I. INTRODUCTION

> The religion which we profess is acknowledged by all, even by those who doubt or deny its Authority, to be of all others the most friendly to the interests of civil society & the best calculated to promote the happiness of Mankind....That man who has most largely imbibed its spirit or who is a Christian indeed becomes thereby a useful citizen, for it is impossible for him to be united to this Creator by religious adoration without having at the same time with his fellow citizens all those other relations of charity & justice which constitute the character of a man of integrity and real worth.[1]

From the time of the earliest settlements on the Atlantic coast, Protestant leaders viewed the American experiment as bright with spiritual promise. They strove mightily to erect communities which conformed ideologically and socially with the divine plan as they interpreted it. Nowhere was this more true than in the New England communities, where church and commonwealth entered into a symbiotic partnership designed to perfect and perpetuate an eminently Christian society under the good counsel of the saints. The church was the community's basic social institution. Its officers assumed responsibility for the general community's social health as well as its spiritual welfare. Throughout the seventeenth century, communities generally accepted their minister's guidance in matters of private

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[1]Anonymous sermon, preached in 1795. Cited in William A. Clebsch, From Sacred to Profane America: The Role of Religion in American History (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 185-86.

conscience and social conduct.[2]

At the center of colonial society stood the minister: exhorter, teacher, counsellor, and social arbiter. He was truly "God's man."[3] The supremacy of church and minister lasted as long as colonial society accepted the truth of certain propositions. Basic to the whole system was a belief that God was the source, sustainer, and judge of all that existed. Politics, economics, public and private morality were all under the kingship of God. God did not deal arbitrarily with humankind. He had a will for his creation, a will that was manifested through the dual channels of reason and revelation. The expositors of the Will of God--those charged with mediating it to the society as a whole, were the elect or "saints," especially the ministers. They were to direct political decisions and social life in such a way as to assure the closest possible conformance of society to the will of God.[4] As the ministers and elect performed their duty they established a protestant moral order in America.

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[2]Joseph Haroutunian, Piety Versus Moralism: The Passing of the New England Theology (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1932), p. 89. See also, Gaius Jackson Slosser, "Origins," They Seek a Country: The American Presbyterians, Some Aspects, ed. Gaius J. Slosser (New York: Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 10. Slosser indicates that the church-state theory dominant in colonial New England was espoused wherever Calvinistic Protestants resided.

[3]Elwyn A. Smith, The Presbyterian Ministry in American Culture: A Study in Changing Concepts, 1700-1900 (Philadelphia: Published for the Presbyterian Historical Society by the Westminster Press, 1962), p. 95.

[4]Jerald C. Brauer, "The Rule of the Saints in American Politics," Church History, XXVII (September, 1958), pp. 242-43.

As the colonial experiments worked their courses, they underwent modifications (some leaders would have said decay). Social and intellectual forces in both the Old and New Worlds led to increasing secularization of life, but in general the churches maintained positions of honor and importance, partly through reciprocal relations with the political and economic leaders of society and partly because of theological modifications which allowed them to respond to the changing spiritual and emotional needs of the populace in general. Accommodation was possible (and largely occurred at a subconscious level) because the tides of change were slow and erratic. Violent social change would bring with it far more serious challenges. Such a period of rapid transition was ushered in by the Revolutionary War.

After the Revolutionary War, America awoke to a new day, the beginning of a new era. After recovering from the patriotic euphoria that political and military success occasioned, religious leaders looked towards a frighteningly stormy horizon. The country seemed severely underchurched. There were only 1,499 ministers and about 1,965 churches struggling to serve over three million citizens.[5] An ominous coldness had settled over the citadels of orthodoxy. In 1798, Dartmouth could claim only a single practicing Christian in its junior class, and at Princeton "there were only three or four who made any

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[5] Donald G. Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis," American Quarterly, XXI (Spring, 1969), p. 37.

pretentions to piety."[6] Something had gone awry. The New Jerusalem had fallen into the hands of the infidels, or so the remnant of the faithful felt. The saints thought of themselves as the intended victims of a monstrous conspiracy. Men like Timothy Dwight were certain that "infidelity" planned to exterminate Christianity in order that virtue might be vanquished and vice possess the field unopposed. Should infidelity come into possession of the "control of national interests" all hope for a decent, orderly society was lost.[7]

Rivals that threatened church power arose from every corner and clergymen were ill-prepared to meet their challenge. Of the many challenges which rendered the position of Protestantism precarious, three seem especially important: competing ideologies, changing demographic conditions[8] and groups which threatened the cultural and economic homogeneity of the country, chiefly Roman Catholic immigrants and the growing numbers of urban poor. All of these challenges remained, to greater or lesser degrees, until the Civil War and beyond, but in the space of two generations a Protestant ideology had been created and Protestant machinery established which met the situation

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[6]G. Adolf Koch, Republican Religion: The American Revolution and the Cult of Reason (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1933), pp. 242-43.

[7]Sidney E. Mead, "Nation with the Soul of a Church," Church History, XXXVI (September, 1967), p. 278.

[8]Of course the frontier, notorious for "lawlessness, rowdyism, Sabbath breaking, gambling, swearing, drinking, and fighting" especially concerned the conspicuously moral Christians back east. See William W. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier. Vol. II: The Presbyterians, 1783-1840, A Collection of Source Materials, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936), pp. 55-56. Equally important, however, was the rural depopulation-urban growth complex along the Eastern Seaboard.

successfully. The Protestant churches grew both absolutely and relatively. Where there had been one church for every 1740 inhabitants in 1800, there was one for every 895 in 1850.[9] Protestantism made a truly remarkable recovery from its post-Revolutionary War malaise. At the close of the Civil War there were approximately five million Protestant church members. Roughly one out of every six Americans maintained a formal association with one or another of the denominations. The influence of Protestantism far exceeded that which its numerical strength alone merited. Protestantism was the popular religion of the American people. Most Americans did not seriously question its religious or social beliefs. The aggressive, self-confident, and surprisingly homogeneous Protestant community had established an ideological hegemony over the rest of American society.[10]

Throughout much of the colonial experience, churchmen collaborating with merchants were able to determine moral standards for the New England community as a whole. The story of the development of New England theology throughout the colonial period has been interpreted with some truth as a series of compromises in ideology and polity effected in order to maintain an allegiance between the church and the mercantile elite.[11] Old social patterns began to

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[9]Bernard A. Weisberger, They Gathered at the River: Revivalists and Their Impact upon Religion in America, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1958), p. 151.

[10]Robert T. Handy, "The Protestant Quest for a Christian America, 1830-1930," Church History, XXII (March, 1953), p. 12.

[11]Haroutunian, Piety Versus Moralism..., passim.

change after the Revolutionary War. The norms of the old order began to disintegrate. The classes that had supported them began to lose their hold on the public imagination.[12] Among the causes of this change certainly the broadening of the suffrage, the increase in size and self awareness of the middle class, the discrediting of portions of the colonial upper classes for loyalist tendencies during the war, and the influx of Enlightenment and Romantic ideas from Europe played major roles.[13] Upper class mores and colonial orthodoxy lost their hold on the social imagination. The aggressive, rising middle class began to claim its right to be the class referent of "ideal American character." As status leadership passed from the upper to the middle class, mainline Protestantism aligned itself with the rising group, henceforth fighting its battles against the "deluded masses," who had to be "saved from the rum seller and the Sunday theater" and against "the corrupted rich with their novel unorthodoxies" as well.[14]

Challenges before the Revolutionary War had directed themselves towards liberalizing Calvinist theology--injecting doses of Arminianism which rendered harmless the more foreboding doctrines of the system--infant damnation, predestination, and the like. The tendency after the Revolution was the same, but the challenge was far more intense. Regular Calvinists were dismayed to watch liberals

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[12]Mathews, American Quarterly, XXI, p. 33.

[13]William W. Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), pp. 91-2. Thomas C. Hall, The Religious Background of American Culture (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1930), pp. 180-181. Koch, Republican Religion..., pp. 26-27.

[14]Weisberger, They Gathered at the River, pp. 79-80.

capture influential churches, and the loss of Harvard caused chagrin almost too deep to bear. From north to south Enlightenment rationalism captured the intellectual classes and Unitarianism and Deism became socially respectable.

Had Unitarianism and Deism been the only anti-Calvinist systems competing for public attention, the situation would have been bad enough; yet neither seemed destined to overwhelm traditional religious ways completely, for they were too cerebral and lacking in emotional appeal to capture the public en masse. Also, those members of society who found Unitarianism or Deism attractive were as devoted to an orderly stable society as the orthodox Protestants were. Conflicts would remain in the realm of theology and not descend to the more dangerous social class level. The loss of the ear of the social elite was painful and humiliating, but the pain could be born.

More serious--deadly serious--were the popular variants of Unitarian and Deistic rationalism--Universalism and freethought. These had great appeal for the socially restive, especially the college-age young and the submerged classes. "Anti-orthodoxy" expressed itself in rhetorical and sometimes physical violence. In 1800 a Wilmington, Delaware, Methodist church was forced to organize its members in order that they might "'deter the infidel rabble from disturbing them in time of worship by breaking the windows, stoning the preacher, casting naseous [sic] reptiles, rotten filth in the windows amongst the female part of the congregation.'"[15] Drawing

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[15]Peter Oliver, "Probationers for Eternity: Notes on Religion in the United States in the Year 1800," Harvard Theological Review, XXXVII (July, 1944), p. 222.

strength and inspiration from events on the Continent, leveling in social tendencies, and often thoroughly anticlerical,[16] "infidels" struck terror in the hearts of the orthodox. The Rev. Lyman Beecher was aghast when he surveyed Orthodoxy's retreat in New England. "No maxims were deemed too wise to be abandoned," he wrote.

> No foundations too deep laid to be torn up, and no superstructure too venerable to be torn down, that another might be built, such as in Europe, they were rearing with bones and blood....The polluted page of infidelity, everywhere met the eye, while its sneers and blasphemies assailed the ear....The result was, a brood of infidels and heretics, and profligates, a generation prepared to be carried about, as they have been, by every wind of doctrine, and to assail, as they have done, our most sacred institutions.[17]

While traditional churchmen found the threat most alarming around the turn of the century or a decade or so before, "infidelity," in a hundred shapes and degrees persisted.[18]

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[16]William W. Sweet, "Natural Religion and Religious Liberty in America in the Colonial Period and Early Nineteenth Century," Journal of Religion, XXV (January, 1945), pp. 54-55.

[17]Lyman Beecher, A Sermon, Delivered at Woolcot, [sic] [Conn.] September 21, 1814, at the Installation of the Rev. John Keyes, to the Pastoral Care of the Church in that Place (New London, Conn.: Samuel Green, 1815), p. 9. All ministers were not as dismayed as Beecher was. Some girded their loins for battle, confident that the Lord's will would prevail. Whether the victory would be of this world or the next they were not certain. The Rev. John H. Livingston, in A Sermon delivered before the New York Missionary Society at Their Annual Meeting, April 3, 1804 (Greenfield, N. Y.: John Denio, 1809), (pp. 29-30) wrote, "Principles and achievements, revolutions and designs, events uncommon and portentous, in rapid succession, arrest our attention. Each year, each day is pregnant with something great, and all human calculations are set at defiance....the Christian, instructed by the word and spirit of his Savior, calmly views the turning of the dreadful wheels, and knows which way they proceed. Strengthened by divine grace he stands undaunted in the mighty commotion, and looks up rejoicing that his prayers are heard, and that his redemption draweth nigh. (author's emphasis)

[18]Albert Post, Popular Freethought in America, 1825-1850 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), passim.

Astute Protestant observers of the time noted a third sort of ideological challenge, which though less overt was ultimately the most dangerous of all--religious indifference.[19] Challenge could be met with response--argument with apologia. But how was one to handle indifference? It was a case of slander being far preferable to neglect. Even a defensive role gave one access to the marketplace of ideas, but when there were no buyers, no amount of hawking could sell the wares. The fact was that religion had become uninteresting and irrelevant as far as many Americans were concerned. Men who were accustomed to public deference suddenly found themselves the butts of public humor.[20] Intellectual activity and social excitement centered in the political and economic arenas.[21]

The old colonial certainties died a hard death. The protestantism resurrected in the first half of the nineteenth century was not the "old time religion." Rather, what was resurrected was an amalgam of old ideas clothed in new words and old words given new subjective and objective content.[22] The faith of the colonial fathers

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[19]Haroutunian, Piety Versus Moralism..., p. 177.

[20]"A favorite joke of the year was the story of the farmer who, asked about his religious opinion, disclaimed any preference in regard to Arminianism, Socinianism, or Deism, but who did not like rheumatism. The name of the Lord was taken in vain not only in speech, but in print. 'Here lies the body of Jacob Sneer/Who had a mouth from ear to ear/Reader tread lightly on this sod/For if he gapes, you're gone by G--.' " Oliver, Harvard Theological Review, XXXVII, pp. 220-221.

[21]R. Jackson Wilson, In Quest of Community: Social Philosophy in the United States, 1860-1920 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.), p. 19.

[22]William G. McLoughlin (ed.), The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900: An Anthology (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 14.

married to the life experience of the nineteenth century middle class sired a religion which bore marks of resemblance to both parents. Various aspects of nineteenth century Protestant ideology will be discussed later in this study--a comprehensive analysis of it lies beyond the paper's scope. At this point it should be mentioned, however, that the theological system which evolved was able to compete successfully because it answered two sets of distinct, but complementary needs: it provided emotional satisfaction and a guide and rationale for the personal conduct of individuals in the rising middle class, and it offered a vision of the "good society" which incorporated both the aspirations and actualities of nineteenth century middle class life in America.[23]

Protestant leaders in the early years of the nineteenth century recognized other challenges to the standing order which were primarily political and demographic and only tangentially touched on theological issues. The new set of political realities which were an outcropping of the Revolution had to be recognized by the various denominations. The older denominations had to cope with disestablishment--either immediately, or ultimately.[24] In early years the

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[23]Mathews, American Quarterly, XXI, p. 38.

[24]Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Rhode Island were the only colonies which had no established church, and even Pennsylvania and Delaware imposed essentially Protestant religious tests for holding office. The only state wherein state-church relationships were the same pre- and post-Revolutionary War was Rhode Island, and Rhode Island was hardly the darling of conservative religious or political elements throughout the rest of the country. E. Clinton Gardner, "Religious Pluralism and the Churches: The New Cultural Situation of Faith," Interpretation, XIX (October, 1965), pp. 419-420.

threatened loss of a preferred position seemed direly foreboding, especially to Congregational leaders in Massachusetts and Connecticut, but in general they adapted to separation fairly easily.[25] A more subtle problem existed, the solution of which gradually evolved throughout the pre-Civil War years. At a time when most leaders concerned with religious organization were accustomed to looking no farther than colonial or state boundaries (and the horizons of some Congregationalists and most Baptists were even more restricted) the civic arena had suddenly and drastically expanded in scope. The American people were being called to political nationhood--a similar call was being felt in the religious arena. The problem was essentially a problem of organization; methods had to be devised and

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[25]Weisberger (They Gathered At the River, p. 3) argues that differences in reaction to disestablishment were a product of differences in the generations of clergy undergoing the experience. Older clergymen were bitter about the experience while younger men looked upon it as a challenge. Clergymen whose active careers spanned the transition tended to embrace the new system wholeheartedly, after their early fears were dispelled by time. The Rev. Lyman Beecher underwent such an ideological flip-flop. In 1814, he wrote, "The religious and civil order of this State, commenced their existence together, and together they will live or expire. One was made for the other, or rather, one was made by the other. Without the religious order of the State to form the conscience and establish the fear of the Lord, our civil institutions, which have stood almost two centuries, could not have endured a year." (A Sermon, Delivered...at the Installation of the Rev. John Keyes..., p. 24). Roughly twenty years later he had changed his mind. He proclaimed vigorously that civil and religious liberty were "introductory to the triumphs of universal Christianity." He declared that "to lay the ban of a fastidious charity on religious free inquiry, would terminate in unthinking apathy and the intellectual stagnation of the dark ages." (A Plea for the West [Cincinnati: Truman & Smith, 1835], pp. 8-9, 86-87). For Beecher and others like him, religious establishment was important only insofar as it fostered a social situation congenial to Christianity. See Elwyn A. Smith, "The Forming of a Modern American Denomination," Church History, XXXI (March, 1962), pp. 81-82.

institutionalized which would simultaneously allow and encourage expansion while discouraging fragmentation and schism.

Not only had a new system of political relationships arisen, but the problem of religious organization was compounded by shifting patterns of population which placed physical burdens upon the abilities of religious elements to adjust to the new situation. The cities and the West were twin magnets, attracting ever growing numbers and actually depopulating older, settled areas, especially in rural New England and Virginia.[26] Also, the sheer magnitude of population growth was threatening to overwhelm institutional resources for training spiritual leaders for the country. At the time when the country was growing so rapidly, ministerial vocations were at a low ebb. Princeton turned out only thirty-nine clergymen between the years 1777 and 1794--only thirteen percent of the total graduated.[27] Looking into the future, the clergy were impressed with America's potential. Possibilities for a spiritual, as well as political empire were present in the American West, but only if laborers could be found to work the fields "white unto the harvest."[28] If a Protestant moral order was to be established, means for reaching an increasingly mobile populace had to be devised.

The problem had both intra- and inter-group dimensions. As

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[26]E. Smith, The Presbyterian Ministry in American Culture, p. 225.

[27]Ibid., p. 93.

[28]James H. Smylie, "Protestant Clergymen and American Destiny: I. Promise and Judgment, 1781-1800," Harvard Theological Review, LVI (July, 1963), pp. 218-219.

belief-systems spread, methods had to be devised to keep units in contact with each other, in order that fragmentation be controlled and kept within tolerable limits, if not eliminated altogether. Traditions had to be maintained and passed on to future generations. Discipline had to be enforced, and, if each group was to extend its influence at a rate concurrent with the country's growth, proselytism had to be conducted in some systematic manner.[29] The institution which evolved to meet these needs was the Protestant denomination. Protestant denominations, in the American sense of the term, were truly evolutionary in development. Existing first as _ad hoc_ organizations of colonial pastors and lay leaders, they functioned to "counter the weaknesses stemming from the diversity and mobility of the membership of congregations." After the Revolution, ecclesiastical conventions made _de jure_ what had previously been _de facto_.[30]

Denominations provided some sort of centralized control over widespread congregations, and, as vehicles of communication, kept ideological patterns in various parts of the country from deviating too far from given norms.[31] They also gave individuals a point of reference broader than the individual congregation, helping to

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[29]The Presbyterians demonstrated their concern by establishing a Standing Committee of Missions in 1802. See H. Gordon Drury, "Missionary Expansion at Home," _They Seek a Country: The American Presbyterians. Some Aspects_, ed. Gaius J. Slosser, pp. 172-73.

[30]Timothy L. Smith, "Congregation, State, and Denomination: The Forming of the American Religious Structure,: _William and Mary Quarterly_ (Third Series), XXV (April, 1968), pp. 167-68.

[31]Mathews, _American Quarterly_, XXI, p. 33. The norms to which the denominations sought to hold their members were social as well as religious. In his book, _Protestants and Pioneers:_

overcome isolation and parochialism. The larger group referent gave individuals a sense of belonging to something that had scope and strength. Each religious group experienced the same denomination-building phenomena, although to different degrees and at different rates and points in time. Early Methodism was perhaps the most centrally directed, and used its unique blend of episcopal and congregational polity to good advantage. The Presbyterians also recognized the advantages of central direction and concerted action. Even the Baptists, more congregational in polity than the Congregationalists were, recognized the utility of inter-congregational cooperation, and, especially in the East, were well on the way to denomination building by the second third of the nineteenth century.

The denominational system ameliorated problems of intra-group cohesion. Similar problems existed among the diverse traditions which existed within American Protestantism. Basic differences between Protestant groups seemed irreconcilable, and the leaders of the various groups soon saw that no one denomination was likely to be able to achieve absolute domination over all the rest. As Sidney Mead put it, "...they had learned in a relatively short time to live together in peace under the genial aegis of the Dutch and English combination of patriotic-religious fervor, toleration,

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Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), T. Scott Miyakawa noted that "the larger Protestant denominations in the early West attempted to regulate the entire personal, social, and economic life of members and their families in accordance with standards which were essentially uniform for each denomination throughout the country...To a considerable extent, the churches were at once centers of religious and social life, advocates of public order, and schools for group and community leadership." (p. 3).

cynicism, simple desire for profits, efficacious muddling through, and 'salutary neglect'."[32] Church leaders of the various denominations were well aware that divisions among them weakened their collective position. Divided, they could well be conquered by competing religious and secular ideologies.

The more observant church leaders recognized that simple toleration was not enough. Cooperation was necessary as well. They recognized that their individual peculiarities of theology, polity, or ethnic origin tended to appeal to only certain portions of the American populace. Some denominations were strongest in frontier communities, others along the Atlantic coast. Some drew strength from the relatively well-to-do, while others drew numbers from the less economically advantaged. Some groups found it very difficult to extend themselves across ethnic boundaries.[33] As much as this tendency

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[32]Sidney E. Mead, "Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism in America," Church History, XXIII (December, 1954), p. 293.

[33]See Miyakawa, Protestants and Pioneers, pp. 103-4 for an analysis of regional differences. E. Douglas Branch (The Sentimental Years, 1836-1860, [New York: D. Appleton-Century Co. Inc., 1934], p. 334) notes the concern of the Reverend Edward A. Washburn, an Episcopal minister, had about class limitations of the appeal of his denomination. Washburn wrote " 'Our system does not reach the mass of the American middle class. We do not mean, of course, that it excludes them altogether, but that a comparatively small portion of them enter its communion. Methodist and Baptist take hold of such classes; we do not.' " Elwyn Smith (Presbyterian Ministry and American Culture, p. 226) notes a similar concern among Presbyterians as he quotes Charles Hodge saying "Our system which requires the minister to rely for his support on the people to whom he preaches has had the following inevitable results: In our cities we have no churches to which the poor can freely go and feel themselves at home....The churches are private property. They belong to those who build them...they are intended and adapted for the cultivated and thriving classes of the community...the mass of the poor in our cities are excluded from our churches."

could be abhorred, it had to be treated as a fact of life--modified if possible, but recognized. All groups had a common hope--that within America a Christian civilization could be created. All desired the development of a congenial social milieu--the creation of a moral order in which their individual systems could thrive and flourish.[34] Some method of cooperation which would hold internecine warfare to a minimum had to be constructed if the hope was ever to be realized. The common beliefs of all American Protestants had to be emphasized--a common core Christianity with theological, but especially with moral and cultural aspects.[35] The theological elements in this common core Christianity tended to be reduced to a few revival-flavored doctrines generally considered necessary for conversion and personal holiness.[36] In its moral and cultural aspects, common core Christianity tended to reduce the Word of God to "a body of laws, comparable to the secular moral law formulated by the humanitarianism of the age..." The upshot was that "piety, no less than politics, was to be judged by its moral fruits. It was instrumental to the making of decent and happy citizens. Good citizenship required justice, honesty, charity, and the like-virtues, which constituted the first principles of social welfare. The purpose of religion was to encourage, cultivate, and accomplish these virtues in

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[34]Charles I. Foster, An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front--1790-1837 (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), pp. 9-10.

[35]Miyakawa, Protestants and Pioneers, p. 213.

[36]Lefferts A. Loetscher, "The Problem of Christian Unity in Early Nineteenth-Century America," Church History, XXXII (March, 1963), p. 5.

the lives of men."[37] Religion thus conceived became indispensable for the national welfare as well as the welfare of the individual. Groups could therefore "indulge in doctrinal disputes within their own circle[s] while, at the same time...busily [engaging] in disseminating basic Christian morality throughout the new, young nation."[38]

Some form of cooperation was essential, not only because it would minimize disruptive differences, but also because it would emphasize those elements of belief and practice which the groups held in common. Coming as the denominations did from different heritages, and appealing as they did to different social and economic classes, there was no assurance that they would automatically develop common social attitudes. Without interdenominational contacts and cooperation, formal or informal, the opposite tendency was at least as likely. The desired cultural unity could just as well have vanished if each denomination followed its own star, developing its own life style. In the face of the overwhelming dominance of Protestant mores in the mid-nineteenth century this possibility is difficult

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[37] Haroutunian, Piety Versus Moralism, pp. 90, 54.

[38] Jerald C. Brauer, "Images of Religion in America," Church History, XXX (March, 1961), p. 7. Sidney Mead (Church History, XXIII, pp. 300-301) notes that insisting upon a body of separately held doctrines while paradoxically insisting that there existed a definable body of essential truths all held in common put Protestant leaders in an uncomfortable position:"...the churches accepted the responsibility to teach that the peculiar views or tenets or doctrines that divided them one from another and gave each its only reason for separate and independent existence, were either irrelevant for the general welfare or at most possessed only a kind of instrumental value for it. It is little wonder that a sense of irrelevance has haunted many religious leaders in America ever since."

to realize. Protestant leaders active <u>before</u> the goal had been achieved recognized the possibility of defeat through disunion, however, and took steps to assure the unlikeliness of its happening. Informal contacts among members and leaders of the various denominations happened all the time, of course--some friendly, others, not so friendly. Formal contacts were assured through the perfection of national voluntary associations--institutions which have come to be collectively known as the "Benevolent Empire."

Extra-denominational organizations designed to promote diverse "good works" were British, not American, inventions, but they reached their pinnacles of success in the United States. Beginning in the decade 1810-1820, national benevolent societies proliferated at an ever-increasing rate, reaching a peak in the Jacksonian era.[39]

Secular historians have found revivalism and the benevolent societies the most attractive (and most accessible) subjects in the religious history of nineteenth century America. So many histories dealing at least in part with the benevolence movement have appeared in the last twenty years that yet another would seem to be futile. However, most of them have either drawn generalizations which merit qualification, or have dealt with specific benevolent organizations in ways which limit the possibilities of understanding their contributions to American culture and thought. Much work remains to be

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[39]The seminal exposition of the theological basis for Christian benevolence is Oliver W. Elsbree's "Samuel Hopkins and His Doctrine of Benevolence," <u>New England Quarterly</u>, VII (December, 1935), pp. 534-50.

done before the benevolence movement can be fully understood. Practically nothing has been written on the benevolence movement as a social institution. Little effort has been directed toward analyzing the ideological and operational structures of the several benevolent agencies. Notwithstanding the paucity of research in this area, certain generalizations can be tentatively made.

While the major benevolent organizations possessed marked similarities in organization, scope, and even personnel, they were not cut from the same bolt of cloth. Their similarities have received wide attention: they were all dominated by laymen; they all tended to develop burocracies with concurrent redefinitions of "Christian service;" all of them had as their goal the "Christianizing" of some facet of American life.

The differences among them were as important as the similarities, and these have often been overlooked by historians interested in broad generalizations. The various societies differed, for example, in the closeness of their ties to particular denominations, ranging from the almost exclusively Presbyterian-Congregational American Home Missionary and American Education Societies, through the broadly non-denominational societies such as the American Bible Society and the American Sunday School Union, to societies with both sacred and secular ties like the American Colonization Society.[40]

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[40]The organizations mentioned hardly begin to scratch the surface. Organizations existed which sought to apply Christian benevolence principles to such arcane problems as the conversion of Jews, the "servant problem," juvenile delinquency, prostitution, the care of orphans and immigrants, and poor relief. See Foster, Errand of Mercy, pp. 115-116.

The societies also differed in the types of work in which they engaged. Some societies in the benevolence movement specialized in what might be called propaganda work for want of a better term--Bible, Tract, and Sunday School societies might fall into this category. Others were primarily missionary societies, both domestic and foreign. Yet other segments of the movement operated in the political sphere a good deal of the time--Sabbatarian, temperance, and anti-slavery groups come readily to mind.

All of the societies were organized to achieve specific objectives (an extreme constitutionalism which in some instances hindered the pooling of resources of societies with complementary goals). The nature of any given objective helped to determine the strength, longevity, and national appeal of the society. Those bound to local, limited objectives tended to be more temporary--social conditions would change and deprive them of either their raison d'etre or financial support (or both). Those whose objectives were broader in scope would count on a longer and more healthy life--especially if conducted in a manner that avoided political controversy and denominational jealousies.

The nature of the goals of the individual benevolent societies and the culmination of those goals in the benevolence movement determined its influence upon American society. If many historians have been willing chroniclers of the benevolence movement, few have been sympathetic observers of it. With a few prominent exceptions, scholars have considered it to have been repressive and narrow. They have described the groups of men behind

it as a curious amalgam of crabbed, frightened reactionaries, rapacious capitalists, self-righteous bigots, and zealous cranks.[41] To be sure, such a characterization bears some truth, yet it seems exaggerated and highly unfair. Certainly the benevolence movement was not just blind reaction. Its aims were higher than protection of private property. The benevolence men were conservative, but they were moralizers too; and as a result, not always satisfied with things as they were. Many of the evils they saw were genuine, and in fighting them, some even became radicals--the abolitionist evangelicals spring immediately to mind.

A positive, coherent, and sometimes even progressive social vision was one of the strengths of American evangelicalism. The petty moralisms and hide-bound, even brutal, economic theories proclaimed by most benevolence men repulse many. But these were never ends in themselves, but rather were means to the achievement of a just, prosperous, industrious, progressive, and happy society which was an evangelical goal. The very success the movement enjoyed--the fact

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[41]Notable among the highly critical studies are Clifford S. Griffin, Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865 (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1960), Foster, Errand of Mercy, and, to a slightly lesser extent, John R. Bodo, The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, 1812-1848 (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1954). Highly favorable treatments are found in Alice F. Tyler, Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), Timothy Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957) and the introduction to H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy, and Lefferts A. Loetsher (eds.), American Christianity: An Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents, Vol. II (1820-1860) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963).

that its vision came close to being the official ideology of nineteenth century America[42] (and to some degree of twentieth century America as well)[43] and the fact that this success was won largely without overt coercion would indicate that large segments of the contemporary public found the movement's program appealing and not at all antagonistic toward their dreams of personal or national fulfillment.

Another point which has interested historians is the relationship between the benevolent societies and the great American denominations. The majority view has been that the denominational movement and the benevolence movement became mutually antagonistic. A highly simplified synthesis of the argument would state that after the Revolutionary War, religion in America was dominated by two opposing tendencies: the inclusivist benevolence movement, and the exclusivist denominational movement. For a while it looked as if the benevolence movement would win, and that denominations would either

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[42]Mead, Church History, XXIII, pp. 312-313. Timothy Smith (William and Mary Quarterly, XXV, pp. 175-176) postulates that in emigrating from Europe the colonists experienced a disruption of the village and kin-group relationships that they had previously known. Thus, a "quest of community," largely religious in nature, became a central part of early American experience. The needed feeling of community was supplied by "The American Protestant consensus, the community of feeling and aspiration which in the nineteenth century helped give the nation itself a sense of oneness."

[43]"...even modern Americans [have] expected displays of piety from public officials, nourished inchoate convictions that atheists could not qualify as perfect citizens, viewed politics as a theater for moral crusades, and applauded the commonplace that American democracy rested on religious foundations." James F. Maclear, " 'The True American Union' of Church and State: The Reconstruction of the Theocratic Tradition," Church History, XXVIII (March, 1959), p. 59.

remain weak influences or would coalesce into some sort of Protestant supra-denomination. However, for various reasons (the interpretation differing from historian to historian)[44] denominationalism underwent a resurgence from about the mid-1830's on, and this resurgence sounded the death-knell for the "Benevolent Empire."[45]

Evidence for this view is usually drawn from the writings of "high churchmen" of the various denominations--men such as (Episcopal) Bishop Hobart or (Presbyterian) Charles Hodge,[46] or from anti-mission elements in the more rabidly congregational denominations and sects--especially along the frontier.[47]

The decline of organized, inter-denominational benevolence is usually dated from the time of the Presbyterian schism of 1837, with the differences between Old School and New School groups over the question of cooperation with the Congregationalists in the Plan of Union and cooperation with benevolent societies in general duly noted.[48]

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[44] Among the reasons often given is that the denominations resented the drain on finances and personnel occasioned by the incessant appeals of the benevolent societies. Also, as the denominations grew stronger, they felt less and less need to band together for mutual protection. See Foster, Errand of Mercy, pp. 127-128, 250-251.

[45] Some go so far as to argue that denominational squabbling not only wrecked benevolent cooperation, but also the development of theological thought as well. The best minds in each denomination were recruited to the task of writing apologias, and suffered from the lack of free mutual exchange between historic traditions. E. Smith, Church History, XXXI, p. 97.

[46] Earl R. MacCormac, "Missions and the Presbyterian Schism of 1837," Church History, XXXII (March, 1963), pp. 41-42.

[47] Miyakawa, Protestants and Pioneers, p. 128.

[48] For examples of this thesis, see Drury, "Missionary Expansion at Home," pp. 175-176, Sweet, The Presbyterians, pp. 121-125, and Foster, Errand of Mercy, pp. 272-273.

Granted the strength of this argument and the abundant evidence documenting it, it remains possible to question whether the antagonism between non-denominational benevolence and denominationalism has not been overemphasized. This position can be approached in two ways. Historical evidence can be gathered pointing to the continued strength of inter-denominational benevolent societies after the supposed death of organized benevolence. Some of the strongest societies did not begin until after 1840--indeed, until after the Civil War. Timothy Smith suggests an amazing transformation of the benevolent impulse--from the conservative pre-civil war tradition to the radical Social Gospel movement of the 1880's and 1890's.[49] A moribund impulse could hardly bring forth an organization as robust as the YMCA. Furthermore, organizations which were among the strongest at the height of the benevolence movement are still performing their chosen tasks over 125 years after the supposed death of the movement. As shall be shown later in this paper, the American Sunday School Union at present employs more people than it did at its supposed height in the early 1830's. Its present obscurity can more logically be laid to the growth of American society than it can be attributed to any internal decline. If indeed organized benevolence on non-denominational lines is dead, someone should be appointed to visit the American Bible Society in New York, or the American Sunday School

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[49] T. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, pp. 83-84. Smith notes that interdenominationalism was especially strong at the local levels, which at times of religious fervor witnessed such interdenominational activities as union prayer meetings and cross-denominational pulpit exchanges.

Union in Philadelphia, and inform them of the fact.

It is possible, too, to question the depth of antagonism towards non-denominational benevolence felt by spokesmen for the more "churchly" tradition. The case of Charles Hodge might be used in example. Hodge has been pictured as an arch-denominationalist, arguing eloquently for denominational control over benevolent enterprises.[50] Yet Hodge evidently saw no important contradiction between arguing for denominationally controlled benevolent agencies and accepting a commission from the American Sunday School Union for the production of a book to be published under its auspices--a book, which by the consitution of the society could contain no peculiarly Presbyterian doctrines. The commission he accepted was offered around 1840, after the Presbyterians had split partly over the question of participation in interdenominational benevolent agencies. The apparent paradox in the Hodge case might be resolved if the differences in the nature and scope of the various societies noted briefly earlier in this paper were considered. It should strike no one as odd that organizations which at first glance seem similar could have basic differences which would allow an individual consistently to accept one and reject another.[51]

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[50]See Charles Hodge as cited by H. Smith, et al., American Christianity, Vol. II., pp. 91-92.

[51]Charles Hodge, The Way of Life ("Written for the American Sunday School Union, and Revised by the Committee of Publication.") (Philadelphia: The American Sunday School Union, 1941.) Hodge himself gave a key as to how he made the distinction: "We have already remarked that there are in the work of missions two distinct functions, the one ecclesiastical, the other secular. The one must be performed by church courts; the other may be performed by others. To the former

A second method of approaching the question of the relationship between the benevolence movement and the denominations might be to develop a general theory of their individual social functions. From such a vantage point it might become apparent that, regardless of any superficial competition between denominationalism and nondenominational benevolence, the two forms of religious organization were complementary.

First, it must be emphasized that if two social organizations are to complement each other, they must each have distinctly separate functions. Such was the case of the benevolent societies and the protestant denominations: each had its own distinct role in the religious life of America.

The denominations functioned in several areas into which the benevolent societies dared not intrude. Denominations were entrusted with the transmission of tradition from generation to generation. They were the sole guardians of Protestant rites and sacraments. It was through attendance at religious functions conducted by denominational churches that a person received identification as one sympathetic with the aims of Protestant Christianity; as it was through membership in one of the churches that a person professed "saving knowledge" of divine truth. Membership in benevolent organizations was never considered a substitute for church membership: one joined a benevolent organization as a member of a church. Denominational

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belong the ordination, mission, direction, and supervision of evangelists; to the latter the mere provision of the ways and means, and the administration of them." As Cited by H. Smith, et al., American Christianity, Vol. II., p. 91.

councils of one sort or another defined orthodoxy and set standards of belief. Ministerial credentials lay in the hands of the denominations.[52]

Benevolent societies sometimes operated in areas which were closed to denominations either by doctrine or social custom. They were effective in influencing public policy in areas where direct church intervention was likely to raise suspicions of ecclesiasticism or establishment. They also helped to defuse (sometimes only temporarily) social questions too controversial to be handled by the church organizations. Concerned Christians could take stands on social issues of the day through the auspices of the benevolent societies, while at the same time maintaining ties with brethren of different convictions through the neutral denominations. The social issue might prove too persistent and volatile to be ignored permanently (as was the case in the slavery issue) but it is at least possible that the time which the benevolent societies gained for denominations by serving as outlets for dissident opinions may have at least postponed schisms and perhaps made them less acrimonious when they finally did occur. After all, most moderates parted more in sorrow than anger.

In addition to complementary functions, similarities in the internal development of both forms of religious organization point to the interrelatedness of the evolving institutions. Functional differences within a system indicate the necessity of each part for the success of the whole. Similar developmental and organizational

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[52]T. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, p. 19.

patterns indicate that both types of organization developed in response to a set of common needs.

First, laymen were at least as important as clergy in both benevolent societies and the denominations. In the latter, they served in positions of influence in the church councils at all levels--in fact, among Methodists and Baptists the line between clergy and devout laymen was scarcely distinct. As the nineteenth century progressed, the minister came more and more to be as much the servant of his congregation as its leader--serving at the pleasure, even whim, of his flock. The benevolent societies, too, were most often governed and financed by dedicated laymen--those clergymen who rose to positions of influence in the societies did so largely because they were willing to share authority with lay leaders--even in areas where ministerial privilege would seem logically to predominate. This parallelism resulted quite naturally in essentially secular interests influencing both movements.

It is interesting to note how closely the organizational developments of the benevolent societies and the major denominations paralleled each other. In both, organization began at the local level. In the early years of the denominations local congregations were almost autonomous. As the process of organization worked itself out, local, state, and regional levels of authority developed each in turn, with national bodies forming the capstones of the system. Whether generating associations, synods, presbyteries, assemblies, councils, or conventions, (or monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings, for that matter) the same centralizing forces operated in each religious group, creating roughly

equivalent agencies in generally the same sequence. The peculiar characteristics of the Methodist system of itinerancy modified, but did not essentially change, the pattern of development.

The major benevolent societies also began as local autonomous units--in many cases a local benevolent society had practically the same membership list as did the local congregation. Gradually, the strength of certain societies caused them to dominate those in their area with similar aims. Societies would voluntarily associate themselves as auxiliaries to others--the end result of the process being national societies, each formed around the nucleus of a strong local society and its regional alliances.[53] In the case of the American Bible Society the New York City Bible Society served as the nucleus, while in the case of the American Sunday School Union, Philadelphia became the focal point of activity.

The parallel developments of societies and denominations occasioned parallel problems. In both the denominations and the benevolent societies tension existed between centralizing forces and local autonomy. In both, schism or threat thereof arising out of local or regional circumstances was often present.

As benevolent and denominational institutions matured, both sought to perpetuate themselves and expand in similar fashions. Following a period of organization and/or consolidation, and in some instances continuous with it, was a period of centrally directed expansion. Where local congregations and societies had coalesced

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[53]Loetscher, Church History, XXXII, pp. 9, 12.

into national organizations, the national organizations sought rational and systematic growth through the creation of new local congregations and societies. The instruments of the denominations were home missionaries and itinerant preachers--those of the benevolent societies also included "missionaries" as well as agents, lecturers, and colporteurs. It was not unusual for a man to wear the colors of both a denomination and one or more of the benevolent societies with apparently little worry over the effects of a divided allegiance, indicating again the essential compatibility of the two movements.

A third factor operating as evidence pointing toward the similar developments of denominations and benevolent societies is the degree to which they came to depend upon each other for ideas and the instruments to carry them out. From the non-denominational benevolent societies the denominations borrowed the idea of specialized institutions such as Bible and tract societies, Sunday schools, and publishing houses. Of those forms of benevolence closely related to religious activities, scarcely a one escaped being borrowed by some, if not all of the religious denominations.

The dependence of the benevolent societies on the denominations is most obvious at the level of staff recruitment. The denominational seminaries were filled with young men eager to spend their summer vacations working for some virtuous (and profitable) enterprise. Nor were established clergymen loathe to accept outside duties in order to further the Lord's work and augment the meager salaries their congregations paid them. There were more subtle borrowings as well. One author has described the entire system of organized benevolence

as it developed in America as consisting of Methodist hierarchy imposed upon Congregational-Presbyterian polity.[54] Again, the interchangeability of agencies and practices points to the compatibility of denominations and benevolent societies.

In a very real sense denominations and benevolent societies made each other possible. The concept of a "denomination" of Christians differed significantly from either "church" or "sect." Neither of the latter allowed for the kind of pluralistic approach within a broad framework of agreement that the former did. Churches, whether established or not, each claimed to be the sole repository of divine truth. Ascription to the body of their tenets was the only guarantor of salvation. Each church claimed for itself the sole right of moral and spiritual leadership of the community. Nonconformists were by definition heretics with which there could be no fruitful intercourse.

Sectarianism was in a sense the churchly tradition turned inside-out. While the former claimed certain rights and perquisites to be honored by members of the whole society whether communicants or not, the latter considered society to be corrupted beyond the point where any intercourse with it was possible. Salvation was possible only through withdrawing (in the case of the most extreme sects, physically) from society, being neither "in" nor "of" the World. Ideally, the church encompassed all of society--saint and sinner alike residing under its banner. Sects, on the other hand,

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[54]Mathews, American Quarterly, XXI, p. 41.

considered themselves to be isolated communities of the elect--surrounded by false prophets and lures to vice. The extreme inclusivism of the church on the one hand, and the extreme exclusivism of the sect on the other, both precluded the possibility of cooperation among religious groups with different beliefs and backgrounds. If either the church or the sect had come to dominate American religious life, the benevolence movement would have been impossible.

The denominational way was, however, the middle way. Like the sect, the denomination did not pretend to be the culture expressed in religious terms: like the church, it did recognize a responsibility for the moral and spiritual welfare of society at large. The denomination was neither confessional or territorial. It was, rather, "a voluntary association of like-hearted and like-minded individuals,... united on the basis of common beliefs for the purpose of accomplishing tangible and defined objectives."[55] No denomination professed itself the sole possessor of the true faith and only guarantor of salvation. The very word denomination implied the existence of more than one valid expression of Christian thought and action. Each denomination at least tacitly recognized that within its tradition rested a mingling of human error with divine truth--the faith delivered of Christ to the primitive church was forever lost: all that could be hoped for--all that could be claimed--was the closest possible approximation of it.[56]

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[55]Mead, Church History, XXIII, p. 291.

[56]Winthrop S. Hudson, "Denominationalism as a Basis for Ecumenicity: A Seventeenth Century Conception," Church History, XXIV (March, 1955), p. 32. See also Mead, Church History, XXIII, p. 297.

The granting of possible error within one's own tradition and the possession of partial truth within another's laid the background against which inter-cooperation became possible.

It was not only that the denominational system made interdenominational benevolence possible: it can be argued plausibly that it made interdenominational cooperation an absolute necessity. Without the emergence of organized interdenominational benevolent societies the denominational system might well have failed. To put it perhaps more precisely, the cultural goals held by each denomination succeeded and the expression of those goals dominated life in nineteenth century America only because the members of the major denominations were able to cooperate with each other. The first mode of cooperation was the benevolent society.

The combination of denominations and benevolent societies organized American protestantism along two axes. Together, they drew the converts generated by revival enthusiasm into a religious structure responsible to both tradition and contemporary culture. The denominations gave American Protestants roots within a religious tradition and provided a sense of continuity. Benevolent societies helped to make the religious impulse culturally sensitive. Because they were <u>not</u> bound to particularistic written or oral traditions they were equipped to react quickly to perceived social situations--to come into prominence, or to fade from existence as social needs changed. By reminding the denominations of social needs--and because they partly generated the perceptions of those social needs--they helped to keep the several Protestant traditions from diverging.

Paradoxically, they helped to strengthen each denomination's self-consciousness, by providing a common ground against which each group's individual characteristics were highlighted.[57] Because the several traditions were able to go their own theological ways yet keep on a common cultural path they were able to exert a joint influence upon society--an influence, formal and informal, greater than would seem merited by their strength of numbers.

Innovations in technique, in ideology, and in organization were directed predominantly towards winning the allegiance of those who could provide the greatest strength and substance to American Protestantism--the middle (and soon-to-be middle) classes.[58] Persons from those classes were attracted to evangelical Protestantism partly because it legitimized their social and economic aspirations and lent an aura of sanctity to their daily activities. Consequently most converts came from those classes, and from them, both denominations and benevolent societies received vigorous moral and financial support.[59]

It soon became apparent that other groups lay outside the pale of actual conversion. Regardless of professed high hopes for the conversion of members of these groups, most realistic Protestant observers quickly gave up hopes for en masse defections from those aligned with "foreign" standards. Chief among these groups were the

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[57]Samuel C. Pearson, Jr., "From Church to Denomination: American Congregationalism in the Nineteenth Century," Church History, XXXVIII (March, 1969), p. 87.

[58]Miyakawa, Protestants and Pioneers, pp. 172-73.

[59]Weisberger, They Gathered at the River, pp. 143-44.

urban poor and immigrants of the Roman Catholic faith. Denominational leaders and benevolence men failed to provide the alienated poor with a working faith because they ascribed to a set of economic theories which blessed the status quo and placed any attempt at modifying it under quasi-religious sanctions.[60]

Protestant leaders greatly underestimated the gulf that separated them from Rome's faithful. They found the "Papist's" religion intolerable. The "Papists" found theirs incomprehensible. Beyond the theological gulf lay a cultural chasm. Protestants simply could not understand why Catholics seemed to prefer the easy-going mores imported from Ireland and the Continent above the stolid, self-consciously virtuous "American" ones they offered them. Baffled, they grew to number the Catholics with the other " 'warts and excrescences' " on the American body politic--the Indians, Mormons, and Chinese.[61]

While the middle class was the principal generator and resource of the denominations and benevolent societies, the lower classes--the rural and urban poor and the Roman Catholics--were among the principal recipients of their ministrations. If the principal goal of American protestants was to "Christianize" America, then some standard had to be raised for those who were beyond theological

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[60]Charles C. Cole, The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1826-1860 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p. 191. See also, McLoughlin, American Evangelicals, pp. 20-21.

[61]Howard M. Jones, "The Influence of European Ideas in Nineteenth Century America," American Literature, VII (November, 1935), p. 242. See also E. Smith, Presbyterian Ministry in American Culture, p. 213.

incorporation. The danger of competing ideologies had to be held within limits. Those not subject to theological control could perhaps be controlled culturally. They could be incorporated into some larger more neutral whole. A civilization could be created which would be eminently friendly to Protestantism, yet subtle enough in the ways it guided human behavior to avoid implacable opposition from non-Protestants.

Protestants sought to create a definition of "Americanism" in their own image. If out-groups could not be transformed overnight into Protestants, perhaps they could be influenced into behaving as middle-class Protestants. Interest in Christian belief became subordinated to interest in "Christian" behavior. "Americans" practiced a series of virtues--prudence, practicality, sobriety, frugality, honor, gentility, etc.[62]--and shunned a series of vices--"indelicate dress, immodest acts, profane language, strong drink, gambling at cards or horses, dancing and frivolity, and particularly Sabbath breaking..."[63] Others could either conform, or leave.[64]

The goal of Protestants was a moderate cultural pluralism--pluralism because absolute uniformity of belief and practice was impossible; moderate pluralism because some "common world of experience" was necessary if there was to be an American society.[65] It would be

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[62]Wilson Smith, Professors and Public Ethics: Studies of Northern Moral Philosophers before the Civil War (Ithaca, N.Y.: Published for the American Historical Association by the Cornell University Press, 1956), pp. 78-79.

[63]Clebsch, From Sacred to Profane America, p. 161.

[64]Bodo, The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, pp. 256-57.

[65]Mathews, American Quarterly, XXI, pp. 39-40.

impossible to overestimate the importance given to this object by Protestant leaders. Lyman Beecher wrote, "The integrity of the Union demands special exertions to produce the nation a more homogeneous character, and bind us together by firmer bonds...." What was needed was "a sameness of views, and feelings, and interests, which would lay the foundation of our empire upon a rock."[66] The result of efforts towards achieving this goal was the emergence of a Protestant moral order which dominated the lives of most persons in most sections of the country throughout the major part of the nineteenth century.

Many of the men responsible for the re-definition of the Protestant moral order have been identified by historians interested in the movement. Historians have found it easier to identify them as individuals than to lay down characteristics for them as a group, however. Griffin calls them "moral stewards" and "would-be overseers of their brethren's conduct." Bodo calls them "Theocrats." Timothy Smith refers to them as "revival men," while Foster, McLoughlin, and others simply call them "Evangelicals."[67] The roots of the movement have at times been discovered in seventeenth century Calvinism (Clebsch), eighteenth century rationalism (Haroutunian), or nineteenth century romanticism (Branch).[68] Griffin claims they represent the voice of

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[66]Cited in Richard L. Power, "A Crusade to Extend Yankee Culture: 1820-1865," New England Quarterly, XIII (December, 1940), p. 638. See also Maclear, Church History, XXVIII, p. 56.

[67]Their Brothers' Keepers, p. x. Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, passim. Revivalism and Social Reform, passim. Errand of Mercy, passim. American Evangelicals, passim.

[68]From Sacred to Profane America, passim. Piety Versus Moralism, passim. The Sentimental Years, passim.

reaction, while Timothy Smith aligns them with liberal forces.[69] Haroutunian and Clebsch accuse them of leaving succeeding generations a legacy of shallow moralism, while Tyler and Timothy Smith number them among the ancestors of Christian radicalism.[70] Rather than accepting any of the above positions as absolute, a more prudent evaluation would allow that all of them hold particles of truth. Within this truly inclusive and heterodox movement examples justifying all of the above positions can easily be found.

Giving any sort of label to a group of men whose most common characteristic may be diversity is hazardous, but for convenience's sake the risk may be allowed. "Evangelicals" may prove to be a convenient term, provided it is defined in a way peculiarly applicable in the nineteenth century. The term "evangelical" or "evangelical party" has often been used to distinguish those denominations or elements within denominations which were friendly to revivals and religious enthusiasm in general. Yet the term can also be used to define the parameters of mainline Protestantism as well, and was so used by many nineteenth century commentators.

Within the category "evangelical" were men from Calvinist and Arminian traditions--men from denominations organized hierarchically and congregationally. Within this category could be found groups which differed violently on questions of acceptance of the "new

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[69] Their Brothers' Keepers, passim. Revivalism and Social Reform, passim.

[70] Piety Versus Moralism, passim. From Sacred to Profane America, passim. Freedom's Ferment, passim. Revivalism and Social Reform, passim.

methods" and "enthusiasm" characteristic of nineteenth century revivals,[71] yet, with all their differences, all considered themselves, on their own terms, evangelical. Indeed, with the exception of a few Episcopalian high churchmen who would even deny that they were Protestant, or the members and clergy of a few radical Calvinistic Presbyterian and Baptist sects, what nineteenth century Protestant Christian wouldn't bridle at being called "unevangelical?" And with good reason, for no Protestant spokesman used the term "unevangelical" as a compliment.[72] It was reserved for Unitarians, Universalists, Catholics and other pariahs.

The definition of evangelical which we are approaching has theological and sociological components. Theologically, it includes all trinitarian protestants, regardless of tradition.[73] Sociologically, it includes those elements of the various trinitarian protestant groups which were self-confident, aggressive, and expansion-minded.[74] Evangelical Protestantism took emerging patterns of secular behavior

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[71]The groups referred to often existed side by side in the same denomination. See Foster, Errand of Mercy, pp. 251-52.

[72]McLoughlin, American Evangelicals, p. 5.

[73]Mead, Church History, XXIII, p. 311.

[74]One example can be taken from among the frontier Baptists. "The anti-missionites were the poorer, less-educated rural Baptists--the very elements even then less confident of rising socially and economically and similar to the less privileged groups which to this day find sects and holiness groups more congenial than the more impersonal middle-class denominations. On the other hand, the pro-missionites were generally better educated and more prosperous, that is, more explicitly middle-class oriented, rising economically and socially, and more optimistic about their future." Miyakawa, Protestants and Pioneers, pp. 156-57.

and gave them a religious justification. In so doing, it helped the emerging middle class define itself.[75] In a sense, they worked to define the middle class in their own image.

In identifying evangelical Protestantism with the "middle class" it would again be wise to use the term in a way which approximates its nineteenth century usage. During the period in question "middle class" seems to have been defined behaviorally, rather than in terms of location on an economic scale. The relatively wealthy and the virtuous poor would be lumped together with those of moderate incomes--as long as they practiced a certain life style which met with the approbation of Protestants.

Above this middle class were the "classes drunk with luxuries," lying on beds of down, clothed in "robes of adorning," intoxicated with the "joyousness of the mazy dance." Woe to those who either hoarded their accursed money, or squandered it, bringing only "shame and a grave." Below the "middle class" lay the vicious poor--"that dense and dark mass, the population of alleys, and cellars, and garrets--the ignorant, the degraded, the grossly sensual, the idle, the worthless--the refuse of society, and the offscouring of the world." Woe too, to those "banditti of thieves, robbers, swindlers, pilferers, incendiaries, burglars, and ruffians" who behaved in a scandalous manner.[76]

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[75]W. Smith, Professors and Public Ethics, pp. 204-05. See also Miyakawa, Protestants and Pioneers, pp. 219-220.

[76]E. Smith, Presbyterian Ministry in American Culture, pp. 216-17. See also Clifford S. Griffin, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860," Journal of American History (Mississippi Valley Historical Review), XLIV (December, 1957), pp. 442-43.

The evangelicals labored mightily to create a standard of appropriate behavior to which American society would conform. Others competed for the allegiance of the middle class. Evangelicals were often hard put to defend the gains they won. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the middle class had no fixed ideology. By the time of the Civil War the evangelicals could look back upon considerable progress. In the last decades of the nineteenth century evangelical behavior standards came close to dominating American society. Not that all Americans conformed to them by any means. Rather, they had become the standard against which deviant behavior was measured. The poor who did not conform were suppressed. The rich and the politically prominent generally conformed in public at least, and reserved their more scandalous behavior for the privacy of their own offices and homes.

All the great American denominations--Baptist, Congregational, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian, as well as their major offshoots--were part of the great Evangelical army. Some of the divisions were able to work together more harmoniously than were others, but whether or not a denomination directed its primary energies towards its own aggrandizement, it contributed to the ultimate goal of all: capturing America for Christianity.

The definition of "evangelical" used in this paper does not imply that differences among Protestants in nineteenth century America were not important, nor does it mean that organized interdenominational benevolence was never a partisan issue. It does argue, however, that to divide Protestants into evangelical and unevangelical factions

based upon support or lack of support of the benevolent societies would be misleading. Nor would it be accurate to divide trinitarian protestants into evangelical and unevangelical denominations--for every denomination, no matter how churchly and liturgical or sectarian and independent it might be, had its faction favoring the evangelical benevolent societies. In order to explain the division among evangelical Protestants over cooperation in benevolent societies many additional factors may have to be explored.

Some of the roots of the division may be demographic--historians will have to investigate to what degree rural versus urban or cosmopolitan versus parochial situations affected the outlooks of various clergymen. Some of the roots may be economic in origin: determinations must be made as to whether the degree of economic security of congregations and clergymen affected their willingness to cooperate interdenominationally. In the end, personality factors might well prove most important. It seems obvious that most ministers were not active in the upper echelons of either the denominational hierarchies or the benevolent societies. What factors, then, influenced the career selection and advancement of those who rose to prominence?

As the Protestant church in America reorganized itself to meet the new conditions of the nineteenth century, the ministerial vocation underwent considerable change. A study has been made of the professionalization of the ministry in New England (chiefly among

Congregationalists in New Hampshire),[77] and all evidence indicates that the phenomena described in the study occurred to some extent in every denomination, in every region of America.

The most readily observable change was the decline in the ideal of a "settled clergy." In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the marriage of congregation and minister had generally lasted "till death did them part." The relationship between minister and community was organic: to a large extent his status as minister determined the privileges he enjoyed in the community. After a short trial period, the minister and congregation entered into a contract which could honorably be dissolved only by mutual consent. Toward the end of the eighteenth century the system broke down, owing chiefly to a shortage of ministers which caused congregations to compete for the services of the few available candidates. Also, congregations grew less willing to continue supporting superannuated ministers. As the nineteenth century progressed, tenure in office progressively shortened. What was rubric in Methodist ecclesiology became custom throughout American Protestantism as a whole.

The change in customary length of tenure led to other alterations in the pastor-congregation relation. From being a member (the chief member) of a congregational family, the pastor became a professional employee--hired because of a limited range of personal

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[77]Daniel H. Calhoun, Professional Lives in America: Structure and Aspiration, 1750-1850 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965). I have summarized Mr. Calhoun's findings throughout this section.

qualities, including the ability to create harmony in the congregation, and the possession of an affecting pulpit style. The ties between pastor and flock became less intimate and the duties of the office more clearly defined.

The professionalization of the ministry evoked changes in the way ministers achieved what sociologists call "status gratification." In earlier times the office itself carried much prestige. The changed situation placed much greater emphasis on performance. Competition among congregations meant that the definition of ministerial success became more standardized. Successful ministers seemed to have been all poured from the same mould.

The minister who possessed the required characteristics for success would most likely find his career develop in the following way: following his seminary training, he would normally serve as a supply pastor, filling vacant pulpits on a temporary basis. Then he might be called to serve one or more rural parishes. As he matured, he might expect to serve more influential congregations in larger, more important cities, capping his career by holding an important position in the denominational councils. This model, essentially true of the Congregational and Presbyterian denominations, would serve the others equally as well with few modifications. Those ministers lacking in ambition or qualifications would be consigned to serving their time in obscure places which could afford no better.[78]

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[78]For a more comprehensive analysis of career development patterns within the Protestant denominations, see Calhoun, Professional Lives in America, pp. 156-57.

There were, however, men who did not lack ambition, but whose talents were not those likely to lead to congregational preferment. Perhaps they were ineffective in the pulpit, or were more adept in situations calling for executive decisions rather than persuasive emotional appeals. It was possible for such men to achieve satisfying careers in the greater Protestant ministry as well. Many with managerial or editorial talents found themselves serving the denominational or inter-denominational benevolent societies.[79]

Studies of the lives of both denominational and non-denominational leaders are important and useful aids in understanding nineteenth century American Protestantism. Some work has been done on leading men of the various denominations--in some cases, full-length biographies. Denominational leaders have received their due attention because they either epitomized denominational thought, or, through the force of intellect and personality, altered the course of denominational development. The lives of the most colorful reformers and revivalists have also received their due share of attention. The controversy they created and thrived upon has attracted the eyes of students of church history.

Very little work, however, has been done on the careers of ministers who spent their lives serving the interdenominational benevolent societies. Denominational historians were not likely to interest themselves in such men, while their careers were too humdrum and subdued to attract secular historians in search of the color and

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[79]E. Smith, Church History, XXXI, p. 76.

excitement found in the lives of revivalists and reformers. Yet the very characteristics which have obscured them from scholarly recognition contribute to their importance.[80]

Through the study of the lives and writings of the servants of organized benevolence one can explore concepts at the very center of Protestant theological and social thought in the nineteenth century. The clergymen serving the interdenominational societies were successful only to the degree that they could avoid particularism and controversy. Relying for support upon Protestants of all persuasions, they strove to please all and offend none. This often meant dealing in generalities and commonplace ideas--a sort of religious Babbitry. But these generalities and commonplace ideas also demand the attention of the historian, for they created a pervasive life style without resorting to the kind of legal sanctions available to an established church. They formed the basis for a Protestant moral order, the strength of which astonished European observers who expected only chaos to arise from the American denominational system.[81] Furthermore, they offer greater insight into the religious and social beliefs of the majority of contemporary American Christians than do the more studied ideas at the extremes of nineteenth century Protestant thought.

Perhaps no single clergyman can be taken as a perfect example of the interdenominational churchman. Many of them served a society only a short while before drifting back into their denominational

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[80]T. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, pp. 78-79.

[81]Mathews, American Quarterly, XXI, p. 31.

connections. Others spent their entire professional career in the service of a single benevolent organization; and, given the differences between the organizations, their words and works could hardly be taken as typical of career benevolence as a whole. The peculiarities of the career of one man, the Reverend Robert Baird, make his concerns, activities, and arguments uniquely fit samples of a broad spectrum of benevolent activity in the nineteenth century. An ordained minister from a Presbytery which belonged to the Old School, he nevertheless had New School ideas. He never served a congregation, nor held any office within the Presbyterian Church, yet he never broke with the adversaries of organized benevolence--those who recognized little if any possibility for Christian service outside the denominational context.

In the course of his long career he served practically every important benevolent society in some capacity or other. Furthermore, he held positions of importance in four societies which illustrate the types of benevolent enterprises current during his life: quasi-political activities (the New Jersey Missionary Society and its part in the battle for common schools in New Jersey), propaganda activity (the American Sunday School Union and the great Western Campaign of the 1830's), an organization specifically devoted to the reduction of inter-denominational tensions and the fostering of good will (the Evangelical Alliance), and a proselytizing society (the American and Foreign Christian Union). Investigating Baird's work in these organizations should provide insight into their rationales, methodologies, and contributions to American social thought and practice.

Baird's career deserves investigation because of his role as church historian as well. He can perhaps claim the distinction of being the first church historian to treat other evangelical denominations as fairly as he treated his own. His observations and general accuracy have caused him to be cited frequently (but not as often accurately--several historians have given him spurious middle initials, and William Warren Sweet, in one of his volumes, insists on attributing Baird's work to one Robert Beard[82]). It would seem that few in his day, or since, have offered as plausible explanations for the success of the American religious system.

Finally, Baird was a member of, and spokesman to and for, the American Protestant middle class. His life and work illustrates the aims and appeal of middle class Protestantism in America. He was of that group which made America and American religion in its own image. Throughout a public career spanning forty years, he traveled almost continually at home and abroad, zealously prosecuting what he conceived to be the Lord's work. His European efforts have received attention elsewhere, and shall be only considered tangentially in this study.[83] The American career of Robert Baird--his efforts toward bringing forth the re-emergence of a Protestant moral order in the United States--shall be considered in the chapters that follow.

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[82]For instance, "Robert F. Baird," in McLoughlin, American Evangelicals (p. 5), "Robert M. Baird," in Karl A. Olsson, By One Spirit: A History of the Evangelical Covenant Church of America (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1962), p. 41, or "Robert Beard" in Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, p. 119, 496-97.

[83]Charles J. Miller, "British and American Influences on the Religious Revival in French Europe, 1816-1848" (Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Dept. of History, Northwestern University, 1947).