Chapter 22

RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, and ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies. The Lord will make our name a praise and glory, so that men shall say of succeeding plantations: "The Lord make it like that of New England." For we must consider that we shall be like a City upon a Hill; the eyes of all people are on us.

JOHN WINTHROP

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

U.S. CONSTITUTION, FIRST AMENDMENT

If there is no Hell, a good many preachers are obtaining money under false pretenses.

WILLIAM A. ("BILLY") SUNDAY

AMERICA'S CONTRIBUTION to the technology of the modern world is never questioned. The facts are there, and they cannot be denied. America is also a model of what the economy of abundance may be — or could be — in the future. Here too the facts are undeniable. But has this country made a significant contribution to the spiritual life of the world — or at least of the Western world, in which it otherwise plays such an important part? The majority of those who have written about religion in America would probably answer yes to the question, although a minority — an eloquent one — would say no.

On the political side, the United States was the first country in the Western world to make an effective separation between church and state — effective in that it allowed and perhaps even inspired both realms to act with vigor and force. Similarly, it was the first country in the Western world to write into its basic law the principle of religious toleration, and then to implement that law in practice. One result has been the astounding diversity of religious

experience and worship: a new sect seems to be born every day, and this is not only a phenomenon of our own time, nor has it been confined to Southern California. Another result has been that Americans have learned to appreciate the religious beliefs, and the religious scruples, of others — of their neighbors and of peoples in other lands — in a perhaps unique way. On the whole, America is a deeply religious nation, as the following pages make clear; but, also on the whole, it does not persecute other peoples or nations because they are not or because they are religious in a different way.

On the purely religious side, America has also made contributions. Revivalism is discussed in a later section of this chapter; it is not a phenomenon confined to this country, but here it developed, especially in the nineteenth century, into a type of religious experience of remarkable richness and, sometimes, beauty. More important, perhaps, is the rise of two or three Christian sects that in the twentieth century have gained adherents all over the world. Christian Science is the leading example; it is a prominent instance of a wider current of faith healing in modern religious life, not unrelated to pastoral psychology, and having its roots in the transcendentalism to which Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy's Boston was devoted a generation or so before she founded her new religion. The Jehovah's Witnesses are another important indigenous religion, claiming hundreds of thousands of adherents in the United States, Europe, and (notably) Africa, and practising a down-to-earth integration of the races that is a model for other churches. The Mormons, or the Church of the Latter-day Saints, is another sect that, although lacking worldwide influence, has played an important role in our own country's history, especially, of course, in the state of Utah. Bahai might also be mentioned; it is already powerful and appears to be growing. And there are others as well.

America has also had its distinguished theologians, even if — as must be admitted — the country's habit has been practical rather than speculative, so that it cannot be claimed that America is one of the great contributors to this kind of religious thought and experience. But Josiah Royce and William James, to mention no others, were influential figures around the turn of the century even in Europe; James's book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is one of the most readable on the subject ever written. And no history of religion in America would be complete without respectful mention of Jonathan Edwards, who possessed one of the most powerful and searching intellects of the eighteenth century (and not only in America), and who devoted his last years to an attempt to resolve some of the age-old theological problems that still trouble his descendants. Edwards is now mainly known as the author of a handful of "hell-raising" sermons, but he was much more than that.

Finally, America has seen the development within the last century or so of a great new development of the Catholic Church; one that, it may be, prefigures the history of this venerable institution in the next century or two. Roman Catholics are now and have been for a long time the largest religious denomination in the country, and their influence in every walk of American life — from mores to politics, from education to art — is known and felt by everyone. Furthermore, the Catholic Church in America was severely criticized at the turn of the century for its "Americanizing" tendencies — for its impulse to adapt itself to the special circumstances in which it found itself on this side of the water. That was all very well for 1900, but now, with Vatican II, this impulse toward adaptation and away from rigid uniformity has been adopted by the entire church, mainly under the impetus of Pope John XXIII, who might almost (it has been said) have been an American himself.

The history of the Catholic Church in

America is a history not only of successful development but also of persecution, and the reader will find a much fuller discussion of the subject in Chapter 12: MINORITIES. The same may be said of Judaism, which is also not extensively treated in the following pages. The story of religion *in America* is first and foremost — though not exclusively — an account of the career of the post-Reformation, Western European faiths in the brand-new, challenging conditions of the New World. It is this story that the following sections attempt to tell.

1. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF RELIGION IN AMERICA

THE EUROPEAN CONTRIBUTION did not cease when the American colonies achieved a "separate and equal station" and became the United States of America. American religion continued to be significantly influenced by British and continental European tendencies, from the days of pietistic revivalism down to the time of the neo-orthodox and ecumenical movements. Even the major secular challenges to traditional religion throughout American history were mainly of European origin: the rationalism of the Enlightenment, Darwinian naturalism, and modern atheistic humanism.

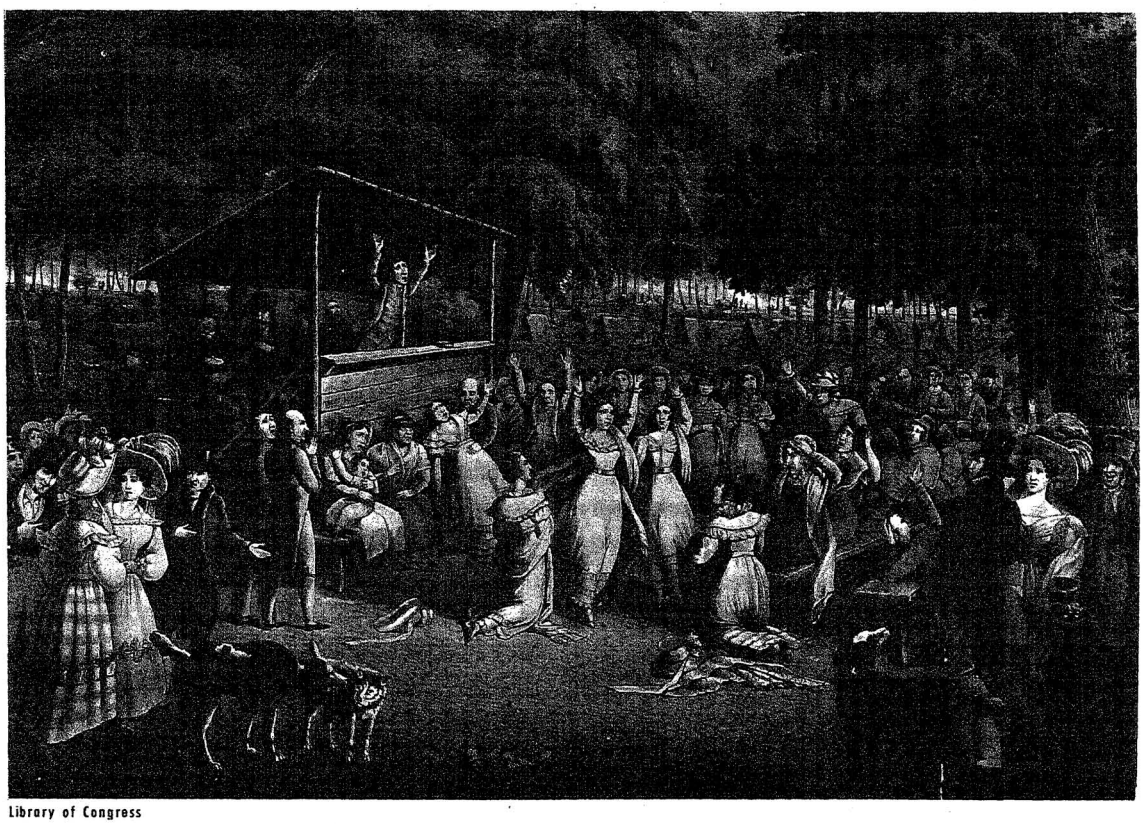
European religion, however, assumed special characteristics in the new physical and social setting of American life. Usually the traits were not entirely new and were already present to some degree in Europe. But under American conditions they were intensified, became more central, and marked a whole new religious development.

Take, for instance, the extraordinary diversity of the religious faiths. At first, this merely duplicated the diversity of churches and sects in the British Isles, to which was soon added the multiplicity of continental European confessions. But in Europe, religious uniformity was the assumed traditional norm, and deviation from the prevailing religion of a nation usually entailed social and political deprivations. In America, on the contrary, the ideal of uniformity soon proved impractical, pluralism became the recognized way in religion, and the unique solution of separation of church and state emerged. What in Europe was an abnormality — tolerated or not — became in America the accepted norm.

Another salient trait of American religion was its lay or popular character. Once more this had precedents, especially among British dissenting groups. But in this country, the general tendency was toward lay control or a weighty lay voice in church government, even among traditional hierarchical organizations. (Note, for example, the vestry in Anglican churches and the lay trustees among Catholics.) The wide-open spaces and independent-mindedness that characterized American parishes did not encourage European-style parochial or episcopal direction.

American religion was also lay-oriented in the manner and substance of its preaching and practice, as demonstrated by the striking success of evangelical revivals in various eras. Revivalism, of course, was nothing new in the Western world (it went back to the medieval friars), and its development here paralleled the pietistic revivals going on in Europe and England at the same time. But in America the open, pluralistic pattern of religion, unsupported by state authorities, together with the frontier situation, encouraged the evangelical approach, and became a central characteristic in the nineteenth century.

All these conditions and circumstances encouraged another salient trait of American religion — its activist, pragmatic temper. The American clergyman usually had no captive congregation, constituted by the mere fact of birth and residence, and submissive to long-standing, unquestioned tradition. In the raw new communities of the frontier, and in the more settled places, too, he had to go out and attract his potential



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"Camp Meeting"; lithograph by H. Bridport after Rider, about 1840

congregants in a free and equal competition with spokesmen for other modes of faith. For success in this enterprise, he had to give up the traditional, conventional formalities — "to quit reading his old manuscript sermons," as Peter Cartwright counseled — and address the minds and hearts of the people in new ways.

The consequence was that Americans tended to judge religion by its results — its success in attracting members, providing saving emotional experiences, engaging in social reform activities, and the like. Religion became more a way of doing and acting than of believing. In this it paralleled the essential development of religion in other times and places, but with the American activism went a marked anti-intellectual animus. Feeling was glorified over reflection, theology was neglected or scorned, and at times an unlearned ministry was considered superior to a learned one.

Another marked characteristic — the other side of its diversity and competitiveness — was the remarkable spirit of cooperation and brotherhood among the religions and denominations. From the earliest era of the republic, foreign observers were struck — with abhorrence or approbation — by the friendly coexistence of widely varying faiths. Helping one another to build meetinghouses, temporary sharing of the same place of worship, the exchange of pulpits on occasion, and a general human warmth toward neighbors of other ways and beliefs were the sort of thing noted by many writers. As against this, however, there were also moods and movements of intolerance — toward Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and others who did not fit in with the predominant White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant pattern.

Religion has pervaded all aspects of American culture and largely determined its basic political, moral, and social views. It fostered and established the educational institutions out of which the later secular culture evolved. Its book — the Bible, especially the King James version — has had an enduring effect on the American mind, culture, and literature, and tens of millions of "100 percent Americans" have attested its influence in the Anglicized versions of He-

brew first names. (After World War I, however, its influence decreased, and Americans became increasingly unfamiliar with its text and teachings in the cultural milieu of a secular age.)

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"The circuit preacher"; in "Harper's," 1867

2. PERVASIVENESS: A RELIGIOUS PEOPLE

THE CENTRAL AND PERVASIVE ROLE of religion in the three centuries of American history is not seriously disputed. Most observers have remarked on the strikingly greater religiousness exhibited by Americans in comparison with their European contemporaries in various eras. "There is no country in the world," Alexis de Tocqueville asserted in the 1830s, "where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America." Similarly, in 1855, the German-Swiss theologian Philip Schaff estimated that there were in America "more awakened souls, and more individual effort and self-sacrifice for religious purposes, proportionally, than in any other country in the world, Scotland alone perhaps excepted."

The remarkable church attendance of Americans in comparison with Europeans was noted by many observers. "Churches and chapels are legion," lamented the German agnostic Karl T. Griesinger in the 1850s, "and nowhere are they more heavily frequented than in this land of tolerance and freedom. . . . [Church] attendance is more common here than anywhere else in the world." These observations were confirmed by the Presbyterian minister Robert Baird, who lived in Europe from 1835 to 1843 and wrote a pioneer work on religion in America. "In no other part of the world, perhaps," Baird found, "do the inhabitants attend church in a larger proportion than in the United States; certainly no part of the Continent of Europe can compare with them in that respect."

Religion in this country reached its low point — in both adherence and membership — during the period immediately after the Revolution. "In the religious ebb tide of the immediate postwar years," wrote church historian Winthrop Hudson, "it was by no means obvious that the churches would be able to survive." Religion apparently reached its high point in the period after World War II, when church membership in the United States was approximately double what it had been in the 1920s — at a time when church adherence had dwindled to a tiny remnant in many European countries.

Many churchmen and theologians regarded the so-called religious revival of the post-World War II era as more apparent than real — a matter of social fellowship rather than religious commitment, of conformity rather than faith, of shallow religiosity rather than serious religion. Many secular sociologists and historians agreed with this interpretation. However, sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset, after a comparative study of statistics in various eras, concluded in 1963 that Americans were then, just as they always had been, save for the early uncertain

years of the republic, a deeply religious people.

The strong and sometimes violent antireligious movements that have marked the history of modern Europe have been notably absent in the United States. Yet the European rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was an important force in shaping the American mind and character. Many leading Americans in the eighteenth century, influenced by John Locke and similar thinkers, substituted a natural religion of reason for the revealed doctrines of traditional Christianity. While some stayed formally within the bounds of Christianity, others approached or embraced a noninstitutional Deism — a philosophical faith based on universal reason and morality.

Deism asserted — on the basis of reason alone — that God exists, that His worship consists in a life of virtue and repentance, and that man will be rewarded or punished for his deeds in a future life. However, it denied traditional Christian teachings about Jesus, original sin, vicarious redemption, and special Biblical revelation.

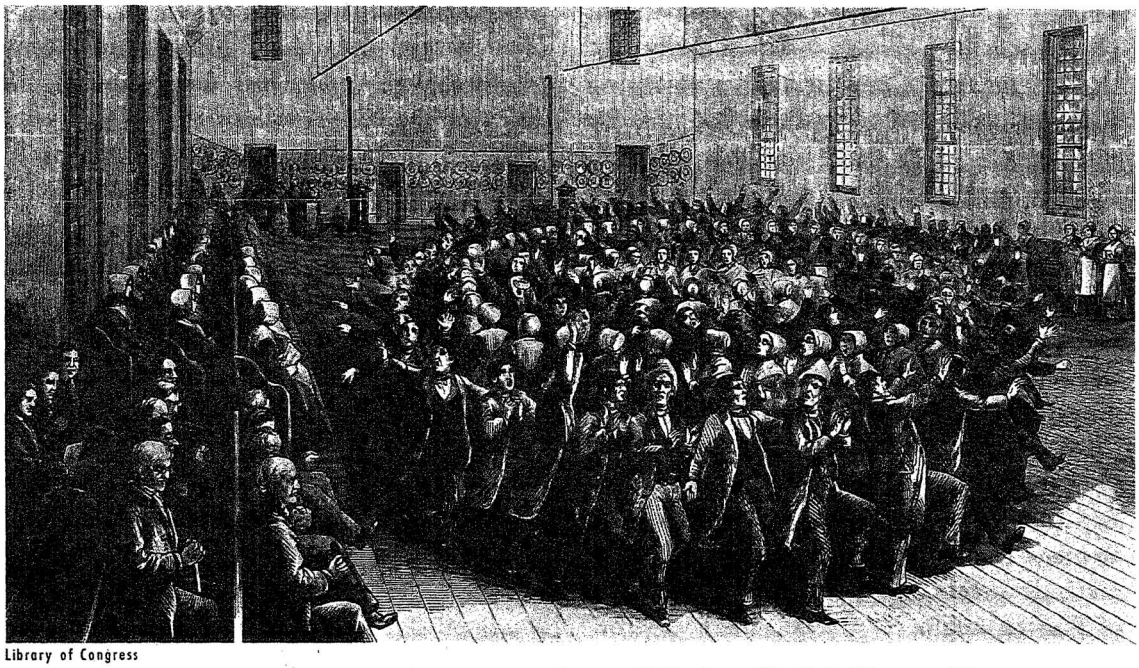
The religious radicals included major heroes of the founding stages of the republic, such as Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. The latter went as far as to produce a revised version of the New Testament deleting all references to miracles and making Jesus out to be nothing more than an extraordinary man and a powerful moral teacher. One of the embarrassing problems for the early nineteenth-century champions of the Christian faith was that not one of the first six Presidents of the United States was an orthodox Christian.

Radical Deism, with its direct attack on Christian doctrine and practices, did not long survive the eighteenth century, but religious rationalism — both in its moderate and radical aspects — had important spiritual heirs and left lasting legacies. William Ellery Channing's Unitarianism, the more radical Transcendentalism of Theodore Parker and Emerson, Horace Bushnell's Liberal Christianity, and John Dewey's religious humanism were among the rationalists' lineal successors. Among their legacies — shared paradoxically with their opponents, the pietists — were religious toleration, separation of church and state, and the idea that man is not born sinful, but capable of either good or evil. [For a different treatment of some of the matters discussed in this section, see Ch. 1: National Character.]

3. DIVERSITY AND SIMILARITY: A PROTESTANT HOUSE

Philip Schaff, observing the American religious scene in the middle of the nineteenth century, declared that "all Christian denominations and sects, except the Oriental, have settled in the United States," presenting "a motley sampler of all church history." Had he returned a century later he would have found "Oriental" (Eastern Christian) sects, too, and a good many sects, both Christian and non-Christian, imported from Europe and Asia or hatched in the hospitable haven of the United States, especially in Southern California. Some 250 Protestant sects were listed in a census report in the 1950s, in addition to the larger Protestant denominations, and the Roman Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and other faiths.

Almost all commentators dwelt on this remarkable multiplicity of religions, and most viewed its source as lying in the influx of immigrants with varying backgrounds and beliefs, but few recognized as acutely as Schaff the basic similarity and common ancestry of the vast majority of the diverse groups. Whereas in Europe, he noted, religion was rooted in medieval Catholicism, in America "everything had a Protestant beginning, and the Catholic Church has come



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Religious exercises in a Shaker meetinghouse, New Lebanon, N.Y.; from "Leslie's Illustrated," 1873

in afterwards as one sect among the others and has always remained subordinate. . . . [America's] past course and present condition are unquestionably due mainly to the influence of Protestant principles."

The United States was originally settled by people with a specifically British (largely English or Scottish) type of Protestant faith; this predominance continued during the westward expansion of the nation; and the original cast of mind had a permanent effect on the American mind, character, and institutions. "The civilization of the United States is essentially Protestant," the French observer André Siegfried declared in the 1920s.

The house of American religion was originally a Protestant house — leaving aside the early French and Spanish settlements — and the other, older faiths, Judaism and Roman Catholicism, dwelt within that house. They were undoubtedly affected by the prevailing Protestant tone and ways, although they sometimes felt sheepish, under the criticism of their European coreligionists, for becoming too assimilated to American Protestant culture. This situation gradually changed under the impact of the streams of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, as well as from Ireland. By World War II, Catholicism and Judaism had become recognized as equal religious communities, along with previously dominant Protestantism, and there were mutual influences among the three main branches.

Winthrop S. Hudson has termed the period after 1914 the "post-Protestant era" of American history, when "Protestantism had ceased to enjoy its old predominance and near monopoly in the religious life of the nation." Yet "a distinctly Protestant ethos" had been the central religious influence on American life and culture for 300 years. The story of religion in America must largely be concerned with this ethos, which consisted in an emphasis on lay decision and action, personal experience and commitment, and deeds and works in secular pursuits — as opposed to the hierarchical ecclesiastical, and at the same time otherworldly emphasis of traditional Roman Catholic Christianity.

The majority of churchgoers at the time of the Revolution adhered to the "Reformed" (or Calvinist) type of Protestantism, which had broken more radically with the traditional Catholic order of church government and liturgy than had the Lutheran type. In England, the exponents of a more radical reform or "purification" of the Church of England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were called "Puritans." Their opponents, called "Anglicans" or "Episcopalians," controlled the church, and the Puritans were labeled "Dissenters." The main dissenting denominations, which originally considered themselves integral parts of the Church of England, later became known as Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists (after their type of church government or practices). The Quakers too were of Puritan origin.

Thus, despite differences in some respects, the leading non-Anglican denominations at the time of the Revolution had a common religious tradition — Puritan Calvinism. Moreover, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists had assented, in one form or another, to a common credo: the Westminster Confession of faith of 1643, which, Schaff said, was "the reigning theology of the country." The Anglicans, too, despite their differences with the Puritans on liturgy and episcopal rule, were Reformed or Calvinist in their basic theological doctrines, and had a "low church" Puritan attitude in Virginia — their central seat in the American colonies. Even the Methodists, despite their later rejection of Calvin's doctrine of predestination, were originally Puritan Calvinists of the evangelical type.

These groups, with a common origin, set the tone for the development of religion down to the twentieth century. By 1850 the Methodists and Baptists had become the most popular Protestant denominations, supplanting the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, and the Disciples of Christ had emerged as a new denomination. By 1960, however, the other, more "Catholic" type of Protestantism, Lutheranism — of continental European, not British, origin — had forged into third place. And Roman Catholicism, which had only about 1 percent of the congregations in 1775, was the largest single religious denomination by 1850, and continued to hold a growing lead thereafter. Judaism, which had only an infinitesimal representation in 1775, still had only a minute percentage of religious adherents by mid-twentieth century, but it played a cultural and religious role far out of proportion to its numbers. [For a further discussion of the development of Roman Catholicism and Judaism, see Ch. 12: MINORITIES; and for treatment of other points raised in this section, see Ch. 10: PLURALISM.]

4. TOLERATION AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

THE TRADITIONAL PATTERN for dealing with religious diversity in Europe was to suppress it. The religious ground for such action was that there was but one true faith, so deviation was error and sin; the political, that a diversity of faith would subvert political unity and order. This was the standard position in Anglican England and Calvinist Geneva, as well as in Catholic France and Spain. Such toleration as was granted in more recent times was usually quite limited — extending to mere residence or the right to public worship, but often with a denial of political rights. The English Act of Toleration of 1689, for example, which is regarded as one of the landmarks in the struggle for religious liberty, specifically denied full citizenship rights to Protestant dissenters, Catholics, Jews, and Unitarians.

Opposition to the suppression of religious diversity by the state arose from the so-called left-wing Protestant sects and from some secular thinkers. These critics argued that it was blasphemous or illegitimate for the state to interfere in the relationship be-

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"The Propagation Society — More Free than Welcome"; by Peter Smith, 1855

tween man and God, and that such interference led to civil discord and disunity. John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) was a famous and influential expression of this attitude from a political philosopher (though it was still marked by an animus against Catholics, Jews, and atheists). Religion for Locke, as for the sectarians, was a purely voluntary matter, with which the state could and should have no concern.

The early settlers of New England, Virginia, and most of the other colonies espoused the standard European pattern of religious uniformity and suppression of dissent. The Puritans too (save for a small group of "Separatists") believed that there was only one true church, whose principles should regulate the life of the whole community, and that dissent could not be tolerated. They believed this in spite of their persecution by the established Church of England, in spite of their belief that each congregation was an autonomous church, in spite of their principle that a personal experience of regeneration was necessary for church membership.

Outweighing all these deeply held beliefs was their central aspiration to build a Biblical Commonwealth on the model of the ancient Israelite theocracy, in which religious norms and scriptural rules would govern the whole life of the people. Hence, religious offenses in Massachusetts Bay were punishable by the civil authorities, and what were usually considered civil offenses could lead to excommunication in an integral secular-religious society. Church officials and civil magistrates were arms of one and the same community. The Puritans saw themselves as a holy people in a covenant relation with God, commissioned to serve His glory and to do His will.

Obviously, a community based on this view of civil and religious authority could not consistently permit dissent. That, at least, was the opinion of Governor John

Winthrop, who in 1637 maintained the right of the community to deny residence to persons with religious opinions that might "disturb and hinder the publick weale" by causing divisions and suspicions about the authorities among the people, besides being "sinne and unfaithfulness."

This was also the attitude of Nathaniel Ward, himself a refugee from religious persecution in England, who maintained in 1647 that to tolerate "false religions or opinions" was an indication of a lack of sincere faith. "I dare aver," he declared, "that God doth nowhere in His word tolerate Christian states, to give tolerations to such adversaries of His truth, if they have power in their hands to suppress them." As for liberty for religious dissenters in New England, he proclaimed "that all Familists, Antinomians, Anabaptists, and other Enthusiasts shall have free liberty to keep away from us, and such as will come to be gone as fast as they can, the sooner the better."

The scholarly John Cotton approached the question with less directness of language, but he came out with the same result as Ward. Cotton was all for liberty of conscience, provided it was "rightly informed" by the proper authorities, at least "once or twice. . . . And then if any one persist, it is not out of conscience, but against his conscience. . . . So that if such a man, after such admonition, shall still persist in the error of his way, and be therefore punished, he is not persecuted for cause of conscience, but for sinning against his own conscience."

The most important opposition to Cotton and the other spokesmen for the Puritan theocracy came from Roger Williams, who suffered in his own person the penalty of banishment for his religious opinions. He declared in 1644, against "the bloudy tenet of persecution for cause of conscience," that the civil and religious realms are completely separate, and that persecution for religious beliefs is contrary to the teachings of Christ.

"All civil states with their officers of justice in their respective constitutions and administrations are proved essentially civil," Williams maintained, "and therefore not judges, governors, or defenders of the spiritual or Christian state and worship. . . . God requireth not a uniformity of religion to be enacted and enforced in any civil state; which enforced uniformity (sooner or later) is the greatest occasion of civil war, ravishing of conscience, persecution of Christ Jesus in his servants, and of the hypocrisy and destruction of millions of souls. . . . An enforced uniformity of religion throughout a nation or civil state confounds the civil and religious, denies the principles of Christianity and civility, and that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh."

Williams argued for religious liberty on both religious and political grounds. He adhered to the orthodox Protestant beliefs in divine predestination and justification by faith, and he concluded that any interference by human authorities was wrong. He also argued that only toleration or religious diversity could maintain civil peace, order, and unity. For both reasons — "true civility and Christianity" — he went far beyond most religious libertarians in his time and argued that God commanded that "a permission of the most paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or anti-Christian consciences and worships be granted to all men in all nations," with only "the sword of God's Spirit" to be used to convert them.

The magistrates of the Puritan theocracy, as we have seen, reached a different conclusion regarding the requirements of the Reformed faith and civil unity and therefore expelled Roger Williams from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He founded a new colony in the wilderness — Providence Plantation (later Rhode Island) — as a haven for religious dissenters and radicals, with civil rights for persons of all religious views.

Williams' famous action and his writings

have often been misinterpreted by modern writers. It is true enough that the new colony tolerated dissenters of all sorts, but this was not because, as it might be for a modern secularist, Williams thought a man's religion of small importance. On the contrary, Williams wanted to separate church and state because he feared that the state would corrupt the church. When compared with Jefferson's program, for example, Williams' looks the same, and in fact it had much the same result; but Jefferson's main motive was just the opposite fear from Williams', namely, that the state would be, or might be, corrupted by the church.

Another demonstration of religious liberty was provided by Maryland, founded by the Roman Catholic Calvert (Lord Baltimore) family in 1632. It was the first colony to grant religious freedom to all Christians and was remarkable anywhere in the world at that time for fostering mutual toleration between Catholics and Protestants. However, its Toleration Act of 1649 prescribed death and confiscation of property for those who denied the Trinity and other Christian doctrines, and lesser penalties for other religious offenses, including Sabbath-breaking.

Pennsylvania, founded in 1681 by the Quaker William Penn as a "Holy Experiment," guaranteed freedom to men of all religious views. "We must give the liberty we ask," Penn insisted, speaking for a cruelly persecuted minority that held that true faith must be voluntary. "We cannot be false to our principles. We would have none to suffer for dissent on any hand."

Apart from the stands of those who espoused freedom of conscience or principle, practical economic and political necessities demanded a relaxation of the pattern of uniformity that originally prevailed in almost all the colonies. Peter Stuyvesant was admonished by New Netherland's directors in 1663 for conniving to allow "sectarians" freedom of worship, in violation of the colony's charter, "except you intend to check and destroy your population." Other colonial boards of directors and proprietors were aware of the economic advantages of religious freedom. "A free exercise of religion," the Lords of Trade told the Virginia Council, ". . . is essential to enriching and improving a trading nation; it should ever be held sacred in His Majesty's colonies." The presence of vast empty lands in the New World also made it impossible to fence in dissenters and encouraged a drain of enterprising, productive settlers, as well as the establishment of such contagious centers of dissent as Rhode Island.

It was also practically necessary for the various religious faiths to have some form of toleration guaranteed throughout the colonies, since a church that was established in one place might be a dissenting and even persecuted denomination in another. The Anglican Church, for example, which was established throughout the South, was unable to get a place of worship in Massachusetts Bay until 1687, when the royal governor forcibly took over the Old South Meetinghouse in Boston.

One possible solution was to adopt what Ezra Stiles in 1761 called "the happy policy of establishing one sect without infringing the essential right of others," thus fostering "the friendly cohabitation of all." He had in mind the new liberalized system in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire, where the Congregationalist Church was established, but non-Congregationalists were permitted to assign their religious taxes to their own churches. Another was to have the state levy "a general and equal tax for the support of the Christian religion," leaving to the individual the determination as to which church or minister should receive his tax money, as Maryland provided in 1776.

It was in Virginia, the stronghold of Anglican ecclesiastical power, that the decisive conflict for religious liberty took place. Its results set the pattern for the future Ameri-

can solution of church-state relations.

In 1784 the Anglican Church in Virginia, which had been disestablished, tried to regain state support under a "general assessment" for all Christian churches impartially through "a bill establishing a provision for teachers of the Christian religion." Eminent Virginians including Washington and Patrick Henry supported the measure as a convenient solution, and they were joined by some non-Anglican clergymen who welcomed state support. But most of the dissenting groups (notably the Baptists), as well as many lay Anglicans, joined with Jefferson and Madison in successfully opposing the bill on the grounds that it set up a multiple establishment of Christian churches by the state.

Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance" against the bill — a classic document in the perennial American church-state debate — asserted that any state support of religion was illegitimate and inexpedient. The free exercise of religion is an inalienable natural right, he argued, preceding all civil duties, and hence the state has no jurisdiction whatsoever in religious affairs. Extending state support generally to all Christian churches, he maintained, is just as much a violation of basic human rights and liberties as supporting only one church. "Who does not see," Madison asked, "that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians in exclusion of all other sects?"

Final victory for this position in Virginia came in 1786 with the passage of Jefferson's "Act for Establishing Religious Freedom," which declared that the state could lay no tax for religious purposes and that a man's religious beliefs could not be made a condition for holding public office.

The Constitution of the United States, drafted the following year, echoed the Virginia prohibition. "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States," Article VI concludes. It was to this basic provision that John F. Kennedy appealed in 1960 when the question of his adherence to the Roman Catholic faith was raised.

A positive guarantee of religious liberty and nonestablishment was later included in the Bill of Rights. The first phrase of the First Amendment declares that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

The meaning of these words in specific instances was to be the subject of differing opinions for the next two centuries. But it was soon obvious, as Madison had acutely foreseen when he decried "fifteen centuries [of] the legal establishment of Christianity," that a momentous transformation had occurred in the age-old pattern of church-state relations — a transformation from coercive uniformity to voluntary pluralism. The new nation had overturned a system that had endured for 1,500 years, and in so doing had gone far beyond the most advanced European thought of the time. This radical reversal, church historian Winfred E. Garrison declared in 1948, was comparable only to "the change of the church in the fourth century, from a voluntary society" to an integral coercive church-state.

The Constitution provided the ideal juridical basis, Catholic scholar John Courtney Murray said in 1951, for the proper exercise of religion in a modern free society since it safeguarded the spiritual dignity and freedom of individual persons and at the same time maintained the transcendent value of the religious sphere against external state control and interference. According to a later statement by Father Murray, in 1966, it was this antitraditional American position that was the basis of the Second Vatican Council's declaration on religious freedom, and that carried the day against the attempt

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"Church and State — no union upon any terms"; cartoon by Thomas Nast for "Harper's Weekly"

of some conservative churchmen to retain restrictive powers in a Catholic-controlled state. The American way of church-state relations, in Father Murray's eyes, was both more rational and more Christian than the traditional Old World way. [For further discussion of some of the matters treated in this section, see Ch. 3: CONSTITUTIONALISM.]

5. REVIVALISM: THE VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLE IN ACTION

THE SEPARATION OF church and state presented the American churches with a challenge as well as an opportunity. It came at a time when religion was at an all-time low, both in appeal and in adherents. The voluntary principle of the new system was severely tested from the beginning, for the churches had to go out and literally find their freely "gathered" members. They were thrown completely on their own resources and had to rely on their own efforts and appeals to attract and retain members and to support themselves. Furthermore, this challenge was presented in the unique geographical-social setting of ever receding frontier regions, with their masses of unchurched people, as well as in the more settled areas.

Revivalism provided the means to meet this challenge and the momentum for the Great Century of the expansion of Christianity in the United States, resulting in the greatest mass conversion in the history of the church. Revivalism had served this function once before in American religious history, when the Great Awakening (*c.* 1725-1750) countered the decline of Puritan piety in the early eighteenth century. It had then made Protestant Christianity more of a religion for the common, unlearned man, and had tended to ignore or overlap denominational bounds. It also had aroused the intense opposition of more conventional churchmen, who feared that the new evangelists would abolish the rational element in religion and do away with the need for a learned clergy.

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Camp meeting at Eastham, Mass.; from "Gleason's Pictorial," 1852

The Second Great Awakening began at about the same time as the new republic and lasted through the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It revived the weak and depleted orthodox churches of New England and spread like wildfire in the new frontier regions.

Its basic purpose in various eras was to "revive" the faith of past "professors" or to "awaken" the religious concern of the previously unconcerned: to call for a "return" or a "turning" to God. Usually this took the form of arousing a deep sense of personal sin and of separation from God and of holding out the possibility or even the certainty of divine forgiveness and salvation — "reconciliation." The rhetorical methods of accomplishing this went all the way from the systematically marshaled and carefully reasoned sermons of a Jonathan Edwards to the shouting, emotional, hell-fire preaching of a frontier camp meeting.

The Puritan churches had an evangelical tradition of requiring "regeneration" experiences in their members and of preaching to arouse "conviction" of sin. But by the time the First Awakening broke out, their religious life had become more conventional and decorous and their requirements more external. It was a "time of extraordinary dullness in religion," Jonathan Edwards observed, and he himself was dismissed from his pulpit for insisting on the old requirement of a personal "experience" for church membership.

But traditional churchmen, and liberals too, opposed the revivals, not merely because their bureaucratic "dullness" was threatened or because they were angry at the tactless and often unfair attacks of the revivalists on "an unconverted ministry." They also opposed them on the grounds that revivalists placed the central and even sole stress on emotional "experiences" without regard to traditional doctrines, polity, and practices. They centered their denuncia-

tion especially on the bizarre behavior that often marked these experiences and on the type of preaching that aroused it. All this went under the name of "enthusiasm," and all traditionalists were against it.

Jonathan Edwards, himself a great revivalist, observed that, during the revival initiated by George Whitefield in Northhampton in 1740, "it was a very frequent thing to see a houseful of outcries, faintings, convulsions, and suchlike, both with distress and also with admiration and joy." Such "affections," he noted, would spread like an epidemic to others in the town.

Much more extreme responses were observed by witnesses of the great camp-meeting revivals after 1800 on the Kentucky frontier. James B. Finley graphically described the emotional "summons" of the preacher and the disturbed, frenzied responses of the audience — tremors, shrieks, and falls, with the cessation of "breathing, pulsation, and all signs of life . . . for hours." He also recorded even more extreme actions: "the humiliating and often disgusting exercises of dancing, laughing, jerking, barking like dogs, or howling like wolves, and rolling on the ground." Peter Cartwright, one of the great circuit-rider preachers on the Kentucky-Tennessee frontier, described what he called "the jerks." Men and women, whether saints or sinners, would be "seized with a convulsive jerking all over," which they could not stop save with earnest prayer.

It was such goings-on that aroused the opposition of respectable churchmen. Charles Chauncy wrote a scathing denunciation of the methods and effects of revivalists such as Whitefield during the First Awakening. They aroused, he said, "a spirit of superstition and enthusiasm . . . gross disorders and barefaced affronts to common decency, with no evident increase in moral holiness." The "enthusiasm" evoked by the revivalists, he maintained, was "an *imaginary,* not a *real* inspiration," and was attended by "freakish or furious" physical effects — and a complete imperviousness to rational argument.

An official note of disapproval of the wild activities during the Second Awakening came from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1805. "God is a God of order," it was asserted, "and not of confusion, and whatever tends to destroy the comely order of His worship is not from Him."

Moreover, many of the great revivalists themselves had made a critical distinction between the essence or substance of conversion and its accompanying external marks — genuine or not. Jonathan Edwards, a formidable arouser and analyst of religious feelings, criticized his parishioners for taking outward manifestations — "raptures and violent emotions of the affections, and a vehement zeal" — for the substance of conversion. "It is not the *degree* of religious affections," he noted, "but the *nature* of them that is chiefly to be looked at." He also pointed to a change in disposition and conduct as a criterion of whether the "affections" exhibited were truly conversionary or not.

It was Timothy Dwight's belief that deep emotional disturbance is the natural accompaniment of a conversionary experience. In like manner, Finley was convinced that the bizarre behavior he had witnessed was not merely "a nervous affection" or "enthusiasm and delusion" but the sign of God's regenerating power. "This great work of God did do it," he declared. However, Cartwright viewed emotional disturbances as a mere means sent by God to bring sinners to repentance, not as necessary for conversion, since "God could work with or without means."

In a remarkably short time, revivalism became an accepted and even respectable part of the American religious scene, and con-

ventional church leaders abandoned their opposition to it. The career of Charles G. Finney, who made central and western New York state a "burned over district" with his revivals in the 1820s, provides a good example of the change in attitude. When he began to bring his campaign into the large Eastern cities, Lyman Beecher warned Finney to stay out of Boston. "If you attempt it," Beecher proclaimed, "I'll meet you at the state line, and call out all the artillerymen, and fight every inch of the way to Boston, and then I'll fight you there." Nevertheless, a few years later, Beecher welcomed Finney to his Boston pulpit and was happy to have him as an ally in his own revivalist campaign.

Finney's methodical, imaginative "new measures" proved particularly suited to urban life, and his invention of the "protracted meeting" for a whole city, spread over many weeks, became the model for many later revivals. After his time, the revivalists could usually count on the cooperation and goodwill of most conventional church leaders.

His methods and the conduct of big-city revivals were perfected by Dwight L. Moody (aided by Ira D. Sankey) in the post-Civil War era. Moody, the last of the great classic revivalists, applied business methods and organization to the production of urban revivals — through lavish publicity and advertising, strong financial support, efficient executives, and large crews of volunteer lay workers, with all possible details overseen and foreseen. To the charge that he was making a business out of salvation he replied: "It doesn't matter how you get a man to God provided you get him there."

Moody was convinced that the big cities had become the heart of the nation and that new methods were therefore required to start a national revival of religion. He was enormously successful — in both England and the United States — and set his stamp on modern revivalist methods down to the post-World War II era. For example, "decision cards," to be signed by converts and turned over to local ministers, were Moody's invention. This device and the basic tactics of his campaigns were applied in the context of mid-twentieth century technology and communications by later revivalist luminaries such as Billy Graham.

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Salvation Army prayer service in a New York slum

Moody's career marked the end of the great revivals in America. After 1900 — despite the occasional successes of a Billy Sunday or a Billy Graham — revivalism ceased to be the main technique for Christianizing Americans, and more restrained methods were adopted, even by the evangelical groups. Yet revivalism left indelible marks on American religion. It assured the triumph in the nineteenth century of evangelical pietism over both eighteenth-century rationalism (even the Unitarians had revivals) and traditional religious thought and ways. Its stress on personal feeling and experience as against assent to orthodox doctrines and conformity to traditional observances became, by and large, the American way in religion. The "great century" of religious expansion and vitality, however, was largely a period of mediocrity in theology

and the philosophy of religion. "No theologian or theology of first rank," observed Kenneth Scott Latourette, "issued from the nineteenth-century Christianity of the United States."

The dynamic course and consequences of the evangelical revivals and missionary activity brought about a remarkable reversal in the American view of the relation between divine grace and human action. Although the Awakenings began with the basic assumption that God alone works man's redemption, revivalism — even in the most rigidly Calvinist denominations — gradually shifted to the view that human initiative and decision play a determining role. Certainly in the frontier revivals, John Wesley won the day over John Calvin, and "Methodism" won out over "Presbyterianism." It was an emphasis that was to continue well into the twentieth century. [For discussion of some of the matters treated in this section, but from a different point of view, see Ch. 2: FRONTIER.]

6. SOCIAL ACTION: THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN AMERICA

"RELIGION IN AMERICA takes no direct part in the government of society," Tocqueville noted in 1835, "but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions." Despite the distinct separation between religious and political institutions, American democracy was religious, and American religion, including Roman Catholicism, was "democratic and republican" — in marked contrast with Tocqueville's France. Although religious groups and leaders, he observed, took no direct part in political activities, religion had a decisive though indirect influence on American society, working on the minds and hearts of men, and shaping their morals, manners, and customs. Thus he saw an unofficial, undeclared "alliance" between politics and religion, in which "religious zeal" combined with "the fires of patriotism" to spread, through voluntary societies, democratic Christian civilization throughout the continent.

Although there was far more direct partisan political activity by churchmen at that time than Tocqueville acknowledged, there can be little doubt that religion's major influence on American politics and society during the nineteenth century was indirect. This contrasted sharply with the situation, or at least the avowed ideal, in colonial America, whether in Puritan New England, Anglican Virginia, or Quaker Pennsylvania. The religious and political authorities were clearly distinguished in the Puritan theocracy, for example, but they were also organically linked to serve the same ends in a single religious-political community. Thus in 1639 in Massachusetts Bay a man could be punished for inordinate profits in business by both a civil court fine and censure and also by ecclesiastical admonition or even excommunication.

The Puritan experiment in building a "wilderness Zion," a holy community in which all of life and culture would be ordered according to the divine will, was short-lived. But its underlying spirit was transmitted in the enduring belief that the American people had been especially chosen by Providence, as Bryce noted, "to work out a higher type of freedom and civilization than any other state has yet attained."

Under the new system of church-state separation, this task was at first viewed as essentially a matter of the voluntary activities of the churches and the benevolent and reform societies with which they were closely associated. And the emphasis was on the reformation and regeneration of individuals to create a holy community rather than on the making and remaking of laws and institutions. Society was to be reformed and made new through an appeal to the moral conscience and free decision of the individual.

This shift went so far, according to some commentators, that the whole aim of estab-

lishing a Christian society was forgotten and attention was concentrated wholly on the saving of individual souls. The conversionist appeal of mid-nineteenth-century revivalism, said Washington Gladden, who had experienced it at first hand, was "almost wholly individualistic. It constantly directed the thoughts of men to the consideration of their own personal welfare." And Francis Wayland declared in 1842 that the evangelical revivals seemed to affect inner feelings rather than social actions, since "men are told how they must feel, but they are not told how they must act."

However, many practices and principles of nineteenth-century evangelical Christianity contrasted sharply with those observed by Wayland and Gladden. The vast network of benevolent and reform societies that covered America in the nineteenth century was a direct result of the revivalist movement. The benevolence societies launched great crusades, church historians have noted, for temperance, prison reform, education, peace, and the abolition of slavery. And the actions of groups like the Quakers, who were among the leaders of social reform in America, indicated that a concern with inner states was not necessarily opposed to a concern with social ills and their remedies.

The religious principles behind the evangelical reform movements were first stated by Samuel Hopkins and Nathaniel W. Taylor during the early decades of the republic. Hopkins, who witnessed and strongly approved the Second Awakening, declared that "moral depravity, or sin, consists in self-love; and that holiness consists in disinterested benevolence, which is . . . wholly contrary and opposed to self-love." The fruits of true conversion, according to Hopkins, were the works of disinterested benevolence for the good of the whole community. Similarly, Finney declared that the new convert must work for God's kingdom in this life.

Nevertheless, the dominant religious and moral stress throughout most of the nineteenth century was individualistic. Social and economic reforms were to be accomplished by appealing to the individual heart. America as a whole was to be made better by the conversion of its citizens. Society was indeed to be uplifted and purified, but not through social means, in the view of evangelical Christianity.

After the Civil War, religious thinkers observed the cruelties and injustices of the newly industrialized nation and began to question whether a purely individualistic solution of social problems was possible. Instead of religion purifying and remaking society, it was charged, society was corrupting religion and making it a mere echo or accomplice of secular power. Wayland's warning earlier in the century that Christians who did not receive specific guidance on social ethics from the churches would get it in the marketplace seemed to have come true. Eminent preachers and churchmen embraced what Henry F. May has called "clerical laissez faire." They proclaimed that wealth went to the most moral and godly men, that poverty was the result of deep-rooted sin, and that private or associative acts of charity were an interference with Divine Providence as well as with natural economic laws.

The most cogent and imaginative expression of this viewpoint came from a Scottish immigrant steelmaker, Andrew Carnegie, who had built one of the great American fortunes. His message, the "Gospel of Wealth," proclaimed in 1889, showed more social concern and awareness than many of the ministers and theologians of his time.

The accumulation of great wealth in the hands of a few, while the masses of men were relegated to poverty, was a necessary result, declared Carnegie, of "the laws upon which civilization is founded" (including individualism, private property, and competition). But the rich man was to consider his wealth as a trust fund that he was called on to administer for the common good, "thus

becoming the mere agent and trustee for his poorer brethren," and using his superior administrative and economic abilities to do them the most good. This was to be accomplished not through almsgiving — which did inestimable harm both to the recipients and to society as a whole — but through contributing parks, musuems, libraries, schools, and so forth, that would improve the general condition of the people. "Such, in my opinion," he concluded, "is the true gospel concerning wealth, obedience to which is destined some day to solve the problem of the rich and the poor, and to bring 'Peace on earth, among men goodwill.'"

Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth" applied the traditional doctrine of "stewardship" — which went back to the original Gospel parable of man's use of his "talents" — to late-nineteenth-century social conditions. Under those conditions, which gave rise to much discontent and misery, it was soon answered by the "Social Gospel" proclaimed by Washington Gladden, Walter Rauschenbusch, and other Protestant theologians.

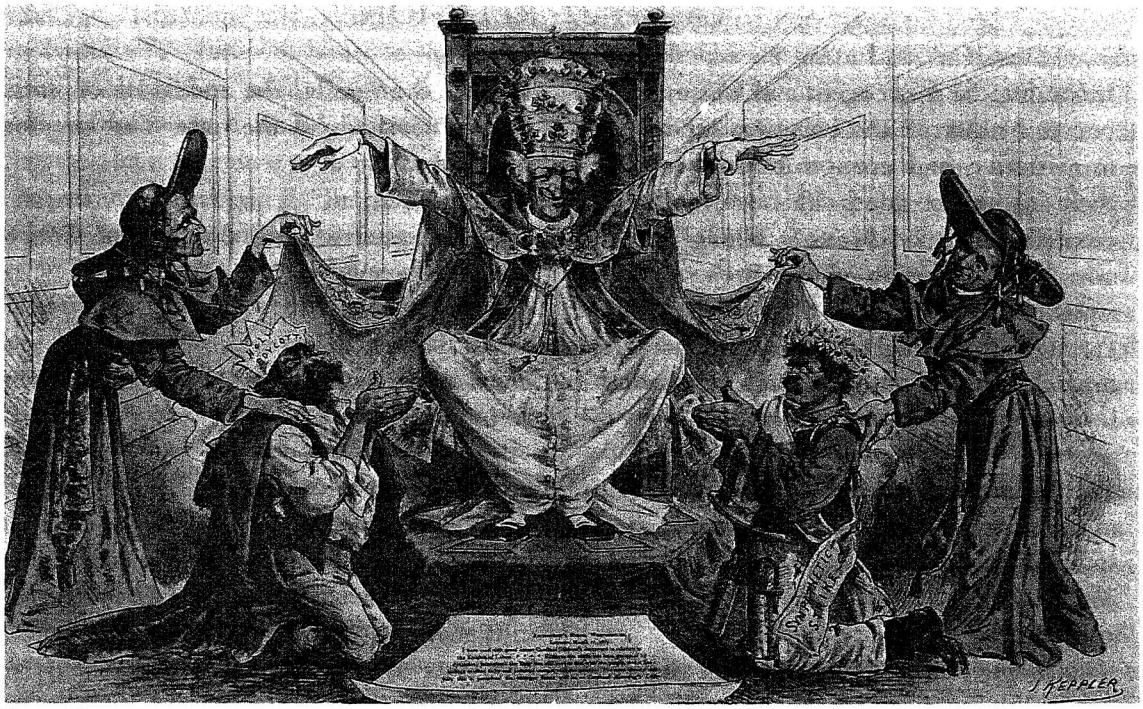
The secular and religious spheres could not be separated, they declared, and the basic Christian doctrines of love of neighbor and the kingdom of God were to be applied to actual social and economic life. The kingdom was not something in the sky, at the end of history. It was coming — it could be made to come — here and now. The Social Gospel aimed at the transformation of society and its institutions, not at the conversion of isolated individual souls. The basic thrust of the movement is indicated by the titles of Rauschenbusch's books, such as *Christianizing the Social Order* and *Prayers for the Social Awakening.*

"The Kingdom of God," wrote Rauschenbush in 1917, "is not confined within the limits of the church and its activities. It embraces the whole of human life. It is the Christian transfiguration of the social order. The church is one social institution alongside of the family, the industrial organization of society, and the state. The kingdom of God is in all these and realizes itself through them all." This is the modern situation, he asserted, and the original Gospel, which was essentially social, must be enabled to do its work under present conditions. Laissez faire economics and Social Darwinism, in this view, are both antisocial and anti-Christian.

The Social Gospel movement left an enduring legacy to American Protestant social thought and action — and was paralleled by similar movements in the Roman Catholic and Jewish faiths. Its periods of greatest influence were in the decades preceding both world wars, but its leaven seemed to be at work later in the devoted activities of clergymen in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and its ideas have been restated in a new form in such works as Harvey Cox's *The Secular City* and in other expressions of the "new theology."

Theological opposition to the Social Gospel came mainly from two sources: pietistic fundamentalism or conservatism and intellectual neo-orthodoxy or "realism." Fundamentalists opposed it as the activist expression of the liberal or "modernist" school of Protestant theology, which they believed betrayed the "fundamentals" of traditional Christian faith. Originally, this reaction had an old-fashioned, pietistic, individualistic, unsocial slant, insisting on maintaining a separation between the religious and the secular. But as social issues and transformations became an increasingly central concern for Americans during the New Deal years and later, many fundamentalist leaders voiced militantly conservative positions on social issues. They too became involved with what they had dismissed as "politics" and played an important role in conservative and right-wing political movements in the 1950s and 1960s.

The major theological attack on the Social Gospel came, in the 1930s and 1940s, from Reinhold Niebuhr, a man who had



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"A Business Alliance. Leo XIII — Bless you, my children! I think we can work together nobly in America"

himself been a fervid exponent of the view that sin is social and capitalist society immoral. The events of his time — including two world wars and the rise of Communism, Fascism, and Nazism — led him to the stand that the precepts of the Social Gospel were based on a naïve and utopian view of human nature and the human situation. Further, they ran counter to the "realistic" image of man in the Bible and in traditional Christian thought.

Although the Social Gospel was socially concerned, said Niebuhr, it was essentially nonpolitical and it had no understanding whatsoever of the nature and uses of power. It assumed, just as did evangelical revivalism, that social transformation could be accomplished through moral crusades — through voluntary, nonlegal, noninstitutional methods. The Social Gospelers, he declared, misunderstood both Christian doctrine and social reality in assuming that a state of perfect holiness could be established in the actual, empirical, historical world. "The relation of life to life is . . . a relation of power to power," he insisted, and power could be either physical or spiritual or both. This meant conflicts — struggles for power — between groups of men as well as individuals. The Christian realist, Niebuhr maintained, must aim at the perfect justice and love commanded in the Gospel, but he could expect to attain only as close an approximation as possible to perfection within the moral ambiguities and power struggles that were inherent in the human situation.

Niebuhr did not reject the social critique of the Social Gospel but combined a traditional Christian view of man as sinner — both individually and communally — with the liberal social aims of the movement he was attacking. "Adequate spiritual guidance can come," he declared in 1934, "only through more radical political orientation and more conservative religious convictions than are comprehended in the culture of our era." He resigned dramatically from the Christian socialist and pacifist groups to

which he belonged, because in his opinion they were utopian and doctrinaire, but he vigorously supported what he considered politically feasible means of attaining as good and decent a society as possible. Niebuhr's attack was directed against the moral idealism that had pervaded American thought about human affairs generally — against the idealism of a Woodrow Wilson as well as of a William Jennings Bryan.

Many mid-twentieth-century Americans continue to emphasize the individual will as the way to reform society, or, alternatively, to maintain that the churches should not meddle in social and economic affairs. For example, it is argued that racial discrimination in housing and other fields can only be abolished through a change of heart, not through a change of law — hence, that it is wrong for church leaders to fight for such legislation. It is also argued that it is not proper for the churches to take action against social ills. For example, in 1966, when the Presbyterian Church proposed to hire the militant organizer Saul Alinsky to fight the war against poverty in the San Francisco Bay area, an Oakland councilman declared: "It's about time the clergy, including my own, stuck to matters ecclesiastical and left political and welfare matters to duly elected officials." [For a different treatment of some of the matters discussed in the above, see Ch. 5: GENERAL WELFARE.]

7. CONFLICT AND CONSENSUS IN A SECULAR AGE

DESPITE THE "VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLE" that has characterized the American churches' methods of recruitment, most of them have not been inhibited in using their influence to get punitive laws passed against what they viewed as moral and religious evils: swearing, blasphemy, atheism, and breaking the Sabbath; contraceptives, alcoholic beverages, and gambling; and books, movies, and plays that they considered lewd and licentious.

However, this attempt of religious groups to shape the secular community in accord with their moral and often ascetic ideals was countered by the growing influence of secular ideas and ideals in an increasingly secularized twentieth-century society. At first the churches fought against the theological implications of doctrines such as evolution. But soon eminent church leaders like Lyman Abbott and Henry Ward Beecher accepted evolution as "God's way of doing things," and assimilation of the new ideas of the secular disciplines became common among leading Protestant thinkers. The concepts of Darwin, Marx, and Freud, and the findings of the natural and social sciences, sometimes seemed more influential than traditional Christian thought in the new forms of theology. Religion seemed to reflect secular culture, rather than speaking to it of eternal truths and values.

The conservative, fundamentalist groups — always important numerically on the American religious scene — and the neo-orthodox theologians fought against this tendency. But whatever the shifts and reversals in the sphere of reflective thought, and the furor of such events as the Scopes anti-evolution trial in 1925, the social and mental environment in which most twentieth-century Americans spent their lives was preponderantly secular, urban, and mechanized. In practical, everyday life it was mainly secular values and considerations that determined judgments and aroused concern, even among traditional churchgoing people.

Assimilation to the ways and norms of the secular community has been, according to many commentators, a persistent trait of American religion since the beginning of the republic. Tocqueville, as early as 1835, remarked on the generally nondogmatic, nontranscendental, patriotic, "American" characteristics of religion in the United States. Historian Sidney Mead observed in the

1950s that after the Civil War a secular "Americanism" or religion of democracy had mingled with or even replaced the traditional Protestant faith, not only outside the churches but also very largely within them. "It is the American Way of Life," said Will Herberg in 1956, "that is the shared possession of all Americans and that defines the American's convictions on those matters that count most."

Some scholars questioned whether this view of American religion was correct. Using secular ways of thought in most areas of life need not mean that one has abandoned a traditional faith and supplanted it with a "culture religion." Father John L. Thomas, for example, pointed to the statistical opinion-poll evidence that Americans at mid-twentieth century overwhelmingly affirmed belief in the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. Possibly modern Americans simply separated their secular and religious beliefs and attitudes more sharply than was common or necessary in previous eras.

The proponents of the view that American religion had become secularized at its very heart were not willing to take these figures at face value. It was suggested that although people may not be consciously aware of or willing to admit subtle and deep changes in treasured beliefs and attitudes, these may nevertheless be indicated by their everyday actions and procedures rather than by what they say or think they believe. Furthermore, it was noted, even the superficial opinion polls showed a diminution of traditional beliefs among younger people, especially college students — not to speak of college teachers. The misunderstanding between "God and the Professors" widely discussed in the 1930s had practically become a divorce by the 1960s.

The most notable conflicts engaging American religious groups at mid-twentieth century involved their relation to secular society, particularly to government. Since 1787 complicated and vexing questions about the relative weight of religious liberty and the public welfare and about the proper and reasonable relations between religion and government had arisen. Within a century after the guarantee of free exercise of religion, the Mormons were prohibited by federal law from practising polygamy, as commanded by their faith. In the 1940s the Supreme Court both denied and then affirmed the right of Jehovah's Witnesses' schoolchildren to refuse to salute the American flag on religious grounds.

The point at issue in such cases was just when and how the requirements of public decorum and unity should override the basic right to religious expression. Both the religionist Roger Williams and the rationalist Thomas Jefferson had seen public order and the common good as among the ends to be assured by full religious liberty and had specifically advocated the use of state power against violations of civil security and morals. The Supreme Court divided in the flag salute cases on the question of whether a sense of national unity may be coercively imposed by a means that offends religious principles. The Court by mid-twentieth century seemed to have moved to a position far more sensitive to the rights of individual conscience, including civil disobedience, than was held by the revered fathers of American religious liberty.

An even more explosive question was that of "religion in the schools." Originally, popular education had been undertaken by the churches, and even after the public school system was established in the nineteenth century, public education had a distinctly Protestant "nonsectarian" tone, including the reading of the King James version of the Bible and the recital of the Lord's Prayer. By the twentieth century this unofficially Protestant-Christian type of schooling had become almost completely nonreligious and was the main means by

"WHAT DO THEY EXPECT US TO DO— LISTEN TO THE KIDS PRAY AT *HOME?*"
Courtesy, Herblock, "The Washington Post," 1963

which Americans were inculcated with common ideals and the sense of belonging to the national secular community. "The secular public school," Niebuhr declared in 1958, ". . . is a distinctively American phenomenon. . . . The secularization of education is the price we pay for the rigor with which we separate church and state."

But many religious spokesmen were unwilling to pay the price and desired to mitigate the rigors of church-state separation, which they saw as endorsing secularist beliefs by default. As the Supreme Court moved steadily in the 1950s and 1960s toward prohibiting all religious exercises — nonsectarian or not — from the public schools, a mounting storm of criticism arose from both Catholic and Protestant sources. Their main argument was that since the Judeo-Christian faiths are intimately involved in American culture, to excise all religious expression from the public schools is to deprive children of an essential spiritual dimension of education — and ultimately to foster irreligion. Supporters of the Court's decisions maintained that putting religion in the schools violated the nonestablishment and religious freedom guarantees of the Constitution, since it coerced or embarrassed those with nontheistic or agnostic views — and that it was irreligious to have religious exercises in a government-sponsored institution.

In this controversy the question was raised of whether government could legally aid and foster religion in general, or all actual religions, as opposed to establishing a specific religion. This reincarnated in the twentieth century the same dispute that had apparently been settled in Virginia in the eighteenth century. Also raised was the question of whether freedom of religion extended to the right not to believe and not to be offended in one's disbelief. Support for the Supreme Court's decisions brought agnostics and secularists together with the minority Jews and Unitarians, and with the Protestants who still maintained strict church-state separation.

The "secularism" charge, however, as indicated above, was a double-edged sword, which could be used against either side. The signal victory of the movement "to put God back into the schools" in the 1950s, during the Eisenhower administration, was the insertion of the words "under God" into the Pledge of Allegiance. A century before, in a time of still vigorous evangelical piety, relatively uncorroded by the "acids of modernity," a move by various Protestant denominations to put "Almighty God" and "Christian government" into the Constitution had failed. Now, in a prevailingly secular age, a similar move had some success, and the question arose of whether its basic motivations were really "religious" or "secular."

In the 1960s the secular challenge to religion was posed most dramatically from

within the churches themselves. A new school of "radical" theologians, including writers such as Harvey Cox, Gabriel Vahanian, Thomas J. J. Altizer, and William Hamilton, affirmed secularization, not merely as an historical fact but as the sole source of meaning and value in the modern world. In its extreme form, this school declared that "God is dead."

In their view, the living God who had been present to man in previous eras had disappeared from human experience and for all practical purposes had died. Some of the new theologians flatly asserted that the death of God was an actual historical fact, a real death and not a mere absence from human consciousness. "God has died in our time, in our history, in our existence," Altizer proclaimed. Hence, the new radicals concluded, the traditional religious beliefs and attitudes must be replaced by a completely secular system of values and truths.

The contemporary Protestant, said Hamilton, must complete the Reformation "movement from the cloister to the world," depart wholly from the sacred institutions, places, and forms of the Christian faith, and move into the world and toward his neighbor, to be the latter's helper and comrade. "Any system of thought or action," he declared, "in which God or the gods serve as fulfiller of needs or solver of problems," is to be rejected. The secular world and the community of men alone are to be affirmed and trusted to achieve these tasks.

For the death-of-God theologians the main spiritual activities consisted in personal ethics, social-justice movements, and cultural creativity. In their view the Christian emphasis must center on Jesus of Nazareth as the model of human life and character in the world, or on Christ as the incarnate Word or Spirit that is present in human existence and history. The Christian expectation lies in a patient waiting and a hope that someday the lost reality called "God" may return in some other, noninstrumental role, or that man's lost connection with the sacred will paradoxically be found through a wholehearted affirmation of the profane, by living fully in the secular. The new radicals insisted on keeping a Christ without God.

The response to the death-of-God theologians was immediate and intense once the message of their obscure academic papers and lectures was broadcast to the world through the mass communications of the secular age that they so vigorously affirmed. They became a popular sensation among collegians, a source of stimulus to many lay and clerical members of the traditional faiths, and the object of angry attacks and threats by religious adherents who were offended by their views. In addition, a reasoned and considered opposition was voiced by serious theologians and philosophers who rejected their positions as absurd, contradictory, or untrue. A few of their critics, however, such as Langdon Gilkey and Kenneth Hamilton, praised them for raising the live and relevant questions regarding the problematic situation of religious faith in a secular culture.

As the United States approached the 1970s the future prospects for religion were uncertain. The basic premises of religious faith had been challenged from within by intelligent, dedicated Christian scholars and churchmen. Not only were traditional doctrines and dogmas being questioned but religion itself, in any form, and even belief in God were dismissed as irrelevant and worthless in a secular age. On the other hand, owing largely to these critics, there had seldom been such intense discussion of basic religious issues — of the existence and nature of God, of the value and meaning of faith and worship — at least since colonial New England, where questioning was more narrowly restricted and less public.

The figures on church membership and

attested beliefs still remained remarkably high. There was nothing like it in the rest of the Western world. The meaning of these remarkable figures still remained doubtful. Most sociologists of religion and historians of culture tended to depreciate their religious significance. Yet some respectable scholars and theologians regarded the figures as an indication of an enduring attachment to traditional faith.

The major question, then, remained to be answered. Would religion continue, as it seemed to have done in the recent past, to become more and more a cultural accessory or appendage, a mere function of secular society, and ultimately fade away as the expression of the relation to a transcendent God? Or would it be revitalized, renewed, and reinspired, and gain once again the power it had once had, and thereby provide living witness to the eternal commands, for men in a nuclear age? [For further discussion of some of the matters treated in this section, see Ch. 21: EDUCATION.]