CHAPTER TWO

THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES

To understand any movement in history, one must first understand its context. What else was happening at that time? What were people thinking? How did they do things?

I. SOCIAL CONTEXT

The United States was undergoing social, economic, and physical change while foreign missions were developing in the first half of the nineteenth century. This change threatened the traditional religious institutions and the traditional patterns of piety.

Rapid Expansion

In the fifty years from 1800 to 1850, the United States more than quadrupled in population, from 5.3 million to 23.2 million. Its area more than tripled, from 891,000 to 2,992,000 square miles, as the western border moved from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. The federation of sixteen states

in 1800 had grown to thirty-one states in 1850. Three forms of growth were (1) westward migration, (2) the development of commerce, and (3) the development of industry.

(1) Westward migration. The western border of settlement by persons of European origin--the frontier--moved from western New York in 1800 to eastern Kansas in 1850. The Valley of the Mississippi, that vast area from the Appalachians to the Rockies, increased in population by a factor of twenty-five, from 386,000 in 1800 to 9.7 million in 1850. Accounting for 7% of the population of the United States in 1800, by 1850 the Valley was home to 42% of the population. This vast expansion brought with it the development of towns and cities, a thriving economy based on domestic production, and a network of roads, canals, and railroads. It also produced a highly mobile and self-reliant population, physically removed from the older generation, its traditions and institutions.

(2) Development of commerce. Soon after independence, American ships were trading in the Mediterranean, the Baltic, Latin America, and East and South Asia. American sailors brought to this country's seaport communities the luxuries of the world, and American merchants were among the new nation's first millionaires. Seamen also brought home stories of exotic places, and societies very different from America.

(3) Development of industry. Textile mills began to flourish in New England beginning in the 1820s, creating a new class of wealthy industrialists, and a new urban work force. Many of the first workers were young women and children; two groups who now for the first time had personal income.[1]

These three forms of expansion, the frontier, commerce, and industry, all tended to separate people from their past. Tradition, the older generation, and the church, no longer had the influence which they possessed in the stable rural communities of the colonial period. America was becoming more materialistic, more worldly. The successful man was self-confident, self-reliant, aggressive, and hard-working.

Many religious leaders were concerned that in this new world, some were leaving God behind as well. Ebenezer Porter (1772-1834), a professor at Andover Seminary and a supporter of missions, spoke of the great objects of missions in a sermon in 1827. He then said,

> Do we demand that the world shall stop the movements of her secular machinery, and stand still, to gaze at the magnitude of these objects? Certainly not. Let senates debate, and statesmen adjust the affairs of empires;--let commerce spread its canvass, and drive on its schemes of gain, in every climate; let science push its adventurous researches into regions of polar ice; let genius multiply its resources of art, its mechanical

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[1] The information in this subsection is derived from census reports, and: Marcus Cunliffe, The Nation Takes Shape: 1789-1837 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962).

> inventions, its triumphs over the wind and tides. . . . But let not God be shut out of his own world.[2]

American Democracy and Voluntary Associations

The American Revolution (1775-1783) created a new nation with new ways of thinking and doing. The Revolution influenced the religious community in several ways.

First, the American Revolution was a period of religious declension. While everyone's attention was directed to war and politics, religion was neglected. For two decades after the war, religious leaders worked to reclaim the people for religion.

Second, the American Revolution was accompanied by a movement to disestablish the church. For Reformed and Presbyterian churches, disestablishment meant the removal of any restrictions on their activity. For the Presbyterians in particular, the Revolution was followed by a period of numerical and geographic expansion. Disestablishment came more slowly in New England, and was feared by some church leaders. But when it did come, the Congregational churches gained new vitality, as they were forced to compete for support.

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[2] Ebenezer Porter, The Duty of Christians to Pray for the Missionary Cause (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1827), 23.

Third, the new democratic spirit was critical of anything that appeared to be a position of privilege. This included the clergy. Popular anti-clerical feelings pressured ministers to develop a more active "professional" role in order to justify their existence. Also, in this democratic spirit, lay persons claimed a larger role in religious activities.

Fourth, and most important for the development of missions, American democracy expressed itself through voluntary associations for religious purposes. This period produced an explosion of associations: in Massachusetts, there were fifteen voluntary associations in 1760, but 2,500 more were organized in the period 1760-1830.[3] Founded on the principles of individual volition and non-coercion, they were highly compatible with America's self-reliant democracy. Richard D. Brown in a 1973 article attributed their rise to two causes: the Revolution and the Second Great Awakening.[4] Revolutionary democracy called

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[3] Richard D. Brown, "The Emergence of Voluntary Associations in Massachusetts, 1760-1830" The Journal of Voluntary Action Research 2 (1973): 66.

[4] Brown, "Emergence of Voluntary Associations," 68. American societies were patterned after British precedents--[Leonard W. Bacon], "Voluntary Associations," Quarterly Christian Spectator 4 (1832): 142-43; New York Missionary Society, The Address and Constitution of the New York Missionary Society (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1796), 3-4. Others point to revolutionary France as the source of voluntary societies for both Britain and America--Johannes van den Berg, Constrained by Jesus'

for responsible citizenship. The theology of the Awakening called forth an activist Christianity. The benevolent voluntary associations challenged traditional religious patterns with a piety that called on all Christians--including the laity-- to minister out of love for God, and that gave priority to a common evangelical faith over denominational peculiarities. The missionary movement expressed itself organizationally as a collection of
voluntary societies.

Women's Sphere

Life for women in America was significantly influenced by one economic change. Increasingly, a man's place of work was removed from his home. As a result, the family ceased to be the unit of economic production. Women lost an important way of being "useful." Men and women were spending their time and energies in different environments, which were conducive to different values. Gender roles became more sharply distinguished. Many modern writers use the term "domesticity" to describe this new situation for women.[5]

Love: An Inquiry into the Motives of the Missionary Awakening in Great Britain in the Period Between 1698 and 1815 (Kampen, Neth.: J. H. Kok, 1956), 111.

[5] Nancy F. Cott, "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England," Feminist Studies 3 (1975): 17-21; Barbara Welter, Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century (Athens, Oh.: Ohio University, 1976), 84;

For the majority of American women, who lived on farms, this change did not occur. However, it did happen for increasing numbers of women in cities and towns, in what we would today call the upper and middle classes. Because much of the literature read by women of all classes, expressed the values and experiences of these women, they set the trends that others followed. The women affected by domesticity had an important role in the foreign missionary movement.

In early nineteenth century America, men and women each had separate spheres of activity. Man's world was business; woman's world was the family. Men were expected to be aggressive and competitive; women were expected to be nurturing and submissive. Religion was included in women's sphere.[6]

Mary P. Ryan, "A Woman's Awakening: Evangelical Religion and the Families of Utica, New York, 1800-1840," American Quarterly 30 (1978): 610-11; Mary P. Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865 (New York: Cambridge University, 1981), 62; Barbara Leslie Epstein, The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University, 1981), 67.

[6] Joseph Lathrop, The Importance of Female Influence in the Support of Religion: A Sermon Delivered to a Charitable Female Association in West Springfield, May 15, 1810 (Springfield: Dickman, 1810), 5; Welter, Dimity, 84.

The great majority of church members were women. Orthodox pastors speculated that women had always been in the majority in the church.[7] Statistics indicated that women accounted for at least three-fifths of the additions to membership in American churches in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[8] Women were not only more numerous, they were also more active in religious activities. Rufus Anderson (1796-1880), Corresponding Secretary for the ABCFM, stated in 1839:

> *Woman is the life and soul of benevolent action for the benefit of the world. . . .* Nearly one-half of all that is and has been raised in our country for publishing the gospel among the heathen nations, has been contributed by females; and probably the number of contributors and active friends in that sex is two or three times as great as in the other.[9]

In the first half of the nineteenth century, women were active in the Protestant American churches as attenders, supporters, and organizers of new

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[7] Benjamin Wadsworth, Female Charity an Acceptable Offering: A Sermon Delivered in the Brick Meeting House in Danvers, at the Request of the Charitable Female Cent Society in Danvers and Middleton, for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Nov. 7, 1816 (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1817), 26.

[8] Richard D. Shiels, "The Feminization of American Congregationalism, 1730-1835," American Quarterly 33 (1981): 48; Ryan, "Woman's Awakening," 603.

[9] Rufus Anderson, An Address Delivered in South Hadley, Mass., July 24, 1839, at the Second Anniversary of the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1839), 8.

endeavors. Women responded warmly to the revivals; women organized and contributed in order to send revivalists like Charles G. Finney (1792-1875) on revival tours; women prayed for and witnessed to their men-folk, eventually bringing some of them to regeneration.

Modern commentators believe that religion became more "feminine" in this period,[10] in several ways. Early nineteenth century Protestantism was emotional, in this period of revivals, rather than rationalistic. Revivals got much of their strength from small prayer circles, or "religious conferences," characterized by intimate sharing. The institutions of the Sunday School and the "Family Altar," along with the development of juvenile religious literature, placed an emphasis on nurturing children into the faith. Submission and sacrifice were frequent themes in hymns and in preaching. Christ was presented as a friend, who was gentle; God was pre-eminently a God of love. Compared to earlier times, salvation was more likely to be understood in relational terms, less in legal terms.

As the church leaders of this period interpreted the Bible, women were not to instruct men or to exercise authority over men. Yet women were the equals of men in regard to the most important aspect of life, "equally with men redeemed

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[10] Welter, Dimity, 82-102; Shiels, "Feminization," 62; Cott, "Young Women," 15-29; Epstein, Politics of Domesticity, 45-49; Nancy A. Hewitt, Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872 (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University, 1984), 20.

by the blood of Christ."[11] Men and women were also intellectual equals, and should be intellectual companions. And women should not bury their talents in the ground. It was the duty of women to use their gifts to the glory of God. Mary Webb (1779-1861), who had organized the first female missionary society, in Boston in 1800, later declared, "Our object is not to render ourselves *important* but *useful.*"[12] Religious leaders of both sexes emphatically declared that women had the right and duty to do much more than they had in the past. In an era of innovation, many new activities were promptly claimed as being in women's sphere; the boundaries of that sphere were being steadily pushed outward.[13] A

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[11] Reynolds Bascom, "On the Humane and Benevolent Exertions of Females," SIA, Student Dissertations, vol. 10, [p. 1]; see also, Samuel Worcester, Female Love to Christ; A Discourse Delivered in the Tabernacle in Salem, Before the Female Charitable Society, at Their Annual Meeting, Sept. 27, 1809 ([Salem]: Pool and Palfrey, [1809]), 12.

[12] Albert L. Vaill, Mary Webb and the Mother Society (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1914), 50.

[13] For a discussion of women's sphere, see: S. Worcester, Female Love to Christ; Wadsworth Female Charity; Reuben Puffer, The Widow's Mite: A Sermon Delivered at Boylston, before the Boylston Female Society for the Aid of Foreign Missions, Jan. 8, 1816 (Worcester: William Manning, Jan. 1816); Matthew LaRue Perrine, Women Have a Work to Do in the House of God: A Discourse Delivered at the First Annual Meeting of the Female Missionary Society for the Poor of the City of New York and Its Vicinity, May 12, 1817 (New York: Edward W. Thomson, 1817); Bascom, "Exertions of Females," SIA; Joseph Emerson, Female Education: A Discourse Delivered at the Dedication of the Seminary Hall in Saugus, Jan. 15, 1822 (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong and Crocker & Brewster, 1822); Ashbel Green, The Christian Duty of Christian Women (Princeton: D. A. Borrenstein, 1825); Anderson, Address, 1839, Mt. Holyoke; Lathrop, Importance of Female Influence.

major area of increased activity for women was in voluntary associations for benevolent purposes, especially missions.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, women organized thousands of voluntary societies. They wrote constitutions, kept minutes, and conducted business meetings; they raised funds for benevolent purposes around the world; they canvassed neighborhoods, documenting human and religious needs, and administered orphanages and welfare programs. These associations provided women with community, an understanding of self, and fulfillment in significant activity. So the needs which were met for men in their jobs, were met for women in religious voluntary societies.[14]

American Foreign Missions as a Social Phenomenon

America's foreign missionary movement was a remarkable social phenomenon. It captured the spirit of the times and somehow involved everyone. For men of enterprise, missions was a business, exporting salvation to the whole world. Women organized, prayed and worked, to nurse the world into a relationship with a loving God. Children read real adventure stories in the missionary journals. The wealthy were publicly praised for their gifts and given honorary offices in the voluntary societies. Mission literature constantly lifted up the widow's mite, and the importance of the most humble gift. The studious

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[14] Nancy F. Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835 (New Haven: Yale University, 1977), 138.

learned about a world of exotic places and peoples. The devout prayed and contemplated the inter-racial harmony of the white robed throng around the throne of the Lamb. The active organized. The eloquent spoke. The saddler sold more saddles, the farmer grew more potatoes, and the child hemmed more handkerchiefs, all to the glory of God and for the glorious cause of missions. And a growing number of young men and women showed heroic devotion and sacrifice, put their "all on the altar," and left country and kin for the cause of the cross of Christ. Like wheels within wheels, a voluntary missionary society composed of over a thousand smaller societies, rolled across America, and enrolled the faithful into the cause. One cause--foreign missions--unified and mobilized American evangelical Christianity--finding new ways for a new society to express its devotion to the faith of its ancestors.

II. THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The founders of American foreign missions were orthodox Reformed evangelical Christians. Calling themselves "orthodox" to distinguish themselves from the Unitarians, they believed in a three-fold supernatural God, the divinity of Christ, and the Incarnation. These Congregational, Presbyterian and Reformed Christians identified with the Reformed, or "Calvinist" branch of the Protestant Reformation. They were in awe of the sovereignty of God, which was a source of great comfort to those who had experienced regeneration through the Holy Spirit,

but was a source of terror to those who were still unregenerate sinners. They sought to live a life of good works, making manifest the grace of God that had been experienced. Calvinists were people of the Book: the Bible was the rule of faith and of all of life.

The founders of America's foreign missions were the successors of the Evangelical Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century. They admired George Whitefield (1714-1770), Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Theodorus Frelinghuysen (1691-ca.1748), and Gilbert Tennent (1703-1764), leaders of the Calvinist wing of the Great Awakening. As Evangelicals they believed that each person needed to feel a personal spiritual experience--a change of heart that would be evident in a changed life. Preaching was the principal "means of grace" to bring about this change. Regeneration produced a zeal for the spread of the Christian faith, not just in clergy, but in all believers.

For the founders of America's foreign missions, the most important theologian was Jonathan Edwards. Other writers of theology, like Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), and Nathanael Emmons (1745-1840), interpreted and modified the thoughts of Edwards.[15] The rise of

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[15] Oliver Wendell Elsbree, in The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America, 1790-1815 (Williamsport, Pa.: Williamsport Printing and Binding, 1928), argued that the theology of Samuel Hopkins was the source of the missionary movement. Scholars after Elsbree followed this view. However, Charles L. Chaney, The Birth of Missions in America (South Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1976), 74-75, more recently and convincingly argued that Jonathan Edwards is the source of the theology of the missionary movement, and Hopkins is only one of several interpreters of Edwards. This

Edwards' admirers to leadership in the church, the spread of the revivals called the "Second Great Awakening," and the rise of foreign missions, were three simultaneous and related events.

Late eighteenth century America and Europe were thoroughly influenced by Enlightenment thinking, which placed emphasis on observation, experiments, and reason. The Enlightenment was concerned about the moral, and ultimately the greatest good. It rejected traditional authority, and any reference to the supernatural. Enlightenment thinkers were optimists: their era was the best of all possible worlds, and, with the help of enlightened education, the future would be even better.

The Evangelical Awakening, the seed bed of the missionary movement, challenged Enlightenment thinking. John and Charles Wesley, Whitefield and Edwards, had strong support from the poor--those for whom this was not the best of all possible worlds. The Awakening had a deeper appreciation of the problem of evil. Explained as the doctrine of original sin, it could not be overcome by better education; it could only be overcome by Jesus Christ. The supernatural was real, and the traditional teachings of Christianity were valid.

The Awakening, which produced the missionary movement, while opposed to many of the conclusions of the Enlightenment, was actually an

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dissertation follows the reasoning of Chaney, and quotes extensively from Edwards in outlining the theology of the missionary movement.

alternative expression of Enlightenment thinking.[16] The foreign missionary movement, an expression of the Evangelical Awakening, appealed to Enlightenment sympathies for empirical evidence, benevolent action, the advancement of learning, and progress.

Reason, Religious Affections and Will

The evangelicals who began America's foreign missions, believed in a religion of both heat and light. That is, true religion included both emotion (heat) and reason (light), both feeling and thinking, both heart and mind. The numerous Biblical references to love and joy led Jonathan Edwards to conclude that emotions had priority, when those emotions were the result of the activity of God. He declared, "TRUE RELIGION, IN GREAT PART, CONSISTS IN HOLY AFFECTIONS."[17] True religion must be felt, must be experienced, to become valid for the individual.

However, a person's emotions could not be trusted. Evangelicals often quoted Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" The evangelical believer subjected oneself to arduous self-examination--constantly questioning one's feelings and motives.

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[16] Wolfgang Eberhard Löwe, "The First American Foreign Missionaries: 'The Students,' 1810-1820. An Inquiry into Their Theological Motives" (Ph.D. diss., Brown, 1962), 14-25.

[17] Jonathan Edwards, A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, in The Works of President Edwards, ed. Sereno E. Dwight (New York: S. Converse, 1829), 5:9.

Were one's feelings from God, or were they just animal passions? Emotions were placed under careful scrutiny by reason. Evangelicals often referred to themselves and others as "hopefully pious" or "hopefully converted," because only God knew for sure. Jonathan Edwards, in A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, had explained that most of the emotional expressions of the Great Awakening were ambiguous. They could come from God, or they could have rational natural causes. He concluded,

> Christian practice, or a holy life, is *a great and distinguishing sign* of true and saving grace. But I may go further, and assert, that it is *the chief* of all the signs of grace, both as an evidence of the sincerity of professors UNTO OTHERS, and also to their OWN CONSCIENCES.[18]

The Christian life, characterized by self-denial, a desire to glorify Christ in all of life, and love of God and neighbor, was the most convincing evidence of the validity of one's religious experience.

Edwards understood the relationship between reason, emotion, and will. Valid religious experience normally arose from an increase in knowledge and understanding.[19] Religious experience then energized the will. So there was a sequence. Knowledge could kindle emotions, which would lead to action. The advocates of foreign missions valued the dissemination of information in order to touch peoples' feelings, and cause them to act. The early nineteenth century

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18 Ibid., 273.

19 Ibid., 151.

was equally a time of thirst for knowledge, deep emotions, and action.

Disinterested Benevolence

Jonathan Edwards addressed the question of the greatest good in The Nature of True Virtue. He argued that, "True virtue most essentially consists in BENEVOLENCE TO BEING IN GENERAL."[20] Benevolence is love which expresses itself in good deeds. "Being in general" refers to all humanity. Edwards was saying that the greatest good, true holiness, consisted in having the attitude that produces acts of love toward all persons.

This required an identification with the needs of others. Nathanael Emmons, a pastor and theologian of the generation after Edwards, explained, "True benevolence always disposes those who possess it, to enter into the feelings of their fellow men under all circumstances."[21] The sermon in which Emmons said this was titled "Disinterested Benevolence." His text was the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:36). "Disinterested" benevolence was doing good without the desire of getting anything out of it. The Good Samaritan had no "interest" in helping the man by the side of the road, in that he would get no benefit from it.

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[20] Jonathan Edwards, The Nature of True Virtue, in The Works of President Edwards, ed. Sereno E. Dwight (New York: S. Converse, 1829), 3:94.

[21] Nathanael Emmons, "Disinterested Benevolence," in The Works of Nathanael Emmons, D.D., ed. Jacob Ide (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1842), 5:256.

Samuel Hopkins, friend and student of Jonathan Edwards, spoke of disinterested benevolence in an essay that was a commentary on Edwards' True Virtue. After several pages of Scripture references on the general theme of "God is love," Hopkins concluded,

> Thus we see the holy love of God is represented as consisting in disinterested benevolence and goodness, the highest and most remarkable exercise of which appears in redemption, in giving his Son to die for sinners, that they might live through him; and that the holiness of men consists in imitating this benevolent love.[22]

Love and benevolence were constant themes in the sermons and tracts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century: the love of God-the-Father in sending Christ to redeem humanity; the love of Christ in dying for the sins of humanity; and the love of the pious Christian for "being in general"--seeking the good of all persons, near and far. Love was the dominant motive of the missionary movement.

Millennialism and Missions

Writing in 1747, before the rise of modern missions, in a work popularly known as An Humble Attempt, Jonathan Edwards saw in the prophecies of Scripture, "a future glorious advancement of the church of God."[23] Edwards did

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[22] Samuel Hopkins, An Inquiry Into the Nature of True Holiness, in The Works of Samuel Hopkins, D.D. (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1852), 3:41.

[23] Jonathan Edwards, An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People, in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, in The Works of President Edwards, ed. Sereno E. Dwight (New York: S. Converse, 1829), 3:445.

not believe that this was to occur in some far removed time beyond time, but soon. He called on Christians to gather regularly to pray for this day. Jonathan Edwards was the prophet of the modern missionary movement. He wrote,

> It is evident from the scripture, that there is *yet remaining* a great *advancement* of the interests of religion and the kingdom of Christ in this world, by an *abundant outpouring of the Spirit of God,* far greater and more extensive than ever yet has been. It is certain that many things, which are spoken concerning a glorious time of the church's enlargement and prosperity in the *latter days,* have never yet been fulfilled. There has never yet been any propagation and prevalence of religion in any wise, of that extent and universality which the prophecies represent. It is often foretold and signified, in a great variety of strong expressions, that there should be a time come when *all nations,* throughout the whole habitable world, should embrace the true religion, and be brought into the church of God.[24]

Edwards continued to string along Scripture after Scripture, all speaking of a day when Christ shall rule on earth. He believed the day would come soon, if people would pray for it.[25] But the millennial kingdom, this rule of Christ on earth, would come gradually, and through human means. In A History of the Work of Redemption, Edwards explained:

> There is no reason from the Word of God to think any other, than that this great work of God, will be wrought, though swiftly, yet *gradually.* As the children of Israel were *gradually* brought out of the Babylonish captivity, first one company, and then another, and *gradually* rebuilt the city and temple; and as the Heathen Roman empire was destroyed by a *gradual,* though a very swift prevalency of the gospel. . . . All will not be accomplished at once, as by some great miracle, like the resurrection of the dead. But this work

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24 Jonathan Edwards, Humble Attempt, 460-61. See also: Samuel Hopkins, A Treatise on the Millennium (New York: Arno, 1972), 11-42.

25 Jonathan Edwards, Humble Attempt, 480.

> will be accomplished by *means,* by the preaching of the gospel, and the use of the ordinary means of grace, and so shall be *gradually* brought to pass.[26]

The millennial kingdom of Edwards and his followers was to be a very earthly kingdom, where Christ ruled indirectly. Christ would come in person with his angels only at the close of the millennium (hence this view is called "post-millennial"). The millennium would be a time of great piety, knowledge, peace and prosperity. It would be "the glorious age of the gospel."[27] The participants in the early missionary movement believed that they were participating in the establishment of this earthly millennium.[28]

For Edwards and the early leaders of missions, the spread of the gospel to new nations clearly indicated the coming of the millennial kingdom. Besides this central sign, every moral reform and social improvement pointed to the new age of peace and faith. The missionaries and the supporters of moral reform actively participated in the ongoing evolution into this new age.

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26 Jonathan Edwards, A History of the Work of Redemption, in The Works of President Edwards, ed. Sereno E. Dwight (New York: S. Converse, 1829), 3:392.

27 Ibid., 405.

28 In the period between Edwards and the rise of missions, in particular during the American Revolution, there was a "convergance of millennial and republican thought."--Nathan O. Hatch, The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England (New Haven: Yale University, 1977), 3. American preachers of all theological opinions identified the cause of America and democracy with the millennium. See also: James West Davidson, The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth Century New England (New Haven: Yale University, 1977); Ernest Lee Tuveson, Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968).

Summary

As surely as knowledge kindled emotions, which led to action, the theology of these evangelical Calvinists shaped their piety, which resulted in the events of history. As participants in Awakening, tears came easily to their eyes; feelings were expressed, examined and cherished. As children of the Enlightenment, they lived in a de-mystified world. God's action in history was real, but was always indirect. God worked through natural and human means. "Voices from heaven" were suspect, and decisions were made by careful analysis of *facts.* The doctrine of disinterested benevolence was pervasive. God was love. The greatest good was love. And real love expressed itself in action. Through action, the believer participated in bringing in the millennial kingdom--the kingdom of love. The principle means and sign of the coming of
the kingdom was the success of world-wide Christian missions.

III. ECCLESIAL CONTEXT

Lois Banner wrote in her 1970 dissertation on the voluntary societies of the Second Great Awakening,

> At the same time that the clergy turned their interest towards religious missions and benevolence, they were involved in organizing their denominational structures. Each movement--that of benevolent effort and that of denominational growth--vitally influenced the other.[29]

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[29] Lois Wendland Banner, "The Protestant Crusade: Religious Missions, Benevolence, and Reform in the United States, 1790-1840" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia,

To better understand how missions as a movement of devotion and piety could sweep across and unify a broad spectrum of Christians, at the same time that denominational formation was dividing them, we need to understand the developing denominationalism of the missionary constituency.

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was supported by the membership of churches in the Reformed tradition--Congregational, Presbyterian, and Reformed--which found themselves in different situations in different parts of the country. Attempts to explain the development of the Board and other voluntary societies, as efforts of an establishment to control the people, are not sensitive to this diversity.[30] The coalition that supported the American Board included both leaders of the establishment and dissenters, and crossed barriers of class, region, ethnicity,
and polity. Their evangelical Reformed faith was what they held in common.

Spirit of Unity

1970), 10.

[30] This theory of "social control" was advanced by Charles I. Foster, An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837 (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina, 1960), Clifford S. Griffin, Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1960), and others, and was assumed by other writers. This theory has been refuted by Banner, "Protestant Crusade." See also Lois Wendland Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," Journal of American History 60 (1973): 23-41.

The General Association of Connecticut, a Congregational body, had a history of close association with the Presbyterian Church, to its west. Connecticut Congregationalists frequently used the terms "Congregational" and "Presbyterian" as synonyms, and thought of themselves as being of the same denomination as the neighboring Presbyterians. The religious periodicals of Connecticut Congregationalists described denominational divisions as an expression of human sin, contrary to the command of Christ, and contrary to the unitary nature of religion.[31]

In 1792 the General Association of Connecticut adopted a Plan of Union with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, whereby each body elected two delegates--with voice and vote--to the other body.[32] In 1801 these two groups entered into a more extensive Plan of Union for co-operation in the new settlements to the west. Rather than each establish small competing congregations, they would join each other's congregations.[33]

The "Plan of Union" became more than what was written on paper. Congregational missionary societies, like the Missionary Society of Connecticut,

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[31] B. N., pseud., "Christianity Not Promoted in the World by the Existence of Different Denominations," Christian Spectator 4 (1822): 460-66; "Christian Union," CEMRI 2 (1809): 387.

[32] Calvin Chapin, "History of the General Association of Connecticut," AQR 12 (1839-40): 27.

[33] General Association of Connecticut, "A Plan of Government For the Churches in the New Settlements," CEM 2 (1801-02): 116-17.

sent to the frontier missionaries who organized New Englanders into Presbyterian churches. Whole Associations of Congregational churches were received into the Presbyterian Church. Congregational people and churches soon composed almost half of the Presbyterian Church.

The spirit of this movement of church union was expressed in an article in the Utica Christian Repository, in August, 1822:

> That all real disciples of Jesus Christ, ought to be united in sentiment and practice, and to be of one heart and of one soul, will be doubted by none, who believe the scriptures to be given by divine inspiration, and wish well the prosperity of Zion. Their existence under different names and forms of the christian religion, and their attachment to different communions, is an evil to be lamented. . . . The late union of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches in the Western District, under one general form of government . . . it was thought would . . . be hailed as a token for good, by every one, who discerns the signs of the times, and is expecting the approach of the millennium.[34]

The same spirit of unity expressed itself in numerous local voluntary societies. Evangelical Christians of different denominations united to establish orphanages, widows' homes, local welfare societies, Bible societies, and home missionary societies in the last decade of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Christians hailed this unity across denominational lines as an exhilarating sign of the approaching millennial kingdom.

Both the Plan of Union of 1801 and the voluntary societies expressed an understanding of "church" that was greater than any denomination. This

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[34] Presbertees, pseud., "Congregational Churches," Utica Christian Repository 1 (1822): 284.

understanding was both visionary and practical. Motivated by a millennial vision of Christian unity, American Protestants constructed institutions for a more compassionate and devout America.

Struggle for Orthodoxy

At the same time that American Protestants were developing warm fellowship ties across denominational lines, they also felt a need to define the boundaries of that fellowship. This concern to define "orthodoxy" promoted a broad pan-Evangelical orthodoxy. Throughout the United States, Evangelical leaders condemned Thomas Paine's (1737-1809) Age of Reason, and tried to counter its influence. The Evangelicals also spoke out against Universalism. However, the greatest issue in this new definition of orthodoxy was the struggle against the Unitarians in eastern Massachusetts.

The ABCFM began in eastern Massachusetts, in the context of a religious "war" between Trinitarians and Unitarians. The founders of the American Board were the "generals" and "captains" in the war for orthodoxy. They also took the lead in advocating the developing Congregational organization in that state. From the vantage point of Boston, the struggle for orthodoxy, the development of missions, and the development of Congregational structures and institutions, were but different campaigns in one great struggle for God. Although the

ABCFM became a national institution, it was always based in Boston, and conditions there had a controlling influence on the policies of the Board.

In 1805 Henry Ware (1764-1845) was elected to the position of professor of theology at Harvard College. The orthodox were convinced from reading Ware's works that he was Unitarian, although he denied it at the time. Joseph S. Clark (1800-1861) later wrote of the election of Ware,

> Like an electric shock on torpid nerves, it energized the whole body of evangelical Christians. It awoke a spirit of religious enterprise which, if it could not restore lost endowments to their intended and original use, could found others on a broader and safer basis.[35]

Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826), pastor in Charlestown, who as a member of the college Board of Overseers had opposed the election of Ware, Samuel Worcester (1770-1821), pastor at Salem, and Leonard Woods, pastor at Newbury, were among the most energized. Both parties understood that the Unitarians were the establishment, "the most conspicuous objects of public respect and confidence."[36]

The orthodox set to work establishing the institutions that would support a counter-culture. These institutions included (1) a periodical to proclaim the orthodox cause, and to keep the orthodox informed; (2) a statewide organization,

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[35] Joseph Sylvester Clark, A Historical Sketch of the Congregational Churches in Massachusetts from 1620 to 1858 (Boston: Congregational Board of Publications, 1858), 236.

[36] Review of Glorying in the Cross, by James Sabine, Christian Disciple, n.s. 1 (1819): 133.

more connectional and confessional than Massachusetts had previously known; (3) an educational institution for preparing clergy.

(1) In June 1805, one month after Henry Ware's installation at Harvard, Morse began the publication of the Panoplist. This was not the first orthodox religious journal in America, but in three months it was the largest, with a circulation of 2,000.[37] (2) A General Association of Massachusetts had been established in 1803, but for several years only three to five of the twenty-four district associations in the state were represented, all from the west. Promoted by the Panoplist,[38] the General Association grew to ten associations by 1810, and more thereafter. (3) Andover Theological Seminary opened on 28 September 1808 for the training of college graduates for the ministry.[39] All three

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37 William Buell Sprague, The Life of Jedidiah Morse (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1874), 70.

38 [Leonard Woods], "Survey of New England Churches," Panoplist 2 (1806-07): 15-17, 167-73, 210-16, 269-74, 313-18, 359-65, 404-12, 503-12; 3 (1807-08): 16-23, 103-12, 251-59, 352-59, 396-402, 547-62. See also [Leonard Woods], "A Survey of the Churches of Massachusetts," Panoplist 1 (1805-06): 541-42; Stephen West, moderator, "The General Association of Massachusetts Proper," Panoplist 3 (1807-08): 88-90; J., pseud., "On the General Association," Panoplist 3 (1807-08): 443-60; David Tappan, "An Address from the Convention of Congregational Ministers in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, to Their Christian Brethren of the Several Associations, and Others Not Associated, Throughout the State [1799]," Panoplist, n.s. 1 [4] (1808-09): 402-05.

39 Andover Seminary was also promoted by the Panoplist. See: [Eliphalet Pearson], "Thoughts on the Importance of a Theological Institution," Panoplist 3 (1807-08): 306-16. See also Leonard Woods, History of the Andover Theological Seminary (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1885), 55; "Outlines of a Theological Institution," Panoplist 3 (1807-08): 345-48.

institutions--the Panoplist, the General Association of Massachusetts, and Andover Seminary--played important roles in the development of America's foreign missions.

Meanwhile, local churches and parishes were dividing between Orthodox Congregationalists and Unitarians. These were often protracted struggles, involving repeated church councils, parish meetings, and court trials with appeals.[40] The courts consistently supported the Unitarian faction. In the period from 1810 to 1840 over one third of the Congregational Churches of Massachusetts were divided. By 1840 the General Association counted 126 "exiled churches"--orthodox churches having to start over from scratch, without any share of the property, furnishings, or invested funds of their former parishes. Many of the most affluent and influential persons had been left behind, but in the cases of the exiled churches alone, 75% of the membership had come out.[41] Joseph S. Clark, secretary of the Massachusetts Domestic Missionary Society, 1839-1857, saw this crisis bringing renewal,

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[40] See J. Clark, Congregational Churches, 244-50; [Jeremiah Evarts], "Review of the Dorchester Controversy," Panoplist 10 (1814): 256-61, 289-307; Review of The Result of an Ecclesiastical Council, Published at Princeton (Mass.), Panoplist 13 (1817): 264-73; Joseph Lyman, moderator, "Result of an Ecclesiastical Council Held at Sandwich, May 20, 1817," Panoplist 13 (1817): 274-79; Samuel M. Worcester, The Life and Labors of Rev. Samuel Worcester, D.D. (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1852), 2:217-20.

[41] J. Clark, Congregational Churches, 273.

> Those struggles for dear life in which churches, scarcely able themselves to stand, were called upon to hold up others actually fainting, gave them incomparably more strength, more power of self-propagation, than all their lost meeting-houses and parish funds together could have done. It accustomed their sympathies to flow outward to the weak, by imposing on them the necessity of bearing one another's burdens. It taught them to GIVE. . . . It is a significant fact, that nearly the whole family of benevolent societies whose birthplace is New England were born in these perilous times, amid the alarms of a war waged in defense of that religious faith which gave them being.[42]

American foreign missions were born, developed, and flourished in the midst of this religious war.

Developing Denominational Life

In the period immediately following the Revolution, and the first half of the nineteenth century, Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, and Congregationalists developed their denominational structures. The interests of the denominations intersected in different ways with the interests of the American Board and other benevolent societies. Ultimately, the missionary movement and its piety was incorporated into the life of the denominations.

Presbyterian. The Presbyterians organized a General Assembly in 1789, and began a period of phenomenal growth. Presbyterians were no longer inhibited by their dissenter status, were leaders in the revivals of the new Awakening, and were moving west. The church grew from a membership of

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[42] Ibid., 270-71.

21,270 in 1808 to 222,580 in 1833. In twenty-five years the church had grown by a factor of eleven!

Tension developed between the "new-school" Presbyterians, many of whom were of New England Yankee origin, and the "old-school" Presbyterians, mostly of Scotch-Irish origin. The old-school objected to the blending of Presbyterian and Congregational identities in the Plan of Union. The old-school wanted a Presbyterian Church more clearly defined doctrinally and ecclesiastically, and carrying out functions that were being done by voluntary societies. They believed that the union of Christians in one church was neither realistic nor desirable. Ashbel Green (1762-1848), editor of the Presbyterian magazine, The Christian Advocate, in an 1826 article explained, "Dissension and discord may best be avoided, and kind feelings toward our fellow Christians may best be preserved and cherished, by the several religious denominations retaining . . . their distinctive character."[43]

Each year when the General Assembly met, the two sides faced-off. At issue was both power and principle. Issues of power were: Who would control the Presbyterian Church? Who would manage the funds that devout

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[43] [Ashbel Green], "How Shall We Maintain Both Truth and Charity?" Christian Advocate 4 (1826): 397. This article is attributed to Ashbel Green on the following basis: An unsigned article, "The Best Method of Conducting Christian Missions," Christian Advocate 7 (1829): 61-68, 123-27, 166-69, 217-21, claimed to have been written by the same hand as the article here quoted. Another article, [Bacon], "Voluntary Associations," 142-47, attributed the second article above to the editor of the Christian Advocate, who was Ashbel Green.

Presbyterians gave to benevolent purposes? The issue of principle was the question of the church. Do we accept the limitations of this fallen world and participate actively in the life of a clearly defined denomination? Or are we moved by millennial expectation to function under the Plan of Union and in some vague "super-church" of voluntary societies without regard for variations in theology and custom?

The Presbyterian Church was paralyzed by this conflict, with one General Assembly often reversing the actions of its predecessor, until the church finally divided in 1837. The old school developed its own church institutions, while the new school continued to cooperate in undenominational endeavors with Congregationalists. Many of the leaders of the old school Presbyterian Church had participated actively in the American Board, and as a result, the domestic activities of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions (BFM) displayed a continuity with American Board practices.

Congregational. Before 1795, Connecticut was the only state in which Congregationalists had county and statewide representative standing organizations. Elsewhere, associations of clergy were informal; when a congregation needed the advice of other churches it would form a council with a few neighboring congregations of its choice.

Beginning in 1795, standing organizations were established by Congregationalists in other states. The state organizations became inter-related

through Plans of Union, with the same format as the 1792 Plan between the General Association of Connecticut and the Presbyterians.[44] With each state organization sending two voting delegates to each other organization, the state Congregational bodies became formally linked without benefit of a national organization.

The early history of the Vermont Convention demonstrated the role of the new voluntary societies in the development of Congregational denominational structure. The Convention Registrar wrote in 1838:

> The number who composed the Convention for ten or fifteen years after its organization, was small, and very few attended who were not members. All the business, except the delivery of one or two public discourses, was usually transacted in the study or the parlor of the minister, whose hospitality they shared. But after the Anniversary of the Domestic Missionary Society, in 1823, was brought into connection with the meeting of the Convention, and especially after other Anniversaries were still added, the meeting . . . became numerously attended both by males and females; was of thrilling interest; and might well be denominated the religious festival of the State.[45]

All of the new state Congregational bodies faced opposition from many, who feared infringement on their congregational autonomy. However, the state organization generated voluntary societies and became the center around which

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[44] The General Association of Connecticut adopted Plans of Union with Congregationalists in Vermont (1802), Massachusetts (1809), New Hampshire (1810), Rhode Island (1821), Maine (1828), and New York (1835). See Chapin, "General Association of Connecticut," 29-35; General Association of Connecticut, Minutes, 1809, CEMRI 2 (1809): 276.

[45] Thomas A. Merrill, "History of the General Convention of Congregational and Presbyterian Ministers in Vermont," AQR 11 (1838-39): 41.

they coalesced. The voluntary societies gave the state organization a reason for being, widespread popularity, and a strong missionary flavor. The emphasis on inspiration, rather than business, opened the meetings to a large attendance, including women. While the American Board did not have state-wide organization in New England, it did take an active part in the meetings of the state Congregational bodies.

Reformed. In the late eighteenth century, the Reformed Dutch Church in America experienced tension between its ethnicity and its American-ness. This was expressed in three different ways. (1) Congregations were more frequently using English, rather than Dutch in worship, but this change was resisted. (2) Some strongly embraced the Great Awakening, to which Theodorus J. Frelinghuysen had given leadership, while others "valued orthodoxy more than experimental religion."[46] (3) Some wanted greater autonomy from the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, but others opposed.

In 1771, John H. Livingston (1746-1825) was ordained. Son of an influential Reformed family, sympathetic to the Awakening, and educated in the Netherlands, Livingston healed the wounds of his church, and led it into a vigorous life in a free country. The Reformed Dutch Church participated in the

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[46] David D. Demarest, History and Characteristics of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 2d ed. (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1856), 90.

Second Great Awakening and in its voluntary societies. At the same time, this church was developing its own structures and institutions. It searched for ways to be involved in missions, as a denomination, in cooperation with others.

Missionary Piety and Denominationalism

Foreign missions was a unifying cause for a group of churches--Congregational, Presbyterian, and Reformed--sharing a common theology. In the minds of its promoters, the holy cause of missions lifted the church above trivial disputes over doctrine and polity. Those petty squabbles made the church the target of ridicule from the non-religious. The promoters of the ABCFM considered this a justifiable ridicule. By contrast, the unity of Christians in the disinterested benevolence of missions caused the critics of Christianity to re-examine their criticisms and their assumptions. Foreign missions also drew attention to the central doctrines of Christianity that were worth fighting for.

While the cause of foreign missions was believed to nourish the piety of the church, fighting over details of doctrine or polity was believed to have a harmful effect on the piety of the church. The promoters of the ABCFM believed that emphasis on denominational loyalty diminished the church member's basic loyalty--loyalty to Jesus Christ.

The expectation was that as the millennial kingdom approached, denominational distinctions would melt away. Societies like the ABCFM were

organizations of the new and coming kingdom. But denominational distinctions didn't fade away--they hardened.

Yet the ABCFM was the agent of the churches, carrying out the wishes of its constituency in foreign missions. When the churches wanted to carry out missions in a more denominational way, the Board complied. The ABCFM worked with and through the churches at every level of organization. Each of the cooperating denominations--Congregational, Presbyterian, and Reformed--in its own way, incorporated the missionary piety into its denominational life.