the students and their teachers began to process south in unison, moving as a "whole body" through the gates of the City Hall Park onto Broadway's wide, cobbled pavement. For two full hours the parade wound slowly down the one mile stretch to the Castle Garden amphitheatre in the Battery, offering the denizens of New York's bustling commercial district an ample showcase of the "high moral beauty of so many thousand children, educated by the charitable aid of the more fortunate."[263] Upon arrival at Castle Garden – the former federal Fort Clinton, repurposed by the city for large civic gatherings – the children filed to their seats, over two thousand girls on high terraced benches along the back wall and more than three thousand boys flanking them on the left and the right.[264] On the stage in front of them sat the "managers and clergy" responsible for the administration of the NYSSU, and on the floor sat an audience of some six thousand "ladies and gentlemen" gathered to bear witness to the spectacle, bringing the total number of people in attendance to a whopping twelve thousand.

After an opening prayer, the gathered multitude sang together a "majestic and devotional" hymn setting of Psalm 100 – "All People That On Earth Do Dwell" – joining "thousands of innocent voices" in the rousing melody of Old Hundred, and causing the Battery to reverberate with a "swelling…loud anthem."[265] "A more interesting…sight, it is not easy to imagine," marveled the *New York American*, "awaken[ing] feelings and associations the *most* affecting."[266] This convocation of respectable, pious young scholars drawn from the ranks of the urban poor was a "delightful spectacle to the philanthropist," commented the *Commercial*

[263] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 456; "Sunday School Union" *Commercial Advertiser*; "New York Sunday School Union," *The American.*
[264] "Sunday School Union," *Commercial Advertiser*; "New York Sunday School Union," *The American*.
[265] "New York Sunday School Union," *The American*.
[266] Ibid.

Advertiser, a demonstration of the efficacy of benevolent investment in "improving the moral condition of the race," auguring a coming American future transformed by the "full harvest" thereof.[267]

"Like A Vast Engine"

The tightly choreographed, emotionally affecting spectacle of the NYSSU parade was not an isolated event. In fact, it functioned as the opening ceremony of the 1826 Anniversary Week celebration in New York City. A fixture on the formalist evangelical calendar by the mid-1820s, Anniversary Week was an annual convention of the nation's most prominent evangelical benevolent organizations, often known to historians as the "Benevolent Empire."[268] The Anniversary Week celebration had coalesced over the prior decade around the annual meeting of the American Bible Society, held each year during the second week of May. Firmly established by 1826 as the flagship institution of national evangelical benevolence, the ABS's organizational model offered a prototype for doing public business that emerging evangelical benevolent organizations could follow. Furthermore, the convening power of the ABS meant that during the week of its annual meeting, New York City was guaranteed to be replete with well-connected evangelical organizers who had benevolent enterprise on their minds. As Charles Foster put it, "any project believing itself entitled to Evangelical support took that time and place for its starting point, and had an anniversary to celebrate."[269] An occasion of "public business and religious congratulations" that drew thousands from "all parts of [the] country," the 1826 Anniversary Week featured celebrations and business meetings for the ABS, the New York

[267] "Sunday School Union," *Commercial Advertiser.*
[268] For the first historiographical usage of the term, see Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse.*
[269] Foster, *An Errand Of Mercy*, 146.

Sunday School Union, the American Home Missionary Society, the American Tract Society, the United Foreign Missionary Society, and the Presbyterian Education Society, as well as a variety of smaller ancillary organizational meetings.[270]

The Baptist *Christian Watchman* described this Anniversary Week as an interdenominational "religious festival" akin to the historic feasts of Passover and Pentecost – "occasions of joy and seasons of public rejoicings" that marked the providential identity of the people of God in time and space. While "not strictly ecclesiastical," given the interdenominational, lay-led quality of most of the represented organizations, Anniversary Week's compelling combination of ceremonial pageantry, distinguished oratory, and reams of published statistical data charting the Christianizing progress of benevolent institutions was "necessary and useful" to antebellum evangelicals. It was a conference of like-minded souls, "well calculated to stir up the pure minds of believers…animat[ing] and encourag[ing] them successfully to…devise ways and procure means of enlarging the boundaries of the Redeemer's kingdom."[271]

But Anniversary Week was not only intended to encourage religious insiders as they pursued their benevolent duty. It was also an outward facing public performance, amplifying recent accomplishments and prophesying future possibilities for American culture that evangelical benevolent efforts were bringing into reality. As Mark Noll has described it, Anniversary Week was an intentionally "impressive public spectacle," a "visible demonstration of evangelical social construction."[272] "All those who have ever passed the week of the

[270] "Anniversary Meetings In New-York," in *Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 11 (New Haven, CT: Nathan Whiting, 1826), 810; "Religious Festivals," *Christian Watchman*, May 19, 1826. Cf. Young, *Bearing Witness Against Sin*, 74–75.
[271] "Religious Festivals," *Christian Watchman.*
[272] Noll, *America's* God, 198.

Anniversaries in New-York City will never after forget [it]," enthused the *Religious Intelligencer*, marveling at the integrated social power of the movement that the various gathered institutions represented.[273]

> "Behold as it were, in General Assembly convened, the Statesmen, and Divines, and Philanthropists of our vast territory; its men of science, – officers of trust and influence, met by concert to lend their countenance—eloquence—money, to the cause of piety and humanity. It is a system, we say, beautiful to the view…[with] a power of propelling through the ranks of society, a regard for the interests of religion and benevolence – a power of forcing them on the attention of such men, as will not be made to attend but *by force*, like that of a vast engine."[274]

This striking passage of sympathetic editorial reporting identifies three apposite formalist evangelical tropes intended to be made present in the spectacle of Anniversary Week: the governmental, the aesthetic, and the providential.

First, Anniversary Week makes visible the earthly viceroys of the moral government of God. In considering the spectacle, the reader is admonished first to look and see, "in general assembly," American national luminaries gathered to exert their considerable social influence in the interest of improving the moral condition of the human race. There is an unabashed social elitism here, an enthusiasm for the accrual of worldly power and authority in the service of divine ends. As we have seen, this is entirely characteristic of the formalist evangelical imagination in action.

Second, the reader is told that the spectacle of Anniversary Week is beautiful, as it offers to its participants an anticipatory view of the impending victory of God in their culture, beginning with its luminary leaders. If the likes of these men are working in the interests of religion and benevolence, the rest of the culture surely cannot be far behind. As the diverse agencies present at Anniversary Week make their gradual progress, what flickers forth through

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[273] "Anniversary Meetings In New-York," *Religious Intelligencer*.
[274] Ibid.

the thickets of statistics and speeches is nothing less than the dawning light of the future millennium – the longing of every sensitive Christian heart.

Third, the reader is reminded of the conviction that although the gathered institutions of evangelical benevolence are led by distinguished elites, the power of what is being enacted at Anniversary Week does not come from any individual leader, or even a single powerful agency like the ABS. Anniversary Week is a "vast engine," a "system" that commands the attention of those who would ignore the interests of the moral government of God, in a manner that is (according the reporter) quite literally coercive. Emergent from the performance of the Anniversary Week system is the power to demand "the attention of such men as will not be made to attend but *by force*." This describes nothing so much as the anthropomorphization of the operations of a Calvinistic account of providence, framing the forces emergent from the collective work of the benevolent societies as constituting a "virtual proxy nation," acting with divine authority "that counteracted the centrifugal forces" of the boundless democratic moment, and sough to bring coherence, oversight, and discipline to the whole.[275] Anniversary Week, the reporter suggests, is no one person's project – an assertion interestingly corroborated by the archives, which contain so little evidence of a formal, central committee that one wonders if it might be intentional.[276] Rather, Anniversary Week appeared each second week of May in New York as a vast prophetic liturgical drama. Nominally it was led by "statesmen, divines, and philanthropists," but it was nothing if not the work of a *people*, thousands and thousands of everyday, pedestrian witnesses to the barely perceptible but ineluctable power of divine agency, remembering with their bodies the millennial transfiguration of the city that was to come. Such a

[275] Brooke, "Cultures of Nationalism," 20.
[276] Foster, *Errand Of Mercy*, 149.

performance could not be ignored, fastening the attention of all who came into contact with it on the "interests of religion and benevolence."

"What Means This Large Assembly?": Embodying a Regime of Anticipation

As the final echoes of song faded in Castle Garden, the Rev. William Curry, a twenty-five-year-old Presbyterian minister from upstate New York, took the podium. Standing before the crowd of twelve thousand – undoubtedly the largest crowd he had ever addressed – Curry posed two rhetorical questions. "What *means* this large assembly? *Why* have we met together?"[277] *Prima facie*, the answer was simple. The parade was a public progress report on the effects of the work of the NYSSU – year over year numbers, grown from 900 schools in 1817 to 1200 in 1826.

The *meaning* that Curry ascribed to this data, however, emerges in the way he perceived the benevolent work of the NYSSU to be bearing fruit in metahistorical continuity with biblical narrative. Melting down the boundaries of time and space, Curry compared the NYSSU parade with the gospel stories of Christ's "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem, reading it as a moment of theopolitical pageantry that was parallel to his present moment. In the biblical narrative, a gathered crowd welcomes Christ into the gates of Jerusalem with shouts of praise and branches waving, declaring in public space that Christ was the long-expected Messiah, the divine king and deliverer of Israel.[278] "When I…behold the scene [today], my mind instinctively recurs to the period when Jerusalem was in her glory," Curry declared. "My imagination places me at one of her gates – I behold her thousand children rushing forth to meet the coming Saviour…I behold their eyes kindle and their faces glow with the intensity of their adoration; and the long loud cry

[277] "Sunday School Union," *Commercial Advertiser*.
[278] See Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-44 and John 12:12-19, KJV.

burst at once from every heart[…] 'Hosannah! Hosannah to the Son of David! Hosannah in the highest!'"[279]

The biblical narrative, which under Curry's embellishment had thrust Jerusalem's children into the foreground, held for him much affective resonance with the events of the day, with children marching, banners flying aloft, and climactic hymns being sung. But the biblical narrative, Curry hastened to point out, was not without personal villainy and public tragedy. The enthusiastic recognition of the lordship of Christ at Jerusalem's gate was short-lived. "That cry [of worship] has long since ceased," Curry explained, "stifled by the curses of the *fathers* of those children, [who] murdered the Prince of Life—the Lord of Glory."[280] Under the influence of such "fathers," the public of first-century Jerusalem decisively chose against Christ within days of their hosannas – the crowd of worshippers became a murderous mob.

Some eighteen hundred years later, Curry averred that New York City was beginning to witness a similar acclamation of Christ, and faring much better in relation to it. "After a lapse of near two thousand years," Curry declared, "I again hear the echo of that same Hosannah, in the songs which arise from the lips of these gentile children."[281] Here then was cause for celebration! Over the ten years of its existence, the NYSSU had been a means for gathering thousands of poor children from the iniquitous, irreligious deprivation of their fathers' houses, teaching them literacy, morality, and the Christian gospel message. As a result, one of the city's largest public spaces was now resounding with loud hosannas, welcoming Christ into its gates as king. Through systematic, benevolent attention to the educational needs of the poor, the NYSSU had facilitated this phenomenon, and it was marvelous. "May this song never again cease!"

[279] "Sunday School Union," *Commercial Advertiser*.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid.

Curry cried, as the children rose to sing another hymn. "May it wax louder and louder, until throughout the earth, the gray-headed sinner and the middle aged shall join all the children in the universal cry – 'Hosannah to the Son of David, for he is now the Saviour of the world—Hosannah in the highest.'"[282]

Anthropologist of religion Kevin O'Neill has written compellingly about what he calls "affective spaces," spaces which, when produced via shared affect, create a sense of felt difference in a community, a binding together and a binding apart.[283] "Affect," he writes, "is raw, reactive sensation… [which] makes legible a series of spaces that are not necessarily territorial but are nonetheless deeply political…the felt distance that exists between *us* and *them*…between the *sinner* and the *saved*."[284] Affective responses present within crowds establish "collectivities with a kind of spatial quality," creating a "public," or a "deep horizontal comradeship," the kinds of political distinctions that "the faithful come to feel."[285]

This is a helpful framework for reflecting on the kind of work that is being done in and among the participants in the NYSSU Anniversary Week parade. The society has no territorial claim to City-Hall, Broadway, or Castle Garden – they are of the city writ large. Within those city venues, however, the NYSSU is, by managing and manipulating the sensations of the participants, establishing an affective space that is constituting what we might call a benevolent Christian public. With happiness, this public becomes aware of its community as the children march and sing, and the orators hold forth. With pride, it senses the fitting correspondence of its space *to* the familiar city spaces the community is inhabiting as the pageantry proceeds. With

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[282] Ibid.
[283] Kevin Lewis O'Neill, "Beyond Broken: Affective Spaces and the Study of American Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 1104.
[284] Ibid, 1095.
[285] Ibid., 1104.

sorrow, it senses its physical and spiritual distance from the remaining poor "gentile children" who have not yet been reached by the Sunday schools, those who are not present, singing hosannas. The affective space that has established the benevolent Christian public that day saturates the quotidian city spaces, real (e.g. Castle Garden) and imagined (e.g. the home of an unschooled "gentile" child), with a peculiar intensity of meaning. With this Anniversary Week celebration, the NYSSU is generating a space in which every participant knows at the sensory level that they are part of a benevolent Christian public, which gives deep and potentially life-defining meaning to their collective moment.

But something else is going on at the celebration, in tandem with the creation of sensory community, that when taken together with it, gets to the heart of the purpose of Anniversary Week performances. Appetite is being created in the participants for more of the same. In his classic article, "Psychology and Form," literary theorist Kenneth Burke wrote that "[aesthetic] form is the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfaction of that appetite. This satisfaction – so complicated is the human mechanism – at times involves a temporary set of frustrations, but in the end, these frustrations prove to be simply a more involved kind of satisfaction, and furthermore serve to make the satisfaction of fulfillment more intense."[286] The NYSSU meeting is not only designed to articulate a community but to create an appetite within that community – an appetite that becomes part of the *definition* of that community – for a perfected city in a perfected nation, where every child who should be is under the care of a Sunday school. Watching the children parade, enjoying the children singing, and listening to the preacher tell of the echoes of the New Jerusalem in New York City all contribute to the stimulation of that appetite.

[286] Kenneth Burke, "Psychology and Form," *The Dial*, July 1925.

Crucially, that appetite is *partially* fulfilled within the framework of the event. After all, there are some six thousand students singing and smiling and bearing witness to the good that is already taking place. "If there could any longer be any doubt as to the utility of Sunday Schools in the minds of any in the audience," pronounced Rev. James Milnor, rector of St. George's Episcopal Church in Manhattan and president of the NYSSU, "let them look at the throng now assembled. The thousands now here, who, but for Sunday Schools, would be suffered to grow up without any kind of profitable instruction, do not comprise [even] one half of the number taught [by the NYSSU] in this city."[287] But what about the rest of the children? The audience's appetite has been whetted for total transformation, a millennial condition in New York's New Jerusalem. "And yet," Milnor went on, "there are not even now schools and laborers enough. There are still hundreds and thousands in the streets, growing up in idleness…The audience would be astonished to learn by how few it had been accomplished, and on how small a number of people the whole labor of these schools devolves. But the cause is that of God and our country, and we persevere."[288] With that, after a closing hymn, the audience, with a partially fulfilled and partially not-yet-fulfilled appetite, was dismissed.

This potent combination of the creation of sensory community through a managed affective space within which eschatological appetites are stirred, fulfilled in part, and (crucially) unfulfilled in part, constitutes the *regime of anticipation* that is the central aesthetic form of formalist evangelical benevolence. The establishment of such experiences lies at the heart of the performative purpose of Anniversary Week. These were not merely business meetings, scheduled for the sake of convenience around the busy schedules of a common set of formalist evangelical leaders. Instead, they were interlocking performances of a week-long temporary

[287] "Sunday School Union," *Commercial Advertiser*.
[288] Ibid.

sensory community, constituted annually to shadowed forth fresh evidences of the millennial dawn, stirring the hunger of anticipation among all those gathered who have embraced the formalist evangelical reading strategy for history.

As such the carefully choreographed pageantry of the NYSSU meeting was not an end in itself, but an iteration of the Benevolent Empire's regime of anticipation, creating hunger for a full-scale millennial transformation that evangelical benevolent enterprise could bring about, if only the public would participate and enable the managers to do their instrumental work. A parade of poor children, educated and catechized by evangelicals, marching dignified and joyful through Manhattan's central political and economic artery under scripture banners, was more than just an inspiring sight on a beautiful day out. It was an eschatological sacrament of anticipation, an efficacious performance of a present reality that was intended to act as a life-altering signpost to future grace.

Or not. Significantly, part of the operation of this regime of anticipation was reflection on its opposite. What would happen to the moment of shared sensory community if people did not respond to this impressive, beautiful moment with the necessary form of voluntary support? Participants were meant to leave the gathering with that question at some level in their minds. This reflection on the potential negation was part and parcel of the regime of anticipation.
It was of course true that there were very real questions and anxieties present to the managers of the NYSSU about how they were going to get their jobs done. As Rev. Gardiner Spring affirmed at the NYSSU officer's meeting later that evening, there was a "great want of zealous active laborers in this field of heavenly glory."[289] It *was* possible that, in their absence, the New Jerusalem could turn its back on Christ just as the hard-hearted fathers of the singing children

[289] Ibid.

had some 1800 years earlier. The NYSSU *needed* to convert children *en masse*, and to do that, they needed teachers. As Milnor had put it, "the cause is that of God and our country." Would it happen? There was a latent and meaningful anxiety layered within the administrative questions – an anxiety that will grow at Anniversary Week in the 1830s.

It is important to observe, however, that such reflection in the moment under examination does not return the rhetoric of Anniversary Week to the classical form of the jeremiad, looking backward as it did to an idealized time in order to scourge, encourage, and by any means propel its auditors forward into their destiny.[290] Such rhetoric had been muted among benevolent evangelical formalists since the establishment of the ABS, in the interest of facilitating formalist participation in the post-Ghent democratic moment. The problems faced by the Benevolent Empire were not problems that they characterized, in the main, as backsliding and laxity. Indeed, when that thought was mooted at the NYSSU officer's meeting by Rev. Samuel Lucky, who grumbled that "the work of benevolence has always had to contend with the opposition of the selfish," Gardiner Spring responded with a *corrective* perspective.[291] "I see in the benevolent plans which are now going forward the increasing brightness of that glorious day…All that advantage which the church is to derive from those benevolent institutions, God in his infinite wisdom will take care to perfect."[292] It was the job of the officers of the NYSSU, he averred, to co-labor with God in that process of perfection. The problems faced by formalist evangelical benevolent organization were not problems of backsliding, but rather technical problems, problems of the management of means. God was about the business of perfecting the *instrumentality* of the means by which institutions of benevolence operated. He was not angrily

[290] Cf. Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*; Sacvan Bercovitch; The *Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
[291] "Sunday School Union," *Commercial Advertiser*.
[292] Ibid.

withholding anything because of their sin. Rather, God was inviting them to discover their *highest potential* as efficacious instruments of incremental millennial progress. Perfecting the *means* to measurable, incremental change was the matter at hand. This was the work that regimes of anticipation required, creating momentum in the gap between the present moment and eschatological future that could now be envisioned as "the rational unfolding of immanent possibilities."[293]

Founding A Regime of Anticipation: The American Tract Society

No benevolent organization in the 1820s began its work with more enthusiasm for or practical embodiment of a regime of anticipation than the American Tract Society.[294] The ATS held its first public meeting on May 11, 1825 in the august Assembly Room of the City-Hotel on Broadway in Manhattan. It was an ebullient affair. "Zeal and energy," commented one reporter, "marked every step of the proceedings."[295] At the stroke of ten o'clock, the formal convention of ATS officials – some seventy men from at least seven Protestant denominations and almost every state in the union – entered the hall *en masse*.[296] There they were enthusiastically greeted by a "numerous" and "highly respectable" audience of women and men from New York's evangelical elite who had gathered in support of their bold mission: "to diffuse a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of sinners, and to promote the interests of vital godliness and sound morality, by the circulation of Religious Tracts calculated to receive the approbation

[293] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time,*122.
[294] Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Macmillan, 1997), 31.
[295] "American Tract Society," *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), May 17, 1825.
[296] "American Tract Society," in *Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 10 (New Haven, CT: Nathan Whiting, 1825), 819–21.

of all evangelical Christians."[297] Impressive prayers were prayed.[298] Copious tears were shed.[299] Several exuberant addresses, "forcible" and "abounding in eloquence," were made by ATS delegates in praise of the society's object.[300] The audience was "much gratified with the proceedings," observed a reporter from the *New York Statesman.* "From present appearances," he noted, "this association is likely to become scarcely less extended than the Bible Society."[301]

One of the morning's speakers, the Dutch Reformed Rev. Thomas DeWitt framed the emergence of the ATS as having world-historical significance. The moment of the founding of the ATS, he claimed, would be retrospectively understood by future church historians as a *novum* in the narrative of salvation history, "an important era in the annals of the Church" to be included "in the record of fulfilled prophecy."[302] The scheme of the ATS to wed technological development to gospel proclamation, maximizing its efficiency through centralizing operations in "one great and powerful institution" was the climax of "a bright era in the annals of man, as it regards the march of intellect, and the measures taken to advance the interests of the Redeemer's Kingdom."[303] Tracts were "little heralds of the word" which would "abide" in the absence of ministers and missionaries, silently preaching to individual hearts unto momentous effects that only "the day of judgment would unfold" – the "latter-day glory," variously prophesied in the scriptures was emerging among them.[304]

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[297] "National Tract Society," *New York Spectator*, May 17, 1825; "National Tract Society," *New-York Statesman*, May 13, 1825; American Tract Society, *The Address of the Executive Committee of the American Tract Society to the Christian Public, Together With a Brief Account of the Formation of the Society* (New York: D. Fanshaw, 1825), 3; "American Tract Society," *Religious Intelligencer*, 819.
[298] "National Tract Society," *New-York Statesman*.
[299] Robert Baird, *The Christian Retrospect and Register: A Summary of the Scientific, Moral and Religious Progress of the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1851), 255.
[300] For the most complete account of the speeches made, see "National Tract Society," *New York Spectator.*
[301] "National Tract Society," *New-York Statesman*.
[302] "National Tract Society," *New York Spectator*.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid.

The Executive Committee of the ATS echoed DeWitt's sentiments. In its "Address to the Christian Public," penned for the committee by Rev. Gardiner Spring (who we met above), it clearly described the eschatological self-consciousness of the society:

> We live, fellow citizens, at an eventful period of the world. The purposes of God's mercy appear to be *rapidly unfolding, and rapidly and surely advancing to their final issue*. New scenes are already opening upon the world and upon the church; and the 'enterprise to be achieved is the conversion of the world to its redeeming God and King.'[305]

Both newness and speed were in the air. In 1816, the ABS – the organization that the ATS acknowledged as its direct antecedent in national gospel proclamation – had prophetically declared that "the times were pregnant with great events." In 1825, as the managers of the ATS interpreted the immanent missional possibilities of their moment, ten years later, it seemed clear that the pregnancy of the times had advanced. The anticipated millennial dawn, was – it seemed – coming now.

The rationale behind this heightened degree of anticipation contained two major elements. The first was that, in its founding, the ATS demonstrated a degree of national Christian unity that spoke of millennial possibilities. Developing a national society for tract distribution of course required unanimity among its organizers concerning what the gospel actually *was*. The early opinion of many formalist Protestant leaders, some of whom would later come to support the ATS, was that the national, interdenominational aspirations of the ATS were quixotic, if not downright impossible to achieve. "I had supposed," commented Rev. James Milnor upon first hearing of the plans to form the ATS, "that the union to publish the Bible without note or comment was about as far as Christians of different denominations can go: I am not sure they *can* unite in a Tract Society."[306] It had been hard enough to establish the American Bible Society

[305] "Address of the Executive Committee of the American Tract Society," 15.
[306] American Tract Society, *Thirtieth Annual Report of the American Tract Society* (New York: American Tract Society, 1855), 294.

in 1816, uniting evangelicals around the purpose of publishing inexpensive unannotated copies of the Protestant Bible, a text they all held in common. How could they ever come to sufficiently agree about the content of the gospel message to make an interdenominational tract society a viable concern? Reverend Leonard Woods, Congregationalist Professor of Theology at Andover Theological Seminary had voiced similar sentiments. Apart from divine intervention, he thought, the "dissensions of past ages" indicated that such "cooperation of Christians of different names" in the formation of a Tract Society was "impracticable…impossible."[307]

But in 1825, it had been accomplished. One Rev. Carey, a Baptist missionary, declared that the establishment of the interdenominational ATS was a consummation of the prior history of gospel proclamation, a joyful reaping of the "harvest of tears" sown by "a long line of the worthies of the church who have preceded us." It was "the glory…of this country…most auspicious to the cause of our Divine Redeemer, and demanding…our zealous and persevering efforts…The union of Christians [around tract distribution] is but a type of that union which will exist in heaven."[308]

The young Methodist Rev. John Summerfield observed that the "exertions of the present age" and specifically the ATS's tract publishing enterprise, indicated the "bright prospects of the Christian church…in the 19th century," contrary to the vituperative prophecies of such skeptical tractarians as Thomas Paine, Voltaire, and "that arch-infidel Hume."[309] Christianity's light was not receding, Summerfield proclaimed, but in fact "dawning" through these benevolent

[307] American Tract Society (Boston), *A Brief History of the American Tract Society, Instituted at Boston, 1814, and Its Relations to the American Tract Society at New York, Instituted 1825.* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1857), 45.
[308] "National Tract Society," *New York Spectator.*
[309] Ibid.

technologies being deployed by Christians in unity, creating on Earth "an atmosphere [of heaven] which angels come down to inhale, and in which God himself delights to dwell."[310]

As an instructive aside, Summerfield's speech made quite an impression, not only because he was a compelling speaker, but also because he was the *only* Methodist willing to participate in the foundation of the society – a striking reminder among the celebrations of unity of the parochial quality of formalist national benevolence, taking place while Methodists were evangelizing the American frontier at astonishing rates. One observer recalled that Summerfield

> "seemed, as with the eye of a prophet, to behold the dawn of a holy literature, in the progress of which the intellect of the world would be illuminated, the…creeping things of infidelity driven to their dens of darkness and the power of Christianity triumphant in the earth. And this enterprise was not to be monopolized by any particular denomination…[but by] UNION among all Christians of every name."[311]

Further revealing the ongoing political tenor of the conversation, Washington's *National Intelligencer*, a reliably Democratic newspaper with no love lost on the ghost of Federalism, rebuked Summerfield for his criticism of Thomas Paine. "The reverend gentleman might, we think, quite as wisely have hit upon something else to return thanks to his Maker for, and a different occasion for pouring forth his relentless ire against the bones of a deceased patriot. If these are the sentiments and the temper the National Tract Society is to diffuse, its labors can answer no valuable purpose."[312] The political stakes of Anniversary Week remained high. "National" initiatives, as Ben Park has reminded, were "locally imagined" and often heavily contested.[313]

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[310] Ibid.
[311] John Holland, *Memoirs of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. John Summerfield, A.M.*, Abridged, with Additional Letters and Reminiscences (New York: American Tract Society, 1850), 305.
[312] "At the Meeting of the National Tract Society," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), May 19, 1825. Cf. Mark Noll, *America's God*, 346-364.
[313] Park, *American* Nationalisms, 15-16.

Beyond this special attention paid to national unity, the other, perhaps bigger, reason that the founding of the ATS elicited such an effulgence of millennial anticipation was technological – attending to the question of millennial *means.* In the first place, tracts were small and relatively easy to produce. Moreover, the ATS was a centralized national organization and so capable of capturing sizable economies of scale. It was soon going to become possible to produce *vast* numbers of tracts at very low cost. "A Tract which contains *ten pages* can be published for a *single cent!*" crowed the Executive Committee.[314] And they were right. Within a year, the ATS had printed a whopping 697,000 tracts, constituting 8,053,500 pages of gospel invitation.[315] The long-standing dream of producing an evangelical mass media was becoming a reality. It might soon be that the supply of religious print would *drive* the demand of the public interest in reading material, enabling the ATS to claim a measure of *control* over public religious sentiment. This propagandistic technique was one of the long-range dreams of the society.[316]

Complementary to this was the fact that tracts were easy to interact with. In an era when good, godly books were often expensive and hard to access, this was a big deal.[317] They were, as the ATS Executives put it, "short, plain, striking, entertaining, and instructive," lacking both the heft and the complexity of a Bible.[318] "A tract may be pursued at leisure," they wrote.

> "It may be consulted in the hour of retirement and solitude; it can be read in a little time; and though it may contain instruction important and weighty enough for the consideration of the sage, and yet simple enough to be accommodated to the taste and intelligence of a child, may be easily weighed and deposited in the memory."[319]

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[314] American Tract Society, *Address of the Executive Committee*, 6.
[315] American Tract Society, *First Annual Report of the American Tract Society: Instituted at New York, 1825 with Lists of Auxiliaries and Benefactors Addresses at the Anniversary &c* (New York: D. Fanshaw, 1826), 12.
[316] Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 76-81.
[317] Nord, *Faith In Reading,* 113-129.
[318] American Tract Society, *Address of the Executive Committee,* 4.
[319] American Tract Society, *Address of the Executive Committee*, 5.

This simplicity of means combined with vast multiplication meant that tracts could work broad-scale evangelistic wonders without the need for any intermediary explanation. The Executive Committee had lots of ideas. For example, a pastor could "double his usefulness" with tracts, "extend[ing] his public instructions where the impressions of his official duty would otherwise be lost." Merchants could give them to ship's captains. Businessmen could include them in every bale of goods they shipped. Travelers could scatter them along roads as they walked. The print message of the gospel would be everywhere. Anyone could become a preacher with a tract, because they did not even have to use words.

"All this may be done in the most inoffensive and inobtrusive way; with no magisterial authority" they wrote. "The diffusive light [of the gospel], may be emitted from numberless sources, and in every direction."[320] Tracts would thus begin to function, as John Lardas Modern has demonstrated, as "non-mediating…mediation," wielding an "apophatic form of power" to "deposit information directly into consciousness."[321] This was a great leap forward in evangelical technology, creating for the first time a sense of anticipation that it was possible to build an instrumental infrastructure that would lead the nation on a journey to the millennial dawn in a manner that would be virtually self-perpetuating. Recall Gardiner Spring's admonition to the NYSSU that the heart of benevolent enterprise was laying hold of the most effective potential instrumentality for shepherding forward the conditions for millennial anticipation. What was happening, explicitly and dramatically at the ATS, was the development of heretofore unseen and unparalleled technical means that would allow the society to control and amplify the flow of national interaction with the gospel. At scale, this was a new and astonishing mode of spiritual technology. The presses came to be seen as vehicles of divine efficacy, mechanized extensions of

[320] American Tract Society, *Address of the Executive Committee*, 6.
[321] Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*, 64.

the evangelistic speech of the millennial body politic. What had previously been confined to churches, revivals, and schools could now become part of the ambient environment of American experience, as present and irresistible as dawning light – assuming of course that people were willing to support it.[322]

Under the cultural and epistemic conditions created by the diffusion of countless millions of tracts from their soon-to-be-constructed, state-of-the-art production and distribution center in New York City – that "city of destiny" – the world, "by the blessing of God…and under the influence of these silent messengers of Divine truth," would experience revival of religion on a previously impossible scale.[323] And then the end would come.

Establish God's Empire On The Ruins Of Error

The most defining moment of the founding day, the peak of the performance of this regime of heightened millennial anticipation, came after the meeting had formally concluded. Mid-afternoon, when the tide of speeches had subsided, the gathered multitude, "much gratified with the proceedings," spilled out of the precincts of the City-Hotel, assembled themselves in procession, and began to march north to a vacant lot at the corner of Nassau and Spruce Streets.[324] There they would ceremonially lay the cornerstone of the Tract House, a soon-to-be-built five-story building for which $20,000, a very substantial sum, had already been quietly raised.[325]

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[322] American Tract Society, *Address of the Executive Committee*, 5.
[323] "American Tract Society," *Religious Intelligencer,* 821; Nord, *Faith In Reading*, 77.
[324] "American Tract Society," *Religious Intelligencer*, 821.
[325] "National Tract Society," *New York Spectator*. According to a combination of data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Robert Sahr's historical study of inflation, this sum would be worth nearly $500,000 in 2017. "$20,000 in 1825 → 2017 | Inflation Calculator." U.S. Official Inflation Data, Alioth Finance, 9 Jan. 2019, https://www.officialdata.org/1825-dollars-in-2017?amount=20000.

The Tract House would be an imposing landmark, an impressive public presence for the ATS, designed to accommodate a street-level bookstore, the ATS's central tract depository, numerous administrative offices, a stereotype foundry, a folding room, a finishing room, and *ten* steam-powered Treadwell presses.[326] Its location, just across the park from City Hall, was both "healthy and airy" and high-traffic; it would be "accessible and convenient" to the general public, offering maximum exposure for the work of the ATS and ready rental income from any surplus office space.[327] However, laying the cornerstone of the proposed building was about far more than efficiency. Rather it was defining moment for the incipient society – the peak of its liturgical regime of anticipation within Anniversary Week.

Philosopher Michel de Certeau describes the strategic impact of building construction in the midst of busy public spaces as an experience of mastery, "postulat[ing] a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats…can be managed."[328] The Tract Society, as all formalist benevolent enterprises, was profoundly defined in relation to its Other – those who had not yet seen and heard the gospel. They were the strategic target, people whom God would reach one way or the other, in time or eternity. It was the job of the ATS to develop effective means by which the people who made up that Other were instrumentally enabled to encounter God within the span of ordinary time. Construction of place, de Certeau asserts, is an intervention in the flow of time, an attempt at the "mastery of time," running out ahead of its flow through institutional practices

[326] American Tract Society, *First Annual* Report, 18; Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 77–78.
[327] "American Tract Society: The Society's House," in *Religious Intelligencer*, vol. 11 (New Haven, CT: Nathan Whiting, 1826), 613.
[328] de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 36.

"proceeding from [the built] place, whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and 'include' them within its scope of vision."[329]

Whether consciously or not, precisely this is what ATS rhetoric suggests the society was trying to institutionalize by immediately breaking ground on a building on the day that it came into existence. It not only had designs upon its Other; it had profound and powerful *means* by which engage the Other – means that were deliberately intended, once they were released upon the world, to be unmediated. The *means* – tracts – would work independently toward their eschatological ends, while the ATS would exist as a necessary administrative layer in the process, altering the flow of millennial time from the place that it was building in New York, the "city of destiny." In contrast to the temporary affective *space* made by such organizations as the NYSSU at Anniversary Week, the ATS building was making permanent its regime of anticipation, literally driving stakes into the ground in light of its conviction that it now had the technology to make proximate the millennial dawn.

Leading the parade to the cornerstone was Sampson Vryling Stoddard (S.V.S.) Wilder, Esq., a successful Massachusetts merchant, industrialist, and erstwhile diplomat who had just been named the first President of the ATS. Wilder was an obvious choice for the presidency. Not only was he publicly pious, well-heeled, and worldly-wise, he was also a superlative evangelical institution builder, called a "prince of [evangelical] benevolence" in the early antebellum period.[330] Active in some twenty evangelical concerns as diverse as the Paris Tract Society (which he organized in his home while doing business in France after the War of 1812), T.H. Gallaudet's pioneering Hartford Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, and the fledgling Amherst College (whose early operations he underwrote almost single-handedly), Wilder worked

[329] Ibid.
[330] *Records from the Life of S.V.S. Wilder* (New York: American Tract Society, 1865), 26.

tirelessly for modern evangelical causes built upon "the cumulative power of association and division of labor in work for Christ."[331]

His wide experience as a manager in the fields of the Lord notwithstanding, Wilder knew that steering the ATS would be a challenging task. Indeed, Wilder had tried hard to refuse the president's chair. "I cannot consent, even for a moment, to be considered a candidate," he had written to his friend Rev. William Hallock, a behind-the-scenes ATS organizer who had brought him the proposal from the ATS Executive Committee a few months earlier.[332] But Hallock had insisted, challenging Wilder to recognize the will of Providence and "carry [his] cross" – presiding over the cornerstone ceremony, the subsequent building project, and the myriad difficulties the ATS was likely to face as it began its momentous work. "Everything conspires to lead you into that office," Hallock declaimed, no doubt anticipating his friend's objections. "We ought to expect [obstacles]…it is not yet time to have gained the victory; we are just setting out in the campaign; it is a war…which must last *during life*. Our rest is beyond the grave…We know you will not…deny us and our country your services."[333] In Hallock's view, founding the ATS was not just a good idea, an experiment in evangelization. Rather it was a moral duty with world-historical consequences, not unlike a war. In the face of such persuasion, Wilder, not wishing to "prove an icicle to the establishment and progress of [the] infant institution," acquiesced to a temporary appointment, "yield[ing] assent to the wishes of the friends of Zion" that he preside over the laying of the cornerstone.[334]

[331] *Records from the Life of S.V.S. Wilder*, 225–226, 76–80, 282–298.
[332] *Records from the Life of S.V.S. Wilder*, 233.
[333] *Records from the Life of S.V.S. Wilder*, 235–236.
[334] *Records from the Life of S.V.S. Wilder*, 236.

As he led the procession northward up Broadway from Cedar Street, Wilder considered what he was about to say, how he would narrate the campaign on which the ATS was embarking as it staked its claim in the heart of Manhattan's civic center. Passing among the hawkers and hackneys that crowded the streets, he observed the scores of shops and offices dedicated to accruing the "furnish[ings of] mammon," as fleeting as they were enticing.[335] Further along, he regarded the Park Theatre at the corner of Chatham and Ann Streets, a "misshapen pile" with a famously disfigured façade, infamous among the pious for catering to the public's desire for all manner of vices, from escapist plays to strong drink and prostitutes.[336] Drawing near to the site, he looked northwest to the opulent City Hall, an extravagant architectural symbol of New York's "present wealth and future prospects" that had taken nine years to build at a cost of more than double its quarter-million-dollar budget.[337] It was precisely in this space, between these buildings of grand temporal government and the aesthetics of consumer desire that the ATS would construct its building, a living edifice designed to provoke millennial anticipation among the Christian public.

At last the procession arrived at the site of the future Tract House, and the delegates crowded onto the damp earth of the freshly-dug foundation, eager to witness this "highly interesting" ceremony.[338] After a short prayer, Wilder began to speak. "We enjoy this day, my friends," he said, "one of the most exalted privileges which this age of benevolent exertion affords — the privilege of commencing a work which has for its object the best, the *eternal* interests of our fellow-men"—in implied contrast with virtually all of the institutions that

[335] "Views In The City of New York: Park Row," *New-York Mirror*, August 7, 1830, 33; *Records from the Life of S. V. S. Wilder*, 240.
[336] "Views In The City of New York: Park Row," 34; *Records from the Life of S. V. S. Wilder*, 240.
[337] "Views In The City of New York: Park Row," 33; Burrows and Wallace, Gotham, 369–370.
[338] Holland, *Memoirs of John Summerfield*, 453; *Records from the Life of S. V. S. Wilder*, 237; "American Tract Society," *Religious Intelligencer*, 821; "National Tract Society," *New-York Statesman*.

surrounded them.[339] "We are not…assembled," he said, directing his audience's attention to the City Hall across the street, to found a "splendid edifice in which statesmen convene to…form those political institutions whose aim reaches not beyond the spheres of our temporal existence."[340] Impressive as it was, the infrastructure of the earthly city was too low an object for the ATS's concerns. Neither though, he reminded them, did the ATS aim to minimize the significance of earthly pursuits like the Park Theatre did, purveying numbness to the gentle touch of saving providence – "fascinating embellishments…that seduce…the sons and daughters of gayety and fashion…into forgetfulness of their eternal destiny."[341] Nor either was the ATS a common enterprise, merely devoted, like the innumerable "buildings of bustle and business" that surrounded it, to sustaining its own earthly success.[342]

Rather, the ATS Tract House was a sacramental sign – effecting what it signified – of the fact that the millennial dawn was *now* breaking. The time was now for the administrators of the millennial dawn to take their place. Pointing south to the building of the American Bible Society, he declared that the "highest honour" of the ATS was to be "auxiliary" to the ABS, from which "emanate, as from a fountain of light and life, the sacred oracles of truth." It was "to the universal influence of these oracles," that is, the text of the Protestant Bible, that "we trust [our new] edifice will tend to prepare the way."[343] Tracts are but "humble…instruments," he noted, "but in the hand of God they can become mighty for the accomplishment of his greatest

[339] "American Tract Society," *Religious Intelligencer*, 821.
[340] "Views In The City of New York: Park Row," 33; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 369–370; "American Tract Society," *Religious Intelligencer*, 821.
[341] "American Tract Society," *Religious Intelligencer*, 821.
[342] Ibid.
[343] *Records from the Life of S. V. S. Wilder*, 240. In this way, Wilder indicates that the ATS will play John the Baptist to the ABS's Jesus. At the end of the day, the United States was a *biblical* society — the ATS was simply playing its assigned role in advancement of that cause.

designs."[344] The ATS's work was to be the vanguard, producing the instruments – the revolutionary means – by which thousands upon thousands would come to embrace a biblical narrative for their lives, over against the idolatrous temporal urgencies that constantly vied for their time and attention. In this way, he concluded, the ATS would administrate millennial goals in the present moment, "establish [God's] empire upon the ruins of error and sin and wretchedness; and…extend it in the world to come."[345]

"Do We Not *Already* See The Breaking Twilight…"

One year later, at the first anniversary of the ATS, Wilder spoke again to the society. In view of what reporters identified as the public's unparalleled "intrinsic interest" in the "promise of [the] great and extensive usefulness" of this fledgling "national institution," it was no surprise that the house was packed and abuzz with energy.[346] After an opening prayer, he approached the dais and began to narrate the foundation of the ATS in miraculous, providential terms:

> "The recurrence of this anniversary, my Christian friends, should excite within our breasts the liveliest emotions of gratitude to Almighty God for the kind care with which his fostering providence has watched over our humble efforts. Twelve months ago we commenced our enterprise, without any definite agreement with regard to the particular tracts that we should publish, with no pecuniary resources for printing, and without any convenient accommodations for the prosecution of our object; and now what a different aspect of affairs are we permitted to witness. *Well we may exclaim, 'What hath God wrought!'*"[347]

Wilder then recapitulated the history of the first year of the existence of the ATS. Much had indeed been accomplished, and he claimed it all. One hundred and eighty-five tracts had been approved by the interdenominational Publication Committee. Seven hundred thousand

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[344] Ibid.
[345] Ibid., 240–1.
[346] "Anniversary Meetings In New-York," *Religious Intelligencer*, 810; "American Tract Society," *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), May 12, 1826.
[347] *Records from the Life of S. V. S. Wilder*, 242.

tracts had been printed and many thousands distributed to auxiliary societies throughout the country in a "great spirit of cooperation." The Tract House had been built "under such prudent and economical conditions as not only to afford suitable accommodations to the business of the Society, but also to yield a considerable sum annually to its resources."[348]

But all this success, he averred, was not merely a work of human aspiration – in fact it was far more than that. The unlikely success of the ATS, emergent after just a year of effort, was a manifestation of the fact that the dawning of the millennium was happening *now*. God had enabled the birth of a new kind of institution, one that simultaneously reflected the conditions of the millennium in the present and signposted the full coming of the millennium in the future.

> "The Saviour whom we acknowledge predicted that when lifted up on the cross he would draw all men unto him. *Do we not already see the breaking twilight of that millennial morn?* Are not the evangelical institutions which characterize the present age propitious tokens of its coming? And what a privilege do we who are here assembled enjoy, in being permitted to bear a subordinate part in its advancement."[349]

In short, for Wilder, the meaning of the "normal" history of the ATS as an interdenominational evangelistic print enterprise was anything but normal. Rather, its coalescence signaled the emergence of a new era, free from the technological limits and theological constraints of the past. The world was being borne into the full extension of this millennial future on the currents of the proleptic mission of the ATS. God was on the move, using the society to build the American Zion.

Conclusion: Icarus Ascending

Later that day, Rev. Justin Edwards was said to have "struck the key-note of the institution" when he amplified the pivotal significance of the fledgling society's historic position.

[348] Ibid., 242–243.
[349] Ibid., 243.

What the ATS must do, Edwards declared, was "take the truths of the Bible, and, in 'thoughts that breathe and words that burn,' stamp them on the pages of Religious Tracts; multiply these Tracts by thousands and millions; send them forth, attended, in answer to prayer, by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven."[350] The result of this cascade of spiritual print would be would be "a *very great* mourning, and…a great turning unto the Lord our God" around the nation and the world as unbelievers converted *en masse.*[351] In developing the means that precipitated this mass conversion, Edwards too held that the ATS was co-laboring with God to hasten the dawning of the millennial day, enabling the appearance of the eschatological evangelical internationale prophesied in the books of Daniel and Revelation: "multitudes out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue, will assemble on Mount Zion, and open an everlasting anthem 'unto him that loved us and washed us with his blood.'"[352]

Edwards underlined the significance of the *times.* Repeatedly noting that the *message* of the ATS was not new – nothing more than what Christians had proclaimed in the face of opposition from "the vales of Judea" to "the throne of the Caesars" to "the darkness of papal midnight" – he was convinced that the conditions of the *moment* in which American evangelicals found themselves were of immense significance, unprecedented in the history of the young nation. Deploying the rhetoric of boundless optimism characteristic of the "Era of Good Feelings," Edwards described Americans as "a great people…capable of improvement greater than the sun ever saw…a people of invincible energy, ceaseless action, and untiring

[350] Rev. William A. Hallock, *Light and Love: A Sketch of the Life and Labors of the Rev. Justin Edwards, D.D.* (New York: D. Fanshaw, 1856), 204. American Tract Society, *First Annual Report*, 29–31. Edwards is citing a line from English Augustan poet Thomas Gray's "Progress of Poesie" which describes poetry as "thoughts that breathe, and words that burn." He took tracts to be poetic renderings of Biblical truth, an interesting window into 19th century religious aesthetics.
[351] American Tract Society, *First Annual Report*, 29–31
[352] American Tract Society, *First Annual Report*, 35. See Daniel 3:4, Revelation 5:9, 7:9, 12:1, KJV, among numerous other prophetic references.

perseverance; enjoying civil and religious liberty…holding property of every description, and to any amount."[353] If, at this fruitful and formative point in their national history, Americans were also able to become *virtuous* through strenuous pursuit of the conversion of their hearts and lives by God, they would "become greater and greater, till the light of revealed truth, and the light of human science, the light of true religion, and the light of civil and religious freedom, shall blaze from one end of this continent to the other, and with a brightness that shall illumine the world."[354] This moment in the history of the United States was of similar import in church history to the Christianization of the Roman Empire or the Reformation.[355] *Americans* would lead the world into the promised millennial dawn.

The chief obstacle to this realization was the possibility that American national sin would outweigh national virtue, snuffing out the millennial instrumentality of the nation. It was precisely here, at the intersection of biblical prophecy and political history that the ATS's campaign was so important. "We must make development of character such as creation never witnessed," Edwards exhorted, "rising to a height of goodness and greatness, from which we shall be the benefactors of the world, and instruments in bearing its millions to glory [lest] we shall sink, under a load of guilt such as the earth never bore, to endless perdition."[356] The time was now, Edwards insisted, to blanket the nation with gospel tracts. The stakes were world-historical in scope: "we are called by the God of heaven to make an experiment; and one of the most momentous that was ever entrusted to mortals."[357] The experiment was the voluntary establishment of the conditions of "public virtue" that could sustain the republic, enabling it to

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[353] American Tract Society, *First Annual Report*, 30. Cf. Higham, "From Boundlessness To Consolidation," 149–65.
[354] American Tract Society, *First Annual Report*, 30.
[355] American Tract Society, *First Annual Report*, 29–30.
[356] American Tract Society, *First Annual Report,* 30.
[357] Ibid.

become a beacon of Protestant hope, a city on a hill to which the rest of the world might look. Only God could do this work in people's hearts, but God had provided the *means* to the ATS. With modern stereotype press technology at its disposal and pockets full of evangelical cash, the ATS could spark a nationwide revival of private Christian conversion and public Christian virtue, and in so doing, "aid in renovating a world, and preparing a 'multitude that no man can number' to shine in the beauty of holiness and shout the triumphs of grace to everlasting ages."[358] They must not fail in their work. They would not fail. The future history of the world depended on it.

[358] American Tract Society, *First Annual Report,* 29; 35. Cf. Revelation 7:9, KJV.

Interlude

The Passion of George Bush

In the autumn of 1832, on the eve of his accession to the professorship of Hebrew and Oriental Languages at the fledgling University of the City of New York, the Reverend George Bush was feeling nervous.[359] It was not his new teaching responsibilities that worried him. Known to friends as "The Walking Library" or "Encyclopedia Bush," the former evangelical missionary pastor, was a jovial and enthusiastic pedagogue.[360] He relished his role as "the solver of doubts and the explainer of mysteries" to the growing stream of acolytes who sought him out in his labyrinthine offices near City Hall, eager to share in his massive philological erudition.[361] Wielding a commanding knowledge of the ancient "oriental languages, antiquities, and literature," in an era when the discipline of philology was at a low ebb in the United States, Bush enjoyed a reputation for being something of a linguistic savant, "one of the most profound and ingenious scholars of our present age."[362]

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[359] John H. Dillingham and Rufus W. Griswold, *The Prose Writers of America, with a Survey of the Intellectual History, Condition, and Prospects of the Country.* (Philadelphia: H. T. Coates, 1870), 354; Bush was elected to the professorship by the trustees of the fledgling instutiton in 1831, but did not teach any students until the university officially received its first freshmen class in September of 1832. See Thomas J. Frusciano, *New York University and the City: An Illustrated History* (New Brunswick, NJ :Rutgers University Press, 1997), 21, and 15–25.

[360] Woodbury M. Fernald, *Memoirs and Reminiscences of the Late Prof. George Bush* (Boston: O. Clapp, 1860), 186–187. The best account of Bush's experience as a popular though controversial pastor – ultimately dismissed by his presbytery – is found in Jacob Piatt Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis: The History, the Industries, the Institutions, and the People of a City of Homes* (Chicago, IL: Lewis Publishing Company, 1910), 576–578; On the evangelical mission of the AHMS, see Suzanne R. Thurman, "Cultural Politics on the Indiana Frontier: The American Home Missionary Society and Temperance Reform," *Indiana Magazine of History* 94, no. 4 (December 1, 1998), 287 and passim. See also David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures : Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 32–34.

[361] Fernald, *Memoirs of George Bush*, 187–190.

[362] Ibid., 186; Dillingham and Griswold, *The Prose Writers of America*, 354; On Bush and the decline of American philology, see Shalom Goldman, "Professor George Bush: American Hebraist and Proto-Zionist," *American Jewish Archives* 43, no. 1 (1991): 60 and passim.

Nevertheless, in spite of his popularity, Bush was certain that he was about to become embroiled in public controversy. After four years of research and writing, he had just completed the manuscript for his newest book, a study of the biblical doctrine of the millennium, entitled *A Treatise on the Millennium; in which the Prevailing Theories on That Subject are Carefully Examined, and the True Scriptural Doctrine Attempted To Be Elicited and Established,* to be published by Harper Brothers.[363] Deliberately provocative, Bush's *Treatise* fulminated a lover's quarrel with his fellow formalist evangelical elites over their abundant – and, he thought, wildly erroneous, even dangerous – use of millennial rhetoric in the constitution of American Protestant identity.

Bush regarded it as uncontestable sociological fact that millennial rhetoric had become ubiquitous among formalist evangelical elites in 1832. "No phraseology in prayer, in preaching, in the religious essay, or in the monthly concert address," he observed, "is more common than that of *millennial* state, *millennial* reign, *millennial* purity, *millennial* glory, &c."[364] But ubiquity did not imply theological understanding.[365] In his moment, Bush bristled, millennial talk had become "a long-established and seldom-questioned opinion," inherently vulnerable in its ubiquity to misuse in the name of theological tradition.[366] Most of those who spoke of millennial hope, Bush inveighed, meant little more by it than that they harbored "vague anticipation" of a

[363] George Bush, *A Treatise on the Millennium: In Which the Prevailing Theories on That Subject Are Carefully Examined; and the True Scriptural Doctrine Attempted to Be Elicited and Established* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832). Bush set about researching the millennium no later than his return to Princeton in 1829. See Fernald, *Memoirs of George Bush*, 374–376.
[364] Ibid., vii.
[365] Indeed, as Susan Ryan has observed in her study of antebellum benevolence, rhetorical ubiquity often signals precisely an instability or insecurity in the commonly-held meaning of a conceptual keyword. See Susan M. Ryan, *The Grammar of Good Intentions: Race and the Antebellum Culture of Benevolence* (Cornell University Press, 2004), 9-10.
[366] Bush, *Millennium*, 257.

God-given future of "peace, piety and bliss" for the world.[367] For those few who confessed more precise eschatological formulations, popular millennial rhetoric looked forward to, as Bush put it, "a future felicitous state of the church and world of a thousand years duration," during which "the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan" is imprisoned, according to the visionary language of the twentieth chapter of the book of Revelation.[368] But even these "prevailing impressions" (for "opinions they can scarcely be called," he acidly noted) about what the biblical Millennium was, were "ill-defined" in the extreme, Bush charged, fixed to no "precise ideas" from scripture.[369] Upon subjecting the millennial rhetoric of formalist evangelical imagination to the "test of rigid exegesis," it may well be revealed to be "nothing more than a brilliant illusion," temporarily sustained by "ardent fancy…[but] destined to be ruthlessly dispelled by the onward course of time and Providence."[370]

Bush thought that millennial anticipation had become such a popular trope in formalist evangelical rhetoric most because it was *useful* for framing benevolent causes. Preaching the good news of a soon-coming "future era of blessedness...peculiarly congenial to the human mind," was both a message of spiritual hope and also an ethical goad for calling their auditors to work harder at achieving those blessed "millennial" characteristics that could be pursued by human means in the present.[371] While Bush believed there was good scriptural warrant to hope for major future civilizational improvement, redolent of the glory of God, to express that future hope as "millennial" was, he thought, irresponsible. While the language of millennial

[367] Bush, *Millennium*, vii.
[368] Bush, *Millennium*, vii. See Revelation 20:2, KJV.
[369] Bush, *Millennium*, vii, iii.
[370] Bush, *Millennium*, 258–259.
[371] Bush, *Millennium*, 258. Cf. Bercovitch, *Rites of Assent*, 150-157, on the link between striving and prophecy, which he finds to be a major transition emergent in the formalist evangelical tradition with the frank postmillennial theology of history espoused by Jonathan Edwards. For a morphology of the way this tradition develops in the culture of evangelical print, see Nord, *Faith in* Reading, 39-40.

anticipation was a powerful social goad, "a mighty…motive [to] benevolent effort," if it was not based in biblical fact, it exposed those who anticipated its dawning to grave theological dangers.[372]

A respected scholar, trained in classics at Dartmouth College and in divinity at Princeton Theological Seminary, George Bush had been immersed for his whole adult life in Baconian "common-sense" methods of theological reasoning. These methods, on which all elite evangelical biblical interpretation was based in the first decades of the nineteenth century, taught that theology was a rational "science, grounded in the same inductive methods that marked the other sciences."[373] The texts of scripture constituted *the* primary source for this theological science, with the Bible best understood as a "field of facts analogous to the terrain from which geologists collected rocks."[374] The work of a "common-sense" interpreter was to excavate these facts – clarifying, contextualizing, and systematizing them, and then clearly expressing them with the reverence due to the actual words of God.[375] As Bush knew it, the Bible was "ultimately legible," given from heaven "not to *confound* but to *instruct* its votaries…[in] clear knowledge and unambiguous diction."[376] As such, the proper work of a Christian minister was to translate the Bible's legibility to the public – demystifying complexities, democratizing revelation, "making the unknowable known and the invisible verifiable."[377] Even the "figurative language" of scripture, wrote Charles Hodge, Bush's professor of philology at Princeton, "is just as definite in its meaning and just as intelligible as the most literal," when well-interpreted and properly

[372] Bush, *Millennium*,, xii.
[373] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 174.
[374] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 190.
[375] On the process of inductive "common-sense" biblical interpretation in this period, see Holifield, *Theology in America*, 174–196.
[376] Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*, 23; Bush, *Millennium*, iii.
[377] Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*, 23.

organized.[378] It was this manner of perspicacious biblical clarity that Bush sought to demand from his evangelical colleagues in their use of millennial rhetoric. When, in 1832, Bush observed their inability to clearly delineate from the Bible *why* they believed what they did about the Millennium, it raised for him a great concern about the tyranny of dogmatic theology over the word of God in scripture. After all, liberation of *and* by the biblical text, over against "the placets of renowned doctors, or the dictation of ecclesiastical synods," was the beating heart of the Reformation Protestantism to which he and his colleagues traced their spiritual genealogy.[379] "How many venerable theories and darling dogmas," Bush declaimed, "would be demolished by the simple touch of philological exegesis!"

The young Bush was passionately captivated by the possibilities opened by this method of biblical interpretation. By his early thirties, he had decided to fully devote his "peculiar gifts" for philological exegesis to producing resources aimed at lay readers, offering "clear, simple, precise explication of the written oracles of God" to a broad audience.[380] Garnering a reputation

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[378] Charles Hodge, "The Theology of Intellect," cited in George Marsden, "Everyone One's Own Interpreter? The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth Century America," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 90.

[379] Bush, *Millennium*, v.

[380] J. Addison Alexander, "'A Treatise on the Millennium, &c.' by George Bush," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 5, no. 2 (April 1833): 204; George Bush, *Questions and Notes Critical and Practical Upon the Book of Genesis: Designed as a General Help to Biblical Instruction* (New York: J.P. Haven, 1831), iii. Between 1829 and 1832, Bush produced practical commentaries on Genesis and Exodus, popular study guides for adult bible classes on the historical books of the Old Testament, and a well-regarded life of Muhammad that contextualized the global rise of Islam's "system of imposture" within the stream of Christian providential history. Fernald, *Memoirs of George Bush*, 85, 185–186; George Bush, *Scripture Questions Designed Principally for Adult Bible Classes: Deuteronomy-Esther* (New York: Morgan, Robbins & Co., 1829); Bush, *Questions and Notes Critical and Practical Upon the Book of Genesis*; George Bush, *Questions and Notes, Critical and Practical, upon the Book of Exodus: Designed as a General Help to Biblical Instruction* (New York: J.P. Haven, 1832); George Bush, *The Life of Mohammed: Founder of the Religion of Islam, and of the Empire of the Saracens* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1830); Bush also worked during this period for Harper Brothers publishers as a tastemaking, censorious "examiner," a "gentlem[a]n of high literary acquirements and correct taste," who would ensure that the religious and philosophical works they published would be nothing less than "interesting, instructive, and moral." His work in this period, both as an author and an editor, contributed to the growth

as an "elegant and eloquent writer on theological and historical subjects," Bush's goal in writing was entirely driven by the common-sense values he had been taught in his sterling evangelical education – the *clarification* of the text's meaning to all his readers.[381] The "sacred volume," he wrote, "was given to man *in order to be understood*." Both the "unlettered" and the "learned" should be equipped, after reading well composed exegetical works, to "ascertain with *absolute precision* the ideas attached by the Holy Ghost to the words and phrases employed by the sacred penmen."[382] The subsequent diffusion of understanding of the precise meaning of biblical texts to all with eyes to see would, he thought, begin to dispel the doctrinal quibbling that empowered sectarianism, and aid the American church in its ongoing quest for an ever-reforming "more perfect operation of Christianity."[383]

On this basis, Bush felt it necessary to argue in *A Treatise on the Millennium*, that, popular and useful as millennial anticipation had become for formalist evangelical activists, in biblical perspective it was bunk. The results of his textual investigations had convinced him of the "startling position that the *Millennium,* strictly so called, is PAST."[384] Deploying the canons of critical history, linguistic exegesis, and common-sense epistemology over three hundred pages, he marshaled an extensive inductive case that the evil beast of Revelation 20, bound for a

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of an antebellum religious lay reading public, whose tastes publishers like Harper Brothers intended to both cultivate and satiate. See Eugene Exman, *The House of Harper: The Making of a Modern Publisher* (Harper Collins, 2010), 11; Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2004), 75–79, 156.

[381] Fernald, *Memoirs of George Bush*, 185–186.

[382] Bush, *Millennium*, iv–v. Emphasis original.

[383] Bush, *Millennium*, iv, v; For some of Bush's comments on continued reformation, see Fernald, *Memoirs of George Bush*, 129, 88, 217–219; The notion of continuing the work of the Reformation was a present theme among many antebellum Protestants, particularly those involved in the production of biblical texts. For one clear example from Bush's benevolent evangelical milieu, see "Extracts from the Speech of the Rev. Thomas DeWitt, before the American Tract Society," in *Religious Intelligencer* (New Haven, CT: Nathan Whiting, 1825), 53–54. David Morgan reflects concisely on this phenomenon in Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures*, 101–107.

[384] Bush, *Millennium*, 260; Fernald, *Memoirs of George Bush*, 373–376.

thousand years, could symbolize absolutely *nothing* other than pre-Christian Greco-Roman religion – "*Paganism personified*."[385]As the best histories of the period had made clear, paganism was "suppressed" shortly after the reign of Roman Emperor Theodosius I, who banned many of its practices, furthering the institutionalization of Constantinian Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Thus, Bush concluded, Revelation's symbolic dragon was bound "somewhere between [A.D. 395] and A.D. 450," and unbound again around the time of the capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453.[386] To anyone who was willing see beyond the evangelical benevolent shibboleth of millennial anticipation, Bush made the case that the Bible clearly disclosed that the Millennium was in fact over before the Reformation began.

It is not, of course, the substance of Bush's exegetical conclusions about the millennium that bear reflection here. What is of interest – and what Bush found himself so unnerved by – was that American Protestants had, by the early decades of the nineteenth century, developed a *tradition* of millennial discourse. This tradition, he feared, did not exist in subsidiary dependence on systematic biblical exegesis, but rather was simply appropriating biblical language as the source of a rhetorical trope for signifying group identity and narrating shared mission.[387] "Upon what," Bush thundered, "is [this widespread millennial] expectation founded? … Is [all this rhetoric] anything more than a mere traditionary tenet, which from time immemorial has in some way obtained currency among the pious, and…has become with us a matter of mechanical

[385] Bush, *Millennium*, 146.
[386] Bush, *Millennium*, 149.
[387] This is very similar to Mark Noll's observation that, in the years between the Revolution and the Civil War, the use of the Bible in American public life was "not so much [as] the truth above all truth…a compendium of instruction for faith and practice…[but rather] as the story above all stories. On public occasions, Scripture appeared regularly as a typical narrative imparting significance to antitypical events, people, and situations of United States history." This may be seen as the eisegetical companion to what Oliver O'Donovan describes as an anticipatory theology of history. See Mark A. Noll, "The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation, 1776-1865," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 43.

repetition in after-life, when 'The priest hath finished what the nurse begun'"?[388] By raising these skeptical questions about the biblical foundations of the massively popular doctrine of the coming Millennium, Bush felt certain that he would be caught a firestorm of withering critique. His inquiry would be viewed, he grandiloquently predicted, as terribly subversive, "little short of profanation…[a] lifting up of axes against the carved work of the sanctuary."[389] Like a modern-day Luther, he braced himself for assault, taking his stand against the resistance that would surely come: "Here we intrench ourselves; behind this munition [of argument] we take refuge from the missiles of prejudice and the shafts of imputed heresy."[390]

But the anticipated assaults never materialized. Something much worse than that happened – people liked the book, absorbed its critique, and moved on. Most general reviewers approved of the book, while claiming insufficient expertise to evaluate its scholarly judgments. The *Rhode Island American* hedged its bets, considering Bush's *Treatise* as "not a whit behind any of those that have heretofore been offered to the world on this same topic."[391] The *New York American* was more forthright, saying "we are too little versed in such investigations to venture an opinion on the justness of Mr. Bush's conclusions, but we admire his zeal, and…we believe it sincere…If patient research, much learning, apparent sincerity in seeking the truth, and earnestness to advance the cause of true religion, can elucidate that which is in its nature most mysterious….the author [has] succeeded."[392] The *American* went on, without mentioning any of Bush's labored arguments about the millennium being past, to extract an agreeable passage from late in the book where Bush explains that "*the Gospel is the genius of Universal Emancipation*,"

[388] Bush, *Millennium*, vii.
[389] Bush, *Millennium*, vi.
[390] Bush, *Millennium*, 260.
[391] "The Millennium," *Rhode Island American and Gazette*, December 14, 1832, 4.
[392] "Review of the Week: A Treatise on the Millennium," *New York American*, December 14, 1832, 1.

and that the imagery of John's Apocalypse translates "into the death-doom of despotism and the Magna Charta of the liberties of the world." Far from inspiring outrage, Bush's text was appreciated and then assimilated into the broader discourse of popular millennial anticipation.

Theologically acute readers had some critiques to offer, but they did not come close to attacking Bush in the manner he had predicted. By and large they were impressed by his erudition, bemused by his *sturm und drang*, and happy to recommend his book as an excellent, minority report contribution to an ongoing learned conversation about eschatological history. The *American Monthly Review*, edited by Hebraist and Harvard professor Sidney Willard, offered a comprehensive and extensive summary of Bush's major arguments, prefaced by an application of Cicero's famous aphorism that, concerning the millennium, "it may be that no one of the opinions is true; it cannot be that more than one is true."[393] The reviewer, likely Willard himself, acknowledged the variance of Bush's argument from "the prevalent notion of modern times," gently critiqued his "pedantic" style, and, in the final analysis, differed from Bush's conclusions.[394] But nonetheless, the treatise as a whole was adjudged learned, useful, and worth reading – hardly the savaging Bush had expected.[395] Joseph Addison Alexander, Bush's colleague from seminary days, wrote the most critical engagement with the work in Princeton's conservative, orthodox *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review*. While Alexander was clearly more concerned than any of the other reviewers about the theological stakes of Bush's revisionist argument, his critique conveyed more an air of puzzlement than outright opposition. What Bush meant by the "latter-day glory," Alexander explained, was *exactly* what was intended by popular

[393] Andrew Preston Peabody, *Harvard Reminiscences* (Cambridge, MA: Ticknor, 1888), 61–67; Sidney Willard(?), "A Treatise on the Millennium," ed. Sidney Willard, *American Monthly Review* 15 (March 1833): 202.
[394] "A Treatise on the Millennium," *American Monthly Review*, 202, 207, 211.
[395] "A Treatise on the Millennium," *American Monthly Review*, 212.

rhetoric of the millennium: "The utmost that we can imagine to be proved by Mr. Bush is that…the name *Millennium,* as commonly applied, is inappropriate and erroneous.…[this] issue…is a very harmless one; so harmless, that to some, we are afraid, his large expressions will appear ridiculous…We believe that [his arguments] might be honestly adopted without any deviations from the strictest orthodoxy."[396]

George Bush's worst fears about tolerance for the untethering of theological opinion, by regular folks and scholars alike, from careful study of the biblical text were realized. The reviews confirmed his disquieted impression that, by 1832, formalist evangelical millennialism was, above all else, a *tradition* – a background assumption of elite benevolent public rhetoric. Simultaneously deeply felt *and* theologically vague, talk about the millennium was communicating not, in the first place, a clear biblical doctrine, but a practical, national, theopolitical vision, re-narrated through the lens of a vague but powerful scriptural trope.

Mark Noll has made the broad observation that in the years between the Revolution and the Civil War, the use of the Bible in American public life was:

> "not so much [as] the truth above all truth…a compendium of instruction for faith and practice…[but rather] as the story above all stories. On public occasions, Scripture appeared regularly as a typical narrative imparting significance to antitypical events, people, and situations of United States history."[397]

What Noll is describing bears much similarity to what Bush identified, to his dismay, in the ubiquity of vague millennial talk he perceived all around him. It was not biblical exegesis but the evidence of contemporary historical circumstances that made the concept of the millennium legible in 1832. Only as the nation grew in perceptible righteousness would the millennium draw nearer. As Lyman Beecher framed it in 1833, talk about the millennium *should* be vague and

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[396] "A Treatise on the Millennium," *American Monthly Review*, 210.
[397] Noll, "The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation," 43. See also Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 276-288.

general, to avoid associations with late "fanaticism…exploded theories, or…the perversion of human faculties."[398] The only proper index of the millennial dawn was gradual, visible social improvement. The millennium "is essentially a time when the people will be all righteous; when benevolent efforts will have been made to the utmost ability of the church, and crowned with divine blessing; and therefore…the sooner the church begins to live and act for the Millennium, the sooner it will begin to appear."[399] In saying this, it is important to recognize that Beecher was not playing down millennial expectation. Quite the contrary in fact. Rather, he was insisting that it be founded on what could be seen and known as the present reality of the world – the logic of anticipation.[400] The burden of eschatological metahistory lay not in the hope of divine interruption, but squarely on the shoulders of the nation's spiritual improvers. Icarus was in full flight.

[398] Lyman Beecher, "Review: Harbinger of the Millennium," in *The Spirit of the Pilgrims*, vol. 6 (Boston: Peirce and Williams, 1833), 412.
[399] Beecher, "Review: Harbinger of the Millennium," 413.
[400] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 121-123.

Chapter Three

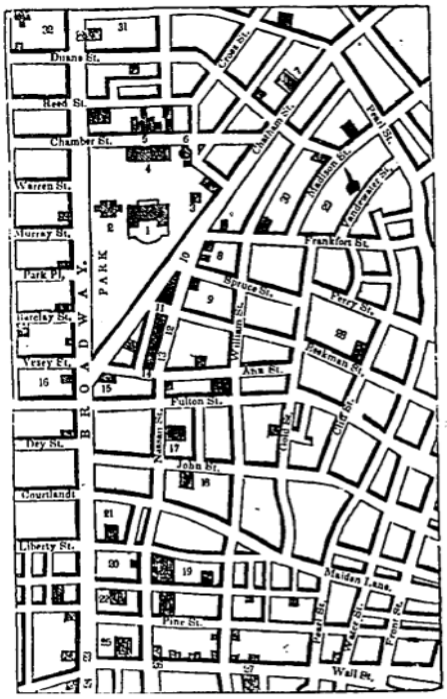
'Conquer or Die!': Millennial Anticipation and the Challenge of Benevolent Racism

Introduction: Anniversary Week, 1834

In 1834, New York's Anniversary Week was bigger and bolder than ever. Held from May 5-10, it featured meetings of more than sixteen major benevolent societies, among them evangelistic juggernauts like the American Bible Society, the American Tract Society, and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, agencies for national social amelioration like the American Education Society and the American Peace Society, alongside numerous smaller or newer groups, most notably including the fledgling American Anti-Slavery Society.[401] The collective ambition embodied at Anniversary Week for social engineering in the name of Christian civilization and millennial anticipation had implications for virtually every aspect of American social life. Religious and commercial newspapers all over the northeastern United States printed the schedule of anniversary meetings, while the *New York Evangelist*, a leading revival and reform newspaper, produced an out-of-town Visitor's Guide for "our religious friends," complete with a street map that highlighted dozens of relevant landmarks for exploration, among them eight churches, nine benevolent society offices, three activist newspapers, a bookstore, and the "Temperance Coffee Room."[402] While the anniversaries generally began at 10am, for many the day began much earlier, at one of two popular 5:30am

[401] "Anniversary Week in New-York," *Christian Watchman*, April 25, 1834, 3; "Anniversaries," *Commercial Advertiser*, May 8, 1834, 2; "Anniversary Week in New-York," *Newburyport Herald*, May 13, 1834, 2; "The Anniversaries," *Pittsfield Sun*, May 15, 1834, 3.
[402] "The Visitor's Guide," *New York Evangelist*, May 3, 1834; Hugh Davis, "The New York 'Evangelist', New School Presbyterians and Slavery, 1837-1857," *American Presbyterians* 68, no. 1 (April 1, 1990): 15–16.

prayer meetings, in which attendees gathered to remember to God the events of the coming day and the millennial causes they represented.[403]



THE VISITOR'S GUIDE.

This small map embraces the central portion of our city, and may be useful to some of our religious friends who wish to spend a "week in New-York." The references below are to the figures on the map.

1. The City Hall.
7. Chatham street Chapel—2nd Free Church.
8. Evangelist Office—Revival Tract Society—Emancipator.
9. American Tract Society—National Preacher—Education Office—American Home Missionary Office—J. P. Haven's Bookstore—Clergyman's Directory.
10. Brick Church Chapel—Agency of A. B. C. F. M. Colonization Office—Assembly's Board.
11. Brick Church.
12. Clinton Hall—Am. Baptist Home Miss. Society.
13. American Bible Society.
14. Franklin Buildings—Temperance Coffee Room.
16. St. Paul's Church.
17. South Baptist Church—American Seamen's Friend Office.
18. John street Church.
19. Middle Dutch Church.
27. Merchant's Exchange—Post Office.
30. Colored Presbyterian Church.
33. Masonic Hall.

Figure 2: "The Visitor's Guide" *New York Evangelist*, May 3, 1834.

[403] "Anniversaries," *Commercial Advertiser*; Foster, *An Errand Of Mercy*, 151.

The New York Sunday School Union once again offered a stunning public performance of millennial goals, marshalling more than *ten thousand* Sunday School children at City-Hall park, "well dressed, with smiling faces," to sing hymns and hear addresses from Sunday School Union officials.[404] "No sight could be witnessed more grateful to the heart of the christian and philanthropist," gushed one reporter, "than to see *those that are to be the sages and the patriots of the age beyond us*, in trooping multitudes together."[405] Another commented that it was "an imposing sight to witness so many young immortals, attended by their teachers and superintendents...the entire meeting was calculated to create a strong impression, favorable to the benevolent enterprise."[406] For those who had eyes to see it, the flickers and shadows of the coming millennial dawn that votaries of evangelical benevolence so eagerly anticipated were once again being projected across the topography of lower Manhattan.

Nowhere was this made clearer than at the physical epicenter of Anniversary Week activity in 1834: Chatham Street Chapel. Hosting no fewer than twelve of the major meetings in five days, Chatham Street Chapel had, just two years prior, been the Chatham Garden Theatre, a seedy playhouse adjacent to New York's Five Points neighborhood, infamous for prostitution, drunkenness, and general debauchery.[407] In early 1832, aiming to make a major strategic investment in the cause of evangelical reform, Lewis Tappan, a wealthy Manhattan merchant and a leading backer of evangelical benevolence had acquired the lease to the theater – "one of

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[404] "Anniversary Week in New-York," *Newburyport Herald*.
[405] "Anniversary Week in New-York," *Newburyport Herald*.
[406] "Sunday School Union," *New York Spectator*, May 8, 1834.
[407] Kyle B. Roberts, *Evangelical Gotham: Religion and the Making of New York City, 1783-1860* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016); 151-157; Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 131–137; Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 27–31; Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The 19th-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 9-10.

[Satan's] haunts…squatted in the midst of the slums."[408] Putting together a group of investors, "all pious and benevolent individuals," Tappan raised money to redo the interior, converting it from a "nursery of vice" into a "place for the worship of Jehovah."[409] According to their scheme, the building would be used for church services on Sundays, and, throughout the week, for the meetings of various societies friendly to the cause of evangelical benevolence. In a great coup, Tappan convinced revivalist Charles Finney to adopt the new chapel as his base of operations in the city: the "Second Free Presbyterian Church" of New York City.

Imagine "the *sensation*," Tappan wrote to Finney, "that will be produced by *converting* the place with slight alterations into a church," located as it was on "the greatest thoroughfare in the city, next to Broadway."[410] Establishing Chatham Street Chapel was indeed a bold move, a literal conversion of a public space from "a place admirably located for the destruction of souls" into one "equally located for conceiving them."[411] When it was done, New York's *Journal of Commerce* wrote that Chatham Theatre "is no longer a scene of vicious amusement, where the hard earnings of the poor are squandered, and the public morals corrupted, but a place where the plan of redemption will be unfolded, and all invited to partake of its benefits, 'without money and without price.'"[412] Invoking Isaiah's prophecy of Israel's perfected and abundantly good future, its report framed the establishment of the chapel in a progressive narrative of both social

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[408] Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney*, 135; Kathryn Teresa Long, *The Revival of 1857-58 : Interpreting an American Religious Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 97. On the significance of the Free Church model, see Roberts, *Evangelical Gotham*, 145-178.
[409] "Conversion of a Theatre into a Church," *The Liberator*, May 5, 1832; "Chatham Theatre," *New York Mercury*, April 11, 1832.
[410] Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre*, 31; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland, OH: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969), 71.
[411] Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney*, 135. Cf. Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 270-272 and *passim* on "sacralizing the landscape" through the building of churches.
[412] "Chatham Theatre," *New York Mercury*.

and eschatological history — it was a practical engine advancing the future history of God's work to redeem the world. On taking the pulpit at Chatham Street Chapel, Finney declared that he had little interest in drawing congregants from other churches, but only in growth by "the conversion of the ungodly" – only in this way would "the world" be transformed.[413] Tappan and Finney were entirely in sync about this, each possessed of what Tappan's biographer described as an "unclouded faith that *a new world was possible* once the hearts of men were reached."[414] Two years hence, the 1834 Anniversary Week celebrations in Chatham Street Chapel stood as a visible sign of the reasonable anticipation of a world transformed. After two decades of labor and agitation in the cause of benevolence, the formalist evangelicals who had developed the infrastructure that enabled strenuous action unto the conversion and civilization of America were, it seemed, turning the wheels of Providence, propelling the American future in the direction of the millennial dawn.

"We need not say that [Anniversary Week] is a season of refreshing and delight to all…who would promote the welfare of the Christian church or the happiness of their fellow-men," declared the *Newburyport Herald* in a retrospective article on May 13th:

> "The collisions of parties and the clash of selfish interests are [not tolerated]. The passions of a perverted and debased nature are hushed. — If there is strife, it is strife between those, who would be foremost in good works. If there is warmth, [it is that] of those who are zealous to promote the happiness of man both here and hereafter."[415]

But all was not as it appeared. Such a report painted *far* too a rosy picture of the unity exhibited at Anniversary Week in 1834. In point of fact, a storm of strife had arisen during the week's events, one so violent that it permanently unveiled a deep crack in the performative façade of benevolent evangelical consensus. The storm came in the form of the appearance of

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[413] Charles Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney* (New York: Fleming Revell, 1876), 323.
[414] Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan*, 110.
[415] "Anniversary Week in New-York," *Newburyport Herald.*

representatives of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), an interracial, interdenominational benevolent society convened by William Lloyd Garrison in mid-December of 1833, which called for the "immediate and general emancipation" of all enslaved persons with "no compensation given" to slaveowners, on the basis that it was a sin against God and a crime against humanity to enslave another person or deny another person equal rights on the basis of their race.[416] As Manisha Sinha writes, the AASS "broke the national consensus over slavery and race" by making these claims, implying in no uncertain terms that the stability of national union was unsustainable in an American slaveocracy.[417] The AASS was boldly asking questions that white Americans had "dared not answer" since consensus had emerged around the national future in 1816.[418] In the terms of Mary Douglas's institutional theory introduced above, the AASS challenge "denaturalized" the United States in the midst of Anniversary Week, exposing the precarious historical contingency of its social and political infrastructure.[419]

As if this were not enough of a shock to the benevolent system, built as it was on a vision of national unity between American Christians in anticipation of an almost-present millennial dawn, the AASS founding manifesto also took direct aim at the ideology and goals of the American Colonization Society (ACS). The ACS was a popular benevolent institution that northern white formalist evangelicals had helped to architect in December 1816, on the pattern of the ABS, to be "the Evangelical answer to the race problem" in America.[420] Its putative goal was to "repatriate" free or manumitted Africans and African-Americans to a new colony on the

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[416] William Lloyd Garrison, "Declaration of the National Anti-Slavery Convention," *The Liberator*, December 14, 1833, 198; Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 225-227.
[417] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 226.
[418] McDougall, *Freedom Just Around the Corner*, 423.
[419] Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, 48.
[420] Foster, *An Errand Of Mercy,* 151.

African continent, fostering in the United States "*the gradual separation of the black from the white population*" – God's proper order for the world – "*by providing for [the black population] some suitable situation where they may enjoy the advantages to which they are entitled by nature and their creator's will.*"[421] Those self-denominated "enlightened moderate" evangelicals who supported the ACS found that its aspirations allowed them to have their cake and eat it too, many times over. All at once they could oppose slavery, remain confident in their racial superiority, and broker unity between slaveholders and those who believed slavery a sin, all while engaging in the gradual work of millennial improvement, domestically and on the world stage.[422] The AASS thought differently, and in no uncertain terms. "We regard, as delusive, cruel, and dangerous," its founding documents declared, "any scheme of expatriation which pretends to aid, either directly or indirectly, in the emancipation of the slaves, or to be a substitute for the immediate and total abolition of slavery."[423] These were fighting words, drawing clear battle lines on questions about evangelical racism and the national slave system that had run directly, but not explicitly, through the heart of formalist evangelical aspirations since 1816. Anniversary Week aimed to show formalist evangelical intentions for the gathered benevolent organizations to constitute the moral government of a "virtual proxy nation," an administration that would, in the sight of God and the world, bring the United States "in reality to what it already is in principle."[424] It was precisely this commitment that gave traction to their abundant rhetoric of millennial anticipation. The AASS was issuing a challenge to all of it.

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[421] Robert Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks* ([Washington, n.p.], 1816), 1.
[422] Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Tallahassee, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), 35, and 6-33, *passim*. For a summary account, see also Nicholas Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart: How Enlightened Americans Invented Racial Segregation* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 247-280.
[423] William Lloyd Garrison, "Declaration," 198.
[424] Brooke, "Cultures of Nationalism," 20; Walls, "The Evangelical Revival," 82.

In 1834, these matters were bound to make a major stir. While the AASS leadership was comprised of a diverse, interracial coalition of formalist and anti-formalist Protestants, its Executive Committee were lions of New York's formalist evangelical benevolent scene – not least among them philanthropist Lewis Tappan and his brother Arthur, who had been appointed President of the AASS.[425] Thus, when the AASS scheduled its first anniversary meeting in Chatham Street Chapel on Tuesday of Anniversary Week – one day before the New York Colonization Society, a major auxiliary of the ACS, would meet in the same space – followed by no fewer than *three* tumultuous impromptu meetings on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, there was simply no ignoring their presence. During that most symbolically important week of formalist evangelical celebration and self-representation, the AASS made a transparent attempt to align abolitionism with the other major organizations of national evangelical mass culture, and in the process to expose the unchristian racism latent in evangelical support of the ACS.

At one level, their effort failed. The American Colonization Society continued in its activities for decades after 1834. However, the disruption that the AASS orchestrated revealed a massive fissure in the imagined national millennial unity among formalist evangelicals. In turn, the presence of this fissure articulated a deep-seated millennial malaise in formalist evangelical self-consciousness, with long-lasting consequences. After Anniversary Week 1834, national millennial prospects were now *historically contestable* among benevolent formalists – rendering them as much a problem to be assessed as a promise to be anticipated.

[425] Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan*, 107-111.

Founding the American Colonization Society

In order to adequately comprehend the impact of the exposure in 1834 of the latent disruption in millennial consensus, it is necessary consider the ideological origins of the American Colonization Society, focusing on how it came to enter into the collective aspirational consciousness of white formalist evangelicals, as well as the reasons why it was vigorously resisted from the first by black evangelicals.[426] Enumerating the origin story of the ACS is no easy task.[427] As Charles Fenton Mercer, one of the society's principal instigators admitted in 1818 that "the history of its origin is not a little curious," and archival research since then has borne his judgment out.[428] Avoiding as much as possible the thorny intricacies of the story, what is important to know is that the ACS was called into existence by two very different men, Charles Fenton Mercer and Robert Finley, who brought two distinct ideological valences to the work.

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[426] There are interpretative challenges latent in using the term "black evangelical," given the racialized freight that *may* be ineluctably present in the infrastructure of American evangelicalism in the period under consideration. Part of the work of the current project is an attempt to get clearer on this question by teasing out some aspects of the racialization and nationalization of evangelical self-consciousness, made visible in the institutional and eschatological frameworks of evangelical benevolence between 1815 and 1834. That said, I take my cues in using the term from Albert J. Raboteau, "The Black Experience in American Evangelicalism: The Meaning of Slavery," in *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. Timothy Earl Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York: Routledge, 1997), 90-106, and Eddie S. Glaude, *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 19-62.

[427] Since the 1920s, scholars have debated about the ideological origins and outworkings of the ACS, most specifically whether the society aided or impeded the cause of antislavery efforts, intentionally or otherwise. Implicit in this debate is the question of whether the pro-slavery or slavery-agnostic southern legislators or the gradualist anti-slavery northern benevolent evangelicals held more sway in the direction of the organization. See Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar* Solution, 2, 175n2-4, and 1-56, *passim*. Helpful additional works that offer synthetic perspective on the origins of the ACS include Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 160-171; Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500–2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 185-208; Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart,* 247-280.

[428] Douglas R. Egerton, "'Its Origin Is Not a Little Curious': A New Look at the American Colonization Society," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 4 (1985): 478.

Late in 1815, Mercer, the thirty-eight-year-old leader of the Federalists in the Virginia House of Delegates, was growing concerned about the condition of the increasing number of free black people in the upper South. To his delight, the economy was showing early signs of modernization, changing from a strictly agrarian slave-driven system to a system that incorporated manufacturing, industry, and commerce based upon free labor.[429] However, modernization presented a massive cultural problem, given that "the opiate of instruction and optimism would not work on ex-slaves."[430] A modernized economy required some degree of ascent up the social ladder, a demand which he believed put African-Americans at a great disadvantage, given the natural antipathy that would emerge between black and white members of the working class. This was an antipathy that African-Americans could not overcome, due to their natural inferiority to white people. "The only remedy," writes Eric Burin, "was to send them to Africa. There, black colonists would destroy the slave trade, Christianize 'heathens,' and establish commercial relations with the [newly] slave-free South."[431] When he discovered that, in 1800, none less than Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe had quietly explored (though never implemented) a colonization solution for slaves convicted of serious crimes, the wind of destiny filled his sails.[432] Throughout the spring and summer of 1816, after the session ended in the Virginia House, Mercer traveled for several months between Richmond and upstate New York, visiting friends and enthusiastically evangelizing for a colonization initiative as the solution for the problems raised by African-American social immobility within a racist industrializing

[429] Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 13.
[430] Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 13
[431] Ibid.
[432] Egerton, "Origin," 466-467.

economy.[433] Throughout, Mercer remained entirely agnostic on the question of the eventual abolition of slavery, an institution which he personally claimed to dislike. Quite apart from that dislike, however, he advocated for removal via colonization as a pragmatic solution to an inevitable problem of conflict within the emerging working class.[434]

Meanwhile in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, Rev. Robert Finley, a Princeton-trained Presbyterian minister with a longstanding antipathy to slavery and its discontents – as he perceived them – was also beginning to think about colonization.[435] Tutored at Princeton by the relatively racially progressive Samuel Stanhope Smith, he had been pastoring for more than a decade when, in mid-1816 – after a dramatic year-long season of revival in his parish – he began to talk about a "noble and benevolent scheme" that he had in his mind "in behalf of the free people of color in the United States."[436] "The state of the *free blacks* has very much occupied my mind," he wrote to one John P. Mumford:

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[433] Ibid., 469-470.

[434] Ibid., 471. Egerton offers an interesting if not quite convincing account of Mercer's disposition, locating it *outside* of racism on the grounds that Mercer had a similarly low opinion of lower-class whites as well – the difference being that lower-class whites could be educated in public schools and thereby possibly transcend their station. It is not clear to me how Mercer's parallel disgust for poor white *and* poor black people necessarily eliminates racism as one of his motivations for colonization. His ostensible pragmatism about the issue may of course have been masking a deeper blindness.

[435] Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*, 264.

[436] Isaac Van Arsdale Brown, *Memoirs of the Rev. Robert Finley* (New Brunswick, NJ: Terhune & Letson, 1819), 70-75. Douglas Egerton argues that Finley all but *must have* heard about the colonization scheme from Charles Fenton Mercer during his travels in 1816. While Egerton certainly demonstrates that Mercer had a significant contemporaneous role in the founding of the ACS, I am not as convinced as he that Finley's ideas were as derivative as Egerton suggests. After all, Finley's role in the founding gatherings of the ACS, both as an administrative presence and a rhetorical voice is unquestionable. One Washington, D.C. based correspondent of the editor of his memoirs, Rev. Isaac Van Arsdale Brown, describes Finley as being the "sole mover and promoter" of the ACS, going on to insist that it would be a "great injustice" if there was not a town in Liberia named after Finley. Another contemporaneous commentator offers a similar assessment. See Brown, *Memoirs*, 82. It seems to me that some part of what is at stake for Egerton is to give an account of the colonization project that attenuates the influence of northern Protestant benevolence, rendering Finley's benevolent impulses as, in the main, religious window-dressing upon what was fundamentally an economic problem. This seems very unlikely, given

"Their number increases greatly and their wretchedness too as appears to me. Every thing connected with their condition, including their colour, is against them; nor is there much prospect that their state can ever be greatly ameliorated, while they shall continue among us. Could not the rich and benevolent devise means to form a *colony* on some part of *Africa*…which might gradually induce many free blacks to go and settle…We should be cleared of them[,] we should send to Africa a population partially civilized and Christianized for its benefit[, and] our blacks themselves would be put in a better situation."[437]

The "better situation" to which Finley referred was two-fold: in the short term an improvement of the state of free African-Americans, and in the long-term the end of slavery itself. He had concluded by the autumn of 1816 that, as Nicholas Guyatt put it, "colonization offered the best prospect of delivering…the free black population from 'degradation' and of expediting the abolition of slavery in the South."[438] Finley's passion for colonization was "grounded in antislavery convictions…initially directed at the social consequences of emancipation."[439]

According to his biographer, writing in 1819, Finley's local interlocutors made him feel like the proverbial prophet without honor in his hometown, allowing that his colonization plan was "benevolent and noble," but also deeming it "visionary and impracticable."[440] Determined to circumvent these criticisms and move the plan forward, he developed it into a formal proposal,

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the fact that still other representatives of formalist evangelical benevolence, notably Samuel J. Mills, were beginning to correspond about colonization activities in this period and even prior to it. See for example Mills' correspondence on the subject with Paul Cuffe, the influential merchant who explored the possibility of establishing a black settler colony in Africa, dating back to at least 1814. See Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 183, 186, 413n45, 413n60.

[437] Robert Finley, "To John P. Mumford," in *Memoirs of the Rev. Robert Finley*, ed. Isaac Van Arsdale Brown (New Brunswick, NJ: Terhune & Letson, 1819), 77. Egerton contests the date of this letter, which is no longer extant in its autograph. Again, I am not entirely convinced by his argument, not least because in his 1857 *Biography of the Rev. Robert Finley* (Philadelphia: J.W. Moore, 1857), 99, Brown specifically notes the date, which had been misprinted in Archibald Alexander, *A History of Colonization on the Western Coast of Africa* (Philadelphia, PA: W.S. Martien, 1846). Brown corrects Alexander's mistake "from the original, in my possession."

[438] Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*, 264. Colonization was not a *new* idea – it had been being discussed for decades. However, in 1816, it was becoming an idea that had come of age in white American national consciousness.

[439] Ibid.

[440] Brown, *Memoirs*, 78.

"Thoughts On The Colonization of Free Blacks," and, in December of that year, took it to Washington, D.C. in hopes of convincing a group of people to support and fund the initiative.[441] Without any delay or warning, Finley knocked on the front door of Samuel Harrison Smith, publisher of Washington's *National Intelligencer*, invited himself in with his heavy traveling boots on, and requested that Smith reprint his colonization plan in the newspaper.[442] The stunned Smith obliged, and in a matter of days Finley's scheme was out in public.

"What shall we do with the free people of color?" Finley asked, immediately drawing the discursive boundary lines around himself and his benevolent white audience. "The desire to make them happy has often been felt, but the difficulty of devising and accomplishing an efficient plan has hitherto appeared too great for humanity itself to accomplish."[443] And why were free people of color unhappy? Because of the bad habits that slavery instilled. "It can scarcely be doubted that slavery has an injurious effect on the morals and habits…It insensibly induces a habit of indolence [and] dissipation."[444] This was a big problem, Finley thought, for three reasons. First, it was a problem for free black people, whose capacity for "self-government" had been so damaged by years of slavery that they had become, by and large, indolent and dissipated. Second, it was a problem for enslaved people. The damage that slavery had done to the capacity of black people for "self-government" had made it clear that "emancipation" was "unsafe" – freeing the enslaved posed too great a threat to society to be a viable option, particularly given how threatening the "degraded situation" of those already freed. Third, it was a problem for white people. If slavery were ever to be abolished, the effect of the very presence of "[free] people of color remain[ing] among us…will be unfavorable" to white

[441] Robert Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks* ([Washington, n.p.], 1816).
[442] Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*, 266.
[443] Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, 1.
[444] Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, 5.

people's capacity to take responsibility for themselves, making it hard for white people to embrace the proper structures of moral social order.[445]

What then was to be done? Finley's answer was simple, addressing all of the problematic issues he had enumerated. "Remove them. … That [people of African descent] are capable of improvement is not to be contradicted…but it is in vain that we believe them capable of improvement, or that we are convinced that they are equal to the task of governing themselves, unless this unhappy people are separated from their former masters."[446] If they remain in the United States, "they will be kept down, on the one side by prejudice, too deep rooted to be eradicated, on the other by recollection of former inferiority, and despair of ever assuming an equal standing in society."[447] They must leave, being sent "by themselves [to] some climate congenial with their color and constitutions…the hope of place and power will soon create the feeling that they are men."[448] This "literary cannonball of racist ideas," as Ibram Kendi has deftly diagnosed it, formed the substance of Finley's plan.[449] "Let no time be lost!" he appealed. "Let a colony…be formed on the coast of Africa, and let laws be passed permitting the emancipation of slaves on condition that they shall be colonized. By this means the evil of slavery will be diminished, and in a way so gradual as to prepare the whites for the happy and progressive change."[450]

Having disseminated his plan wide across the nation's capital, Finley spent three weeks buttonholing as many power brokers as he could, including President James Madison, President-

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[445] Ibid.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, 5.
[448] Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, 5-6.
[449] Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), 145.
[450] Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, 5.

Elect James Monroe, Kentucky congressman Henry Clay, Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington (nephew of the first President), and lawyer and erstwhile lyricist Francis Scott Key, all with the assistance of his brother-in-law Elias Caldwell, the Secretary of the Supreme Court.[451] Concurrent with Finley's organizing, many of these men were likely also being exhorted on the benefits of colonization by Charles Fenton Mercer, who had, during that very month, proposed a formal resolution in the Virginia House of Delegates which appealed to the United States government to begin a colonization project.[452]

And they heartily responded. On December 21, 1816, all these men and dozens more like them gathered across party and sectional lines to organize the American Colonization Society.[453] Among the founders were counted committed slaveholding politicians like Virginia's John Randolph, ambivalent politicians who took slavery and its fruits to be an unpleasant social burden that their ancestors had left them to carry like Henry Clay, and benevolence-minded anti-slavery social reform advocates like Robert Finley himself and Samuel J. Mills – the ubiquitous formalist evangelical networker for benevolence who had "accidentally" heard about what was going on and rushed to Washington to join in.[454] Notwithstanding for a moment the fact that all present were empowered white men, there was a remarkable ideological diversity in the room. What held the room together? The single point of unity that formed their shared sense of mission was a shared desire, as laid out in the ACS Constitution, to "*promote and execute a plan to colonizing (with their consent) the free people of color, residing in our country, in Africa, or*

[451] Brown, *Biography of the Rev. Robert* Finley, 103-120; Guyatt, *Bind Us Apart*, 265-267; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 162-164.
[452] Egerton, "Origin," 475.
[453] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 165.
[454] Gardiner Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 113; Johnson, *African-American Religions*, 185.

such other place as Congress shall deem expedient."[455] All present had simply come to see the "physical separation" of people of African descent from the United States "as a prerequisite for a successful society after slavery" – whenever that should be.[456] It was a minimal code. Each could have his own reasons for adhering to it, whether a "benevolent" desire to empower African people who had been caught up in an evil transatlantic slave system to have a chance to flourish in their "native" culture, a naked fear of the chaos and danger that morally "degraded" former slaves would wreak on their culture as it industrialized, or some other reason entirely.

But where did emancipation fit? Finley had made it clear in his initial manifesto that enabling slaveholders to make plans for emancipation was close to the heart of the matter for him. Colonization in his view was a plan, as Eric Burin acerbically assesses it, "to rid the United States of both slavery *and* black people."[457] Despite Finley's passion, the founders of the ACS decided the organization would be officially agnostic on the questions of whether and how chattel slavery should come to an end in the United States. The prevailing opinion in the room on December 21 was that they should avoid the issue, which Henry Clay, himself antislavery *and* a holder of more than fifty slaves, identified as a "delicate question."[458] Finley conceded, and the ACS was born, to facilitate nothing more than the (consensual) removal of free and manumitted

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[455] American Colonization Society, *The First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States : And the Proceedings of the Society at Their Annual Meeting in the City of Washington, on the First Day of January, 1818.* (Washington, D.C.: D. Rapine, 1818), 3; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 263-264.
[456] Guyatt*, Bind Us Apart*, 268.
[457] Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 1. Emphasis mine.
[458] Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 14; American Colonization Society, *The Second Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Davis and Force, 1819), 8-9; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 264.

African-American people from the United States. Only this visionary expression of a white national American future could tie the room together.[459]

What then does all this reveal to us about the contours of formalist evangelical benevolence as understood by the likes of Robert Finley or Samuel Mills? Three points are significant to note. The first is that of the easy ideological fellowship that benevolent evangelical visions could share with open racism in this period. As Sylvester Johnson puts it, both Finley and Mills were "White supremacists who held at best a sympathetic view of Blacks, regarding them as inferiors who required the paternal guidance and leadership of the White race."[460] In this sense, their attitudes were entirely consonant with every other white man in the room at the ACS founding, slaveholder, slaveocrat, and gradual abolitionist alike. "What shall *we* do with the free people of color?," Finley asked his fellow white people at the opening of his "Thoughts on Colonization." Colonization was very clearly an elite white strategy, designed for dealing with the problem presented to white people by African-American people who were not *capable* of addressing it themselves.

The second point to observe is that, methodologically, Finley established the ACS with his entire attention fixed upon maintaining equilibrium between the poles of national unity and national Christianization – between the conservative impulse to shore up and stabilize circumstances as they presently were and the transformational impulse to see change come in the direction of righteousness in the republic. When cleaving to the common goal of the American

[459] James H. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 153-154.
[460] Johnson, *African-American Religions*, 185.

Colonization Society with those who were defenders of slavery, Finley certainly did not give up his own desire for gradual abolition of the institution he considered a "great…evil" and a manifestation of "satan's kingdom."[461] However, he framed his approach to addressing the problem in a way that would be most palatable, almost as a therapeutic enterprise. Under the sign of a massive, glacially slow colonization project, "the evil of slavery" would be gradually "diminished," incrementally returning African-Americans to not just the rights but the habits and instincts of their full humanity, while at the same time "prepar[ing] the whites for the…progressive change."[462] In other words, there would be no disruptions – never any shocks to the system. Furthermore, he was also willing, when push came to shove, to keep his desire for even that modest level of emancipatory practice out of the official mandate of the ACS Constitution. ACS liberators, writes Eric Burin, saw themselves "not as radical visionaries but as enlightened moderates," considering their proposals to be "cautious trials in emancipatory experimentalism."[463] All this was in the name of national unity among white elites, *in order that* national righteousness could be achieved at a later time. The notion of a broad-scale immediate emancipation, was, in Finley's comforting language, "unsafe" for the United States, a circumstance which would cast the nation into a melee of threat, violence, and war.[464] Finley was content for ACS manumission and colonization programs to provide a stabilizing alternative to this, even if they also ended up strengthening the spine of the chattel slave system, as John

[461] Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, 8.
[462] Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, 4-5.
[463] Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 35.
[464] Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, 5.

Randolph had predicted they would.[465] If a temporary strengthening of the slave system was necessary in order to both maintain national stability *and* continue to let colonization achieve its hoped-for effects, then so be it.

The third significant point to note is that Finley and his cohorts situated their work in the same framework of millennial anticipation that so inspired their colleagues in the other societies of formalist evangelical benevolence. In a clear reference to the opening of the ABS's 1816 "Address To The People Of The United States," Finley began the conclusion to his "Thoughts on Colonization" with the declaration that "the period we live in is big with great events…It is pregnant with greater still."[466] Thus Finley deliberately aimed to align the ACS with the American Bible Society and the rising tide of benevolent activity that it represented, heralding the emergence of the ACS as part of a God-ordained epochal shift in eschatological theopolitics. He went on:

> "America is blessed with every blessing, civil and religious…Nor shall Africa be forgotten. Her bosom begins to warm with hope, and her heart to beat with expectation and desire. Toward this land of liberty she turns her eyes, and to the representatives of this great and free people, she stretches forth her hands, panting for the return of her absent sons and daughters."[467]

In this passage which is as instructive as it is rhetorically strange, Finley speaks of the moment he and his readers inhabit as a pregnant woman, about to give birth to a "great event" that heralded the return of Africa's sons and daughters. He speaks also of Africa as a woman, panting with desire for those children to return, and "stretching forth her hands" to receive them. This image is a reference to Psalm 68:31 – "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon

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[465] Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 14, 45.
[466] Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, 8. By contrast, as seen above, the ABS "Address" opened with the lines "Every person of observation has remarked that the times are pregnant with great events."
[467] Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, 8.

stretch out her hands unto God" – an ur-prooftext used by various interpretive interests to bolster claims about the special future status of African people in salvation history.[468] However, in Finley's reading, Africa is not stretching her hands to God, but *to the United States* – "this land of liberty" and "the representatives of this great and free people" – *which will instrumentally enable the fulfillment of the eschatological prophecy*. In other words, Finley reads the ACS as nothing less than a divinely appointed instrument which will, through its development of the technical infrastructure of manumission and colonization, enable the United States to act as God's proxy – literally managing the entrance of African people into their destined role in the drama of the evangelization of the world. Here then we see another archetypal example of the managerial culture of formalist evangelical benevolence, which twinned elite-run national infrastructures with the *possibilities* of millennial anticipation. In this modern age, pregnant with great events, the ACS was ushering Africa into a new, Christianized world.

Samuel J. Mills ruminated often on the same scripture, assuring himself in his work for the ACS by assigning it a similar eschatological interpretation. On November 5, 1817, less than a year after the establishment of the ACS, Mills was officially appointed as agent of the ACS Board of Managers (along with his chosen companion Ebenezer Burgess) to go and make inquiries about the possibility of establishing a colony for the societies' purposes either north or south of Sierra Leone.[469] Mills was well equipped for the task, as for several years prior, he had kept up a friendly, professional correspondence with Paul Cuffe, the pioneering African-

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[468] Psalm 68:31, KJV. On African-American usage of these passages, see Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 37-56; Christopher Z. Hobson, *The Mount of Vision: African American Prophetic Tradition, 1800-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Patrick Rael, "Black Theodicy: African Americans and Nationalism in the Antebellum North," *The North Star* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 1–24; Timothy E. Fulop, "'The Future Golden Day of the Race': Millennialism and Black Americans in the Nadir, 1877–1901," *Harvard Theological Review* 84, no. 1 (January 1991): 75–99.

[469] American Colonization Society, *First Annual* Report, 19-23.

American merchant and sea captain who had become well-known by 1816 for his successful early explorations of a settler colonial project relocating African-Americans to Sierra Leone.[470] Upon the foundation of the ACS, Mills received an encouraging letter from Cuffe, which enclosed contact information for James Forten and Peter Williams, important African-American leaders in Philadelphia and New York, with whom Cuffe advised him and Finley to work as they sought to develop the ACS project.[471] "The Colourd Peoppelation of these large Cities Would be more awakened" to the colonization notion by instruction from them than "from…a stranger," he admonished.[472] It would prove to be good advice, which Finley would try to take up, but which Mills did not live to follow. On November 15, 1817, he set sail for Sierra Leone via London, exploring potential sites for the colony between March 12 and June 15, 1818, when he died at sea, aged thirty-five, after a brief illness.

Mills wrote several letters and diary entries in conjunction with this trip in which the anticipatory eschatological framework of his labors often arose, signaled in the salvation-historical shibboleth of Psalm 68:31.[473] On July 30, 1817, when trying to sell Ebenezer Burgess on traveling with him to Sierra Leone, he wrote:

"My brother, can we engage in a nobler effort? We go to make freemen of slaves. We go to lay the foundation of a free and independent empire on the coast of poor, degraded Africa…if the plan proposed succeeds, it will ultimately be the means of exterminating slavery in our country. It will eventually redeem and emancipate a million and a half of wretched men. It will transfer to the coast of Africa the blessings of religion and civilization; and Ethiopia will soon stretch out hands unto God."[474]

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[470] Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 183, 186-190.
[471] Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, 189.
[472] Paul Cuffe to Samuel J. Mills, January 6, 1817, cited in Winch, *A Gentleman of* Color, 189.

[473] Albert Raboteau argues that the two biblical tropes most significant to the nineteenth century conceptions of black destiny as well as attempts to account for black suffering are the Exodus narrative and Psalm 68:31. See Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*, 37-56.
[474] Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 117.

Here in miniature is Mills' formalist evangelical theology of benevolent enterprise. The labors were to be personally liberative and politically far-sighted. His desire was to tear down institutions that produced evil and replace them with institutions that produced Christianization. The net effect of this liberative work, as he saw it, would not simply be physical emancipation but spiritual worship, based upon civilizational improvement. The promised stretching out of the hands of "Ethiopia" would emerge as a possibility from good management of sanctifying institutions.

On February 26, 1818, on board the ship *Mary* a few miles off the coast of Spain, Mills wrote to his sister the last letter he would ever compose. "Whether I am to live or die while engaged in this mission, God only knows," he confided, "but one thing we know, and in this we rejoice, Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God. The time will come when the barbarous tribes of Africa shall worship Jesus as King in Zion. The time will come, when her children, now under oppression, and in bondage, shall become the freemen of the Lord."[475] His dual invocation of imagery commonly used to describe the conditions of political enslavement in the United States to describe the condition of spiritual bondage in the absence of the worship of Jesus as King is again illustrative of the larger eschatological picture that Mills beheld when he considered his benevolent work. The benevolent political work of manumission and colonization to which Mills was committed through his work with the ACS – the removal of "Africa's children" from bondage into colonial freedom – was always already spiritual work which would enable spiritual liberation for all the "barbarous tribes" as yet unchristianized. And, when the work was done, the worship of God would break out as "Ethiopia" stretched forth her hands, taking her place on the map of Christendom. Mills took pains to underscore the fact that he did

[475] Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 132-133.

not expect this work to happen in a snap, by some sort of divine intervention. "I do not intend to express my entire confidence that precisely the measures contemplated will be succeeded at once," he wrote.[476] He knew it would be hard work. But, he also *knew* that the work would not be in vain: "I did not engage in it…before I felt a full conviction that the contemplated measures would be approved of God…This I believe, that the agitation [for colonization] will eventuate in the most happy results."[477] This was a theopolitical project of God's initiative, and God would see it through to its eschatological conclusion. What was required of him and his brethren in the ACS was to do the work and, as the work took hold, watch for signs of the anticipated millennial dawn.

A month later, on March 22, a Sabbath day just weeks before he died, he prophesied as much in his diary as he observed the coastline of Sierra Leone, reflecting on a church in view that the formerly enslaved colonists had built, under British colonial administration. "The altars on these mountains, which the natives had dedicated to devils, are falling before the temples of the living God, like the image of Dagon before the Ark," he rejoiced. "The time *is coming* when the dwellers in these vales and on these mountains will sing Hosannas to the Son of David. Distant tribes will learn their song. 'Ethiopia shall stretch forth the hand unto God and worship.'"[478] This confluence of political and spiritual power, he believed, was how Habakkuk's dream would be fulfilled – the earth would be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea. In this sense, benevolent millennial work, as Mills understood it, trafficked exclusively in the art of the possible. Millennial transformations were gradual, not

[476] Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 133.
[477] Ibid.
[478] Spring, *Memoir of Samuel John Mills*, 140.

disruptive, deriving from a progressive historicity in which eschatological conditions were founded upon, and could be anticipated among, the visible characteristics of the present.[479]

In the years that followed, such eschatological characterizations became and remained a primary way that the formalist evangelical votaries spoke of the work of the ACS. As Nicholas Guyatt observes, they saw God as its architect and the unstoppable momentum of "the majestic river" of Providence behind it. All that was necessary was that its managers properly "direct the current."[480] In spite of its "curious" origins, its unusually narrowly-described mission, and the ideologically diverse coalition of people who supported it, such folk intended for ACS to be seen a part and parcel of the formalist evangelical national organizations that constituted the Benevolent Empire.[481] As Alex Lovit writes, the ACS came to be understood as part of the "grand benevolent scheme, benefitting multiple groups and leading the world closer to a millennial ideal of universal Christianity, prosperity, and democracy…[by establishing] a segregated globe of racially homogenous societies, all converging toward millennial perfection."[482]

Eschatological Themes in African-American Resistance To The ACS

The other critical component to grasping the ideological foundations of the ACS, in order to shed light on the disruption in formalist evangelical benevolent self-consciousness that took place at Anniversary Week in 1834, is a consideration of the upswell of resistance to its proposals from African-American evangelicals in the northeast. As Manisha Sinha has rightly

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[479] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 121-123.
[480] Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States,* 187, 185, and 183-194, *passim.*
[481] Young, *Bearing Witness Against Sin*, 75; Alex Lovit, "'The Bounds of Habitation': The Geography of the American Colonization Society, 1816-1860" (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2011), 30-31.
[482] Lovit, "Bounds of Habitation," 60, 10.

observed, while religious revivals and (majority white) reform movements in the antebellum period have often been credited for their role in the cultivation of the immediate abolition movement, the black roots of that movement, first in mindset and then in tactics, have been all too often overlooked by historians.[483] It was precisely in resistance to the proposals of the ACS that African-Americans, first in Philadelphia in 1817 and then beyond, began to come together in broad solidarity and prophetic clarity around an unremitting demand for equal rights as Americans and immediate abolition of slavery.[484] It was this energy that the AASS borrowed in order to articulate their agenda in 1833 and present it in such dramatic fashion at Anniversary Week in 1834.

There is a substantial and ever-growing literature on black abolitionism, a review of which is beyond the scope of this study.[485] For my purposes, I want to consider three fairly well-known episodes from the story of black abolitionism between 1817 and 1834, examining the ways in which they worked to critique not simply colonization as such, but more precisely the ideological posture of formalist evangelical benevolence that sought to incorporate colonization into an idealized vision of the American national future.

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[483] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 195. While the trend is changing in recent years, notable earlier exceptions include Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) and Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[484] Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 22-26; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 196-214; Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 203; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 237-240. Each of these studies depend in different ways on the pioneering work by Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*.

[485] The best starting point is Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, as well as Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stauffer, *Prophets Of Protest: Reconsidering The History Of American Abolitionism* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

ACS Benevolence in Philadelphia, 1817

In January of 1817, as the news circulated about the formation of a national colonization society by powerful white men, many of whom were intimately connected to the slaveocracy, many free people of color began to express their deep consternation.[486] In Philadelphia, as James Forten, a wealthy sail manufacturer and influential leader in the city's black community put it in a letter to Paul Cuffe, "the People of Colour here was very much fritened."[487] The presenting reason for their fear was the possibility that the ostensibly benevolent intentions of the ACS were actually a stalking horse for forced removal of free black people from the United States. While the ACS Constitution affirmed a provision that colonization would only happen "with…consent" it is easy to understand the concern. After all, in his widely circulated "Thoughts on Colonization," Robert Finley had made it clear that the premise of his colonization program was that he had no confidence in the capacity of free black people for either self-government – they had been too "degraded" by slavery – or self-improvement in a society so governed by white supremacist public sentiment. Furthermore, he had affirmed that a general emancipation would be "unsafe" for the sustainability of American public life. To the ACS, then, free black people had become a dangerous liability to the American future. Emigration was, in its view, the *only* available answer to this national predicament, and the *only* basis on which the gradual abolition of slavery was imaginable.

During the second or third week of January, about three thousand African-American Philadelphians assembled at Richard Allen's Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, to express their disgusted rejection of this scheme. If the intentions of the Managers of the ACS were so benevolent, such outpouring of charity intending the "happiness [of] free people of

[486] Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 189-190.
[487] James Forten to Paul Cuffe, January 25, 1817, cited in Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 190.

color," why did they get the distinct impression that the society saw free black people as a problem to be addressed by whites?[488] It was a dramatic affair. James Forten, who had been tapped to chair the meeting, asked the overflowing crowd to take a vote expressing their opinion on the ACS's colonization scheme. There were none in favor of it, and the expression of the No vote was so loud, Forten recalled, "as it would bring down the walls of the building."[489] Significantly, the vote was not against schemes of colonization *in se*. In fact, several of the most prominent leaders in Philadelphia's African-American community, among them the renowned Paul Cuffe and James Forten himself, had for years been actively envisioning a broad-scale colonization option for free black people who wished to emigrate.[490] Rather, the vote was against the racism inherent in the ACS proposal, characterizing free Africans as fundamentally degraded – "dangerous and useless," in the reported words of Henry Clay at the first ACS Meeting – unequal to the task of making good governing decisions concerning their own future.[491] Where was the benevolence in this? People of African descent, whether free or enslaved, were not "an inherent liability to the White republic," the meeting resolved, but were rather, in Forten's words, "the first successful cultivators of America…entitled to participate in the blessings of her luxuriant soil."[492] In this affirmation of black dignity alongside the fact of ineradicable black integration into *American* identity writ large, black Philadelphia refused the ACS's offer of a program of benevolent colonization, due to its paternalistic racism. In their view, the ACS was little more than a "deportation society" under another name, a structure of commodification and

[488] Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, 1 and *passim*.
[489] Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 238.
[490] Johnson, *African-American Religions*, 186-187, and 159-208 *passim*; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 161-163; Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 177-206.
[491] Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 238.
[492] Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 191; Johnson, *African-American Religions*, 186.

dehumanization not too far removed from that of the slave system itself.[493] Solidarity with enslaved people, and the affirmation of the equal humanity of all people of African descent, was more important than any perceived advantage of colonization under the sign of white supremacy. "We never will separate ourselves voluntarily from the slave population of this country," the meeting resolved, again in Forten's words. "They are our brethren…and we feel that there is more virtue in suffering privations with them, than fancied advantages for a season."[494] On the idealized grounds of Christian morality, black Philadelphia in 1817 rebuked and rejected the self-consciously benevolent ACS as a racist venture that could not comprehend the equality, dignity, and self-determination of black people.

Having heard that the people of Philadelphia were "considerably alarmed by the proposed plan of colonization…suspecting that some purpose injurious to their class of people was hidden under it," Robert Finley paid a visit to meet with Forten, along with several other leaders who had been tasked by the meeting at Mother Bethel to stay abreast of the intentions of the ACS.[495] According to his biographer, friend, and fellow colonizationist Presbyterian, Isaac Van Arsdale Brown, Finley spoke to the group of Philadelphian eminents for a hour, "endeavouring to remove their fears and prejudices, pointing them to the character of the gentlemen who advocated the scheme, and showing the advantages that would probably result from it."[496] While Brown reports that, after Finley's disquisition, Forten and the others "declared themselves fully satisfied…that the designs of the gentlemen who proposed and advocated the scheme were benevolent and good, and that the thing in itself was desirable," there is no evidence that this meeting changed anything. Indeed, the opposite seems the case.

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[493] Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 241.
[494] Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 191.
[495] Brown, *Biography of the Rev. Robert Finley*, 122; Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 192.
[496] Isaac Van Arsdale Brown, *Biography of Robert Finley*, 122.

When the ACS formed an auxiliary in Philadelphia in August 1817, consisting of only white people, more protests broke out. Forten and his associate Russell Parrott wrote a public address to the "most benevolent" white citizens of Philadelphia, making it clear that the ACS colonization scheme "will [not] be required by any circumstances, in our present or future condition, as long as we shall be permitted to share the protection of the excellent laws, and just government which now enjoy."[497] In the words of Forten's biographer Julie Winch, he had become convinced that the ACS was a "pernicious" and "contemptible" organization, not benevolent but rather white supremacist and pro-slavery at its essence, seeking to dislodge African-Americans from any place they had claimed within the national identity of the United States.[498] The only appropriate response to it, he concluded, was not reasoned progressive argument, but rather prophetic fire. Winch recounts the very instructive story of an 1824 encounter between Forten and a Mr. Cowles, "a young white New Englander…on his way to Washington for the ACS meeting." Cowles apparently sought to convince Forten of the benevolence of the ACS, but was met not with talk of plans and progress, but only with talk of interventionist "divine retribution for the sins of slavery and racial oppression."[499] Cowles reported Forten's conviction that:

"reasoning from the righteousness of God and from the manifest tendency of events he was brought to the conclusion that the time was approaching and…was already at the door, when the 250,000,000 who had for centuries been the oppressors of the remaining 600,000,000…would find the tables turned upon them and would expiate by their own sufferings those which they had inflicted on others."[500]

Here we see Forten adopting an imaginative rhetoric which we will see iterated again in African-American resistance to ACS benevolence, as well as in the rhetoric of the AASS in 1834.

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[497] Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 196.
[498] Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 197-198, and 197-206 *passim*.
[499] Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 202.
[500] Ibid.

Change is coming, no doubt, but it is not the kind of change that can be anticipated through the infrastructures of millennial progress. Instead, the change that is coming will emerge from the necessity of the righteousness of God, apocalyptically turning the tables on those who have profited from the institutionalization of sinful national systems. A better day will dawn – an atoning day – but it will not be through the typical formalist evangelical paradigm of stabilizing, elite-managed millennial improvement that Cowles the fresh-faced New England reformer would have espoused. In a manner precisely opposite to how Robert Finley had portrayed Africa stretching out its hands to the present-day United States, operating as God's deputy in the redemption of the world, Forten envisioned the dawning of a millennial day through divine interventions that would feel to Cowles like both unanticipated sociopolitical reversals and, at once, divine judgments. Here was a view of salvation history that problematized the comforts of progressive national theopolitical linearity. For his part, Cowles was "thoroughly upset," finding such doctrines "highly repugnant to [his] feelings."[501]

Forten's comments fall squarely in line with the providential eschatological imagination that some scholars have identified and denominated as a distinctly African-American millennialism in the antebellum period.[502] Rita Roberts points out that while "some northern blacks" especially before the founding of the Colonization Society, "believed that their country would introduce steps leading to the millennium," the emergent African-American millennial

[501] Ibid.

[502] Some relevant texts include Matthew Harper, "Emancipation and African-American Millennialism," in *Apocalypse and the Millennium in the American Civil War Era*, ed. Ben Wright and Zachary W. Dresser (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2013); Rita Roberts, *Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reform in Northern Black Thought, 1776-1863* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2011); Hobson, *The Mount of Vision*; Glaude, *Exodus!*; Rael, "Black Theodicy"; Timothy E. Fulop, "'The Future Golden Day of the Race'"; David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), the book which first awakened my mind to the potential of American religious history to plumb the depths of lived theological imagination.

consensus in the post-ACS years was that black people would be instrumental in the salvation of the nation and establishment of its eschatological righteousness, but not until God had *judged* the United States and destroyed the sin of slavery.[503] Matthew Harper has further observed that black millennialism sometimes "did not fit well into the categories of [nineteenth century] white eschatology." Neither optimistic nor linear, black millennial themes tended to be organized around a dialectic "mix of hope and sorrow" that was as attuned to divine judgment as earthly progress.[504] (This of course is the precise dynamic from which the American Bible Society departed in its inaugural rhetoric that we examined in Chapter One, setting the optimistic course for all the national benevolent organizations that followed in its pattern.) In this sense, Harper reads African-American millennialism as being more consonant with that of seventeenth-century New England Puritans than their nineteenth-century benevolent formalist descendants, because, tempered by their "firm belief in human depravity," early American Puritans, like black millennialists, knew that "God Himself, not human progress, would inaugurate a *literal* millennium with favor on his chosen people."[505]

Once again Oliver O'Donovan's differentiation between hope and anticipation as two distinct modes of imagining the future has analytic relevance. Anticipation "teases out a future that lurks within the present as a possibility," calling for reflection and action unto the "rational unfolding of imminent possibilities" and the managerial engineering of discernible futures.[506] Hope, on the other hand, summons those possessed of it to a bracing, existential immediacy, available only to those who have come to recognize – undone by faith, tragedy, or political circumstance – that history is in some sense not their own, well beyond their control in spite of

[503] Roberts, *Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reform*, 66-67, 78-81, 165-166.
[504] Harper, "Emancipation and African-American Millennialism," 159-160.
[505] Ibid.
[506] Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 122-123

the fact that they can envision its proper end. Unable "to suppose [either] that the next thing will follow from the last, *or* that what [is done] next does not matter," the person compelled by hope finds themselves "shockingly summoned from imaginative anticipations into practical readiness. In presenting [one] with the certainty of the world's *last end*, hope clears a space of freedom [to act]…[One] hopes for what [one] cannot anticipate, for deep changes in the world which can come about when the lion shall lie down with the lamb."[507] Such hope resists instrumentalization, and thus also resists despair. It operates in a manner akin to what Eddie Glaude has called "hope against hope," an eschatological imagination that functions as a "regulative ideal toward which [one can] aspire," quite apart from the illusion that one can *create* proper conditions for the millennial dawn. Emergent from an existential relation to the *ideals* of "that kingdom beyond history," the price of such hope was knowing what the end would *ultimately* be, without having the capacity to manage it.[508]

ACS Benevolence in Freedom's Journal, 1827

By the middle of the 1820s, colonization had become firmly ensconced as a darling cause of northern evangelical benevolence. While there were still divided perspectives among the ACS Managers with respect to questions of antislavery, falling largely along sectional lines, the ideological center of gravity was subtly moving north. In 1825, Ralph Randolph Gurley, a Presbyterian minister from Connecticut, became the Corresponding Secretary of the society. An excellent administrator, Gurley not only began to edit the monthly magazine of the ACS, the *African Repository*, he also implemented a plan for hiring "traveling agents" for the ACS who

[507] O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time*, 123.
[508] Glaude, *Exodus!*, 112.

would efficiently expand the reach and profile of the society.[509] Among other duties, they set up local auxiliaries, advocated for colonization with politicians, and talked pastors into preaching about colonization on July 4.[510] This was a master stroke. Not only did donations soar under Gurley's leadership, but more importantly, in co-opting the Independence Day sermon, he very obviously aligned the cause of the institution with the cause of the nation, under the banner of God's providential superintendence.[511] In 1825 alone, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, and the annual Convention of the Episcopal Church of Virginia – all bastions of formalist evangelical benevolence – chose to recommend that their churches should preach and fundraise on July 4 on behalf of the ACS.[512] In making this move, Gurley had ensured that the ACS was clearly understood to be in league with the other national organizations of God's moral government.[513]

In a rhetorically eloquent Independence Day sermon entitled "A Plea For Africa," Leonard Bacon, the well-known pastor of the First Church (Congregational) in New Haven, Connecticut, painted a portrait of Africa as a "*continent* of misery" populated by "a *race* degraded from the level of humanity."[514] The reason for this misery and degradation, Bacon declared, was the intra-African pursuit of the institution of slavery, which had reduced the continent to a place where "treachery and lust are unforbidden, where rapine and murder are unrestrained, and where all the horrors of a savage warfare are perpetual."[515] Furthermore, due to the long existence of "this horrible commerce in the blood of men…there are now descendents of

[509] Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 16, 23.
[510] Ibid, 16.
[511] Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States,* 186.
[512] Alexander, *A History of Colonization*, 236.
[513] Young, *Bearing Witness Against* Sin, 74-75.
[514] Leonard Bacon, *Plea for Africa : Delivered in New-Haven, July 4th, 1825* (New Haven : T. G. Woodward and Co., 1825), 14.
[515] Leonard Bacon, *Plea for Africa*, 10.

Africa in every quarter of the globe," including "nearly two millions of these beings…within our own borders," of whom the vast majority are slaves.[516] By Bacon's reckoning, the slave culture of Africa had – with some assistance from slave traders – brought to the United States people whose "intellect is a blank," whose "moral nature is blind," and whose "being is a wreck." The solution to all this, Bacon believed, was to cut off the problem at the source – "civilizing and Christianizing the African continent."[517]

> "Cover Africa with the institutions of civilized freedom, and fill it with the light and knowledge of religion, and the whole race is raised from its hopeless depths of degradation. And on the other hand, give freedom and intelligence and all the rights and honours of humanity to the exiled descendents of Africa, and you have completely provided for the salvation of the continent from which they sprung."[518]

In other words, the colonization program should be supported, so that the "exiled descendents of Africa" living in the United States could be restored to dignity by being trained for the glorious humanizing task of Christianizing and civilizing the continent from which they came, founding there a colony "in the principles of American freedom, and supported by American liberality."[519] "You can imagine," he urged his congregation, "how the light of Christian truth might be made to beam forth on the benighted Pagans…[as well as] how the negro, here despised and broken-spirited, would there stand up in the full majesty of manhood."[520]

This, Bacon exulted, was the glorious "privilege" before all who would choose to engage in the "scheme…of magnificent benevolence…The institutions of our age are a republic of benevolence."[521] The transition would happen gradually, of course, beginning with the abolition of slavery through an orderly process of manumission and expatriation sponsored by the ACS,

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[516] Leonard Bacon, *Plea for Africa*, 12.
[517] Leonard Bacon, *Plea for Africa*, 15.
[518] Ibid.
[519] Leonard Bacon, *Plea for Africa*, 20.
[520] Ibid.
[521] Leonard Bacon, *Plea for Africa*, 22.

"not by some sudden convulsion, demolishing the fabric of society, but by the tendencies of nature and the arrangements of Providence, slowly, yet surely accomplishing the happiness of man."[522] All that the ACS needed for this astonishing, albeit gradual, transformation to take place, was "the voice of public opinion…the contributions of the benevolent…and the prayers of the churches."[523]

I have described the content of Bacon's sermon at length so that we can understand the stakes of a second representative episode from the history of African-American abolitionist critique of colonization *qua* the ideology of benevolence: the 1827 conflict between the editors of *Freedom's Journal* and Samuel Miller. Founded in March of 1827, *Freedom's Journal*, the first newspaper run by African-Americans was edited by Rev. Samuel Cornish, a Presbyterian minister and John Russwurm, a graduate of Bowdoin College. They intended it to be a journal of black public discourse. *Freedom's Journal* existed, Cornish and Russwurm wrote in the first issue, to be a "medium of intercourse between our brethren" all over the United States, so that "an expression of *our* sentiments…may be offered to the publick."[524] The impact of the establishment of such an institution can hardly be overstated. It offered to African-Americans, as Eddie Glaude notes, "the possibility of a national community" made visible through discursive print.[525] It also, importantly, offered access to the discursive perspectives of the African-American community to a wider American audience. Issues of significance to African-American people would discussed among the authors *and*, by extension, considered by the entire "enlightened publick."[526] As Theodore Wright, the first black graduate of Princeton Theological

[522] Leonard Bacon, *Plea for Africa*, 17.
[523] Leonard Bacon, *Plea for Africa*, 21.
[524] Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm, "To Our Patrons," *Freedom's Journal*, March 16, 1827. Emphasis mine.
[525] Glaude, *Exodus!*, 59.
[526] Cornish and Russwurm, "To Our Patrons," *Freedom's Journal*.

Seminary would later recall, prior to *Freedom's Journal*, African-Americans "could not gain access to the public mind," because white newspapers, "secular or religious," would not print their opinions if they were controversial in any way.[527] Cornish and Russwurm intended to use their newspaper to do precisely this: "candidly discuss…plans which apparently are beneficial" in order that they may be "properly weighed; if worthy, receive our cordial approbation; if not, our marked disapprobation."[528] In this way, black public opinion would not merely be known but communicated with rhetorical force.

The work of the American Colonization Society was in the sights of the editors from the first, the principal "apparently beneficial…plan" demanding heretofore unpublished critical scrutiny by the African-American population it intended to serve. The colonization agenda cultivated what they saw as a profound pessimism in the white benevolent community concerning the potential of African-Americans "to become truly free, not in Africa but in the United States."[529] This pessimism, however well intended, was corrosive to black dignity and rooted in ignorance of the facts. Leaders who "we love and admire," they wrote, "have not hesitated to represent us disadvantageously, without becoming acquainted with the true state of things," and thus have "fallen into the current of popular feeling…actually living in the practice of prejudice while they abjure it in theory, and feel it not in their hearts."[530]

In this spirit, Cornish and Russwurm immediately launched a campaign to correct inaccuracies and confront smears contained within publicly printed sermons, speeches, and essays in favor of colonization. Their strategy was generally to reprint the offending section of

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[527] Theodore Wright, "Address of the Rev. Theodore S. Wright, before the Convention of the New-York State Anti-Slavery Sociaty...Held at Utica, Sept. 20," *Colored American*, October 14, 1837.
[528] Cornish and Russwurm, "To Our Patrons," *Freedom's Journal*.
[529] David E. Swift, "Black Presbyterian Attacks on Racism: Samuel Cornish, Theodore Wright and Their Contemporaries," *Journal of Presbyterian History (1962-1985)* 51, no. 4 (1973): 442-445.
[530] Cornish and Russwurm, "To Our Patrons," *Freedom's Journal*.

text, and then offer commentary on it. They were always direct in raising critical questions of colonizationist argument. In one of innumerable examples, they wrote against a Washington editor who "tells us that here [in the United States] we can never have free privileges. We do not believe it…the Lord reigneth. We are unwavering in our opinion that the time is coming (though it may be distant) in which our posterity will enjoy equal rights. The idea that the free [black] population of the North are more fitted to the climate of Africa than the whites is perfectly futile – acts evince the contrary."[531] Alongside intellectual ripostes, they often offered scathing rebuttal to personal attacks or obvious bigotry: "The Editor, in a badly written paragraph, commences by doubting whether the editorial department of this Journal is conducted by 'the free negroes of New-York' or [by a] 'busy white man.' We do not wonder that a mind trained to prejudice and accustomed to habits of oppression and cruelty, should be so contracted in its views."[532] This posture of demanding argumentative proof over the tides of "popular feeling" and refusing to ignore insults to dignity was, *in se*, a rebuttal of the commonly voiced colonizationist opinion that African-Americans, free or enslaved, had been so "degraded" by the white supremacist American slave culture that they were incapable of self-determination in the context of American democracy.

Such a vigorous approach was of course guaranteed to sometimes offend the more fragile among the benevolent. Enter the Rev. Dr. Samuel Miller, Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government at Princeton Theological Seminary. One of the founders of the seminary and a very influential teacher, Miller was sympathetic to the colonizationist position. According to James Moorhead, "although [in his early ministry] he spoke against slavery as an evil, he espoused the gradualist philosophy of emancipation and did not consider it a violation of his

[531] "Colonization Society," *Freedom's Journal*, June 8, 1827.
[532] Ibid.

principles when he later used slave labor in Princeton…as it was difficult to otherwise secure domestics."[533] Nonetheless, Miller was a subscriber to *Freedom's Journal*, in putative support of the "children of Africa throughout our country," and also, presumably, in the interest of having an inside look at free African-American discourse.[534] His look didn't last long.

Miller had read a *Journal* article in which Russwurm skewered colonizationists as being "zealous…in imposing upon the public the foolish idea that we are all longing to emigrate to their land of 'milk and honey' and a thousand other Munchausen stories too trifling and inconsistent to be repeated."[535] It was "high time," Russwurm held forth, for all to know "the truth of the matter – that we [African-Americans] are all, to a man, opposed, in every shape to the Colonization Society."[536] After five months of almost weekly denunciations of colonization in *Freedom's Journal*, this was the last straw for Miller. He decided to write to cancel his subscription, enclosing a letter by one "Wilberforce" – "an acquaintance" with whom Miller fully agreed – requesting publication.[537]

The Wilberforce letter is a model of precisely the kind of white benevolent condescension that incensed Cornish and Russwurm. "I could not conceive a better method of *checking* the progress of African rights," Wilberforce wrote, "than to attack in the name of these rights the American Colonization Society. The ignorant, coarse, bitter way in which he assails this best friend of black men, may…destroy itself…How can he speak thus of this society?"[538] Wilberforce went on to list, with not a hint of irony or self-questioning, all of the benevolent

[533] Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary*, 156.
[534] Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary*, 84.
[535] "To The Senior Editor -- No III," *Freedom's Journal*, August 17, 1827.
[536] Ibid.
[537] "Untitled (Concerning Samuel Miller and 'Wilberforce')," *Freedom's Journal*, September 21, 1827; Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary*, 84.
[538] "Wilberforce," "For the Freedom's Journal," *Freedom's Journal*, September 7, 1827. Emphasis mine.

values and plans of the ACS, involving the spiritual and moral uplift of Africa through the emigration of those free or manumitted Africans who wanted to go, having been wooed to the cause of global benevolence by their civilizing experience in the United States. "How sad," he scolded, "how shameful" for *Freedom's Journal* to pull down "what the wise and good are so laboriously, and alas so slowly, building up...*Save me* from my *friends*, and I will take care of my enemies."[539]

Samuel Cornish had only one response to this self-pitying, sanctimonious diatribe on the far-sighted yet unjustly maligned cause of colonization to which Wilberforce, Miller, and so many formalist benevolent evangelicals had cleaved in 1825 – that of black dignity and self-determination. This was for him the *sine qua non* of the African-American future, both politically *and* eschatologically. "That our people do not wish to be colonized in any country whatever, should be a sufficient reason against the *scheme*, if Liberia were even a paradise," he wrote, bluntly seeking to expose the paternalism of the ACS that structurally sought to keep African-Americans in a subalternate position while bemoaning their degraded state.[540] Progressive narratives of millennial improvement through colonization (like the one woven above by Leonard Bacon and amplified by the ACS) were but fantasies, because the vast majority of African-Americans did not *want* to play the role they were being assigned. In short, Cornish asserted, the representatives of the benevolent culture that Wilberforce and Miller espoused were not listening to the voices of those whose liberation they were trying to engineer. They were so wrapped up in establishing the instrumental means of colonization, achieving the millennial vision that they had dreamed up in 1817 as a solution to keep the white nation together, that they could not hear the voices warning them of the fundamental flaws in the plan –

[539] Ibid. Emphasis mine.
[540] Ibid.

indeed, as Miller showed, they were *offended* by those voices. "Nothing serves more, to *keep us* in our present degraded state," Russwurm reflected, "than the revolting pictures drawn by Colonization orators."[541] The consequences of this deafness would be dire, eschatological in scope, Cornish inveighed, quoting the prophet Hosea's prediction of desolation and terror for nations that abandon their covenant fidelity to the ways of God: "The utmost that will ever be effected by the [American Colonization] Society will be but 'sowing the wind, and reaping the whirlwind.'"[542] What was coming to the ACS, and the nation it represented, if it stayed this course of chattering white benevolence, was not millennial improvement but apocalyptic judgment.

David Walker, 1829

The textual apotheosis of the critique of colonization in the 1820s is undoubtedly David Walker's *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. While Walker's text has been widely analyzed in an abundance of contexts – in light of which fact I will forego much historical introduction – I want to offer my own brief reading of the *Appeal* because it so acutely and originally keeps track of American national identity in relationship to the ideology of formalist evangelical benevolence.

In a divergence from the colonization-critical approach of *Freedom's Journal*, Walker is not trying through his *Appeal* to demonstrate his own distinction in having risen about the "degradation" of slavery. Nor, *contra* Ibram Kendi, is he disparaging people of African descent in the United States when he writes that "we (coloured people of these United States) are the

[541] Ibid.
[542] Ibid. Cf. Hosea 8:7, KJV.

most degraded, wretched, and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began."[543] Nor, in some tension with the title of his work, is he speaking only to people of color in the United States. Instead, he is developing a rhetorical device by which to offer to all Americans a theopolitical metanarrative explication of the condition of their national present, which will in turn enable him to make visible the alternative futures of the United States to his readers. Clarity around these alternative futures is of great consequence to him, as a major (if penultimate) concern of Walker's *Appeal* is the preservation of the United States *as a Christian nation.*

Why, then, are "we coloured people" – notice he includes himself with the pronoun – so degraded as a group? The answer is simple: the "wretchedness and endless miseries of slavery" have been "reserved…in a phial" and, in this "enlightened and Christian nation," "poured out upon our fathers, ourselves, and our children by *Christian* Americans!...May God Almighty, who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, open your hearts to understand and believe the truth." There are just two groups, then, with whom Walker is concerned in his narration of the American present: "we coloured people" and "Christian Americans," who are known to the reader, either by implication or sometimes explicitly, as white. (He sometimes calls them "white Christians of America," or, when he's being very specific, "pretenders to Christianity."[544]) Both groups would claim Jesus Christ as Lord – a fact underscored by Walker's canny, quasi-liturgical invocation of the same in his "Preamble" – but they are nonetheless separated. Furthermore, both groups are internally undifferentiated. Walker is neither much concerned to distinguish between those

[543] David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 1; Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 165. Even when Walker distinguishes his own self-awareness from the self-awareness of "many of my brethren…ignorantly in league with slaveholders" (*Appeal,* 2), he does not separate himself from them, but rather remains close to them, seeking to shake them awake.

[544] See, for example, the prefatory note to Walker's Third Edition of the *Appeal*, on the page facing the "Preamble," as reproduced in Walker, *Appeal*.

"coloured people" who are enslaved versus those who are not, nor is he concerned to distinguish between those "white Christians of America" who hold slaves versus those who do not, who are anti-slavery versus pro-slavery, and so on. Walker presents a simple binary between the two groups.

How then are these groups separated in his present moment? By their currently different positions in the eschatological drama of redemption. The "Christian Americans" – the white people – have a "phial…of wretchedness and endless misery" which they are pouring out on "we coloured people." The clear point of reference for such a "phial" is Revelation 16, in which the seven vials of God's wrath are poured out upon the earth before the judgement of Babylon and the dawning of the millennium that precedes the end of the world. The thing that is awfully amiss, of course, is that in Walker's image, the white Christian Americans have taken the place of God's avenging angels, and the victims of their apocalyptic violence are "we coloured people." Once again, as in Robert Finley's image discussed above of "Ethiopia stretching out her hands" to the United States, the "Christian Americans" are standing in for God himself, (mis)using God's power for self-aggrandizement and racist advantage.

This concatenation of images on the *first* page of the *Appeal* is surely not coincidental. Walker is framing the problem of the American present in terms of eschatological nationalism – specifically grappling with the question of what makes a Christian nation Christian. In another striking example of this mindset, in his prefatory note, Walker refers explicitly and with bewilderment to the fact that the "Christian Americans" are "looking for the Millennial day" at the same time that they have degraded the "coloured people" in their country. It seems to him a radical contradiction of intentions, but nonetheless, that is the situation.

What is to be done? Walker has two main tranches of argument, one for each group. Among the people of African descent, "my afflicted, degraded, and slumbering brethren," he wants to "awaken…a spirit of inquiry and investigation respecting our miseries in this *Republican Land of Liberty!!!!*"[545] He wants black folks all over the United States not simply to personally transcend their afflictions and miseries – showing their *bona fides* as self-governing members of a white-supremacist society – but rather to go upstream of their miseries to critically investigate their sources, inquire as to *why* they continue to rain down, and ultimately insist, because of the ongoing redemptive activity of God, that they immediately cease, on pain of death.

The *Appeal* then goes on to model this inquiry into the four interconnected sources of black misery: slavery, ignorance, white-supremacist Christianity, and colonization. Walker develops a case in each chapter that each of these individual miseries is rooted in both the individual comportment of "the white Christians of America" and, by extension, the social structures around which they have built the United States. He names the white Christian origins of each of these sources with a ferocious clarity and an implacable, imprecatory rage, highlighted on the page with block capitals, italics, and strings of exclamation points. (We will return to this in a moment.) Having identified the four origins, Walker then extends his investigation into the miseries of "we colored people" by offering – in similarly bold terms – a premise for resistance rooted in fundamental relationship to a God who is at work in the world.

Resistance to slavery begins with insistence upon the human dignity of black people:

> "Are we MEN ! ! – I ask you, O my brethren! are we MEN? … Have we any other Master but Jesus Christ alone? Is he not their Master as well as ours? – What right then have *we* to obey and call any other Master, but Himself? … God will not suffer us, always to be oppressed. Our sufferings will come to an *end*, in spite of all the Americans this side of eternity."[546]

[545] Walker, *Appeal*, 2.
[546] Walker, *Appeal*, 16.

The force of resistance to slavery emerges not, in the first place, from a devaluing of white Christian dignity (though that does appear from time to time) but from a demand for self-evaluation that is aligned with proper worshipful conformity to the trajectory of the will of God in the world – choosing to live *now* in light of what *will be*.

Similarly, resistance to ignorance comes from insistence on working for higher and higher employment, in the recognition

> "of the immovable *fact*, that your full glory and happiness…shall never be fully consummated, but with the *entire emancipation of enslaved brethren all over the world*. … Do any of you dare say this never will be done? I assure you that God will accomplish it … you must go to work and prepare the way of the Lord."[547]

This resistance also finds its foundation not strictly in conformity to the ethical principles of theology, but rather in the duty and joy of participation in the things that God is doing and will do in the world.

Resistance to white-supremacist Christianity is rooted in obedience to the God of the Bible, rather than to the God narrated through the lens of subjugating racism. "Did not God make us all as seemed best to himself?" he declares. "What right, then, has one of us to despise one another, and treat him cruel, on account of his colour…Will the Lord suffer this people to go on much longer, taking his holy name in vain?"[548] God will call each to account.

And finally, resistance to colonization is rooted in awareness that, in God's ultimate justice, "we coloured people" have as much right to the land of the United States as any white person. "This country is as much ours as it is the whites, whether they will admit it now or not,

[547] Walker, *Appeal*, 30.
[548] Walker, *Appeal*, 43.

they will see it by and by…Do the colonizationists think to send us off without first being reconciled to us? … Does not vengeance belong to the Lord?"[549]

This, in simplified, stylized terms, is how Walker exhorts "we coloured people" to action – no matter what their social position. But what does have to say to the "white Christians of America"? In a sense, Walker's message to white Christians is as simple as it is direct: "O Americans! Americans! ! I call God – I call angels – I call men, to witness, that your DESTRUCTION *is at hand*, and will be speedily consummated unless you REPENT."[550] The great originary sin of white Christian America, as far as Walker is concerned, is the establishment of "the inhuman system of *slavery*…the source from which most of our miseries proceed."[551] White Christians must, immediately, dismantle that system, or else face certain and sure destruction. As Glaude notes, Walker is not making his *Appeal* on the grounds of "rational deliberation," but instead pours forth prophecies of divine reality and their concomitant imprecations, reflecting the convictions of his black evangelical Christianity about the way things *are* and the way things *will be*.[552] Directed toward white American Christians, that reality speaks of the need for immediate deconstruction of the national slave system.

Apart from a radical change in the circumstances of the national present, white Christian Americans are actively choosing their own destruction, as well as the destruction of the nation as they know it. White Christian America, with all of its attempts to technically manage the breaking of the millennial dawn, was actually only engineering its own destruction – playing God in the realm of anticipatory eschatology while living in "open violation of the Bible" in

[549] Walker, *Appeal*, 55, 69.
[550] Walker, *Appeal*, 43.
[551] Walker, *Appeal*, 3.
[552] Glaude, *Exodus!*, 38.

relation to their African-American brethren.[553] The infrastructure of formalist evangelical benevolence was in fact operating *against the grain* of the trajectory of God's eschatological providence, and thus would be condemned and destroyed.

> "They have newspapers and monthly periodicals which they receive in continual succession, but on the pages of which you will scarcely ever find a paragraph respecting slavery, which is ten thousand time more injurious…than all the other evils put together. … I tell you Americans! that unless you speedily alter your course, *you* and your *Country are gone ! ! ! ! ! !* For God Almighty will tear up the very face of the earth! ! ! Will not that very remarkable passage of Scripture be fulfilled on Christian Americans? Hear it Americans! ! "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: -- and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still…"[554]

Deploying a second reference to the Book of Revelation concerning the end of the world and the finality of God's judgment, Walker turned the prophetic tables on Christian America, consigning its "moral government" to the flames.

However, this disaster was not the only option. Walker's eschatological framework accommodated alternative futures. After all, the resistance to which he called African-Americans regarding colonization was premised not only on God's continued action but also on their ongoing claim to an identity with rights to American land. In the case of white Christian America, his call to repentance was a real one.[555] "What a happy country this will be if the whites listen," he mused. "There is not a doubt in my mind, but that the whole of the past will be sunk into oblivion, and we yet, under God, will become and united and happy people. The [colonizationist] whites may say it is impossible, but remember that nothing is impossible with God."[556]

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[553] Walker, *Appeal*, 38.
[554] Walker, *Appeal*, 39.
[555] Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, PA.: Penn State Press, 1997), 247-248.
[556] Walker, *Appeal*, 70.

Finally, and most significantly for our purposes, Walker's sense of what would emerge from this moment of reconciliation, in which slavery was dismantled and a shared culture of moral improvement was rebuilt on a foundation of equality and righteousness, was nothing less than the Christianization of the world. "It is my solemn belief," he wrote, "that if ever the world becomes Christianized (which must certainly take place before too long) it will be through the means, under God, of the *Blacks*, who are now held in wretchedness, and degradation, by the white Christians of the world."[557] Walker had a full-fledged vision of the millennial dawn, but it could only come through a thorough exorcism of white supremacy from American civic culture. After a radical national cultural renovation, with "justice done at home," then the world would be converted by free black people. The toxic and seemingly ineluctable entanglements of slavery and anti-black racism in "Christian America" were, for Walker, what stood between the present moment and the dawning of the millennial day that formalist benevolent evangelicals so desired to see, in the United States and for the sake of the world. Based on the social conditions of the nation at the end of the 1820s, this was not a future that could be readily anticipated – it demanded a radical rupture. Nonetheless, it was a future for which some white formalist evangelicals, not least the founding members of the AASS, began to hope: to make America Christian, for the very first time.

"We Are Holding Back The Latter-Day Glory": The AASS at Anniversary Week

Full of the same spirit of "Christian America" critique that animated David Walker's *Appeal*, the American Anti-Slavery Society burst onto the scene at Anniversary Week in 1834. On May 6 at 10am, the AASS conducted its official first anniversary meeting at Chatham Street

[557] Walker, *Appeal*, 18.

Chapel, the symbolic epicenter of all things benevolent in New York City. The first of the *four* public meetings that the AASS held throughout the week – three more than any other society – the anniversary meeting was all the more notable for not actually being the society's anniversary, given that it had been founded in Philadelphia the prior December. The presence of the AASS in New York was an unambiguous bid for participation, an all-out attempt, as Charles Foster rather mildly put it, to "displace the American Colonization Society" from the agenda of formalist evangelical benevolence, with daily newspapers vividly recounting the details of the proceedings.[558]

Before a packed house that Tuesday morning, Henry G. Ludlow, the thirty-seven year old, Princeton Seminary-educated pastor of the thriving Spring Street Presbyterian Church, declared that "he believed this meeting to be the funeral of colonization."[559] James Thome, a twenty-one-year old Kentuckian studying at Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, described colonization as an "incubus…crushing us down and binding us hand and foot…lull[ing us] to sleep [in spite of the fact] that our bed is a volcano," concurring with another speaker who said simply that "the Colonization Society originated in hell."[560]

One of the main impulses behind this talk of death and diabolism was to draw a stark division between colonizationist equivocation on the questions of abolition and the sin of slavery – equivocation that was defended, as we have seen, in the name of the cautious preservation of

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[558] Foster, *Errand of Mercy*, 150.
[559] American Anti-Slavery Society, *First Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society, &c.* (New York: Dorr and Butterfield, 1834), 15.
[560] American Anti-Slavery Society, *First Annual Report*, 12; "Messrs. Editors," *Commercial Advertiser*, May 30, 1834. Lane Seminary was another evangelical institution being sundered that year by abolition debates. For an overview, see Sinha, *The Slave's Cause,* 241-243; Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 123-124, 159-162.

national unity – and the *possibility* of the pursuit of millennial goals. This was a major challenge to the self-understanding of the gathered crowds of formalist evangelical benevolents. Since 1816, their national societies had called on Christian America for funding and support precisely because those societies were instruments for incremental cultural change in the direction of national righteousness, change that made national millennial anticipation a reasonable prospect. Rev. Simeon S. Jocelyn, pastor of the Temple Street Church, an African-American congregation in New Haven, starkly drew out the eschatological implications of this compromise:

"How is this enslaved and languid church, defiled as she is with guilt, and steeped in the blood of the poor innocents…how is she to go forth to millennial triumph? How shall she give knowledge that withholds education? How imitate papists and destroy the beast? How withhold the Bible and convince the heathen? How throw down the bloody altars of human sacrifice, and yet sacrifice souls to slavery? *Never, no, never can the church begin her millennial warfare till cleansed of this pollution*. Even her prayer shall become sin. … We may boast of our benevolent institutions and of our revivals in vain, in vain till we are washed of this blood. *We are holding back the latter-day glory*. … Let us arise and banish prejudice and oppression … Then shall the light of Zion go forth like brightness."[561]

As a young engraver, prior to his pastoral training, Jocelyn had designed and created the millennially optimistic "Chronological Chart Exhibiting the Rise and Progress of Christianity" for the *Religious Intelligencer* discussed in Chapter One. Eighteen years later, he had become convinced that, absent the abolition of slavery, the American church had not yet even begun to pursue millennial goals, mired as it was in hypocritical compromise.

Henry B. Stanton, a journalist and Lane Seminary student, took the gathered attendees to task in a similar way, pointedly asking:

"Shall we hold our public anniversaries and talk of converting the world? Shall we preach millennial sermons, and celebrate the triumphs of the cross over Hindoo caste? Shall we storm the wall of China, and expect it to dethrone the Man of Sin, and yet bow down before the selfish hatred of the American white man towards his colored brother, and declare it to be invincible? No, sir — never — not while we hold the Bible in our hands. Not while we can retain the memory of its precepts or the consolations of its promises."[562]

[561] American Anti-Slavery Society, *First Annual Report*, 19.
[562] American Anti-Slavery Society, *First Annual Report*, 26.

For Stanton, millennial prospects were ironized and nullified by the ongoing presence of the racial logic of colonization under the canopy of formalist evangelical benevolence. Stanton's comments offer a good example of a point made by historian George Frederickson – echoing the critiques of Forten, Cornish and Russwurm, and Walker, among other black evangelical abolitionists – that much of the evangelical abolitionist critique of colonization in this moment was rooted in the accusation that colonizationists denied of biblical Christianity. "To rule out [*a priori*] the possibility of a racially egalitarian society was, to [evangelical abolitionist] thinking, a willful and perverse denial of both the Gospel and the Declaration of Independence," he writes.[563] To the AASS, "the colonizationist doctrine of ineradicable prejudice was *un-Christian*…denying that Christian brotherhood was actually and immediately attainable."[564]

This rhetorical talking point contained within it a major threat to the formalist evangelical model for benevolent work. As we have seen, what held the ACS alliance together across sectional lines was the choice of its founders to sidestep the issue of the morality of slavery in the name of not offending public sentiment – they would consider it as a strategic and logistical problem rather than a problem of righteousness. It was exactly this bargain that allowed the society to remain a national concern, rather than a sectional one. Indeed, in a meaningful sense this was the gambit of all of the formalist evangelical institutions that aspired to national reach and millennial goals. Whether through distributing Bibles "without note or comment," distributing tracts that "diffuse a knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ…calculated to receive the approbation of all Evangelical Christians," or colonizing "(with their consent) the free people of color, residing in our country," the object being advanced had to be an instrumental goal that

[563] George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 29-30.
[564] Ibid.

seemed self-evidently good to the sentiment of the public, nationwide. As the ABS embodied in 1816, if big benevolent goals were to be achieved that required the participation and support of large swathes of the growing middle-class, it was necessary that those goals be demonstrably moderate, conservative, and trans-local – appealing to what was already within range of the majority public sentiment. They had given up *castigating* Americans with jeremiadic prophecy and now instead *invited* them to participate, in an undisruptive way, in the eschatological logic of millennial anticipations concerning what "Christian America" was already becoming. *Public* sentiment was the arbiter of what was possible. For a national society to embody innovative moral ambitions in this moment, it was necessary *first* to change public sentiment.[565] This, in a nutshell, was the social bargain that formalist evangelicals struck in 1816 which allowed them to run a cabal of elite-led moral institutions in the post-Federalist United States.

The problem was, Stanton argued, that public sentiment in the case of slavery and colonization, was prejudiced and despotic. Therefore, because the ACS, like other national benevolent societies, took public sentiment as its validating principle, it too had become prejudiced and despotic. The public sentiment of Christian America held that African-Americans were "subjected to the operation of an invincible prejudice" in light of their race, "which could never be removed."[566] While colonizationists "acknowledge…the criminality of this prejudice," and "professed to deplore it," they nonetheless "insist that it cannot be overcome." With all its organizational infrastructure, the ACS – both "wielding" and being "borne along by" public sentiment – was institutionalizing a system of sin that had nothing to do with millennial

[565] Johann N. Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 114, and 114-139 *passim.*
[566] American Anti-Slavery Society, *First Annual Report*, 25.

improvement and national righteousness.[567] This, Stanton averred, was cowardly, wrong, and above all, un-Christian.

> "The Anti-Slavery Society takes the opposite ground. It contends that prejudice is vincible—that error can be renounced—that folly can be cured—that sin can be repented of—that the white man can become a Christian, and the colored man his brother. Prejudice is proved to be vincible because it has nothing to stand upon, because it has been overcome in other countries, because it is beginning to be renounced in ours, and because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation from this, as from every other sin."[568]

This was a bold challenge to the ACS, and to the organizations at Anniversary Week *in toto*. If these gathered institutions of formalist evangelical benevolence wanted to play the role of national moral legislators in Christian America, guiding the nation towards any sort of eschatological destiny, it was essential that – when necessary – they learn to act against the mandate of "public opinion," in the name of the gospel. Only this would enable the possibility of *beginning* to make good on millennial promises.

Many others spoke in favor of abolition and against colonization at the meeting that Tuesday morning in Chatham Street Chapel, but so many more *wanted* to speak that the meeting ran out of time, adjourning and reconvening on Thursday night for a widely reported second meeting at Third Free Church on Houston Street. On Friday morning, the AASS furthered their confrontation with the ACS by circulating flyers and posting placards "throughout the city," inviting "friends of the Colonization Society" to an interview – again at Chatham Street Chapel – with Thomas C. Brown, a free African-American from South Carolina who had recently returned from Liberia.[569] Brown would give, the AASS averred, "public testimony as to the actual state of the colony."[570] Drawing an unruly crowd of abolitionists and colonizationists alike, Brown's

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[567] American Anti-Slavery Society, *First Annual Report*, 25.
[568] American Anti-Slavery Society, *First Annual Report*, 25-26.
[569] "The Anti-Slavery Society," *Commercial Advertiser*, May 10, 1834.
[570] "Colonization, Fanaticism, &c., &c.," *Evening Star* (New York), May 12, 1834.

dramatic testimony spoke in vivid detail of "fourteen frustrating sorrowful months in Liberia," filled with sickness, starvation, death, sexual impropriety and abuse of power.[571] When asked if he would ever return by "consent" to Liberia, he said "I could not be induced to go again with my own consent, unless there was no other place where a man could live."[572] Representatives of the ACS protested that Brown's testimony was unreliable and requested a second day of interviews, which was granted the following day, to a gathered multitude of over three thousand – more than a thousand over the stated capacity of the Chapel. While colonizationists tried to mute the impact of Brown's testimony with questions about his character, there was not much they could do. The AASS had caused a major stir at Anniversary Week, raising huge questions not only about colonization, but about the millennial aspirations and the moral witness of the event as a whole and the organizations it represented. In the New York press, the AASS was broadly vilified, accused of being "fanatics" who were trying to provoke war with the South, and "visionary enthusiasts" whose "immense mischief…seriously threatens to disturb, if not destroy the great yearly anniversaries held in this city on each succeeding month of May."[573]

Its dramatic performance sent shockwaves throughout the other major societies. In a bid to test the American Bible Society's ability to challenge public opinion on slavery, the AASS pledged $5,000 (mostly of Lewis Tappan's money) to the ABS, as part of what they conceived as a $20,000 general campaign "for the purpose of supplying every colored family in the United States with a bible."[574] This campaign would obviously include the distribution of Bibles,

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[571] American Anti-Slavery Society, *Examination of Mr. Thomas C. Brown, a Free Colored Citizen of S. Carolina, as to the Actual State of Things in Liberia* (New York: S.W. Benedict & Co. printers, 1834); Burin, *Peculiar Solution,* 68.
[572] American Anti-Slavery Society, *Examination of Mr. Thomas C. Brown*, 9.
[573] "The Anti-Slavery Society," *Commercial Advertiser*; "Colonization, Fanaticism, &c., &c.," *Evening Star*.
[574] American Anti-Slavery Society, *First Annual Report*, 33.

without note or comment, among enslaved people and those adjacent to them – a prospect that often made slaveholders very nervous. When Arthur Tappan took the proposal of this gift to the ABS Board of Managers, of which he was a member, not only did they refuse the money, but they declined to renew his membership on the board.[575] On Wednesday morning, at the ATS Annual Meeting, during a discussion about how to grow more effective at tract distribution in the South, Rev. Dr. James Milnor, chairman of the Executive Committee, "cautiously alluded" to tension over "a certain delicate subject" – obviously slavery – expressing desire above all things to see "continued cooperation" and "blessed union preserved."[576] On Wednesday afternoon, the New York Colonization Society went into damage control mode (with no idea of the further damage that was to come later in the week), highlighting the world-changing benevolent motivations of their enterprise, over against the callous, public-opinion pragmatism, of which the AASS had accused them. Rev. William Jackson offered a sanguine defense, arguing that, with greater wisdom than abolitionist radicalism, the ACS sought to "preserve a happy medium between extremes, and it had generally…found that the truth lies there, as well in theology as in politics."[577] This was weak tea. The moment was one of disruption, not equivocation.

"Conquer Or Die": Parsons Cooke's Millennial Malaise

Perhaps the most interesting characterization of the moment at Anniversary Week came from Reverend Parsons Cooke, pastor of the Congregational Church in Ware, Massachusetts.[578] In his speech to the American Tract Society, Cooke evinced a deep malaise about the prospects

[575] Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan*, 115.
[576] "American Tract Society," *New York Evangelist*, May 10, 1834.
[577] R.R. Gurley, ed., *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, vol. 10 (Washington, D.C.: Way & Gideon, 1834), 92.
[578] American Tract Society, *Ninth Annual Report of the American Tract Society* (New-York, D. Fanshaw, 1834), 5.

for the millennial dawn, exposing a surprising uncertainty in his mind about the millennial reading strategy for history that had occupied the ideological and performative center of Anniversary Week since its inception. In spite of the fact that Cooke had not yet offered a direct response to the challenges raised by the AASS – it would take another three years before he did that – his striking remarks offer much insight into the turbulence and unease of the moment.

In spite of the terrible weather that day, over two thousand observers were crammed into the four-tiered theater and about three hundred clergy from a range of nations and denominations were seated in rows on the broad stage.[579] Cooke rose to speak just after the Annual Report had been read, at a moment for worshipful celebration of the ways God was using the ATS. The Annual Report confirmed the convictions of ATS supporters, offering them a rich variety of qualitative and quantitative primary sources that seemed to demonstrate that the ATS was about God's business, "advancing the Redeemer's kingdom in a world of sin" — heralding the "introduc[tion] of the millennium."[580]

In contrast to the occasion, Cooke's speech contained an almost double-minded ambivalence. In one moment, he showered unreserved praise on the ATS, lauding its irreducible significance to the *future history* of the world's salvation. But in the next moment, he painted a bleak picture of the *current historical moment*, lamenting the relative invisibility of the work of the society and making a case for the very real possibility that it may fail.[581] Cooke's speech was haunted by the fragility of millennial anticipation.

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[579] "American Tract Society," *New York Spectator*, May 8, 1834.
[580] American Tract Society, *Fifth Annual Report of the American Tract Society* (D. Fanshaw, 1830), 9. Society, *Ninth Annual Report of the American Tract Society, Presented at New-York, May, 1834*, 30.
[581] *Contra* the loosely veiled notion that the jeremiad is about religious control, a pressure valve on evangelical anxiety that produced effects opposite to the words that it used, I take it that Cooke's malaise is real. He is genuinely concerned that the United States is a long way from any sort of millennial state — this whole thing might fall apart at any moment. And indeed, as James Bratt and others have shown,

Wasting no time in discharging his formal duty, Cooke moved that "the report should be published, as a proper response of gratitude to God for the facts that it presents; and that it may herald them far and wide."[582] He then immediately framed the details of the report in the context of millennial historiography. When the report was published, he declared, it would be placed "among the materials from which, in the millennium, shall be constructed the history of the *decline and fall of the empire of sin.*"[583] What had just been read was not merely a good report, but divine revelation gestating in national history. It was a primary source for future church historians to use when, in the clear light of the church's latter-day glory, they composed the narrative of the dawning of the millennium. The work of the ATS was burgeoning, by the power of the stereotype press, an ever-widening distribution network, the conditions of American religious freedom, and dint of evangelical will. Its initiatives and representatives were acting, as another of the day's speakers put it, as "*co-workers* with [God]" building in their day toward the establishment of the "'new heavens and…new earth'."[584] Here was unguarded rhetoric of millennial anticipation, central to the identity of the ATS.

Cooke did not disavow it. God was eager "to give effect to the means employed," multiplying their efficacy to the ends of the earth. Quoting a prophecy from Isaiah 60 in support of the millennial goals of the ATS, he said, "'A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation'; and this is beginning to be verified in the experience of this Society…Our prospects are full of promise; our motives to action unlimited…We live in a day when heaven

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within a few years, it began to do just that. The coming millennium was, in many respects, an albatross around the neck of evangelical aspiration.

[582] American Tract Society, *Ninth Annual Report of the American Tract Society*, 5.

[583] Ibid. emphasis original.

[584] See the speech of T. R. Green, given shortly after Cooke's speech in American Tract Society, *Ninth Annual Report of the American Tract Society*, 9. Emphasis original.

and earth are about to unite their mightiest energies," unto the conversion of the world.[585] The "empire of sin" would, eventually, fall.

However, from these vertiginous heights of enthusiasm about the ATS's role in shaping the eschatological future, it is quite startling to observe how rapidly Cooke's analysis took a darker turn, becoming quickly mired in the reality of his historical present. Having located the ATS in the vanguard of the church militant, proceeding vigorously towards millennial glories, Cooke observed it was also true that "the ultimate bearing of these efforts…[is] now unappreciated" by most of the world.[586] This was a problem. One could not convert the world if the world was not paying attention, and by Cooke's lights, it seemed that very few people were. The condition of the world with regard to sin and righteousness was *not* in fact changing much at all. "We are suffering the current of affairs to roll on, almost as unconscious of the destinies involved, as are the tenants of the deep of the navies that are sweeping over them…As the Cesars and Herods drove their schemes of aggrandizement with no deference to the majesty of a present Redeemer, so the last coming of Christ will be unobserved by those who have not their hearts open."[587] Simply put, Cooke saw a massive tension between the faith-based salvation historical narrative that formed the ATS' ideological engine, and the observable ordinary historical reality of the unfolding condition of the world. In spite of the deluge of tracts, Bibles, and other millennial instruments, Americans were not converting *en masse.* In the tension he invoked lay the integrity of the concept of the historicity of the millennium.

The more Cooke spoke, the more it seemed that this tension worried him. This was not merely a problem of a difference in perception between believers and unbelievers — it was a

[585] American Tract Society, *Ninth Annual Report of the American Tract Society*, 5.
[586] Ibid.
[587] Ibid.

concrete problem rooted in the interpretation of available evidence. Of the fact "*that the time of the conquest of the world is near*," the supporters of the ATS "needed…to be fully impressed [by] prophecy," but there was nonetheless *no* convincing historical data to back it up. "On human calculation," Cooke averred gloomily, the dawn of the millennium "would seem to be *impossible*," though he hastened to add (perhaps with a little guilt for having brought the subject up on an otherwise celebratory occasion) that "human calculation cannot gainsay eternal truth."[588] Visible history was not yet even close to being aligned with prophecy, in spite of all that the ATS and its allied societies were doing in the cause of benevolence.

For Cooke, hope — indeed, *all* the hope of the ATS — seemed to lie not in millennial performances or anticipatory millennial labor, but rather in a radical divine intervention. Evangelicals, he noted, served a wonder-working God who, in Scripture, often acted at the last minute: "From prophecy it is to be expected that the main interest of the conflict [with the "empire of sin"] will be condensed upon its closing scenes."[589] The Bible was peppered with stories of "work rapidly done — of nations born at once."[590] But even this was only modest comfort. After all, his audience was well-aware that theologians and politicians had for decades posited that the United States itself might well be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of a "nation born at once," the "nation born in a day."[591] But when would that day come? Where was the widespread renovation of righteousness? What was the real effect of all the schemes of the ATS on the moral improvement of the nation? For a few moments, in the middle of his speech

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[588] Ibid.
[589] Ibid.
[590] Ibid.
[591] Isaiah 66:8. For a notable example of the rhetorical tradition, see John Quincy Adams, *An Address, Delivered at the Request of the Committee of Arrangements for Celebrating the Anniversary of Independence: At the City of Washington on the Fourth of July 1821, Upon the Occasion of Reading the Declaration of Independence.* (Cambridge, MA: Hilliard and Metcalf, 1821).

celebrating yet another year of strenuous labor unto the growth and expansion of the ATS, Cooke revealed his epistemic uncertainty about the millennial reading strategy around which his formalist evangelical peers had structured the institutional self-consciousness of their Benevolent Empire. This metahistorical framework of millennial expectation lay in substantial tension with the concrete facticity of the world he observed around him. One wonders how much he had in mind the drama of the AASS meeting that had unfolded twenty-four hours earlier on the very stage from which he was speaking.

Indeed, Cooke admitted, for a moment, to being afraid: "It is to be expected" under such conditions "that all moral causes…will imbibe an almost fearful impulse, compelling the church at once *to conquer or die.*"[592] While he was not about to give up, he did not see present evidence of a guaranteed victory for the forces of moral improvement and evangelical benevolence. Rather, he saw a fight — a radically contingent struggle against the "empire of sin" that the church would *either* win *or* lose. There was no doubt that God's promises in scripture about the ultimate victory of the church were sure, but God's promises about the precise timing and the common assumptions about events that should provoke millennial anticipation were "designedly indefinite," indistinct.[593] Failure was possible, if not already somewhat evident, and the stakes were high.

Though Cooke's millennial malaise flared up revealingly for a moment, it did not consume him. He concluded his speech on a rallying note, calling for increased exertions in prayer and publishing. It passed virtually without comment in the press. Seen from a distance, however, his public confession of ambivalence about the historical efficacy of the work of the ATS is striking. It opens a small window into an important question facing many formalist evangelical

[592] Society, *Ninth Annual Report of the American Tract Society, Presented at New-York, May, 1834*, 5.
[593] Ibid.

millennialists in this moment: namely, that of *how* to think and talk about history — both God's "salvation history" and the "ordinary" history of the United States — with honesty and faith in the face of a commonplace rhetoric of millennial anticipation which, while emotionally powerful, seemed increasingly historically unsustainable.

This was the essence of Cooke's unexpected lament. Prophecy was *supposed* to overcome present reality, to make history in its own image. But if fulfillment of a soon-expected prophecy was deferred too long, its veracity — or at a minimum the veracity of its interpretation — began to come into question. For how long could the "time of the conquest of the world" be said to be "near" before that prophetic report became radically ironized? Further, and even more important to the question of antebellum evangelical identity formation, what was the meaning of the past and the present to a community of people so straining to reach the eschatological finish line? Did prior or present experience have any authority to adjudicate reality, or was orientation to the new millennial future so fundamental to antebellum evangelical identity that past and present experience had no validity—especially if the reality of those experiences called prophecy into question with every passing year?

Cooke's millennial malaise speaks of a desire for a coherent theology of history to undergird formalist evangelical efforts in a moment when millennial prospects were demonstrably historically contestable. What was grounding the buzz of millennial anticipation on which Anniversary Week depended? A general sense of national moral and spiritual improvement was not enough – especially when there was so little evidence to back it up.

The Race Riots of July 1834

As we have seen, the most particular vulnerability to which the millennial imaginary of benevolent national formalists was exposed concerns matters of race. In the sweltering heat of early July 1834, New York City was wracked by intense race rioting, the worst the city experienced in the years leading up to the Civil War.[594] For three nights from July 9 and July 11, mobs took to the streets of lower Manhattan, attacking the lives and livelihoods of citizens, black and white, whose perceived devotion to "the complete equality of the Negroes" was deemed too "disorderly," "fanatical," and "incendiary" to be welcome in the city.[595] When morning broke on July 12th, after three days of rough justice from the "mob Police," many prominent buildings in lower Manhattan lay in smoldering ruins.[596]

A few examples give a sense of the apocalyptic whole. Cascades of shattered stained glass covered the ground on Centre Street, outside the gutted remains of St. Philip's Episcopal Church, where Rev. Peter Williams, an African-American Episcopal priest (falsely) accused of performing an interracial wedding, was minister. Inside the church, the altar had been broken into pieces, the curtains torn, and the pews burned in the street.[597] Around the corner, the African Baptist Church on Anthony Street had all of its windows broken, and the African school on Orange Street, which doubled as a Methodist meetinghouse had been "totally demolished."[598]

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[594] For a fine concise account of the riots, see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 556-560. Cf. Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626–1863* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 172.
[595] "The Fourth of July," *Commercial Advertiser*, July 5, 1834; "Chatham Street Chapel," *Commercial Advertiser*, July 8, 1834; "Incendiarism," *Journal of Commerce* (New York), July 10, 1834; Gustave de Beaumont, *Marie Or, Slavery in the United States: A Novel of Jacksonian America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1958), 244, 243-253 *passim*.
[596] On mob police, see "Incendiarism," *Journal of Commerce*.
[597] Craig Townsend, "Episcopalians and Race in New York City's Anti-Abolitionist Riots of 1834: The Case of Peter Williams and Benjamin Onderdonk," *Anglican and Episcopal History* LXXII, no. 4 (December 2003), 489.
[598] "Attack on Tappan's Store," *Journal of Commerce* (New York), July 12, 1834.

Many private homes and businesses belonging to African-Americans were "greatly injured or totally destroyed."[599] Countless black citizens were stoned and beaten, some very severely.[600]

While the indiscriminate wrath of the mob was reserved for African-Americans, many white advocates of the cause of African-American equality were targeted as well. Around midnight on July 11, a raging crowd "battered in the doors" of both Rev. Henry Ludlow's Spring Street Church and Rev. Samuel Cox's Brick Presbyterian Church on Laight Street, "shatter[ing] the windows to atoms" and "destroying whatever they could" in the interior.[601] Following the desecration of their churches, the mob set out to tear apart the nearby homes of Revs. Ludlow and Cox, but was repulsed by a squadron of cavalry from the National Guard. The previous night, just two blocks from City Hall, Lewis Tappan's home had been completely destroyed, windows and doors smashed, walls torn down, property looted, and furniture burned in a bonfire by the front door.[602]

At issue, as contemporary French observer Gustave de Beaumont framed it in a crystalline analysis, was the trajectory of African-Americans from liberty to equality in the United States: "This is the main point in the quarrel between the two races in the northern United States. As long as the freed Negroes show themselves submissive and respectful to the whites…hold[ing] themselves to a position of inferiority, they are assured of support and protection. The American then sees in them only those poor unfortunates whom religion and humanity command him to aid. But as soon as they announce their claims to equality, the pride of whites is aroused, and pity inspired by misfortune gives way to hatred and scorn." As objects

[599] Ibid.
[600] For one example, see "Disgraceful Proceedings," *Journal of Commerce* (New York), July 11, 1834.
[601] "Attack on Tappan's Store," *Journal of Commerce*.
[602] Wyatt-Brown, *Tappan,* 118-119; Craig Townsend, "Episcopalians and Race," 488-490 and passim.

of benevolence, black folks fit nicely into the formalist evangelical national millennial project. As equals, they had no place, at least not in the judgment of public sentiment.

The rallying cry of the rioting mob was opposition to the twin offenses of "abolitionism" and "amalgamism" — the embrace of total equality, both socially and maritally, between whites and free blacks.[603] These two themes, according to de Beaumont, characterized the agenda of the "Anti-Slavery Society…[a] group composed of sincere philanthropists, religious men…[who] attack with indefatigable zeal the prejudices separating the Negroes from the whites."[604] All of the churches and white leaders who were targeted were believed to be proponents of these doctrines that were broadly distasteful to white popular opinion in the city.

In reporting on the riots, while few in the press defended the actions of the rioters, deeming them "disturbing," "disgraceful," "unpleasant, and most discreditable," there was little love lost on the purported ideology of the victims.[605] In most newspapers, abolitionists were portrayed as "maniacs" and "reckless fanatics," "pushing a dangerous project" that went far beyond what the Constitution permitted and white American society desired in the cause of African-American liberty. Some considered abolitionist rhetoric to be "treasonable" in its disregard for the rule of the law of the land and the integrity of the Union, noting the appeal to

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[603] de Beaumont, *Marie*, 244, 243-253 *passim*; Leslie M. Harris, ""From Abolitionist Amalgamators to 'Rulers of the Five Points': The Discourse of Interracial Sex and Reform in Antebellum New York City"," in *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History*, ed. Martha Hodes (New York: NYU Press, 1999), 191–192. On the demonstrable organization of the mob, see Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 113-122. At least three of the churches that were destroyed were targeted specifically because they were thought to be performing and even encouraging interracial marriages, which Gustave de Beaumont described as the "most obvious index of equality" between the races.
[604] de Beaumont, *Marie*, 244.
[605] "Chatham Street Chapel," *Commercial Advertiser*; "The Fourth of July," *Commercial Advertiser*; "Riots," *Evening Star* (New York), July 10, 1834; "Incendiarism," *Journal of Commerce*;

higher moral law — "opposition to tyrants is obedience to God" — to underwrite resistance to legal slave powers.[606]

The parallel concern about "amalgamism" reveals that the quarrel with abolitionists was also a matter of aesthetics and social propriety. Abolitionists were advancing a corrosive ideology of total social equality that was a misunderstanding of the aims of true religion and a solvent to the public good. Responding to the riots, Rev. Ralph Gurley of the American Colonization Society declared that abolitionists deserved "strong censure…for endeavoring to inflame the public mind…against the peace and permanency of our happy Union."[607]

Conclusion

Icarus was falling. The riots offered a proleptic picture of the fact that Americans should not anticipate a future of incrementally increasing perpetual peace but rather one of apocalyptic fire, not of the formalist's idealized gradualism but of the abolitionist's rupture. The future, we can now see, lay with what was then the minority report. For some, the millennium, were it to dawn, would not be a matter of Federalist gradualism, but of the abolitionist's rupture. As David Walker had seen clearly but so many benevolent white formalists had not, the American millennial project could not relate only to African Americans as objects of the benevolence of "Christian America." For the nation to develop in righteousness, its white Christians would have to learn to see, to discern how to combine their benevolence with their repentance.

In *Entering Into Rest*, Oliver O'Donovan comments that Christians who believe that God is present in the midst of history, "working everything together for good," are clinging not to an

[606] "The Fourth of July," *Commercial Advertiser*; "Incendiarism," *Journal of Commerce*; "Riots," *Evening Star*.
[607] Gurley, R.R., *The African* Repository, 190.

archive but to a promise.[608] Yet, "faith insists on scrutinizing the historical records too," looking to the past and to the present for traces of God's actions.[609] This is constitutive of the dynamics of Christian reflection on history, the likes of which we have seen several times over in this chapter, as well as in the prior chapters. The danger arises, O'Donovan suggests, when Christians take up "a quest for a 'Christian event'…looking for a disclosure of the God who redeems and sanctifies the human race even through its cultural traditions."[610] This captures in a nutshell the highest aspirations of the formalist evangelicals whose millennial imaginary and its institutionalization we have been considering. Specifically, the danger lies in obviating the complexities of a social circumstances, in order to be able to "joyful[ly] cry that God is at hand." In such a moment, "*not seeing* is the risk" of the quest for a 'Christian event' – not seeing is the blindness of mortal sin."[611] This is precisely what David Walker insists that "white Christian America" must come to understand, and precisely why he demands that "Christian America" must *listen* to him, in order to repent. "To be messengers of peace in a world of strife," O'Donovan writes, "we must sometimes be messengers of strife in a world of false peace."[612]

[608] O'Donovan, *Entering Into Rest,* 96.
[609] O'Donovan, *Entering Into Rest,* 97.
[610] O'Donovan, *Entering Into Rest,* 98.
[611] Ibid.
[612] O'Donovan, *Entering Into Rest,* 101.

Chapter Four

"Biography Is Prized In Heaven": Joseph Emerson, Ralph Emerson, and the Millennial Uses of History

Introduction: Outstanding Millennial Debts

In his article, "The Reorientation of American Protestantism, 1835-1845," historian James Bratt claims that, by the mid-1830s, northern formalist evangelical culture was thick in the throes of an eschatological identity crisis.[613] It was in default on what he calls an "outstanding bill," namely, "some delivery upon the promise of the Millennium."[614] Using Charles Finney as a synecdoche for both the community *and* the problem to which he is referring, Bratt reconsiders Finney's famous dictum from his 1835 *Lectures on the Revivals of Religion* that "if the Church will do all her duty, the Millennium may come in this country in three years."[615] While this statement has often been read as a high point of benevolent Protestant rhetoric, delivered in triumph and power from Finney's Chatham Street pulpit, Bratt reads it as a "swan song," delivered in frustration and exhaustion shortly before Finney's retrenchment into educational enterprise at the Oberlin Institute.[616] The millennium was *not* perceptibly coming in 1835, and the next three years were no different. Indeed, there was a case to be made, given the quarrelsome anxious, and chaotic state of the evangelical world, that things were getting *worse*, not better. "The three years Finney had targeted for the millennial dawn," Bratt avers, "brought twilight instead."[617]

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[613] Bratt, "The Reorientation of American Protestantism, 1835-1845," 52–82.
[614] Bratt, "Reorientation," 65.
[615] Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Company, 1835), 282.
[616] Bratt, "Reorientation," 52; Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney,* 160-164.
[617] Bratt, "Reorientation," 61.

What was to be done? Within the paradigm of formalist benevolent activism and revivalistic spirituality, not many solutions immediately presented themselves. *More* benevolent exertion and *more* revivals did not seem like the answer to most of those who were feeling this millennial malaise, exhausted by the "rollercoaster of enthusiasm."[618] Adding an additional layer of challenge was the fact that millennial anticipation had so formed the formalist evangelical imaginary that *some* delivery on its promise remained necessary.[619] This was the bill that had been racked up across the span of a century of Edwardsean millennial evangelicalism, growing particularly high since 1816, when the political existence of formalist Protestant institutions became contingent upon their promise to engineer millennial advancement.[620] Having been stirred up for so long, millennial desires to experience perceptible movement forward toward God's intended design at the individual and community level were neither "easily met" nor easily "dismissed."[621]

In short, Protestant leaders across the spectrum had their imaginative work cut out for them, work which they undertook in a vast variety of innovative ways, beginning in the mid-1830s. Under the pressures of millennial malaise and revival exhaustion, a great imaginative pluralization took place in American Protestant life, a pluralization that constitutes the moment of "reorientation" that Bratt so acutely observes.[622] Some left free evangelical paradigms for higher liturgical expressions of Protestant faith. Some abandoned the primacy of conversionism

[618] Bratt, "Reorientation," 65.
[619] Ibid.
[620] Cf. my argument in Chapter One, and passim.
[621] Bratt, "Reorientation," 65
[622] Part of what Bratt is doing in highlighting this moment of reorientation in the 1830s is trying to dislocate facile, nation-building narratives that draw direct continuity and consonance between evangelical benevolence, evangelical revivalism, and a rising tide of abolition that culminated in the Civil War. For Bratt, as for me, the 1830s were a moment of enormous disruption and discontinuity within evangelical culture in the United States.

as the doorway into Christianity, choosing instead to focus on an organic, developmental understanding of Christian maturity. Some became scholars and critics of the Bible, while others became prophets. Some tried to jettison their millennial expectations, while others reimagined millennial theology and practice for their new moment.

It is to representatives of this last group – the reimaginers – that I am going to turn my attention in the two final chapters. I will explore some ways that some underexamined formalist evangelical Protestants, originating within the communities that produced the culture of millennial benevolence we have been considering thus far, sought to "pay the millennial bill" by developing forms of millennial theology and practice that brought out a measure of stability and sustainability from the breathless millennial anticipations of their religious inheritance. Such people did not always do this work on purpose – they were not necessarily out to "solve" the millennial problem. Rather, they were trying to make sense of their theological identity in a time of eschatological turbulence for the formalist Protestant institutions that had sought to use the millennium as a lever on the national consciousness. In this chapter I will consider the careers of Rev. Ralph Emerson, the Brown Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Andover Theological Seminary, as well as that of his brother Rev. Joseph Emerson, an education reformer whose systematic approach to millennial pedagogy was deeply influential on Ralph's own. Using Joseph as an exemplar, Ralph Emerson, an easy-to-overlook figure in the intellectual history of northern formalist evangelicalism, subtly reimagines the criteria for millennial progress through a fresh engagement with eschatological history and concrete historicity.

"Biography Is Prized In Heaven": Learning Millennial Lives

"Have we not already enough of good biographies? perhaps someone may ask, as he very leisurely takes up this volume."[623] With this self-deprecating speculation, Professor Ralph Emerson began his hefty 1834 biography of his older brother Reverend Joseph Emerson, a Massachusetts Congregational minister turned leading evangelical advocate for education reform and women's seminaries. On one level, Ralph Emerson's comment was just whimsical rhetoric. As the professor of Ecclesiastical History at Andover Theological Seminary and the author of a biography published within a year of his brother's untimely death in 1833, there was no doubt about his perspective on the matter — his answer was *literally* in the hands of the reader. On another level, though, Emerson was raising a real question about the practical value and purpose of history in his moment.

In the first half of the 19th century, Americans were awash in a sea of history. Beginning around 1800, works of history and biography began to pour forth from American presses at unprecedented rates. In a still unsurpassed general survey of the phenomenon, George Callcott has calculated that between 1800 and 1860, 36% of the best-selling books in the United States were historical in nature, as compared to 15% before 1800 and 15% after 1860.[624] Virtually all national magazines devoted increased space to historical topics, and much of the most popular literature, from Washington Irving to Walter Scott, was what would be called today "historical

[623] Ralph Emerson, *Life of Rev. Joseph Emerson, Pastor of the Third Congregational Church in Beverly, Ms., and Subsequently Principal of a Female Seminary* (Boston, Crocker and Brewster; Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1834), 3. The title's abbreviated reference to "Ms." refers of to Massachusetts, not Mississippi as modern regular usage would have it.
[624] George H. Callcott, *History in the United States, 1800-1860; Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 33.

fiction."[625] As Callcott puts it, in this era history became "fun" for Americans — a historical sensibility had been awakened in the imagination of the public.[626]

The first major productions of historical research and interpretation written by Americans for American audiences also began to appear, most famous among them George Bancroft's eight volume *History of the United States of America* (1834-1860).[627] David Levin famously classed the antebellum histories of Bancroft and his peers as "romantic art," highly literary renderings of the past that, while often well-researched, aimed to baptize the imaginations of their readers into the subjective experience of the people and events that were being portrayed.[628] Such history was intended to function as a moral and sentimental education for its American readers.

With equally lofty goals in view, history began to be taught to children in secondary schools in the early decades of the 19th century, with a focus on narratives of the emergence of the United States.[629] In 1827, for example, it became law in Massachusetts that every secondary school teacher be able to teach the history of the United States as a separate subject, in order to

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[625] Callcott, *History in the United States*, 34.
[626] Callcott, *History in the United States,* 35.
[627] Other noted examples include William Prescott's *The History of Ferdinand and Isabella* (1837), Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* (1847), Richard Hildreth's *The History of the United States of America* (1854), John Lothrop Motley's *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* (1856), John Gorham Palfrey's *History of New England* (1859-1890).
[628] David Levin, *History As Romantic Art: Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, And Parkman* (Stanford University Press, 1959), 9–12. Several later historians, from J. F. Jameson to Peter Novick have argued that these people wrote history before there were professional standards for academic historiography. However, as Eileen Ka-May Cheng has taken pains to show, the fact that these works were *sometimes* ideological does not mean that they threw caution to the wind with respect to goals of facticity and objectivity. In fact, quite the opposite is the case. See Eileen Ka-May Cheng, *The Plain and Noble Garb of Truth: Nationalism and Impartiality in American Historical Writing, 1784-1860* (University of Georgia Press, 2011), as well as John Franklin Jameson, *The History of Historical Writing in America* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1891); Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).
[629] William Russell, "The Early Teaching of History in Secondary Schools," *The History Teacher's Magazine* 5:10 (September 1914), 312. See also Ruth Miller Elson, *Guardians Of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 406-410.

adequately develop the self-understanding of virtuous American citizens.[630] In his enormously popular *History of the United States*, published in 1822, Reverend Charles Goodrich framed the study of American history in secondary schools as teaching "virtue, enterprise, courage, generosity, patriotism…politicks…government…[and] the dealings of God with mankind."[631] Much of the focus of textbooks like Goodrich's was on distinguished individual actors, usually men, who were not only to be admired, but imitated: "In the story of Columbus," Goodrich wrote, "we are introduced to a man of genius, energy and enterprise…While we admire the lofty character of Columbus and look with wonder at the consequences that have resulted from his discovery…let us emulate his decision, energy, and perseverance."[632] As with the "romantic" historians, the big goal of historical education in secondary schools was not just to teach facts but to capture the imagination of students.[633] Such an approach was extremely popular — within fifty years, Goodrich's textbook alone had gone through at least 150 editions and sold more than half a million copies to schools nationwide.[634]

In the historical sub-genre of biography, of which *The Life of Joseph Emerson* was a part, the sweeping experientialism of the romantic histories met the didactic emulation-based moralism of the classroom text — and Americans had an insatiable appetite for it. Eileen Ka-May Cheng observes that between 1830 and 1850, the demand for biographies underwent an "exponential" surge.[635] In 1830, a critic for the *New York Mirror* described this national

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[630] David B. Tyack, *Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 41-43; Russell, "The Early Teaching of History," 312.
[631] Charles A Goodrich, *A History of the United States of America: On a Plan Adapted to the Capacity of Youths, and Designed to Aid the Memory by Systematick Arrangement and Interesting Associations* (Hartford: S.G. Goodrich, 1822), 2-3.
[632] Goodrich, *History of the United States of America*, 10.
[633] Callcott, *History in the United States*, 62-66; Anon, "Mrs. Peabody's Key To History," *North American Review*, Vol 39, Issue 84 (July 1834), 200-208.
[634] Russell, "The Early Teaching of History," 204; Tyack, *Common Ground,* 42.
[635] Cheng, *Plain and Noble Garb of Truth*, 88.

enthusiasm as a "present-day…biographical mania."[636] "We are not now contented," the critic went on, "to see the senator enveloped in his toga…[or] the counsellor surrounded with the insignia of office. [Rather] we delight to follow them into the privacy of domestic life, and see how they act, divested of these appurtenances which claim respect from 'vulgar minds.' The divine must be disrobed of his band and cassock; and the soldier shorn of his plumed helm and mailed front…to stand the scrutiny of their fellow men…the test of the universal gaze."[637]

This democratized gazing at the lives of public figures once protected by their celebrity was not prying or degrading, argued the critic, but rather a function of moral discernment and experiential desire, a practical education in the way that "great" people actually lived. Biography was history made concrete and practical, "the ultimate statement of what was unique, real, and particular in history."[638] Popular demand for such work gave rise to an immense outpouring of biographical literature from hugely popular narrative historians like Mason Locke Weems and Joel Tyler Headley to novelists turned biographers like Washington Irving and Nathaniel Hawthorne, more scholarly writers like Jared Sparks and Josiah Quincy, and, most common of all, "life-and-letters biographies" like the *Life of Joseph Emerson*.[639] The common denominator between all such works was that they sought to capture and combine the quotidian facticity of human experience with the high-flown idealism of the moral imagination as rendered through exemplary lives.

In the context of a biography-mad America, Ralph Emerson's defense of the statement that "we have *not* enough" biography, "nor shall we have, so long as God shall continue to raise

[636] "Biographical Mania," *New-York Mirror*, May 15, 1830.
[637] Ibid.
[638] Callcott, *History in the United States*, 97.
[639] Callcott, *History in the United States*, 98-99; Cheng, *Plain and Noble Garb of Truth*, 89-94.

up the fit subjects for such works" becomes much more interesting.[640] "History," he agreed with the aphorism attributed to Thucydides, "is philosophy teaching by example."[641] And "biography," he thought, "is the life and soul of history….Each [life] has something new to teach."[642] But this, in the end, was just the exalted fruits of paganism. Specifically *Christian* biography, he believed, had far higher aims.

"*Christian* biography has something more exalted than mere human philosophy to teach. It teaches the ways of God towards man in relation to an eternal and blessed existence. — Yes; and it will be studied, too, not merely in this world but in the next. *Biography is prized in heaven.* The records of the judgment day, will give the disclosure of human life in relation to God. And the thrilling interest that will never flag during those long disclosures, will be the interest of biography."[643]

For Emerson, biographies of exemplary Christians were not merely narratives of lives well-lived, worthy of imitation. Rather they were eternal stories that transgressed the perceived boundary between earth and heaven, legible in both time and eternity by the citizens of both domains. They narrowed the distance between God and humanity by offering stories of lives conformed and conforming to the "wisdom, love, and power" of God.[644] Christian biographies were not merely aimed at moral pedagogy, but were rather historical narrations of the relation between God and human beings — stories of lives that embodied God's priorities, effulgent with God's glory. Done well, they captured far more than the sum of their parts — they "glowed."

"If then it is desirable that earth should be made more like heaven," Emerson concluded, "let it be filled with just and glowing biography…This is the way to become acquainted with

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[640] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 3.
[641] This quotation was likely drawn from a contemporaneous essay on the philosophy of history in the *North American* Review, newly published at the time time of the publication of *The Life of Joseph Emerson*. See Jared Sparks, ed., "Philosophy of History," in *The North American Review*, vol. 2 (Boston, MA: Charles Bowen, 1834), 30–56.
[642] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 3.
[643] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 4.
[644] Ibid.

divinity, both for theory and practice."[645] History in the mode of Christian biography was able to do nothing less than introduce its reader to the living God, theologically and practically. Just as "God has so filled his own divine book with such [biographical] sketches" to illustrate the reality of the relation between God and people, Christian histories did the same.[646] For Ralph Emerson, Christian history — and in particular the historical study of Christian lives — could have the effect of introducing people to God, of calling them to higher moral and spiritual lives, lives that brought heaven to earth, lives that ushered in conditions of the millennium.

Millennialism and Historicism

In her elegant and programmatic article, "Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America," historian Dorothy Ross grapples with the question of why historicism did not take root in American historical consciousness until the 1880s, roughly a century after it had gained prevailing purchase among historians in Europe.[647] While the article is three decades old, it nonetheless stands as a clear statement of a very interesting question, as well as a provocation to continued inquiry. Ross defines historicism simply as an interpretative methodology which insists that history is "self-explanatory," i.e. that "all events in historical time can be explained by prior events in historical time."[648] For her, seeing the world through historicist lenses requires "a process of secularization" – for historicism to become a viable way to interpret history, the "*changing* earthly world had to be loosed from the *eternal* world of God and his immutable truth."[649] According to such a framing, there is no place in a properly historicist imagination for

[645] Ibid.
[646] Ibid.
[647] Dorothy Ross, "Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 4 (October 1, 1984): 924-925, and *passim*.
[648] Ross, "Historical Consciousness," 916, 910.
[649] Ross, "Historical Consciousness," 910.

the agency of a metaphysical, metahistorical God calling and enabling people in their historicity to move toward a teleological destiny, individual or collective.

The chief obstacle to the emergence of historicism in the United States, according to Ross's analysis, was a pervasive commitment to nationalistic millennialism, with interwoven religious and republican strands. While many European historians responded to the failures of the French Revolution by backing off from universal claims, Americans responded to the relative success of the American revolution by diving headlong into them. Importantly for Ross, this assessment should not be read as a simplistic explanation. "The millennial investment of the American republic," she writes, "is the key to [understanding American] historical consciousness in the nineteenth century. But that formulation should be the beginning rather than the end of our understanding."[650] The *fact* of the significance of varieties of millennialism is very clear in the theopolitical imagination of the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century, but how those varieties actually work is less clear.

Ironically, while Ross's article offers a fine treatment of political millennialism, which has been pursued in a variety of different ways since her article was written, distinctively Protestant theological concerns about history do not get anything like as much attention in her article, and when they do, her assessment is quite one-dimensional. As she reads it, Protestant theologies still functioned among self-consciously orthodox evangelical interpreters to police the historical imagination rather than to develop it. She repeatedly asserts that American Christian reflection on history in the antebellum era was "aggressive," "actively oppos[ing]" proto-historicist ideas and constantly "demanding proofs of…orthodoxy" from young, German-influenced historians like George Bancroft.[651] While Ross casts Bancroft (rightly) as being

[650] Ross, "Historical Consciousness," 913.
[651] Ross, "Historical Consciousness," 916.

himself a millennialist, she portrays him as straining against the shackles of American orthodoxy's oppressive theological *a prioris*. Self-consciously orthodox Protestantism deliberately sustained "universal principles of God and nature" and in so doing oppositionally "narrowed the sphere in which historical change could be accepted."[652] Its representatives, argued Ross, were eager to attenuate the range of modernist historical imagination in order to guard its theological order.

There are good reasons that Ross might have deployed to frame orthodox Protestant imagination as a generally anti-historical regulatory framework in the first half of the nineteenth century. There are many examples of American evangelical Protestants in the 1820s and 1830s grappling with varieties of uncertainty and discomfort about what the value of history might be to a theological imagination.

To many, church history was considered a boring subject, perhaps due in part to textbooks that were styled as chronicles, not interpretations.[653] In 1824, a Princeton Seminary student, Stephen Peet, described his church history professor, Samuel Miller, as "a storehouse of facts, words and anecdotes…one of the longwinded preachers and lecturers, [he] delights to live in past ages…if he had happened to have been born 500 years ago, he would have [preferred it.]"[654] There was no confusion as to what he meant – the man was boring and his discipline unrelatable. Historian Philip Schaff had the same impression when he came to the United States to teach at Mercersburg Seminary in the 1840s. "The dry, lifeless style too, in which the study of

[652] Ross, "Historical Consciousness," 920.
[653] Cf. Elizabeth A. Clark, *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) on Samuel Miller and the Mosheim School.
[654] Stephen Peet, "Stephen Peet to Ralph Emerson," May 3, 1824, Box 1, Ralph Emerson Papers, Beloit College Archives.

Church History is conducted in our theological seminaries, must necessarily tend to destroy all satisfaction or interest in its pursuit…History is still regarded and treated as a mere conglomeration of notices, more or less interesting, thrown together in a perfectly outward way."[655]

To others, the facts of history were almost epiphenomenal to reality, far less relevant than the philosophical matrix that held them together. This was less about idealism and more about the fact that historical data was not seen to offer much insight about the world. Morris Barton, a student at Auburn Theological Seminary wrote a disputation paper in 1822 entitled "Is the study of history or philosophy more beneficial?"[656] While he was willing to acknowledge that history reveals "the means by which individuals, communities, and nations, have risen to eminence, virtue, and renown," his conclusions all found historical knowledge to occupy an instrumental place, offering limited insight about the world as it was.

> "Without the aid of history, undoubtedly the light of Science would shine much more dimly than it now does --- but without the aid which philosophy furnishes, this light must be blotted out forever…Erace from the world the result of philosophical investigation, and you leave it in the darkness of midnight, shrouded in all the mysterious and visionary conjectures of the heathen world, [idolatry and superstition], and throw an impenetrable veil around that apparatus which has brought to light the most brilliant exhibition of the divine character."[657]

Finally, to some, church history seemed positively dangerous to the cultivation of orthodox theological imagination. The faculty disputes over the place of ecclesiastical history in the curriculum at Andover Theological Seminary are an instructive case in point.[658] In this

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[655] Philip Schaff, *What Is Church History?: A Vindication of the Idea of Historical Development* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott, 1846), 5.
[656] Morris Barton, "'Is the Study of History or Philosophy More Beneficial?,'" Disputation Paper (Auburn Theological Seminary, Auburn, NY, December 24, 1822), Morris Barton Papers, William Clements Library, University of Michigan.
[657] Ibid.
[658] J. Earl Thompson, "Church History Comes To Andover: The Persecution of James Murdoch," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 15 (1975): 213–27; Sara Paretsky, *Words, Works, and Ways of Knowing: The*

moment when the literate American public were expressing an exuberant, unprecedented interest in history, many evangelicals – including many in the leadership of Emerson's own seminary – still regarded historical study with some suspicion. In 1825, the Andover faculty and administration voted to reorganize the three-year curriculum, devoting the first year exclusively to Bible, the second year to theology, and the third year to "sacred rhetoric" – that is, preaching. Church history was relegated to a summer term, and only half of the term at that.[659] Part of the reason was petty politics – James Murdock, Ralph Emerson's predecessor in the Brown Professorship of Ecclesiastical History, had a querulous temperament and was not at all well-liked by his colleagues.[660] The more important reasons, however, were twofold. First, church history was simply not seen as being that important to a theological education. In the words of Andover's first theology professor, Leonard Woods, "true religion is to be learnt, and learnt from the Bible."[661] Second, the modern discipline of church history was thought to be at least potentially theologically dangerous by the Andover faculty, who worried that historicizing the church using trendy German methodologies could muddy the clear water of their otherwise common-sense evangelical convictions.[662] Ultimately, Murdock was boxed out of the curriculum and fired in 1828 on theological grounds, accused of having repudiated orthodox substitutionary views of the atonement.[663] The faculty debated long and hard before hiring Ralph Emerson to replace him in 1829. The study of church history seemed to several of the faculty and trustees a "labyrinth of opinions and controversies" which might easily perplex and unsettle students

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Breakdown of Moral Philosophy in New England before the Civil War (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 13-17.

[659] Thompson, "Church History," 219-220.

[660] Thompson, "Church History," 215-216.

[661] Thompson, "Church History," 222.

[662] Thompson, "Church History," 219.

[663] Paretsky, *Words, Works, and Ways of Knowing*, 13.

studying for the pastorate or the mission field, drawing them into doctrinal error or temptation to rely on tradition, reason, or personal revelation over against the revealed word of God in scripture.[664] While some admitted that "history [might be] an important means of understanding the doctrine of revelation," others focused on the primacy of the Bible, asking "how can the history of the subsequent opinions and actions of men help us to determine the sense of the sacred writings?"[665] This, wrote historian J. Earl Thompson, was a primary demonstration of the neglect and devaluation of church history at seminaries in this era.[666]

All these examples add evidentiary force to Dorothy Ross's broad claim that there was a battle between Protestant theological millennialism and proto-secularist historicism in American historical imagination that would not be overcome until the 1870s, at the earliest, with the increasing "professionalization" of the field. However, as we have already seen, Ralph Emerson had an understanding of the millennial uses of biography, a mode of historical inquiry that dwelt not in the heady atmospheres of millennial speculation, but in the quotidian and often ambivalent experiences of an individual life. To him, meditation on those experiences could transform the reader, leading to inner ethical and spiritual transformation that would "make earth more like heaven." This was a millennial aspiration of the first order. This perception of biography as a millennial "usable history" suggests that Ross's binary in American historical imagination between the policing of orthodoxy and removing God from the causal picture altogether was rendered different at the level of the individual life.

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[664] Leonard Woods, *History of the Andover Theological Seminary* (Boston: J. R. Osgood and company, 1885), 188–9. Cf. Henry Warner Bowden, *Church History in the Age of Science: Historiographical Patterns in the United States, 1876-1918* (University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 36–7.
[665] Woods, *History of the Andover Theological Seminary*, 188.
[666] Thompson, "Church History," 213.

To be clear, Ralph Emerson was a formalist evangelical millennialist all the way down, committed to seeing an American future conformed as fully as possible to the ways of heaven, leading certainly to the millennial dawn. Among other benevolent societies, he was an enthusiastic supporter of the American Education Society and the Andover Peace Society, where he spoke in August 1832 of the millennium that would soon dawn if the Peace Society was successful in its objects.[667] He was a beloved pastor, with a lifelong interest in revivals in the Edwardsean tradition. [668] He was also equally convinced that it was in individual experience, as much as in collective sanctification, that heaven came to earth and millennial conditions began to obtain. The eager study of personal histories, alongside national and natural histories, in all their ambivalence and complexity, would allow students to discover historical time itself as a sacramental sign that revealed God's ways to those with eyes to see, and, in the revealing, transformed the inquirer. Perhaps it is not surprising, given his estimation of the power of biography, that Ralph Emerson should have first learned many of these millennial habits of mind from his brother Joseph.

[667] Ralph Emerson, "General Report Presented to the Peace Society in the Theological Seminary, Andover, at Their Annual Meeting," August 1832, Box 6, Ralph Emerson Papers, Trask Library, Andover Newton Theological School. Emerson was invited to be a member of the Board of Directors of the American Education Society in 1835. See William Cogswell, "William Cogswell to Ralph Emerson," July 3, 1835, Box 1, Folder 23, Ralph Emerson Papers, Beloit College Archives.

[668] On the legacy of Emerson's pastorate, see Joseph Eldridge, D. D. and T. M. Crissey, *History of Norfolk, Litchfield County, Connecticut* (Everett, MA: Massachusetts Publishing Company, 1900). He kept track of occasions of revival throughout his life, beginning in his student days at Yale. See for example Eleazar Fitch, Isaac Parsons, and Morse Fisher, "To Ralph Emerson," April 11, 1815, Box 1, Folder 3, Ralph Emerson Papers, Beloit College Archives.

"It Fired His Soul"

"One word more on the great subject of the millennium is requisite," Ralph wrote on the last page his biography of Joseph.[669] Over 439 pages, Ralph had represented his brother's life to the reader, describing in meticulous detail Joseph's family dynamics, his educational experiences, his brief pastorate in Beverly, Massachusetts, and most of all, his pioneering work as a leading evangelical education reformer, instrumental in the establishment of several "Ladies Seminaries" throughout New England until his untimely death at age 56. Ralph Emerson chose to make the texture of the *Life of Joseph Emerson* very personal, even intimate, reproducing many letters and diary entries with the intended effect that his brother be made present in the volume — Emerson wanted his readers to "meet" his brother in the book. He wrote "with a view to usefulness" — presenting Joseph Emerson as an exemplary (albeit imperfect) figure whose life was worthy of thorough consideration and imitation.[670] The *Life* was a place that readers on Earth could go to grow accustomed to the ways of heaven, with Joseph as an iconic intermediary between the two. "If individuals would become better prepared for the upper world," he wrote, "let them devoutly peruse the lives of those who 'have died in faith and gone on to inherit the promises.'"[671] And, as Ralph Emerson understood it, the beating heart of Joseph Emerson's exemplary life was the millennium.

"The millennium, *the millennium,*" he wrote, was the theme that "fired [Joseph's] soul," the "point at which he aimed," his "ruling passion."[672] Throughout his career, Joseph Emerson was utterly compelled by a vision of the world transformed under the "universal reign of Christ,"

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[669] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 438. Hereafter I will refer to the two brothers by their first names, for clarity.
[670] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*,. 5.
[671] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 4.
[672] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 222, 439.

a world "deliver[ed] from satan's bondage."[673] The future millennium formed the epistemic lens through which he perceived his present reality: "Before his eye, the millennium stood as the bright vision of a glorious reality; and every event around him, and every act of his own, was viewed in its relation to this consummation."[674] His attunement to this future millennial reality was, his daughter remarked, "a solace in every affliction, and seemed to irradiate every science, every duty, and every place."[675]

The millennial future was to him the final cause and the proper aim of all Christian desire. "Had it not been for his vivid faith and glowing interest he felt in this grand renovation," Ralph observed, "his life [would have] been far less happy and far less useful."[676] Thus, Ralph exhorted, readers should not just aim to understand his brother's convictions, but learn to concretely imitate them: "When all good men shall thus feel, and thus live, the millennium will very soon be. AMEN EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS."[677]

"Christians Think So Little About The Millennium"

Given the millennial milieu in which Joseph seemed to constantly operate, it is striking to discover that he seems to have felt rather alone in it: "It is one of the most astonishing things in the world that Christians should think so little about [the millennium]," Joseph Emerson commented to his daughter Nancy during one of their many protracted theological conversations in the 1820s.[678] Again, Ralph agreed. While he thought the boom of postmillennial speculation among the followers of Samuel Hopkins in the 1790s had elicited too much "minute speculation"

[673] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 222, 439.
[674] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 439.
[675] Ibid.
[676] Ibid.
[677] Ibid.
[678] Ibid.

about the details of the millennium that led people to claim "wisdom beyond what is written" in Scripture, he argued that it was, in 1834, "needful for us to guard against relapsing into the opposite extreme, viz. a degree of scepticism on what *is* written by God for our learning, encouragement, and guidance to practical effort…It will be folly and sin, to close our eyes to the cheering light God has given because some now, as in all previous ages, have speculated erroneously on the subject."[679]

Here we see transparently that Ralph is deliberately attempting to intervene in millennial discourse with the production of the *Life of Joseph Emerson*. The year Joseph said this, Lyman Beecher had written in the Congregational Trinitarian *Spirit of the Pilgrims* magazine that "the word Millennium attached to a book has been considered of late years by many as only another name for fanaticism," as an object of "ridicule," of "exploded theories," and the "perversion of human faculties."[680] The millennium, he wrote, "has become a 'Philosopher's Stone' in religion, because so many have made pretentions to great discovery."[681] Given the amount of false speculation, Beecher offered a much more straightforward definition to his readership: "there will be a time in which the church of God will be in a state of far greater prosperity than it has ever yet been."[682] While at one level this was eminently practical, it gets at the skepticism that Ralph was worried about. Had formalist benevolent evangelicals in 1834 replaced a vivified, commanding millennial vision, redolent of concrete biblical detail and divine initiative, with a pragmatic Beecherian account in which "millennium" simply equals "improvement, *ad infinitum.*"

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[679] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 254.
[680] Beecher, "Review: Harbinger of the Millennium," 412.
[681] Ibid.
[682] Beecher, "Review: Harbinger of the Millennium," 413.

The operative word, then, in Joseph's lament that "Christians think so little about the millennium" is, precisely, "think." What was in short supply, Joseph believed and Ralph affirmed, was not moralizing talk *about* the millennium and its potential future effects, but a stable, intellectually coherent, millennial logic for *thinking* about time, progress, and the work of God in history. This would be a way of thinking that did not abnegate the past and also accorded with the thoroughly supernatural possibilities of present experience. If the millennium was to remain a controlling theological concept in Protestant identity – calling the future into the present, while also living as if in the presence of the future – Joseph knew that *thinking* about the millennium must be detail oriented, biblically informed, and historically grounded. The alternative, as framed by Beecher's formulation, was to embrace the vague and vigorous anticipation that, in the apparent delay of the millennial dawn, had opened the Pandora's Box of so much malaise.

Ralph rushed to explain that Joseph's conviction that people must think about the millennium was eminently "*practical*" – Joseph was not into "fanciful schemes...[like] the chiliasts of old, and some of later date."[683] What he *was* into – indeed, what he devoted his life to – was organizing and recommending an American Protestant piety and practice that could sustain millennial fervor because it was rooted in both biblical metahistory *and* concrete historical experience.

In theological and pedagogical terms, Joseph's concern was that mainstream millennialism in 1833 so eagerly yearned to discern the eschatological future that it rarely paused to consider the ethics or the epistemology required to sustain it beyond the moment of fervency – whether that be in a revival meeting or an Anniversary celebration for one of the benevolent

[683] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 439.

societies. While Joseph was a great advocate of revival, and entirely consonant with the possibility that the millennium could come in America, he was more interested in equipping people to think systematically about the realities of the world as it was. As we have seen earlier, when the millennial dawn did *not* materialize more broadly as expected, the necessity of a more subtle theological and ethical interpretation of eschatological history became quickly apparent. Apart from it, the former joys of the once-revived would quickly become bitter and corrosive. Hope deferred would make the heart sick.

Resolving this issue was the great contribution that Ralph was trying to bring to the world through Joseph's biography. As a metahistorical framework, the millennium provided far more than an idealized future state in time towards which the United States was rapidly advancing. Interestingly, Ralph includes a letter in the biography that reveals a dispute between himself and Joseph about the specifics of biblical mathematics on the timing and the duration of the millennium.[684] In that perspective, the function of the *Life* is in no sense to offer an argument about the linear, temporal "attainability" of a national or global millennial state, in spite of the fact that both Ralph and Joseph take it as a given that one should work to advance its coming. Rather, the nearness of the condition of the millennium in Joseph's vision is its presence in the epistemic conditions of an individual person. The millennium *underwrote* Joseph's epistemology and his philosophy of history. The idea of the millennium was the centerpiece of his broader metaphysics – a teleological logic of scriptural narrative and personal history that gave the past its stable significance and made intelligible the American religious future. In this sense, when Ralph highlights Joseph's millennialism, what Ralph is giving the reader is a picture of Joseph's

[684] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 252.

way of knowing the world in the terms of millennial order and millennial hope – what we might call a millennial Christian humanism.

"Broken Fragments of Science"

To show how this infrastructure of millennial Christian humanism came into being, Ralph first offers some significant details about Joseph's own educational journey. Since childhood, Ralph tells the reader, Joseph had been devoted to the ministry by his father.[685] As a youth, this caused him no angst — he loved Trinitarian Congregationalism and the ministry of its churches, and furthermore he had no capacity for farming.[686] However, sometime during his training for ministry at Harvard College, from which he graduated in 1798, an inner conflict arose. Joseph discovered in himself an equal or even deeper sense of calling to thoroughly pursue education, both his own and that of others. In October of 1800, while engaged in further theological training at Harvard under the old school moderate Calvinist professor David Tappan, working as a "resident graduate" tutor and facing the impending possibility of a pastoral call from a church, Joseph confessed to a friend that he had developed a passionate desire to write a book "on the very important subject of education."[687] The obstacle he faced was inexperience. His early education had been "extremely imperfect," so to present himself as wanting to become

[685] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 13.
[686] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 21.
[687] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 56, 51; Gary J. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 17. It was Tappan's death in 1803 that would "upset a delicate liberal-conservative balance on the Harvard faculty, which set off a bitter factional fight [between liberals and conservatives] for control of the college." (Dorrien, *Imagining*, 4.) This fight would end with a liberal Unitarian victory at Harvard, provoking the conservative Trinitarians to regroup and form Andover Theological Seminary as a counter-institution.

a teacher of general subjects, as opposed to the pastoring for which he had been bred would draw criticism from his peers and mentors in theological education.[688]

"Besides reading and thought, [more experience in education] is very desirable…But my profession, the profession of my choice, is theology; and my theological fathers and brethren would probably advise me to not undertake the office of a pedagogue…I might possibly do as much good by preaching and keeping school at the same time, as by preaching only; though the voice of the world would be that I did it for filthy lucre."[689]

So Joseph demurred, even though the subject of education was his practical passion. This sense of having "had no education" haunted him throughout his early life, eventually coming to a point of crisis just after his time at Harvard. In a journal entry dated March 1, 1803, he rudely awoke to the terrible realization that he had graduated from Harvard College but had not actually been educated. He wrote:

"I have spent more than twenty-five years in the world: and much of this time has been taken up in trying, and trying, and trying to study. Do not think me jesting; it is the real language of my heart. Sometimes I have thought, I had almost begun, or that I should soon begin, to study in earnest. Sometimes I have ventured to cherish the belief, that I had really made some progress in knowledge; at others, I have almost given up in despair the thought of ever knowing any thing. … I do not deny that I think myself possessed of something that the world calls knowledge…But I have had no education."[690]

While a student at Harvard, Joseph was a diligent worker "devoted…to the severer studies," according to his classmate, Unitarian divine William Ellery Channing.[691] Another of his classmates, Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, recalled that, while he was a little "shy" and "occasionally melancholy," in matters of learning Joseph was sincere and enthusiastic, sharing Story's deep interest in mathematics while also taking great delight in both the abstractions of

[688] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 14-15.
[689] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 56.
[690] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 91.
[691] William Ellery Channing to Ralph Emerson, in Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 112.

metaphysics and "highest order…harmony" of poetry.[692] Joseph's career at Harvard was, Story summarized, "one uninterrupted course of blameless virtue," which resulted, two years after graduation, in his being asked by President Joseph Willard to return to the college as a tutor.[693]

But nonetheless, there was a fundamental problem – a problem that would lead to his discovery of the contours of his true vocation as a millennial Christian humanist.

"Though I have read a considerable number and variety of books, and thought as much as most persons of my age, yet I hardly dare so much to flatter myself as to imagine my acquisitions deserve the name of science. Imagine to yourself a heap of stuff, consisting of timber partly hewn, and partly rough; broken shingles, with here and there a whole one; rusty, crooked, broken nails, with some a little better, etc. Should you call such a matter a house? If I have any thing that looks like knowledge, it is nothing more than *broken fragments of science*."[694]

At Harvard, he had learned nothing systematic – "scientific" – about the way of the world or the ways of God. His education had no center, no infrastructure to make sense of it. He "knew" a great many things from having read "a considerable number and variety of books," but those things were in no particular order – and any true knowledge of God or God's world would, by definition, have some order to it. This was a pivotal moment for Joseph – the moment that galvanized his vocation to teaching. He would develop a series of pedagogical systems

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[692] Joseph Story to Ralph Emerson, in Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 115-116.

[693] Significantly, when Emerson first received Willard's invitation, in a meeting on the steps of Boston's State House, he waffled. (Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 65.) In light of his expected future career as a Congregational minister, he had left Cambridge for Franklin, Massachusetts in 1799, where he was bolstering his studies as an apprentice to the controversial Hopkinsian theologian, Nathaniel Emmons. In spite of their shared theological interests, however, studying with Emmons was never a perfect fit — Emmons often "intimated…dissatisfaction" at Emerson's wide-ranging literary interests, which were, according to one student, only "*ostensibly* theological." (Theron Metcalf to Ralph Emerson, in Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 66-7.) As Emerson's later work would clearly demonstrate, he considered his literary work to be theological in nature, but Emmons remained unconvinced. In view of this tension and the opportunities that Harvard would provide to teach a broader range of subjects, as well as his hope to teach some of Emmons' theological students for whom he was a responsible, a wider range of subjects, Emerson accepted Willard's offer and returned to Cambridge in 1801. (Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 67-69 and 69-111 *passim.*)

[694] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 91.

connected in a "great plan" both to chart and to discipline the expansive curiosity of his mind in the "works of nature."[695] His aim was to draw together an educational system that would integrate knowledge of the nature and history of the world, in relation to the knowledge of God, so that no one would have to have the experience of disintegration that had at Harvard.

From Broken Fragments To "Sanctified Science"

In 1818, after thirteen years of pastoral ministry, Joseph at last founded a Female Seminary for training teachers in Byfield, Massachusetts, in which this passion for developing an orderly, humanistic millennial synthesis of the knowledge of God and the world came to full expression.[696] "It is not good that the soul be without knowledge," he wrote in a statement of the teaching philosophy of the seminary.[697] Indeed it is a matter of eternal weight. Apart from knowledge of the world, Satan thrives in his attempts to deceive and deprecate humanity. "The devil and his angels are the powers of darkness, the foes of truth, the patrons of ignorance," Joseph declared, while "the eternal Jehovah is the God of order, the God of knowledge, the Father of Lights."[698] Where darkness covers the world, Satan can lead human beings into error – this is how he has "long reigned as the God of this world," maintaining an "undisputed sway in

[695] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 92.
[696] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 247–439 passim; Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 31–2, 42–56; Joseph A. Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 90–93.
[697] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 248. This is a paraphrase of Prov 19:2a ("that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good," KJV), and interestingly, precisely the same phrasing that Samuel Hopkins uses in his *System of Doctrines* II.vi.5 (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1793). I am indebted to Ryan McAnnally-Linz for bringing this to my attention.
[698] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 248.

his vast empire of pagan, papists, and Mahomedans."[699] On the other hand, the knowledge of the truth of things comes from "the Lord Jesus Christ…the light of the world."[700]

Here, in the context of this familiar millennial binary between God and Satan, enlightened civilization and superstitious ignorance, is where the eschatological implications of systematic pedagogy emerge. "It is principally by the instrumentality of knowledge that sinners are awakened, convicted, converted and ripened for glory," Joseph proclaimed, and therefore, "*Sanctified science is* the grand weapon to vanquish the legions of darkness…when knowledge shall fill the earth, Satan shall be cast out. *The advancement of knowledge, then, is no less important than the emancipation, the liberty, the happiness of mankind – no less important than the salvation of the world.*"[701]

In this equation of systematic knowledge of the world as it actually is with the exorcism of Satan's influence over human beings, on an equal par with the salvation of the world, Joseph's millennial epistemology is displayed to the full extent. Right knowledge and understanding of everything in history and everything in human experience, was spiritually liberating, by virtue of the fact that that right knowledge integrated into the system of "sanctified science" – analogically illuminated by relation to the "Light of the World." To enter into this science was to essay real engagement with the concrete facticity of the world as it actually was, and in so doing, receive *and* co-opt a genuinely liberative spiritual power. This was the center of Joseph's vision of millennial Christian humanism, the thing that Ralph so persistently lifted up for the reader to consider. "Sanctified science" was no ordinary teaching method, but rather a means for producing millennial *people*, capable of apprehending the world in a manner commensurate with

[699] Ibid.
[700] Ibid.
[701] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 249. Emphasis mine.

the inner reality of divine liberation.[702] It was only in light of the instrumentality of the collective practice of this form of millennial personhood that it was reasonable to anticipate the approaching millennial dawn.

Joseph pursued the implications of this integrative, liberative epistemic possibility across a diverse variety of disciplines, focusing on clarified experience of the imaginative, spiritual relationship between the facts being learned and the divine author of their order. One striking example of the intellectual range and the spiritual power that this afforded him comes a student's reflection on his lectures on "Astronomical Phenomena," which he taught at least twice, in South Carolina in 1817 and in Boston in 1819, to raise funds for the seminary.[703] Recalling the experience, Ms. Rebecca Eaton remarked that he constantly invoked the "imagination":

> "With him to lead the imagination, we could with seeming ease fly beyond the solar system and behold the unstained beauty and glory of other suns and other worlds. We forgot our teacher. We forgot our earth. We forgot ourselves. We were lost in contemplating the harmony, the variety, the beauty, the grandeur of celestial objects. Nor would he allow us to stop here; but carried the mind onward and onward, and led us, with ever-growing delight, to contemplate the Author of this amazing grandeur."[704]

At the close of this scientific series on the stars and the planets, Joseph recalled, he offered a lecture entitled "The Instructions of Astronomy" in which he "endeavored to prove…that the glorious Savior never died for any creature but man; and that though this earth is the 'bedlam of the universe,' God has greatly distinguished it."[705] Here again, the animating theme of Joseph's millennial pedagogy comes through clearly – though earth may seem a bedlam of confusion and disorder, there is a vast and knowable order to both

[702] Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture*, 91.
[703] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 239, 250.
[704] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 352.
[705] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 243.

the universe *and also* the contingencies of life on earth, if only one can cultivate the inner disposition to discern it.

Throughout his life, Joseph eagerly explored the relationship of his developing millennial Christian humanist method to the study of history. Early in his ministry, Joseph produced a popular "historical scriptural catechism," rendering biblical doctrine in historical form.[706] He also produced, edited, and annotated textbook editions of several works of history for study, including Samuel Whelpley's sweeping *Compend of History* and Charles Goodrich's hugely popular *History of the United States*, always noting places in the text where their historical analyses gave (or didn't give enough) particular evidentiary credence to millennial hope.[707] These works were certainly influenced by the model he found in Jonathan Edwards' *History of the Work of Redemption*, a book he thought "may well be studied, read, or thought over every year."[708] In 1806, he exhorted one inquirer, "Have you procured Edwards's History of Redemption? How much have you read in it? How much do you read in it every day? Are you delighted with it and exceedingly edified? Now is your time for improvement."[709]

In a letter to the seminary's graduating class in 1827, Joseph exhorted students to immerse themselves in historical knowledge, noting that "the study of history is peculiarly pleasing and useful…captivating…elevating to genius…suited to direct and animate the

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[706] Joseph Emerson, *The Evangelical Primer* (Charlestown, MA: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1809).
[707] Samuel Whelpley, *A Compend of History, from the Earliest Times: Comprehending a General View of the Present State of the World...With Corrections and Important Additions and Improvements*, ed. Joseph Emerson, Tenth Edition (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1828); Joseph Emerson, *Questions, Adapted to Whelpley's Compend of History* (Boston, MA: Richardson, Lord, and Holbrook, 1830); Joseph Emerson and Charles Augustus Goodrich, *Questions and Supplement to Goodrich's History of the United States*, New Edition, (First Edition, 1830) (Boston, MA: Jenks and Palmer, 1851).
[708] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 284.
[709] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 156.

inquiring traveller in the path to usefulness and the way of glory."[710] In 1829, Ralph noted that Joseph gave a series of popular lectures in Massachusetts, later repeated in Charleston, on the providential sweep of world history, with the aid of a "large historical chart of his own construction…of which he made frequent and admirable use," along with "a number of large maps."[711] "My estimation of my Chart and my new method of studying and teaching history is still rising," Joseph wrote to Zilpah Grant on Christmas Day, 1829. "I am amazed with the greatness and invigorating, exalting of historical studies and instruction…I have probably never gained more...mental improvement in an equal time."[712] The study of history was particularly conducive to the applications of sanctified science, as it seemed to reveal the correspondence between prophecy and history, exposing the steady progress of divine purposes from the long past forward, written into the midst of historical contingency. Here was Joseph's millennial Christian humanism *par excellence.* The world and all the people in it were already in the stable grip of heavenly transformation – the job of the student of history was to establish systematic knowledge of the contingencies of that world, narrating it within the orderly frame of "sanctified science" so as to cast down Satan's dominion and epistemically recognize the mystical presence of heaven on earth.

[710] Joseph Emerson, *Letter to a Class of Young Ladies, Upon the Study of the History of the United States* (Boston, MA: Crocker & Brewster, 1828), 3-4.
[711] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 329.
[712] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 334.

"Be Constantly Drawing Heaven Down"

When she visited Joseph Emerson in Boston in the late summer of 1832, Zilpah Grant was afraid he had become so sick that they would never meet again.[713] As long as she had known him, he had been physically infirm, but this time, death seemed terribly close. This caused her great sorrow. Joseph had been her teacher at the seminary, and then became her mentor as she developed her teaching career, most recently as the founding principal of Ipswich Female Seminary. But their relationship was more than pedagogical. Grant had lived with his family for more than two years while she was still the assistant teacher at Joseph's school and had related to him since as an "elder brother," a sentiment that he reciprocated.[714] After his death she wrote that she had known him "more thoroughly than perhaps anyone other person, except his own family connexions."[715]

Rightly afraid that this would be their final visit, Grant asked Joseph to write a few parting words in her notebook, as a last occasion of guidance and exhortation to her. Among them, two themes stand out. First, mental commune with heaven: "Feast your spirit continually with the clusters of Eschol," he wrote, in reference to the biblical valley in the land God had promised to Israel, from which Moses' spies brought back astonishing, superabundant fruit. "By the most graphic views of celestial scenery, by meditation, by prayer, by anticipation, by heavenly acts, by the most intimate communion with all that is holy, be constantly drawing heaven down into your own mind, until you are called up thither."[716] Heaven was not a distant dream but a real place, and the boundary between heaven and earth was porous – it could be

[713] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 375–6. It is difficult to be precise about the exact date of Grant's visit. However, the chronology of letters in Ralph Emerson's biography suggests late summer 1832. This timing also makes sense with regard to Grant's school schedule in Ipswich.
[714] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 426; 374.
[715] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 426.
[716] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 375–376.

literally accessed by the spiritually disciplined imagination. Second and relatedly, the metaphysical truths of heaven obtained on earth, and were available to those who pursued them bravely and systematically: "Fearlessly pursue celestial truth, wherever the Word and spirit lead. Be not frightened at the sound of *Philosophy! Metaphysics! Speculation! Human Reason! Logic! Theory! System! Disputation!* These can never harm you, so long as you keep clear of error and sin."[717]

These sections of Joseph's last testament to his student and friend reveal much about his sense of the strikingly thin boundary between eternal divine reality and contingent human experience made available through his millennial humanist paradigm. Here we see another example of his millennial episteme — through spiritual disciplines, the reality of heaven can be "drawn down" into the mind, and if that experiential reality is combined with the application of fearless reason, one can really participate on earth in the knowledge of eternal things. The systematic "celestial truths" that governed heaven had concrete significance for the knowledge and experience of God on earth. In a sense, to the extent that they were in God, neither the past not the future were strangers to him. After Joseph's death, Grant wrote that he had a special greatness because of his familiar acquaintance with the history and character of biblical saints, and his clear conception of invisible realities.[718] Death was to him a change of state, not character, because heavenly realities were epistemically available now across time and space, inexorably transforming his perception of the past and the present through the cultivation of a millennial Christian humanism. "We shall know more about this science," she wrote, "if we ever reach heaven."[719]

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[717] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 376.
[718] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 432.
[719] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 432.

Ralph Emerson's Millennial Historiography

Such was the substance of Ralph Emerson's historical reconstruction of the impact of his brother's millennial Christian humanism on his way of life and pedagogical method. The *Life of Joseph Emerson* functioned like a pedagogical training manual for anyone who desired to learn to apprehend the world eschatologically. More than just an intimate portrait, the biography was an intellectual handbook for his turbulent millennial times – the journey of a Christian humanist trying to reconcile his millennial hope with the concrete facticity of the world that he experienced.

Taking his cues from Joseph's commitments to the ordering realities of "sanctified science," combined with his capacity to dive deeply into questions of great historical contingency, Ralph focused and extended Joseph's method in the realm of ecclesiastical history. After the crisis precipitated by the firing of James Murdock for perceived theological *and* methodological heterodoxy, the trustees had assigned the incoming professor "the duty…to give instruction in pastoral theology" alongside his historical teaching.[720] This measure was intended to ensure that church history at Andover proceeded as a practical discipline, "preparing students for intelligent millennial activity," rather than a discipline that disrupted the curriculum, threatening its norms.[721] Himself a millennial activist who had previously been a learned pastor, rather than a Greco-Roman philologist, Ralph seems to have received the direction of the trustees not as a constraint but as an opportunity to put Joseph's millennial humanism into practice.

While at Andover, Ralph Emerson did not publish much. However, what he did publish clearly demonstrates his prior commitment to both orthodox theological judgment and millennial interests, alongside a willingness to let the facts of history speak in as much of their complexity

[720] "Brown Professorship," *Boston Recorder*, September 30, 1829; Thompson, "Church History," 227.
[721] Thompson, "Church History," 227.

and ambivalence as he could see. He demonstrates very little fear that studying history, even using German-inflected methods – which were gradually becoming more acceptable at formalist evangelical institutions, including Andover – would corrupt students, weaving webs of theological deception around them.[722] Rather, he evinces a desire to learn from the past, in text and context, as a guidepost to developing wisdom for the present work of the church.

One of the most astonishing ways that this commitment becomes visible is through his translation and publication of the lives of three Roman Catholic Desert Fathers – Paulus the Anchorite, St. Anthony of the Desert, and St. Martin of Tours – in a lengthy series of articles in Andover's journal, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, entitled "The Early History of Monasticism: From The Original Sources."[723] While he prefaced the series with an extended reflection on the monks' sub-Christian superstition, their idolatrous loyalties to Roman powers, and the fact that their stories contained "much that is not true," he also managed to hold their lives up as a question to the current state of American Christendom.[724]

It is "no easy thing," he admitted, "for us of this age and in this country, to form a just estimate or even a very definite conception of monasticism."[725] On the one hand, the desert monastics were "grotesque…objects of ridicule" for their devotion to Rome, their anti-communitarian asceticism and their accounts of continuing miracles – "lying wonders."[726] On the other hand, though, they were men of "conscience," "genuine non-resistants" who "cared for

[722] Parestsky, *Words, Works, and Ways*, 64-83.
[723] Ralph Emerson, "The Early History of Monasticism, from the Original Sources," *Bibliotheca Sacra and Theological Review* 1 (1844): 309–31, 464–525, 632–69.
[724] Emerson, "Early History of Monasticism," 316.
[725] Emerson, "Early History of Monasticism," 310.
[726] Emerson, "Early History of Monasticism," 310-313.

the world…Forbearance, gentleness, and meekness was their constant aim."[727] While these were men of "mistaken means," caught up in the vagaries of popery, they were nonetheless paragons of "self-sacrifice," "moral integrity," and ferocious devotion to the "triumphs of the gospel over Satan's kingdom."[728]

The degree of tolerance for historical ambivalence that Emerson exhibits here is most striking, as he is reading figures that his fellow formalist evangelicals would have considered enemies of the gospel to be instead men working, albeit misguidedly, in the interest of the future triumph of the Kingdom of God. "Emanating from such men," he comments, "these biographies give us a view of the spirit of the age…it is a prime office of the faithful historian to perform this self-denying task."[729] The task is self-denying because, as Emerson hastens to remind the reader, it is an unpleasant work intended to help them to guard themselves against the leaven of superstition, popery, or whatever other evil may befall the church of their present day.

> "This charitable view of the original authors of monasticism…is absolutely necessary in order to prepare us the most vigilantly and effectually to anticipate and withstand its approach. Few things can be so perilous to the church as a general belief that no very bad measure was ever introduced by good men…with a great and good purpose.[730]

What follows is more than a hundred pages of monastic biography, presented with virtually no in-lines theological commentary offering guardrails against deception, for any reader who wants to meditate upon them and learn, drawing their own conclusions.[731]

This is Emersonian millennial humanism in action, inviting readers to consider and refine the contours of their own millennial hopes, in contrast to the complex ambivalences of what

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[727] Ibid. The use of the term "non-resistant" is significant, given Ralph Emerson's commitment to the American Peace Society. He is aligning Roman Catholic monks – the erstwhile agents of the Antichrist – with a millennial benevolent cause to which he has personal attachment.
[728] Ibid.
[729] Ibid.
[730] Emerson, "Early History of Monasticism," 312-313.
[731] Paretsky, *Words, Works, and Ways*, 77.

looked in its day like a powerful manifestation of the coming kingdom. Indeed, one could hardly read this commentary on fourth-century monasticism without considering the millennial complexities of the American present. What constituted a "great and good purpose…introduced by good men" in their moment of millennial malaise, redolent of national benevolent societies, slaveocracy, and ecclesiastical schism? What in their moment was an "apparent piety" that would turn out to be, in retrospect, a manifest evil? Only a person who was both shaped by systems of "sanctified science," that allowed the examination of such purposes in relation to a rich humanistic knowledge of a greater whole, while also "drawing heaven down" via reflection on the millennial dawn would have a hope of right discernment.

And for Emerson, provoking contemporary discernment in relation to the Andover theological system was the key function of such millennial humanistic reflection on the history of the church. In a handwritten teaching notebook from 1833, marked "Questions in Ecclesiastical History, for discussion by members of the Senior Class," Emerson recorded probing questions about the "benefits and evils of the ancient union between Church and State," the comparison between "Early Christians…[and] modern, as respects doctrinal knowledge," "instances of great practical evil resulting from apparently the most harmless errors in speculation," and many more, to be raised for conversation.[732] Ambivalence abounds. These questions expose what was, for Emerson, the purpose of church history in a moment of millennial malaise. The senior class, having taken all their systematic courses in Bible and in theology, were now equipped to put that system in action in the interest of millennial humanist reflection on concrete historical problems, first in the past and then in the present. There was no singular answer for the questions Emerson was raising. The phrasing of the questions themselves

[732] Ralph Emerson, "Questions in Ecclesiastical History, for Discussion by Members of the Senior Class" (Notebook, 1833), Box 6, Ralph Emerson Papers, Trask Library, Andover Newton Theological School.

admitted as much. The point, however, was the practice of discernment. "Some of the grand questions of protestantism, now," Emerson wrote in 1840, "are in no small degree agitated as questions of early ecclesiastical history…the young theologian cannot well understand the formulas themselves, without a knowledge of their history."[733]

Conclusion

In conclusion, it bears mentioning that Ralph Emerson's commitment to historically-informed discernment about contemporary questions did not seem to make him any more morally farsighted about the biggest questions facing the church in his day. If anything, it allowed him resources to justify his retrenchment in a thoroughly gradualist conservatism. Regarding the question of slavery, he envisioned the coming of the end of slavery through the *conversion* of slaveholders and "rectifying public sentiment."[734] He argued at length over a series of articles in the *Boston Recorder* that abolitionism was so divisive to the church that it could not possibly be a moral or godly means to a good end.

> "What unprejudiced mind will not be at least a little apprehensive of the soundness of the system of action which is found so readily to array itself against [churches and ministers], objects so dear to the heart of piety and essential to the prosperity of Zion…What movement has there been…either among good men or bad men, which has produced so great, so rapid, so pervading a mischief to the cause of religion as this?...Is this not the very thing which the great adversary exults to see, if it be not indeed produced by him?"[735]

Precisely such an argument might well have been made, with great approbation, concerning the rise of desert monasticism in one of Ralph Emerson's church history seminars.

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[733] Gustav Friedrich Wiggers, *An Historical Presentation of Augustinism and Pelagianism from the Original Sources*, trans. Ralph Emerson (Andover, MA: Gould, Newman & Saxton, 1840), 6, 9.
[734] Ralph Emerson, "To Rev. Samuel Osgood, D.D.," *Boston Recorder*, November 30, 1838.
[735] Ralph Emerson, "To Rev. Samuel Osgood, D.D.," *Boston Recorder*, December 21, 1838.

In their idiosyncratic ways, both Joseph and Ralph Emerson worked to develop an alternative mode of formalist evangelical millennialism to the one that began to founder on the rocks of millennial exhaustion and the ineluctable crisis of evangelical racism in the mid-1830s. Joseph, who did most of his work prior to the crisis, had, by 1833, effectively formed a humanistic pedagogical strategy for attending to the questions the demand raised. Ralph, for his part, amplified and modulated his brother's pedagogical insights as the ship of millennial metahistory was beginning to break apart. Each in their own way, the Emersons were millennialists in whom there was no malaise, because of their insistence, in their teaching and their writing, on the intentional development of a millennial Christian humanism that included *not only* a forward-looking eschatological metahistory of the Church rooted in scripture, theology, and evangelical enterprise, but also a systematic, backward-looking consideration of the concrete complexities revealed by human historicity. Constructing their millennial consciousness this way enabled them to narrate a stable, usable millennial identity rooted in the preservation of the church, while still allowing them to believe they harbored aspirations for far-reaching future transformation of the United States.

Chapter Five

"The Great Natural Kingdom of God": Sylvester Graham's Millennial Body

Introduction

Antebellum programs of food reform offer another powerful example of the reimagination of American millennialism that began to take place in earnest in the 1830s. Sylvester Graham—the leading exponent of food reform in this period—aimed to show that the millennial perfection was within reach of every person who obeyed God with their body, coming into conformity with the laws and principles of God's "great natural kingdom." Many body reformers of the period, not least the famously eccentric Graham, were labeled as quacks in their own day, a judgment often reflected back by historians.[736] Consequently, the study of religious reform movements undertaken by formalist evangelicals has tended to exclude such people from its ranks. Their concerns have been perceived by many scholars as more esoteric than evangelistic, leading to an unfortunate decoupling of historical continuities. The aim of the present chapter is to show that, in fact, the impulses behind the reforming work of Sylvester Graham find their origin in the very same stream of millennial anticipation that informed the major institutions of formalist evangelical benevolence. Seeing these continuities will afford a new perspective on the tectonic shift that took place in the mid-1830s, as the millennial canopy began to give way and millennial malaise set in.

[736] One notable new exception is Jonathan Riddle, "Prospering Body and Soul: Health Reform, Religion, and Capitalism and Antebellum America" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2019). Robert Abzug also made a pioneering contribution to this way of thinking with a chapter on body reforms in Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 163-183.

"I Feel That I Know the Mind of God"

"It does seem to me clearly evident that there is a peculiarity in my case, which demands the serious consideration of the philanthropists of the age."[737] One can imagine Gerrit Smith sighing with weary skepticism when he read those words, penned in a letter to him by his friend Sylvester Graham in 1840.[738] An extremely wealthy man in strong sympathy with reform causes, Smith was constantly asked, by letter, by proxy, and in person to donate to one reform cause or another, and often he obliged. Demands for "serious consideration" and claims to unique importance were no doubt familiar. But the claims in the letter he held before him were peculiar—almost gnostic in their tone.

> "The cause to which I am devoted…embraces all that is good in every other moral and philanthropic enterprise of the day … Providence…has effected such exercises, such an education of my mental and moral powers as has brought me to a knowledge of immensely important principles which the world has hitherto neither understood nor perceived … *I feel that I know the mind of God*."[739]

Ralph Volney Harlow, Gerrit Smith's first biographer, was flabbergasted: "No mere summary could begin to convey the spirit of gorgeous self-assurance that Graham poured into [his] letter."[740] Graham claimed that his program would "elevate and sanctify the [human] race," transitioning humanity into a fundamentally new state of being.[741] Divine in origin and world-historical in scope, Graham's reforming agenda was not at base about food, in spite of his

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[737] Sylvester Graham to Gerrit Smith, 1840, quoted in Ralph Volney Harlow, *Gerrit Smith: Philanthropist and Reformer* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1939), 94-5.
[738] Smith and Graham had worked together in public at least once as representatives of the American reform movement at a conference that Graham helped to organize in New York City in 1839. See "Sylvester Graham to Theodore Dwight Weld" in The Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké, 1822-1844, ed. Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934), 753-5.
[739] Harlow, *Smith*, 94-5
[740] Ibid.
[741] Ibid.

reputation as a food reformer. It was about bringing the whole world into alignment with the mind of God, to which he had providentially been given unique access.

Alas for Graham, Gerrit Smith was not impressed — he may even have been disturbed. In any case, he offered no funds. Graham, cash poor and saddled with liability for bad investments, was left with no choice but to, in his words, "desecrate my mind and spend my energies and wear out my life in toiling in the mines of Mammon."[742] He would die eleven years later in a state of distempered desperation, his prophetic mission unrealized.

Sylvester Graham and the Kingdom of God

Sylvester Graham's startling claim to "know the mind of God" in his letter to Gerrit Smith encapsulates a great deal about his sense of himself as a *religious* figure grappling with the problems that faced the reforming philanthropists of his day.[743] Just a year earlier, in 1839, Graham had published *Lectures On The Science of Human Life*, an explication of his "theo-scientific" physiological system which contended the essence of human nature was constructed via sets of laws imposed on matter by God's thoughts.[744] He believed that his research in philosophy and natural science, had allowed him unique insight into the content of those laws, essentially affording him special revelation into the content of God's design for human behavior.

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[742] Ibid.

[743] Graham was using the term "philanthropist" in its original sense, meaning lover of humanity. Thus he included himself in the category, not just Gerrit Smith.

[744] The term "theo-scientific" is mine. It is somewhat unwieldy, as well as open to the criticism that all science carries with it (at least) implicit theological assumptions. However, I have chosen to use it here because it remains important to show the extent to which Graham made his explicit theological commitments an integral part of his scientific claims. This posture of standing astride the scientific *and* the theological stood out, usually negatively, to scientists of his day. See for example the review of *Lectures On The Science Of Human Life* in *The British and foreign medico-chirurgical review or quarterly journal of practical medicine and surgery,* (London: Churchill & Highley, July-October 1850) Volume 6, 84, and 76-98 *passim.*

A thorough practical application of them would constitute a social reform agenda that comprehended the essence of all reform efforts, from private questions like health and diet to major public political issues like the abolition of slavery.[745]

Graham narrated the religious foundations of this comprehensive agenda using the biblical metaphor of the Kingdom of God, which he defined concisely in his final work, *The Philosophy of Sacred History, Considered In Relation To Human Aliment And The Wines Of Scripture*, as "the spiritual reign of the moral laws of God" over all of life.[746] As Graham construed it, the Kingdom of God was a modern philosophy of "true religion," scientific, biblical, and above all practical way of interpreting the world with a diversity of concrete applications.[747] Once people learned how to interpret the world under the normative narrative of the Kingdom of God, then they could devise practical habits and communal lifeways to enable them to literally live in God's Kingdom in their present, embodying obedience to God's ways "on earth as it is in heaven." While this process was about the reform of natural life, Graham contended in his *Lectures* that a full regime of life lived under the Kingdom of God produced "almost supernatural" effects.[748]

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[745] Graham himself was an antislavery gradualist, Whiggish like most of the formalist evangelicals of this day. However, he was not shy in sharing his antislavery opinions, describing himself in an 1849 letter to William Lloyd Garrison as having been from his youth "thoroughly and ardently an antislavery man." (Sylvester Graham, "To William Lloyd Garrison," March 13, 1849, Boston Public Library, Rare Books Department. https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/dv143g59w) On reforms comprehending abolitionism, see Graham's comments in Sylvester Graham, *Letter to the Hon. Daniel Webster, on the Compromises of the Constitution* (Northampton, MA: Hopkins, Bridgman and Company, 1850), 1.
[746] Sylvester Graham, *The Philosophy of Sacred History Considered in Relation to Human Aliment and the Wines of Scripture*, ed. Henry S. Clubb (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1855), § 394. Hereafter this text will be referred in the notes to as *PSH.*
[747] Graham carefully distinguished "true religion" from the perversions of sectarianism in an 1830 letter to Chief Justice John Marshall. Sylvester Graham, "To Chief Justice John Marshall," January 9, 1830, Box 1, Folder 9, Graham Family Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.
[748] See, for example, Sylvester Graham, *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*, 2 vols. (Boston, MA: Marsh, Capen, Lyon, and Webb, 1839), §1163. Hereafter this text will be referred to in the notes as *LSHL.*

Ironically, Graham's interest in the religious ideology of the Kingdom of God has been overshadowed by his success as a religiously inflected food reformer.[749] By virtue of his famously quirky personality and his eponymous cracker, "Bran-Bread Graham" has been located, by and large, amongst the seemingly boundless array of "special-interest" American reform efforts that waxed in the aftermath of the war of 1812 and waned by 1850 in the wake of the accelerating rise of anti-slavery on the path to the Civil War.[750] But Graham's reforms were not generic attempts to improve American eating habits. Rather, they were, in many respects, a self-conscious *critique* of the traditional forms of revivalist millennialism that began to stumble in the 1830s.

The foundational motif of Graham's religious thought is the Kingdom of God – the intended orderly reign of God over all living things. This simultaneously describes both the ethical content of the divine will for human beings and the ultimate *telos* of natural life on earth. Graham develops this ideology in a variety of different ways, reflecting tensions he felt with certain iterations of millennialism, divine interventionism, supernaturalism, and topographies of

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[749] Some prominent examples of this approach are Stephen Nissenbaum *Sex, diet, and debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and health reform* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Rod Precce, *Sins of the Flesh: A History of Ethical Vegetarian Thought* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2009); Jayme Sokolow, *Eros and modernization: Sylvester Graham, health reform, and the origins of Victorian sexuality in America* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984). The latter work, though indelibly disgraced by its very apparent plagiarism from Nissenbaum's work, does contain some excellent primary research. Even the best published work on Graham's religion, Robert Abzug's *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) underplays the content of Graham's attempts to reshape the discourse of American Christianity as such, effectively locating him outside the Christian tradition. This may say more about Abzug's sense of the Christian center than it does about Graham as such, but it is still a misreading of Graham's intentions. These works almost all deal only with Graham's food reform texts. Perhaps most astonishing, none of these works deal *at all* with Graham's *Philosophy of Sacred History*. The only work besides the present one that engages *Philosophy of Sacred History* at all is Riddle, "Prospering Body and Soul," and Jonathan Riddle, "Body, Soul, and Bible: A Religious History of Nineteenth-Century Physiological Reform" (M.A. Thesis, Baylor University, 2013).

[750] Graham was widely known among his detractors in the press as "Bran Bread Graham." For one of many examples, see "Bran Bread Graham" in the *North American and Daily Advertiser* of Philadelphia, July 24th, 1840.

the afterlife popular among many of his antebellum Protestant co-religionists.[751] The tensions are most readily seen in his 1829 sermon, "Thy Kingdom Come," as well as in letters from that early period. By 1839, with the publication of *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*, the first of his two "major" works, Graham's convictions are expressed more normatively, with the confidence of established conviction. Graham's narration of the doctrines and practices of the Kingdom of God in his later work resounds with optimism about the possibility of forming *natural* citizens of heaven on earth — *contra* the interventionist, instrumental millennialism of the early Benevolent Empire, he offered an early American Protestant account of the democratic organicist spiritual developmentalism that would become central concerns of the likes of Horace Bushnell, Henry Boynton Smith, and Samuel Harris in later decades of the nineteenth century.[752]

In another significant turn away from his orthodox evangelical progenitors, Graham shared many religious impulses with the Swedenborgian spirituality of his friends in the cause of American vegetarianism, Dr. William Metcalfe and the Philadelphia Bible-Christians. While archival records of their direct interactions are thin, their mutual regard, demonstrable ideological sympathy, and even shared religious language leads me to conclude that Graham's religious self-understanding was deeply influenced by them. Graham's *Philosophy of Sacred*

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[751] Of course Graham was far from the only person in his religious milieu to speak about the Kingdom of God. Many millennialist Protestants of the period, from Joseph Smith to Sojourner Truth to William Miller to Charles Finney (to name just a few), narrated aspects of their religious identity using the language of the Kingdom. Historian David Reynolds has aptly dubbed this moment in American history the era of "God's Many Kingdoms." (See David S. Reynolds, *Waking Giant* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009). Thus, it is not the mere presence of language of the Kingdom in Graham's work that is of interest, but rather the eschatological shift that the discourse of the Kingdom of God signified for him and the kinds of things it enabled him to argue for.

[752] See for example, Horace Bushnell, *Views of Christian Nurture, and of Subjects Adjacent Thereto* (Hartford, CT: Edwin Hunt, 1847)*;* Samuel Harris, *The Kingdom of Christ on Earth* (Andover, MA: Draper, 1874)*;* Henry Boynton Smith, *Faith and Philosophy: Discourses and Essays* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1877). In Graham's development of the ideology of the Kingdom of God, one can see an early case of eschatological organicism that that would move to the center of the Protestant conversation in the years following the Civil War.

History is brimming with Bible-Christian-inflected ideas. His account of Christianity challenges standard formalist Protestant narratives of divine interventionism and complicates hard distinctions between nature and the supernatural; Graham was quite conscious about its tension with some popular antebellum narratives of millennial theopolitics.[753] That said, Graham also had much sympathy with the millennialist desire to see the world come under the reign of Christ through the spiritual transformation of individual lives. To integrate these two competing interests, and to describe the religious underpinnings of his reform agenda, Graham drew on the conceptual toolkit of the Kingdom of God. Even though, by 1830, Graham had abandoned his quest for a Presbyterian pulpit, he never abandoned his desire to intervene in American Protestant discourse. Rather, at some distance from the pulpit, he offered a new, practical, philosophical agenda to American citizens awaiting the millennium via his narrative of the "great natural Kingdom of God."[754]

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[753] Graham's story has particular value for what Catherine Albanese has called the "underexamined story of Christian diversity in America." Catherine Albanese, "Understanding Christian Diversity in America," in *American Christianities: A History of Dominance and Diversity*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus and W. Clark Gilpin (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 30 and passim. In the wake of the crumbling of the hegemony of consensus-driven church history in the mid-1970s, the discipline of American religious history inclined strongly away from the study of Christianity qua Christianity, in the favor of studying "non-Christian others," leaving the question of "intra-Christian pluralism" substantially underaddressed. In particular, Albanese has made a very strong case that "metaphysical Christianity," is an identifiable third stream alongside "institutional" and "evangelical" Christianity. It has been "a distinct and robust form of Christian belief from the first," and that as yet, its influence is insufficiently understood.(33). For a longer development of Albanese's construction of this model, see her *A Republic of Mind and Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 1-18. Metaphysically-inclined Christians, adepts at "cultivating a heightened sense of self in relation to perceived higher realities," coming to know themselves as carrying a living flame of divinity within themselves can be found, she avers, throughout the institutional and evangelical churches. (Albanese, "Understanding," 34 and *Republic*, 160.) However, because of both the doctrinal and confessional boundaries of old school church historians and the inclination against studying Protestant Christianity among post-consensus religionists, Albanese argues that the story of the place and influence of metaphysically-inclined Christians as Christians on Christian belief and practice is largely untold.

[754] *LSHL*, § 763.

Thy Kingdom Come: Anxious About Millennialism

On Sunday morning, December 13th, 1829, the Reverend Sylvester Graham, then thirty five years old and temporarily occupying a Presbyterian pulpit in Bound Brook, New Jersey, preached a sermon in the Crown Street church in Philadelphia entitled "Thy Kingdom Come; a Discourse on the Importance of Infant and Sunday-Schools."[755] "Thy Kingdom Come" was Graham's debut in the Philadelphia reform milieu — he was still a novice, recently ordained and not yet permanently settled in a church. He pulled no punches, playing on the religious anxieties of his audience to motivate them to financially support the drastically underfunded American Sunday-School Union. Angering some and thrilling others, he quickly gained a justified reputation as an excellent orator, and within months, he was working full-time as a popular lecturer for the Pennsylvania State Society for the Suppression of the Use of Ardent Spirits.[756]

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[755] Sylvester Graham, *Thy Kingdom Come: A Discourse On The Importance Of Infant And Sunday-Schools* (Philadelphia: Wm. Geddes, 1831). Hereafter this text will be referred to as *TKC.* Cf. Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, Debility,* 13.

[756] On Graham's early career, see Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, Debility,* 10-14; Sokolow, *Eros and Modernization*, 57-61. Graham was only formally hired as a temperance lecturer for about six months, as he found it impossible to stay focused on the topic. He quit in 1831 and began lecturing independently on issues related to physiology. Regarding the angry reactions of some of his hearers, in the introduction to the print version of "Thy Kingdom Come," Graham wrote that the text had been "egregiously misrepresented," that "many minds" had been "prejudiced by the misrepresentations concerning it," and by extension, we can assume, concerning him as well. I could find no records of what were the precise nature of these "misrepresentations." However, the tone of Graham's letters from this brief period when he was representing the American Sunday-School Union is highly contentious and demanding. His aforementioned letter to Chief Justice John Marshall, is an obsequious apology for his comportment during their meeting. His "acute sensibilities" of feeling that propelled his advocacy for the ASSU "deprived [him] of [his] self-possession." He went on: "an impression may have been received by you which is not consonant with that sincere and profound respect which I feel for you and which was my desire to manifest." Reading between the lines, he appears to have spoken with a passionate, stentorian condescension to the Chief Justice, lecturing him about the importance of Sunday Schools for the preservation of America's institutions of freedom and democracy — so passionately in fact that he composed eight quarto sides of untrammeled repentance in which, among other things, he aligned Marshall with George Washington. One can only imagine how terribly this meeting must have gone. This astounding episode points up the fact that Graham's advocacy for the ASSU was intense, turbulent, intemperate, and bound to cause controversy. Indeed, this was a pattern that would follow Graham throughout his life. See Sylvester Graham, "To Chief Justice John Marshall."

"Thy Kingdom Come" was a performance at once boiling with possibility and terrorized by anxious burden. From its opening lines, the fate of humanity hung in the balance: "Man was originally created in the moral and spiritual kingdom of God—bearing the moral image of his creator, and being a holy subject of his moral government; but he revolted from that kingdom and by his sin, 'brought death into our world and all our woes.'"[757] Immediately, Graham had diagnosed the root cause of every problem faced by humanity — "all our woes" — as traceable to a revolt against the "moral and spiritual Kingdom of God." The basic structure of God's authority in the world had been violated, and with terrible consequences. But there was hope.

> "From that hour, however, down to the present moment—through all the generations of mankind, promises have been believed, and expectations cherished, by such as sincerely acknowledge the moral government of God, and the divine inspiration of our sacred Scriptures, that a time shall come, when the moral and spiritual kingdom of God shall be re-established upon earth."[758]

This was no forensic argument about the metaphysical status of sinful humanity—rather, Graham was giving his audience a whirlwind primer on their shared narrative of sacred history from the original heights of human greatness to the depths of human folly and then just as quickly to the bleeding edge of the hope of the faithful that death and woe would once again be banished and the visible reign of God would take hold all over the world. And the last stop on Graham's breathless tour was in the center of their very present moment.

> "Times have been computed with care, and the signs have been observed with deep interest,—and a general impression pervades the Church, that the dawning of the latter-day glory may be near at hand:—and that all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, seem hasting to the coming of this great day of his power."[759]

With unmistakable intentionality, Graham invokes American millennial anticipation, using classic language shared with his contemporaries in the formalist evangelical benevolent

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[757] *TKC,* 3.
[758] *TKC*, 3.
[759] *TKC*, 4.

establishment, as well as hearkening back to the rhetorical traditions of the revivalists of the 1730s and 40s, and the "departed spirits of your Pilgrim Fathers."[760] The reign of God *may* be close at hand. The re-establishment of the authority of God's kingdom on the earth, and especially in America, was once again a reasonable possibility.

And yet, precisely at the moment that Graham invoked popular millennial expectation, he also questioned its coherence and its wisdom. Specifically, he questioned whether or not many American millennialists, in their breathless enthusiasm for the re-establishment of God's kingdom on earth, even had a clear picture of what that phenomenon might look like, not to mention what *kind* of efforts its arrival would involve.

> "In exact proportion to our true desire for the full coming of the Kingdom of God must be our anxiety to know and our willingness and promptitude to exert the human means and efforts by which that kingdom is to be extended over all the earth. And in order to do this, *it is necessary that we should well-understand the true nature and bearing of that kingdom*."[761]

This is of course a rhetorical set up for the rest of his sermon, in which he intends to explain precisely what *is* "the true nature and bearing" of God's kingdom. But it is more than that, as it introduces a central ambivalence in Graham's work concerning efforts to hasten the millennial dawning of God's "latter-day glory."

Graham is not categorically anti-millennial — he describes the full coming of the Kingdom of God as the advent of "the millennial reign of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," emphasizing his hope that American Christians will focus their efforts so that the "millennium which is so often prayed for…and which so many of us profess to desire" will be able to be ushered in.[762] On the other hand, Graham is very concerned the way that he perceives many Americans are aiming at the millennialist goal of a culture conformed the lordship of

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[760] *TKC,* 27.
[761] *TKC*, 4.
[762] *TKC*, 1, 27.

Christ *via* the pursuit of mass adult conversion – a nationwide revival. This, he believes, is fundamentally misguided. The single-minded pursuit of adult conversion, particularly in revival, overemphasized supernaturalism and disregarded natural facts about the way human beings are constituted. His concern is not about *laxity* in millennial pursuits, as in Charles Finney's above-noted call for the "church [to] do all her duty" and see the millennium "come in three years."[763] Rather, Graham's worry is that so much millennial energy channeled towards revivalism and adult conversion is misdirected, operating in opposition to a proper understanding of the facts of human nature.

> "From the testimony of FACT, therefore, we must necessarily conclude, either that the millennium never will take place on earth, or that the established means, in the divine economy of grace, must be brought to bear at some other point, *which has hitherto been very much neglected*; and which is less powerfully fortified by the walls of adult depravity, and education, and habit…*Childhood* is…peculiarly and emphatically the age, designed by God, in the constitution and condition of things, and designated by the Scriptures, and demonstrated by experience, to be the time for the successful application of the means of grace, in bringing the Kingdom of God."[764]

While it is not surprising that a sermon intended to raise money for the underfunded American Sunday-School Union would emphasize the importance of attending to the conditions of natural human development among children, Graham's conviction about this point goes far beyond its temporary rhetorical utility. In arguing for the irreducible importance of child Sunday schools for the formation of Christians, he is advancing broader conviction that any religious system that undervalues the natural developmental dynamics of human life is fighting a losing battle for the coming of the Kingdom of God in the world.

Graham invokes a tripartite structure of authority to undergird this judgment: the scientific "constitution and condition of things," the testimony of Scripture, and the evidence of

[763] Finney, *Lectures on Revivals*, 282.
[764] *TKC*, 11.

practical experience. Each of these is, in his view, a universal criterion which insists on the superiority of a developmental paradigm. Graham notes that Jesus Christ himself "declared, concerning little children, that '*of such is the Kingdom of God;*' and *for that very reason*, he has commanded that they should…come to him…and not be prevented."[765] He avers that many who are stirred by what they take to be the supernaturally mandated significance of their particular "times" are devaluing these crucial universal criteria, and even "preventing" children from becoming citizens of God's Kingdom in the natural, scriptural manner that Christ prescribed.

It is because they militate against *nature* that that so many conversionist efforts are ineffective, jibing the efforts of the American Bible, Tract, and Missionary Societies with the observation that "scarce a wretch perishes under the gallows in our country who cannot quote the scriptures, and who has not heard…many sermons."[766] These organizations are neglecting nature's "established means in the divine economy of grace" in favor of a wrongheaded approach that *only works* in the event of an unusual divine intervention. Graham bolsters this claim with a raft of (anecdotal) statistical evidence about prisoners in England, Wales, and Ireland, showing that Sunday school attendance essentially prevents a life of crime because it forms Christians *in proper accordance with God's natural order*: "not a one [criminal] had been found who had ever been, for any considerable time, a regular member of Sunday school; and not more than two or three who had ever attended such a school at all."[767]

Thus, the viable answer to the moral and spiritual problem of a widely unregenerate public cannot lie in reliance on a notion that American Christendom has entered into qualitatively different millennial times in which prior conditions and constraints no longer hold.

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[765] *TKC*, 11.
[766] *TKC*, 12-13.
[767] *TKC*, 14.

Rather, he argues, the American churches must acknowledge that "the success with which God, in his sovereignty, blesses the means of grace, depends not on *times* but on [concrete, natural] *conditions*, which in all present time, it is the duty of man to aim at, and earnestly strive for NOW."[768]

With this practical, biblical, scientific critique of de-naturalized spirituality in view, Graham attempts in "Thy Kingdom Come" to show the way that the idea of the Kingdom of God can give a framework for the pursuit of millennial goals while remaining more consonant with the concrete constitution of human nature. His argument is not yet fully developed, but the ideas towards which he gestures as well as the formal moves that he raises foreshadows much of the future of his religious program.

He breaks down the nature of the Kingdom of God into seven subheads -- the Kingdom of God as a kingdom of knowledge, of love, of obedience, of righteousness, of peace, of holiness, and of Spirit. Then, he elaborates on these subheads by offering an interpretative point, followed by a long string of positive scriptural aphorisms that provided a sort of divine declarative logic for his point. He aims to be commonsensical, scriptural, and prophetic, all at once. This is best illustrated by example from one of his subheads.

"FOURTHLY. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of Righteousness. — Not the metaphysical righteousness of the schools; — but practical — matter-of-fact righteousness in real life, between man and man…For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright: he leadeth him in the path of righteousness, for his namesake. The Lord God will bring in everlasting righteousness, and cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God; but he that doeth righteousness, is righteous even as he is righteous. For the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."[769]

[768] *TKC*, 12-13, 11. Emphasis original.
[769] *TKC*, 5.

There does not seem to be any complex inner logic to this concatenation of biblical citations. Rather, Graham is experimenting with the adoption of a prophetic voice. One has to imagine the way that it sounded when he delivered it. In marshalling a vast amount of scripture into a short space — citing eight unique verses about righteousness in five sentences — Graham performs a reading that suggests he has visceral purchase on the meaning of biblical righteousness[770]. He is *re-prophesying* a lot of biblical assertions about righteousness, and in so doing locating his own rhetoric more within the spiritual domain of biblical prophecy than normal preaching.

He couples his prophetic cadence with an appeal to common sense and practicality. Graham scorns disembodied theological theories about the ways of God, detached from the nature of real life and real relationships. Rather, he takes himself to be after a flesh and blood vision of God's righteousness that is observable, concrete, and down-to-earth. In Graham's renarration of the Kingdom, the prophetic and the practical, the scriptural and the scientific collide and combine over against "the metaphysical righteousness of the schools" that teach theological abstractions instead of practical philosophy dependent on its common-sense utility "between man and man." The spiritual and the natural worlds are, for Graham, fundamentally interwoven. One is not reducible to the other, but neither can they be radically separated.

At the center of Graham's practical philosophical definition of the Kingdom of God in "Thy Kingdom Come" lies the "primary and fundamental principle" of the Kingdom that is a "prerequisite to every other property," namely that the Kingdom of God is a "Kingdom of knowledge."[771] This knowledge, he asserts, is neither that of atheistic "human science" nor of dogmatic "speculative…theoretical knowledge of moral and religious truth" but rather that of a

[770] The verses he invokes are, in order, Psalm 11:7, Psalm 23:3, Daniel 9:24, Isaiah 61:11, Psalm 85:5, 1 John 3:10, 1 John 3:7, and Romans 14:17, KJV.
[771] *TKC*, 4.

"true knowledge of the character and law and requirements of God…impressed upon on the heart—controlling the affections and becoming an inner rule of action."[772] In a letter written less than a month after he preached this sermon, he calls this kind of knowledge "divine science."[773] (Here we may recognize resonance with the paradigm of "sanctified science" proposed by Joseph Emerson.) For the Kingdom of God to actually come in the world — the hope of every millennialist, himself included — there must be a fundamental *epistemic* transformation in the hearts of all people. Such a transformation must also be at once spiritual *and* practical; neither atheistic science nor impractical metaphysical theology will do. Only visceral, reflexive knowledge of "divine science" manifested in practical action can enable the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth.[774] When this knowledge becomes universal among young and old, when the earth is as "full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea," when all "remember his statutes to keep them," then and only then will it be said that the millennial Kingdom of God has come.[775]

In sum, then, Graham advances three simultaneous, interrelated shifts in "Thy Kingdom Come," all having to do with the interplay of scientific knowledge, scriptural reasoning, and practical experience. The shifts he forwards in this work comprise the religious starting point of all of his future reforming efforts. The first is a shift from concern about the *supernatural nature of the times to come* to concern about the *universal natural conditions of the present* under which transformation can happen, both for individuals and for societies. The second draws directly from the first, calling for a shift of emphasis away from the *conversion* of adults to Christianity

[772] *TKC*, 4. Graham also attacked the possibility of atheistic science in *LSHL* §14.
[773] Sylvester Graham, "To Chief Justice John Marshall."
[774] Ibid.
[775] *TKC*, 4. Graham is quoting Habakkuk 2:14 and Psalm 103:18 among a wide variety of other verses to describe this epistemic phenomenon.

to the *development* of people — and especially children — as Christians.[776] As Graham becomes more explicitly scientific in his writing, it becomes clear that his focus on development is directly connected to a notion of God's fixed laws, and a resistance to the idea of God's arbitrary or capricious will. The third shift is implicit here, but borne out in more explicit ways throughout his corpus. He wants to renarrate *millennial* expectations rooted in predictions about the nature of the times, tactically described by formalist evangelical institutions as being "unusually conducive" to the supernatural work of God, opting instead for a more descriptive language for galvanizing godly action in the midst of present conditions via his practical, common-sense discourse of the *Kingdom of God*. Graham's Kingdom of God does not radically displace language of the millennium — indeed, he himself still uses millennial language from time to time. However, Graham opts here, and for the rest of his days, to speak mainly of the Kingdom of God, as it gives him a more practical, concrete language by which to describe the concrete content of religious ethics. If each of these three ideological transitions takes place by a unified American church, freed from sectarian bias and committed to "*doing* the will of God" as opposed to "speculating near the truth," then the "world will be sanctified" "the kingdom of God shall come, and his will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven."[777]

In The Name Of The Father

For Graham, the themes and questions raised in "Thy Kingdom Come" were not only philosophically important but intensely personal, resonant in a variety of ways by his difficult childhood and his complex relationship to the memory of a father he never knew. Born in Suffield, Connecticut in 1794, Sylvester was the seventeenth child of John Graham Jr., then

[776] This concern was notably taken up by Horace Bushnell in his *Christian Nurture*.
[777] *TKC*, 26-27.

seventy-two years old, and his second wife, Ruth King Smith.[778] His father was the leading light of a well-known New England ministerial family who were ardent proponents of the Great Awakening revivals.[779] Graduating from Yale College in 1740 at a major peak of the Connecticut Awakenings, John Graham Jr. imbibed the *zeitgeist* to the dregs. He was so zealous in fact for the supernatural revival conversionist climate of his times that no less a New Light than Jonathan Edwards questioned his "prudence and steadiness," citing fear that he would be "unable to serve interest of religion" as grounds for his refusal to recommend him for settlement in the West Suffield pulpit in 1746.[780] John Graham Jr. was a well-known radical — in fact, it was precisely because of his radicalism that the church at West Suffield called him to be its minister in the first place.[781] As it turned out, John Graham Jr. was quite steady in his commitment to religion in Suffield — once he was eventually settled as the minister, he served for some four decades, breaking only to serve in the French and Indian War, as well as the War of Independence. However, he never lost his fervor for supernatural conversion via divine intervention as the way to save people from their desperate earthly condition, writing about these subjects in his journals well into the 1780s.[782]

Within two years of Sylvester's birth, his father was dead. Shortly thereafter, Sylvester's mother Ruth went mad and became unable to care for him, so young Sylvester was sent to live

[778] Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, Debility,* 9-10.
[779] Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit,* 1:314-316.
[780] See Douglas L. Winiarski, "Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast? Radical Revivalism and the Great Awakening in the Connecticut Valley," *Church History* 74, no. 4 (2005): 726-7.
[781] On the nature of the Radical Great Awakening, see Douglas L. Winiarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (Yale University Press, 2007). On the call of John Graham Jr. see Winiarski, "Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast?" 727.
[782] John Graham Jr., "Diary" (n.d.), Box 1, Folder 13-14, Graham Family Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

with friends, family members, and court appointed guardians in various parts of Connecticut, New York, Vermont, and New Jersey for almost the next twenty years of his life.[783] It was a bitter, lonely experience; he described himself as being "like a stray lamb among…domestic flocks."[784] Sickly, emotionally fragile, and never truly at home, Sylvester Graham attempted and failed at numerous careers with "moneymaking purpose," much to the exasperation of those who were trying to raise him.[785] He was a retiring child, who wanted nothing more than to "get away from the…world…and think, think, think…to investigate the nature and quality and purposes of things, and particularly in relation to man and human well-being."[786] Retrospectively (and with equal portions of self-pity and self-aggrandizement), he reported that, throughout his life, he was regularly "accused of being a genius…an epithet synonymous with worthlessness."[787]

It was the realization of this temperamental disposition toward reflection on ultimate things that spurred Sylvester Graham to give up the pursuit of money and follow in the footsteps of his father by training for Christian ministry. But similarities between father and son ran deeper than a ministerial vocation. Like his son, John Graham Jr. was also a sickly man, "depressed by bodily ailments" throughout his life.[788] Sylvester's allies in food reform later classified John Graham Jr. as a lifelong "dyspeptic" and "rheumatic," both Grahamite conditions of bodily unrighteousness that Sylvester's famous system aimed to set right.[789] Furthermore, John Graham

[783] Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, Debility,* 10.
[784] Sylvester Graham, "Letter To The Citizens of Northampton," April 1, 1850, Box 1, Folder 9, Graham Family Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.
[785] Graham, "Letter To The Citizens Of Northampton," 3.
[786] Ibid.
[787] Sylvester Graham, "Letter To The Citizens Of Northampton," 5.
[788] Francis Parkman, *France and England in North America*, ed. David Levin, vol. 2 (Library of America, 1983), 1118.
[789] George Ripley and C. A. Dana, eds., "Sylvester Graham," in *The New American Cyclopedia* (New York: Appleton, 1871), 404.

Jr. was also a doctor, practicing medicine "in connection with his pastoral duties."[790] Not only was Sylvester Graham's father a religious radical of the revivalist sort, but he was also a perpetually sick man who sought to medically attend to the sickness of others as a part of his Christian ministry. He was preoccupied both by bodily sickness and the dreadful soul-sickness brought on by original sin, which he described in private treatises such as "Upon The Image of God and Man" and "The Impossibility of Man's Recovery."[791] For John Graham Jr., it was possible for a doctor to try to heal the body, but it required divine intervention to heal the soul.

It is not insignificant that Sylvester Graham was preoccupied by the same themes. While it is easy to over-read the historical significance of the psychological relationship of a son to his father, archival records make it clear that Sylvester Graham often reflected on John Graham Jr.'s life and religion.[792] Sylvester's imagination of his father was ambivalent, not adulatory. For all the vocational instincts that they shared, Sylvester differed substantially from his father on a number of issues, as we have already seen in "Thy Kingdom Come." These differences would only grow wider over time. He was strongly committed neither to a Calvinistic notion of original sin nor to its "New Light" corollary, conversionist practice of human transformation through divine intervention in revival. For Sylvester, the revivalism for which his father was famous was not a proper solution to any of the problems of Christendom. What is more, Sylvester came to believe that the dyspepsia from which his father suffered was a disease rooted in a lack of bodily

[790] Nathan Franklin Carter, ed., *The Native Ministry of New Hampshire ...* (Concord, NH: Rumford, 1906), 237.
[791] Graham Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, 14.
[792] Not only did he compose a nearly fifty page unpublished biography of him which now resides in the Graham Family Papers collection, but he referred extensively to his father when he wrote an apologia for his own life to the citizens of Northampton in 1850. Considering that Sylvester never actually knew John Graham Jr., that he was estranged from most of his family, and that there was very little published about his father, this achievement required a good deal of personal research. See Sylvester Graham, "Biography of John Graham, Jr." (n.d.), Box 3, Folder 7, Graham Family Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan; Graham, "Letter To The Citizens Of Northampton."

righteousness. For all of his father's good intentions regarding the souls of his congregants, Sylvester argued that he, along with all dyspeptics, fundamentally misunderstood the practicality of God's design for his physical body.

Neither, however, did Sylvester wish to entirely rid himself of the influences and emphases of his father's religion. From first to last, his work shared his father's concern for the transformation of human beings into God's image — of their transposition from a state of depravity and decay to a state of godliness and health.[793] Furthermore, like his father, Graham wanted to change the nation and the world by seeing it brought under the lordship of Jesus Christ, as he understood it. The above analysis of "Thy Kingdom Come" shows he adopted many of the rhetorical forms and some of the language of New Light revivalism, including a modified version of millennialism, to make his case for this transition. However, these adoptions were never wholesale and without qualification. To the extent that Graham took on the idiom of his father's New Light revivalist religion — as also his concern for bodily healing — it was necessary for him to transform that idiom and make it entirely his own.

Sylvester Graham, William Metcalfe, and "Bible-Christianity"

The narrative vehicle of Graham's idiomatic transformation of his father's revival Protestantism was his development of the language of the Kingdom of God. This development was in large part enabled by his formative encounter with the doctrines of Dr. William Metcalfe and the Swedenborgian Bible-Christian church of Philadelphia. His connection to them can is seen directly at both the beginning and the end of his career, and it is implicit throughout his

[793] In *TKC*, Graham uses the theological term "depravity" in a traditional Calvinistic manner describe the tough resistance of adults to the gospel. In later works, the term plays a very important role in Graham's descriptions of the physical characteristics of human organs which have been required to endure a life lived in rebellion against the "great natural kingdom of God." See *LSHL* §698.

religious writing. Graham did not derive his notion of the Kingdom of God from Metcalfe and the Bible-Christians — interestingly, the concept that was so critical for him hardly ever comes up in their prose. Rather, the importance of the Bible-Christians to Graham's story is that they provided him with developed religious and physiological ideas that enabled him to follow his instincts away from the interventionist priorities of national formalist evangelical eschatology, towards a naturalized, rational Christianity. Drawing on their innovative religious ideas, Graham developed language of the Kingdom of God as an explanatory rhetorical bridge between the religious world of his evangelical forbears and a more self-consciously modern, scientific American Protestantism.[794]

The Bible-Christians were a Swedenborgian sect, originating in Manchester, England under the leadership of William Cowherd. Cowherd had been a major leader of English Swedenborgians, president of their national conference in the early nineteenth century. However, when he declared in 1809 that scripture, science, and experience taught that it was a "healthful, moral, and religious duty" to abstain from all meat and alcoholic drink, there was widespread opposition to his teaching and it became necessary for him and his followers to separate from the main body of the New Church, and establish Bible-Christianity.[795] William Metcalfe was Cowherd's chief disciple, first studying and then teaching at his "Academy of Sciences" in Salford, while also leading a thriving Bible-Christian church. In 1817, Metcalfe and a group of forty other Bible-Christians immigrated to Philadelphia together, enthusiastic about "the civil

[794] Swedenborgianism was perhaps uniquely suited for such bridge-building work. W.R. Ward notes that Swedenborgianism stayed close to the evangelical establishment in the United Kingdom in the eighteenth century, holding substantial attraction, for example, for John Wesley. Ultimately Wesley rejected it, but he did not do so with opprobrium, saying of Swedenborg, "there is something noble, even in his ravings." See W. R. Ward, "Swedenborgianism," in *Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest*, ed. Derek Baker, vol. 9, Studies in Church History (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 304.
[795] Peter Turner Winskill, *The Temperance Movement and Its Workers: A Record of Social, Moral, Religious, and Political Progress*, vol. 4 (London: Blackie and Son, 1892), 239.

and religious freedom of the people of the United States," with the object of "the propagation of their peculiar religious doctrines and the establishment of the Bible-Christian church in this highly favored land."[796] Alas for Metcalfe, within a year, most of his fellow travelers had apostatized — only five of the original adults remained.[797] Nonetheless, he soldiered on, establishing in Philadelphia a small Bible-Christian church, a free Sunday school for children, and a day school for the elite children of the city by which he endeavored to make a living.[798]

Metcalfe's church was just beginning to flourish again when Sylvester Graham began his transition to Philadelphia in 1829. The initial interaction between the two men concerned Graham's growing convictions about vegetarianism; having heard that Graham, then still a Presbyterian minister was interested in the physiology of vegetarianism, William Metcalfe wrote to Graham and encouraged him in his pursuits.[799] While the official history of the Bible-Christians avers that this letter "most probably caused him…to become [a] champion" of vegetarianism, Stephen Nissenbaum has rightly challenged this assertion, arguing that Graham's interest in vegetarianism was "based from the beginning on purely physiological considerations, while Metcalfe initially derived his vegetarianism from an interpretation of…Biblical texts."[800] Strictly speaking about Graham's intellectual point of departure into vegetarianism, Nissenbaum

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[796] The Maintenance Committee, ed., *History of the Philadelphia Bible-Christian Church for the First Century of Its Existence: 1817-1917* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1922), 24-5
[797] *History of the Bible-Christian Church*, 26-7.
[798] *History of the Bible-Christian Church*, 27-30.
[799] *History of the Bible-Christian Church*, 40. This letter does not seem to have survived.
[800] Ibid.; Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, Debility*, 39. Nissenbaum's prudence about the specific, original source of Graham's vegetarianism is warranted, given Graham's enthusiasm for healthy bread-making and his research into the French physiologists François Broussais and Xavier Bichat in the late 1820s. In his Chapters 3 and 4, he clearly shows the way that Graham drew on the physiology of Broussais and Bichat in his health lectures. However, he is not totally convincing in his assertion that they were the *source* of his vegetarianism. His argument about the origins of Graham's vegetarianism suggests that vegetarianism was a radical physiological idea that was in the air in the 1820s — Graham did not *need* religion to introduce him to it. But then again, maybe it did. It is possible that Nissenbaum is being too reductive on this point, but there is not much positive evidence to argue strongly in either direction.

is correct. More broadly, however, it must be remembered that Metcalfe took himself to be a scientist as well as a minister —like John Graham Jr., he had a career focused on healing both bodies and souls. Speaking of a strict separation between biblical religion and "purely physiological considerations" in an analysis of William Metcalfe or Sylvester Graham is not a helpful analytical matrix.

Church records show that Sylvester Graham never became a member of the Bible-Christian church, and other archival sources conclusively demonstrating his relationship to it are frustratingly limited — Graham left a limited epistolary archive and Metcalfe left none at all. After their initial encounter, there is no concrete record of personal interaction until newspaper reports from 1850, corroborated by the official *History of the Bible-Christian Church*. When Metcalfe organized the first meetings of the American Vegetarian Society, of which he was the first president, he specifically invited Graham to attend and speak. Of course, it seems very unlikely, given the similarity of their ideas, beliefs, and social circles, that Sylvester Graham and William Metcalfe were out of touch between 1830 and 1850, but the archives are silent. When Graham died, another influential Bible-Christian named Henry S. Clubb took it upon himself to edit and publish Graham's major religious work, *The Philosophy of Sacred History,* in book form for the first time.[801]

Far more revealing than the scanty details of personal interactions in the archival record, however, is the way that Graham's religious reflection — and specifically his formulation of the idea of the Kingdom of God — relies heavily on the conceptual content and even often the specific language of Metcalfe's descriptions of the tenets of Bible-Christianity. A man so

[801] *PSH* had previously been serially published. After a distinguished career as a Civil War reporter for the *New York Tribune,* a politician in Michigan, and the second president of the American Vegetarian Society, Clubb went on to become the fourth minister of the Philadelphia Bible-Christian church. See *History of the Bible-Christian Church*, 77. On the intended nature of the *PSH*, see *LSHL*, vii.

intensely prideful that even his friends felt bound to comment on it, Graham almost unilaterally refused to cite the books that most influenced him, saying that he had "much less to do with books than with living bodies in all of his physiological investigations."[802] In an 1844 letter to the Worcester *National Aegis* he wrote "I am a man of few, very few books. My study has been mainly confined to a single volume, and that volume is the volume of Nature."[803] Graham wanted his readers to believe that all of his conclusions were based on his own physiological investigations — but in spite of his demonstrable mendacity, he gave himself a moral out: "I shall not…be surprised if men of general reading find that many of the opinions which I have advanced as peculiar to myself, have been advanced by others with whom I am unacquainted."[804] Indeed. A consideration of Graham's religious sensibility makes it very clear that Metcalfe's Bible-Christianity had a great deal of influence on all of his works, especially his religious opus *The Philosophy of Sacred History*. As we proceed, we will see the particular importance of some Bible-Christian ideas to the development of Graham's idea of the Kingdom of God — it was in relation to their backdrop that the dynamics of Graham's transitional vision of the Kingdom of God became possible, an idea in motion away from a supernatural interventionist model of divine sovereignty and towards a vision of the natural world governed by divine law.

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[802] The works he did cite were, he said, given to him in synopsis or extract form by friends. See *LSHL*, iv. On the matter of Graham's immense pride and argumentativeness, for just one of many examples see a comment about Graham by his good friend Theodore Dwight Weld to Sarah Grimké, his sister-in-law, who was considering attendance at his lectures: "Do go and hear him. He has unpleasant peculiarities about him in some respects it is true -- is vain and egotistic in some measure and has not the unction of spirituality; but with all his defects is I verily believe seeking the good of the Human race." Theodore Dwight Weld to Sarah Grimké, Feb 8th, 1838, in *Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké*, 531.
[803] "Dr. Graham," *National Aegis*, August 3, 1844.
[804] *LSHL*, iv. A variety of studies of Graham's work, not least Stephen Nissenbaum's, have made clear that Graham was thoroughly acquainted with a lot of contemporary literature in physiology, temperance, and related subjects. Also, Graham's use of the word "peculiar" raises a flag — this was the primary descriptor used by Melcalfe in reference to the unusual bodily teachings of the Philadelphia Bible-Christians. Perhaps this is a coincidence, but I suspect not.

Non-Sectarian Christianity And The Boundaries Of The Kingdom

It was precisely at the point when Graham began to interact with Metcalfe that he started to express his Christian identity as "non-sectarian" and generically "religious," over against the doctrinal specificity of his formalist evangelical heritage. A major premise of "Thy Kingdom Come" is that the coming of the Kingdom of God requires the identification and implementation of universally valid, atemporal, anti-doctrinal divine laws in the lives of *all* who called themselves Christian. Shortly after preaching this sermon, Graham permanently separated from Presbyterianism and devoted himself to preaching to non-sectarian audiences.

A long 1830 letter to Chief Justice John Marshall advocating for the American Sunday-School Union illuminates Graham's non-sectarianism most directly. He took pains in the letter to reject all sectarian agendas, laden as they all were with what he called "doctrinal absurdities" and "perversions and misrepresentations" of "true religion."[805] Instead, all of his advocacy for was what he took to be Christian religion in general, whose rational principles of "divine science" aimed at the "great practical end…the greatest and most permanent prosperity and happiness of mankind,"[806] — which, he argued was also the practical end of "political philosophy." His religion was philosophically reasonable, not theologically contentious. This was why Graham's argument about imprinting the laws of the Kingdom of God on the hearts of children via the establishment of Sunday schools should be morally desirable to patriots as well as spiritually desirable to Christians, as long as it happened in a non-sectarian manner. Authentic Christianity had no truck with the dissonance of sectarian doctrinal fighting — such battles only served to distract from the practical application of the "general principles" and moral concerns of

[805] Sylvester Graham, "To Chief Justice John Marshall."
[806] Sylvester Graham, "To Chief Justice John Marshall."

Christianity that was necessary for shaping the religious future of modern civil society.[807] The Kingdom of God, after all, was the condition of the "spiritual reign of the moral laws of God" over all of society. This was hardly a state of affairs that could be confined to the aptitudes of one particular denomination.

Graham's stance on "non-sectarianism" was almost identical to William Metcalfe's. Metcalfe self-consciously positioned the Bible-Christians as standing against sectarian divisions, rejecting the need for "tenacious" argument over "traditional doctrines" and "fervid zeal upon the necessity of accepting…creeds in their most exact literal expressions."[808] "This church," he wrote,

"does not constitute a sect or a denomination, but simply a *Bible-Christian church*; and its members claim to be in perfect union and connection with the sincere and conscientious members of all the various denominations…This Church holds all the fundamental *doctrines*, though not all the doctrinal *opinions* or *views* of the different sects….Antagonistic doctrines [such as] the unity and the trinity of God, the manhood and divinity of Christ, [et al.]…are presented in a light reconcilable to reason and harmonious to one another."[809]

Of course, these so-called "doctrinal opinions" were taken by many American Protestants to be fundamental theological expressions of their beliefs. But Metcalfe thought that his Bible-Christianity could locate a deeper layer of rationalized Christianity that went beyond these antagonistic debates. Predictably, Metcalfe's attempts met with stiff resistance, particularly from the Philadelphia Presbyterian establishment with which Graham had brief formal allegiance.[810] He was often attacked in print. For example, the first issue of *The Presbyterian Magazine*

[807] Sylvester Graham, "To Chief Justice John Marshall." This was why imprinting the laws of the Kingdom of God on the hearts of children should be morally desirable to patriots as well as spiritually desirable to Christians.
[808] *History of Bible-Christians,* 30.
[809] *History of Bible-Christians,* 31. This quote, and those that follow, are official abstracts from a larger teaching of Metcalfe's on the identity of the Bible-Christians in the 1820s.
[810] One wonders whether fear of reprisals from his former Presbyterian colleagues over his "non-sectarianism" contributed to Graham's departure from the institutional pulpit.

positively reviewed an 1821 sermon by Reverend William Wylie whose sole purpose was to rebuff the Bible-Christian goal, contending that their desire for rationalization amounted to epistemic idolatry that undermined the particularity of divine revelation and the "doctrines for which martyrs bled."[811] He also occasionally found himself subject to softer critiques, being offered lucrative, stable positions of leadership in denominational churches, on the condition that he embrace sectarian positions and renounce the more unusual doctrines of Bible-Christianity.[812] In the midst of these frontal attacks from religious enemies and seductions from erstwhile religious friends, Metcalfe continued to advocate for non-sectarianism. He was devoted to the goal of building a religious community that revolved around the irreducible, permanent center of Christian faith, and thus would be most suitable for the future of modernity.

Philosophy of Sacred History: Progressive Hermeneutics and Kingdom Coming

The irony of Graham's articulation of non-sectarianism in particular is that it is opprobrious and functionally *anti*-sectarian. Graham desired to include all Christians under a shared rubric of true religion, as long as these Christians were willing to leave behind what they held as their most cherished doctrines. In place of these dogmatic distinctives, which he took to be narrow-minded and irrelevant, he called for a rationalist, scientifically-oriented biblical hermeneutic that enabled the possibility of new interpretations of scripture and doctrine for their contemporary moment. The way Graham described this move was deeply imbricated in a Swedenborgian rhetoric that is precisely mirrored by Metcalfe's Bible-Christian teaching. It was in the context of articulating the importance of this new hermeneutic that Graham's development and deployment of his idea of the Kingdom of God came to full flowering.

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[811] "Review of Five Sermons," in *The Presbyterian Magazine*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Littell & Henry, 1821), 461–70.
[812] *History of Bible-Christians* 28.

In the 1820s, William Metcalfe articulated the theology of such a hermeneutic, saying that Bible-Christians took the Bible to be "a *record* of all truths necessary to man's salvation," culturally situated in the context of the times in which it was written.[813] To be read rightly, it was thorough need of educated interpretation by contemporary readers who understood its historical and cultural context. There was also a second layer of meaning, "providentially" embedded within the Bible that "contained within it a revelation of divine and spiritual truths."[814] These revelations "have existed within it from the time it was first written, and have been successively developed under God, precisely when needed to re-establish or re-edify the Church, — just as the discoveries of new principles or powers in creation (which have always existed therein) were timed to the demands of the age in which they were made available."[815]

God, in his providence, had so constructed the Bible and the natural world as to contain a storehouse of revelation of divine truth accessible to people in different eras of human development, based on the demands of their age, the needs of the Church, and their capacity for discovery through research. Formally, this revelation was continually present and available to those religious or scientific *virtuosi* who could decode its meaning by genius, persistence, and dint of will. But even beyond the powers of the *virtuosi*, this entire structure of ongoing revelation was providentially designed by God as a system for the perpetual renewal of the church in cultural context.

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[813] *History of the Bible-Christian Church*, 30.
[814] *History of the Bible-Christian Church*, 30.
[815] *History of the Bible-Christian Church*, 30-31. This idea is drawn from Swedenborg's theory of correspondences between worldly natural thoughts and heavenly spiritual thoughts, made explicit in many places in his writing. See, for example, Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Treatise Concerning Heaven and Hell and of the Wonderful Things Within* (London: R. Hindmarsh, 1784) §114. It was a basic tenet of Swedenborgianism that their faith was not brokering "new revelation, but [offering] a true [better] interpretation of the old one." Cf. Ward, "Swedenborgianism," 303.

"The writings and labors of St. Augustine, Fénelon, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Swedenborg, Priestley, and others have been and are helps to devout religious minds, according to their various mental conditions. But, with all the aid of these saints, seers, and philosophers, it is not to be presumed that ALL of God's wisdom has yet been developed from the sacred pages of Revelation. According to the earnestness and need for further light, it will be manifested in greater and brighter glory forever."[816]

Here, in Metcalfe's words, we find Graham's hermeneutical theory in miniature, and the methodological starting point from Graham's theo-scientific project. Metcalfe is articulating, in essence, a theological prolegomena, an invitation to future exertions in biblical studies, in the natural sciences, and in history that will expose further dimensions of the concrete truth about God's world and cast necessary, critical light on the beliefs and practices of the church for the sake of its renewal and the renewal of the culture around it. As a vegetarian Swedenborgian advancing "non-sectarian," post-dogmatic Christianity in heavily Presbyterian Philadelphia, Metcalfe explicitly saw himself and the Bible-Christians operating as forerunners of just such a transition. They were "religious reformers" and the opposition to their beliefs and practices was further proof of their vocation: "Religious reformers in all ages…have been accused as men who 'turned the world upside down,' as enemies to the 'traditions of the fathers' and as authors of 'innovation.'"[817] But, as he saw it, their "innovation" was precisely the point, as their development of non-sectarian Christianity was bringing new spiritual truth and practical application out of the storehouse of biblical revelation. It was through religious reformers such as himself that God purposed to renew the beliefs and practices of Christianity in each progressive era.

Graham also explicitly advocated for the importance of "innovation," and indeed engaged in it. His biblical hermeneutic, articulated in full in *Philosophy of Sacred History*, shared

[816] *History of the Bible-Christian Church*, 31.
[817] *History of the Bible-Christian Church*, 35.

Metcalfe's Swedenborgian starting-point, but extensively and systematically imbricated it into an account of physiology and the natural world that sought to extrapolate the practices of the Kingdom of God from the facts of human constitution. Time and again in that work, he asserted that "every law and principle and property of Nature is the inscription of [God's] omnific will and purpose," and that "Nature is in truth the first great volume of divine revelation, in which the deeply written will of God lies ever ready to be disclosed to the human mind, by the true developments of science, and by all true experience."[818] Conscious that he was assigning ultimate significance to these matters, Graham constantly stressed that only Nature "rightly understood" was normative and revelatory for Christians.[819] This led him to a reverential reliance on the rigors and exertions of the scientific method which alone could afford reliable access to experiential truth about the constitutional laws of the "spiritual Kingdom of God."[820] He denounced the dangers of what he calls "empiricism," or reliance on anecdotal evidence, in these matters — "Let no idle dreamer set up the vagaries of his undisciplined mind as the true revelations of God in Nature…Nothing short of a *perfect scientific demonstration* of the truth of a proposition…can justify us in asserting it as a criterion by which the true meaning of the sacred Scriptures is to be determined."[821]

Of course, this insistence on the irreducible importance of scientific demonstration for right knowledge of the universal laws of God's natural Kingdom demanded openness to the

[818] *PSH*, §127, §166.
[819] E.g. *PSH* §127.
[820] *PSH* §169, 170.
[821] In particular, he levels his critique of empiricism against medical practitioners who rely on their personal experience treating patients to guide them in their knowledge of the human body. Ironically (or not) this is the same critique that many in the transatlantic medical establishment had against his own work. *LSHL*, vi; *PSH* §189. He also adopted a similar attitude in the *Philosophy* against empiricist dismantling of even manifestly harmful cultural institutions. His whiggish subsuming of lifelong anti-slavery sentiments under the gradual, organic hermeneutical rubric of the coming Kingdom also fits perfectly with this mode of theological reasoning.

related proposition that as human science developed, human apprehension of God's revelation must develop with it — particularly the "record of the revelations and dispensations of God to man" that constituted the Protestant Bible.[822] Offering his own spin on Swedenborgian doctrine, Graham called this "the law of adaptation" which was, he said, the "Grand Key in Biblical Interpretation." It bears quoting at length.

"The character of divine manifestation, as understood by man, always accurately indicates the cotemporaneous [sic] state of man, in relation to the true nature and character of God, and with reference to the highest and best condition of which his own nature is capable. If therefore we find in the volume of the inspired word, any law, commandment, precept, permission, promise, or statement, which does not correspond with the true nature and character of God [as apprehended through science and reason], nor is compatible with the highest and best condition of man, we know with entire certainty that…it is not a form of divine authority which, like a constitutional law of God in nature, bears equally on all men at all times but…is of divine authority only when and where the state of things exists which makes it necessary, as a moral force, in carrying man forward in conscious moral freedom towards the fulfillment of the great purposes of divine benevolence."[823]

In essence, Graham's "law of adaptation" enables him to argue for or against the ongoing validity of biblical passages, using his assessment of the conclusions of contemporary science as a plumb-line for his hermeneutical and practical determinations. This was especially important with regard to arguments about the theology of vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol, given the explicit permission given for such things in a "plain-sense" reading of the Protestant bible. But Graham's hermeneutical law was in no sense merely instrumental, a rhetorical workaround that enabled him to teach what he wanted about food and drink using biblical language. Rather, it was built on a Bible-Christian-style commitment to the belief that Christian revelation is progressive, moving through history towards an increasingly greater and more accurate knowledge of the universal laws of God's Kingdom via an understanding of the constitution of human beings.

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[822] *PSH* §176.
[823] *PSH* §176

Echoing Metcalfe, he defends the validity of religious innovation.

"It is not well to reject a measure simply because it is an innovation…The Mosaic dispensation was…an innovation on the patriarchal, and the Christian dispensation was a great innovation on the Mosaic. *But the Christian dispensation was not fully developed in all its principles and bearings of its economy in the days of its apostles. Nor is it yet.* Unfathomable are the depths are the depths of the riches of God in Christ Jesus yet to be disclosed to the Church." [824]

Graham argues that pursuing scientific knowledge of the natural world, guided by the "Holy Spirit of Truth," enables Christians in his present moment and in the future to "look deeper and deeper into the recorded counsels of God," — to know *more* about the true nature of Christianity as described in the Bible than even the apostles did.[825] This move is classically Swedenborgian, prioritizing what Swedenborg himself called "the spiritual sense of the Word, by which the sense of the letter is made clear."[826] He has no primitivist inclination to return to the ostensible purity of the apostolic age, as so many of his contemporary American co-religionists did.[827] Rather his desire was, as he said to a newspaper in 1844, to heed "the voice of the Great Spirit of Truth" by taking off "the shoes of preconceived opinion and walk[ing] barefoot on the holy ground of inquiry" into the future state of modern, reasonable Christianity. [828]

This, then, was the road to the coming of the Kingdom of God in the world. The "Christian dispensation," he argued, was inaugurated after Christ's departure from the world, when the Holy Spirit came to Christ's followers and began to lead them out of the "darkness of [their] minds, [their] false education, [their] preconceived opinion, [their] wrong notions," and

[824] *PSH* §452.
[825] *PSH,* §449; §413.
[826] Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, §545.
[827] Cf. Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence.*
[828] "Dr. Graham," *National Aegis*, 2.. It bears noting that he is describing himself as a latter-day Moses, who received divine revelation and anointing for leadership from the voice of God emanating from a natural symbol embued with the mysterious power of God's immanence — the burning bush. This is a singularly appropriate image for the way that Graham conceived of the revelatory power of scientific inquiry.

lead them to "understand…the spiritual economy and practical bearing of the Kingdom of God," in large part through proper scientific knowledge of the way that the natural world worked. [829] The same Spirit which had taught Christians for centuries was at work among his contemporaries shaping the future practices of Christianity according to the revelation of the laws of God's Kingdom in nature. Somewhat astonishingly, Graham prophetically adopted the voice of God to make this point in his text:

> "My Spirit…teaches you also, upon the same spiritual and holy principle of truth, established in the constitutional nature of things…[these are] the benevolent purposes of my Spirit in the gospel economy of grace, which aims at your highest and best condition and most perfect happiness of your whole nature in the kingdom of God on earth, and your eternal beatitude in the kingdom of glory beyond the grave." [830]

In the clear light of "perfect scientific demonstration" of aspects of the natural constitution of the world which revealed new laws of the Kingdom of God, Graham welcomed innovation that would change the outward face of Christian practice in light of the development of new revelation. Indeed, he argues that this kind of progressive innovation is *inherent* to God's design for the redemption of creation. There was a reason that his book explaining these principles was about *sacred history* — this was the way in which salvation history moved forward to its ultimate conclusion. Returning, more confidently this time, to the account of Christian metahistory with which he framed "Thy Kingdom Come," Graham says that the biblical Adam was "instinctively in the Kingdom of God…even with extremely limited knowledge, and an infantile understanding of abstract principles and moral qualities," from the moment of his creation until the moment of his sin. [831] The "great final cause of the gospel," in light of Adam's sin, "is the perfect restoration of fallen man to the spiritual image and Kingdom of God," through

[829] *PSH* §411; 413.
[830] *PSH* §422.
[831] *PSH,* §122.

the spiritual reasoning and scientific research by which God was still teaching people about how to conform most fully to God's law.[832]

"The Great Natural Kingdom of God": Graham's Hermeneutics Applied

Graham was radically committed to this Bible-Christian style hermeneutic, and its attendant vision of the knowledge of the Kingdom *still* coming in the world. It was the religious foundation of his theo-scientific reform project, developing a nuanced but popular account of human physiology that advanced what he took to be the new, scientifically revealed moral laws of God's spiritual Kingdom. His major work to this effect was undertaken as a series of lectures he gave regularly between 1831 and 1839, and then published in 1839 as *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*. This work made him famous, oracular in some circles and infamous in others.

The *Lectures* were not without their critics. Many, especially in the medical profession, published excoriating dismissals of Graham's "charlatanry," scientific ignorance, and unrepentant plagiarism of other people's ideas.[833] But many others were converted. One published letter from "A Believer" from Massachusetts said that Graham's lectures were "without exception the most valuable I ever attended, containing matter deeply interesting to the Christian and the Philanthropist."[834] Theodore Dwight Weld urged his sister-in-law Sarah Grimké to attend Graham's lectures in 1838 with the promise that "he will give you more knowledge of the laws of life in 12 lectures that you can get from books in six months."[835]

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[832] *PSH*, § 419.
[833] See for example the aforementioned review of *Lectures On The Science Of Human Life* in *The British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review,* 84. See also "Sylvester Graham," *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, November 12, 1851, 316–18. As noted above, both reviewers were quite right about the plagiarism.
[834] A Believer, "Letter To The Editor," *Massachusetts Spy*, November 9, 1836.
[835] Theodore Dwight Weld to Sarah Grimké. New York, Feb 8th, 1838, in *The Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké*, 531.

Bronson Alcott wrote in his diary in 1836 that Graham's "interesting and instructive lecture…explored the organic kingdom with a deep and wide survey." "Physiology," he opined in his reflection on the evening's performance, "[is] the knowledge of the organism of Spirit…the History of the Spirit's Incarnation." Graham's philosophy was enabling him, he believed, to gain knowledge of the way the two worked together in the same manner that Jesus Christ knew them: "The philosophy of the miracles of Christ — this is my aim."[836]

Alcott's drawing together of the physiological and the spiritual for the sake of understanding the powers of the perfect human life modeled by Christ precisely tracked with Sylvester Graham's intentions in his *Lectures*.[837] Beyond advocating for Graham's famous commitment to the suitability of vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol for human physiological life, they offer an account of human agency in relation to God's design. Graham locates the Kingdom of God at the top of a Linnaean hierarchy of the natural world, constituting the final divine authority about the fittingness of human physiological habit. To adopt physiological practices in conformity with the authority and design of the Kingdom makes possible an extraordinary natural life laden with characteristics that appear miraculous, "almost supernatural."

It is possible to distill the essence of his arguments about interrelationship of theological anthropology, human will, and the natural world rather simply. He begins, predictably, with the claim that humans live in a universe of "the most exact and permanent laws…[a fact] that every enlightened Christian and theist will readily admit."[838] When it comes to exclusively scientific argument, his epistemic non-sectarianism extends not only to all Christians but to theists in

[836] Bronson Alcott, "Journal for 1836," ed. Joel Myerson, *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1978), 40.
[837] *LSHL* §603.
[838] *LSHL* § 12, 13.

general.[839] From planetary orbits to molecular structures, from the vegetable kingdom to the animal kingdom to human body, the highest of God's animal creations, all are "governed by the permanent laws which the Creator has established and continually sustains."[840] And yet, people tend to believe that "life and health and disease are matters of entire uncertainty, governed by no laws, and subject only to the arbitrary control of God, or the blind necessity of fate, or the utter contingency of accident."[841] This he sees as demonstrably wrongheaded, a willful abdication of human responsibility for maintaining health by placing life and death largely beyond the pale of human volition. As in "Thy Kingdom Come," Graham strongly resists an account of divine-human interaction that is predicated either on the imposition of God's arbitrary will or on blind fatalism, but looks instead to human agency in the face of God's stability and predictability.[842]

To this posture of what Heather Curtis has aptly named "physical Arminianism," Graham adds a layer of developmental theory.[843] Gleaned largely from vitalist French physiologists François Broussais and Xavier Bichat, this framework shapes the intersection of physiology and spirituality in Graham's system.[844] "All forms of matter," he writes, "are composed of the same elements."[845] Minerals, vegetables, animals, humans, organic and inorganic substances are

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[839] This latitudinarianism may apply to his religious non-sectarianism as well. In 1830, he positively situated the religious stance of one Edwin Porter by saying that "although you have never professed to be experimentally a Christian, [you are] yet full willing to acknowledge the providence of God in all your concerns." Graham strikes out the word "good" before the word "providence" in the letter, perhaps implying even further that there is no need to imply benevolent agency to God's providence in order to recognize divine movement as well as the responsibility that it implies. Admittedly, this was a fundraising letter, which makes Graham's sincerity harder to accurately judge. Sylvester Graham, "To Edwin Porter," January 29, 1830, Box 1, Folder 9, Graham Family Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.
[840] *LSHL* §13.
[841] *LSHL* §14.
[842] Cf. *TKC*, 7-8.
[843] Heather D. Curtis, *Faith in the Great Physician: Suffering and Divine Healing in American Culture, 1860–1900* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 2010), 66.
[844] Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 57-64.
[845] *LSHL* §112.

composed of the same elemental building blocks. As such, infers Graham, "the nature of things depends not on the matter of which they are formed, but on the laws of constitution by which the matter is arranged."[846] The nature of a human being is not, for Graham, derived from any elemental difference from a dog or a carrot or a stone. Rather, the difference arises from the ways in which human beings are constituted by God's laws that determine, permanently, what a human being is — humans are "superinduced by a Power extrinsic from matter, by an Intelligence adequate to the great designs of nature, and by a power competent to the fulfillment of its designs."[847] Sovereign decisions in God's mind determine the constitutional nature of human beings and thus become the permanent laws of human nature. When scientific research conclusively determines some aspect of human constitution, it has literally decoded an element of the mind of God previously hidden in nature: "at each advancing step, we discern more and more…the deep and indelible handwriting of Creative Intelligence, and Design, and Goodness! In every animal — in every vegetable form, God has stereotyped a living alphabet, by which we can spell out his power, wisdom, and benevolence."[848] Seen in this context, his aforementioned claim to "know the mind of God" in his 1840 letter to Gerrit Smith can be understood in all of its totalizing grandeur. To know God's mind is to understand the normative contours of his Kingdom in the natural world.

Without getting too deep into Graham's scientific explanations of precisely *how* this works, which have been amply documented elsewhere, it is important for understanding his religion to understand the basic contours of his scientific vitalism.[849] For Graham the divine act of creation filled the earth with organized forms that were animated with divinely given

[846] *LSHL* §114.
[847] *LSHL* §115.
[848] *LSHL* §48.
[849] See especially Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, Debiliity*.

"vitality," the fundamental principle of living organisms.[850] Graham uses the word "organism" in a specific sense to mean a vital thing that has been constitutionally *organized* in the mind of God out of inorganic matter to have superior capacities enabling them to "propagate and perpetuate" themselves, and establish dominion over the "primitive condition of inorganic matter."[851] This dominion is not restricted to humans but anything that God has providentially organized to grow according to innate instincts, animated with vitality — over against the turbulent chaotic motion of "lonely and lifeless" inorganic world of oceans, volcanoes, earthquakes, and minerals that constituted the condition of earth before vital life began and are themselves not subject to decay and death.[852] The dominion of organic life, however, is not immutable — when the "controlling power of vitality" is sapped at the end of the life of an organism, it decays and "begins to return to the dominion of inorganic affinities and laws."[853] Vitality must be cultivated to "maintain its predominance [and] resist the action of the principles of decay" which are always pulling organisms away from their proper constitution and towards the realm of the inorganic.[854]

Their vitality is cultivated and strengthened among organisms by existing in maximal conformity to their constitution in the mind of God. Of course, there is a hierarchy of possibilities in this system based on the particular constitutional capacities that the various organisms have been given. Vegetables can exist only in the manner of the prior vegetables that gave them their seed — they have no volition and thus no ability to strive to maintain their vitality.[855] They can only grow and then decay via the natural inclination given them by God's

[850] *LSHL* §108.
[851] *LSHL* §111.
[852] *LSHL* §103-111.
[853] *LSHL* §131.
[854] *LSHL* §131-136.
[855] *LSHL* §136-7.

providence.[856] Animals, by contrast, have "sensibility, consciousness of being, volition, and voluntary action or motion," which enables them to undertake a variety of free actions that situate them either in positive or negative relation to their divine constitution, and thus increase or decrease their vitality.[857] Humans are a part of the animal kingdom, and thus also subject to its laws. Humans are not the strongest members of the animal kingdom — indeed they are physically inferior in many ways to many creatures. But, humans have by far the greatest capacity of any animal to increase their vitality. God has given them "immeasurably superior intellectual and…moral powers [that have] exalted [them] far above all terrestrial beings, and made [them] the natural lord[s] of the earth and the sea, and [given them] a natural dominion over all the animal as well as vegetable and mineral kingdoms."[858]

Here we come to the key point for understanding the relation of Graham's practical hermeneutic applied in the realm of physiology to the master narrative of the Kingdom of God that runs throughout his work. Humanity's natural dominion over the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms is not innate, but comes only from "[humanity's] higher faculties as a voluntary power, as an organic instrument…enabled to execute the designs of his mind."[859] God has constituted human beings to have massive intellectual and moral capacity, which they have used to establish dominion over the rest of organic creation. But the very possibility of this dominion is itself a gift from God, a determination of the extrinsically imposed constitutional laws of human nature that exist in God's mind.

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[856] Graham has a fascinating elaboration of his account of Providence and human instinct in an 1837 letter to Josiah Quincy. In it he argues that philosophers have generally given too much weight to human creative agency, and far too little to "the intelligence and design…of the Divine Mind" in simply *giving* certain sets of instincts to individuals. Sylvester Graham, "To Josiah Quincy, Sr.," March 16, 1837, Box 1, Folder 9, Graham Family Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.
[857] *LSHL* §138; 761-2
[858] *LSHL* §763.
[859] *LSHL* §762.

"Man, in common with all created things, is *a subject of the great natural kingdom of God*, which of necessity is governed by the supreme constitutional laws that God, in infinite wisdom and benevolence, has established in the nature of things. … *[Man] cannot abolish the constitutional laws of things under his dominion, nor the constitutional laws of his own nature, nor with impunity to violate any of the constitutional laws of God's great natural kingdom.* By a conformity to the laws of that constitutional nature, he rises in the development of his capabilities to an affiliation with the angels, and to a holy and happy communion with God; but by the transgression of those laws he inevitably sinks to the perdition of very necessary consequences."[860]

In Graham's account of the science of human life, humanity's apparently inherent dominion over the natural world is actually radically contingent. If a human violates the physiological laws of the great natural Kingdom of God, he or she will begin to decay, regress towards inorganicism, and become in various ways "depraved."[861] Language of depravity is Graham's favored way of describing the effect of disobedience to the laws of the great natural Kingdom of God on human organs. He is obviously aware of its usage as a theological term, common in American Calvinism, to describe the withering effects of sin on the human soul; in *Lectures* he uses the term that way as well. This is precisely *why* the language of depravity is so useful for Graham — the developmental health of the body and the developmental health of the soul have the same point of origin in volitional obedience to the laws of the Kingdom as determined through a progressive hermeneutic of scripture and science. They can never be properly separated, because God has chosen to be thoroughly imbricated in the basic physical structure of creation through the constitution of its particularity in God's mind.

Human beings who discipline themselves to live according to the physical laws of the Kingdom — and here Graham particularly focuses on the physiological importance of a vegetarian diet, the consumption of bread made from unmilled flour, and total abstinence from

[860] *LSHL* §763.
[861] On the tendency to decay. see for example, *LSHL* §131. On the depravity of various organs, see, for example, *LSHL* §448, §690, §698.

alcohol — will find that their bodies perform in ways that are "almost supernatural."[862] Conformity to the laws of the great natural Kingdom of God yields astonishing results. Graham gives the example of "John of Thessaly," a Greek sailor who ate a "spare, simple, and coarse vegetable diet" and could "handle the sails with a degree of strength which seemed almost supernatural," sailing with ease in storms when "it seemed impossible for any creature to hold fast."[863] He also relates the story of Caspar Hauser, a famous (though subsequently disproven) case of a German boy raised in captivity on a diet of bread and water who had "almost supernatural" powers of sensory perception, until he began to eat meat, when "the extraordinary acuteness and power of his special senses diminished."[864]

This contingent possibility of "almost supernatural" behavior, available to all people, distills the force of Graham's reframing of Christianity through the narrative of the Kingdom of God. It underscores his contention that there is spectacular, virtually divinizing potential woven by God into the natural fabric of human existence. Obedience to the universal physiological laws of the great natural Kingdom of God is what unlocks this potential. Things imagined by religious fatalists to have been previously confined to the realm of the miraculous — requiring direct divine intervention — were characteristically human, if humanness was rightly understood. The great natural Kingdom of God, then, is a universal order under which the "supernatural" is at once naturalized and democratized. Throwing over the notion of transformation through God's intervention at conversion, Sylvester Graham's theo-scientific physiology proposes a way for *all* people to develop themselves through disciplined knowledge and exertion of the will themselves

[862] Graham uses the phrase "almost supernatural" several times in *LSHL* to describe people who live according to his system. The clearest examples are §1017, §1045, §1147, and §1163, though there are several other instances where he makes the same point but uses different language.
[863] *LSHL* §1044-5.
[864] *LSHL* §1147-8.

in order to see God's kingdom come and God's will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. By coming to know the mind of God for themselves, they could literally bring the dynamics of heaven to bear on earth.

Heaven Is (A Place) On Earth

Graham returned to this question of heaven on earth from an unlikely place—his deathbed. In May of 1851, in prematurely declining health, Graham had been attacked in his local newspaper, the *Hampshire Gazette*, by a poem lampooning his system.[865] Written by an anonymous clergyman, and entitled "Monody, by a sick Grahamite," the poem imagined, in an ambling doggerel cadence, the dying thoughts of a strict believer in the Graham system.[866] The portrayal is full of mocking pathos, filling the mouth of its dying subject with indignance at the vanity of the world that has ignored him: "To carnivorous folly / Man's stomach is wed, / None swallow my notions / None swallow my bread."[867] There is little doubt that this poem, originating as it did in Graham's hometown of Northampton, Massachusetts, was ironically ventriloquizing not just "a sick Grahamite," but Graham himself, as he lay dying.[868] Pictured standing at the traditional threshold between earth and heaven, the Grahamite's quixoticism propels him from this-worldly *rassentiment* to a seemingly ludicrous, otherworldly hope — it

[865] I could not locate the original source. The poems were republished in the *Water-Cure Journal* in 1851 with the comment that there were "among the significant signs of the times." Cf. Anon., "Monody, by a Sick Grahamite," in *Water-Cure Journal, and Herald of Reforms Devoted to Physiology, Hydropathy, and the Laws of Life* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1851), 129.
[866] A monody is a poem whose form originates from Greek tragedy and is sung on the occasion of someone's death. There seems to me little doubt, given Graham's prominence in Northampton, as well as the cultural significance of Graham's sickness, that the "parson" knew Graham was sick and possibly dying.
[867] Anon., "Monody."
[868] Graham would die on September 11th, 1851.

becomes clear in the second stanza that even after his death, the poem's subject intends to continue his reforming quest in heaven.

> "O! Dig me a grave, / Dig it deeply and wide;
> And a large Graham loaf / Lay it snug by my side;
> Tho' I may not want it / I'm yet very sure
> There will be in Heaven / Dyspeptics to cure."[869]

It was upon the content of this verse that Sylvester Graham seized when he wrote his riposte, "The Lampooning Parson, by a Well Grahamite."[870] The combative vigor of his rhetoric as well as his acute religious awareness are on full display in this revealing piece.

> "No doubt the good parson is inwardly sure
> There will be dyspeptics in heaven to cure;
> Since in his crude notion Heaven is but a *where*,
> And he hopes that such shrimps as himself will go there;
> And is conscious that he has his flock always fed
> On offals less wholesome by far than bran bread:
>
> Nor can he with all the dense fog of his brain,
> Help suspecting that they who his Heaven attain
> Will come under a regimen more for their good
> Than gorging themselves with animal food.
> For in the good Book it expressly is given —
> Flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven."[871]

Significantly, Graham does not take the parson's poem as an attack on his dietary regime, but rather as an affront to the religious system that undergirds it. Republishing this exchange as one "worthy of record," the *Water-Cure Journal* noted this stance, commenting that the parson came at Graham with "polished wit" but Graham silenced him by replying with the "deeper wisdom of the philosopher."[872] Graham seizes on what he takes to be the parson's "crude" conception of heaven, mercilessly hammering him with rhyming couplets that highlight the fact that his

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[869] "Monody,"*Water-Cure*
[870] Sylvester Graham, "The Lampooning Parson," in *Water-Cure Journal, and Herald of Reforms Devoted to Physiology, Hydropathy, and the Laws of Life* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1851), 129.
[871] Graham, "Lampooning Parson."
[872] Editorial Comment, *Water-Cure Journal*, 129.

antagonist believes heaven is "but a *where.*" In fact, argues Graham, heaven is not best known as merely a place, but rather as a "kingdom" where God's "regimen" completely obtains.[873] It is the radicalized *telos* of the great natural Kingdom of God, the direction towards which all earthly acts that conform to God's will are moving.

Understood in this fashion, the idea of Heaven functions in Graham's system as an image of a spiritual sphere where the authority of God's Kingdom is *fully* recognized and applied. Ironically, the same is true for Hell.[874] In Heaven, the total application of God's law manifests in the flourish and good health of those who are there, while in Hell, the total application of God's law is a manifestation of righteous judgment on its inhabitants. Earth, then, is the *only* place of contest. It is only on earth where one can choose the extent to which one will comply with the constitutional requirement of the law of the great natural Kingdom of God. This is the force of Graham's disdain for the parson's notion that "Heaven is but a *where*." In conceiving of Heaven as a place that one will go in the future for eternity, he is almost certainly not paying enough attention to the efficacy of adherence to the laws of the great natural Kingdom of God in the present. The focus of Graham's practical ethics of the great natural Kingdom of God remains resolutely there. By virtue of their practical choices, people opt into or out of conformity to the

[873] Stephen Nissenbaum notes that Graham used it in two ways simultaneously, both in its traditional sense as "the rules to be followed in overcoming disease" and in its more radical sense to describe nothing less comprehensive that the right way to regulate one's entire daily life. Heaven, then, as Graham describes it in this poem, is a regulated environment where scripture is rightly interpreted and applied, a "kingdom" where the dynamic authority of the sovereign God is completely understood, embraced, and lived out as a way of life. Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, Debility,* 142.

[874] See the final stanza of Graham's poem in *Water-Cure* in which he describes the character of Dives, a villainous, indulgent man from one of the parables of Jesus who, upon his arrival in Hell, cries out not for the liquor he had (supposedly) preferred in life but instead for a more physiologically righteous beverage, a "drop of cold water." Cf. Luke 16:19–31, KJV.

Kingdom of God — Heaven and Hell are properly understood as the radicalization of ways of life freely chosen on earth.

Here again, Graham's position resonates with Bible-Christian doctrine. Metcalfe also situates his reflection on heaven as a question of the freedom of the will and the ruling orientation of the human heart.

> "Man is endowed with Freedom of Will to choose good or evil. By virtue of this free will in spiritual things, he can be conjoined to the Lord, and the Lord to him…At death, man puts off the material body, which, being no longer needful, is *never* again reassumed. *'Flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*' Man's spirit can never die: after death he rises in a spiritual body into the spiritual world, in which he continues to live forever, — in heaven if he has lived a sincerely religious and good life on earth; or in hell, if his ruling thoughts, affections, and life have been evil. 'Like associates with like,' of its own free will."[875]

In his most famous treatise, *Heaven and Hell*, Emanuel Swedenborg himself argued that human beings chose, in perfect freedom, to go to heaven or to hell, based entirely upon the orientation of their loves during life. Contrary to some versions of Christian belief which claimed that God might intervene to save an evil person out of pure mercy, Swedenborg insisted that there was an inexorable correspondence between the way that a person lived during their bodily existence and the way that they would live spiritually for eternity.[876] Anything else would be an egregious violation of human freedom. In a chapter entitled "Man After Death Is Such As His Life Had Been In The World," he explained that "it is man's ruling love that awaits him after death, and this is in no way changed to eternity."[877] Love and faith always lead to action, and it was by the practical actions of a person's life that his or her eternal destiny would be determined.[878]

These accounts of the freedom of the will, the moral responsibility of every individual to God, and the correspondence of ethical orientation towards God's commandments during life

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[875] *History of the Bible-Christians*, 32-3.
[876] Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, §470, 472.
[877] Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, §477.
[878] Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, §476.

with the trajectory of the soul in eternity, fit hand in glove with Graham's reflections on the nature of heaven.

For Graham, the issue of radical self-determining freedom to choose an eternal trajectory was crucial to his operative ideology of the Kingdom of God, because it required the use of the natural mind and counteracted the same escapist sense of divine determinism or fatalism that we saw him railing against in the *Lectures.* He frames the problem in the theological language of his Calvinist forbears:

"There is a confusion in the common mind, which has been made so deep by education, and rendered so permanent by tradition, that it is well nigh impossible remove it…The radical error in the matter is that men confound the…natural omnipotence of God with the moral efficiency of the divine Spirit in the human soul, [entertaining] the notion that in some mysterious way the Holy Spirit can act directly and immediately and with irresistible energy on the soul, and produce its regenerating and sanctifying effects in the perfect passiveness of man's moral nature."[879]

God's saving action is not direct, immediate, and irresistible. Rather, salvation *requires* action, based on the apprehension of God's reality using naturally available human powers. It is not possible, even for God, to save a person by mere supernatural intervention. The regeneration of the soul is not miraculous, but the natural result of a right active response to the constituting reality of the God's presence.[880] This shift in the "common mind" of American Protestantism, away from interventionist supernaturalism and towards the narrative of the great natural Kingdom of God distills precisely what is at stake in Graham's rejection of the "crude notion that heaven is but a *where*."

[879] *PSH* §81.
[880] He has an striking analysis of the conversion of St. Paul in this regard entitled "The Regeneration of Saul of Tarsus Not Miraculous." *PSH* §87.

Conclusion

On September 11th, 1851, Sylvester Graham died a failure. The sickness, decline, and premature death of this prominent dietary reformer whose system promised longevity and vitality was widely and gloatingly reported. Articles reflecting on the meaning of his death were published by friends and foes alike. His opponents mocked the deadly spuriousness of his physiological claims while earnest Grahamites were quick to note that he himself never developed the moral character to adhere strictly to all the practices that he prescribed.[881] Graham was seen to bear in his body the proof or disproof of his system.[882]

In a way, however, Graham's failure had begun earlier in his life. His meteoric rise to prominence in 1831 — which remains hard to explain historically — was coupled with an equally meteoric departure from public life in 1839, just after the publication of *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*. It may be that he just grew weary of public life and retreated to privacy due to his deteriorating health — his colleague in food reform W. A. Alcott suspected as much.[883] Or it may be that his audience left him. Many of those who were enthusiastic about the concrete details of his food reform practices were not enthusiastic about his increasingly religious formulations of his ideas after 1839. Several who took themselves to have investments in traditional Christianity distanced themselves from him after the publication of the *Lectures*:

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[881] See for example, "Sylvester Graham," in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*; W. A. Alcott, "Dr. Sylvester Graham. Why Did He Die?," *Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics*, November 15, 1851; R. T. Trall, "Biographical Sketch of Sylvester Graham," in *Water-Cure Journal, &c.* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1851).

[882] This had happened before. In 1840, it was rumored by the Boston Whig that he was sick, and the rumor circulated in newspapers from Maine to Virginia, alongside the ribbing of skeptics that although it was "one of the principles of the Grahamites not to be sick," ("Graham," *Hartford Times*, August 1, 1840). Graham was "a victim to his own system" ("Sylvester Graham Is Sick," *Gloucester Telegraph*, August 5, 1840), which was "sufficient to destroy the health of any man of common vigor." ("Bran Bread Graham," *North American and Daily Advertiser*, July 24, 1840).

[883] Alcott, "Dr. Sylvester Graham."

Gerrit Smith refused his appeals for money to advance his revelation of the mind of God, W. A. Alcott remained aloof about whether or not Graham remained "in the true faith of the Gospel," and Charles Finney, a former ally, bluntly and publicly referred to Graham's teachings as "bondage."[884] Only his friends in Bible-Christianity seemed willing to actively sustain relationship with him, advocating for his explicitly religious work all the way up to the end of his life. But, the Bible-Christians too were a dying sect. Numbers dwindled under Henry S. Clubb's leadership — by 1916, church meetings had been relocated to his home, while their building was sold, demolished, and, *astoundingly*, replaced by a slaughterhouse.[885] The most accommodating home for Graham's religious vision of the great natural Kingdom of God was no more.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that contemporary scholars have not much considered Graham as a religious thinker. He was not especially successful in the marketplace of religious ideas.[886] But though he was not successful in his day, he was symptomatic of a coming sea change in nineteenth century American religion. Graham's practical ideology of the Great Natural Kingdom of God is of one the earliest examples of the move towards developmental organicism in the culture of antebellum American Protestantism that would rise to major prominence in the years after his death, mounting a massive challenge to the revival conversionist priorities of earlier generations of formalist evangelicals. At once a reinterpretation of the operation of divine authority and an account of the immanence of God's works in nature, Graham's thinking about the Kingdom was an innovation in its day that, in retrospect, has much resonance with the ideological concerns of the white postbellum Protestant establishment that

[884] Harlow, *Gerrit Smith*, 94-5; Alcott, "Dr. Sylvester Graham"; Charles Finney, "Letter From Professor Finney To Miss A.E, Of Vermont, No. 4," *Oberlin Evangelist*, April 23, 1845.
[885] Kenneth W. Milano, *Remembering Kensington & Fishtown: Philadelphia's Riverward Neighborhoods* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2008),103-105.
[886] His popularity, in the end, was a fad. Robert Abzug has wittily characterized the Graham cracker and a glass of cold water as a sacrament of antebellum American reform. See Abzug, *Cosmos* Crumbling, 182.

was about the business of developing rhetoric for reforging a Christian nation. His religious thought and its practical outworking can and should be read as part of a central movement in nineteenth century American Protestantism away from millennial supernaturalism, concerned chiefly with divine intervention in history, and towards a developmental organicism, concerned with the structural imbrication of God in the natural world.

Conclusion

"In Brueghel's Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away*
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure…"
W.H. Auden, "Musée de Beaux Arts"[887]

Our Icarus story is told. Additional chapters and further refinements could of course be multiplied in all sorts of directions, but for now, enough is enough. And what of it? What have we have seen played out over the course of a few hundred pages?

Under the canopy of the polyglot academic discipline of the study of American religious history, this work has offered fresh arguments and insights relevant to a variety of contemporary discourses currently emergent in the field. First, it exposes the extent to which formalist evangelical leaders had to reposition their public identity in the post-Ghent "Era of Good Feelings," and shows the way that they deployed a renovated rhetoric of the millennium to do so. This is the point of origin of the hypertrophic millennial imaginary that, as the Reverend George Bush affirmed, had achieved an unparalleled ubiquity in formalist evangelical discourse by the early 1830s. Second, this work explores the strategies of the performance of that millennial imaginary in Anniversary Week celebrations, a major American religious festival in the first half of the nineteenth century that has heretofore received very limited scholarly attention. Third, this work articulates the white supremacy of that millennial imaginary, as well as the decades-long inability of the white formalist evangelical administrators to *acknowledge* that racialization. It was not new news in 1834 when the American Anti-Slavery Society burst onto the scene, offering clamorous Cassandra prophecies concerning the sins of slavery and racism in the camp. After all, African-American formalist evangelical leaders had been bluntly pointing it out to

[887] W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems* (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 79-80.

them since 1817. However, the formalist evangelical administrators of the Benevolent Empire had not been willing to hear it; the costs of disunity within their white nationalist consensus were simply too high. Fourth and finally, in the last two chapters, this work makes it plain that alternative millennial futures were, by the 1830s, a significant mode of immanent critique within the fold of formalist evangelicalism. This is an arena that warrants further careful interrogation through the lens of the study of religion. It is all too easy to read the myriad millennial and utopian reformers of the period who critiqued the formalist evangelical tradition as being essentially *separate* from it, as opposed to part of its trajectory. Sylvester Graham offers one particularly compelling example of this, but the opportunity exists to consider many others in a similar light.

In sum, I hope that the net result of all these insights is a novel account of the way that formalist evangelicals, first by technologies of imminent millennial force and later by revisionist ingenuity, sought to develop a legible and relevant place for themselves within the new democratizing conditions of the post-Ghent nation. They had long hence attempted to construct and manage the America that they desired. When their Icarian technology of large-scale metahistorical millennial anticipation began to falter, in light of the concrete historicity of the American slaveocracy to which they had pledged tacit allegiance, some among them sought instead to develop subtle alternative millennial infrastructures, fueled by gentler hopes for more quotidian improvement. They began to return millennial history to its classical location in the chastity of the evangelical middle-distance, while nonetheless still attempting to embrace presentist practices of millennial embodiment, thinning the boundary between heaven and earth at the level of individual habit. This was the spirit in which Joseph Emerson counseled Zilpah

Grant in 1832 to "be constantly drawing heaven down into your own mind until you are called up thither."[888]

Broader implications and further questions also beckon, at a short distance from the disciplinary discourse. Was the Icarian trajectory of the Benevolent Empire that we have traced "an important failure," to borrow Auden's epigrammatic phrase? Perhaps. At one level, the exposure of the grandiose eschatological imaginings and manifest racist ideologies of a cabal of elite white men in the early republic is no revelation at all, no matter how historiographically consequential. However, the way in which the institutions of the Benevolent Empire functioned to inscribe and naturalize those imaginings and ideologies nonetheless remains haunting. "Nothing else but institutions can define sameness," Mary Douglas writes.[889] In the two-decade attempt to establish their vision of national coherence during the centrifugal post-war period of perceived political instability, white formalist evangelicals established institutions that preferred the geographic sameness of the United States on the physical map of Christendom over the spiritual sameness they shared with their fellow African-American formalist evangelicals. When confronted with this reality by the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1834, the managers had no response beyond obfuscation and denial, in the interest of preserving geographic unity.

To have achieved an alternative posture prior to the crisis of 1834 would have demanded an ability from the administrators of national benevolent enterprise that David Walker observes that they did not have – that is, the ability to *listen to* and *learn from* co-religionists whose very existence obstructed the unity of the national mission around which they had built their benevolent institutions and to which their millennial ideology held the key.[890] They had no hope

[888] Emerson, *Life of Joseph Emerson*, 376.
[889] Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, 55.
[890] "What a happy country this will be," he writes, "if the whites will listen." Walker, *Appeal*, 70.

of becoming *self*-critical until they were willing to grant audibility to the critique that formalist evangelical African-American leaders were consistently leveling at their unifying project, beginning with their broad opposition to the colonization project. But granting such audibility was literally not possible with their frame of national Christianization – the premise of their institutions could not allow it. African-American formalist evangelical leaders were, as Manisha Sinha puts it, "the founding critics of the country."[891] The administrators of the Benevolent Empire, on the other hand, were not critics but conciliators, betting on their capacity to win over the nation with a promise of increasingly optimistic millennial anticipation, to be achieved through the efficient deployment of eschatological technologies. Thus it was precisely the technological investments of the Benevolent Empire that served to inscribe the whiteness of "Christian America" as they understood it.

This observation has profound theopolitical implications. In a 1960 essay, the French sociologist and Christian social critic Jacques Ellul rendered a devastating assessment of the relation between Christian faith and technological practice that bears quoting at length in light of all this:

> "Technique is what it is. Administration, as a thing, is fine. The machine, as a thing, is fine. *But as soon as people put their faith in this machine … are convinced … that … the machine will be the vicarious instrument which will allow them to cheaply exercise love of neighbor, then at that moment, we are in full idolatry.* And this is what we have to destroy, to bring back a world of things exactly to be only things.… [Otherwise, tragically] once a thing has been transformed into a divinity, technique for example, we are ready to sacrifice persons to it."[892]

The Icarus story in this narrative bears witness to Ellul's bleak assessment of communities like the organizations of the Benevolent Empire that pin their hopes on instrumental technologies, whether concrete or ideological, to enable them to more efficiently love their neighbor. In fact, as

[891] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause,* 131.
[892] Jacques Ellul, "Christian Faith and Social Reality," in *Sources and Trajectories*, trans. Marva Dawn (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), 177. Emphasis mine.

Ellul claims and our narrative bears out, the technologies themselves, if allowed to become objects of faith – as the administrative millennium of the Benevolent Empire did – will in short order come to *define* for the community who is the neighbor and who is to be sacrificed in the name of efficiency. This is precisely what happened in our story. The unity of white Christian America won the day, and African-American Christians were deemed worthy to be sacrificed in the interest of that unity. As Ellul sees it, the coming of the kingdom of God on earth can never be attained to by technological mediation. Rather he insists that it can only emerge in the vulnerability of "build[ing] bridges, relations between people" in which social partitions and imbalances of power are, to the extent it is possible, agonistically torn down for the sake of the other.

> "It is not a matter, then … of beginning on earth a kingdom of God that will finally end in heaven. It is a matter of something more modest.… It is a matter of being within practical social reality the sign, simply the sign (and not the beginning) … that points to the truth.… We are not marching toward this truth … we shall not attain this truth at the end of our long pilgrimage, *because this truth comes to us.*… It is not that we travel toward truth; this truth advances toward us, this eschatological truth illuminates us … approaches us and our reality. And it is of that [truth] that we are to be the sign now, for the people of this time."[893]

Ellul's vision brooks no administration. There can be nothing cheap or efficient about it. Rather it proposes an antidote to the Icarian trajectory of the Benevolent Empire, calling for an embodied Christian faith constituted by its commitment to "smash[ing] these idols" of divinized technologies, "profan[ing]the state," and rehumanizing the world in light of God's advent.[894]

[893] Ellul, "Christian Faith and Social Reality," 179-180.
[894] Ibid., 176-180. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, trans. Lisa Richmond (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016).

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