VI. THE GREATER VISION: THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

Robert Baird terminated his service to the American Sunday School Union the last day of November, 1834.[1] Although from time to time he had complained about the way the society treated him, the parting seems to have been entirely amicable. The Union missed him, and he spoke of the Union in the highest terms. Frederick W. Porter wrote him shortly after his resignation, hoping to persuade him to change his mind, but he graciously and modestly declined.[2] Baird seemed to be looking for wider fields of opportunity. He also needed to find a position which paid higher wages. His family was growing, and could no longer exist comfortably on an Agent's salary, or so he replied when the Union tried to rehire him in 1838.[3]

Another reason that Baird felt a change of scene was necessary was the state of his health. He had worked himself into near exhaustion in the service of the Sunday School cause, and hoped new employment would give his constitution a chance to

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[1] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Philadelphia, October 29, 1834. ASSU Archives (1834, A-C), 179.

[2] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Paris, July 6, 1835. ASSU Archives (1835, A-C), 85.

[3] R. Baird to John Hall, New York, May 14, 1838. ASSU Archives (1838, A-F), unnumbered.

recover.[4] In such circumstances, what would seem more natural than an application of the nineteenth century's universal panacea for physical and mental ills, an ocean voyage and tour of the Continent?

As Baird remembered it later, the lure of the Old World had attracted him at an early age. While attending college he had begun to read John E. Caldwell's The Religious Herald, which contained reports on the "spiritual condition" of Europe, and his interest had been further aroused by conversations at Princeton with the Rev. Jonas King who had served as a missionary in Greece.[5] His attention soon centered on France, social capital of Europe. His wife was a descendant of the Huguenots, and the treatment of her ancestors at the hands of the French Catholics was never far from the surface of either her or her husband's memory. Furthermore, as early as 1831, Baird was receiving suggestions from friends that he try his hand on the French field.[6] The desire was present--all that was lacking was the opportunity.

Opportunity and desire had occasion to meet in the Spring of 1834, through the instrumentality of The French Association, a group of mission-minded clergymen and lay philanthropists. In 1831, a special meeting was called by the Rev. John Proudfit, who had recently returned from a trip to Europe. Impressed by the change in

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[4]H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, p. 82.

[5]Robert Baird, "Letter to Dr. Candlish, of Edinburgh, Scotland, No. I.," American and Foreign Christian Union, I (February, 1850), p. 60.

[6]H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, pp. 83-84.

atmosphere following the Revolution of 1830, Proudfit was certain that opportunities were opening for Protestant penetration into France. As a result of Proudfit's meeting a committee of correspondence known as the French Committee of New York was formed for the purpose of investigating the feasibility of American participation in a joint French mission with Parisian Protestants. The three most prominent men of this committee were among the most active in the American benevolence movement: S. V. S. Wilder, president of the American Tract Society, Arthur Tappan, and Eleazar Lord.[7]

The French Committee raised $2,000 for the cause at the outset, but on the advice of French Protestant leaders, refrained from the proposed joint-mission venture.[8] The Americans were not content to remain in a passive, fund-dispensing role, however, and kept looking for means to accomplish a more active participation. Interest in the enterprise grew with every communication across the Atlantic. Protestants in Philadelphia, Boston, and other cities caught the spirit of the New York men, and soon the Committee reorganized itself into the French Association in recognition of its wider attraction. The activity of the Association caught the eye of Robert Baird, who was not slow to recognize its potential. He secured the support of the Rev. William S. Plumer, Presbyterian minister of Petersburg, Virginia, who suggested Baird's name to the Association at the time of the May religious anniversaries in New

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[7]Miller, British and American Influences . . . , pp. 110-111.

[8]H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, pp. 87-88.

York.[9]

The Association accepted Plumer's recommendation, and Baird was appointed as its European representative, charged with assessing the religious conditions and prospects in the European countries, and with rendering "all the assistance in his power to the benevolent enterprises recently initiated in the country where he should sojourn." Evidently the Association offered Baird little more than accreditation and moral support, for he spent the last two months of 1834 and January of 1835 raising the funds to pay for his mission.[10]

Baird contemplated a long stay in Europe. Consequently, the early months of 1835 were spent in making preparations for the trip. Household goods had to be sold, for Baird was taking his family with him. His friend Frederick W. Porter aided him in settling his financial affairs. Porter paid $424 to the Widow's Fund of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Baird's name ($24 annual dues, $400 as a deposit against future exigencies), and was left holding about $350, representing a good portion of the money acquired through liquidating his American assets.[11] Ties were cut; debts were settled. All was in readiness for Baird's first

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[9] R. Baird, American and Foreign Christian Union, I (February, 1850), p. 60.

[10] H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, pp. 88-89. For example, Baird arranged to use the Presbyterian Church at Princeton for a fund-raising meeting during the February meeting of the New Brunswick Presbytery. See R. Baird to John Maclean, January 19, 1835. Maclean Papers, Princeton University Archives.

[11] R. Baird to F. W. Porter, New York, February 2, 1835. ASSU Archives (1835, A-C), 57.

European adventure.

The Baird family embarked for Europe on the 26th of February, 1835. After a "short, stormy, and, of course, sufficiently rough" eighteen day voyage, they landed at Havre, and proceeded directly to Paris.[12] From the beginning, Baird was very much on his own. The instructions he had been given were very broad. Basically, he was to attempt two things: he was to win the cooperation and confidence of the leading French evangelicals, and he was to generate support for evangelical activities in France and the rest of Europe among the Americans back home.

Not only did he have to try to generate funds for French benevolent activities, he had also himself and his family to support. He did not find the task easy. His American sponsors seemed to forget him almost immediately, and when he complained to friends such as James W. Alexander of Princeton, all they chose to do was to sympathize.[13] The financial panic of 1837 increased the precariousness of Baird's position. He was forced to withdraw $200 from the sum Frederick W. Porter was holding for him. He wrote Porter:

> I am sorry, very sorry, to do so, but I must have the means of living, and my committee in New York has sent me nothing for a long time. Indeed it is hard to do so now and will be for some months. No remittances now

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[12]H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, p. 92.

[13]James W. Alexander to Robert Baird, Princeton, March 14, 1836. Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

> come from America. Everything is in a dreadful state; all our American houses in Paris are in danger of failing. Indeed, several have done so.[14]

Times remained hard for Baird throughout 1837, and did not greatly improve until his return to Europe from a short visit to America in 1839-40.

During his years in Europe Baird carved out for himself a role as liason and ambassador without portfolio for individuals and benevolent societies on both sides of the Atlantic. He found numerous ways to help individuals and, incidentally, gain their good will. He introduced the writings of Merle D'Aubigne and other continental evangelicals to America, and did what he could to further their distribution.[15] He also flattered American authors by placing their works in the hands of European notables.[16]

He also sought to publicize the works and enhance the reputations at home and abroad of European evangelicals. Recognizing that academic honors would increase their prestige and effectiveness, he arranged for Merle D'Aubigne of Switzerland and J. J. Grand-Pierre of France to receive honorary doctorates from Princeton, writing John Maclean that "a diploma is a thing of much importance

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[14]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Paris, June 14, 1837. ASSU Archives (1837, A-C), 63½.

[15]R. Baird to Samuel Miller, Paris, December 5, 1835. Samuel Miller Papers, Princeton University Library.

[16]For example, Leonard Bacon, Congregational minister and hymnodist, sent books to Baird to be given to Alexis de Tocqueville, whom Baird evidently knew, as well as anyone else Baird judged proper. See Leonard Bacon to R. Baird, New Haven, April 3, 1840. Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

to those gentlemen. They are delighted with the honours conferred upon them."[17]

Baird ministered to the mundane, as well as the religious interests of Christians on both sides of the Atlantic. Americans making the "grand tour" left messages for each other in the hands of the accommodating Dr. Baird. These he tried faithfully to deliver, although he complained that "in this Babylon persons (Americans) may be here for years and we know it not."[18] No task seemed too small--or too strange. In one instance he purchased twenty glass eyes at the request of a Pittsburgh physician, and sent them to him, care of Frederick Porter![19]

Baird served English and American Protestants in Paris as a group, as well as individually. For several years a Rev. Mr. Wilks of England had maintained religious services in a small chapel in Paris. In the fall and winter of 1835-36, Baird took charge of services while Wilks was visiting Geneva, preaching practically every Sunday afternoon to a congregation numbering around 120. The following year he again kept services in Mr. Wilks' absence, aided this

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[17]R. Baird to John Maclean, Princeton, January 9, 1839. John Maclean Papers, Princeton University Archives. Baird thought the diplomas important enough to offer to replace them out of his own pocket when the originals were lost at sea. See R. Baird to John Maclean, Paris, February 26, 1841. John Maclean Papers, Princeton University Archives.

[18]R. Baird to John Maclean, Paris, February 26, 1841. John Maclean Papers, Princeton University Archives.

[19]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Paris, April 27, 1835. ASSU Archives (1835, A-C), 118.

time by the Rev. Robert J. Breckinridge, another Presbyterian clergyman from America.[20]

Paris was a seductive city, even for a clergyman. A large number of its attractions were of a nature which forbade participation in them by conscientious evangelicals. In order to provide this class with a constructive way to spend their leisure time, Baird opened his apartment for a series of Bible study and prayer meetings, which took place every Saturday night. Several years later, Baird described the manner in which these evenings were spent:

> The meetings were held in the parlor, and were commenced precisely at eight o'clock, with prayer,--all kneeling down, in this sacred and solemn service. Afterwards Bibles and New Testaments were handed round, each person taking one. These Bibles and Testaments were for the most part in English, although there were always some persons present who, being familiar with the French, and others with the German, Italian, &c., took copies in those languages.
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> A portion of Scripture was then read by the writer when he was present, (and, during his frequent absences on tours in Europe, or visits to his own country, by some English or American minister of the Gospel,) accompanied by a familiar exposition of the more difficult passages. . . .
>
> Our practice was to take up some portion of the sacred volume, and go regularly through it. In this way the Gospels and most of the Epistles were studied with considerable care, and there is reason to believe with profit. . . .
>
> Something like an hour was spent in this divine study. Then a hymn was sung, and another prayer was offered up. By this time half-past nine o'clock had arrived. Tea and other simple refreshments were then handed round, and the remainder of the evening was spent as a

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[20]R. Baird to the Moderator of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, Paris, August 29, 1836. Philadelphia: Papers of the New Brunswick Presbytery, Presbyterian Historical Society. R. Baird to the Moderator of the Presbytery of the New Brunswick, Paris, September 30, 1837, also in the Papers of the New Brunswick Presbytery. R. Baird to John Maclean, Paris, November 14, 1835. Maclean Papers, Princeton University Archives.

> soiree,--a Christian soiree. By half-past ten the company were usually gone, with the exception of a few young men who might occasionally linger till near eleven.[21]

These soirees may have been a comfort to those nostalgically yearning for a little American domestic life.

Indeed, Baird's Saturday soirees were addressed to the needs of Americans and Englishmen--others were "discouraged from attending"--yet, the crowd in attendance was quite cosmopolitan. Besides English and American worshippers, Baird noted the attendance of persons from Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Russia, Italy, Holland, Poland, Turkey, and Greece--"Even a Nestorian merchant from Bagdad attended regularly." Religious backgrounds were as varied as the nationalities represented were. Baird marked the attendance of Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Moravians, Greek Orthodox, Arminian Orthodox, Nestorians, and even Roman Catholics.[22]

The favors Baird provided for his friends and the formal and informal religious services he conducted all lay outside the bounds of the commission he received at the hands of the French Association. He also set to work vigorously at the tasks those gentlemen presented him. His official duties had two dimensions: he was to cooperate with continental evangelicals (and get them to cooperate with each other) and he was to "acquire such information,

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[21] [R. Baird], "Christian Union Illustrated in the City of Paris," Christian Union and Religious Memorial, II (August, 1849), p. 450.

[22] Ibid., pp. 450-452.

with regard to the state of things in this country [France], as is needed in our country, & to communicate it to our various societies."[23]

Baird set out at once to turn the eyes of the American benevolent societies towards the French field. Although none of the major societies listed him among their official agents (perhaps out of regard for European sensibilities) he seems to have had informal working relationships with most of them.[24] He began his labors on a small scale by joining the Evangelical and Bible Societies of Paris, attending their meetings and distributing Bibles and tracts under their auspices.[25] He diplomatically offered the continental societies advice based on his American experience, and recorded his satisfaction with their progress and acceptance of his ideas.[26]

Baird also achieved some singular successes in his attempts to generate financial support for European missions in America. During his first year in Europe he convinced the Home Missionary Society that its French counterpart merited a thousand dollar donation, and throughout his European ministry successfully solicited donations of money and supplies from the Bible, tract and Sunday

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[23]R. Baird to the Moderator of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, Paris, August 29, 1836. Papers of the New Brunswick Presbytery, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[24]Miller, British and American Influences . . . , p. 159.

[25]R. Baird to the Moderator of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, Paris, September 30, 1837. Papers of the New Brunswick Presbytery, Presbyterian Historical Society.

[26]R. Baird to John Maclean, Paris, November 14, 1835. Maclean Papers, Princeton University Archives.

school organization in America.[27]

The benevolent organizations received services from Robert Baird as well. As he travelled throughout Europe he carried their claims with him, and sought to pave the way for their penetration into Europe. All sorts of societies had their "objects" presented by Baird. He preached the merits of the American Colonization Society before the Court of Prussia. He interceded with the Dutch Government on behalf of the Prudential Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions as that group sought to have the prohibition against non-Dutch missionaries to "Sumatra, Celebes, and other islands of the Indian Archipelago" lifted. And, wherever he travelled, he presented the claims of the Bible, Tract, and Temperance societies.[28]

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[27] Ibid. The French field seems to have been a favorite of American women with benevolent impulses. When Baird returned to the United States in 1839, he made the round of the churches. The ladies of Dr. Bethune's church in Philadelphia raised a contribution for the support of a colporteur in France, and the Female Bible Society of Philadelphia raised two hundred dollars for the distribution of the Bible in France at Baird's instigation. R. Baird to F. W. Porter, New York, August 10, 1839. ASSU Archives (1839, A-G), unnumbered. The donations of the American Sunday School Union largely consisted of books and plates. The Union sent Baird a whole set of their publications in 1835, which he proposed to have translated by societies formed for that purpose in Paris and Geneva. R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Paris, December 5, 1835. ASSU Archives (1835, A-C), 143.

[28] See H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, passim. Especially p. 224 for the American Colonization Society, pp. 172 ff. for the Hague mission on behalf of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and pp. 181 ff. amd 196 ff. for Baird's work for the Bible Tract and Temperance societies in northern Europe and Russia. The most fortunate work, from Baird's standpoint at least, was performed for the American Temperance Society. Baird's "Memoir of the Temperance Society of America" was written at its instigation and published at its expense. R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Paris, December 5,

All in all, Baird had reason to be proud of his successes in Europe. He molded the actions of the American societies to fit the realities of Europe, preventing injuries to the sensibilities of European evangelicals which would have been caused by headstrong American interference in their affairs. At the same time, he guided the development of the French societies, assuring that they would be modelled as closely after their American counterparts as was practical.[29] Also, his appeals to America put the French Revival on a firmer financial footing. During the reign of Louis Philippe, American contributions to the French revival movement amounted to at least one hundred sixty thousand dollars. Baird could take the major responsibility for this ourpouring of American benevolence.[30]

The organizations on both sides of the Atlantic for which Baird labored drew together evangelical Christians of many persuasions. It was only natural for such men to be captivated by the idea of Christian union. The obvious effectiveness of the united efforts in the benevolent societies presented the advantages of some form of union to leaders of the several American denominations as well. The Rev. Samuel S. Schmucker, professor at the Lutheran theological seminary at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, was one of the leaders in the

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1836. ASSU Archives (1835, A-C), 143. The work, written in the fall of 1835, caught the tide of rising interest in temperance and essentially made Baird's reputation in Europe, opening doors to the courts of most European countries and thereby stabilizing his social and financial position.

[29]Miller, British and American Influences . . . , p. 169. H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, pp. 101-102.

[30]Miller, British and American Influences . . . , pp. 169-170.

Christian union movement in America. In 1838 he published a pamphlet entitled A Fraternal Appeal to the American Churches, the arguments of which so moved a number of churchmen from various denominations that they organized a society to promote Christian union based on its principles. The Fraternal Appeal was amplified, signed by forty-two prominent clergymen and laymen, and circulated under the title An Overture for Christian Union. The "Plan for Protestant Union on Apostolic Principles" which evolved out of discussions on Schmucker's amplified pamphlet was endorsed unofficially by Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational, Moravian, and Lutheran churches. The Plan did not propose organic union, but rather a federation with provisions for intercommunion and mutual recognition of clergy.[31]

Meanwhile, enthusiastic laymen threatened to leave their clerical brethren far to the rear. Gerrit Smith presented his Presbyterian church in Peterboro, New York with "a series of resolutions to the effect that sectarianism was 'unscriptual and wicked' and calling for 'a common Christianity to take the place of the Methodist and Presbyterian and Baptist and other sects which now divide and afflict and corrupt Zion.'" When the church declined to adopt the resolutions, Smith was undeterred. He held an "antisectarian" meeting at Oswego where Presbyterian, Baptist, Universalist, and Unitarian laity gave his resolutions their approval.[32]

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[31]Wallace N. Jamison, "A History of the Evangelical Alliance for the United States of America," (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1946), pp. 7-8.

[32]Branch, Sentimental Years, p. 335.

Similar steps toward some form of church union were taking place in England. Protestants had been unsuccessful in keeping Parliament from increasing the endowment of a Catholic college in Ireland, partly because they could not agree among themselves nor coordinate their opposition to the endowment bill. Resolving never to let disunity thwart their plans again, evangelical clergymen from Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and North England called a "Conference of Evangelicals" together at Liverpool, October 1-3, 1845. The expectations of the 216 clergymen and laity of twenty denominations were fulfilled to the highest degree. Plans for future cooperative actions were laid, large areas of common belief established, and an eight-point statement of evangelical belief promulgated.[33]

In the center of these movements emanating from England and America stood Robert Baird. He was aware of them and inspired by them. It was only natural that Baird should find the Christian union movement intriguing. As his son, Henry Martin, put it, "his own history had been a practical exemplification of Christian union."[34] Since his days with the common school campaign in New Jersey, he had had to overcome obstacles thrown in his path by interdenominational squabbling. He yearned for the day when the bickering among Christians would cease, and took comfort in believing that such a day was not far off. As he wrote to Frederick W. Porter, "It is truly consolatory to know that our Lord is the God of

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[33]Jamison, "A History of the Evangelical Alliance . . . ," pp. 11-12.

[34]H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, p. 228.

the whole earth and that he will cause his kingdom to [be] built up and the knowledge of his Son to fill the earth, & all the divisions, schisms, and disturbances which afflict his church and diminish her influence will be so overruled that the glory of God will be advanced."[35]

Baird thought that the pettiness and arrogant self-righteousness which accompanied sectarian encounters shameful--certain evidence that men more often acted as animals, rather than angels.[36] He felt that rational men had to favor an evangelical alliance, because they could not avoid the implications of three self-evident truths: first, that "all the friends and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are united by sympathies and bonds that are more sacred and endearing and permanent than any other relation that belongs to the family of man"; second, "the grand practical object of all Christians should be, to strengthen those bonds"; and, third "any church or association who shall pursue this object without diversion and without intermission, will conform the most to the spirit of the age, and come nearest to the inspired examples, which knew nothing but Jesus Christ."[37]

Baird at no time stated precisely what he considered the ideal form of church organization to be. He most probably did not

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[35]R. Baird to F. W. Porter, Paris, April 23, 1836. ASSU Archives (1836, A-C), 59.

[36]R. Baird, "Joining the Alliance," Christian Union and Religious Memorial, II (August, 1849), p. 434.

[37]R. Baird, "The Idea of a Church," Christian Union and Religious Memorial, II (July, 1849), p. 400.

conceive of the evangelical denominations entering into organic union, any more than Samuel S. Schmucker did. Denominations would remain in his ideal system, but they would lose their individuality and competitiveness when they entered the grand federation. The life or death of any given denomination was unimportant, compared with the higher aim of spreading Christianity. "As the spread of a sect is not necessarily the spread of Christianity," Baird wrote, "so if a sect should perish, Christianity would not perish." Attachment to denominations would be only sentimental and emotional under the new system:

> . . . any denomination taking this ground would be most certain of perpetuating itself; for now its peculiar name, no longer associated prominently with certain dogmas and forms, would become the symbol of pure Christian charity and faithful works of duty.[38]

Baird seemed to take his model for church union from the American "Federal System." Indeed, he likened a denomination which would refuse to join such an alliance with a state which would refuse to join the Union. In each case "local and provincial interests" would keep the body from recognizing the increase in strength, "respectability," and resources which would arise from operating on an increased "scale of nobility and grandeur and excellence" through joining an "E Pluribus Unum."[39]

Baird believed that "sincere" professors of Christianity should remain loyal to their denomination, but not take its peculiar

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[38] Ibid., p. 399.

[39] R. Baird, "Joining the Alliance," Christian Union and Religious Memorial, II (August, 1849), p. 453.

tenets to be infallible. He felt that there was no reason why there should not be intercommunion between groups which differed on "external matters" only. The truly pious should be welcomed at the Lord's table, no matter in whose house it was set.[40]

Baird must have realized that his ideal lay many years in the future, if indeed it lay on earth at all. Yet, there seemed to be some chance that some steps towards the goal were possible in the mid-1840's. Alliance was in the air, and Baird would have a major part in bringing it about, whatever it might be.

Baird understood that public opinion in the mid-1840's would impose restrictions on the degree of Christian union possible, and set his sights accordingly. After the alliance failed, he blamed the failure partly on the over-ambitiousness of its plan, and placed before the public his blueprint for an acceptable Evangelical Alliance. He claimed to have preferred "a sort of Œcumenical Council, composed of delegates from all branches of the true Church of Christ in all lands, who should accept a very simple creed." The delegates would meet once every five or ten years, for the purpose of "exhortation and prayer" and the "communication of interesting intelligence."[41]

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[40] R. Baird, "Familiar Thoughts on Christian Union," Christian Union and Religious Memorial, I (November, 1848), p. 644. Baird recognized that there was a problem: "The only difficulty is to know where to draw the line between those who receive fundamental truths and those who hold opinions which subvert the Christian system." This "only difficulty" was the major cause of most Protestant schism!

[41] R. Baird, "Editorial Remarks," Christian Union and Religious Memorial, III (March, 1850), p. 131. Such remarks were, of course, hindsight and should be treated as such. Baird's actions at the London Conference show that he envisioned some sort of skeletal agency to exist between the "Œcumenical conferences." See below.

Baird assumed that such an organization would avoid doctrinal controversy, and also avoid, or at least treat charitably, any purely "national or local evils."[42] He knew that any course which would arouse national jealousies would doom the experiment in Christian union to failure. Events during the years 1846-1850 proved this true.

Robert Baird was instrumental in turning the plans for national evangelical organizations in America and England into plans for a world-wide Protestant alliance. In the autumn of 1843, he received a letter from the Rev. Leonard Bacon, who at that time was one of the editors of the influential New York Independent, asking him for a conference, at which time he presented a proposal for a world convention of evangelical Christians. Baird endorsed the idea, and wrote to Merle D'Aubigne, asking him to promote the plan on the Continent and in England as well. D'Aubigne agreed to do so and began by presenting the matter to Swiss pastors in the summer of 1844. He also corresponded with Scottish Free Church ministers the following year, about the time of the Liverpool Convention. In the meantime, Bacon had written his friends in England directly. In response to Baird's and Bacon's efforts, British evangelicals invited their brethren throughout the world to a conference in London, scheduled for the summer of 1846.[43] Baird was also instrumental in arranging a meeting of some "friends of Christian union" in New York in the

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[42] R. Baird, The Progress and Prospects of Christianity . . . , p. 42.

[43] R. Baird, "Editorial Remarks," Christian Union and Religious Memorial, III (March, 1850), p. 152.

spring of 1846, to consider the British invitation. The Americans were not entirely satisfied with its doctrinal basis, for it lacked any mention of the doctrines of the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the last judgment, or the future rewards and punishments. After deciding to demand its emendation, they proceeded to accept it and to publicize the proposed meetings. Baird once more sailed for Europe, and, on the 17th of August, presented his credentials as a delegate from the Synod of New Jersey of the Presbyterian church in the United States to the preliminary meeting.[44]

A large and distinguished company of Americans attended the London Conference. Among them were representatives of all the major denominations. Samuel S. Schmucker was there. Lyman Beecher and William Patton helped Baird represent American Presbyterians. Edward N. Kirk was perhaps the most prominent American Congregationalist in attendance, and Pharcellus Church represented the Baptists. Presidents Robert Emory and Stephen Olin of Dickinson College and Wesleyan University attended, as well as Mr. John Harper, the pious publisher from New York City.[45]

The occasion seemed auspicious. London welcomed the Americans with open arms. Thirty churches opened their pulpits to American pastors, and as many as 150 earnest evangelicals practiced the Christian unity they preached by partaking in an open Communion

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[44]H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, p. 230.

[45]Jamison, "A History of the Evangelical Alliance . . . ," pp. 14-15.

service at the church of Baptist Noel.[46]

The Conference began harmoniously enough. The first two sessions were spent organizing the meetings and preparing the groundwork necessary before deliberations aiming at the permanent establishment of an Evangelical Alliance could begin. On the third day, the business of passing substantive resolutions began in earnest. With no opposition the Conference passed a resolution rejoicing "in making their unanimous avowal of the glorious truth, that the Church of the Living God, while it admits of growth, is one church, never having lost, and being incapable of losing, its essential unity." It likewise passed a resolution proclaiming that the Conference, "while recognising the essential unity of the Christian Church, feel constrained to deplore its existing divisions, and to express their deep sense of the sinfulness involved in the alienation of affection by which they have been attended, and of the manifold evils which have resulted therefrom," promising to take the necessary measures, "in humble dependence on the Divine blessing, towards attaining a state of mind and feeling more in accordance with the word and spirit of Christ Jesus."[47] If the Conference had proceed in the spirit of these first two resolutions, the Americans would have had no cause for complaint.

Some disagreements developed over the formulation of a

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[46]H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, p. 232.

[47]Minutes of the Proceedings of the Conference, Held in Freemason's Hall, London: August 19, 1846, and Following Days (London: The Evangelical Alliance, 1846), p. 9.

The next two sessions were devoted to defining the "Objects" of the proposed Evangelical Alliance. The stated ends, as originally proposed, were very general in nature. The Alliance proposed to make manifest "the unity which exists amongst the true disciples of Christ." It promised to "promote union by fraternal and devotional intercourse," and to "discourage envyings, strifes, and divisions." The Bible commanded Christians to love one another. The Alliance vowed to "impose upon Christians a deeper sense of the great duty" of obeying that command.[49]

Such sentiments were indeed noble, but they were hardly concrete enough to give the organization any substance. Further resolution were offered which sought to refine the goals of the proposed organization and to give it something concrete to do. One such resolution, seconded by Robert Baird, proposed

> that in furtherance of this object, the Alliance shall receive such information respecting the progress of vital religion in all parts of the world as Christian brethren may be disposed to communicate; and that a correspondence be opened and maintained with Christian brethren in differparts of the world, especially those who may be engaged, amidst peculiar difficulties and opposition, in the cause of the gospel, in order to afford them all suitable encouragement and sympathy, and to diffuse and interest in their welfare.[50]

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[49] Ibid., p. 22.

[50] Ibid., p. 23. Baird's resolution indicates that, contrary to his later statements, he did conceive of the Evangelical Alliance as a continuing body. Gathering "Christian intelligence" would presuppose a continuing organization, rather than sporadic meetings of like-minded individuals. At the time of the conference, he seems to have conceived of the proposed alliance as a giant committee of correspondence, modelled after the French Association which originally sent him to Europe.

Wednesday, August 26, 1846, was the last day in the reign of concord over the London Conference. The following day a resolution was introduced by the Rev. Thomas Binney which threatened to blow the Conference wide open. In essence it was little more than an amplification of the motion seconded by Baird the day before. Included in the information it proposed the Alliance disseminate were "general or local aspects of infidelity and superstition," education, "public morals, the observance of the Lord's day, temperance, slavery," and "Christian missions."[51] On its face, the resolution looked innocuous enough, but it contained a single word capable of setting the teeth of many American evangelicals on edge. That word was "slavery." If gathering information about slavery was included among the legitimate operations of the proposed Alliance, abolitionists would gain yet another platform from which to publicize their doctrines. American churchmen had already had their peace shattered by the slavery issue. The Methodists had recently split over it. They, and their more conservative or cautious evangelical brethren wished to hear no more of it--especially at meetings of an organization supposedly devoted to peace and concord. Upon returning from the Conference, Stephen Olin wrote a relative, "We American Churches, and especially Methodists, greatly need some such healing influence as the Evangelical Alliance ought to exert."[52]

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[51] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

[52] Stephen Olin to J. R. Olin, Middletown, Connecticut, November 12, 1846, in Julia Olin (ed.), The Life and Letters of Stephen Olin, D.D., L.L.D., Late President of Wesleyan University (2 vols.; New York: Harper Brothers, 1853), vol. II, p. 314.

It did not come. Binney's resolution was only the first of a number of anti-slavery resolutions. The rest of the Conference was convulsed over the issue, and, from the American viewpoint at least, the Alliance was blighted from birth by its introduction.

American evangelicals attending the London Conference of 1846 were not without warning that the slavery issue would be raised. Englishmen planning the conference had been under severe pressure from abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic. Since the success of the British abolition movement in 1833, anti-slavery reformers throughout the British Isles turned their attention to the United States, hoping that their influence would help the anti-slavery cause gain a victory there as well.

Emissaries from the various denominations in England visited their counterparts in the United States, preaching against slavery to the plaudits of American abolitionists and the consternation of officialdom in the denominations, to whom the issue had become a recurring annoyance, if not a nightmare.[53]

British church groups castigated American churches in the press and in memorials directed overseas. As early as 1836, the Leicestershire Association of Baptist Churches questioned whether true religion was making progress in America, proclaiming that as long as "the churches in America tolerate slavery, we must receive with great suspicion the reports which reach us of their great

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[53]Thomas F. Harwood, "British Evangelical Abolitionism and American Churches in the 1870's," Journal of Southern History, XXVIII (August, 1962), pp. 287-306, passim.

religious revivals."[54] In the next ten years, several English denominations had taken the serious step of withdrawing fellowship from members of American branches of their bodies, whether they were intimately connected with slavery or not. The Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Scotland, at their Meeting in Edinburgh, April 30th, 1845, declared that

> persons willfully continuing in Slaveholding, are unworthy of admission to Christian privileges in any department of the church of Christ: and that any church receiving such persons into full communion, holding them as Christian brethren, not walking disorderly, or admitting them into office, is partaker of their sins, and bringing dishonour on the blessed name of holy religion of the Divine Redeemer--that to admit that American Slaveholding is a great sin, and yet to maintain that those who willfully continue in it may be warrantably received into full enjoyment of Christian fellowship, is to lay down a principle which, carried out consistently, would render it warrantable to admit to the communion of the church, all classes of transgressors whatever . . .[55]

The implications of such resolutions astounded American Christians. A person could live in a free state and have no direct contact with slaveholding whatever. He could in fact favor abolition. But if he belonged to a church whose national body admitted churches with slaveholding members, he was placed beyond the pale of Christian fellowship. Come the time for a general conference of evangelicals, bodies of Christians such as the Reformed Presbyterians of Scotland were not about to offer privileges to cousins that they denied to brothers.

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[54]Cited after ibid., p. 291.

[55]Cited after [Glasgow Emancipation Society], The Evangelical Alliance. Will Slaveholders Be Admitted to Membership in It? And Will Its Influence Go to Support and Perpetuate Slavery? (Glasgow: David Russell, 1846), p. 9.

British abolitionist societies, as well as British churches, were actively putting pressure on the Americans. In 1840 and 1843 world anti-slavery conventions were held at London. In both instances, resolutions urging churches to withhold fellowship from slaveholders were passed.[56]

As the time for the London Conference drew nigh, abolitionists addressed it directly, urging it to take a vigorous stand against slaveholding by refusing membership to persons owning slaves. They argued that such a step would greatly further the emancipation cause. Without moral censorship, slaveholders would continue in their wicked ways. Without some affirmative action, preaching would be to no avail. "It is not possible to bring the 'glorious gospel of the blessed God' to bear on Slavery to effect its abolition, while the act of Slaveholding is held to be consistent with a 'credible profession of Christianity,'" argued the Glasgow Emancipation Society.[57] Conversely, "if the Churches and Ministers of the Non-Slave States, and of Great Britain, would faithfully and resolutely adopt and carry out the principle,--that no Slaveholder should be admitted to their communion and pulpits, they might, by the blessing of God, soon bring this gigantic iniquity to a peaceful termination," for slaveholders "fear nothing so much as the loss of this countenance

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[56]Harwood, Journal of Southern History, XXVIII (August, 1962), p. 304.

[57][Glasgow Emancipation Society], The Evangelical Alliance. Will Slaveholders Be Admitted to Membership in It? . . . , p. 5.

of the social and religious sentiment of the world."[58] Upon this basis, the Society felt "deeply anxious that the proposed Evangelical Alliance should sanction this principle, and thus lend their efficient aid to stamp the act of Slaveholding with infamy, and to class Slaveholders, where the Apostle 1800 years ago, and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America fifty years ago, placed them--with 'Man-stealers'--with 'The highest kind of Thieves,' and with 'SINNERS OF THE FIRST RANK,'"[59] for if the Alliance did not do so, "these Slaveholders, thus professing to be members and ministers of Christ, will consider the invitation as extending to them; they will seek membership in that Alliance, and its influence to shield them from the increasing scorn and indignation against Slaveholding."[60]

Between the Liverpool Conference of 1845 and the London Conference of 1846, such pressure told upon the men seeking to organize the Alliance. In March of 1846 a committee met at Birmingham to lay plans for the Conference and to draft propositions upon which the Evangelical Alliance might be erected. Faced with the slavery issue, they adopted a resolution recommending that invitations to the London Conference be withheld from "individuals, who, whether by their own fault, or otherwise, may be in the unhappy position of holding their fellow-men as slaves."[61]

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[58] Ibid., p. 7. [59] Ibid., p. 16. [60] Ibid., p. 4.

[61] [Evangelical Alliance], Minutes of the Proceedings of the Conference . . . , p. 40.

Perhaps unfortunately for all concerned, the invitations to Americans had gone out before the Birmingham Committee made its recommendations. The invitations were based upon the statement of doctrine which was composed at Liverpool in 1845, which contained no mention of slavery, and it was on that basis that most Americans chose to accept the invitation.[62] They were not at all pleased to find the codicil attached by the Birmingham Committee awaiting them when they arrived in London. Abolitionism was going to haunt them again. Stephen Olin wrote later about the experience. "What is to be the end of this great plague?" he asked. "Opposition to it ruins every thing, and friendship for it is impossible."[63]

While the Birmingham resolution was framed only as a suggestion of procedure and had no force to exclude either slaveholders or members of churches which countenanced slavery, it disturbed Americans as a portent of things to come. The battle began in earnest with the introduction of Binney's resolution. Members of the Conference sensitive to the position of the Americans were successful in getting it temporarily withdrawn and referred to a special committee, among the members of which was Robert Baird.[64]

The next day the committee reported a substitute resolution which made no reference at all to slavery, and which enumerated only

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[62] Ibid., p. 39.

[63] Stephen Olin to the Rev. Charles Mallory, Middletown, Connecticut, January 22, 1848, in J. Olin (ed.), The Life and Letters of Stephen Olin, vol. II, p. 370.

[64] [Evangelical Alliance], Minutes of the Proceedings of the Conference . . . , pp. 25-26.

infidelity, "romanism" and "such other forms of superstition, error, and profaneness, . . . especially the desecration of the Lord's day" among the evils to be fought by the Alliance. The substitute resolution went on to suggest that the individual branches of the Alliance be left to prosecute the ends as they thought "most in accordance with their respective circumstances."[65] Although abolition sentiments might creep into the Alliance through the medium of the clause urging members to combat "other forms of superstition, error, and profaneness," the compromise resolution was one with which American Evangelicals could live, especially since individual branches were to have charge of operations within their respective territories. They learned almost immediately that one victory does not win a war, however.

Following the adoption of the resolution concerning the aims of the society and the appropriate methods for prosecuting them, the Conference turned to consider what form the organization should take. It was the idea of those who had originally conceived of a grand alliance of Evangelicals that it should take the form of an international body, to which all who endorsed a minimum statement of belief might belong. This body would be divided into regional bodies, organized "as in their judgment may be most in accordance with their peculiar circumstances." Samuel S. Schmucker entered the appropriate resolution: "The Alliance shall consist of those persons, in all parts of the world, who shall concur in the principles and objects

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[65] Ibid., p. 29.

adopted by the Conference . . . "[66] Immediately, the abolitionists brought their cause before the Conference once again. J. H. Hinton, a Baptist minister from London, moved that "in the First clause, after the words 'those persons,' the words 'not being slave-holders,' be inserted."[67] Disagreement was so vigorous that it was impossible to reach a decision on Hinton's motion on the floor of the Conference. Again a special committee was formed to try to thrash out a compromise. This time the committee consisted of forty-five members, divided into three groups representing British, American, and Continental evangelical factions. Robert Baird also served on this committee.

The committee faced no easy task. On the question of whether or not to admit slaveholders, little room was left for compromise. Robert Baird recounted in his diary that the committee meeting lasted all day. The members divided into American, English, and Continental sub-committees, and deliberated separately for three hours. The American and Continental evangelicals favored admitting slaveholders, but the English were adamant on their exclusion. Finally, a compromise was reached, "for the sake of peace and for the purpose of enabling the Conference to form or organize the Alliance."[68]

The compromise resolution admitted that slavery (along with profanation of the Lord's day, intemperance, and duelling) was a sin and "social evil." It left the combatting of such social evils to

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[66] Ibid., p. 30. [67] Ibid., p. 31.

[68] H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, p. 238.

the respective branches of the organization, and expressed confidence that "no Branch will admit to membership slaveholders, who, by their own fault, continue in that position, retaining their fellow-men in slavery, from regard to their own interests."[69] The resolution was not strong enough to please the most ardent abolitionists, but an amendment designed to eliminate all slaveholders from the Alliance was "negatived," and the compromise passed.

Robert Baird noted the dissatisfaction of Americans on the select committee. Americans in the conference general were no more happy with the compromise which came out of the committee session. The committee had taken all of Saturday to hammer out their resolution, and by the late hour it reached the floor, many Americans had already left the hall. By Monday they had regrouped their forces and moved that the most offensive portion of the compromise be stricken. They were willing to let slavery be castigated as a social evil, if the abolitionists would refrain from demanding any mention of the exclusion of slaveholders from the Alliance. Once again, deadlock threatened, and a special committee had to be formed, to see if any sort of agreement could be reached.[70]

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[69] [Evangelical Alliance], Minutes of the Proceedings of the Conference . . . , p. 36. The italics are mine. The compromise resolution contained two sentences. The first, written by the Americans, castigated slavery as a social evil. The second, withholding fellowship from those who willfully held slaves, was written by the English and inserted over the objection of the Americans. See H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, p. 233 n.

[70] Ibid., p. 37.

As much as evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic wished to see some sort of Evangelical Alliance come into being, it seemed that no mutually satisfactory framework could be established. In the end, the international organization was sacrificed, in order that the regional bodies might have some chance to survive. The committee brought to the floor a resolution which deferred the formation of the "General Alliance" to some "General Conference" at an undetermined future date. It was recommended that regional alliances be formed, "on the understanding that brethren from each country now present shall act collectively in originating their respective national plans."[71] While the resolution put the best possible face on the situation, the fact was that the idea of a world-wide organization of evangelicals was for the present, dead. Americans would have complete control of whatever national organization they would be able to organize, without the benefit of the advice, counsel, or interference of their European brethren. As if to emphasize the disunion hidden under the facade of union, members passed a further resolution, part of which declared that "no Organization of the Alliance shall be held responsible for the proceedings of another."[72]

The outcome of the London Conference pleased few, if any, Americans. Southerners were unhappy. They knew that slavery had been expunged from the official resolutions of the Conference only because of expediency, and resented being told that their institution was a "social evil," at a time when their local ministers were

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[71] Ibid., pp. 43-44. [72] Ibid., p. 45.

beginning to preach that it was a positive good. Regardless of how much American Alliance men might protest that they had no control over the actions of European evangelicals, southern apologists for slavery would assume that birds of a feather did flock together and wished to have as little to do as possible with any of them.

American abolitionists took grim pleasure in the fact that plans for a world-wide union of evangelicals had been frustrated.[73] Yet, they were dismayed at the timidity displayed by their supposed allies in England. In a pamphlet directed to the founders of the Evangelical Alliance, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society denounced the proceedings of the London Conference. They felt that any alliance which even remotely condoned slavery was an alliance which had the Devil in it. "It is better that no Alliance should exist," they wrote, "than that one should be built up to stand on the prostrate body of the slave, and act as an obstruction to the free course of the gospel in his emancipation."[74]

The abolitionists reserved their greatest censures for the Americans who had attended the Conference and had deceived the English, or so the abolitionists felt. They found repugnant the pious protestations of men who "pitied the slave for his hard lot; . . . felt that slavery was an evil; . . . desired to see it abolished; but . . . would not hazard their 'Christian union,' or the

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[73] Wyatt-Brown, Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War against Slavery, p. 316.

[74] [American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society], Remonstrance against the Course Pursued by the Evangelical Alliance, on the Subject of American Slavery. (New York: William Harned, 1847), p. 15.

'peace of the Church' by any efforts to free the slave."[75] Such men had claimed to represent the religious opinion of America at the London Conference, but in fact did not. What they really represented was "that portion of the wealth, the honors, the learning, the benevolent societies, the leading denominations, who have ever used their influence against the anti-slavery movement in this country. They represented the dead weights which abolitionists have for fifteen years been trying to move . . ."[76] By listening to such men, a golden opportunity for striking a blow against slavery and for the Kingdom of God had been irretrievably lost.

Not the least disappointed with the outcome were the American supporters of the alliance idea. They felt that the inclusion of a discussion of slavery had been a grievous mistake. Slavery was an evil, to be sure, but no greater than intemperance or the desecration

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[75] Ibid., p. 3.

[76] Ibid., pp. 7-8. Robert Baird received special censure for his part in the proceedings. He had written to the New York Evangelist gloating over the fact that American delegates to the conference had unanimously "'denounced the folly, the madness, even, of foreigners, and especially Englishmen, interfering with the subject.'" The Anti-Slavery Society responded by asking "of what value can be union or alliance, in which one of the contracting parties maintains, toward the other, the jealousy and defiance indicated by these extracts, denouncing as madness any attempt to interfere with an evil which, more than all others in Christendom, stands in the way of the world's conversion? Who can estimate the evil that will result, if evangelical Christians of every name and nation, by uniting with such an alliance, shall testify that slaveholding, the embruting of the image of God, the chattelizing of the representatives of Christ, is not, and shall not be, a barrier to Christian fellowship?" Ibid., pp. 11-12. The degree to which the slavery issue had driven a wedge among the friends of benevolence is indicated by the fact that this pamphlet, which denounces Baird by name, was signed by Arthur and Lewis Tappan, among others--men whose patronage Baird had enjoyed while working for the American Sunday School Union and the French Association.

of the Sabbath. One man wrote, ". . . we think that it would be as appropriate to make the Alliance a Sabbath Association, or a Temperance Society, as to make it Anti-slavery."[77] Such men lived in an ethical world painted in only black and white. An act was either sinful, or it was not. Such attitudes partly explain, but do not excuse the moral blind spots of such men as Robert Baird.

Baird was perhaps the most disappointed of all in the outcome of the Evangelical Alliance Conference of 1846. He believed so fervently in the concept of Christian cooperation, and had worked so diligently towards bringing the Conference into being that its failure came close to embittering him. On the occasion of the Second London Conference in 1851 he resolved to remain quiet no longer, but rather to warn the conference against following in the footsteps of its predecessor. Consequently, he delivered a blunt and often caustic speech to the assembly.

Baird agreed on one point with the abolitionists. The English brethren had been deceived. But Baird charged that it was the American abolitionists who were guilty of deception. The English were sadly mistaken if they believed that placing American Christians outside the pale of their Christian fellowship would hasten the overthrow of slavery.[78] They had been deceived by listening to a class of "Simons-pure," who considered themselves "the very standards

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[77]"American Slaveholders," Christian Union and Religious Memorial, I (April, 1848), p. 232.

[78]R. Baird, Progress and Prospects of Christianity . . . , p. 45.

in all that relates to proper feeling on the subject of American slavery, and [believed] they have a right to denounce and . . . execrate all who do not approve of their modes of speaking and acting on this question . . ."[79] Baird resented the attitude of moral superiority he encountered among British evangelicals. He accused them of overlooking the beams in their own eyes in order to concentrate on removing the molts in the eyes of their American brothers. Americans felt that the union of Church and State was a national sin. Baird himself thought it was "the greatest curse that has ever befallen christianity." Yet he and his brethren in America were willing to be charitable; to open their arms to brethren who believed such a union was scriptural and useful. Why should not British evangelicals behave in such a Christ-like, forgiving manner?[80]

Futhermore, Baird resented British interferences in an American problem because it was British interference. The memories of the Revolution and the War of 1812 were too fresh in the minds of Americans to allow them to accept British advice graciously. Baird as much as told the British evangelicals to mind their own business: "Let British christians pursue their great work of getting every thing right in their own vast dominion, and we will do the same in our great country: . . . We shall get clear of Slavery, but not at, or in consequence of your bidding, or to please you. We shall get clear of it, because the spirit of christianity demands it; and because the very spirit of our political institutions, and the honour

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[79] Ibid., p. 53. [80] Ibid., p. 42.

of our country demand it."[81] Lest his audience miss the point of his blunt speech, he issued a blunter warning: "The language of taunt and of ridicule and of indiscriminate abuse may wound the hearts of christian men among us, who love their country, and with good reason, notwithstanding its faults; but it will be hurled back with unmeasured scorn. . . ."[82]

Baird's defense of American evangelicals was not written from a pro-slavery viewpoint. Far from defending slavery, he attacked it with his pen, as having been a "curse in all past times." He wrote that it "fosters a proud, arrogant, and unfeeling spirit in the master, and naturally leads to servility and meanness, to deceitfulness and dishonesty, in the slave. Either way it is disastrous to true religion."[83] Baird seemed ahead of his time when it came to lacking color prejudice. He wrote of the world as one large mission

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[81] Ibid., p. 46.

[82] Ibid., p. 45. Baird's speech received harsh treatment in the British press. See H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, pp. 272-73. The speech had the desired effect on the assembly, however. At the close of its session the Alliance adopted resolutions stating, "The Council report that they have had much friendly conference with their American brethren, in which frank and courteous explanations have been mutually given, which have shown how important it is for Christians residing on opposite shores of the Atlantic to have a clear understanding of each other's position. . . . They desire to encourage their brethren in the United States to renew their efforts to revive the organization of the Evangelical Alliance existing there . . . in the confidence that, by the Divine blessing the difficulties which have hitherto obstructed their progress will, in answer to prayer, . . . gradually give way until they are altogether removed." R. Baird, Progress and Prospects of Christianity . . . , p. 50 n.

[83] R. Baird, Religion in America, p. 76.

field. In it one preached to whites and to blacks alike, not because of their color, but because of their common humanity.[84] Southern laws, such as those which forbade teaching slaves to read, he called "unwise and iniquitous" and rejoiced that many masters ignored them.[85]

It was not that he denied the evil of slavery, but rather that he found the number of acceptable means of combatting it severely limited. Baird did not ignore the evil of slavery, but, like other "spokesmen for the middle class insisted that only the most gentle means should be used in combatting it."[86]

Baird rejected out-of-hand the methods of the most vocal abolitionists. He was congenitally opposed to violence, even when that violence did not extend beyond rhetoric. Like many self-assured men, he felt uneasy in the company of other self-assured men with whom he differed. He drew a line separating himself from the active abolitionists in a statement issued under the ægis of the Southern Aid Society:

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[84]Robert Baird, "Mission to Hayti," American and Foreign Christian Union, II (August, 1851), p. 254. Other evidence will be presented in later chapters.

[85]R. Baird, Religion in America, p. 79.

[86]Branch, Sentimental Years, p. 397. Baird had a lot of company as he threaded his way through the slavery maze. In 1845 the Old School tabled all anti-slavery resolutions, declaring that "the existence of domestic slavery, under the circumstances in which it is found in the southern portion of this country, is no bar to Christian communion." The New School's response was ambiguous. In 1846 the General Assembly declared that slavery was "intrinsically an unrighteous and oppressive system," but at the same time declared it had no power to do anything about it. See Edward B. Welsh, "Wrestling with Human Values; the Slavery Years," They Seek a Country, ed. Slosser, pp. 221-22, 224-26.

> The Reform Spirit of the North, especially as it bears down on the South in its most exceptionable forms--is it not too belligerent a weapon to become the Kingdom of the Prince of Peace? It moves with enormous energy, but how utterly reckless of the rights and fortunes of him whom it addresses. With every breath it sounds the war cry, I am right, You are wrong. I shall hear nothing from you. Surrender or die."[87]

He disagreed with the abolitionists not only because he felt their arguments were overbearing and dangerously radical, but also because he felt that they and their methods were largely ineffective, if not counter-productive. "It is now nearly twenty years since [the radical abolitionists] . . . began their work," he wrote in 1851,

> and what have they accomplished? No good whatever, so far as I can see. They did not prevent the annexation of Texas, nor the Mexican war (on the contrary, their infatuated course contributed to hasten both); and if slavery does not gain a foothold in the territories obtained from Mexico at the close of the war, no thanks to them for it; . . . I have little hope that much will be done, leading to direct and open action, on this subject, until a few years shall have passed away, and these men fall into the insignificance and oblivion to which they must come at last.[88]

Baird felt an antagonism to the Garrisonian abolitionists which was personal as well as philosophical. In Baird's eyes, demagoguery in behalf of a good cause remained demagoguery nevertheless,

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[87] [Robert Baird?], The First Annual Report of the Southern Aid Society, Presented by the Executive Committee at the Anniversary Meeting, October 25, 1854, with an Appendix. (New York: The Society, 1854), p. 22. Baird was one of the founders of the Southern Aid Society and served on the governing Board of Directors from the society's inception. The First Annual Report is written in a style so much similar to Baird's and so different from succeeding Annual Reports, written while Baird was in Europe, that it might tentatively be assigned to Robert Baird.

[88] R. Baird, Progress and Prospects of Christianity . . . , p. 55 n.

and deserved to be resisted. If the only "true abolitionists" were "Mr. Garrison and his friends," no right-thinking man could expect the movement to come to any good end.[89]

Baird was a gradualist on the slavery issue and indeed on all aspects of social reform. His conception of human nature left him with no hope outside of a gradual melioration of the ills which plagued humanity. Slavery could not be eliminated in one fell swoop. Furthermore, the basic impetus towards its removal had to come from the South itself.[90] Any other course of action was fraught with peril, and might bring in its wake worse evils than that which it sought to overcome. The only course of action which combined safety with a reasonable possibility of eventual success was steady, gentle, sympathetic moral suasion. He firmly believed that with trust in God, patience, and prudence, slavery would be done away with in time.[91]

The gradualism of men like Baird was roundly condemned in his day: the condemnation continues to the present time, and understandably so. There is something repugnant inherent in temporizing about a question concerning an obviously evil social institution. When the Anti-Slavery Society argued that the position of Baird and other religious bureaucrats was actuated by self-interest and a desire to protect their fiefdoms from discord and disunion, their

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[89] Ibid., p. 56. [90] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

[91] Robert Baird, State and Prospects of Religion in America; Being a Report Made at the Conference of the Evangelical Alliance, in Paris, August 25, 1855. (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1856), p. 51.

statements bore as much emotional as factual weight.[92] Historians have also noted how much the personal security of the leaders of the national denominations and the benevolent societies depended upon maintaining broad bases of support.[93] It would be unfair to level a blanket charge of hypocrisy against such men, however. The personal sacrifices men like Baird made would indicate that self-interest did not consciously play a major part in their decisions.

Such men believed that improvements in the human condition always occurred gradually. Evil was a real, spiritual force, not just a product of social circumstances. It existed in the hearts and minds of men, and evidenced itself in their actions. Close off one avenue of expression to it and it was sure to find another. The danger lay in exchanging one evil for another equally as noxious. Slavery was evil, but so were discord, strife, and civil war. To men like Baird it made little sense to exchange one for the other.

Whether or not Baird occupied morally tenable ground in the position he took vis-a-vis slavery and the Evangelical Alliance has become a moot point. He was right in fearing that the introduction of the slavery issue would have fatal consequences as far as American participation was concerned, not that Baird and his fellows did not make an effort to give the idea some substance. When they

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[92][American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society], Remonstrance, p. 3.

[93]See, for example, Clifford S. Griffin, "The Abolitionists and the Benevolent Societies," Journal of Negro History, XLIV (July, 1959), pp. 195-216, passim. Also, Timothy Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, p. 190.

returned from the London Conference, they set to work with a will. They held public meetings in New York, and in the season of the Anniversaries in May, 1847, established an American Evangelical Alliance which they hoped would take its place in the galaxy of American benevolent societies. Auxiliary societies were formed, and meetings held in cities and larger towns. A monthly magazine, the Christian Union and Religious Memorial, was established, to which Baird lent his aid and name as editor.[94]

Notwithstanding all this activity, the Alliance was, in Baird's own words, a "deplorable failure."[95] The magazine, although as well written and attractive as most of the religious periodicals of the day, was never a financial success. In October, 1850, Baird issued an urgent appeal for funds in order to keep the magazine functioning:

> The writer proposes to raise funds by donations to sustain the magazine; and if a few more like him could be found, there would be no difficulty in continuing it. Will other friends come forward now and say what they will do? It may be the means of keeping the magazine in existence. Our publisher will do all in his power, and if he can go on without further pecuniary loss, he will gladly do so. Let all who are disposed to aid the cause come forward at once and say what they will do.[96]

The friends remained conspicuously absent. The next issue proved to be the final one, and the publisher, Samuel Hueston, issued a bitter

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[94]R. Baird, Progress and Prospects of Christianity . . . , pp. 40-41. Baird donated his service to the magazine free of charge. Christian Union and Religious Memorial, II (June, 1849), p.353.

[95]R. Baird, Progress and Prospects of Christianity . . . , p. 45.

[96]Christian Union and Religious Memorial, III (October, 1850), p. 485.

note of termination:

> During the fall of 1847 the writer was induced to enter on the publication of this Magazine from various causes, the leading ones being a firm conviction that a work of this kind would be the means of doing much good, and a belief that it would be sustained by the Christian public. In both these views he now feels he was mistaken. Like the child of poverty, it was at its birth ushered into the cold arms of (Christian?) charity, dependent upon it alone for sustenance, and as a natural consequence it has always been feeble, and must now be consigned to an early grave. It would be useless as well as unprofitable for me to try to exhibit or mourn over the causes which have led to this result.[97]

Europeans were soon apprised of the consequences of their actions at the 1846 Conference. At the London Conference of 1851 Americans were conspicuous by their absence. Only Robert Baird and a few other stalwarts attended, and European evangelicals bemoaned the fact. "Alas! alas! why?", one wrote. "Our Alliance has scarce lived in America; our brethren who came thence went home from us, we are told, with a heavy heart; and now that we convoke the world again, good Dr. Baird appears among us mournfully, and seems to say, 'I am only come to tell you.'"[98] Baird did tell them, and in no uncertain terms, why Americans did not respond to the call. Reforms and conciliatory gestures were made, but with only limited results. The next General Conference was held in 1855 in Paris, and although that city was a favorite watering spot for evangelical clergy and laity, only nineteen Americans attended the meetings, one of them

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[97] Christian Union and Religious Memorial, III (November-December, 1850), p. 545.

[98] Rev. William Arthur to Rev. Dr. Peck, August 28, 1851, in J. Olin (ed.), Life and Letters of Stephen Olin . . . , vol. II, p. 298 n.

being the reliable friend of the Evangelical Alliance, Robert Baird.[99]

Many factors contributed to the failure of the Evangelical Alliance in pre-Civil War America. The "absurd attempt to make it an engine to act against salvery," as Stephen Olin put it, was perhaps the prime factor.[100] Contributing also was opposition from the religious left, which feared anything which smacked of ecclesiasticism and from the religious right, which took its denominational beliefs and obligations with supreme seriousness. Ill will generated between New School Presbyterians and Congregationalists by events surrounding the fracture of the Plan of Union in 1852 also contributed.[101] Baird added an additional reason why the Alliance failed. He charged that Americans found the cause lacking in drama and excitement--a sin

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[99]Jamison, "History of the Evangelical Alliance . . .," p. 19. By 1857, American opinion had significantly changed. The General Conference of that year was held in Berlin. Baird attended, as usual. He brought with him a letter of greeting and "heartfelt sympathy" which had been adopted by the New School General Assembly and the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Church, and which had been signed by nearly a thousand evangelicals, including one Supreme Court Justice, "ten or twelve other Judges, a large number of members of Congress and of the Legislatures of the several States, several Governors, five Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church, two of the Moravian, and one of the Methodist Episcopal, as well as professors of theological seminaries and pastors of churches in every State of the Union." H. M. Baird, Robert Baird, pp. 302-303. The next Conference was held in 1861, while the United States was in the throes of civil war. Only ten Americans were among the 1800 evangelicals meeting in Geneva, one of them being Robert Baird. Once peace had been restored, large numbers of Americans took part in Evangelical Alliance activities. Jamison, "History of the Evangelical Alliance . . . ," pp. 20-21.

[100]Stephen Olin to Rev. Charles Mallory, Middletown, Connecticut, January 22, 1848, in J. Olin (ed.), Life and Letters of Stephen Olin . . . , vol. II, p. 370.

[101]T. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, p. 42.

in an age that craved the spectacular. He amplified the charge to some length:

> There is a repulsive side to the cause of Christian Union; and it is one that men are not fond of looking at. Charity is a very pleasant virture so far as it consists in kind looks and loving words; but in its practical bearings it is often found a very difficult one. It is no easy task to withhold the expression of the most sincere convictions, to moderate the verdict of the most sober judgment, lest they should conflict with the requirements of the law of charity. And we do not doubt that there are many who consider it quite unnecessary to do so. No character, indeed, is so popular in our day, as that of a man of earnest, fearless determination, whose opinions on all subjects are made up irrevocably and exhibited recklessly on all possible occasions. Such a Boanerges will always gain a hearing in the religious world; and whether the result of his bravery be to split a church asunder, or to wound the heart of many a Christian brother, his aim will be attained,--popularity will be his reward. A similar course is pursued, whether the object be to establish a paper, to build up a church, or to propagate a sect: a bold avowal and unflinching defense of denominational or individual peculiarities is considered essential to success.[102]

In the final analysis, the Evangelical Alliance failed because it was irrelevant. Societies which offended abolitionists and slaveholders managed to survive, as did organizations with extremely limited objectives, resources, and membership roles. The difference was that they had some sort of concrete work to do. It was not without reason that benevolent societies spelled out their objectives in minute detail. Americans demanded action, if not immediate results, from organizations requesting their support. There was little room in the benevolent panoply for an organization passively devoted to the dissemination of "good thoughts." Even

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[102] Christian Union and Religious Memorial, II (December, 1849), p. 706.

Leonard Bacon, the editor of the New York Independent who had been one of the original leaders in the Evangelical Alliance movement, was led to complain that the Alliance was "like a costly and complicated mill, without the millstones. It has a great many wheels to move, and it takes a great deal of power to move it, and it makes a great deal of noise when in motion; but it grinds no meal. It is a great cost without return."[103] Robert Baird was forced to agree with this analysis to some extent. Americans "know the benefit of fraternal feeling and kindly intercourse," he wrote. "Indeed it is our happy state in this respect, which constitutes one of the causes that contribute to render an Evangelical Alliance almost impracticable with us, for any length of time. It is hard to convince our people that it is needed for us."[104]

If the Evangelical Alliance proved to be an irrelevancy from the standpoint of American society, it was not at all an irrelevant factor in the development of the religious thought of Robert Baird. He worked diligently for the cause through thick and thin. His major writings were written under its influence--for the purpose of furthering its ends. It was the inspiration of the alliance ideal which led him to analyze and defend the American religious system--a defense which came to be an apotheosis of Christian voluntarism.

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[103]Cited in Christian Union and Religious Memorial, III (March, 1850), p. 129.

[104]R. Baird, State and Prospect of Christianity . . . , p. 55.