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ABSTRACT

BEST SELLING RELIGION: A HISTORY OF POPULAR RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN AMERICA AS REFLECTED IN RELIGIOUS BEST SELLERS, 1850-1960

By

Ralph Allison Carey

The religious best seller furnishes the student of popular thought with important evidence regarding the history of religious ideas in America. From Michael Wigglesworth's The Day of Doom (1662) to Morris L. West's The Shoes of the Fisherman (1963), best selling religion was a pervasive part of popular American culture. Among the top best sellers have been such religious works as Charles Sheldon's In His Steps (1897), Lew Wallace's Ben-Hur (1880), Lloyd Douglas' The Robe (1942), Hurlbut's The Story of the Bible (1904), Fulton Oursler's The Greatest Story Ever Told (1949), Henry Morton Robinson's The Cardinal (1950), and Norman Vincent Peale's The Power of Positive Thinking (1952).

From Susan Warner's The Wide, Wide World (1850) to Catherine Marshall's Christy (1967), best selling religion in America was characterized by an anti-creedal, anti-denominational form of piety which stressed a religion of the heart and practical Christian discipleship. While

characterized by many of the social and religious currents of their age, most of the religious best sellers fail to reflect the major intellectual challenges to traditional orthodoxies. Although the heart religion and ethical concerns of this popular religious thought tended toward anti-intellectualism, it was rarely concerned with fundamentalist defenses of orthodoxy. The cold, formal creedalism of the church was seen as the enemy of vital faith more often than the scepticism of a non-believing world.

The best selling religion of the eighteen fifties and sixties was sentimental and domestic in its emphasis. The Wide, Wide World of Susan Warner combined the crises of home and heart as did Maria Cummins' The Lamplighter (1854) and Augusta Jane Evans' Beulah (1859) and St. Elmo (1867). E. P. Roe stressed the conversion theme in Barriers Burned Away (1878) and Opening a Chestnut Burr (1874), while Hannah Whitall Smith promised abundant discipleship in The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life (1875). The Christ-story tradition appealed to readers of Joseph Holt Ingraham's, The Prince of the House of David (1855) and Lew Wallace's Ben-Hur (1880) just as it did later to the readers of Lloyd Douglas.

The impact of Darwinian science and higher criticism in shaking the foundations of orthodoxy was reflected in Mrs. Humphrey Ward's Robert Elsmere (1888), Margaret Deland's John Ward, Preacher (1888), and Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896). Social Christianity, with

its practical concern for a discipleship involving social reform, was the theme of Charles Sheldon's In His Steps (1897). A muscular Christianity was preached by Ralph Connor's Black Rock (1898) and Harold Bell Wright's best selling novels, That Printer of Udell's (1903), The Shepherd of the Hills (1907), and The Calling of Dan Matthews (1909). Winston Churchill's The Inside of the Cup (1913) combined themes in a muscular social gospel.

The nineteen twenties and thirties experienced a decline in best selling religion as only Lloyd Douglas' Magnificent Obsession (1929) reached best selling proportions beyond the annual lists. Bruce Barton's The Man Nobody Knows (1925), E. Stanley Jones' Christ of the Indian Road (1925) and Henry C. Link's Return to Religion (1937) represent a variety of popular themes in this period of religious depression.

The nineteen forties and fifties were decades of religious revival. The large quantity of best selling religious volumes testify to the popular revival of interest in religion. The appearance of names like Sholem Asch, Joshua Liebman, and Fulton J. Sheen on the best seller lists indicated the maturing pluralism of American religion. Sholem Asch's The Nazarene (1939), and The Apostle (1943), along with Lloyd C. Douglas' The Robe (1942) and The Big Fisherman (1948) revealed the popular revival's quest for historical roots. A quest for peace could also be

found in such best sellers as Joshua Leibman's Peace of Mind (1946), Fulton J. Sheen's Peace of Soul (1949), Norman Vincent Peale's The Power of Positive Thinking (1952), and Billy Graham's Peace With God (1954).

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RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN AMERICA AS REFLECTED IN
RELIGIOUS BEST SELLERS, 1850-1960

By

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 532

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter	
I. SENTIMENTAL RELIGION, 1850-1870	8
II. THE CONVERSION THEME OF E. P. ROE.	47
III. THE CHRIST-STORY TRADITION: <u>BEN-HUR</u>	72
IV. SHAKING THE FOUNDATIONS: <u>ROBERT ELSMERE</u>	107
V. SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY: <u>IN HIS STEPS</u>	128
VI. MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY: CONNOR, WRIGHT, CHURCHILL.	154
VII. THE DECLINE OF BEST SELLING RELIGION, 1919-1939.	194
VIII. THE QUEST FOR AN HISTORICAL RELIGION.	232
IX. PEACE AND POWER.	280
X. POSTSCRIPT, THE NINETEEN SIXTIES	322
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY	327
APPENDIX	342

INTRODUCTION

The history of popular thought in America includes, of necessity, a substantial amount of religious ideas. Any narrative of intellectual developments in America must concern itself with the pervasive nature of religious values and traditions. Yet the history of religious ideas must not be studied solely from the perspective of historical theology or ecclesiastical history. Popular religious thought in America cannot be adequately assessed through printed sermons, denominational literature, or the polemic literature of college and seminary writers. The limited audience of such intellectual contributions would suggest the need for sources more representative of popular culture.

Popular literature--the newspaper, the magazine, the best seller--has a central role as source material in the study of popular culture. The best seller, in particular, furnishes the student of popular thought with important evidence regarding vox populi, even though in turn that is not vox dei. Frank Luther Mott's Golden Multitudes (New York, 1947) and James D. Hart's The Popular Book (New York, 1950) have provided us with excellent histories of popular literary taste in America. The general religious, sentimental, democratic, and self-help themes in the history of

popular thought are revealed in these studies of best sellers. Religious best sellers, in particular, provide us with a substantial knowledge of popular religious thought. The religious best seller of all time, and in fact the all-time best seller in any category, has been the Bible. Published in many translations and editions, the Bible has probably led the next best seller in every year as well as accumulated an estimated total sales of well over two hundred million. In addition to the Bible, and the many companion devotional volumes which made up a large part of America's popular reading, books with religious themes frequently appeared in best selling proportions. From Michael Wigglesworth's The Day of Doom (1662) to Morris L. West's The Shoes of the Fisherman (1963), best selling religion was a pervasive part of popular American culture.

In fact, of the twenty-one top best sellers listed by Frank Mott in 1947, four were clearly religious works. Charles Sheldon's In His Steps (1897) had ranked next to the Bible in sales, while Lew Wallace's Ben Hur (1880) Lloyd Douglas' The Robe (1942), and Hurlbut's Story of the Bible (1904) shared in the top best honors. By 1965, according to Alice Payne Hackett's calculations in 70 Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1965 (New York, 1967), Sheldon's In His Steps had fallen behind Dr. Spock's baby and child care book and Peyton Place on the all-time best seller list. Other religious best sellers that Miss Hackett concluded

had sold over two million copies were: Lew Wallace, Ben-Hur (1880); Fulton Oursler, The Greatest Story Ever Told (1949); Lloyd C. Douglas, The Robe (1942); Hurlbut's The Story of the Bible (1904); Douglas, Magnificent Obsession (1929); Henry Morton Robinson, The Cardinal (1950); and Norman Vincent Peale, The Power of Positive Thinking (1952). There were at least twenty more which had sold over one million copies.

Any study of early American religious thought certainly focuses on the forms of piety expressed in such best sellers as: Wigglesworth's The Day of Doom (1662); Richard Baxter, A Call to the Unconverted (1664); Lewis Bayly, The Practice of Piety (1665); John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress (1681); William Penn, No Cross, No Crown (1741); James Hervey, Meditations and Contemplations (1750); and John Fox, Book of Martyrs (1793). Pilgrim's Progress illustrated not only the religious interests of many in colonial times, but it continued to sell well into the nineteenth century. Its universal themes place it among those best sellers which reached classic status.

This study of best selling religion begins with Susan Warner's The Wide, Wide World, published in 1850. It does so for several reasons. First, the religious best sellers of the colonial period have already played a large role in the assessments of that period's religious history. Second, the best sellers of the first half of the nineteenth

century include only two religious works--Emanuel Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell (1825) and Jacob Abbott, The Young Christian (1832). Third, Miss Warner's The Wide, Wide World is the first best selling religious novel written in America, and therefore, the forerunner of a long line of successors.

Best selling religion in America was characterized by an anti-creedal, anti-denominational, form of piety which stressed a religion of the heart and practical Christian discipleship. While characterized by many of the social and religious currents of their age, most of the religious best sellers fail to reflect the major intellectual challenges to traditional orthodoxies. Although the heart religion and ethical concerns of this popular religious thought tended toward anti-intellectualism, it was rarely concerned with fundamentalist defenses of orthodoxy. The cold, formal creedalism of the church was seen as the enemy of vital faith more often than the scepticism of a non-believing world.

The best selling religion of the eighteen fifties and sixties was sentimental and domestic in its emphasis. The Wide, Wide World of Susan Warner combined the crises of home and heart as did Maria Cummins' The Lamplighter (1854) and Augusta Jane Evans' Beulah (1859) and St. Elmo (1867). E. P. Roe stressed the conversion theme in Barriers Burned Away (1872) and Opening a Chestnut Burr (1874),

while Hannah Whitall Smith promised abundant discipleship in The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life (1875). The Christ-story tradition appealed to readers of Joseph Holt Ingraham's, The Prince of the House of David (1855) and Lew Wallace's Ben-Hur (1880) just as it did later to the readers of Lloyd Douglas.

The impact of Darwinian science and higher criticism in shaking the foundations of orthodoxy was reflected in Mrs. Humphrey Ward's Robert Elsmere (1888), Margaret Deland's John Ward, Preacher (1888), and Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896). Social Christianity, with its practical concern for a discipleship involving social reform, was the theme of Charles Sheldon's In His Steps (1897). A muscular Christianity was preached by Ralph Connor's Black Rock (1898) and Harold Bell Wright's best selling novels, That Printer of Udell's (1903), The Shepherd of the Hills (1907), and The Calling of Dan Matthews (1909). Winston Churchill's The Inside of the Cup (1913) combined themes in a muscular social gospel.

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The nineteen forties and fifties were decades of religious revival. The large quantity of best selling religious volumes testify to the popular revival of interest in religion. The appearance of names like Sholem Asch, Joshua Liebman, and Fulton J. Sheen on the best seller lists indicated the maturing pluralism of American religion. Sholem Asch's The Nazarene (1939), and The Apostle (1943), along with Lloyd C. Douglas' The Robe (1942) and The Big Fisherman (1948) revealed the popular revival's quest for historical roots. A quest for peace could also be found in such best sellers as Joshua Liebman's Peace of Mind (1946), Fulton J. Sheen's Peace of Soul (1949), Norman Vincent Peale's The Power of Positive Thinking (1952), and Billy Graham's Peace With God (1954).

A concluding introductory word regarding the selection of religious best sellers may be helpful. This study was based largely upon best sellers appearing in the previously mentioned works by Mott, Hart and Hackett. Mott's definition of a best seller was a book whose sales equaled 1 per cent of the total population of continental United States for the decade in which the book was published. Thus, a book published in the eighteen fifties was required to have a total sales of 225,000 in order to make best seller status. In 1900 the figure was 750,000; in 1940 it was 1,300,000. Mott also includes a list of "better sellers" which have come close to all-time best selling status.

James Hart's criteria was less rigid but insufficiently clear to make it a reliable guide. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, Mott's general definition of a best seller was followed with some flexibility allowed to include Alice Payne Hackett's more recent sales data and her annual lists for the period since 1895. These annual lists, drawn from Bookman during the period 1895-1912 and thereafter from Publisher's Weekly supplement the longer range best selling patterns with the short range popular tastes.

A religious best seller was assumed to be a literary work, fiction or non-fiction, that gave a major if not central, role to religion in its plot or discussion. Such a definition is difficult to apply with certainty to many of the novels and self-help literature of the mid-nineteenth century because of the heavily didactic nature of popular American writing. The many novels of Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, which reached best selling stature, were not included on the basis that the religious interests and the didactic purpose are peripheral to her stories. Mrs. Stowe's conviction that Uncle Tom's Cabin had been written by God as dictated to her, is not enough to overcome the insufficient concern with religious ideas and institutions. Without reflecting on the value of Mrs. Stowe's work as a source for understanding popular culture, this study focuses on those best sellers which overtly offer their religious message.

CHAPTER I

SENTIMENTAL RELIGION, 1850-1870

American popular culture in the eighteen forties and fifties expressed a variety of preferences and tastes. The impact of the industrial revolution on the publishing business and the rise of popular literacy provided fertile ground for a maturing national culture. Popular tastes and preferences were increasingly reflected in the printed word and the public arts. A pivotal period in the growth of the nation's culture, the ante bellum period has been carefully analyzed by cultural historian Carl Bode, who distinguished four principle complexes or clusters of qualities in the popular mind. Chauvinistic patriotism, aggressive materialism, religiosity, and sentimental love have been described by Bode as the major traits discernible in the mid-century American character.¹

The religious and sentimental strains were the most prominent in the ante bellum character. Manifested in many phases of popular thought and culture, those strains were

¹Carl Bode, The Anatomy of American Popular Culture, 1840-1861 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959), pp. ix-xv.

frequently combined. A sentimental religion emerged and characterized much of the popular literature of those two decades between 1850 and 1870. The Wide, Wide World, by Susan Warner, was published in 1850 and became the first novel with a central religious theme to reach the status of a best seller. Maria Cummins' The Lamplighter (1854), J. H. Ingraham's The Prince of the House of David (1855), and two of Augusta Jane Evans' works--Beulah (1859) and St. Elmo (1867)--followed Miss Warner's pioneer work as religious best sellers.

The religious history of the first half of the nineteenth century in America had been one of notable growth in church membership and church influence. One of the important social trends in the nineteenth century was the remarkable success of an evangelical Protestantism. With the status of religion in low ebb at the beginning of the century, the Protestant bodies increasingly adopted evangelical and revivalist patterns in their successful effort to Christianize what they deemed a pagan society. By 1850, revivalism was firmly implanted in most of the major denominations (led by Baptists and Methodists), and the churches' influence in the culture had increased enormously.²

²Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform (New York, 1957), pp. 15-33, 44.

The social influence of the revivalist churches was far greater than their increased numbers would imply. European and American observers, alike, commented on the religious nature of American society. It was a period of voluntarism and interdenominational efforts in missionary and benevolent enterprises. Bible, tract, missionary, and temperance societies pursued projects that effected the national culture for decades to come.³ A time of religious ferment, the eighteen fifties experienced continued strivings of perfectionism, millennialism, and utopianism as well as the theological conflicts between Calvinists, Arminians, Unitarians, and Transcendentalists.

Yet the impact of the Second Great Awakening, which lasted from 1800 to 1835, was one of reorientation for religious thought as well as practice. The adoption of revivalism by most of American Protestantism corresponded with a decline in systematic theology or creedalism as a test for orthodoxy. Calvinism was reinterpreted and modified until the distinction between it and Arminianism was minimal. William McLoughlin argues that this Evangelicalism evolved from this decline of the old orthodoxy in the face of the permeation of American culture by Scottish Common Sense philosophy, Arminian theology, and revivalist methods.⁴

³Ibid., p. 44.

⁴William G. McLoughlin, ed., The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900: An Anthology (New York, 1968), pp. 1-14.

By the eighteen forties and fifties a Romantic Evangelicalism had come to dominate the thinking and preaching of the churches. Represented by the post-Kantian idealism of Horace Bushnell and Henry Ward Beecher, rather than the transcendentalism of Emerson and Theodore Parker, Romantic Evangelicalism continued the pragmatic, non-creedal Protestantism in a romantic and sentimental version. It emphasized the intuitive perception of truth through the feelings or emotions of the heart, rather than the common sense rationalism of the Scottish Realists or Lockean Empiricists. The Romantic Evangelicals stressed the personality of Jesus rather than the moral order of God. They also provided a sentimental idealization of women, children, and parenthood as the embodiments of Divine grace.⁵

This transition from "Head" religion to "Heart" religion occurred in Evangelical religion notably in the 1830's accompanied by the more frequent appeals to the feelings, the imagination, and emotions, than to reason and conscience. Horace Bushnell's Christian Nurture (1847) and God in Christ (1849) were pleas for an end to dogmatism and pedantic creedalism as well as to the revivalistic overemphasis on crisis conversion. Arguing that truth was not of the natural understanding, Bushnell saw man's

⁵Ibid., pp. 14-15.

relationship to God in almost Coleridgean terms. Nature, the Christian environment, and the organic development of Christian faith were themes articulated by Bushnell and shared by the Romantic Evangelicals.⁶

Heart religion, which rejected the dogmatism of creed or reason, shared much of the spirit of pietism. Although Charles Finney never rejected systematic theology, he introduced the pietistic emphasis on "consciousness" to American revivalism.⁷ If American pietism is what McLoughlin calls "the belief that every individual is himself responsible for deciding the rightness or wrongness of every issue (large or small) in terms of a higher moral law," then Romantic Evangelicalism contributed to the pietistic strain in American culture.⁸ As Richard Hofstadter has pointed out, the religious "enthusiasm" of evangelicals stressed direct personal access to God which often led to both anti-intellectualism and anti-institutionalism.⁹

This Romantic Evangelicalism devoted itself to sentimental sermons on "The Christian Home" and "Motherhood."

⁶Ibid., pp. 16-17.

⁷Perry Miller, The Life of the Mind In America (New York, 1965), pp. 30-33.

⁸William G. McLoughlin, "Pietism and the American Character," The American Experience, ed. Hennig Cohen (Boston, 1968), p. 49.

⁹Richard Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism In American Life (New York, 1964), pp. 55-56, 421.

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The innocence and purity of childhood, and the saintliness and virtue of womanhood were visions shared by Evangelicals as well as the larger Victorian culture. McLoughlin argues that it was they "who made home and hearth the central features of American sentimentalism."¹⁰ The Sentimental years, as social historian E. Douglas Branch called the period from 1836 to 1860, were years in which romantic thought was enthroning sentiment in both religion and literature.¹¹

Heart religion, with its concern for touching the sensibilities of churchgoers, revised the whole quality of hymnody. Since men's hearts could be touched more easily through poetry and song, Romantic Evangelicalism emphasized melodies that could arouse sinners to the recognition of God's love and invoke visions of heaven.¹² This rise of interest in sacred melody, corresponding to the rise of revivalism, brought Lowell Mason of Boston into prominence as the dominating musical figure in the mid-nineteenth century. His hymns, as well as his nonreligious music, were cheerful, joyous expressions of the spirit of the age.¹³

¹⁰ McLoughlin, The American Evangelicals, p. 17.

¹¹ E. Douglas Branch, The Sentimental Years, 1836-1860 (New York, 1965), p. 325.

¹² McLoughlin, The American Evangelicals, pp. 19-20.

¹³ Bode, op. cit., pp. 19-24.

The most prolific publisher in the United States at mid-century was the American Tract Society. In 1885, the Society's annual production of story-sermons had passed the 12,000,000 mark. Its number of bound volumes exceeded 1,000,000. Colporteurs, who were part-time missionaries and tract salesmen, traveled throughout the society distributing pious literature. Preaching an earnest, loving Christianity, the Colporteurs and their tracts were effective agents in the spread of the evangelical Protestantism.¹⁴

The Bible was, of course, the best seller.¹⁵ The American Bible Society was the chief distributor of Bibles. Founded in 1816, through a cooperative effort of several evangelical groups, this nondenominational society was at its greatest vigor by the mid-fifties. Between 1851 and 1856 the production of Bibles and New Testaments averaged almost three-quarters of a million a year. The success of the Society during the ante bellum years was reflected in the impact this best seller made on American culture. The presence of King James vocabulary in prose and the Biblical parables, citations, quotations, and illusions in American literature are obvious evidences of this book's influence.¹⁶

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 132-140.

¹⁵Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York, 1947), p. 297.

¹⁶Bode, op. cit., pp. 140-144.

[illegible]

It is not surprising that, along with tracts and fiction-ized manuals like T. S. Arthur's Ten Nights In a Bar-Room, the Biblical novel should appear. J. H. Ingraham's The Prince of the House of David was further evidence of the popularity of the Biblical story.

In addition to the American Tract Society and the American Bible Society, American publishing in general was experiencing its biggest boom to date. The eighteen forties and fifties were decades of outstanding growth for magazines and books.¹⁷ Harper's New Monthly Magazine appeared in 1850, with its fare of Dickens and other popular figures of English fiction. Appealing to a wide American audience, Harper's led the general magazine field throughout the fifties.¹⁸ American readers also supported two important sorts of special-interest magazines: the women's magazine and the religious journal. Godey's Lady's Book and denominational periodicals reached large numbers of readers, even if not all the same constituency. Yet Godey's fiction was rarely concerned with religious themes and denominational journals disapproved of fiction, leaving the field open to the writers and publishers of books.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 109-110, 258-59.

¹⁸ Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, Vol. II (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), pp. 29-30.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 56-61.

Book publishing reflected the general economic and social expansion of the period. Mechanical improvements in printing and improvements in sales and distribution techniques led to a tripling of the value of book sales during the two decades before the Civil War.²⁰ Much of the success of the publishing trade was also due to the emergence of a new reading public, which was becoming increasingly feminine. According to one estimate, women composed four-fifths of the middle-class public which devoted its leisure time to reading.²¹ With the growth of a middle-class, many women were freed from much of the domestic drudgery by new kitchen stoves and sewing machines. Having been educated in free public schools, these women could join men as customers of the book publishers.²²

At first, this new growing feminine audience joined men in their reading tastes. The works of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and Bulwer-Lytton were very popular, as were the native authors, Cooper and Irving. Yet there was a growing literature for women by women. Starting in the eighteen thirties, feminine writers reached a position of dominance in popular writing by the fifties.²³ Women read the Bronte

²⁰Bode, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

²¹James D. Hart, The Popular Book (New York, 1950), p. 86.

²²Helen Waite Paposhvily, All the Happy Endings (New York, 1956), pp. 37-38.

²³Ibid., pp. 37-41.

sisters and Jane Austen, and at the same time contributed to an avalanche of native feminine fiction, that was largely characterized by sentimental and domestic themes.²⁴

Domestic novels with sentimental treatment of feminine characters, often young girls, gave rise to a new literary genre. The following names are only representative of the many popular domestic sentimentalists who appeared in the eighteen fifties: "Grace Greenwood," Caroline Lee Hentz, "Fanny Fern," Ann S. Stephens, "Fanny Forester," Sarah Josepha Hale, Maria Cummins, Lucretia P. Hale, Mary Jane Holmes, Louisa M. Alcott, E. D. E. N. Southworth, "The Widow Bedott" (Mrs. Whitcher), and Augusta Jane Evans Wilson.²⁵ This popular literary activity, largely a second flowering of New England culture led Fred Lewis Pattee to characterize the decade as "the feminine fifties."²⁶

These feminine writers employed a Home-and-Jesus formula, which combined the domestic and religious themes in a sentimental wrapping. The strains of family life, the moral education of youth, and the religious solution for all problems were the elements of this new fiction much as

²⁴Hart, op. cit., pp. 86-90; Mott, Golden Multitudes, p. 122.

²⁵Herbert Ross Brown, The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860 (Durham, 1940), pp. 323-357.

²⁶Fred Lewis Pattee, The Feminine Fifties (New York, 1940), pp. 50-67, 110-129.

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they had been in behavior manuals of the previous generation.²⁷ Feminine novelists Mary Jane Holmes and Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth wrote sentimental domestic novels annually, many of which became best sellers. Yet it was Susan Warner and Augusta Jane Evans Wilson who went beyond moralism in their best sellers to write novels with predominantly religious themes.

Several themes are common to the religious best sellers of the fifties and sixties. Within the broad sentimental and pietistic interpretation of Christian discipleship the reader is introduced to the concept of Christian conversion, the blessings of complete submission to the Divine Will and its Providential Care, and the consolation of religious faith in the face of the death of a loved one and the other trials of a pilgrim's progress in "stepping heavenward." Except for Augusta Jane Evans Wilson, the authors tend to ignore ethical and theological questions that would tax the mental faculties of a Sunday schooler. Religious feelings or "sentiment," fed by frequent devotional activities (particularly Bible reading and prayer), become the source of strength in this "vale of tears" and the key to personal and domestic happiness.

This sentimental interpretation of Christian doctrine is the basis for America's first best selling

²⁷Mott, op. cit., p. 122.

religious novel, The Wide, Wide World. Written by Susan Warner, an emotional, religious New Englander, the book was first issued in December, 1850, under the pseudonym Elizabeth Wetherell. Originally rejected by almost all the leading book publishers of New York, The Wide, Wide World was accepted by G. P. Putnam on his mother's recommendation that "If you never publish another book, publish this." Putnam's never had a larger success. Within three months it had sold 1,500 copies, by 1852 it was in its fourteenth edition, and in 1892 it was still popular in a fifty cent edition.²⁸ Altogether it sold over a half-million copies.²⁹

The book was favorably received in the early reviews. Van Wyck Brooks' later described it as a "swamp of lachrymosity," a "malarial" book featuring "a little prig."³⁰ Alexander Cowie's view that "Miss Warner rants about religion" and tries to "sanctify a saint" would not have been considered a liability for a domestic sentimentalist.³¹ It was praised by contemporaries as a work of almost faultless excellence which was read with the most heartfelt sympathy and delight.³²

²⁸Pattee, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

²⁹Mott, op. cit., p. 124.

³⁰Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England (New York, 1952), p. 428.

³¹Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York, 1948), p. 418.

³²Pattee, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

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The all-pervading religious motif of Miss Warner's book must have been a chief factor in its popularity with an age which still demanded a moral lesson fiction.³³ It is the story of little Ellen Montgomery's physical and spiritual pilgrimage through "the wide, wide world." Separated from her mother while a young girl, Ellen is forced to journey to live with an unkind aunt. Mourning the loss of her mother and reacting angrily to her hostile Aunt Fortune, she finds it difficult to love God more than mother and to overcome evil with good. The rest of the book becomes a chronicle of her "trials without" and "trials within" as she journeys through "the wide, wide world" in search of happiness. That happiness, sobered by tribulation, comes only after years of cultivating the "fruits of religion and discipline."³⁴

The fervent piety of the mature Ellen and of the minister's daughter and the divinity-student son who guided her, was a reflection of Miss Warner's own religious convictions. Her sister, Anna B. Warner, wrote of Susan's work that:

It was written in closest reliance upon God: for thoughts, for power, and for words. Not the mere vague wish to write a book that should do service to her Master: but a vivid, constant looking to him for

³³Hart, op. cit., pp. 89-90.

³⁴Susan Warner, The Wide, Wide World (New York: Fenno, 1904), p. 397.

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guidance and help: the writer and her work both laid humbly at the Lord's feet. In that sense, the book was written upon her knees: and the Lord's blessing has followed it down to this day. How many of whom even I have heard, trace their heart conversion straight to that blessing on the pages of the "Wide, Wide World."³⁵

This was only the first of many religious best sellers whose success was to be attributed to Divine Inspiration.

The union of sentiment and religion in The Wide, Wide World is exemplified by little Ellen's approach to all personal and ethical problems. She "feels" that she is not a Christian; she has a "feeling" that Sunday ought to be spent in growing better and learning good things; and she finds her "feelings" slowly changed in harmony with the "Bible words" she has been reading. She comes to have a "sense" of God's love in her heart, as described by Mr. Baxter (probably referring to Richard Baxter, the English pietist, and author of the best selling A Call to the Unconverted (1664) and The Saint's Everlasting Rest). In addition to the Bible, the best selling piety of Baxter and John Bunyan are Ellen's favorites.

In fact, the little girl's pilgrimage seems to be patterned after Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Given a copy by the Divinity student, John, Ellen received great comfort and contentment from "the pilgrim's progress from this world to a better." After reading it or the passages about

³⁵ Anna B. Warner, Susan Warner (New York, 1909), p. 264.

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heaven in the Bible (Revelation was one of her favorite Biblical books), she would press her hands together and say to herself "'I will try to be a good pilgrim!'" Heaven is her goal and the "wide, wide world" is certainly a vale of tears.

This pietistic emphasis on the devotional life was another common denominator in the religious thought of the sentimental era. Devotional manuals as well as fiction stressed the argument that the Christian pilgrim's progress is quite dependent on Bible reading and prayer.³⁶ Ellen Montgomery finds herself unable to cope with the inner and outer trials when the practice of piety, reading her mother's Bible and praying, has been neglected. Her struggle to become a Christian revolves around her failures in her devotional life. This is stated clearly in her first conversation with the minister's daughter, Alice, who says:

"You are grieved to find yourself so unlike what you would be. You wish to be a child of the dear Savior, and to have your heart filled with His Love, and to do what will please Him. Do you?--Have you gone to Him day by day, and night by night, and told Him so?--have you begged Him to give you strength to get the better of your wrong feelings, and asked Him to change you and make you his child?"

"At first I did, Ma'am," said Ellen in a low voice.

"Not lately?"

³⁶Bode, op. cit., pp. 132-141.

"No Ma'am;" in a low tone still and looking down.

"Then you have neglected your Bible and prayer for some time past?"

Ellen hardly uttered, "Yes."

"Why, my child?"

"I don't know, Ma'am," said Ellen, weeping,--"that is one of the things that made me think myself so very wicked. I couldn't like to read my Bible or pray either, though I always used to before. My Bible lay down quite at the bottom of my trunk, and I even didn't like to raise my things enough to see the cover of it. I was so full of bad feelings I didn't feel fit to pray or read either."

"Ah! That is the way with the wisest of us," said her companion; "how apt we are to shrink most from our Physician just when we are in most need of Him. But, Ellen dear, that isn't right. No hand but His can tough that sickness you are complaining of. Seek it, love, seek it. He will hear and help you, no doubt of it, in every trouble you carry simply and humbly to His feet;--He has promised, you know."

They pray together and Ellen promises not to forget her Bible and prayer again, and more weeping, but now with the joy of finding a friend who can provide such spiritual help and hope. Her troubles surely will grow less.

Reading the "sweet Bible words" provides Ellen with a refuge from the hardships and sorrows of the "wide, wide world" by directing her thoughts either toward heaven (and reunion with loved ones) or toward "the gentle promises and sweet comforting words" of Christ to the weak and sorrowing. Prayer was precious because of the "Friend who draws closer to His children the closer they draw to Him." It was also a joy to Ellen, when separated from loved ones, to "think

that He who hears prayer is equally present with all His people, and that though thousands of miles lie between the petitioner and the petitioned-for the breath of prayer may span the distance and pour blessings on the far-off head."

The Providential workings of a sovereign God is another theme of Miss Warner's common to the best selling religious literature of the period. The Heavenly Father or "Friend" knows what is best for his children. His will is perfect, ordering what is best. The Biblical view that "all things work together for good," leads Miss Warner's characters to attribute everything to Providence. Even trouble and sorrow come from God, although "God sends no trouble upon His children but in love; and though we cannot see how, He will no doubt make all this work for our good." The view that "Good came out of evil" dominates this tale of Divine Providence.

Submission to the Divine Will is necessary, of course, if Good is to result. "All things work together for good" for those who love Him. This becomes Ellen's problem--how to love Him (more than Mother) and to submit to the trials ordained by His will. Submission becomes easier, however, when she realizes that "God is faithful" and "He can and He will . . . make up to us more than all we have lost." The Reward is not conceived in material terms by Miss Warner. The goal of these divinely planned tribulations is a temperate and beautiful Christian character

that will be attractive to others and will eventually inherit the promise of heaven.

In order to achieve this goal, little Ellen, must be deprived of her Mother, security, and Home so that she will have no hindrances to her love of God. As a traveler told her:

"Sometimes He sees that if He lets them alone, His Children will love some dear thing on the earth better than Himself, and He knows they will not be happy if they do so; and then, because He loves them, He takes it away,--perhaps it is a dear mother, or a dear daughter,--or else He hinders their enjoyment of it; that they may remember Him, and give their whole hearts to Him. He wants their whole hearts, that He may bless them."

God's plan and purpose for Ellen is not complete until she has seen her friend, Alice taken from her in death and has been separated from John by an ocean. Reunion with native country and loved "brother" John (Miss Warner leaves this possible romantic relationship before it becomes explicit) is possible only after she has had sufficient time and tried to develop the virtues of self-discipline and religious devotion.

Susan Warner's commitment to a Sovereign God who orders lives through trials and temptations according to His purpose, was not a commitment to thoroughgoing Calvinism. Her "New Light" Presbyterianism or more broadly, her evangelical Protestantism is reflected in the image of a living God who responds favorably to human initiative in the conversion experience. Her most common name for God

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is "Friend." Ellen and her spiritual companions are seeking and serving a personal "Friend" who hears their every cry and responds with love. No better Friend can be found than the one who "Sticketh closer than a brother." Ellen learned this, of course, only when she "had no other friends to lean upon."

The role of human effort, in establishing a faith relationship with God, is considerable in the opinion of the author of Wide, Wide World. One must not trust in striving or works, but in God alone; one must try to love God and to overcome evil with good. Ellen's struggle to become a Christian involved considerable human effort, which was rewarded when love of God and submission to His will became the object of those efforts. Ellen was often counseled to "try hard," almost leaving the reader with the impression that self-discipline may well have been the essence of Christian discipleship for Miss Warner.

The individualism of mid-nineteenth century religious thought is reflected in Ellen's search for personal piety and in her Arminian faith. Ethical problems are presented as being entirely personal and individualistic. Should she obey her guardian's order to drink wine or follow her own practice of abstinence? (In an age of temperance societies, the temperance question gets only an oblique reference by Miss Warner.) No Kingdom of God within history is expected. As John put it: "We must

wait till we join the spirits of the just made perfect, before we see society that will be all we wish for." Little of the millennial reform spirit here! The new heaven and new earth described in the book of Revelation would be built, it is implied, not by human efforts, but by God on the ruins of this world.

Miss Warner's religious individualism does not result in a camp meeting or revivalist expression of the conversion experience. Although there is little of Horace Bushnell's "Christian nurture" in Ellen's wide, wide world, she certainly does not experience an "anxious bench" conversion. Long after her initial confessions of sin and commitments to follow her Savior, she still cannot call herself a Christian. Resolving to be a Christian did not result in an "instantaneous" conversion but was only the first step in a long, slow struggle to be dispossessed of her evil spirits. Discipline and much Bible reading and prayer were the means by which little Ellen's heart was seized with Christian principle. A high standard of piety is required of this sentimental heroine, but she is not an example of frontier "crisis" conversion or Methodist perfectionism.

The roots of sin are too deep for Ellen to be suddenly transformed into a new creature without fault. Pride and resentment were constantly cropping up, particularly when the devotional life had been neglected. This

doctrine of sin was certainly not that of nineteenth or twentieth century religious liberalism. Sin, for Miss Warner's characters, was inherent in human nature, even that of a child. The power of sin, this "hard-hearted" nature, was overcome only by extensive prayer and trust in Him. The hope of a "new heaven and a new earth wherein righteousness should dwell" was based on the pessimistic view that this "wide wide world" had been filled with sin until the earth groaned under the weight of sorrow and death. Contrary to a "sentimental formula" based upon an optimistic view of human goodness, the sentimental religious book depended on the pervasive power of sin as a formidable obstacle in the struggle for personal piety.

The religious thought of a particular culture is often reflected in the hymns or religious songs of the period. Many religious novels include references to these hymns, which support, in most cases, the emphasis of the written word. The Wide, Wide World is the first, again, to illustrate this fact. Ellen Montgomery's favorite hymns reflect the pietistic discipleship already described. "How sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" with its emphasis on making the "wounded spirit whole" and calming the "troubled breast" particularly appealed to tearful Ellen. "How Firm a Foundation" and "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" were favorites also. "Rock of Ages" and "O Canaan Land" also combined her interests in religious peace now and heaven to come.

Two years later Susan Warner contributed a second work of sentimental piety to the "feminine fifties." Entitled Queechy (1852), this novel trailed the earlier volume in sales.³⁷ A more vigorous and less doleful story, Queechy is yet another story of the spiritual growth of its feminine characters. The leading character is a girl who falls from her inherited position of luxury into poverty learning thereby the same spiritual lessons Ellen Montgomery learned.³⁸ Again, feeling and emotion, rather than action and sensation characterize the literary work and the religious thought of Miss Warner.³⁸

The fifties saw the publication of a number of classics of American literature. This was the age of Hawthorne--The Scarlett Letter, The House of Seven Gables, and The Blithedale Romance. Melville's three works of the period--White-Jacket, Moby Dick, and Pierre--were largely unread. This was also the age of Thoreau's Walden and Whitman's Leaves of Grass. But this was the age of feminine best sellers. Every single one of the top sentimental religious works sold more than all of these literary works combined.³⁹

³⁷Mott, op. cit., p. 124.

³⁸Pattee, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

³⁹Hart, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

Hawthorne's reaction is well known. Writing to his publisher, in 1855, to tell him of his decision to stay in Europe, Hawthorne said:

America is now wholly given to a d----d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public is occupied with their trash --and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of the 'Lamplighter,' and other books neither better nor worse?--worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the 100,000.⁴⁰

Published in 1854 by John P. Jewett of Boston, who published Uncle Tom's Cabin two years earlier, Maria Cummins' The Lamplighter sold forty thousand copies in the first eight weeks and a hundred thousand within the first decade. Long a popular book, its sales eventually surpassed that of the Wide, Wide World.⁴¹

One student of religious best sellers, Willard Thorp, argues that The Lamplighter is a pious novel but not a religious novel because the "crux of the action is not the effect which the Christian message has on the lives of the characters."⁴² The latter half of the novel is certainly a middle-class success story and the piety tends to be platitude rather than exposition. However, the

⁴⁰Caroline Tichnor, Hawthorne and His Publisher (Boston, 1913), pp. 140-141.

⁴¹Mott, op. cit., pp. 124-125.

⁴²Willard Thorp, "The Religious Novel as Best Seller in America," in J. W. Smith and A. L. Jamison, ed., Religious Perspectives in American Culture (Princeton, 1961), p. 207.

central role of religion in the early part of the novel, as well as its pietistic themes which were common to this genre, make this best seller a part of the illustrative sources for sentimental religious thought.⁴³

Gerty, the heroine of The Lamplighter, is another Ellen Montgomery. An orphaned waif, Gerty is rescued from the Boston slums (a touch of realism not found in the Wide, Wide World) and from a cruel guardian by a friendly lamplighter, True Flint. "Uncle True," with the help of the Sullivans next door, raises Gerty as well as the old bachelor knows how. Uncle True's death throws the young girl onto the wide world again to be rescued this time by a saintly blind lady, Emily Graham. Much of the rest of Miss Cummins' novel is concerned with Gerty's sentimental attachment to Miss Emily and her romantic social success. More courageous than Susan Warner, Miss Cummins concludes the story with several proper love scenes between Gerty and her long separated childhood sweetheart, Willie Sullivan.

The Lamplighter follows the pietistic theme of Susan Warner's best seller. In the first chapters it becomes immediately apparent that there is need for "Light in Darkness." Gerty's darkness has resulted in a hot,

⁴³ Maria Cummins, The Lamplighter (New York: A. L. Burt, n.d.).

uncontrollable temper which spurs her to strike out at all the injustice which befalls her. A complete pagan, she comes to know God through the efforts of Willie and Miss Emily. Knowing Him brings the source of strength necessary to conquer self, to sacrifice personal desires to fight life's battles, and to find comfort in the face of man's wrath and in times of grief and sorrow. Perfect submission to the will of an All Wise, Righteous and personal God, leads to self-control, virtue, and holiness. God not only judgeth righteously but rewards the virtuous. For Gerty that reward is not entirely reserved for the hereafter as she finds happiness, financial security, and romance in this life.

All the elements of this popular religious literature are found in this passage about Gerty:

. . . She has locked the doors, made all things safe and comfortable, and now sits down to read, to meditate, and pray. Her trials and cares are multiplying. A great grief stares her in the face, and a great responsibility; but she shrinks not from either. No! on the contrary, she thanks God that she is here; that she had the resolution to forsake pleasure and ease, and in spite of her own weakness and man's wrath, to place herself in the front of life's battle, and bravely wait its issues. She thanks God that she knows where to look for help. But, though her heart is brave and her faith firm, she has a woman's tender nature; and, as she sits alone she weeps--weeps for herself, and for him who, far away in a foreign land, is counting the days, the months, and years which shall restore him to a mother he is destined never to see again. But remembering that she is to stand in the place of a child to that parent, and that her hand must soothe the pillow of the invalid, and minister to all her wants, comes the stern necessity of self-control--a necessity to which Gertrude has

long since learned to submit--and, rallying all her calmness and fortitude, she wipes away the tears, and commends herself to Him who is strength to the weak and comfort to the sorrowing.

A "blessed religion" sustains the heart and a "heavenly faith" leads one through suffering to the perfect joy of submission to the Goodness and Wisdom of Providence.

The Prince of the House of David: or, Three Years in the Holy City, published in 1855, was described by its author, the Reverend J. H. Ingraham, as "an account of all the scenes and wonderful incidents in the life of Jesus of Nazareth." This sacred history was an expanded version of Gospel writers' accounts, emphasizing the miracles of Christ in order to prove His divinity. Epistolary in form, the novel features a young Jewess, Adina, who writes to her father describing her contacts with the miraculous prophet, Jesus. Her father, along with the reader, is entreated to accept the historicity of the supernatural activities of this Messiah. This attack on rationalism and scepticism, including liberal or Unitarian Christianity, was to become a major theme of religious best selling writers.

Orthodoxy's fight against the new liberalism, whether of the Unitarian or more radical transcendental variety, received best selling assistance from Augusta Jane Evans Wilson. Of all the "d----d mob of scribbling women" whose first books were published in the fifties, the most talented as well as one of the most popular was Mrs. Wilson. Beulah (1859), with its defense of Methodist

orthodoxy against scepticism, and St. Elmo (1867), the erudite and yet most popular of domestic novels, established Augusta Jane Evans Wilson as probably the most successful champion of popular Victorian culture, including its "sentimental religion."⁴⁴

Religious controversy and apologetics were of minor interest to most of the feminine writers of the fifties. The domestic novels were less concerned to attack "liberal" thought than they were to affirm their relatively simple "religion of the heart." Theological differences and doctrinal squabbles did not concern these advocates of a pietistic religion of feeling, who furthermore, were writing for the widest audience possible. Augusta Jane Evans, however, while mirroring much of the mid-Victorian tradition, was an exception to this aspect of the sentimental tradition, with her excursions into the current philosophical and theological battles. Whether it was a cold, emotion-starving Calvinism or a transcendental mysticism, any form of sterile faith was confronted with the truth by "Beulah" or Edna Earl of St. Elmo.

Born in 1835, Augusta Jane Evans experienced a varied childhood in Columbus, Georgia and San Antonio, Texas. Frontier and slave-holding society, as well as

⁴⁴William Perry Fidler, Augusta Evans Wilson, 1835-1909: A Biography (Birmingham, Ala., 1951), pp. 3-7.

wealth and poverty were a part of her early life, and these provided her with material for her writings. Her first book, Inez (1855), which was written while she was still in her teens, described the Texas War of Independence within the framework of an attack on the errors and evil influences of Catholicism. A badly written book, its sales never entitled it to popular rank. The evident desire to combat theological heresy, although tempered later by her own religious struggles, foreshadowed her efforts in the two "best sellers."⁴⁵

The years, 1855-1859, were difficult ones for Miss Evans. Having read the masters of that age of romantic idealism--Goethe, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Tennyson, Cardinal Newman, Arnold, Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman, Lanier, and Lord Byron--she experienced an intellectual and religious struggle between the "reflections of that Philosophical Age" and her orthodox Christian training. A series of letters from Augusta Jane to a scholarly young Methodist preacher, the Reverend Walter Harriss, reveal the doubts she had concerning the very foundations of Christianity. Her speculations tortured her spirit, forcing her to seek for "Eternal truths" from the philosophic traditions of Western society.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 9-46.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 47-50.

The battle was won for orthodoxy. Having gone "clean through that slough of mis-called philosophy" she came out on the other side, rejecting the atheistic metaphysicians for the peace of mind of "blind faith." Nature and art were not to be rejected as unfit vessels, however; rather they were to be accepted as teachers of moral truths. Art could elevate, refine, and sanctify the heart! Miss Evan's mission had been found: an artistic endeavor that would guide its followers toward Christ's Gospel.⁴⁷ Beulah was an autobiographical record of this intellectual battle and an exposition of art's religious purpose.

The conflict between heart and mind, became the subject of Beulah. A fictional confession or record of Augusta Jane's own struggle to preserve her orthodox Methodism from the dangers of scepticism, Beulah mirrors the sentimental piety of the age. The heroine, loved by a Dr. Guy Hartwell, regards her suitor only with the affection of a girl for her guardian. During the five years in which they are separated, Beulah studies great literary works and struggles with scepticism. After hundreds of pages of sentiment, including the usual floods of tears and agonizing prayers, she becomes a Christian again and marries Dr. Hartwell on his return. The author leaves Beulah, with her feminine intuition, guiding her husband into Heaven.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 50-55.

In contrast to most sentimental novels, Beulah, and later St. Elmo, present the reader with a parade of learning which could have served as instruction in the successful defense of orthodoxy or in the futility of theological speculation. Miss Evans must have felt that art's function was not only to preach the Gospel but to discuss theology, philosophy, literature, and science for the cultural benefit of the reader. Also, the "case for orthodoxy" seemed to necessitate this futile pursuit of a rational basis for religious faith.

Beulah is launched, then, on a "Sea of Cosmogonies." She reads Poe's "Eureka" and is subverted by the "seemingly infallible reasoning" of this humanism. She has reached "the portal through which she entered the vast Pantheon of Speculation." Emerson, Carlyle, Goethe, Theodore Parker, Richter, Feurbach, Kant, and Coleridge all follow. She doubts "the plan of redemption as taught by divines, as laid down in the New Testament" and wonders about the justice of cursing "a race in order to necessitate a Savior." Having done with German mysticism and transcendentalism, Beulah flirts with Locke, Descartes, Sidney Smith, Hume, Spinoza, and others. Radical doubt forces her to cry out wearily: "Oh better die than live as I have lived, in perpetual struggles! What is life worth without peace of mind, without hope."

Rational argument, having led her to reject Christian Theism, now, however, leads her to reject an uncaused lawful

Universe. God must be the First Mover of causes and the Creator of life. She humbles "her proud intellect," leaves the "icy shadow" of scepticism, and returns to the safety of "the holy religion of Jesus Christ," where her "weary spirit found rest . . . that rest which only the exhausted wanderer through the burning wastes of speculation can truly comprehend and appreciate." The tyranny of the intellect has been defeated by the cry of the "heart." Sentimental piety has had a "learned" defense.

The period between the publication of Beulah (1859) and of St. Elmo (1867) was a period of intense work by the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society, but no major religious works were published which became best sellers. Miss Evans turned her writing talents to the "cause" of the South, and as a propagandist for the Confederacy she wrote a novel entitled, Macaria (1863), which idealized Southerners and the South. Emotionally defending the "Brave Soldiers of the Southern Army," Miss Evans moralized in typically domestic sentimentalist fashion.⁴⁸

Following the war, she crusaded for war memorials to honor Confederate dead before turning to the task of writing what became one of the top best sellers of all time. St. Elmo appeared in 1867 and was a prodigious instantaneous success. Within four months the publisher

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 84-127.

could boast of a sale approaching one million copies. Its total sales cannot be estimated accurately, but before the advent of book clubs it ran a close third to Uncle Tom's Cabin and Ben-Hur among the all-time best sellers in American fiction.⁴⁹ For some years after 1867 parish ministers were astonished at the number of male infants presented for christening with the unusual name of St. Elmo. Plantations, steamboats, girls' schools, hotels, articles of merchandise, and thirteen American towns shared the name with the children.⁵⁰ A parody, entitled St. Twelvemo, was written by humorist C. H. Webb attributing Edna's conversational ability to a dictionary swallowed during infancy.⁵¹

The sentimental version of Christianity has its most popular presentation in the novel, St. Elmo. Lacking realism, the novel accurately reflected the sentimental prejudices and emotions of its time. The emphasis on "feeling," as a guide to truth and beauty, could be found in frontier politics, customs, and art, as well as in evangelical religion. As Augusta Jane Evans' biographer puts it: "St. Elmo is as openly, as unashamedly sentimental as 'Home Sweet Home,' or

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 128-129.

⁵⁰Earnest Elmo Calkins, "St. Elmo, or, Named for a Best Seller," Saturday Review of Literature (Dec. 16, 1939), vol. 21, no. 8, p. 3.

⁵¹Mott, op. cit., p. 127.

the dramatic version of 'Rip Van Winkle,' or the sermons at a camp meeting. . . ."52

Edna Earl, in the tradition of Ellen Montgomery and Gerty True, is orphaned and must make a pilgrimage through a wide, wide world. Following a train accident, the young girl is nursed back to health by Mrs. Murray, the mistress of a large Southern plantation. The story concerns Edna's growth to physical, intellectual, and spiritual maturity and her romantic relationship with the just returned young master of the plantation, St. Elmo Murray. Mrs. Murray's son is a Byronic hero who, according to one critic, "bowled over a whole generation of romantic school-girls."⁵³ Disappointed in love as a young man, St. Elmo became a rake, breaking the heart of every beautiful woman who crossed his path. Edna's "fresh, pure heart" not only conquers the cautious, worldly-wise hero but leads him from the heresy of scepticism to Christian conversion, and to the ministry.

The noble young soul of Edna was characterized by a "Love of Nature, love of books, an earnest piety and deep religious enthusiasm," the complete catalog of sentimental thought. "Left to stray through the devious, checkered paths of life without other guidance than that which she received from communion with Greek sages and Hebrew

⁵²Fidler, op. cit., pp. 130-131.

⁵³Ibid., p. 133.

prophets," this heroine of middle-class readers became "an utter stranger to fashionable conventionality and latitudinarian ethics." When the laws of God were violated, particularly in the form of dueling, she rejected all attempts to justify the act as an acceptable social custom.

Love of nature, an important part of the romantic creed, was not rejected by Miss Evans (soon to be Mrs. L. M. Wilson, the wife of a southern Colonel) as a pantheistic threat to Christianity. Many aspects of nature's beauty, particularly the "ministry of flowers," served to remind her readers of the arguments thus furnished in favor of "the Christian philosophy of a divine design in nature." The woods and fields, the flitting bird and gurgling brook, every passing cloud and whispering breeze, all brought messages of God's eternal love and wisdom drawing the tender, yearning heart more closely to the Lord God Omnipotent.

Love of books, within the framework of Christian stewardship, was an acceptable attribute for the pure-in-heart. Edna Earl had developed this affection for books in the library of her blacksmith grandfather, who possessed a family Bible, Pilgrim's Progress, Irving's sermons on Parables, a few tracts, Plutarch's Lives and a worn school copy of Anthon's Classical Dictionary. This reading led to a love of learning and to a conversational erudition which matched the author's discourses. The love of learning could be justified because of its utility in the defense

of the Gospel. As Miss Evans saw it, the learning of Saul of Tarsus was needed to "confront and refute the scoffing sophists who, replete with philhellenic lore, and within sight of the marvellous triglyphs and metopes of the Parthenon, gathered on Mars Hill to defend their marble altars to the Unknown God."

Edna's love of learning, was therefore, not worthy for its own sake, but only as a means "to tear the veil from oracles and sibyls, and show the world that the true, good and beautiful of all theogonies and cosmogonies, of every system of religion that had waxed and waned since the gray dawn of time, could be traced to Moses and to Jesus." She understood that to engage in this high calling she must study modern knowledge as well as the classics. The new "positive science," her spiritual and intellectual guide the Reverend Mr. Manning told her, could honor the God of nature without the compromise of faith. Times have changed, he said:

'Infidelity has shifted the battlefield from metaphysics to physics, from idealism and rationalism to positivism or rank materialism; and in order to combat it successfully, in order to build up an imperishable system of Christian teleology, it is necessary that you should thoroughly acquaint yourself with the "natural sciences," with dynamics, and all the so-called "inherent forces of nature," or what Humboldt terms "primordial necessity." This apotheosis or dirt, by such men as Moleschott, Buchner, and Voght, is the real Antaeus which, though continually overthrown, springs from mother earth with renewed vigor, and after a little while some Hercules of science will lift the boaster in his inexorable arms and crush him.'

The love of books leads Edna into one of the only careers open to educated women--writing. As one of Hawthorne's "scribbling women" she can engage in apologetics for the faith and do "God's work." In the course of explaining her work as a "moral architect," she summarized Augusta Jane Evans' own religious convictions and those of the sentimental era:

'I love my race, I honor my race; I believe that human nature, sublimated by Christianity, is capable of attaining nobler heights than pagan philosophers and infidel seers ever dreamed of and because my heart yearns toward my fellow-creatures, I want to clasp one hand in the warm throbbing palm of sinful humanity, and with the other hold up the lamp that God gave me to carry through this world, and so struggle onward, heavenward, with this generation of men and women. I claim no clear Uriel vision, now and then I stumble and grope; but at least I try to keep my little lamp trimmed, and I am not so blind as some, who reel and stagger in the maremme of crime and fashionable vice. As a pilgrim toiling through a world of sinful temptation, and the night of time where the stars are often shrouded, I cry to those beyond and above me, "Hold high your lights, that I may see my way!" and to those behind the below me, "Brothers! Sisters! come on, come up!" Ah! these steepes of human life are hard enough to climb when each shares his light and divides his neighbor's grievous burden. God help us all to help one another!'

The love of nature and the love of books were both subordinate to the "earnest piety and deep religious enthusiasm" of this pilgrim toiling through a sinful world on the way to heaven. Sentimental pietism, with its rejection of a "cold, intellectual Christianity" and its emphasis on intuitive faith nourished by prayer and Bible reading, permeates St. Elmo. The "sentiments" aroused by the beauty of God's handiwork, by the struggles heavenward

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past the temptations of this world (including unholy romance), and by the holy love between consecrated Christians provide an acceptable medium for proclaiming God's merciful atonement through Jesus Christ.

Miss Evans' orthodoxy, although an optimistic Methodism in contrast with Susan Warner's comparatively dour Presbyterianism, reflected the continuing emphasis upon the necessity of submission to God's perfect and just will in order to attain happiness. Sorrow, death, and pain were conceived of as inflicted by God in order to show men their dependence on Him. The death of loved ones who are Christians provided proof of the assurance of immortality. Sinful, weak, human nature could, however, look to Jesus as St. Elmo did, and hear the comforting words "'Come unto me, all ye weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'" God answers prayer, atones for sin, and, for Methodist St. Elmo, makes free from sin providing "'fruit unto holiness,'" as well as everlasting life.

The sixties came to a close with the publishing of a "better" seller, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps [Ward]'s The Gates Ajar (1868). A treatise on the afterlife, this ethereal story was written by a feminine scribbler who felt she had been inspired. As she explained it in her autobiography:

That book grew so naturally, it was so inevitable, it was so unpremeditated, it came so plainly from that something not one's self which makes for uses in which one's self is extinguished, that there are times when it seems to me as if I had no more to do with the writing of it than the bough through which the wind cries, or the wave by means of which the tide rises. The angel said unto me 'Write!' and I wrote.⁵⁴

This inspiration seems to have fallen short, however, of Biblical or best seller quality even though the book sold well for a few years. It had a natural appeal to the bereaved following the Civil War, as the heroine, Miss Mary, has lost her only brother, Roy, in the War, and now finds it impossible to be resigned to the afflictions of "a dreadful God." The problem seems to be that the church, with its scholarly minister, has taught her only "glittering generalities, cold commonplace, vagueness, unreality" and dreadful truths about God, death and heaven. When she has been helped by an aunt to peek through the gates that are ajar and see heaven, a loving God is exposed and a trusting faith is restored.

Although the work abounds in comforting conjectures about heaven, including the view that the departed Roy is with his sister constantly in spirit and has retained most of his human, bodily characteristics, the main thesis is the loving, human side of God-in-Christ, so often neglected by the "polished Dogma" of "eloquent sermons." This anti-intellectual strain, depreciating even the life of learning

⁵⁴Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, Chapters From a Life (1896), p. 95.

held so high by Augusta Jane Evans, is the logical extreme of the pietism inherent in the sentimental best sellers. The works of E. P. Roe, Charles Sheldon, and Harold Bell Wright were to share, in varying degrees, this anti-dogma, anti-creed, and even anti-intellect sentiment of a "religion of the heart."

CHAPTER II

THE CONVERSION THEME OF E. P. ROE

Pioneers in theology, philosophy, and social theory during the Gilded Age were re-interpreting reality in a nation undergoing radical social and economic transformations. Under the impact of post-Hegelian idealism and Darwinian evolutionary theory, major intellectual discoveries challenged American beliefs. American writers responded to these intellectual currents and social realities with forms of realism that contrasted sharply with the pre-war romanticism.

Popular tastes, however, continued to reflect patterns of thought and feeling that had been accepted in the 1850's. The continuity and unity of popular thought from the fifties through the eighties was little affected by the intellectual revolution of the period.¹ In the face of industrialization and urbanization, popular culture accepted with complacency the agrarian values of an earlier age.²

¹Robert R. Roberts, "Gilt, Gingerbread, and Realism: the Public and Its Taste," The Gilded Age: A Reappraisal, ed. H. Wayne Morgan (Syracuse, N.Y., 1963), p. 175.

²Henry Nash Smith, ed., Popular Culture and Industrialism, 1865-1890 (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1967), pp. iv-xvii.

An optimistic belief in progress provided the foundation for the individualistic success cult of the self-made man. The Gospel of Wealth attempted to reconcile this belief in progress with the moral values of an earlier rural and village age.

Popular literary tastes continued to prefer the sentimental, domestic, romance. The feminine writers of sentiment continued to provide their readers, in the seventies, with novels that celebrated an insipid Victorianism. The heroines of Mrs. Henry Wood's East Lynne, Miss Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Lady Audley's Secret, and Marie Louise de la Ramee's Under Two Flags combined the European taste for the sensational with the usual domestic heart-breaks and the triumph of good over evil.³ A Publisher's Weekly survey of booksellers in 1878, revealed that the most widely sold fiction included St. Elmo, The Wide, Wide World, and two novels by the Reverend E. P. Roe.⁴

Popular religious values, particularly the sentimental piety of Susan Warner and Augusta Evans Wilson, received strong support from the works of Edward Payson Roe. A Presbyterian clergyman, Roe graduated from Williams College and served as a Union chaplain during the Civil War.

³Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York, 1947), pp. 143-146.

⁴Publishers Weekly, May 20, 1876; Allen Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America (New York, 1927); James D. Hart, The Popular Book (New York, 1950), pp. 168-169.

At the close of the war he became pastor of the Highland Falls, New York, Presbyterian Church. In 1871, while serving in this pastorate, Roe learned of the Chicago fire and visited the city before the embers stopped smoldering. After wandering about the ruins for several days, he returned home to write the novel Barriers Burned Away.⁵ Published in serial form in the New York Evangelist, the story was so popular that Dodd, Mead Publishers issued it in book form in 1872. The immediate success of the novel encouraged the author to try other sermons in fictional form. His fourth novel, Opening a Chestnut Burr (1874), established the success of his formula and he resigned from his church to devote his talents to writing for this enlarged congregation.⁶

These two best sellers, and the fifteen popular novels which followed, established E. P. Roe as one of the most popular novelists of the Gilded Age. Matthew Arnold suggested, with some sarcasm, that the "western states are at this moment being nourished and formed, we hear, on the novels of a native author called Roe."⁷ His serial fiction was also appearing in a half-dozen religious periodicals.⁸

⁵Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XVI, p. 84.

⁶Mott, op. cit., pp. 147-148.

⁷Matthew Arnold, Civilization in the United States (New York, 1888), p. 184.

⁸Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, Vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass., 1938), pp. 54, 76, 99, 224.

One of the fruits of this prolific and popular writing career was an estimated annual royalty of \$15,000.⁹

Another has been the credit, shared with Lew Wallace, for dispelling the last American doubts and prejudices against the novel.¹⁰

Roe's formula was simple and he employed it consistently throughout his fifteen years of writing. As with the Chicago fire, he used some topical material, historical event, or current issue. Drawing on personal observation or newspaper accounts he developed a descriptive style that emphasized "Nature" and rural virtues. Almost invariably the plot concerned what Carl Van Doren called "the simultaneous pursuit of wives, fortunes, and salvation."¹¹ The last goal, salvation through a personal conversion experience, was the dominant theme.

The conversion theme was not new to best selling religious literature. The Wide, Wide World and St. Elmo had used conversion to Christianity as part of the novels' didactic purpose. A dramatic religious experience was certainly compatible with much of nineteenth-century Protestantism. Even though the seventies began what has

⁹Publishers Weekly, July 28, 1888.

¹⁰DAB, Vol. XVI, p. 85.

¹¹Carl Van Doren, "The Later Novel," The Cambridge History of American Literature, Vol. 3, ed. by Trent et al. (1921), p. 74.

been called a "critical period in American religion" with the challenges of industrialism, urbanism, and immigration, as well as Darwinism and Biblical criticism, the majority of Protestants held fast to the individualistic patterns of religious thought and expression.

E. P. Roe's novels came, then, during a period of broad social and theological re-orientation. His readers were probably among the bulk of the nation's churchgoers who have been described as "country-bred, evangelically oriented, intellectually unsophisticated, and sentimentally insecure individuals."¹² Rejecting the "New Theology," with its progressive sympathies for the new intellectual currents, Roe's readers shared the conservative tastes of Dwight L. Moody's revival audiences. The common bond between the "sentiment and make-believe" of popular writing and the religious rhetoric of preachers like Moody and Thomas DeWitt Talmage is striking. The anecdotal nature of popular preaching corresponds to the rise of "good and bad boy" stories in the religious press and popular magazines.¹³

The new revivalism of Moody was one phase of the Third Great Awakening, as William McLoughlin has called

¹²William G. McLoughlin, Jr., Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham (New York, 1959), p. 168.

¹³Bernard A. Weisberger, They Gathered at the River (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1966), pp. 171-173.

it.¹⁴ Moody preached that a return to individual piety was the answer to the challenge of secularism and materialism. He shared the emphasis of Henry Ward Beecher's conservative version of the "New Theology," which stressed the doctrine of love rather than the terror of hell-fire. Neither orthodoxy nor progressivism was as important as a pietistic concern for soul winning and a perfectionist belief that a truly converted Christian was free from sin and all its temptations.¹⁵ The conversion motif in Gilded-Age revivalism, with its "old truths" of individual piety in the face of change, found its counterpart in the novels of E. P. Roe.

Dennis Fleet, the hero of Barriers Burned Away, is a pious country lad who has migrated to the city. By practicing the virtues of honesty, industry, and thrift, Dennis is increasingly able to obtain promotions in business. His Christian piety and rural simplicity contrasted with the "frivolousness" and "immodesty" of fashionable and class-conscious urban society. Dennis' real tribulations involve his love for Christine Ludolph. Miss Ludolph is separated from him by a number of barriers: wealth and social class; German ancestral ties, including a probable noble marriage; and most importantly, her German scepticism about

¹⁴McLoughlin, op. cit., p. 167.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 169.

Christianity. These barriers between the beautiful but unconverted girl and the heroic Christian youth are burned away in the Chicago fire. The rescue of Miss Ludolph by Mr. Fleet not only saves her life but also saves her from a life of unbelief and selfishness. Her conversion on the shores of Lake Michigan, as the city burns behind them, is a dramatic testimony to the power of prayer--her feeble prayer for another victim of the fire and Dennis' prayer for her salvation.

With Christine Ludolph's conversion to Christian faith and the loss of her father's life, and of her own wealth and status in the fire, all the barriers to their romance have been removed, goodness and providence have been proclaimed in this story of the triumph of Divine and human love. As the Reverend Roe puts it:

Our story is finished.

It only remains to say that Christine stands high at court, but it is a grander one than any of earth. She is allied to a noble, but to one who has received his patent from no petty sovereign of this world. She has lost sight of the transient laurel wreath which she sought to grasp at such cost to herself and others, in view of the "crown of glory that fadeth not away," and to this already, as an earnest Christian, she has added starry jewels.

Below is Ludolph Hall in which sturdy independence led her to begin her married life. But she is climbing the mountain at her husband's side, and often her hands steady and help him. The ash-tree, twined with the passionflower, is not very far above them, and the villa, beautiful within and without, is no vain dream of the future. But even in happy youth their eyes of faith see in airy, golden outline their heavenly home awaiting them.¹⁶

¹⁶E. P. Roe, Barriers Burned Away (New York, 1900), p. 455.

After burning such formidable barriers to faith and love, E. P. Roe employed his formula in other conversion novels. A prickly chestnut burr was the metaphor for his next best seller. The change from an urban to a rural setting and from a Christian hero to a Christian heroine did not alter the formula found in Opening a Chestnut Burr (1874). Walter Gregory, a "blase man of the world," who had exhausted himself in the evil dregs of life, is clearly in need of a "simple, truthful" heroine and a conversion to Christianity. Annie Walton, whose character is in some degree "the essence of Christ's character," becomes the Providential source of his salvation.

Gregory finds the girl and his faith by returning to his ancestral home in the highlands of the Hudson. He arrives with the dim hope that Nature and memories of his pious mother will combat the physical illness and moral debasement of his evil, urban life. A religious sceptic, in a non-intellectual sense, he lived a materialistic and unbelieving existence. The profits and pleasures of the moment, without the creedal customs and traditions of religion, were the "all in all" of his ambitions. Annie Walton became the Divine Instrument for changing all that. Intuitively she saw his need, and ministered to him by quietly living and expressing her steadfast faith.

This lost soul, having lost faith in himself and mankind, begins to read a Bible presented to him by Annie.

Starting with the fourteenth chapter of St. John, where Annie had marked: "Begin here," he read:

Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

Finding himself believing God he cried out: "Lord Jesus, I am palsied through sin; lift me up, that I may come to thee." He continued to read Annie's Bible every day, finding his doubt and fears slowly vanishing. Although his faith came slowly, unlike the dramatic conversion of Christine Ludolph, the author indicates that "He was a Christian, though he did not know it, and would not presume to call himself such even to himself."¹⁷

Opening a Chestnut Burr, concludes with Gregory triumphing over his deceitful rival for Annie's love and his heroic effort to save lives in a sea-disaster. The hero emerges with his manhood restored by Christian faith, with a wife, and a business that prospers. God's providential love has again been demonstrated in the salvation of the sinner and the happiness of the romance. In this second best seller, Roe was also well on his way to converting American readers to the belief that novels could be more effective than sermons in the evangelical cause.

¹⁷E. P. Roe, Opening a Chestnut Burr (New York, 1902), p. 375.

Of the dozen novels that E. P. Roe wrote before his death in 1888, the only other best seller was From Jest to Earnest (1875).¹⁸ As the title indicates, the same conversion theme is at work. In this case two of the main characters are converted from frivolous, upper-class lives of "jest" to that of "earnest" Christianity. Lottie Marsden, a rich and fashionable idolater of the world, finds true self-hood in Christian faith through the influence of the young seminarian, Frank Hemstead. Romance flourishes and Mr. and Mrs. Hemstead become home missionaries where they "are the chief social, refining, and Christianizing influences of a growing Western town."¹⁹ The other conversion involves a Mr. Harcourt, whose reputation as a lawyer is somewhat overshadowed by his sporting bachelor life. Alice Martell and a series of crises, including a near drowning in the river, lead the sinner to repentance and faith.

Roe's narratives seem to be preaching, like young Hemstead on his western mission, "Such a wholesome, sunny Gospel that it won even the most prejudiced." Certainly the most sceptical and hardened sinners in these novels are unable to resist the influence of God's love as it is lived and witnessed to by a Christ-like hero or heroine.

¹⁸Mott calls it a "better seller," op. cit., p. 322.

¹⁹E. P. Roe, From Jest to Earnest (New York, 1886), p. 412.

Conversion, for Roe's sinners, never involves a theological, creedal, or ecclesiastical commitment. A simple act of faith--trusting God and the promises of the Bible--is all that is required as a prerequisite. Obedience is also essential, if one is to be truly counted among the redeemed. Men worship God in love, faith, and obedience.

True religion, then, is a practical faith. Roe frequently made clear in his dialogue sermonettes that religious feelings come and go but that the test of conversion is practical discipleship. "What do you propose to do?," Hemstead asks Lottie. "Are you willing to take up your cross and become His faithful follower?" This test question concerning practical discipleship, while pietistic in its concern for individual ethics, expressed the activistic mood of American Christianity. Both revivalism and the social gospel shared this emphasis on practical fruit of religious experience. Roe's Christians avoided the unrefined, lower-middle-class revivalism and the social heresies of the Progressives, but they also demanded behavioral change from professed conversions. Annie Walton summed it up when she asked: "Does feeling merely make a Christian? Is not action more than feeling? Do not trusting, following serving, and seeking to obey, make a Christian?"

How are men convinced of their need of Christ and brought to saving faith? For Roe, conversion was a product

of God's providence and love striking a response in the heart and experience of the sinner. Although crises, such as fire, shipwreck, snowstorms and other natural disasters were often precipitating events, the reader was explicitly reminded that God woos men through the love and kindness of simple, natural Christians. The evil that befalls men, while not always understandable to finite minds, is usually attributable to the blindness and affliction of sin. Roe's characters suffer greatest when caught in a web of weakness and fear spun by their own sinful lives. Natural disasters and temporary romantic difficulties are surmounted with triumph when their peace has been made with God.

Peace with God was not, however, the product of reason or intellectual inquiry. Heart and experience, not head, lead unerringly to truth. When Gregory of Opening a Chestnut Burr appealed to reason above conscience, Annie intuitively knew he was wrong. She replied:

Even my slight knowledge of the past has taught me how many absurd and monstrous things can be done and said in the name of reason. Religion is a matter of revelation and experience. But it is not contrary to reason. . . . My religion is a matter of fact, of vivid consciousness.²⁰

The appeal to revelation and experience, did not preclude arguments for the faith. Most of Roe's characters were effective apologists in the face of sceptical attacks on

²⁰Roe, Chestnut Burr, p. 196.

Christianity. In the lengthy beach episode of Barriers Burned Away, Dennis parries all of Christine's sophisticated thrusts at belief and leaves the feminine sceptic without intellectual defenses against her natural impulses to believe.

The natural impulse was Roe's dominant theme when dealing with human character and motivation. Conscience and experience are men's surest guide. Religious dogma was rejected if it did not conform to the intuitive, natural experiences. The Bible and its truths were accepted because of its conformity to experience. Christianity passed the pragmatic test. It worked, bringing happiness and contentment, and in the case of Roe's heroes, health and prosperity also. His Christians thrived under the influence of Nature. Artificial environments, particularly the city, fostered artificial character and ambition. Only by resisting the temptations of wealth, high society, and other unnatural influences could one find his true natural self-hood.

Depravity of the human heart is not, therefore, totally the condition of Roe's sinners. Human nature is a mixture of good and evil. The taint of sin poisons the natural flower but does not completely obliterate the original beauty or the obvious design. Lottie and Christine are both described as examples of nature's most exquisite workmanship, yet tarnished jewels. While these two heroines, as well as Gregory and Harcourt, are blinded to truth

and made weak by sin, they often reveal the potentially untarnished character which they inherited from nature or pious mothers.

Women clearly are the best hope of preserving and nurturing simple, natural Christian faith. Unless raised herself by pagan parents, as in Christine's and Lottie's cases, a woman can be like Annie, a maiden sent by God to touch sinful men. As Roe put it in his preface to Opening a Chestnut Burr:

. . . a glad zest and hopefulness might be inspired even in the most jaded and ennui-cursed, were there in our homes such simple, truthful natures as that of my heroine; and in the sphere of quiet homes--not elsewhere--I believe that woman can best rule and save the world.

As mothers or wives, who practice simple piety, women may look forward to a central role in the conversion of man and society.

If Christianity is largely a natural response to one's better self, aided, of course, by Divine Grace, then theological and ecclesiastical expressions are, at best, unnecessary and, at worst, artificial substitutes. Creeds, unregenerated church members, and fashionable churches are not held in high esteem by Roe's Christians. Following his conversion, Gregory becomes part of a struggling mission rather than joining a "gorgeous temple on Fifth Avenue." Henstead sacrifices opportunities for a prestigious urban ministry for home mission work in the West. Dennis and Christine never seem to need a church or minister to begin

or pursue the Christian life. Roe's religion was clearly Protestant Evangelicalism with its non-creedal, anti-dogmatic, pietism and unconcern for ecclesiastic authority.

The winds of philosophical and theological change are barely felt by the reader of these novels. Reason in religion is clearly subservient to heart-felt experience. "New school rationalists," "scientific sceptics," and "modern philosophers" are only part of a long history of intelligent men who have been ignorant of the Bible and the power of prayer. The threat to religion from new scientific endeavors is no greater than at any time in history. There is no necessary conflict between realms of knowledge, since truth is one. Even Biblical criticism is not to be feared. As Hemstead expressed it: "If all the light of human knowledge were turned upon it in one burning focus, its intrinsic truth would only be revealed more clearly."

Roe's gospel was certainly of a middle-class variety. He is one of the literary advocates of self-improvement, if not a sentimental apostle of the self-made man. His settings and characters were a reflection of the native middle-class, with its celebration of industry, frugality, integrity and piety. His novels are also an early example of the native middle-class revolt against the corrupting influence of urban industrialism, with its unethical business practices and "foreign" laboring masses. The enemies of

traditional values are clearly identified in Barriers Burned Away. The Browns personify all the unattractiveness of the nouveau riche and the German, Ludolph, is clearly unAmerican in his impious materialism. The city, as in all of Roe's novels, represents the evil triumph of luxury, fashion, and extravagance over traditional ideals of simplicity, modesty, and frugality. Egalitarianism is threatened by the immorality of the new values.²¹

Although a self-made man will probably be a man of selfishness, pride, and impiety, the old ideal of self-improvement was not to be rejected. As Hemstead explained it: God "will help only those who try to help themselves." Success was not to be rejected if it could be had on Christian terms. Dennis Fleet's rise in business and Gregory's material success seemed to be a direct result of Christian virtues, particularly integrity. In fact, for Roe's characters, doing God's will did not mean a "vale of tears" but rather prosperity and happiness in this world.

Roe's gospel, then, was a judgment on and a message to the rich and fashionable rather than the poor. The simple and searching gospel of Christ was the answer to the discontent of sophisticated, wealthy, urbanites who

²¹John G. Cawelti, Apostles of the Self-Made Man (Chicago, 1965), pp. 131-133.

had been raised in the new pagan society or who departed from the rural piety of mother's hearth. These practical atheists needed to be confronted with the message of God's providence and love and their need of conversion to obedient faith. The result would be heroic lives, able to endure natural disasters and prosperity, and touching the rest of humanity with kindness and forgiveness.

The theme of religion as easing the pain and difficulty of decision-making, and providing "power to live by" for "successful living" is a persistent one in non-fiction as well. In one study of best selling "inspirational religious literature," it has been demonstrated that happiness and satisfaction were the promised fruit of religion.²² One of the earliest and most popular inspirational books on religious living was Hannah Whitall Smith's The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life. Published first in 1875 (the publishers, Fleming H. Revell, claim a date of 1870, although the first copyright was in 1883), it was estimated that her inspirational classic had a sales of nearly two million by 1952.²³ The more recent paperback edition is still a prominent book in religious book stores.

²²Louis Schneider and Sanford M. Dornbusch, Popular Religion: Inspirational Books in America (Chicago, 1958), p. 15.

²³Foreword of 1952 edition of Hannah W. Smith, The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1952), p. 8.

Hannah Whitall Smith brought her Quaker faith in the inner life to the task of reviving the "secret" of a happy life. She saw herself as part of the "apostolic succession of those who have walked and talked with God," and who can, therefore, "tell the blessed story . . . in the homely and familiar words of everyday life." It was not to be a theological book or a sectarian one. As she stated it in the preface of the 1888 edition:

I do not want to change the theological views of a single individual. The truths I have to tell are not theological, but practical. They are, I believe, the fundamental truths of life and experience, the truths that underlie all theologies, and that are in fact their real and vital meaning. They will fit in with every creed simply making it possible for those who hold the creed to live up to their own beliefs, and to find in them the experimental realities of a present Savior and a present salvation.²⁴

The practical, non-theological, anti-creedal message of the heart had another effective preacher who was capable of helping E. P. Roe and others take "the gloom from the Gospel" and make life an unending joy.

The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life grew out of a religious experience which Hannah Smith called the "higher life" or the "life of faith." She described this experience, the fourth and final "epoch" of her religious life, as a life of "absolute consecration, entire obedience,

²⁴Hannah W. Smith, The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life (New York, 1888), p. vi.

and simple trust."²⁵ She was convinced that all of God's children "feel instinctively, in their moments of divine illumination, that a life of inward rest and outward victory is their inalienable birthright."²⁶ She went on to describe a religious life which promised not only salvation from the penalty of sin but salvation from the power of sin. A consecrated life, obedient and faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, results in a life of "practical holiness."

This life "hid with Christ in God" is one of personal piety matching all the demands of Wesleyan Methodism's Christian perfection. Mrs. Smith describes the practical results of this kind of Christian life in terms quite congenial to that body of "holiness" literature characteristic of mid-nineteenth century perfectionism:

Meekness and quietness of spirit become in time the characteristics of the daily life. A submissive acceptance of the will of God, as it comes in the hourly events of each day, is manifested; pliability in the hands of God to do or to suffer all the good pleasure of His will; sweetness under provocation; calmness in the midst of turmoil and bustle; a yielding to the wishes of others, and an insensibility to slights and affronts; absence of worry or anxiety; deliverance from care and fear,--all these, and many other similar graces, are invariably found to be the natural outward development of that inward life which is hid with Christ in God.²⁷

²⁵H. W. Smith, The Unselfishness of God and How I Discovered It (New York, 1903), p. 276.

²⁶Smith, The Christian's Secret . . . (1888), pp. 15-16.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 203-204.

The methodical daily life of such Christians leads to a self-denying consideration of others; simplicity in dress and life styles; renunciation of self-indulging habits, and the surrender of all "purely fleshly gratifications." Service to others also follows and demands stewardship of occupation, voice, purse, pen, hands and feet.

The "secret," then, is found in faithfully following God's will as it is revealed in the daily devotional walk. There is no question about the certainty of that revelation to the completely consecrated and submissive will. Obedience, also a possibility for the consecrated Christian, will soon lead the believer into such a "wonderful life of conformity to Himself" that it will be evident to all around him. The "happy life," then, is the "sweet joy of being an 'epistle of Christ, known and read of all men.'" It is not a worldly happiness, depending on material success or even the interpersonal fruits of "positive thinking," but rather a happiness that grows more "unworldly, more serene, more heavenminded" until the affairs of this world are completely overshadowed by "a most blessed union with the Lord Jesus Christ."²⁸

The "unworldly" quietism of Hannah Smith's happy life did not exclude the delight of "the welfare of His Creatures." Service to others was one of the marks of

²⁸Ibid., pp. 204-208.

practical holiness. The absence of any reference to pressing social crises in her best seller must be balanced with the reform interests of her own life. She worked ardently for peace, temperance, and feminist causes in the tradition of Quaker activism.²⁹ Pietism and perfectionism did not exclude interest in social reform. In fact, as Timothy Smith pointed out in regard to pre-Civil War revivalism, perfectionism could be a motivating force for social reform.³⁰

The Christian perfectionism of pre-Civil War evangelical and reform movements carried over into the Gilded Age.³¹ While many Gilded Age Protestants accepted the blessings of material progress or took comfort in Moody's premillennial evangelism, others found a religious sanction for their discontent with this world. Uprooted Protestant workers increasingly found the religious ties and certainties of the past a resource for expressing disaffection with the acquisitive society of the present. Labor reformers often appealed to the absolute values of pre-industrial Christian perfectionism to legitimize their

²⁹DAB, Vol. 17, pp. 274-275.

³⁰Timothy Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform (New York, 1965).

³¹Herbert G. Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age," American Historical Review, Vol. LXXII (Oct., 1966), pp. 74-101; C. E. Olmstead, History of Religion in the United States (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1960), p. 352.

attacks on the new dogmas of Gilded Age social thought--Spencerian determinism, laissez-faire industrialism, and the Gospel of Wealth.³²

Gilded Age Protestantism's interest in both pietism and social reform is reflected further in the Congregational minister, Josiah Strong's, popular volume, Our Country (1885). Strong's book illustrates much of the era of transition from an individualistic to a social gospel. A response to the challenges of industrialism, immigration, and particularly urbanism, Our Country was a broadly influential study; "the Uncle Tom's Cabin of city reform," according to the historian Henry May.³³ The third version of Our Country to be published by the American Home Missionary Society, Strong's volume turned out to be more than a home missionary pamphlet. Before Turner wrote his essay on the frontier, Strong had sensed the potential crisis of a disappearing Western frontier and the rise of the city. Extraordinary times demanded an extraordinary response on the part of the church and Christian Anglo-Saxon civilization.³⁴

Reverend Strong had served Congregational pastorates in the western missionary field as well as in the old

³²Gutman, op. cit., pp. 78, 96, 98.

³³Henry F. May, Protestant Churches and Industrial America (New York, 1963), p. 116.

³⁴Jurgen Herbst, "Editor's Introduction," Our Country (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. ix-xxvi.

missionary area of Ohio. After serving as Secretary of the Home Missionary Society in Ohio, he eventually became General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance for the United States. It was from this position that he provided thirty years of leadership for the evangelical wing of the social gospel movement. Writing as a Congregational minister with a strong involvement in home missions, he set forth his view of America's historic mission and contemporary crisis within the framework of the optimistic new theology.³⁵

Stewardship was the dominant theme. God had promised to use America as an instrument in bringing about the Kingdom of God. The progress of western civilization revealed God's plan of redemption. Yet civilization brought not only promise of progress but mounting discontents. The "putrefying sores" of urban slums threatened the health of the social system. Romanism and unregulated immigration added to the perils of American mission. The crisis illustrated the continued need for missionary efforts and stewardship of resources to promote conversion. America had been blessed with wealth, as Strong's statistics illustrated, and since it professed to be a Christian nation, it was obligated to use an increasing proportion of its wealth for the advancement of "the Lord's work."

Strong's version of the Gospel of Wealth stressed both the evil and good potential of money. Anglo-Saxons

³⁵Ibid., pp. xv-xvii.

were noted for both their acquisitive love of money as well as their self-denying charity. Wealth had created social classes and subverted equalitarianism, but it had also provided the opportunity for world-wide evangelism. The task of Our Country was to realize the tremendous possibilities of a Christianized money power. Since all of man's possessions belonged to God, Strong argued that the Christian responsibility of stewardship was imposed by Divine plan. The challenge to America was one of responding to the crises of the day with consecrated money power. The result would be the end of the "social question" and the hastening of the arrival of the Kingdom.

This principle of stewardship explains Strong's approach to America's relation to the World. In a chapter entitled "The Anglo-Saxon and the World's Future," Strong argued that the world's future is to be shaped by the competitive and superior civilization of the Anglo-Saxon. Historians usually cite this chapter as proof of Strong's support for and influence on an aggressive, jingoistic, nationalism that culminated in the imperialistic expansionism of the turn of the century. However, as one critic has recently pointed out, Strong did not use Anglo-Saxon superiority, competition among races, and Darwinism as an expression of aggressive nationalism. Strong's nationalism was, rather, inspired by the principles of social Christianity and his faith in God's providential use of this

Anglo-Saxon nation to advance the Kingdom. World evangelization and international cooperation rather than political and economic imperialism were his goals. Social reform at home would strengthen America for an unselfish nationalism that would fulfill Christian stewardship by serving internationalism.³⁶

³⁶D. R. Muller, "Josiah Strong and American Nationalism: A Reevaluation," Journal of American History, Vol. LIII, No. 3 (Dec., 1966), pp. 487-503.

CHAPTER III

THE CHRIST-STORY TRADITION: BEN-HUR

General Lew Wallace's Ben-Hur, A Tale of the Christ, first published in 1880, ranks among the top half-dozen best sellers by American authors and surpassed all other examples of best-selling religious novels in popularity.¹ This famous story of Christ's time, with its mixture of Oriental, Roman, and Christian elements, has become a classic example of best-selling religion. The "quest for the historical Jesus" was not only a scholarly effort of liberal, theological critics at the end of the nineteenth century but also an interest of the popular religious mind as well. In fact, Ben-Hur had been preceded and was to be followed by popular literature which sought to capture the essence of the life and times of Jesus. From the novels of the Reverend William Ware, in the eighteen-thirties and forties, to those of Sholem Asch and Lloyd Douglas, the Christ-story remains a persistent theme among religious best sellers.

The first popular American religious novel to deal with the historical origins of Christianity was the Reverend

¹Frank L. Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York, 1947), p. 174.

William Ware's Letters of Lucius M. Piso, from Palmyra to his Friend Marcus Curtius at Rome (1837). A second edition was issued in 1838 and the novel was retitled Zenobia; or, The Fall of Palmyra. By the 1860's, when the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society were distributing millions of pages of testaments and tracts to a war-torn nation, Ware's Zenobia had been issued in eight editions.² Ware wrote a sequel to Zenobia in 1838, Probus; or, Rome in the Third Century. His third and last novel, Julian; or, Scenes in Judea (1841) continued to follow the theme of the successful search for the Christ and of Christ's disturbing presence in the beginning of Christian history. Ware had inaugurated a "greatest story ever told" tradition that was to reach a wide audience for over one hundred years.

Zenobia also reflects a Unitarian perspective supportive of the anti-creedal, non-dogmatic nature of popular American Christianity. William Ware brought to this literary effort a scholarly religious background. The son of the Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard, he was himself ordained as a Unitarian minister in 1821. He served his first pastorate in New York City at the newly established Unitarian Church. His health soon ended his pastoral ministry, and made possible a writing career that was to

²James D. Hart, The Popular Book (New York, 1950), p. 118.

place him in that long line of clerical, best-selling authors.³

This first novel of Ware's is in the form of a series of letters from Lucius Piso, an aristocratic citizen of Rome, to his friend Marcus Curtius. Lucius has traveled to the wealthy and beautiful city of Palmyra and his letters to Marcus, back home in Rome, are full of the happenings in this exotic fringe of the Empire. Queen Zenobia is the ruler of Palmyra only by the grace of the Roman Emperor Aurelian, but Lucius finds her court so attractive that he becomes a member of that elite, inner circle. The Queen, a charming, cultivated ruler, has surrounded herself with the best in philosophy, religion, and the arts. The court of Zenobia becomes a perfect setting for a dialectical treatment of the new religion, Christianity. Zenobia's daughter, Julia, serves the author's purpose by introducing her new religious faith to the court circle. Having been instructed by both Paul, the Bishop of Antioch, and St. Thomas, the hermit, Julia is ready to discuss questions of immortality or revelation even with her tutor, the philosopher Longinus.

The religious debates, at the feet of Zenobia, reflect many of the theological currents of the eighteen thirties. Ware was writing during the triumphal period

³Willard Throp, "The Religious Novel as Best Seller In America," Religious Perspectives In American Culture, ed. J. W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton, N.J., 1961), p. 197.

of his denomination in New England. William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) was providing outstanding leadership for Unitarian Christianity as pastor of the Federal Street Church in Boston. Channing, in his "Baltimore Sermon" in 1819, had expressed the Arian view of a non-Trinitarian, unified God, who revealed himself to men through their innate rational and moral faculties. Rejecting the orthodox Incarnation and Atonement, Channing Unitarians, of whom Ware was one, emphasized the immanence of God in Christ and all men, and the virtuous life that leads to happiness and salvation.⁴ Ware's fictional Christians are clearly Unitarians of this variety. While accepting miracles, as did Channing, and special revelation, Julia is taught a faith that appeals to reason and the affections. A tolerant, active religion of service is presented to the sophisticated admirers of Zenobia. The liberal nature of this new faith is even more clearly revealed in the absence of any mention of God's judgment of evil or man's sinful nature. Doubt and scepticism are but temporary obstacles to the rational and moral arguments for this religion of love.

Ware's fictional characters are chiefly concerned about the doctrines of immortality of the soul and the nature of revelation or divine authority. While all the participants in the dialogues seem to agree that men yearn

⁴Clifton E. Olmstead, History of Religion in the United States (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1960), pp. 296-297.

for, and therefore believe in, immortality, yet they are attracted by Julia's presentation of Christianity's authoritativeness. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle may have understood many eternal truths, but only Christianity speaks authoritatively as the voice of God. In answer to the objection that Christians are divided by many teachers and doctrines, Julia replies:

I admit that there are disputes among the Christians, but like the disputes among philosophers, they are about secondary matters. There is no dispute concerning the great and chiefly interesting part of the religion--its revelation of a future life. Christians have never divided here, nor on another point, that Christ, the founder of the religion, was a true messenger from God. The voice of Christianity on both these points is a clear one. Thus, I think, will everyone judge, who, as I have done, will read the writings in which the religion is found. And I am persuaded it is because it is so plain a voice here, that it is bidding fair to supersede every other form of religion. And that it is a voice from God, is, it seems to me, made out with as much clearness as we could look for. That Christ, the author of this religion, was a messenger from God, was shown by his miracles.

In addition to the voice of God, through the miracle-working messenger Jesus Christ, promising happiness in an afterlife, Christianity was an ethical system that teaches "goodness and faithfulness to the sense of duty." This kind of virtuous good works will be duly rewarded "not only now and on earth, but throughout an existence truly immortal." And to complete the attractiveness of this religious message, Ware, through his holy recluse, expounded a faith characterized by the "plainness and simplicity" of its doctrines. Since Christianity preaches no new and

startling truth, only service to mankind, the value of this religion lies in the divine authority it adds to old truths.

Zenobia reflected a tolerant, optimistic, rational Christianity that stood in sharp contrast to the evangelical pietism of Susan Warner and Augusta Jane Evans. This contrast may also document the changing configurations of American Christianity, with the decline of Unitarian influence and the rise, by mid-century, of aggressive, evangelical "Methodist Age" Protestantism.⁵ This rise of Evangelicalism certainly explains why Ware's popularity was eclipsed by those writers on religious themes whose works were published after 1860.⁶ Yet there remains some important continuity of emphasis between this early religious fiction and that which was to follow. The "plainness and simplicity" of the Christian message would continue to be the emphasis of more Trinitarian novels. A non-creedal, undogmatic faith which stressed the ethical life, while promising heavenly reward, was not to be the exclusive property of Unitarians. Even the attempt to appeal to both reason and affections will be found in pietistic versions of best-selling religion. And finally, the ecumenical criticism of exclusive denominationalism

⁵C. C. Goen, "The 'Methodist Age' in American Church History," Religion In Life, XXXIV, No. 4 (Autumn, 1965), pp. 562-572.

⁶Hart, op. cit., p. 118.

and the anti-clericalism found in Julia's reaction to the Bishop of Antioch were to remain persistent themes in popular religious literature.

In Probus, the sequel to Zenobia, Ware continued his description of the early Christians in a pagan world. Having arranged a love affair between Lucius and Julia in the first novel, the author then provided the newly married Pisos with a persecution of Christians under the capricious Emperor, Aurelian. Since the couple had been preaching the happy life of Christian virtue, combined with a strain of abolitionism and democracy, they were hunted by the Roman authorities. The leader of these egalitarian Christians was Probus, who preached a Unitarian sermon to the Emperor, for which he was condemned to be thrown to the lions. A number of miracles took place, including Julia's escape from torture and death. A happy ending is provided, in reward for faithfulness, by the fortunate assassination of Aurelian and the succession of the gentle Tacitus.

The last novel in this trilogy is Julian; or, Scenes in Judea (1841). It is in this work that Ware provided the prototype for those perennial religious-historical novels, which trace the unbeliever's encounter with those who have seen Christ's miracles and who, himself, finally beholds the Christ. This Christ-story encounter was destined to be a most successful formula, patterned on the all-time best seller, the Bible.

Julian is a Jew who has been raised in Rome as a Roman. Traveling in Judea he follows his Hebrew heart and becomes a Jew in faith as well as in blood. His interest in John the Baptist results in his learning about the new prophet, Jesus. Following Jesus' path, without actually seeing him, Julian talks with the fisherman at the Sea of Galilee and other disciples of this man sent from God. However, Julian increasingly discovers that this man cannot be the hoped-for Messiah since he preaches peace. Julian's climatic encounter with Jesus takes place as the prophet makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His description, in the last of his letters to his mother, provides a dramatic scene that was to be a favorite of Christ-stories thereafter.

I cannot well describe my sensations as Jesus drew nigh, so that I could with distinctness observe his countenance and form, but they were such as I never before experienced in the presence of a mortal; and it could not well be otherwise, as I doubted not that I looked upon one within whom were lodged the very power and wisdom of Jehovah. Awe and dread were therefore the feelings that would have alone prevailed, were it not that, however wonderfully I felt he was united to God, I saw that the language of his countenance was not that of an Angel, nor of a God, but of a man bound, like myself by the closest ties to every one of the multitudes who thronged him. Its expression was mild and pitiful; but at the same time of one who, if full of regard and compassion for each and for all, also possessed the energies and the will to do for those whom he loved whatsoever should be needful for their advantage or redemption. Strength and power were lodged in the lines and forms of the face, not any less than benevolence, giving ample assurance that there were inward forces of intellect and will, equal to every work that might be given him to do. . . . Thus while the innumerable multitude of those who encompassed him, and hailed him King and Deliverer, and

could find no words of Joy in which to give vent to the hopes that were within, he rejoiced not, but was evidently sad. The sight of the city with its populace all awaiting him, and the sounds of their tumultuous cries as they were borne to us from afar, and the waving of their hands in token of welcome, seemed to awaken no feeling of triumph in his heart, but, instead, drew forth tears. I confess that I was also astonished; and could only say, the whole of this man is mysterious and impenetrable--we know him not--we do not comprehend what he is, nor what he has come to do.

Julian, however, does not become a convert to Christianity. Whether Ware's unevangelical Unitarianism prevented such a temptation to convert all Jews or whether his desire for historical and cultural consistency demanded such a conclusion, is difficult to determine. In any case, he leaves Julian marveling over the crucifixion and Resurrection, which seemed to confirm the testimony of the disciples and the soldiers. Julian is convinced that "they sufficiently proved him to be a messenger and prophet of God, at the same time that they failed to prove him the Messiah who had been foretold, for Whom Israel had waited so long, and still waits."

In 1855, a more orthodox Christ-story than Julian, the Reverend Joseph Holt Ingraham's The Prince of the House of David was published. Ingraham's religious romance was an immediate best seller which continued to be popular throughout the nineteenth century. At the expiration of its copyright in the eighties, the book was published in numerous cheap editions including a "dime novel" by Street and Smith. By the nineties, the Prince could be found in

the thousands of Sunday School libraries which provided a religious reading public beyond that encountered by book sellers. Village libraries also spread the influence of this respectable, sacred defense of the historicity of Christ's life and the Divinity of his nature.⁷

The phenomenal popularity of Ingraham's novel was a product of the author's writing experience and knowledge of the religious reading public. Joseph Holt Ingraham (1809-1860) was a man of remarkable experience and talents. As a young boy he went to sea, saw much of the world, and took part in the excitement of a South American revolution. During his subsequent career in college, he discovered that he could use this exciting past in writing popular novels and short stories for cheap weeklies. According to James Hart, he single-handedly accounted for nearly 10 per cent of the fiction titles published during the eighteen forties. By the end of 1851 he had written more than eighty thrillers, read largely by travelers on trains and steamboats, with such titles as: Captain Kyd; or, The Wizard of the Sea; Frank Rivers; or, The Dangers of the Town; and Lafitte; The Pirate of the Gulf.

Ingraham's religious novels, which appeared after his ordination as an Episcopal clergyman, at the age of

⁷Mott, op. cit., p. 94.

forty-two, benefited from the varied and successful writing experience of the author. While rector of Christ Church in Holly Springs, Mississippi, the Reverend J. H. Ingraham turned his writing efforts toward the production of three religious novels: The Prince of the House of David; or, Three Years in the Holy City; The Pillar of Fire; or, Israel in Bondage (1859) and The Throne of David, from the Consecration of the Shepherd of Bethlehem, to the Rebellion of Prince Absalom (1860).⁸ The conversion to religious fiction must have been a sincere one, for Ingraham attempted to buy up the copyrights of his earlier thrillers in order to stop their publication.⁹

The reception of the Prince was a mixed one. Many orthodox Christians in the fifties had some reservations about a fictional treatment of the life of Christ. Methodists were still reluctant to endorse religious fiction, and it took Ben Hur and the novels of E. P. Roe in the eighties to convince the editors of The Methodist Quarterly Review that religious ideals could be proclaimed in fiction.¹⁰ T. S. Arthur, the author of that best selling temperance

⁸Mott, op. cit., p. 94; Hart, op. cit., pp. 98-99; Thorp, op. cit., pp. 200-201.

⁹Mott, op. cit., p. 94.

¹⁰John O. Waller, "The Methodist Quarterly Review and Fiction, 1818-1900," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, Vol. 71, No. 9 (1967), pp. 588-589.

tract, Ten Nights in a Bar-Room (1856), represented, no doubt, many religious readers when he described The Prince as "one we shrink from reading" because of the characters and language introduced to the story which were not found in Scripture. The novel was charged with a lack of reverence.¹¹

The novel, nevertheless enjoyed popularity in the fifties and sixties, and this popularity may have been related to its orthodox answers in a time of doubt and scepticism. Just as this work of fiction was unacceptable to religious conservatives, who wanted only the King James Bible for their Christ-story, so religious liberals found Ingraham's supernaturalism and "historical" Christianity an unattractive piece of apologetics.¹² The mid-nineteenth century was the period in which transcendentalism, had become a challenge to the established orthodoxy of both Trinitarians and Channing Unitarians. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker had been providing leadership for this small group of literati since the eighteen thirties. Rejecting historical proofs of Christianity, with its emphasis on the historicity of miracles and the person of Jesus Christ, the Transcendentalists emphasized intuitive or

¹¹Warren G. French, "A Hundred Years of a Religious Bestseller," The Western Humanities Review, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Winter, 1956), p. 47.

¹²Ibid., p. 49.

internal evidence. Bordering on pantheism, Emersonian Transcendentalism saw God incarnate in all men, not just in Jesus. Since men were able to know God and the truth, that transcends sense experience, through their own reason and intuitive moral faculties, orthodox scriptures and creeds were unnecessary. Religious authority was not to be found in a quest for the historical Jesus but in the contemplation of the soul.

The readers of The Prince of the House of David certainly found an antidote to the pantheism of Emerson and the humanism of Parker. The novel abounds with evidences of Jesus' miraculous nature and activity. Jesus' supernatural powers are emphasized to the complete neglect of his message or mission. Adina, the prolific letter-writer who tells the story, is confronted entirely with miracles, not sermons or parables. A young Jewess from Cairo, Adina visits Jerusalem and reports, by letter to her father, the events of Jesus' life from his Baptism to the Ascension. She becomes a friend of Mary and Martha and is almost always on the edge of the crowd which follows the Master. Her faith grows almost in direct proportion to the miracles He performs. Adina's conversion follows that expected first encounter with Jesus. He has been baptized by John the Baptist, and she writes:

No sooner did the baptized stranger go up out of the water, than there was heard above all our heads a noise of rolling thunder, although the sky was cloudless; and when we looked up we beheld a dazzling light, though it was noonday, brighter than the sun;

and from the midst of this celestial splendor there darted with arrowy velocity a ray of light, which descended upon the head of the Christ. Some of the people said it thundered; and others that it lightened; but judge the amazement and admiration of all, and the dread awe that shook every soul when, amid the glory above his head, was seen the form of a dove of fire, with outspread wings overshadowing Him as it were, and from the heavens, what was supposed to be thunder, shaped itself into the voice of God, which uttered these words in the hearing of every ear:

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye Him."

Her next letter to her father announced her conversion. She confesses, having reflected on this heavenly proclamation, that "Yes, it is the Christ, and I will believe in Him!"

The young convert continues to write to her father concerning the miraculous life of this Divine Son of God. In fact, while the letters purport to cover the entire period of Jesus' ministry, at least one third of them are devoted to the period between his arrest and the Ascension. Each event declares the Divinity of Jesus, and results in a letter urging her father to accept the Messiah. As Adina sees it (over and over again), "Either Jesus is Messiah, as he asserts, and his miracles prove, or he is not." If he is not, "then he is an impostor and a falsifier, as well as a fearful blasphemer of Jehovah!" Finally she urges:

Doubt, then, no longer, dearest father! Jesus, the son of Mary in his human nature, was the Son of God in his Divine nature; an incomprehensible and mysterious union, whereby He has brought together in harmony the two natures, separated far apart by sin, by sacrificing his own body as a sin-offering, to reconcile both in one Immaculate body upon the cross. There is now no more condemnation to them who believe

in Him and accept Him; for in his body He took our sins, and with his precious blood, as that of a lamb without blemish, cleansed them forever away.

Adina's thirty-nine letters (a significant number for an Episcopalian clergyman) had presented an acceptably orthodox challenge to the doubters of the day and had utilized the popular style of romance fiction to portray the miraculous life of Christ. Those readers who were disturbed or antagonized by the rational or transcendental criticism of evangelical piety could find in Ingraham's best seller a reassuring gospel. For those readers who wanted no prophetic ethical challenge to the complacency of the era, The Prince's kingdom was certainly not of this world. For those who wanted the Biblical story in romantic, serialized, and suspenseful style, Reverend Ingraham had written one of the most tantalizing.

The "quest for the historical Jesus" was, of course, not confined to writers and readers of popular religious romances. Long before the Civil War, American theologians had begun to feel the impact of religious scholars. The writings of Schleiermacher and Hegel, reinterpreted by Josiah Royce and George Trumbull Ladd, had introduced a philosophical idealism to American religious thought. The views of the German Theologian, Albrecht Ritschl, introduced to America by Adolf von Harnack, had given strong impetus to a new liberal theology. Stressing the ethical nature of human history, these Ritschlian Theologians

stressed the humanity of Jesus Christ. The Transcendentalism of Emerson, Thoreau, and Parker was supplanted by a more widely held religious idealism which stressed the Jesus of history who, through his deeds of mercy, his wise teaching, and his magnetic personality, provided men with an unexcelled example of the life of service and communion.¹³

Some American Christian thinkers were also becoming familiar with the new historical-critical studies of the Biblical documents. New Testament studies abroad had also stimulated a series of "lives of Jesus" which were becoming well known by the 1860's. D. F. Strauss' Life of Jesus (1835) had precipitated a crisis in orthodox circles on the Continent. Radically challenging the historical reliability of the Gospels, Strauss' Jesus was placed in an historical setting stripped of the "myths" of the Biblical account. Christ became a Hegelian pure idea, a new synthesis in the theological dialectic of history. Renan's Life of Christ added to this new historical Jesus the image of the supreme teacher of secular morality. These biographies pioneered in the efforts to place Jesus in the historical and geographical context of the times, but concluded in affirming only that the Christ lived, taught, made disciples, and died at the hands of Jewish clerics. The miracles were clearly a legend of the church.¹⁴

¹³Olmstead, op. cit., pp. 468-469.

¹⁴James H. Nichols, History of Christianity, 1650-1950 (New York, 1956), pp. 172, 287.

This interest in the Jesus of History was also evident in popular literature. In addition to the fiction of Ware and Ingraham, several biographies of Jesus appeared in the seventies. The novels of two English writers, F. W. Farrar's Life of Christ (1874) and J. Cunningham Geikie's Life and Words of Christ (1877), unlike the "lives" of Strauss and Renan, celebrated the Christ of Faith as well as the Jesus of human history. Neither of the biographies of Farrar and Geikie sold in America on the scale of Ingraham's novel, yet they reflect the continuity of interest in the life and times of Jesus Christ.¹⁵ The Christ-story, whether presented in Scripture, fiction, or "historical" works, had become a perennial attraction to the reading public.

Frederick William Farrar (1831-1903) was an outstanding Anglican theologian. His Eternal Hope (1878) and Mercy and Judgment (1881), published after his Life of Christ, evidenced his intellectual and theological indebtedness to Coleridge and to the liberal churchman, F. D. Maurice. Yet much of his effort seems to have been directed toward formulating a mediating position between the Broad Church party (Anglican Liberals) and the more conservative Evangelical party.¹⁶ The popularity of his Life of Christ

¹⁵Mott, op. cit., p. 322.

¹⁶J. L. Neve, A History of Christian Thought, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia, 1946), p. 232.

was, no doubt, partly due to the elaborate style he had developed in his earlier works of fiction. Yet his biography of Jesus is clearly informed by substantial scholarship. While ignoring the critical problems related to the Gospel accounts, he does a thorough job of discussing the political, cultural, and geographical context of Jesus' times. His Life does not appear as a polemic against Strauss or Renan, yet the acceptance of the Biblical accounts is implicit throughout the narrative. Unlike Ingraham's efforts to prove the Divinity of Christ through the force of the miraculous, Farrar simply assumes the truth of that to which the history of Christianity testifies.

John Cunningham Geikie (1824-1906) was also a widely known author of books on biblical and religious subjects. Ordained a Presbyterian minister, he later became an Anglican priest. Considered by many in the orthodox or conservative evangelical camp to be one of the best religious writers of the age, Geikie produced a ten-volume work on the Bible as well as a host of smaller treatments of church history.¹⁷ Clearly in the "Life of Our Lord" category, Geikie's biography is liberally sprinkled with references to the "authorities" of Biblical studies. The celebration of Jesus as the Divine Savior, and the

¹⁷Dictionary of National Biography: Twentieth Century, Vol. 2 (London, 1912), pp. 92-93.

everlasting life he brings to the believer, is constantly the framework for "His Sayings and Discourses." The author shares Farrar's conviction that the witness of so many through the centuries to the unmatched person and work of this "Ideal of Humanity," cannot fail to convince the honest sceptic and strengthen the religious life of the believer.

It was a Civil War general, however, who surpassed the clerics and theologians in reaching the American reading public with the Christ-story. In an age of growing scepticism and doubt about religious truths, it was Lew Wallace's Ben-Hur that reached more people with a message of historical certainty than any piece of apologetics. Published in 1880, Ben-Hur, a Tale of the Christ combines the exotic elements of the ancient Oriental world with the more familiar setting of the Holy Land. In the cosmopolitan nature of its world scene, the suspenseful narrative of sacred history, and the dramatic action of characters and plot, Ben-Hur surpassed the earlier efforts of Ware and Ingraham. The encyclopedic breadth of General Wallace's tale has left it the unmatched giant of the Christ-stories.

Ben-Hur is a young Jew who has been accused of attempting to kill the Roman governor. Messala, his false accuser, sees him sentenced to the life of a galley slave. Escaping to Rome, Ben-Hur finds favor with the tribune Arrius and is adopted as his son. The most exciting and well-known part of the plot is the chariot race in

the Circus at Antioch. Here Ben-Hur has a chance to revenge himself on Messala as they are pitted against each other in the race. Wallace's five-chapter, suspenseful treatment of the race is climaxed by Ben-Hur's adroit maneuver of his iron-tipped chariot axle, crushing the wheel of Messala's chariot. The resulting crash, and Messala's trampling by the horses, insure the victory for the hero.

With all the dramatic events of Ben-Hur's triumph over Messala, Wallace had not neglected the "tale" of Christ. The Jewish hero's life and travels brought the reader intermittent news of the teacher, Jesus. The climactic encounter occurs, following the chariot race, at Jesus' baptism. The shock of Jesus' countenance and presence shatter his hope for an earthly king. Dreams of "war and conquest, and lust of dominion" seemed profane in the light of this tender, humble, and holy apparition. Ben-Hur wonders where he has seen this man before.

That the look, so calm, so pitiful, so loving, had somewhere in a past time beamed upon him as that moment . . . became an assurance. Faintly at first, at last a clear light, a burst of sunshine, the scene by the well at Nazareth that time the Roman guard was dragging him to the galleys returned, and all his being thrilled. Those hands had helped him when he was perishing. The face was one of the pictures he had carried in mind ever since. In the effusion of feeling excited, the explanation of the preacher was lost by him all but the last words--words so marvellous that the world yet rings with them:

"--this is the SON OF GOD!"

Ben-Hur's constant following of the wandering Nazarene brings him into contact with the novel, pacific

teachings of this strange teacher. Miracles are witnessed also, including the healing of his leperous mother and sister. This miraculous power of Jesus and the crowds that follow Him give rise to a hope, on Ben-Hur's part, that the Nazarene will unify all Israel against the hated Rome and Romans. He dreams of insurrection and war, only to be frustrated by Jesus' silence on an earthly kingdom. The arrest, trial, and crucifixion, of Jesus (which he witnesses), finally destroy the young rebel's hope of military triumph over Rome. A change comes over his feelings as he watches the suffering of Jesus on the cross.

A conception of something better than the best of this life--something so much better that it could serve a weak man with strength to endure agonies of spirit as well as of body; something to make death welcome--perhaps another life purer than this one--perhaps the spirit-life which Balthasar held to so fast, began to dawn upon his mind clearer and clearer, bringing to him a certain sense that, after all, the mission of the Nazarene was that of guide across the boundary for such as loved him; across the boundary to where his kingdom was set up and waiting for him. Then, as something borne through the air out of the almost forgotten, he heard again, or seemed to hear, the saying of the Nazarene:

"I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE."

And the words repeated themselves over and over and took form, and the dawn touched them with its light, and filled them with a new meaning. And as men repeat a question to grasp and fix the meaning, he asked, gazing at the figure on the hill fainting under its crown: Who the Resurrection? and Who the Life?

"I AM,"

the figure seemed to say--and say it for him; for instantly he was sensible of a peace such as he had never known--the peace which is the end of doubt and mystery, and the beginning of faith and love and clear understanding.

Ben-Hur's conversion and subsequent service to the Christ requires sacrifice of neither life nor happiness. Although the lengthy novel is brought to an abrupt end following the burial of Jesus, the reader is permitted in a postscript, a glimpse of Ben-Hur and Esther, his wife, five years later in their Roman villa. The couple have just committed themselves and their fortune to the Christians at the Catacomb of San Calixto. "Out of the vast tomb Christianity issued to supersede the Caesars."

General Wallace's Christ-story began as a proposed serial for Harper's Monthly. Captivated by the potential for a historical romance in the Gospel of St. Matthew's account of Jesus' birth, with Oriental Wise Men and a Star, Wallace wrote such a story in 1875. His motivation was much the same as that which had prompted his earlier novel of the Aztecs, The Fair God (1873). As he related it in an article, "How I Came to Write Ben-Hur," in the Youth's Companion, February 2, 1893, he "was not in the least influenced by religious sentiment. I had no convictions about God or Christ. I neither believed nor disbelieved in them."¹⁸ His indifference to the opinions of preachers, to whose churches he would never belong, was slowly shaken by a growing reverence and awe of his subject.¹⁹

¹⁸ Reprinted in Lewis Wallace, An Autobiography, Vol. 2 (New York, 1906), pp. 926-936.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 927-928.

The turning point in his writing and his religious opinions came on the night of September 19, 1876. On a train from Crawfordsville, Indiana, to Indianapolis he encountered the famous agnostic polemicist, Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll. After listening to Ingersoll's sceptical attacks on belief in God, heaven and Jesus Christ's Divinity, Wallace determined to tackle his unfinished story of Christ's birth and resolve the questions raised by the iconoclast. Not yet a believer he wanted only to resolve the difficulties, "if only for the gratification there might be in having convictions of one kind or another."²⁰ Thus the question of Christ's Divinity assumed the central role in his research and writing. Filling in the thirty years of silence in Christ's life with a dramatic story of the cosmopolitan Roman Empire, Wallace developed the argument that mankind was so debased that salvation could only come by direct Divine action--the Incarnation.

The paradoxical linking of Jesus with Ben-Hur clearly reflects this thesis. Just as traditional Christian orthodoxy professes belief in a fully divine and fully human Jesus Christ, so Wallace combined a secular hero with a narrative of the life of Christ. Ben-Hur's romantic adventures are characterized by such pagan values as ambition, patriotism, revenge, and sexual love. In contrast, the

²⁰Ibid., pp. 929-930.

story of the Magis and the Christ abounds in miracles and a spirituality of faith, Divine love, and peace. This association of the human and the divine created some problems for the writer. He never completely solved the tension between Ben-Hur's worldly, romantic attractiveness and the self-sacrificing spirit of Christ. Yet that paradoxical union, the hero's final conversion to spiritual values, did support the author's argument for the Incarnation. The Divine had entered into the midst of the excitement of sinful human history.

One result of this narrative form of apologetics was Wallace's own conversion from indifference to Christian faith. Although one may discount some of the force of this testimony, which came years after the success of the novel in winning over the religious public, Wallace asserted that, "Long before I was through with my book, I became a believer in God and Christ."²¹ Although he never became a church member, claiming to enjoy his freedom and thinking himself unable to be a good communicant, he professed a simple belief in the Christian concept of God. He recounted his simple, creedal belief in the Divinity of Christ as follows:

Should one ask of another, or wonder in himself, why I, who am neither minister of the Gospel, nor theologian, nor churchman, have presumed to write

²¹Ibid., p. 936.

this book, it pleases me to answer him, respectfully-- I wrote it to fix an impression distinctly in my mind. Asks he for the impression thus sought to be fixed in my mind, then I should be twice happy did he content himself with this answer--The Jesus Christ in whom I believe was, in all the stages of his life, a human being. His Divinity was the Spirit within him, "and the Spirit was God."²²

The other result of Lew Wallace's defense of the faith was best-selling success for the book, the author, and the publishers. Harpers had accepted the manuscript, with some hesitation believing that its historical treatment of the Holy Land was out of fashion. Encouraged by the moderate success of Wallace's The Fair God, the publishers felt that even this bold, melodramatic mixture of Sir Walter Scott and the King James Bible deserved a try. The early reaction of the public was not reassuring. About 2,800 copies were sold in the first seven months, yielding royalties of less than \$300. By the end of 1881 the demand had dwindled to almost nothing. Yet by the close of 1882 sales began to rise to \$300 a month. The next year, sales more than doubled, and they continued to double annually for several years. By 1911, one million authorized copies had been sold, and two years later Sears, Roebuck and Company ordered one million copies to be sold by mail-order in a thirty-nine cent edition. In 1933 a Modern Library edition appeared, and on expiration of the copyright in 1936, several more editions appeared. Sales passed the

²²Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 1-2.

2,500,000 mark in 1944 and the book continues to sell well.²³

Americans who did not read the novel or hear any of Wallace's many lectures in churches and on Chautauqua platforms, could have seen numerous theatrical productions or later movie versions of Ben-Hur's "tale of the Christ." Although, for a number of years Wallace resisted offers to have the story produced on Broadway, he finally agreed to a proposal by Theatrical Syndicate, which opened the play on November 29, 1899. The original, unprecedented, investment of \$75,000 was easily recovered by the returns from a continuous run of twenty-one years. In spite of the critics, who often referred to it as a circus and not a drama, the dramatic production was so successful that the road company gave six thousand performances in the larger cities, to crowds estimated at more than twenty million persons, who paid ten million dollars. When the original company closed in April of 1920, records had been established that have been unequalled in the history of the theater. As Wallace's biographer assessed it: "Through sixty years every American within reach of print and pictures, and many a foreigner, must at least have heard of Ben-Hur; most came to know it and remember it. . . ."²⁴

²³Irving McKee, "Ben-Hur" Wallace: The Life of General Lew Wallace (Berkeley, 1947), pp. 173-174.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 176-186.

The first motion picture production was Kalem's one-reel version in 1907. Wallace's successful damage suit won him \$25,000 to make it "the most costly one-reel scenario in cinema history."²⁵ The MGM production, a four million dollar "colossal" of "colossals," was written by Carey Wilson and Bess Meredyth and released 1925. Revived in 1931 and equipped with sound it continued to play the movie theaters in the era that produced a new search for the historical Christ--in the novels of Sholem Asch and Lloyd Douglas.²⁶ MGM's most recent Ben-Hur received the 1959 academy award for best picture, and by 1965 it was second only to Gone With the Wind among box office attractions, with gross receipts of \$38,000,000.

Just as Ben-Hur had been preceded by the novels of Ware and Ingraham, it was followed by a long line of historical romances dealing with the Christ or the early Christians. At least eight such works, which were clearly imitations of the best seller appeared between 1891 and 1906. G. J. Whyte-Melville's The Gladiators: A Tale of Rome and Judea, Marie Corelli's Barabbas, and Florence Kingsley's Titus, A Comrade of the Cross were the most popular of this school of imitations.²⁷ Nor did Wallace retire from the writing of historical romance. His The

²⁵Ibid., p. 187.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 187-188.

²⁷Ibid., p. 174.

Prince of India (1893) combined the color of Constantinople with the current interest in historical fiction and the writer's reputation to post a moderate record of sales. However, the novel had neither the romantic formula, nor the strong religious appeal, to compete with its predecessor. In addition, Wallace wrote a number of articles for popular magazines. His "Boyhood of Christ" was first published in Harper's Monthly in December, 1886, and was reprinted two years later as an illustrated brochure. In this form The Boyhood of Christ (1889) sold ten thousand copies at \$3.50 per copy. The theme was the same: Jesus was the God man, a truly human being with the divine spirit.²⁸

And yet, for all the claims to an orthodox view of the Incarnation, Wallace's Christ is more God than man. The General's own creed may have been a simple belief in a carpenter with a "divine spirit," but the images of Christ in his best seller are surrounded with a miraculous, holy aura not unlike that portrayed in The Prince of the House of David. Ben-Hur's mistake, again and again, is the judging of the Nazarene by human standards. The teachings of Christ, so much a part of the Gospels, are reduced to a few major sayings. Unlike Ware's Julian, which abounds in the ethical teachings of Jesus, Ben-Hur summarizes the burden of His teaching as: peace, good-will, love, and non-resistance. Stressing the claim to Messiaship, Wallace

²⁸Ibid., p. 224.

defends his thesis through the miraculous and irresistible personality of Jesus. Emphasizing the historicity of Christianity's claims, he neglects the force of New Testament ethics.

The over emphasis on the miracles as compared with the ethical teachings in this presentation of Christ is related, no doubt, to two doctrinal commitments. Like Ingraham, Lew Wallace is concerned with emphasizing the Divinity of Christ and the spiritual nature of His Kingdom. Rejecting Hebraic traditions concerning the Messiah, Ben-Hur follows the path of the Prince of the House of David in asserting a Kingdom not of this world. By ending the narrative with Christ's death, Wallace is not forced to deal with the ethical decisions of the early Christians. Again, a popular reading public would not find a serious challenge to ethical complacency, but only support for traditional religious reductionism in a colorful, dramatic, package.

The novel's ecumenical appeal derived from the non-ethical reductionism of Wallace's religion, and also the non-creedal, non-denominational setting. By stressing the pre-church history of Christ--a "Bible-only" tradition, the author was assured of a wider acceptance than that of consensus-Protestantism. Catholic readers had little difficulty accepting a tale of Christ that evidenced little, if any, of the Reformation perspective on Church history.

Sanction of the Roman Catholic Church was actually given to an Italian translation in 1895. A second Italian edition, translated by the Pope's honorary chaplain, who modified a few impious parts, received the blessing of his holiness Pope Leo XIII.²⁹

The ecumenical appeal of a historical romance was successfully continued by Henryk Sienkiewicz's Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero. Published in 1896, the same year as Charles Sheldon's social gospel novel, In His Steps, this story of the early Christians in Rome became an immediate success. Although it was a translation of a Polish writer's work, Quo Vadis led the Bookman best seller list for 1897 and remained in fifth place in 1898.³⁰ One estimate places it as the number one best seller for the first twenty-five years of the Bookman list.³¹ Since this annual list includes only the sales of selected book sellers the many pirated editions were not a part of the estimated sales. The defective copyright, and the resulting number of unauthorized editions, make it difficult to estimate its total sales. Hackett lists a conservative 754,000 sales, while Mott argues that the many paper cover editions, some as cheap as seven cents, gave it a sale of

²⁹Wallace, An Autobiography, Vol. 2, pp. 941-942.

³⁰Alice Payne-Hackett, 70 Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1965 (New York, 1967), pp. 93-94.

³¹Mott, op. cit., p. 211.

considerably beyond a million and a half by 1915.³² The recent Bantam classic edition, by the original American publishers, Little, Brown and Company, has extended that figure well beyond the fifty-year-old estimate.

Such a successful contribution to the historical treatment of religion is surprising if one considers only the unpronounceable foreign name of the author and the Latin title of the book. Actually Sienkiewicz (1846-1916) was an experienced writer of unusual talent for writing historical romance. An historical trilogy, published in the eighties had brought the acclaim of the critics and Polish nationalists. Quo Vadis, which enjoyed a world-wide popularity, contributed only part of the international prestige which led to the award of a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1905. His writing ability, combined with the popularity of historical fiction in the nineties, insured an extensive reading public.

The theme of Quo Vadis was the conflict between the decadent order of Roman Society and the radical influence of the early Christians. Vinicius, the young patrician hero, comes into contact with the Christians by falling in love with Lygia, a hostage barbarian princess who has become a convert to the new faith. Vinicius' efforts to make a concubine of the beautiful Christian girl, with the help

³²Hackett, op. cit., p. 86; Mott, op. cit., p. 211.

of his tribune uncle, Petronius, fail and the remaining narrative combines this continued pursuit with the slow conversion of the young Roman. Petronius, philosophically reveals the pagan decadence of Nero's Rome, while Lygia introduces the pursuing Vinicius (and the reader) to the revolutionary life and values of Christianity. The scepticism of Petronius, the hedonism of the Augustan court and the cruel social chaos of the city are contrasted with the fanatic devotion to Christ and his teachings of the rapidly growing religious sect.

Quo Vadis? is the question which haunts Petronius as he participates in the orgies and intrigues of Nero's court. It is the question which characterizes the torment of Vinicius mind and heart as he seeks reconciliation with Lygia. It is the question asked of Peter, by a vision of Christ, as he almost deserts the persecuted Christians. Finally, it is the question the new religion is clearly asking of the old social order and the participants in that society. The author's case for Christianity rests on the firm conviction of these faithful adherents in the reliability of the eyewitness accounts of Jesus Christ. Their steadfast and hopeful endurance of persecution portrays a new life and order destined to triumph over the dying old order.

The author of Quo Vadis artfully introduced such a variety of elements in his novel that several reading

publics could be appealed to. The romance of Vinicius and Lygia was an old and successful formula. The cosmopolitan Roman Empire had already been shown, in Ben-Hur, to be an asset to sales. The realism of the novel, particularly in dealing with the debauchery of upper-class Romans and the torture of Christians, no doubt appealed to those who were tired of the "genteel tradition." Those religious readers, won over to the novel by E. P. Roe and Lew Wallace, could find an unqualified apology for the Christian Faith and the triumph of the Church in Rome. Catholic readers would certainly find little that was objectionable in a novel which closes with these words:

And so Nero passed, as a whirlwind, as a storm, as a fire, as a war or death passes; but the basilica of Peter rules till now, from the Vatican heights, the city, and the world.

The religious emphasis of Quo Vadis is interwoven among the dramatic social and political events of Nero's rule. The burning of Rome and the subsequent arrest of Christians, who are thrown to the lions or turned into human torches at a garden party, provides the framework for the Christians' witness to their Christ. As Vinicius pursues and finds Lygia, only to be separated by her imprisonment, the hero is frequently confronted with the "new life" of Christianity. His conversion, a slow process involving suffering and loss of past pleasures, is complemented by the rescue of Lygia from death in the Arena. Their happiness is clearly founded in their hope of eternal

salvation promised by their faith. Present pain and suffering are not the formidable enemies of happiness that Petronius fears, but rather earthly trials to be endured with trust and confidence in God's will. As Vinicius writes to Petronius following the young couple's escape from persecution:

. . . it is Christ who is blessing us, our beloved God and Savior. We know tears and sorrow, for our religion teaches us to weep over the misfortunes of others; but in these tears is a consolation unknown to thee; for whenever the time of our life is ended we shall find all those dear ones who perished and who are perishing yet for God's truth.

The novel's emphasis on miraculous divine intervention and otherworldly hopes was consistent with the historical treatment of persecuted believers who expected God's immanent judgment on a pagan world through Christ's return. Yet unlike Ingraham's and Wallace's novels, the extensive development of Christianity's radical ethical teachings gives Quo Vadis considerable theological balance. The Christians have convinced Vinicius that "It is not enough to honor Christ, one must also live according to His teachings." Since his teachings abound with dictums to "love men as thy own brothers" and to return good for evil, Rome's hedonistic religions are clearly under God's judgment as inadequate for happiness. The testimony of the apostle Peter, who is God's "vicegerent" in Rome is that Jesus was known for both His miracles and His mercy. Doing likewise meant forgiving one's enemies, including

those who burned one at the stake or who watched the lions attack. The new life is at variance, then, with pagan ethics. It is also critical of the social inequality of Roman society. The author's equillitarianism is evident in the descriptions of Christians who ignore or condemn social distinctions. Stopping short of abolitionism, the novelist portrays Christian masters and slaves loving one another. A Christian social order, including equal justice, trust, and domestic tranquillity, is proclaimed superior to the grandeur of Rome. Happiness and love, Rome could not give, only God.

The popular treatment of the historical Jesus and his early followers did not end with Quo Vadis. Out of the many imitations of Ben-Hur and Quo Vadis, only a few, of course, would be able to compete on a best-selling level. Hurlbut's Story of the Bible (1904) reached the traditional religious buying public, but Papini's Life of Christ (1923) and Barton's The Man Nobody Knows (1925) reflect some religious themes of another generation. A new novelistic quest for historical religion was not again to be successfully undertaken until the nineteen thirties and forties. Yet the continued popularity of those earlier best sellers evidenced the strength of this Christ-story theme in the popular religious mind.

CHAPTER IV

SHAKING THE FOUNDATIONS:

ROBERT ELSMERE

The intellectual currents of the Gilded Age began to influence popular culture by the eighteen nineties. Called a "watershed" of American history by H. S. Commager, the decade of the nineties was certainly a period of rapid change. The economic and social change, which was already transforming a rural America into an urban industrial society, was accompanied by scientific and philosophic forces as unsettling as the factory. Under the impact of these forces, popular culture began to be shaken with the doubt and confusion already experienced by the trained and sophisticated intellects. Values formed in a pre-urban society were now being examined in the light of the new science and the urban experience.¹

The challenge to orthodoxy came from a variety of sources. Darwinian evolution, Biblical criticism, Hegelian Idealism, and the new socio-economic changes. Since the eighteen seventies, Charles Darwin's Origin of Species (1859) and Descent of Man (1871) had been the center of

¹H. S. Commager, The American Mind (New Haven, 1950), pp. 41-54.

major conflict between older orthodoxies and the new science. The English philosophical evolutionist, Herbert Spencer, had brought the Darwinian thesis to the popular attention of Americans through his own writings. John Fiske, in his Harvard lectures and his Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy (1874), had attempted to harmonize Spencerian evolution with the tenets of Christianity. Robert G. Ingersoll had aroused the wrath of the orthodox with his free-thinking lectures which popularized the agnosticism of Thomas Huxley.²

The conversion of James McCosh, President of Princeton College, Henry Ward Beecher, and Lyman Abbott to evolution as part of the providence of God, revealed that compromise with the new science was growing by the eighties and nineties. The new trend in Biblical higher criticism had also prompted controversy among Christians. German scholars had been subjecting Scriptures to a scientific literary-historical criticism which had raised many questions about traditional views of the Bible. The growing challenge to a literal and infallible Word of God added fuel to the fires of theological controversy. Although millions of American Christians refused to abandon their faith in the literal meaning of Scripture, many seemed receptive to the new view. A revised version of the New Testament, reflecting

²Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought, 3rd ed. (New York, 1964), pp. 529-539.

the newer, critical studies, sold well; as did Washington Gladden's Who Wrote the Bible? (1891), suggesting that the old dogmatism was beginning to crumble.³

With the rise of philosophical idealists, men like Josiah Royce, George S. Morris, and George Trumbull Ladd, the theological dependency on Scottish common sense philosophy was challenged and the harmony between Christianity and philosophy in American higher education was severely shaken. In addition, scientific scepticism was aided by the changes in life and thought as a result of the advance of urbanism. Urban life faced the church with a challenge to its traditional role. The city, with its contribution to the loosening of social ties and the advancement of science, worked against the religious institutions and traditional Christian supernaturalism.⁴

Under the impact of scientific scepticism, theological conservatism began to give way to a "New Theology" which synthesized the scientific currents with idealistic philosophy. The result was a liberal or progressive theology which accepted evolution and higher criticism while stressing the immanence of a god known by conscious thought. Jesus was the historical man from Nazareth who provided the example of man's truest potential as a Son of God. Revelation, history, and human nature were all a part

³Ibid., pp. 526-528.

⁴Ibid., pp. 528-529, 524-525.

of the progressive divine process. As the old bastions of dogmatism fell away, a simplified ethical Christianity could respond to the growing demand for a "social gospel."⁵

The pietism of religious best sellers, in the four decades since Susan Warner's Wide, Wide World, had been of a non-creedal, yet conservative, variety. While experiential and ethical faith were exalted over ecclesiastical and dogmatic belief, the best-selling pietism had been unapologetically orthodox. Not only were most best sellers orthodox, they ignored the battles which were raging in theological circles. Harriet Beecher Stowe stands out as an exception with her treatment of liberal challenges to old light Calvinism in The Minister's Wooing (1859); the fact that this artistic success did not reach the best selling proportions of Uncle Tom's Cabin may indicate the lack of popular interest in such religious conflict. It would take almost thirty years for a best selling treatment of such religious conflict to appear. In 1888 three such novels appeared: Mrs. Humphrey Ward's Robert Elsmere, Marie Corelli's A Romance of Two Worlds, and Margaret Deland's John Ward, Preacher.

Robert Elsmere was a sensation in both England and America. Mrs. Humphrey Ward's novel of religious conflict and doubt was part of a Victorian genre that was rapidly

⁵Sydney Alstrom, "Theology In America: A Historical Survey," The Shaping of American Religion, Vol. I of Religion In American Life, ed. by James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton, 1961), pp. 285-288.

matching the strength of didactic religious fiction.⁶ The loss of faith and hope was already a major characteristic of what Walter Houghton calls "The Victorian Frame of Mind."⁷ Englishmen, afflicted by what Matthew Arnold called "depression and ennui," reflected their anxiety in this popularity of the problem religious novel.⁸

One of the "classics in the literature of lost faith,"⁹ Robert Elsmere immediately became a best seller in America. Selling at least a million copies, the novel revealed a new reading public.¹⁰ "Free thinking," of Mrs. Ward's variety at least, was now rivaling the pietistic apologetics of Ben-Hur and other religious fiction. Oliver Wendell Holmes and other writers judged her book to be the most popular novel since Uncle Tom's Cabin.¹¹

Clearly a Modernist tract, Robert Elsmere is the story of a young clergyman who loses his orthodox faith

⁶Margaret M. Maison, The Victorian Vision (New York, 1961), pp. 211-241.

⁷Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven, 1957), p. 64.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Maison, op. cit., p. 241.

¹⁰Frank L. Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York, 1947), p. 181.

¹¹Mrs. Humphrey Ward, A Writer's Recollections (New York, 1918), Vol. II, p. 91.

in the manner of many Oxford educated Victorians, including the author, for this novel is truly a confessional, spiritual autobiography. Mary Augusta Ward, a niece of Matthew Arnold, had lived at Oxford during the religious controversies connected with post-tractarian Liberalism. She had reacted strongly against the narrowness of Christian orthodoxy, and had written a pamphlet in 1881 denouncing the equation of unbelief with sin. This became the basis for Robert Elsmere.¹²

Mrs. Ward's familiarity with German criticism, resulting from a research project for The Dictionary of Christian Biography, led her to the problem of historical testimony. This question of the value of testimony is central to her novel. Just as she herself had lost all faith in the supernatural element of Christianity, her hero, Robert Elsmere, succumbs to German thought. The impact of T. H. Green, an Oxford teacher of the English version of Hegelianism, is clearly present in young Elsmere's adoption of ethical idealism.

Mrs. Ward's lengthy (seven "books" in two or three volumes, depending on the edition) presentation of Robert's "gain and loss" is the reverse of Newman's conversion tale in Loss and Gain (1848). As a young Oxford student, Robert falls under the influence of the theist philosopher Grey (T. H. Green) who plants seeds that will slowly germinate

¹²Ibid.

and eventually flower in an heterodox fashion. Robert marries a conservative Evangelical girl, leaves Oxford, and settles in a comfortable living as Rector of Murewell parish with his orthodoxy still intact. His "frank, genial and open-hearted" nature is frequently expressed in an idealistic passion for social justice in the parish. This concern for the poor brings him to a fateful confrontation with the Squire.

The resolution of their earlier conflicts over the status of the Squire's tenants, leads to a close friendship between the German-educated sceptic and the bright, studious churchman. The Squire's research library and conversation soon aid Elsmere in his continued historical interests. Having read the Squire's history of religion, The Idols of the Market Place, the young man begins his tortuous, doubt-ridden, journey through German historical-critical studies of religious testimony. His doubts about revealed supernatural faith grow inspite of his passionate desire to believe. The temptation to reject head in favor of heart is resisted only when he recalls Grey's dictum: "God is not wisely trusted when declared unintelligible." Relentlessly pursuing the truth, he goes through "a desperate catechism."

"Do I believe in God? Surely, surely! 'Though he slay me yet will I trust in him!' Do I believe in Christ? Yes,--in the teacher, the martyr, the symbol to us Westerns of all things heavenly and abiding, the image and pledge of the invisible life of the spirit, --with all my soul and all my mind!

"But in the Man-God, the Word from Eternity,--in a wonder-working Christ, in a risen and ascended Jesus, in the living Intercessor and Mediator for the lives of His doomed brethren?"

He waited, conscious that it was the crises of his history, and there rose in him, as though articulated one by one by an audible voice, words of irrevocable meaning.

"Every human soul, in which the voice of God makes itself felt, enjoys equally with Jesus of Nazareth, the divine sonship, and 'miracles do not happen!'"

It was done. He felt for the moment as Bunyan did after his lesser defeat. . . . He moved mechanically onward and presently, after the first flutter of desolate terror had passed away, with a new intruding sense which seemed to him a sense of liberty--of infinite expansion.

This conversion to an unmiraculous theism, with its human Christ, is certainly in contrast to the conversions to supernaturalism of St. Elmo, Barriers Burned Away, and Ben-Hur. One can imagine the horror with which the readers of those earlier novels greeted Mrs. Ward's new creed. Robert succinctly expresses it to a group of workingmen in a slum settlement house project:

The man who is addressing you tonight believes in God; and in Conscience, which is God's witness in the soul; and in Experience which is at once the record and the instrument of man's education at God's hands. He places his whole trust, for life and death, "in God the Father Almighty,"--in that force at the root of things which is revealed to us whenever a man helps his neighbor, or a mother denies herself for her child; whenever a soldier dies without a murmur for his country, or a sailor puts out in the darkness to rescue the perishing; whenever a workman throws mind and conscience into his work, or a statesman labours not for his own gain but for that of the State! He believes in an Eternal Goodness--and an Eternal Mind--of which Nature and Man are the continuous and the only revelation. . . .

The Divine Spirit was immanently at work in the world and not confined to the church from which Robert Elsmere felt

obliged to resign. Settlement work in the slums became for the ex-churchman the appropriate expression of a "reconceived" Christianity.

The appeal of Robert Elsmere for American readers was certainly not due solely to the religious argument. Mrs. Ward's literary abilities were clearly superior to most popular American authors. Her use of an English setting was no handicap to a reading public devoted to Dickens, the Brontë sisters, Jane Austen, Thackeray, and Trollope. Her romantic intrigues compared favorably with those of Augusta Jane Evans and E. P. Roe. The surprising thing was the success of a novel clearly designed as an attack on Christian orthodoxy. The continuity of best selling piety had been broken.

Several religious elements remain, however, which may explain the possibility of such a best seller. The anti-ecclesiastical, anti-creedal theme was certainly not new in American religious fiction. E. P. Roe was typical of most religious novelists in his critical approach to institutional Christianity. Ecclesiastical structures and orthodox creeds were usually deemed to have had an adverse effect on the character of church members. Ecumenicity and tolerance were usually depicted, in the novels of this

period, as the victims of rigid orthodoxy. The common theme was the ethical element of religion.¹³

In a nation conditioned to multiplicity in denominations, Elsmere's withdrawal from the established church and his organization of a new religious ethical society should not have appeared shocking. In addition, his religious idealism, while shorn of supernaturalism, was as pietistic as it had been before his crisis of faith. Shocked at both the militant atheism of working class radicals and the materialistic atheism of the upper-class, the hero leads a religious crusade as evangelical as any American evangelist. Elsmere's social vision and settlement work anticipated the Social Gospel novel soon to flourish in America. And the religious hero's "New Brotherhood of Christ" is not substantially different from Walter Rauschenbusch's "Brotherhood of the Kingdom."

Yet, the book was as controversial as any book of its time, in spite of the impact of the New Theology and scientific scepticism, and in spite of the elements of continuity with other best selling religious works. It was denounced from the pulpit in both England and America, and by Gladstone who disapproved of its heresies.¹⁴ This

¹³Elmer F. Suderman, "Criticisms of the Protestant Church in the American Novel: 1870-1900," Midcontinent American Studies Journal, Vol. V, No. 1 (1964), pp. 17-23.

¹⁴Maison, op. cit., p. 258; Mott, op. cit., p. 180.

furor no doubt aided its sales, which in turn may have helped the sales of Ben-Hur, considered by many an antidote for Mrs. Ward's "free thinking."¹⁵

Of Mrs. Ward's dozen other novels, only The History of David Grieve (1892) and The Marriage of William Ashe (1905) had significant sales in America. The international copyright agreements of 1891 had eliminated the American practice of "pirating" cheap editions which had boosted the earlier sales of so many English novelists.¹⁶ David Grieve was not the successful hero that Robert Elsmere had been, however. His rejection of orthodoxy and his spiritual journey towards "the Christianity of the future" is a confused, artless, imitation of the earlier model. His philanthropic efforts as well as his "vision of faith" are without the dynamic enthusiasm of Elsmere or the "kindled mind" of Mrs. Ward's later Modernist hero, Richard Meynell (1911).¹⁷ Yet Mrs. Ward's established popularity in America, as well as her fame as a leading feminist and settlement worker, could only have helped the cause of modernity.

Shortly after the publication of Robert Elsmere, Marie Corelli, England's other most popular woman writer

¹⁵Mott, op. cit., p. 181.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Maison, op. cit., pp. 315-316.

in this period, began a novel intended to answer Mrs. Ward's scepticism. This defense of Christianity, titled Ardath, was published in 1889. While specifically attacking the "infidelity" of Robert Elsmere, Ardath was actually the third novel in which Marie Corelli preached against unbelievers. Her second novel, Thelma (1887), was the first to be published in America and it quickly won a substantial reading public.¹⁸ Although primarily a romantic tale involving an English baronet and a beautiful descendant of Viking kings, Thelma does deal with the question of scientific scepticism. The faith of the hero, Lorimer, has been destroyed by a "scientific professor." Lorimer believes in nothing: "I came from nothing--I am nothing--I shall be nothing."¹⁹

Her earliest novel, A Romance of Two Worlds (1886) was published in America in 1888, the year of Robert Elsmere. In contrast to the rationalism of Mrs. Ward, A Romance of Two Worlds was a mystical conglomeration of pseudo-science, mesmerism, spiritualism, evangelistic religion, amateur psychology, cosmogony, and faith healing. Since these subjects were already of great interest to many in this country, it may explain the book's instant success. In a melodramatic fashion, the author developed a conversion theme based on "the Electric Principle of Christianity."

¹⁸Mott, op. cit., p. 179.

¹⁹Marie Corelli, Thelma (New York, 1906), p. 66.

Preferable to the atomic theory, in the author's view, was a doctrine of soul-germs and electricity protoplasm that was purely imaginary. God is defined as "a shape of pure Electric Radiance." Believers are constantly exhorted to "cultivate the Electric Spirit within you." This mystical amalgam of science and Christianity obviously appealed to many in age age of science and declining faith.

In Ardath, the monk Heliobas (the Chaldean "physical electrician" of Two Worlds) brings about the conversion of an agnostic poet by sending him on fantastic journeys through space and time until he actually sees the angelic spirits surrounding Christ. His conversion results in health and romantic marriage. Yet in this novel, as in her others, the attempted union of science and Christianity remains an undogmatic mysticism. The church is a hindrance to such a faith. In The Sorrows of Satan (1895) and The Master Christian (1900), the only other of Miss Corelli's many novels to reach a significant American reading public, the church and dogma are the enemies of Christ. Cardinal Bonpre, the "Master Christian," is a model against which all other clerics appear corrupt. The search for a lost faith or primitive Christianity in the face of scientific progress had a popular champion in the visionary and melodramatic works of Marie Corelli.

The year (1888) of Robert Elsmere and A Romance of Two Worlds also was the year of Margaret Deland's American

novel, John Ward, Preacher. Although never reaching the best-selling status of the two English novels, John Ward, Preacher reached a popular audience with a distinctively American theme of religious conflict. The old light Calvinism, preached by John Ward, is rather harshly treated by the author. She depicts him as clinging to a narrow doctrine of reprobation in the face of attractive incarnations of God's unrestricted love. His wife, considered a heretic by the Presbyterian session, is a victim of his orthodoxy. He determines that they must live apart until her suffering results in correct belief. He sends for his wife, Helen, as he lies deathly ill, and his state of mind is described:

He knew that death was near, but there was an exultant look in his fading eyes, and sometimes his lips moved in grateful prayer. Perhaps his physical extremity had dulled his fears for his wife's salvation into a conviction that his death was to be the climax of God's plans for her. He was bewildered at the temptation of greater joy at the prospect of her presence than gratitude that God should save her soul alive. But he never for one moment doubted she would come to tell him she had found the light.

John Ward, Preacher was often compared with Robert Elsmere, and it raised a similar controversy in conservative church circles, although Gladstone wrote Longmans, the English publisher, that he did not consider it an attack on Christianity.²⁰ Yet apologists for the old order were

²⁰Willard Thorp, "The Religious Novel as Best Seller in America," Religious Perspectives In American Culture, Vol. II of Religion In American Life, ed. by James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton, N.J., 1961), pp. 223-225.

certainly right in perceiving this work as another of those fictional attacks on ecclesiastical and creedal orthodoxy.

The Bookman best seller list of 1896 included two religious novels which evidenced the continued popularity of "new light" attacks on orthodoxy. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' A Singular Life (1894) and Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896) continued the Robert Elsmere theme almost a decade later.²¹ Miss Phelps departed from her other-worldly considerations of Heaven to express an undogmatic Christian humanism in her singular hero, Bayard. As a student in seminary, Bayard breaks with the severe theology of his teachers. His request for ordination is denied because he could not subscribe to the belief in the eternal damnation of the wicked. Rejected by his church, he starts an independent work among the lower classes in Windover. Miss Phelps clearly expressed, through Bayard, her own convictions of how Christ would live in a modern town.²² Denominational ties and orthodox creeds are rejected in favor of an essentially activist, ethical Christianity.

The usual love story was not forgotten. Bayard falls in love with Helen, the daughter of one of his

²¹Alice Payne Hackett, 70 Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1965 (New York, 1967), p. 92.

²²Mary Angela Bennett, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (Philadelphia, 1939), p. 74.

orthodox professors. The climax of the story is reached when he is enabled to marry Helen by an inheritance from a wealthy uncle. Temporal success seems to be the reward of righteousness, until disaster strikes. Drawing an unmistakable Christ-image, the author causes her hero to become the fatal victim of a missile thrown by an opponent of the mission. The death does not seem to be in vain. His funeral, attended by hundreds of "neglected, poor, simple, sodden, and heartbroken" men, as well as prostitutes, widows, orphans, discontented laborers and foreign sailors, is evidence of the victory of a life lived for others.

The Damnation of Theron Ware has been described by Willard Thorp as "one of the best of all American novels on a religious subject."²³ Old time religion, of the Methodist variety, is victim to Theron Ware's encounters with a sophisticated Catholicism, the new critical scientific learning, and the attractiveness of ethical paganism. An unholy trinity of Science, Art, and Sex, in the form of a sceptical priest, a cold-blooded doctor and a beautiful pagan aristocrat, immediately begin the process of spiritual disintegration in the young Methodist minister. His intellectual naivete is challenged by Father Forbes' symbolic approach to revealed religion which proclaims that the mind

²³Thorp, op. cit., pp. 228-229.

of man is "alive with . . . thoughts and beliefs" which have evolved through the centuries in a "whole receding series of types of this Christ-myth of ours." The defense of orthodoxy is left to Brother Pierce who early admonishes the minister:

"We are a plain sort o' folks up in these parts" . . . "We walk here," he went on, eyeing the minister with a sour regard, "in a meek an' humble spirit, in the straight an' narrow way which leadeth unto life. We ain't gone traipsin' after strange gods, like some people that call themselves Methodists in other places. We stick by the Discipline an' the ways of our fathers in Israel. No new-fangled notions can go down here. . . . We don't want no book-learnin'. . . . What we want here, sir, is straight-out, flat-footed hell--the burnin' lake o' fire an' brimstone."

The frank union between religion and sex in Frederick's novel stands in sharp realistic contrast to the earlier religious novel. Theron goes through three stages of madonna-worship, involving his wife Alice, the beautiful pagan, Celia, and the pragmatic Christian, Sister Soulsby. As Doctor Ledsmar intimates, there exists "a sort of backwash of the old pagan sensuality and lascivious mysticism. . . ." Theron Ware's fall from intellectual, cultural, and sexual innocence provides the artistic framework for another attack on narrow creedalism and, in this case, unsophisticated isolation from modern thought.

Orthodoxy reacted ambivalently toward one of the most popular intellectual currents of the nineteenth century --New Thought or "mind cure." Rejecting its cultist tendencies, particularly in the form of Mary Baker Eddy's

Christian Science, many Protestants were attracted to a religious emphasis that promised power over "nervousness" or other psychological deficiencies. Largely led by and for women, the "mind cure" movement fed on the residue of New England transcendentalism and spiritualism, and on prevalent varieties of pseudo-psychology.²⁴ New Thought literature began to flood the public market, including Ralph Waldo Trine's In Tune With the Infinite (1897).

Eventually selling a million and one-half copies, this best seller promised in its subtitle "Fullness of Peace Power Plenty."²⁵ The point of the movement, and Trine's book, was to get people to think the thoughts of God; since God was All and One, the supreme Mind, and unlimited Goodness. When an individual, according to Trine, realized his oneness with this "Infinite Power" then he "becomes a magnet to attract to himself a continual supply of whatsoever things he desires." Although a departure from creedal traditions, In Tune With the Infinite was a new version of the old alliance between pietism and the success ethic.

At the turn of the century, there appeared a best seller which dealt with the conflict between Science and Theology in a quite controversial fashion. James Lane

²⁴Donald Meyer, The Positive Thinkers (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1965), pp. 1-75.

²⁵Hackett, op. cit., p. 85; Meyer, op. cit., p. 25.

Allen's The Reign of Law (1900) chronicles the "conversion" of a Bible College student to a belief in science as the sole source of truth. Following the pattern of his earlier well known stories, A Kentucky Cardinal and The Choir Invisible, Allen used the Kentucky hemp country as his setting. But in this novel he departed from the "genteel tradition to attack the sectarian roots of his own college experience. The Bible student, David, is the son of a pious pioneer family. His grandfather built the local church, and in an ecumenical spirit, opened its pulpit to preachers of every denomination. In order to live up to this religious heritage, young David decides to enter the ministry by way of the Bible College in Lexington.

The young ministerial student is at first captivated with the scholarship of his professors and the "non-sectarian," "Bible simply" theology which they teach. But soon his thirst for knowledge carries him beyond the real sectarian limits of this theology, and he soon finds himself reading the forbidden works on evolution. Astonished at the intolerance toward other "erroring" Christians exhibited by the college pastor and his fellow students, David begins to absent himself from church in order to study the "errors" of Darwin. Following a journey of spiritual doubt, David is an unsophisticated American version of Robert Elsmere. His agonizing search leads him through an agnostic rejection of Christian orthodoxy to faith in the New Science.

David's "apostasy from dogmatism" made him a friend of that peculiar professor "whose worship of God was the worship of Him through the laws of His universe and not through the dogmas of men." His love of Gabriella is also made possible by her rejection of church and dogma in favor of an intuitive belief in Divine Goodness. Together they can leave the anti-intellectual climate of the Bible-Belt and go north where David will study science in order to teach the new knowledge of the physical universe. As they prepare to leave the hemp country, David cries for joy in his new found faith:

Science! Science! There is the fresh path for the faith of the race! For the race henceforth must get its idea of God, and build its religion to Him, from its knowledge of the laws of His universe. A million years from now! Where will our dark theological dogmas be in that radiant time? The Creator of all life, in all life He must be studied! And in the study of science there is least wrangling, least tyranny, least bigotry, no persecution. It teaches charity, it teaches a well-ordered life, it teaches the world to be more kind. It is the great new path of knowledge into the future. All things must follow whither it leads. Our religion will more and more be what our science is, and some day they will be the same.

The Reign of Law never reached the sales of Robert Elsmere or John Ward, Preacher, appearing only on Bookman's best seller list of 1900.²⁶ That accomplishment, however, was evidence of a reading public ready for an evolutionary hypothesis that had been earlier considered subversive of

²⁶Hackett, op. cit., p. 96.

piety and sound theology. The temper of the times was suited to this logical extension of a long history of best selling criticism of church and dogma. Individualistic piety, with its faith in the accessibility of each conscience to the Divine, may have prepared the ground for such turn-of-the-century openness to progressive theologies and scientific Modernism.

CHAPTER V

SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY: IN HIS STEPS

During the 1890's, an increasing number of American Protestants were moved by a sense of social crisis and led to believe in the necessity and possibility of a Christian solution to that crisis. The rural provinciality of conventional Protestantism had begun to feel the erosion of the confidence in the established social order that had been so characteristic of the seventies and eighties. Precipitated by conservative, progressive, and radical analyses of the urban-industrial development, a social gospel movement in American Protestantism came of age by the end of the century.¹

The large, conservative wing of social Christianity remained primarily concerned with preventing socialism and other radical changes in the social structure. Reacting with fear and horror to the social crisis, their conservative analysis and prescriptions were representative of

¹Charles H. Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915 (New Haven, 1940), pp. 121-122; Henry F. May, Protestant Churches and Industrial America (New York, 1949), p. 163.

most clerical social theory prior to the mid-nineties. Yet in spite of their opposition to labor unions and income taxes, these conservative social Christians did pave the way for a progressive social gospel by their abandonment of complacency and their advocacy of evangelical missions in urban slums. Their opposition to collective social reform did not prevent them from advocating a degree of voluntary, individual reform, including higher wages. Instead of repeating the old clichés about "iron laws" of wages, these Protestants departed sharply from the older, complacent conservatism and went beyond Carnegie's Gospel of Wealth to urge the employers to avoid a "selfish" political economy in favor of some mild reform.²

By the last decade of the century a growing group of Protestant theorists began to agitate for a progressive effort to reform society. Primarily concerned with finding a Christian solution to the social crisis, these middle-of-the-road progressives abandoned conservative defenses of the status quo and challenged the sufficiency of the traditional doctrine of stewardship to control the growth of injustice or to further the Christian concept of Brotherhood. This moderately progressive school, usually known as the Social Gospel, achieved a remarkably influential position

²May, op. cit., pp. 163-169; Aaron I. Abel, The Urban Impact on American Protestantism, 1865-1900 (Cambridge, Mass., 1943), pp. 88-136.

in American Protestantism and in American social thought.³

Reflecting the middle-class nature of their institutions and leadership, the Social Gospel advocates preached a middle-class creed that sacrificed only a minimum of individualism to meet the urgent demand for social action. Its middle-class moderation and typical American optimism probably explains its rapid growth, in the nineties, as an increasingly effective critique of conservative social and economic thought. Led by men like Washington Gladden, R. Heber Newton, and Dean George Hodges, this maturing Social Gospel sympathized with the weak labor movement; it proclaimed a faith in the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man that promised an evolutionary progress toward a Christian society, the Kingdom of God on earth.⁴

This critique of existing society was carried much further by a small but energetic group of Christian radicals. Rejecting much of the optimism of the moderate Social Gospel, these Christian radicals proposed sweeping remedies in the place of limited reform. They stressed the prophetic tradition in Christianity and denounced the basic existing social and economic organization as un-Christian. Most

³Hopkins, op. cit., pp. 121-170; May, op. cit., pp. 170-181.

⁴Ibid.

radicals found the cooperative ideals of Christian Socialism, and its effective leader, the Reverend W. D. P. Bliss, the effective expression of social Christianity. Declaring socialism as the necessary result of Christianity, the Society of Christian Socialists, organized by Bliss in 1889, grew rapidly in the nineties, prompting widespread criticism and discussion in the churches. Far too radical to draw any large following from the middle-class church public, the Christian Socialists remain a small but defiant force on the left-wing of social Christianity. Attracting public attention out of proportion to their numbers, Christian radicals played a significant role in the growing critique of capitalism and the attempt to apply Christianity to the social crisis.⁵

The Social Gospel movement in the nineties was clearly reaching a large number of Americans through the spoken and written word. Although the influence of the church and of clergyman probably had declined, particularly among the wage-earners and the best-educated, yet the pulpit still influenced large sections of the population. Ministers were included on symposiums on industrial and social problems. The Chautauqua public, with its religious interests, heard Gladden, Hodges, Strong and other leading exponents of progressive Christianity. Leading secular

⁵May, op. cit., pp. 235-262.

magazines, as well as the widely-read religious press, were offering Social Gospel articles and discussions of the merits of reform proposals. Henry George's Progress and Poverty (1879) and Josiah Strong's Our Country (1885), with their assault on vested interests and challenge to Christianize the social order, prepared the way for books with a prophetic Social Gospel message.⁶

In the tradition of Social Christianity's call for urban reform was W. T. Stead's If Christ Came to Chicago (1894). Stead, a British journalist with Christian social reformist convictions, wrote a book length tract which described Chicago's miserable conditions. This vivid description of police brutality, vice, corrupt politicians, tax injustice, and inadequate relief, was climaxed by a visionary reform of the city that made it a model world capital. This reform, according to Stead, would come through an ecumenical church arising out of the working-class-reformer alliance. By-passing the existing Protestant churches and their wealthy members, this new, truly universal church would ally itself with labor and administer civic affairs according to the principles of human brotherhood.⁷

The Social Gospel was most widely presented through the Christian social novel. Written by clerical and lay

⁶Ibid., pp. 204-207.

⁷Ibid., pp. 118-119.

authors alike, the Social Gospel novel elaborated the If-Christ-Came motif and other social interpretations of discipleship in fictional form. Reflecting the history of the social Christianity movement in its conservative, progressive, and radical branches, the Social Gospel novel may have served as the most effective bridge between the pietistic individualism of the evangelical tradition and the social activism of twentieth-century Protestantism.⁸

To the extent that they criticized the materialism and ethical unconcern of the American Protestant churches, the religious novels since the 1870's had paved the way for a distinctive Social Gospel literature. One study of sixty novelists writing in this period found strong disapproval of institutional Protestantism reflected either in the absence of any reference to the church or in the minor role played by the church in the characters' religious life.⁹ By celebrating an ethical, individualistic piety in contrast to an affluent, unconcerned creedal orthodoxy, novelists like E. P. Roe had developed a best-selling motif that remained available to Charles Sheldon and other authors of Christian social novels.

⁸Grier Nicholl, "The Christian Social Novel In America, 1865-1918" (unpublished dissertation, U. of Minn., 1964), pp. 308-326.

⁹Elmer F. Suderman, "Criticisms of the Protestant Church in the American Novel: 1870-1900," Midcontinent American Studies Journal, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1964), pp. 17-23.

The early ancestors of the Christian social novel included Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' The Silent Partner (1871) and E. J. Haynes' Dollars and Duty (1887). Both books present pictures of horrible working and living conditions in New England mill towns. Class warfare is mitigated only by the Christian influence of the concerned hero or heroine. Welfare work, sympathy, and improved factory working conditions are capable of preventing the growth of unionism and social conflict. This conservative version of social Christianity predominated in the novels of the seventies and eighties, but the decade of the nineties saw the growing influence of the progressive version of Christian social responsibility.

Washington Gladden wrote a "prophetic dream-story" for the Century Magazine, which was published in book form in 1883 as The Christian League of Connecticut. The story concerned an interdenominational league and its social effects upon an ordinary factory town. Edward Everett Hale, the author of A Man Without a Country, attempted to apply Christianity to industrialism in How They Lived in Hampton (1888). This narrative made a strong plea for the building of a cooperative industrial commonwealth.

Albion W. Tourgee's Murvale Eastman, Christian Socialist (1889) was one of the best known Christian social novels which sympathized with boycotts of unfair industries. Not really a tract for Christian Socialism, Tourgee's book

combined an excellent literary style, the usual love story, and the timely concern with Labor-Capital strife to popularize the moderate version of the Social Gospel.¹⁰

The most successful work of evangelistic fiction dealing with the If-Christ-Came motif was Charles M. Sheldon's In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do? (1897). Reflecting the impact of W. T. Stead's work, the growing avalanche of social gospel tracts, and above all, his own ministerial experience, Sheldon's social interpretation of discipleship not only became one of America's all-time best sellers but it illustrated the continuity and change in popular nineteenth century religious thought. Evangelical pietism had merged, in Sheldon, with the growing social concern of progressive Christianity. The traditional best-selling themes--personal piety, creedless ethics, conversion, stewardship--were all there; but in addition, Sheldon's millions of readers were to be exposed to a social gospel they might never have known of at all.

Charles M. Sheldon was converted and "confessed Christ" when, as an adolescent, he attended a series of protracted meetings held by his "Uncle Joe" in Yankton, South Dakota. From the beginning of his Christian discipleship through the years at Phillips Academy, Brown University,

¹⁰Dana F. White, "A Summons for the Kingdom of God on Earth: The Early Social-Gospel Novel," The South Atlantic Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 3 (Summer, 1968), pp. 469-485.

and Andover Theological Seminary, Sheldon followed a "common everyday" Jesus. Upon accepting a call from the central Congregational Church of Topeka, Kansas, in 1889, he began a ministry dedicated to a practical, socially relevant Christianity. Doctrinal questions never attracted the ethically-oriented mind of Reverend Sheldon.¹¹

In order to appeal to the Sunday evening congregation of young people, the pastor of Central Congregational experimented with writing and reading serialized sermon stories. Richard Bruce, Or The Life That Now Is, was the first of these installment sermon stories. Several others followed, including The Crucifixion of Philip Strong, a treatise on Christian discipleship which involved sacrifice, suffering, and an almost literal crucifixion of the hero-disciple. The sharp criticism of an affluent, unconcerned, un-Christlike Christianity, pointed to his future work, In His Steps. Written and read to his congregation in 1896, In His Steps was sold to the Chicago Advance, a Congregational periodical. By June, 1897, the sale of the book form had reached 100,000 copies. The book's subsequent history, according to the author, was one in which " . . . it seems as if the Divine Power took a very weak bit of human composition and molded it into his own gracious purpose."¹²

¹¹C. M. Sheldon, His Life Story (George H. Doran Co., 1925), pp. 37-82.

¹²Ibid., p. 140.

One of the top best sellers of all time, Sheldon's serialized "sermon story" can still be found in most Protestant church and home libraries. The claim has been made that In His Steps has sold a total of thirty million copies, and Sheldon reports, in a foreword to a late edition, that the book "has had more circulation than any other book except the Bible." The exact publication figures, due to a defective copyright, will probably never be known. However, Frank L. Mott has estimated the total sales at not greatly in excess of two million.¹³

The traditional Christian themes of conversion, stewardship, and sacrifice were blended, in this best seller, with a renewed and much stronger emphasis on a creedless, undogmatic religion of conduct. The return to apostolic Christianity resulted in a fellowship "not of creed but of conduct" for the disciples who followed "in His steps."¹⁴ For Sheldon, this emphasis on conduct was nothing short of a new definition of Christian discipleship,

¹³Frank L. Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1947), pp. 195-197. Commenting on an interview with the Rev. Dr. Sheldon in 1942, Mott attributes the "myth of thirty million" to the fact that the author of In His Steps "simply had no mind for exact statistics, while at the same time he had a strong feeling for the romance of fine round numbers," p. 196.

¹⁴Charles M. Sheldon, In His Steps: "What Would Jesus Do?" (Garden City, N.Y.: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1952), p. 158.

upon which the regeneration of Christendom and the solution to the "social problem" depended.¹⁵

The text for Sheldon's "sermon story" was I Peter 2:21: "For hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that ye should follow his steps." The setting for the exposition of this text was the First Church of Raymond, which bears a close resemblance to the author's own Central Congregational Church in Topeka, Kansas. The Reverend Henry Maxwell's Sunday morning sermon to the "best dressed, most comfortable looking people of Raymond" has just come to a close when the service is interrupted by an unemployed "dusty, worn, shabby-looking young man" who explains his own life of suffering as part of "an awful lot of trouble in the world" that would not exist if people lived the songs they sang and followed His steps. This man's premature death imprints the condition of lost, suffering humanity on the Reverend Maxwell's mind and heart, resulting in a search for the meaning of Christian discipleship.

The following Sunday, Pastor Maxwell challenges his congregation to pledge themselves for an entire year not to do anything without first asking the question, "What would Jesus do?" The pledging volunteers would then be expected to act "just as He would if He was in our places"

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 151, 196, 240-241, 245.

regardless of the consequences. As Henry Maxwell phrased it, "we propose to follow Jesus' steps as closely and as literally as we believe He taught His disciples to do."¹⁶

The volunteers included some of the most prominent citizens of Raymond. There was Edward Norman, editor of the Raymond Daily News. Alexander Powers was superintendent of the great railroad shops in Raymond. Donald Marsh was president of suburban Lincoln College. Milton Wright was one of the large merchants employing at least one hundred men, and Dr. West was a young but well known surgeon. Jasper Chase, the novelist, Miss Virginia Page, the heiress, and Rachel Winslow, the talented soloist, represented wealthy and respectable elements of the city. Their pledge "to do what Jesus would do" leads them down the path of "joyful suffering" to a new definition of Christian discipleship.

Although the decision as to what it means to follow "in His steps" remains an entirely personal one for the volunteer, Maxwell's faith in the Holy Spirit's guidance is vindicated as each disciple finds little confusion in his own mind or in the judgment of others. The revolutionary nature of their actions transforms their own lives and particularly the lives of those around them. The editor, Edward Norman, runs the paper strictly on Christian principles. This means the absence of any news about yesterday's prize fight, the refusal to advertise

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 1-15.

tobacco and whiskey, and finally the termination of the Sunday paper. The resulting loss of financial support eventually leads Norman to the brink of bankruptcy only to be saved by the contributions of other wealthy members of First Church.

The railroad superintendent, Alexander Powers, upon learning that the company has violated the Interstate Commerce Law, resigns his position in order to testify before the Commission. The resulting hardship for his family emphasizes the self-denial and suffering entailed in doing "what Jesus would do." President Marsh of Lincoln College bears his cross by entering politics on a Reform ticket to fight against "rum and corruption" in municipal government. Milton Wright resists the profit motive and operates his business on the principles of unselfishness and stewardship. The principle of stewardship also involves self-denial for Rachel Winslow as she gives up an opportunity to sing professionally in order to sing for tent revivals in the slums of Raymond. The other volunteers make similar, if less dramatic, sacrifices in their adherence to the pledge.

Self-denial and suffering become the complement of stewardship for the disciples in Raymond's First Church. Henry Maxwell's ministry is characterized by a growing emphasis on practical love and an opposition to the hypocrisy of the wealthy and socially important. Jesus'

words "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me," lead Maxwell to practice a greater personal austerity and a more fearless pulpit ministry. In attempting to follow in His steps he listed a number of things Jesus would probably do in his parish:

1. Live in a simple, plain manner, without needless luxury on the one hand or undue asceticism on the other.
2. Preach fearlessly to the hypocrites in the church, no matter what their social importance or wealth.
3. Show in some practical form His sympathy and love for the common people as well as for the well-to-do, educated, refined people who make up the majority of the parish.
4. Identify Himself with the great causes of humanity in some personal way that would call for self-denial and suffering.
5. Preach against the saloon in Raymond.
6. Become known as a friend and companion of the sinful people in the Rectangle slum of Raymond.
7. Give up the summer trip to Europe this year. (I have been abroad twice and cannot claim any special need of rest. I am well, and could forego this pleasure using the money for some one who needs a vacation more than I do. There are probably plenty of such people in the city.)¹⁷

This set of resolutions is almost identical to the "working creed in the ministry" found in Sheldon's autobiography. He identified his creed as "The creed of Jesus,--Love to God and Man." His ministerial program, as found in His Life Story (1925), reflects a stronger commitment to the political, social, and economic redemption of

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 6-61.

man than his early social-gospel novel. The emphasis on conduct, not creed, however, remains central to his thought.¹⁸

Social Christianity emphasized goals or ends as well as the suffering and self-denial implicit in the concept of stewardship. In His Steps, while often more concerned with sacrifice than healing or reward, does hold suffering humanity as the beneficiary of Christian discipleship. It was, after all, the unemployed man's testimony and the conditions of the Rectangle in Raymond that prompted First Church's search for the meaning of following Jesus. Maxwell's recognition that the working men, in general, were uninfluenced by the church led to attempts to bridge the gap between church and labor. The slum, with its damning effects on character, was an object of concern also. Institutional church work and traditional tent revivals were both employed to fight the evil of the slum.

The "curse of the saloon," was the root of all evil, however. It was the saloon that was responsible for the Rectangle, with its crime and death. It was the saloon that corrupted the political and social life of the nation. It was the great object and enemy of President Marsh's political reform efforts as well as that of the tent revival. Since the saloon inevitably meant corrupt municipal government, the first step in purifying civic life must

¹⁸Sheldon, His Life Story, pp. 262-274.

be the end of licensing for the saloon. Reverend Maxwell and his pledged church members found it necessary to change their earlier positions and fight "rum and corruption."¹⁹ The anti-saloon emphasis with its complementary accent on a campaign of "organized righteousness," places Sheldon in the right-wing of the social gospel.²⁰

Municipal corruption, with its roots in the saloon furnished a worthy opponent for the follower of Jesus. President Marsh felt it was "My plain duty . . . to take a personal part in this coming election, go to the primaries, throw the weight of my influence, whatever it is, toward the nomination and election of good men, and plunge into the very depths of the entire horrible whirlpool of deceit, bribery, political trickery and saloonism as it exists in Raymond today."²¹ Edward Norman, the editor, also joined the fight against political corruption. In his new "Christian" paper, the Evening News, he editorialized on the "moral side of political questions." He takes a non-partisan stand and discusses all political issues from "the standpoint of right and wrong." Following in His steps means, then, that every political question must be submitted to the first question: "Is this measure in accordance with the spirit and teachings of Jesus as the

¹⁹ In His Steps, pp. 60, 90-93.

²⁰ Hopkins, op. cit., pp. 104-105.

²¹ In His Steps, p. 90.

author of the greatest standard of life known to men?"²²

The moralistic approach to political reform, which so characterized the middle-class Progressive movement and its social-gospel origins, was never better illustrated than in Sheldon's best seller.²³

The ethical questions dominating this novel also reflect a blend of the old and new. Sheldon's version of Social Christianity certainly rejects the Sumnerian or Spencerian concept of the social jungle. There is no room for self-interest, "enlightened or otherwise." The trouble with the world, according to Maxwell, is that it is suffering from selfishness. This attempt to apply Christian ethics to business practices is exemplified by Milton Wright's summary of "what Jesus would do" in his place as a business man:

1. He would engage in the business first of all for the purpose of glorifying God, and not for the primary purpose of making money.
2. All money that might be made he would never regard as his own, but as trust funds to be used for the good of humanity.
3. His relations with all the persons in his employ would be the most loving and helpful. He could not help thinking of all of them in the light of souls to be saved. This thought would always be greater than his thought of making money in the business.

²²Ibid., p. 67.

²³Sheldon's relationship to Progressivism is suggested by the evidence of his friendship with William Jennings Bryan and the presence of In His Steps in Bryan's personal library. W. H. Smith, "William Jennings Bryan and the Social Gospel," Journal of American History, Vol. LIII, No. 1 (June, 1966), pp. 45, 49; Sheldon, His Life Story, pp. 177-178.

4. He would never do a single dishonest or questionable thing or try in any remotest way to get the advantage of any one else in the same business.
5. The principle of unselfishness and helpfulness in the business world direct all its details.
6. Upon this principle he would shape the entire plan of his relations to his employees, to the people who were his customers and to the general business world with which he was connected.²⁴

This brand of stewardship preached and practiced by the disciples of In His Steps, and which battled against the saloon, tobacco, prize fights, gambling, and Sabbath violations represented old battlegrounds for American Protestantism.

For Social Christianity the Kingdom of God was both ideal and actual. Whether it served as the ultimate standard by which all men's efforts were judged or whether it was a goal to be progressively realized in history, the Kingdom of God played a central role in social gospel thinking. Sheldon's In His Steps has little if any eschatology. The search for an ethical and practical definition of discipleship places the emphasis upon the present and immediate future. However, there are a few references to the Kingdom. Norman, in his formulation of what Jesus would do as editor of a daily newspaper, cites the main principle guiding the paper as "the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the world." Political questions are also to be treated from the "standpoint of the advancement of the Kingdom of God on earth." Maxwell's final

²⁴In His Steps, p. 76.

vision of a regeneration of Christendom leads him to hope for the "dawn of the millennium of Christian history."²⁵ The Kingdom of God is both the standard of judgment and the goal of faith.

For all its social gospel themes, In His Steps reflects Sheldon's orthodox roots. Traditional values permeate the renewal of First Church in Raymond. Personal religious experience, characterized by the presence of the Holy Spirit and fed by a life of prayer, is the prerequisite for Christian Discipleship. As Henry Maxwell tells his fellow pledge-takers, "We must know Jesus before we can imitate Him." Alone with the Divine Presence the followers of Jesus pray for guidance by the Holy Spirit in order to have wisdom to follow in His steps.²⁶ Sheldon was not as theologically minded as Walter Rauschenbusch but he shared "the lonely prophet's" origins in the evangelical orthodoxy of the nineteenth century.²⁷

The Institutional church and settlement house approach to the problem of the slum is only half the answer for Sheldon. The traditional tent meeting is employed to evangelize the slum dwellers of the Rectangle. At the conclusion of the evangelist's sermon the traditional

²⁵Ibid., pp. 133-135, 245.

²⁶Ibid., p. 137.

²⁷His Life Story, pp. 141-143; Winthrop Hudson, The Great Tradition of the American Churches (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), pp. 226-242; H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), p. 194.

invitation hymn, "Just as I am," is sung and "broken, sinful" people stumble forward to the rude bench in front of the platform. Conversions or "new births" are the result.

The traditionalism of In His Steps is also evidenced in its romantic, sentimental and idealistic tone. Its easy optimism triumphs over the worst portrayals of urban depravity. Edward Norman expresses the common faith that "Good things are more powerful than bad," and that the great fight is between good and evil. There are few moral ambiguities or ethical complexities. "Christian America" has been challenged by Henry Maxwell, disciple of Jesus, who "with a hope that walks hand in hand with faith and love . . . laid him down to sleep and dreamed of the regeneration of Christendom, and saw in his dream a church of Jesus without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, following him all the way, walking obediently in His steps."²⁸

The shortcomings of Sheldon's literary art are many and obvious. The serial or installment origin of the novel results in an episodic effect that damages attempts at characterization, setting, or plot. The final third of the story, set in Chicago, may add to the thesis but at the expense of unity. The novel's heavy emphasis on theme serves tractarian but not literary purposes.

²⁸In His Steps, pp. 136, 245.

The romantic sentimentalism and utopianism of the popular version of the Social Gospel characterizes this best seller's religious thought.

After Sheldon's In His Steps, from 1897 to 1915, Christian social novels tended to move away from the conservative evangelistic emphasis toward the progressive and sometimes radical social gospel. While Sheldon continued to write religious fiction every year down to 1914, he did not repeat his earlier sales success. His emphasis on an individualistic approach to social reform, contrasted sharply with the major social gospel leadership. Washington Gladden, George Herron, and Josiah Strong had advocated major modifications of the environment, and this progressivism was reflected in many novels.

That group of novels, following the pattern of Robert Elsmere and A Singular Life, which traced the decline of orthodoxy in a scientific age, also tended to interpret the gospel in social terms. Emmanuel Bayard, the hero of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' A Singular Life (1895) fulfills his Christian calling in Angel Alley, as a slum worker. His lack of orthodoxy, resulting in his failure to be ordained, is no handicap in his Christ-like work among the degraded humanity around the coastal wharves. John Storm, the hero of English writer Hall Caine's The Christian (1897), was another popular, and muscular, embodiment of slum reform. His "new social application" of Christianity

replaced the old creeds and allowed him to combine the "glorious gospel" of work for the poor with a glamorous love affair with an actress.

In contrast to their general pessimism regarding the institutional church and its ministerial "hirelings," the progressive social novels often portrayed ministers, who had been converted to a social concern, fighting heroically against wealth and privilege. In the steps or image of Jesus, these clerical heroes drove the money changers and the Pharisaic hypocrites out of the church and out of civic power. Just as Phillip Strong and Henry Maxwell, in Sheldon's best known works, denounced the wealthy opponents of reform, so the Reverend Mr. Pertow of Austin Miles' About My Father's Business (1905) proclaims from the pulpit the selfishness of the rich. Bishop Watts, of John T. Moore's The Bishop of Cottontown (1906), risks death in accusing the mill owners of exploiting children in the cotton mills. Reverend Emerson Courtright, after expulsion from his church, preaches Henry George's "economics of Jesus" to rich and poor alike. Industrialists, saloon keepers, and corrupt politicians are all militantly confronted by these ministerial bearers of a Social Gospel.²⁹

²⁹Grier Nicholl, "The Image of the Protestant Minister in the Christian Social Novel," Church History, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3 (September, 1968), pp. 319-34.

Radical or Utopian prescriptions were also available to the reader of popular Christian social novels. While the Utopian strain can be found in Sheldon and other conservative, evangelical social gospellers, yet in William Allen White's In The Heart of a Fool (1918) and Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward, 2000-1888 (1888) and Equality (1897) the radical vision is truly revolutionary. Grant Adams, White's hero, is an imitator of Jesus who works as a laboringman and preaches a "revolution of love." Bellamy's utopia guarantees economic equality to all people in the brotherly love of the Kingdom of God.

William Dean Howells was clearly affected by both progressive and radical strains of social Christianity. Influenced by Henry George, Bellamy, and W. D. P. Bliss, Howells became quite sympathetic to Christian efforts at reform. Annie Kilburn (1889), A Hazard of New Fortunes (1889) and his Utopian novel, A Traveller from Altruria (1894) all reflect his ideal of Christian brotherhood. Although Howells seems to have stopped short of a complete commitment to Christian Socialism, his many readers did find in his "realism" a sympathetic concern for the workingman and a sharp critique of Protestant hypocrisy. His "traveller," with his "Christian republic" of peace and plenty, may not be characteristic of his thought, yet the indictment of monopolistic capitalism and the egalitarian

commitment to reform is characteristic of this influential literary figure.³⁰

Opposition to the development of social Christianity certainly existed among elements of the church. Evangelical pietism, particularly in the revivalist version, often has been cited as a conservative and even reactionary force. From D. L. Moody to Billy Sunday, the message of the revivalist was personal reformation not social action. Benjamin Fay Mills was an outstanding exception, for he transferred the urgency and technique of revivalism to the cause of social reform. But he remained an outstanding exception. Most evangelical Protestants failed to depart from the primacy of individual soul-winning in the face of the new urban-industrial society.³¹ This opposition was rooted partly in the social origins of rural and middle-class, "entrepreneurial" churchmen.³² It was also a product of the long-standing evangelical notion that conversions were the natural and most effective way to Christianize the nation. Fundamental social change would be the product of successful soul-winning.³³

³⁰ Ibid.; May, op. cit., pp. 10-213.

³¹ William G. McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism (New York, 1959), pp. 283, 336.

³² May, op. cit., p. 189.

³³ C. C. Goen, "The 'Methodist Age' in American Church History," Religion In Life, Vol. XXXIV, No. 4 (Autumn, 1965), p. 566.

This evangelical opposition to the Social Gospel may have been overcome somewhat by the Christian social novel. The religious novel, as has already been pointed out, tended to reflect many of the characteristics of evangelical pietism. The evangelical emphasis upon the imminent judgment of God upon human affairs, the need for personal regeneration, the necessity of a social expression of brotherly love, and the belief in a coming Kingdom of God, were all recurring strains in religious best sellers, including the works of Sheldon and other Social Gospel novelists. The evangelistic and revivalistic overtones of even the most radical novels, such as Bellamy's, was evidence of both the legacy of evangelicalism and the possible influence of this Social Gospel propaganda on evangelical readers.³⁴

Certainly Sheldon's best seller and most of the other popular religious novels of the nineties continued to reflect the tendency toward theological reductionism in American Protestantism. The pietistic unconcern with creed and denomination, while accompanied by a radical personal commitment in the religious best sellers, was often a reflection of a progressive acculturation in the churches. Successful churches in post-Civil War America were unable to maintain high standards of Christian

³⁴Grier Nicholl, "The Christian Social Novel and Social Gospel Evangelism," Religion In Life, Vol. XXXIV, No. 4 (Autumn, 1965), pp. 548-561.

commitment, theological understanding, or disciplined membership.³⁵ The complacent "unregenerate" churchman is one expression of that compromising reductionism; the other is a body of popular literature committed to a Christianity which is free from the stifling and adverse effects of orthodox creeds and fashionable churches.

³⁵Winthrop Hudson, American Protestantism (Chicago, 1961), p. 47.

CHAPTER VI

MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY: CONNOR, WRIGHT, CHURCHILL

Best selling religion in the Progressive Era was characterized by a strenuous or muscular Christianity which was part of the response to accelerated social and intellectual change. The growth of the factory and the city had led to the stratification of American society. The social and economic differences between large and small manufacturers, between capital and labor, between new immigrants and old natives, and between the city and the farm, conflicted with equalitarian ideals. An intellectual revolt against formalism and determinism coincided with the material changes to produce the reform impulse of progressivism.¹

American thought at the beginning of the twentieth century was increasingly characterized by the paradoxical themes of belief in evolutionary historical progress and a return to pre-industrial ideals of natural social democracy. The new intellectual trends in science, philosophy, the

¹George E. Mowry, The Era of Theodore Roosevelt and the Birth of Modern America, 1900-1912 (New York, 1958), pp. 14-15, 37.

social sciences, jurisprudence, religion, and the arts stressed pragmatic openness to change and reform. Yet in the face of scientific and cultural change, among progressives there persisted a faith in the certainty and universality of traditional moral values. Central to the period's culture was the continuation of nineteenth century middle-class faith in the reality, certainty, and eternity of moral values.²

The persistent moralism of the progressives, epitomized by the social gospel, was everywhere evident in the crusades against unrighteousness, whether in the form of monopolistic trusts, urban vice and crime, liquor interests, or class politicians. Words like truth, justice, patriotism, unselfishness, and decency were constantly used in the process of making moral judgments concerning individual and corporate behavior. Confidence in the possibility of progressive reform on traditional moral terms characterized middle class society's response to the cultural challenge of industrialism.³

The reformers, however, were faced with the stigma of effeminacy and ineffectuality which was the legacy of nineteenth century upper-class reform. The association of reform with Eastern society's ineffectual civil service

²Henry F. May, The End of American Innocence (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1964), pp. 6, 9.

³Ibid., pp. 9, 10.

efforts and with upper-middle-class feminists resulted in masculine suspicion of proposals to remake the world. The challenge of this handicap was increasingly accepted by reformers who stressed the virile, muscular nature of progressivism.⁴ The union of moralistic and muscular reform was best exemplified in Theodore Roosevelt.

In a speech delivered in Chicago in April, 1899, Theodore Roosevelt called upon his countrymen to lead "the life of strenuous endeavor."⁵ High among his list of life's virtues was "manliness."⁶ A noted competitor and combatant, Roosevelt once remarked that man's mission in life could be summed up with the words "work, fight, and breed."⁷ His experiences as a cowboy, big game hunter, and Rough Rider helped make Roosevelt's presidency a symbol of the era's fight against the "flabbiness" and "slothful ease" of the overcivilized man, "who has lost the great fighting,

⁴Richard Hofstadter, Anti-intellectualism in American Life (New York, 1964), pp. 185-191.

⁵Quoted in Fred Lewis Pattee, The New American Literature, 1890-1930 (New York, 1930), p. 104.

⁶William Henry Harbaugh, Power and Responsibility; The Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt (New York, 1961), pp. 91, 99.

⁷Mowry, op. cit., p. 110.

masterful virtues."⁸ For Mark Sullivan, T. R. was "the outstanding incomparable symbol of virility in his time."⁹

Roosevelt's preaching the manly virtues of the strenuous life appealed to a generation that celebrated the Klondike Gold Rush and the clean romance of Richard Harding Davis' tales of outdoor adventure. Prize-fighting and Kipling's poems were equally popular evidences of the muscular tastes of Roosevelt's constituency.¹⁰ Progressives, in order to dramatize the compatibility of reform with virility and strenuousness, followed Roosevelt's lead in an exaggerated concern with manliness as prerequisite for efforts to alter America and the world.¹¹

Roosevelt's insistence upon the strong, virile virtues of primitive frontier America also symbolized the continuity with nineteenth century romanticism. While in reality, American frontiersmen feared and hated a wilderness environment in which they had to fight for survival and success, the romantic perception of primitive life as

⁸Theodore Roosevelt, quoted in Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind (New Haven, 1967), p. 150.

⁹Mark Sullivan, Our Times, 1900-1925, Vol. II (New York, 1927), p. 235.

¹⁰Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 204, 264-265, 276.

¹¹James R. McGovern, "David Graham Phillips and the Virility Impulse of Progressives," The New England Quarterly, Vol. 39, No. 3 (September, 1966), pp. 335-336.

virtuous persisted. By the eighteen nineties, a growing realization that the frontier was gone led to a romantic notion of the role of primitive conditions in developing sound bodies, firm minds, and the manly self-reliance without which, Roosevelt argued, "'no race can do its life work well.'"¹² The impact of Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 address on "the significance of the Frontier in American History" dramatized the American sense of indebtedness to a strenuous life of conquering and settling a wilderness.

In reviewing Captain Alfred Mahan's Life of Nelson in the June 1897 The Bookman, Theodore Roosevelt praised "those stern and virile virtues which move the men of stout heart and strong hand who uphold the honor of their flag in battle."¹³ In extolling the warlike virtues, Roosevelt shared his aggressiveness and belligerence with many other men of his generation, including Henry Cabot Lodge, John Hay, Henry Adams, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. The cult of military valor was, of course, world-wide. The generation that thrilled to Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade" was followed by a generation that took Kipling's Barrack-Room Ballads to its heart.¹⁴

¹²Theodore Roosevelt, quoted in Nash, op. cit., pp. 152-153.

¹³Quoted in Harbaugh, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁴Harbaugh, op. cit., pp. 91-98.

The development of the soldierly virtues and the will to use them became part of the intellectual resources of an imperialistic generation. Reading the development of human history from a social-Darwinian frame of reference, they concluded that a country, as well as an individual, must expand its influence or lose place, power and prestige. The failure to fulfill its potential was the consequence of a nation's unwillingness to practice strength, determination, and sacrifice. Preserving the virile, manly qualities would prevent national decay and extinction.¹⁵

Imperialism, while rooted in the drive for economic gain, owed much to intellectual and psychological forces as well. Social Darwinist emphases on stern and virile virtues were combined with the moralistic drives found in American life. This moralism, expressed strongly in connection with struggles for domestic reform, characterized much of American foreign policy. Although American Protestant missionaries were not simply agents of business enterprise or the Department of State, they were the instruments of a strong tradition of religious imperialism. A sharp line could not be drawn between the secular movement of imperialism and the religious movement of foreign missions.¹⁶

¹⁵Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁶Paul A. Varg, Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats (Princeton, 1958), pp. 81-85.

Roosevelt's friendship with Kipling is not surprising given that generation's enthusiasm for the strenuous effort to carry out "white man's burden."¹⁷

William James may have been speaking for many in his and Roosevelt's generation when he defined the moral life as one of "strenuous mood."¹⁸ Even an anti-imperialist and anti-militarist like James argued for the necessity of hardy, masculine virtues. In his essay, "The Moral Equivalent of War," James concluded that militarism was "the great preserver of our ideals of hardihood, and human life with no use for hardihood would be contemptible."¹⁹ Since war disciplines communities and inculcates the martial virtues of "intrepidity, contempt of softness, surrender of private interest, obedience to command," anti-militarists must find a moral equivalent of war if these strenuous and honorable virtues are not to be lost. Since men are unwilling "to see the supreme theatre of human strenuousness closed" and the "splendid military aptitudes" lost, a way

¹⁷Henry Pringle, Theodore Roosevelt (New York, 1931), p. 128.

¹⁸Quoted in Edwin H. Cady, "'The Strenuous Life' as a Theme in American Cultural History," New Voices In American Studies, ed. by Ray B. Browne, Donald M. Winkelman and Allen Hayman (Purdue, 1966), p. 60.

¹⁹William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," The Writings of William James, Vol. I, ed. by John J. McDermott (New York, 1967), p. 664.

must be found to preserve these muscular virtues if peace is to be beneficial.²⁰

The strenuous themes of primitivism, masculinity, war and combat, and even sportive competition are evidenced in the literature of the progressive period. Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, Jack London and a host of lesser literary figures wrote in a variety of ways and moods about the struggles, triumphs, and disasters of strenuous men. The fascination with "vitality" and "red-blooded" adventure can be discovered in Norris' McTeague, The Octopus, and Vandover and the Brute. The thrill of violence and brute force is celebrated in London's The Call of the Wild and Houston Steward Chamberlain's glorification of the "great blond beast."²¹ Whether it was the strenuous mood of William James' free and moral man or the Nietzschean superman of Jack London, the accent was on the force and vitality of individual will.

Popular literature, written chiefly for women, was characterized in this period by the rise of a distinctively masculine novel. With rugged stories and settings, combined with the older sentimentalism and didacticism, the masculine novels were read by both men and women.²² The frozen North

²⁰Ibid., pp. 661-671.

²¹Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), pp. 70-87.

²²James D. Hart, The Popular Book (New York, 1950), p. 214.

figured in a number of masculine adventures in addition to those of Jack London. Rex Beach's The Barrier (1908), The Silver Horde (1909) and The Net (1912) treated the theme of virility in the Klondike gold rush. The "Sourdough Poet," Robert W. Service, immortalized the rough life of the Yukon with his crude but comic "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" and "The Cremation of Sam McGee" which were memorized by stage entertainers and college sophomores alike. Service's ballads were repeated far beyond the reaches of readers of published works.²³

The "great open spaces," as a setting for muscular exploits, were not confined to the Alaska of London, Beach and Service. Owen Wister's The Virginian, first published in 1902, reflected the influence of Kipling in its celebration of man's competitive relationship with an uncivilized environment. Providing the archetype cowboy for future Western tales, Wister depicted a man of nature who is a totally free man because of his boundless strength derived from nature. The Virginian engages in the classic battle with evil, as it is personified in evil men and their wicked deeds. Wister's dedication of The Virginian to his friend and Harvard classmate, Theodore Roosevelt, indicated the obvious influence of the president in the growing cult of the muscular western hero--the cowboy.²⁴

²³Frank L. Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York, 1947), pp. 235-236.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 236-237.

Among the hosts of cowboy tales that followed on the heels of The Virginian, none surpassed the popularity of Zane Grey's westerns. Betty Zane, The Spirit of the Border, and Riders of the Purple Sage were among the most popular of his more than fifty novels. Featuring heroic Indian fighters and faster-than-the-eye gunslingers, Grey's books sold approximately fifteen and a half million. The success of Zane Grey over-shadowed the popular westerns of Emerson Hough and Steward Edward White, but not the Tarzan books of Edward Rice Burroughs. Tarzan of the Apes was a pulp-magazine serial before this story of wild, brute strength was published in book form in 1914.²⁵

One of the strongest expressions of virility and strenuousness was found in the muscular Christianity of popular religion. A strenuous or muscular Christianity had been in vogue in Victorian England, as evidenced by the popularity of Thomas Hughes' Tom Brown's School Days, a classic text in the fighting virtues. His The Manliness of Christ supported the famous clergyman, Charles Kingsley, in his preaching of a "healthy and manly Christianity, one which does not exalt the feminine virtues to the exclusion of the masculine."²⁶ Americans, like Roosevelt, were familiar with this muscular Christianity, having read

²⁵Ibid., pp. 237-239.

²⁶Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven, 1957), pp. 202-204.

adaptations of Hughes in McGuffey's Readers.²⁷ In his autobiography, Roosevelt mentions "Tom Brown" among the good books which will enable a person to "furnish himself with much ammunition which he will find of use in the battle of life."²⁸

Muscular Christianity was celebrated within the revivalist tradition, which still played a large part in American Protestantism. One of the foremost of America's revivalists had been Dwight L. Moody, who represented a rather genteel Victorian variety of evangelism. However, one of his prominent successors, Sam Jones, a Georgian evangelist frequently referred to as "The Moody of the South," followed a more masculine gospel. Reaching the peak of his career in the eighteen nineties, Jones and Benjamin Foy Mills preached a "new evangelism" which became known for an activist concern for the social aspects of Christianity. While Jones' social gospel remained as provincial as the Georgian moral code and was largely expressed in preaching prohibition, its muscular theme had a wide appeal to lower-middle-class audiences.²⁹

²⁷Sullivan, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 39.

²⁸Theodore Roosevelt, An Autobiography (New York, 1913), p. 335.

²⁹William G. McLoughlin, Jr., Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham (New York, 1959), pp. 283-329.

Jones' Muscular Christianity was his interpretation of following or imitating Christ. He said he liked "a broad, useful, aggressive Christianity--a Christianity with a musket and a cartridge belt." Since "Satan won this country by fighting," then "we must win it back from him in the same way."³⁰ Muscular Christianity meant being aggressive and determined in the fight against the evils of the liquor traffic. Preachers were not only to preach Christ but to "raise the devil." In some southern cities, revivalist Jones even urged local Law and Order Leagues to take the law into their own hands against illegal saloons.³¹

The most successful opponent of what Sam Jones called "the effeminate Christianity" was revivalist Billy Sunday. Calling for "fighting men of God" and not "hog-jowled, weasel-eyed, sponge-columned, musky-fisted, jelly-spined, pussy-footing, four-flushing, charlotte-russe Christians," Sunday stood squarely for a muscular Christianity. Bernard Weisberger describes Sunday as a "fighter without quarter against the foes of womanhood, cleanliness, God, motherhood, hard work and America."³² Sunday's militant masculinity was seen by one writer as more insistent than even that of Teddy Roosevelt. He told his audiences

³⁰Quoted in Ibid., p. 294.

³¹Ibid., pp. 299, 329.

³²Bernard A. Weisberger, They Gathered at the River (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966), pp. 248-249.

during the Progressive Era that he admired "the man who has real, rich, red blood in his veins instead of pink tea and ice water." He described Jesus as "the greatest scrapper that ever lived." His conclusion was obvious: "Let me tell you, the manliest man is the man who will acknowledge Jesus Christ."³³ Sunday's crude preaching was criticized by many, but his popularity surpassed that of any evangelist in America and was at least a part of the cult of the muscular and the virile.³⁴

Muscular Christianity, then, drew upon and reinforced a popular culture enamored with the virility of the strenuous life and the manliness of the social gospel. A strenuous, moral fight against unrighteousness became a persistent best selling theme during the two decades before the First World War. The ground for such reformism had been prepared by Josiah Strong's Our Country (1885), Charles Sheldon's In His Steps (1897), and Hall Caine's rugged social gospel novel, The Christian (1897). Although the virtues of physical strength were not celebrated by these and most social gospel writers, moral strenuousness is central to the battle against unrighteousness.

In 1898, the year after Sheldon's best seller appeared, the novel Black Rock was published. Written by

³³McLoughlin, op. cit., p. 427.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 415-416.

a Canadian minister, Reverend C. W. Gordon, under the pseudonym of Ralph Connor, Black Rock is a rugged tale of Western life, where men fought out "that eternal fight for manhood, strong, clean, God-conquered." Connor's best selling novel and those of Harold Bell Wright which followed exemplified the "muscular Christianity" phase of popular religious thought in America.

Presented as a true story, the book relates the progress of Christianity in the mining-lumber town of Black Rock, British Columbia. "Ralph Connor" finds himself interrupting his medical studies to visit an old friend who runs a lumber camp in the Selkirks. The extended visit becomes the basis for Connor's description of the wild Black Rock and its transformation under the influence of a Presbyterian minister, Reverend Craig. Craig is a strong, rugged man who easily gains the respect of the motley lumber crew who speak with Scotch, Irish and French accents. The lumbermen, for the most part, are a hard working, hard drinking, and hard fighting group, two of which qualities are virtues, and one, a vice. The "curse of drink" prevents them from saving enough after payday to return to family and native country. Wives and children are, in effect, deserted, mothers land in the workhouse, and strong manhood is sacrificed on Friday night at Slavin's Saloon.

The Reverend Craig's battle is with the liquor forces in Black Rock, who plot to entice the men away from their newest resolutions and make them free-spending customers every payday. The men, in turn, battle for their manhood and, in some cases, for their lives. The strategy takes the form of a temperance league, in which the men pledge themselves to be teetotalers and spend payday celebrating with coffee and doughnuts. The league's failure is secured by the saloonkeeper, Slavin, when he spikes the "lemonade" at a social ball and encourages his henchmen forcibly to induce leaguers to break their pledge. A beautiful frontier brawl between league and whiskey men ensues at the hotel when the league men seek revenge by destroying all the stores of whiskey. The invigorating fight is accompanied, however, by the ruin of the league.

The alcoholic death of one of the fallen league men, the fatal illness of the saloon-keeper's baby (as a result of the drunken doctor's overdose prescription) and the Christian forgiveness of a new league led to a successful victory over the whiskey interests. In fact, Slavin, the saloonkeeper, becomes the manager of the new league's hall with its coffee room, reading room, and theatrical programs. The newly formed Presbyterian Church had succeeded in leading rough men into Christian discipleship and fighting the good fight for "God-conquered" manhood.

Black Rock's theme, "that eternal fight for manhood, strong, clean, God-conquered," emphasizes both the simplicity and the rugged grandeur of the "muscular" version of the Christian faith. The "eternal fight" became the essence of discipleship. Craig challenged the men at Black Rock's first communion service with the words: "It is a hard fight, a long fight, a glorious fight . . . but every man who squarely trusts Him and takes Him as Lord and Master comes out victor!"³⁵ For the rough men of Black Rock, fighting tactics can be justified in dealing with the "whiskey business." In fact, at the end of the brawl with Slavin's gang, Craig took down his Bible and read to the league "that psalm for all fighters--'God is our refuge and strength.'"³⁶ The battle might be the Lord's, but He certainly had to have the forces.

The "eternal fight" had a goal--manhood. This manhood was also described as "strong, clean, and God-conquered." It was the "base loves," particularly love of whiskey, which robbed the men of their strong, clean manhood. It was only "in loving Him" that they could be "God-conquered" and therefore saved from the loss of manhood. The total abstinence league, then, combines all the elements of this masculine fight. "The only safe man is the man who quits it dead and fights it straight," and yet

³⁵Ralph Connor, Black Rock (New York, 1898), p. 131.

³⁶Ibid., p. 163.

this fight is only successful when trusting Him and taking Him as Lord and Master. The "good, clean, brave heart" only comes from "our Father." Conquering one's self involved being God-conquered.³⁷

This muscular Christianity, with its fight for manhood, utilized a number of familiar themes. Discipleship meant stewardship. Connor's reluctance to join in Black Rock's first communion was a result of his Bohemianism and laziness. As he put it: "It calls for a life where a fellow must go in for straight, steady work, self-denial, and that sort of thing."³⁸ Mrs. Mavor, the widow of a miner killed by an accident due to another man's drinking, makes several sacrifices. Her love for Craig, conflicting with "Honor, faith, and duty," means self-denial and sacrifice as she leaves Black Rock without him. Self-denial is often only a temporary obligation for the disciple, for Mrs. Mavor eventually returns to become Mrs. Craig.

The ethic of work is expressed not only in Black Rock's muscular frontier life but also as a requirement of Christian living. Working kept one from becoming selfish and weak. Every man had his own work which, in turn, became "Christ's own work in your hands."³⁹ Connor's friend, Graeme, expressed his conversion by rejecting a life of

³⁷Ibid., p. 218.

³⁸Ibid., p. 125.

³⁹Ibid., p. 263.

ease in the East to return to finish "Old man Nelson's" work in the mountains.

Work and self-denial were victims of and antidote to the "curse of drink." Best selling religion's pre-occupation with the total abstinence movement is at the heart of Black Rock's fight. This ethical absolutism is not a constant, puritanical emphasis with Connor. The league members smoke and occasionally swear. Although an almost entirely male community might be faced with the problem of sexual immorality, no mention of sex is made in Black Rock. The subject was either being ignored, according to Victorian standards, or rated very low on the scale of "base loves."

Conversion, while not always expressed in traditional terms, did find its place in Connor's message. Very early in the story, "old man" Nelson kneels in the snow, under a starlit sky, to "try Him." The parable of the prodigal son especially appeals to the lost men who wander back to a place of trust in Him. The conversion experience is often less emotional than the signing of a temperance pledge. In fact, for the Presbyterianism of Connor's story, conversion is seen largely as an initiation or renewal of a covenant.

The religious thought of this best selling work has all the variety of Black Rock. A creedless, eclectic, ecumenical community, Black Rock "possessed in a marked

degree that eminent Christian virtue of tolerance." No orthodoxy was required and it was generally conceded that one religious opinion was as good as another.⁴⁰ Craig's Presbyterianism did demand commitment for the fight against evil and for manhood. But theological differences were certainly unimportant. The ecumenical spirit of the novel, while not completely transcending the anti-Catholic bias, did allow for Craig's cooperation with the local priest in the baptism and funeral of Slavin's baby.

A religion that works is the reasonable one, according to Graeme. A liberal mythological faith, having failed to produce new lives, is inferior to the religion that produces strong, clean men who will fight for righteousness. A religion that is theoretical and not practical has no appeal for the men of Black Rock. An anti-intellectualism common to much popular religious thought leads Graeme to complain: "It does seem a sinful waste of God's good human stuff to see these fellows potter away their lives among theories living and dead and end up by producing a book!"⁴¹ For Graeme, the only creed tenable or necessary is knowing that "good is good and bad is bad, and good and bad are not the same." All that is left, then, is the belief that "God is at the back of a man who wants to get done with bad."⁴²

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 104.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 254.

⁴²Ibid., p. 254.

A religion that expresses itself in comfortable, unconcerned ways is not for the disciples at Black Rock. The "husks" of the churches, in the form of "elaborate services and eloquent discourses," are rejected for a faith that is simple and rugged. Just as with old man Nelson's story, "the stern fight, and the victory of the life, and the self-sacrifice, and the pathos of the death" appealed to men "who loved fight and could understand sacrifice."⁴³

Reverend Gordon's success with Black Rock prompted a second Ralph Connor novel, The Sky Pilot, published in 1899. A popular work, but with sales amounting to only about one-half of those of Black Rock, Sky Pilot continued the theme of Christian influence at work among rugged western men.⁴⁴ In this novel and the more than a dozen Connor novels to follow, muscular Christianity fights against the evil forces of drink and lost manhood. For Connor, the gospel must be lived and preached by men who escaped being shut up in theological seminaries out of contact with life where they cannot "recognize a social problem if it walks up to him on the street."⁴⁵ Combining the social gospel theme of Sheldon and the muscular attitude of Jack London, Connor's muscular Christianity continued best-selling religion's antipathy to creedal, comfortable faith.

⁴³Ibid., p. 252. ⁴⁴Mott, op. cit., pp. 197-198.

⁴⁵Grant Overton, American Nights Entertainment (New York, 1923), p. 185.

Muscular Christianity continued to find a best selling market in the first years of the twentieth century as rugged outdoor adventure permeated popular literature. Owen Wister's The Virginian (1902), John Fox's tales of Kentucky mountaineers in Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come (1903) and The Trail of the Lonesome Pine (1908), and the novels of London, Beach, and Burroughs established the masculine appeal in mass culture. Religious themes and the church continued to be the subject of much popular writing also. A publishing firm, Street & Smith, began a new ten cent series in paper covers in 1910 called the Alliance Library, which included In His Steps, Reverend Cortland Myers' Would Christ Belong to a Labor Union?, D. L. Moody's What Is Christ?, Reverend C. H. Spurgeon's John Ploughman's Talk, Connor's Black Rock, and others.⁴⁶

This union of social Christianity and masculinity reached its best-selling peak in the novels of Harold Bell Wright. His first novel, That Printer of Udell's was published in 1903, and was followed by a series of novels that "eventually made one of the most amazing records in the history of American best sellers."⁴⁷ The moderate success of Wright's first novel was dramatically surpassed by his second and most popular novel, The Shepherd of the Hills

⁴⁶Mott, op. cit., p. 226.

⁴⁷Ibid.

(1907), which has sold at least 1,200,000 copies.⁴⁸ The Calling of Dan Matthews (1909), The Winning of Barbara Worth (1911), The Eyes of the World (1914), and When a Man's a Man (1916) were all top-bracket best sellers. Their Yesterdays (1912) and The Re-Creation of Brian Kent (1919) were both Bookman annual best sellers and helped push the grand total of all nineteen of Wright's books over the ten million figure.⁴⁹ In the tradition of E. P. Roe, Charles Sheldon and C. W. Gordon, Harold Bell Wright lifted the sermon-in-fiction to best selling heights.

Harold Bell Wright was born in Rome, New York, on May 4, 1872. Left motherless at ten he was put out to work on a farm. He was exposed to the educational fare of country schools and the trades of house painting and decorating. His preparatory education at Hiram College, in Ohio, was interrupted after two years by a severe bout with pneumonia and eyes weakened by overwork. With his dream of a college education ended, Wright went to Missouri where he began a career preaching to the mountain folk of the Ozarks. Pastoring Disciples of Christ churches in Pierce City, Missouri; Pittsburg, Kansas; Kansas City, Kansas; Lebanon, Missouri; and Redlands, California,

⁴⁸ Alice Payne Hackett, 70 Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1965 (New York, 1967), p. 26. Mott estimates the sales of The Winning of Barbara Worth at 1,635,000 but this is disputed by Hackett who estimates 900,000.

⁴⁹ Mott, op. cit., p. 232.

Reverend Wright retired from a twelve-year ministry in 1908 in order to pursue his literary ministry on a full-time basis.⁵⁰

It was while serving as pastor of the Pittsburg, Kansas church that he wrote his first novel, That Printer of Udell's, a social gospel challenge to the social unconcern of a wealthy, hypocritical, creedal religion. Published and marketed by a Chicago mail-order bookseller, Elsbury W. Reynolds, whose Book Supply Company eventually made publishing history with the success of its advertising and marketing of Wright's novels, That Printer of Udell's sold nearly 450,000 copies. Reminiscent of In His Steps, the plot involved a hero who rises from the status of an unemployed tramp to a respected printer. His criticism of the church hypocrites is finally overcome by the force of the minister and the challenge to fight the social problems from within the church. The establishment of a settlement house, in the face of wealthy church opposition, follows a well known social gospel theme. Melodramatic incidents and the ever-present love story add the necessary popular ingredients to start Harold Bell Wright on his long career.⁵¹

⁵⁰Twentieth Century Authors, ed. by Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (New York, 1942), pp. 1552-1553.

⁵¹Mott, op. cit., p. 229.

Ill health forced Wright to take an extended vacation in the Ozarks, where he began to work on The Shepherd of the Hills which was published in 1907. The local color of his Ozark retreat and the influence of the mountain folk provided Wright with the resources for his most popular book. The story of a mysterious old man who comes into the hills and becomes known as a shepherd and teacher, is the backdrop for a broadside attack on the dishonest sophisticated life of city churches. The simple Christian virtues of the hill folk, such as beautiful young Sammy Lane, are contrasted with the sterility of the shepherd's former life as a famous city preacher. The muscular exploits of young Matthews on behalf of the right established the author's developing pattern of masculine themes.

The Shepherd of the Hills benefited from an excellent press and began to realize an encouraging sales. While it did not make the Bookman lists its steady sales assured Wright that he had a successful writing career before him. He, therefore, resigned from his pastorate in Redlands, California in 1908 to devote himself full-time to writing. In 1909, The Calling of Dan Matthews sold two hundred thousand copies in eight months. Together with the two previous books, Wright had reached a market of over half-million by the end of the year. Responding to Reynolds' \$48,000 advertising campaign, book distributors met the rising

demand for Wright's best selling religion by stocking the small town bookstores across the country.⁵²

The Calling of Dan Matthews, with its direct and almost bitter critique of the church, was Wright's most complete and, yet, last expression of the muscular Christianity. This may have been the author's own farewell to the life of the church which he had left, for the book's hero, young Dan, concludes his long fight with the corrupt elders of the church he pastors by returning to the virtuous life of the Ozarks. The Winning of Barbara Worth departed from the church and religion as a theme but made the annual best seller list in 1911 and 1912 with capitalism, the Colorado River Valley, cowboys, and a beautiful heroine as part of the ingredients for his fictional recipe. Rugged, muscular settings and characters continued to prevail in Their Yesterdays, The Eyes of the World, When A Man's a Man, and The Re-Creation of Brian Kent. The strength and healing derived from hills, mountains, or desert provide his heroes with the resources for fighting and conquering the immoral forces of the effete urban civilization of the East.

Wright's personal fight against ill health provided the experience upon which his fictional efforts were based. When a Man's a Man was written, much like The Shepherd, while the author was convalescing in the wilds of primitive

⁵²Ibid.

nature. In 1916, having suffered for some time with respiratory difficulties, Wright was diagnosed as a victim of tuberculosis. He traveled to the Arizona desert to battle for his life, at least until he finished the book. He not only completed the book, but won the battle with tuberculosis and lived to write ten more books before his death in 1944. He described this desert experience as one of "very real joy in fighting," once he knew how to get at his enemy. He saw this fight with death as "a game," played out in the thrill of a life lived outdoors.⁵³

Muscular Christianity, in the form of Wright's novels, was reaching millions of readers. Nearly one million copies each of The Shepherd and Dan Matthews had been sold by 1914, together with a million and a half copies of Barbara Worth.⁵⁴ These buyers and readers of Wright were part of a new larger book public which had been developing during the first decade of the century. In fact, by 1910 there was a larger book reading audience than would exist for many years after the First World War. Wright's three big sellers were among nineteen books that sold more than a million copies each in the years between 1901 and 1915, whereas there were only eight books with a sale of more than a million copies between 1916 and

⁵³Harold Bell Wright, "Why I Did Not Die," The American Magazine, XCVII, No. 6 (June, 1924), pp. 15, 82.

⁵⁴Mott, op. cit., p. 231.

1930.⁵⁵ Yet Wright's audience was more than just part of a general phenomenon. In addition to attracting readers who also read John Fox, Jack London, Kate Douglas Wiggin, and Eleanor H. Porter, Wright's moralistic fiction-sermons created an exclusive audience all of their own. According to one critic, he had become the favorite novelist of people who probably never read any other novels, and therefore he had the opportunity to train people to read books.⁵⁶

Wright's readers, whether part of the primitive virility cult or of the pollyanna persuasion of a new and exclusively Wright book-buying public, were treated to a heavily didactic and religious fare. Themes ranged from a muscular social gospel, largely confined to his first three novels, to a variety of popular themes, in his later novels, which continued to be part of an overall portrayal of the great moral fight. The battles between the forces of righteousness and evil were associated with the defense of Nature's rugged virtues against the encroachment of corrupt urban values. In his later career, even Wright seemed to succumb to the force of social change. His former Ozarkian friends viewed his divorce and remarriage

⁵⁵Robert E. Spiller, et al., Literary History of the United States, Vol. II (New York, 1949), p. 1121.

⁵⁶Hildegard Hawthorne, "The Wright American," in The Bookman Anthology of Essays, 1923, ed. by John Farrar (New York, 1923), pp. 104-112.

in 1920 and his broadened religious views with shock and sorrow.⁵⁷

However, it was those first three Wright novels--That Printer of Udell's, The Shepherd of the Hills, and The Calling of Dan Matthews--that illustrate the muscular version of that old best-selling religion. The young printer of Udell's is an articulate critic of denominational religion and all its creedal perversions of Christ's simple teachings. The teachings and doctrines of men were to blame for the church's false service to Christ. The hope of the world lay with men like Dick, who had experienced life outside the church and "whose heart is filled with love for men; who is absolutely free from ecclesiastical chains, and who is a follower of no creed but Christ, a believer in no particular denomination."⁵⁸ Dick's conversion to a creedless, denominationless believer in Christ's truth made him an agent for social ministry in Boyd City. His personal application of Christ's teaching to daily life resulted in "High purpose, noble activity, virtue, honesty and cleanliness." God's law for the individual, according to the author, was also the source of transformation for the life of the city. The book's text,

⁵⁷Literary Digest, August 21, 1920, p. 57.

⁵⁸Harold Bell Wright, That Printer of Udell's (New York: A. L. Burt, 1911), p. 118.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me," established Wright squarely on the side of a gospel of "practical Christianity."⁵⁹

Dan Howitt, the old shepherd who travels to the Ozark hills to find the peace and strength of God, becomes the central figure of Harold Bell Wright's most popular novel. Drawing on the mountain setting, the author sees all of life as a choice between two trails--one higher and the other lower. The choice of the higher trail, taken by Sammy Lane and young Matt, leads to true womanhood and true manhood. This choice inevitably leads to a battle, however; a battle against the temptation to strive for earthly honors or material wealth found along the lower trail. The old shepherd's secret is dramatically revealed as his long lost, and assumedly deceased, son is discovered hiding in a hill cave. The son has been hiding from the Matthews, the mountain couple whose daughter died giving birth to his son. While in hiding, the young Howitt has been able to be near his son, who wanders about the mountains as a half-wit. The old shepherd, in revealing his true identity as the father of the young artist who wronged the Matthews and their daughter, also reveals that he was a famous preacher in the city. But he pleads for forgiveness for

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 344, 346.

himself and his son on the basis of his death as a sophisticated, intellectual churchman and his rebirth in the hills as a true man of God who was able to minister to the mountain people.

The Shepherd of the Hills is largely an Ozark Mountain love story, but the sermon is still central. God cannot be found in the unnatural surroundings of cities, seminaries, and other institutional expressions of a business civilization. God is found in the hills "from whence cometh my help." The natural environment breeds men and women who lack the education, culture, and refinement of the city and therefore are spared the dishonesty and falsehood of a surface culture that denies true manhood and true religion. Peace, strength, and justice can be found in Wright's hills. Men and women who practice self-denial, self-control and guilelessness, may still have to fight evil forces and evil men, as young Matt did literally. But they will be virile Christians unlike any found in the urban, cultural centers of religion.

The most complete statement of Harold Bell Wright's religious thought can be found in The Calling of Dan Matthews. As a sequel to The Shepherd of the Hills, the book's hero is the son of young Matt and Sammy. Dan Matthews, as a result of the influence of the old shepherd upon his mother and father, has "that inborn passion to serve, that fixed principle in his character that his life

must be of the greatest possible worth to the world." He chooses, therefore, the calling of the pastoral ministry which takes him out of the Ozarks to school and then to a church in the city of Corinth. An evil spirit, the Ally, inhabits the city, and Dan's "calling" is tested in the battle between his unspoiled Christian desire to serve and the church elders who exemplify the spirit of the Ally rather than that of Christ.

In chronicling Dan's struggle with the town's social problems and his growing disillusionment with the pastorate, Wright fires his heaviest salvos at the church. Almost every chapter illustrates the theme that "to the churches Christianity has become a question of fidelity to a church and creed and not to the spirit of Christ." Since only "the spirit of God in a thing . . . can make it holy or sacred," the churches whose "faithfulness to the dead past and to the obsolete doctrines" of their respective denominations cannot inspire loyalty or devotion. As a hired servant of Memorial Church, Dan finds himself unable freely to serve the needy and undesirable in Corinth or to challenge the church to a sense of social mission. Judge Strong is an undisguised enemy of real Christian commitment and Elder Jordan had "that inhuman something in his religion that has always made religion a thing of schools and churches, rather than a thing of farms and shops; a thing of set days, of forms, rites, ceremonies,

beliefs--rather than a thing of everyday living and the commonplace, individual duties, pleasures and drudgeries of life."⁶⁰

Dan is daily challenged by Hope Farwell and Dr. Harry, both sterling characters alienated from the church, to see the "selfish, wasteful, cruel, heartless" nature of the church's creeds and traditions. As Hope saw it, the true church "that is so inseparable from the religion of Christ is so far forgotten that it never enters into any thought of the church at all."⁶¹ The Doctor endorsed Dan's decision to resign from the pastorate with words comparing the church to the town monument:

How can an institution, or a system of theological beliefs--with cast-iron prejudices, cast-iron fidelity to issues long past and forgotten, cast-iron unconcern of vital issues of the life of today and cast-iron want of sympathy with the living who toil and fight and die on every side--how can such speak the great loving, sympathetic, helpful spirit of Him whose name only it bears, as that bears only the name of my friend?⁶²

Dan had believed so strongly in the ministry of the church that he failed. By doubting the church and its professions he began to see religion in clearer light. The final words of his farewell sermon, before the congregation and its "bosses," was a summation of the author's message:

⁶⁰Harold Bell Wright, The Calling of Dan Matthews (New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1909), pp. 105, 277-278.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 102.

⁶²Ibid., p. 342.

It is not the spirit of wealth, of learning, or of culture that can make the church of value, or a power for good in the world, but the spirit of Christ only. It is not in fidelity to the past but in fidelity to the present that the church can be Christian. It is not the opinion of man, but the eternal truths of God that can make it a sacred, holy thing. It is holy to the degree that God is in it. God is as truly in the fields of grain, in the forests, in the mines, and in those laws of Nature by which men convert the product of field and forest and mine into the necessities of life. Therefore, these are as truly holy as this institution. Therefore, again, the ministry of farm, and mine, and factory, and shop; of mill, and railroad, and store, and office, and wherever men toil with strength of body or strength of mind for that which makes for the best life of their kind--that ministry is sacred and holy.⁶³

With this broadened concept of the ministry, Dan Matthews leaves Corinth to return to the old homestead in the Ozarks to practice Christian stewardship with the mining resources on Dewey Bald and to marry Hope Farwell.

Nature, primitivism, muscular virtues are all a part of Dan Matthews' existence. His almost pantheistic reverence of Nature were revealed in the farewell sermon. As with his parents in the other Ozark tale, Dan is a natural man taught by his natural environment "those things that alone have the power to truly refine and glorify life." Finding that he can worship God best in His own temple of Nature, the young minister is soothed and calmed by hill, field, forest and stream. As a primitive, strong man he felt a passion for Hope Farwell unequaled by most of "the

⁶³Ibid., pp. 345-346.

race today." His strong passionate manhood was never guilty of forgetting the high purpose and spirit of Christian character in his relations with Hope, but his virility was less checked in dealing with his enemy Judge Strong. In muscular fashion, the "young giant" thoroughly thrashed the man who tricked, robbed, and slandered the defenseless victims of his business and churchly power. The strong must often be instruments of God's justice in Wright's muscular Christianity.

Dan Matthews' strength and devotion to a muscular social gospel was matched by his primitive anti-intellectualism. Deriving his heroic virtues from Christian breeding in the mountains, Dan "felt: he did not reason." Not given to self-analysis, as "few really strong men are," he entered his many battles with an intuitive and single-minded devotion to a religion of deeds not creeds. Harold Bell Wright had succeeded in creating a story and a hero who continued the sharp critique of creedal denominational religion and capitalized on the popularity of muscular themes. The persistent desire for a simple faith, rooted in Nature and freed from the stifling influence of intellect and urbanity, received its widest support from the sermons of best selling evangelist Harold Bell Wright.

The critique of the church and its subservience to corrupt materialism was continued by Winston Churchill's The Inside of the Cup. Published in 1913, this social

gospel novel rose immediately to the top position on the annual best seller list and remained third on the 1914 Bookman list.⁶⁴ Although its sales never reached the proportions of Wright's best sellers, it was given considerable attention by the reviewers and readers of "the great popular novelist of middle-class" Americans.⁶⁵ A novel by Churchill had led annual fictional sales in 1901, 1904, 1906, and 1908 as well as 1913. Two other novels were second on annual lists, one was third, and only one novel failed to rank among the annual top ten. Ranging from historical romance to political and social problem novels, Churchill provided the Progressive generation with moral judgments on most of the issues of the day.

Winston Churchill was born in 1871 in St. Louis, a descendent from prominent families but orphaned as an infant and raised by an aunt with only a moderate income. His early struggles for a living by working in a warehouse may have contributed to his fictional theme of the failings of a business society. He received an appointment to the Naval Academy from which he graduated in 1894. He resigned his commission, however, to become a writer. After less than two years journalistic experience working on The Cosmopolitan

⁶⁴Hackett, op. cit., pp. 110, 112.

⁶⁵Mott, op. cit., p. 212.

he married a wealthy St. Louis girl providing him the independence to begin a writing career.⁶⁶

His first novel, The Celebrity, published in 1898, was considered a notorious parody of Richard Harding Davis but it was Richard Carvel in 1899 which brought him best selling fame. With the royalties from this best selling Revolutionary War romance, Churchill bought land in New Hampshire where he built the Harlakenden House, which served as his writing headquarters as well as Woodrow Wilson's summer White House.⁶⁷ The Crisis followed in 1900 with a Civil War theme and The Crossing, published in 1904, celebrated the conquest of Kentucky and the exploits of George Rogers Clark. The historical details, woven together with nationalistic and romantic themes placed Richard Carvel and The Crisis on the top of the popular market for historical novels.

Churchill entered politics in 1902, was elected to the lower house of the New Hampshire State Legislature and was re-elected in 1905. In 1906 he ran in the primary for governor as a Theodore Roosevelt Progressive Republican. Defeated by the old-guard machine, he entered the race again in 1912 as a Bull Moose candidate, but lost to the

⁶⁶Robert W. Schneider, Five Novelists of the Progressive Era (New York, 1965), p. 207.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 208.

Democrats in the Republican split. His active life as a Progressive provided the resources for his political novels, Coniston (1906) and Mr. Crewe's Career (1908). The moral fight against political corruption was followed by his explicit rejection of the Gospel of Wealth in A Modern Chronicle (1910). The quest for individual integrity in a corrupt contemporary society remains the Progressive theme which links Churchill's new fiction to the spirit of the age.

In the years between 1910 and 1913, the year of The Inside of the Cup, Churchill began to contemplate the religious issues of the day and their relationship to social reform. His pattern of discussing his religious doubts and concerns with clergyman friends led to extensive theological reading. His article in Atlantic in January, 1912, entitled "Modern Government and Christianity," established Churchill as one of the literary champions of the social gospel.⁶⁸ When The Inside of the Cup appeared, his commitment to individual integrity and Christian service had reached full bloom. The readers of Robert Elsmere and In His Steps now had a companion volume in their library of best selling social Christianity.

The theme of religious doubt in the face of intellectually and socially inadequate creedal traditions, as

⁶⁸Warren I. Titus, Winston Churchill (New York, 1963), pp. 96-98.

found in Robert Elsmere, and the theme of individual efforts to transform the church into a community of committed disciples, are combined in this tractarian novel of Churchill. It is clearly a statement of his own religious development. As he explained in an afterword to the book, although he was not posing as a theologian, the hero had arrived at the religious position which the author himself had reached.⁶⁹

The story took place in a large city in the Middle West, where young John Hodder has been invited to pastor St. John's, an old and wealthy church in the city. Eldon Parr, the vestryman of St. John's, makes it quite clear to the clergyman that what the membership wants is orthodoxy and social conservatism. Hodder's orthodoxy and loyalty to the church are slowly shaken by the intellectual challenges of sincere and courageous skeptics and by the failure of the church to minister to working people and slum dwellers in the parish. Parr's alienation of his son and daughter reveals to the rector the basically materialistic attitudes supported by Parr's orthodoxy. As Parr's exploitive business dealings surface to Hodder's knowledge, the young minister goes through a personal crisis that eventually results in a conversion to a new Christianity--a blend of transcendental idealism and social Christianity.

⁶⁹Winston Churchill, The Inside of the Cup (New York: Macmillan, 1914), p. 511.

Hodder's new birth resulted in a social ministry for St. John's and a unity between the church's social gospel and the reform politics of local Progressives. The triumph of justice is assured as Hodder succeeds in marrying Alison, Parr's daughter, and victoriously remains at St. John's with the Bishop's support over the opposition of Parr. A note of evolutionary millennialism pervades Churchill's ending placing him more squarely in the spirit of Progressivism than any of his best selling predecessors.

The Inside of the Cup remains more orthodox than Robert Elsmere and more committed to reform from within the ecclesiastical structure than The Calling of Dan Matthews, but like In His Steps, and the entire tradition of best selling religion, the church is examined in uncompromising terms. Hodder's sermon, following his refusal to resign under pressure from the vestry, challenged all the congregation's preconceived notions of churchly Christianity. As Alison heard him, he was saying:

"Let them shake out of their minds everything they had thought it to mean, church-going, acceptance of creed and dogma, contributive charity, withdrawal from the world, rites and ceremonies: it was none of these."⁷⁰

Christianity, according to Churchill's cleric, was absolutely opposed to the acquisitive motive of a property-owning society. Christians must enlist in an heroic

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 435.

discipleship that calls them "into life, into the struggles going on around them today against greed, corruption, slavery, poverty, vice and crime. Let them protest, let them fight, even as Jesus Christ had fought and protested."⁷¹

The fighting spirit of Churchill's Christians is closer to Sheldon's In His Steps and Wright's That Printer of Udell's than to the more literal muscularity of Black Rock and Dan Matthews. Yet the moral struggle involves physical risks. Moral force and courage are the test of true manhood and Christian discipleship. Churchill's muscular Christianity united the religious problem theme with the strenuous moral progressivism of the social gospel.

⁷¹Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

THE DECLINE OF BEST SELLING RELIGION, 1919-1939

The period between the World Wars was a period of decline for best selling religious books. In fact, between Harold Bell Wright's The Calling of Dan Matthews (1909) and Lloyd C. Douglas' The Robe (1942) there was only one over-all best seller with religion as a dominant theme--Lloyd Douglas' Magnificent Obsession (1929). Wright's last three all-time best sellers--The Winning of Barbara Worth (1911), The Eyes of the World (1914), and When a Man's a Man (1916)--were didactic romances without clear religious messages. The Re-Creation of Brian Kent (1919), which revived Wright's older, sermonic themes, sold about 750,000 copies but failed to match the sales of his earlier novels. By the time of God and the Groceryman (1927), a sequel to The Calling of Dan Matthews, Wright was no longer in favor with enough book buyers to win a place on any best seller lists. Lloyd Douglas' Magnificent Obsession, published in 1929, eventually reached overall best selling status, but its heavily muted theism made it a clearly modernist contribution to the religious novel tradition.

The twenties and thirties, therefore, were decades when the currents of popular culture were reflected in the changing patterns of book buying and reading. The failure of religious fiction to achieve pre-World War I sales figures reflects not only a reading public's changed taste, but a decline in the role of religion in shaping popular culture. The "better sellers," such as Bruce Barton's The Man Nobody Knows (1925), emphasized the ambivalent attitudes of a consumer society regarding traditional religious themes in an era of prosperity and economic change. The economic disaster of the thirties reinforced the decline of popular religious writings rather than sparking a revival of the Old Time Religion in print.

The social and cultural history of the 1920's is characterized by conflict and change of revolutionary proportions. An urban, machine culture was challenging the supremacy of rural, small-town America. A "revolution in manners and morals" followed this assault on traditional moral codes and the classes which had exercised moral authority. The Younger Generation, according to Frederick Lewis Allen, led this rebellion against their parents, teachers, and moral preceptors. Reflecting the influence of the post-war mood of restless disillusionment, the growing independence of the American woman, the impact of Freudian views of sex, prohibition, the automobile, the

confession and sex magazines, and the movies, the young challenged the guardians of Victorian culture.¹

The social revolution of the Roaring Twenties consisted of a rebellion against the traditional values of a rural, small-town, Protestant culture and the old, native, middle-class guardians of its moral code.² Much of what Henry May calls "the end of American innocence" had been accomplished before the First World War, but the Jazz Age Twenties felt the full force of the rejection of the moral provincialism associated with the native, middle-class society.³ The flapper style, speak-easies, petting, the Black Bottom, and True Story Magazine were some of the evidences of social change associated with the revolution in morals.

The writers and artists of the Lost Generation articulated the attack against the Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture of a nation that had been transformed by the forces of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. In their alienation from the moral and cultural values of

¹Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday (New York, 1931), pp. 88-103.

²Gilman M. Ostrander, American Civilization in the First Machine Age: 1890-1940 (New York, 1970), pp. 228-236, 239.

³Henry May, The End of American Innocence (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1964).

American society, the post-war writers expressed cynical disillusionment with the culture's middle-class respectability, its acquisitiveness, its commercialism, and its genteel moralism in the arts. F. Scott Fitzgerald's This Side of Paradise (1920), Sinclair Lewis' Main Street (1920), Arrowsmith (1925), Elmer Gantry (1927) and the thirty intellectuals represented in Civilization in the United States (1922), edited by Harold Stearns, illustrated the loss of faith in the old cultural norms. To the Lost Generation, the post-war appearances of loyalty hysteria, nativism, prohibition, the KKK, fundamentalism, and normalcy, was a denial of all the pre-war hopes and aspirations concerning a more tolerant, cosmopolitan culture.⁴

The alienation of intellectuals during the twenties produced not only the cynicism and disillusionment of the stereotype "lost generation" with its rejection of Puritanism, Victorianism and babbitttry, but it also produced strong nationalism (often racist) and a cultural renaissance based on a fresh commitment to the preservation of many ideals and values in the American past. Enthusiasm for nature and frontier values was combined with a new artistic faith in progress. The war, Freud, and the failures of science led not only to despair for a few but to a search for new bases for esthetic and ethical judgment. Even the alienated stance

⁴Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), pp. 147-155.

of the "lost generation," while faithless compared to New Humanists like Irving Babbitt, the Anglo-Catholic T. S. Eliot, or the genteel traditionalists Willa Cather and Ellen Glasgow, were not without values. F. Scott Fitzgerald's "new generation . . . grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken" was searching with Hemingway and the handful of disillusioned intellectuals for a new existential hero who could face the inevitability of human failure with the courage derived from this new perspective.⁵

The popular mood expressed its ambivalence in a variety of ways during the twenties. The cult of the hero, with its human embodiment of courage, strength, and honor, reasserted the belief in the value of rugged individualism in an age when urbanized society seemed victorious over the frontier. Athletic stars provided spectators with new heroes in a sports crazy America. Jim Thorpe, "Red" Grange, Jack Dempsey and Babe Ruth were only a few of the new symbols of physical struggle by aggressive men. Herbert Hoover provided a presidential hero for the nostalgic individualists.⁶ Although one study of popular biographical articles in the Saturday Evening Post and Colliers revealed

⁵Ibid., pp. 155-239.

⁶Roderick Nash, The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930 (Chicago, 1970), pp. 126-137.

a trend toward what Leo Lowenthal called "idols of consumption" away from "idols of production," the major heroes were still self-made men.⁷ The best expression of popular ambivalence regarding technological progress was the idolization of Charles A. Lindbergh. Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic in a tiny single-engine airplane in 1927 gave rise to a virtual national hero worship that reveals the attitudes of the typical American. As John Ward interprets this phenomenon, Lindbergh represented individual courage in the old pioneer spirit. It was a flight which united man and machine in such a way that the old ideals were kept alive. The grubbiness of the twenties could be transcended in a vicarious pioneering venture in a new era of technological progress.⁸

Popular books in the 1920's provide further evidence of continuity as well as change in popular American thought. The continued popularity of Gene Stratton-Porter, Harold Bell Wright, Owen Wister, Zane Grey, and Edgar Rice Burroughs, although below their pre-war best selling levels, emphasized the market for frontier and rural patterns of thought in the twenties. Although Americans did not buy as many books per capita during the post-war decade as they

⁷Leo Lowenthal, Literature, Popular Culture, and Society (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1961).

⁸John William Ward, "The Meaning of Lindbergh's Flight," American Quarterly, Vol. X, No. 1 (Spring, 1958).

had before 1914, they seemed to have read more borrowed books.⁹ Library circulation in Middletown (Muncie, Indiana) increased dramatically during the period but book buying and reading was confined largely to middle-class women. Fiction remained most widely read but a marked increase in technical books, biography, and science was noted. Middletown's readers, with their preference for the "smiling optimism" of poet Edgar Guest, were probably typical of readers throughout the country.¹⁰

The best sellers of the decade represent the variety and confusion of popular tastes. The sales of H. G. Wells' Outline of History (1920), Hendrick Willem Van Loon's Story of Mankind (1921), and Will Durant's The Story of Philosophy (1926) indicated the renewed interest in historical and philosophical themes. E. Phillips Oppenheim's The Great Impersonation, Edith Hull's The Sheik, and Ripley's Believe It Or Not appealed to quite different reading publics. Sinclair Lewis' Main Street (1920), Babbitt (1922), and Elmer Gantry (1927) reached annual best seller lists as did Emily Post's Etiquette, Edna Ferber's So Big and Thornton Wilder's The Bridge of San Luis Rey. On the other hand, Bruce Barton, E. Stanley Jones, and Lloyd Douglas

⁹Clifton Fadiman, "What Does America Read?" in America as Americans See It, ed. by Frederick J. Ringel (New York, 1932), pp. 73-77.

¹⁰Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd, Middletown (New York, 1929), pp. 230-237.

appealed to a public which had not lost its interest in religion.

The religious interests of the reading public reflect both the continuity and the change in the status and emphasis of religion. Although one contemporary observed a burgeoning of religious literature and a new religious constituency for the books of Harry Emerson Fosdick and E. Stanley Jones, most saw a decline in religion's role in the culture.¹¹ Church historian Robert Handy described the period 1925-1935 as one of "religious depression." The decline in the missionary enthusiasm and conviction had resulted in a decline in per capita giving for missions and a decline in the missionary force. Protestantism, still the dominant religious grouping, began to see a fall in attendance, particularly evidenced in the demise of Sunday evening services. The ministry's loss of status and public esteem and the widespread criticism of religion and the churches are also cited as marks of this religious depression.¹²

During the first two decades of the twentieth century Protestantism had been at the peak of its strength and influence. As Winthrop Hudson describes it:

¹¹Gaius Atkins, Religion In Our Times (New York, 1932), pp. 278-279.

¹²Robert H. Handy, "The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935," Church History, Vol. XXIX, No. 1 (March, 1960), pp. 3-16.

These were the halcyon days. Churches were crowded, at least in the cities; costly edifices were being built; programs were proliferating; the moral order of society, in public esteem if not always in practice, was unquestioned; a broad range of humanitarian concerns elicited widespread interest and generous support; and on occasion when an issue was clearly drawn the Christian conscience spoke with an authority which was decisive in party councils. Never before had the churches been able to boast of such a large portion of the population being listed upon their membership rolls, and never before had the members of the churches been so busy--serving in social settlements, organizing boys' clubs, joining sewing classes, attending "open forums," and conducting campaigns.¹³

This era of crusades, or "movements" as they were called, was followed by two decades in which the position of the churches in American life declined and much of the influence and status of the religious organizations was lost. The old moral homogeneity of Protestant-dominated communities was a victim of either complacency or rising secular pluralism or both.

In the post-war years, whether Protestantism lost its disciplined evangelistic fervor and its "sense of a distinct and specific vocation in society," or was just overtaken by the social change which accompanied the automobile, the radio, and Sunday golf, the result was "the collapse of Protestantism as a dynamic force in American life."¹⁴ Protestantism could no longer easily count upon

¹³Winthrop Hudson, The Great Tradition of the American Churches (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1963), pp. 195-196.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 198, 225.

its historic position as an accepted, senior partner in the national culture. Much of the efforts of the churches in the twenties seemed to be a part of a defensive reaction. Fundamentalists attempted to resist a new culture, while liberals, like Fosdick, attempted to adapt to modern developments. Neither group succeeded in re-establishing Protestantism's prestige in an age when many took exception to the entire tradition of Protestant culture.¹⁵

Fundamentalism was the most obvious example of what Richard Hofstadter referred to as "the revolt against modernity." Modernism within large portions of the great evangelical denominations and secular challenges to religious orthodoxy, combined with the new urban culture, presented many Protestants with a major challenge.¹⁶ Striking out against the higher criticism of the Bible, evolutionism, and the social gospel, fundamentalists rejected the modernists' adaptation to an increasingly scientific and secular culture. The focus of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy was the theory of evolution. Since the battle for control of the denominational machinery had already been won by the liberals, the fundamentalists concentrated on

¹⁵Donald B. Meyer, The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941 (Berkeley, 1961), p. 10.

¹⁶Richard Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life (New York, 1964), pp. 117-123.

the attempt to preserve the youth from the teaching of evolution in the schools.¹⁷

The Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, dramatized the fundamentalist-modernist controversy across the nation. It was a technical victory for William Jennings Bryan, the prosecution, and anti-evolution laws, but urban America judged Clarence Darrow and the forces of modernism as the victors. The Old Time Religion was on the retreat before the advance of an increasingly secular, pluralistic culture.¹⁸ The fundamentalist Protestants who constituted the bulk of the leadership and membership of the revived Ku Klux Klan may not have been representative of the church leadership in the twenties, but they illustrated the strength of Protestantism's dilemma in the face of modern challenges to provincial culture.¹⁹

Since both progressive and conservative wings were committed to the orthodoxy of Prohibition, the defeat of the "noble experiment" was a blow to the prestige of Protestantism. The specter of a coercive Protestant moralism using the power of the state was disastrous for liberals

¹⁷ Norman F. Furniss, The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931 (New Haven, 1954), pp. 76-100.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 176-181.

¹⁹ Robert Moats Miller, American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919-1939 (Chapel Hill, 1958), pp. 137-153.

within the Social Gospel wing. It also demonstrated that the new popular culture and the intelligentsia were a part of a post-Protestant, urban, and industrialized America.²⁰

The extent of Protestantism's collapse cannot be precisely established, but manifestations of social and religious decline can be traced throughout the post-war period. While making impressive gains in wealth, primarily in urban centers, religious institutions declined in proportion to the population growth. Although church membership grew at about the same rate as the population between 1906 and 1926, it fell behind population growth in the years from 1926 to 1930. Large cities experienced the paradoxical pattern of larger church buildings and dropping membership and attendance. Except for very conservative denominations or "third force" sectarians, the Protestant churches dropped the revivalist patterns and missionary outreach of an early part of their history.²¹

An analysis of religious articles, published in sixty-nine periodicals during the years 1910 to 1930, revealed the relative number to be lower at the end of the period. At the beginning of the period twenty articles out

²⁰Paul A. Carter, The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel, 1920-1940 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1954), pp. 31-45.

²¹C. Luther Fry, "Changes In Religious Organizations," in Recent Social Trends In the United States, a Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends (New York, 1934), pp. 1009-1056.

of every thousand involved religious subjects; by the early twenties the ratio had dropped to about half the earlier figure. Although by 1930 fifteen of every thousand were on religious subjects, the treatment of religion was increasingly critical in tone. Controversial questions dealing with religious liberty reflected the growing religious uncertainty in a period when old standards and attitudes were being alternately attacked and defended. Fundamentalism versus modernism, science versus religion, orthodoxy versus free thought, were the themes pervading many of these popular magazine articles.²²

Changing religious interests and attitudes were reflected in book-buying patterns as well. Most homes that possessed books in the twenties included the usual Bible and several religious books.²³ To a writer in Publisher's Weekly, the twenties seemed to have opened with the continued appeal of Bibles and religious books. A decade which began with the filming of In His Steps, the sale of one-half million copies of Fosdick books, and the popular Boston appearances of Reverend S. D. Gordon, the author of the famous "Quiet Talk Series," seemed to be a decade

²²Ibid., pp. 1018-1019.

²³William S. Gray and Ruth Munroe, The Reading Interests and Habits of Adults (New York, 1929), p. 100.

destined to continue best selling religion.²⁴ Yet the publishing records reveal a decline in the proportion of books on religion by the twenties. In addition, of those religious books published, fewer dealt with the Bible and themes about the future life. Gains were registered in the proportion of books dealing with prayer, religion and science, the spiritual life, God and Christianity. The overall impression of book and magazine religion during the twenties is one of decline in quantity and a rise of topics dealing with both criticism of religion and personal religious experience.²⁵

Religious "better sellers" during the 1920's reflect this ambiguity and paradox in the decade's popular religious thought. Traditional inspirational themes, and what James Hart calls "platitudes of piety"²⁶ exist side by side with books that reflect the new commercialism, the new psychology, and the new religious aberrations. H. G. Wells' God The Invisible King placed number five on the 1917 best seller

²⁴"Religious Books As Best Sellers," Publisher's Weekly, February 19, 1921, pp. 513-514.

²⁵Hornell Hart, "Changing Social Attitudes and Interests," ch. VIII in Recent Social Trends In the United States, pp. 397-408.

²⁶James D. Hart, "Platitudes of Piety: Religion and the Popular Modern Novel," American Quarterly, Vol. VI, No. 4 (Winter, 1954), pp. 311-322.

list with its form of evolutionary religious modernism. Combining a criticism of creeds, dogmas, and religious authority with a faith in a personal and intimate "God of the Heart," Wells revealed his debt to William James. As Wells defined religion:

. . . it is a process of truth, guided by the divinity in men. It needs no other guidance, and no protection. It needs nothing but freedom, free speech, and honest statement.²⁷

In a somewhat unorthodox fashion, Wells restated the non-denominational, anti-creedal, religious attitude of much of America's best selling religion.

A popular religious book by an Italian Catholic reflected the growing pluralism of American society. Giovanni Papini's The Life of Christ remained on the best seller lists for 1923, 1924, and 1925, and eventually sold 250,000 copies.²⁸ This was the first popular biography of Christ since those of Farrar and Geikie almost fifty years earlier. Charles Dickens', The Life of Our Lord (1934), a century-old children's book, was number ten on the 1935 list, but neither Papini nor Dickens were really competing with the fictional Christ-story tradition of Ben-Hur and The Robe. Papini did reflect, however, some of the

²⁷H. G. Wells, God the Invisible King (New York, 1917), p. 173.

²⁸Alice Hackett, 70 Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1965 (New York, 1967).

religious currents of his day. Attempting to avoid an orthodox tract for the orthodox, Papini wrote, nevertheless, in reaction to the "modernism" of Roman Catholic liberalism with its intellectual debt to radical German Protestant Biblical critics like Strauss and Renan.²⁹ Protesting against the pious lives of Jesus, nevertheless, Papini openly attacked the scientific approaches to the Christ of the Gospels.³⁰ His attempted apologetic to those outside the church remains largely an evangelist's plea for the fundamentals of the faith.

In the tradition of Hurlbut's The Story of the Bible (1909), which has sold three million copies over the years, Elsie E. Egermeier's Bible Story Book (1923) sold almost two million without ever appearing on an annual list. Mrs. Charles E. Cowman's Streams in the Desert, Vol. 1, published in 1931, proved that its two million purchasers represented a continued demand for religious inspiration that was not reflected on the annual best seller lists. The large sales of older inspirational books by Ralph Waldo Trine, Mary W. Tileston, and S. D. Gordon indicated the continuity of the pietistic tradition into the post-war period.³¹

²⁹James H. Nichols, History of Christianity, 1650-1950 (New York, 1956), pp. 294-305.

³⁰Giovanni Papini, Life of Christ (New York, 1925), pp. 3-20.

³¹Hackett, op. cit., pp. 85-85.

Inspiration and foreign missions were united in The Christ of the Indian Road (1925), written by the veteran Methodist evangelist to India, E. Stanley Jones. A prodigious writer, preacher, and world traveler, Jones became known for his "Christ of the Round Table," "Christ of the American Road," and other "Christs," all of which stressed the centrality of the person of Jesus to faith. The Christ of the Indian Road, with its Christ who transcends Western Civilization, appealed to that same religious constituency who made books "better sellers" but never "best sellers." Jones did reinforce the anti-creedal, anti-institutional theme of best selling religion. The Christ at work in India, according to Jones, escapes the thought patterns of Hebraic, Greek, and Western culture and addresses the "good news" in universal terms to Indians. The Indian contribution, reflected here and in many of Jones' later writings, was to express Christianity in living, personal discipleship--a perspective greatly needed, he felt, by an increasingly secular West.

A thoroughly Western interpretation of Christ appeared in Bruce Barton's The Man Nobody Knows (1925). This biography by a successful advertising man attempted "A Discovery of the Real Jesus." The author's perception of Jesus as "The Founder of Modern Business" reflected not only the times but his own role in a business society. Barton's own life story involved an Horatio Alger rise from

a birth in Robbins, Tennessee, where his father was a circuit-riding mountain preacher, to the chairman of the board of Batten, Barton, Durstine, and Osborn, Inc., one of the largest advertising agencies in the world. By the time his book was published, Barton had already made advertising history with his slogan for the Salvation Army-- "A man may be down but he's never out." He went on to successful sloganeering for Betty Crocker and for U.S. Steel and many other large corporations.³²

Not content with writing advertising copy, Barton produced hundreds of articles and editorials for popular magazines, including The American, Collier's, Woman's Home Companion, Cosmopolitan, Good Housekeeping, and Reader's Digest. His syndicated column in Every Week had already revealed the smiling, practical, approach to life that he was to find in Jesus. Success, influence, philanthropy, service, and devotion to work, are themes which dominated his journalism.³³ His sense of a businessman's public responsibility was also revealed in a short political career which saw him serving in the United States Congress from 1937 to 1941 as a outspoken critic of the New Deal,

³²Newsweek, July 17, 1967; Charles Moritz, ed., Current Biography Yearbook, 1961 (New York, 1962), pp. 31-33.

³³Bruce Barton, More Power to You (New York, 1922).

and as an unsuccessful New York Republican candidate for the senate in 1940.³⁴

The Man Nobody Knows was number four on the 1925 nonfiction list and number one the next year. The 1962 paperback edition may add a substantial number of copies to the over 720,000 already sold.³⁵ The popularity of the book is usually ascribed to its reflection of a Protestant ethic at a time when the cult of success was still strong.³⁶ Barton's chapter titles reflect interpretation of Christ as a business leader in the business world: the Executive; the Outdoor Man; the Sociable Man; His Method; His Advertisements; the Founder of Modern Business; the Master.³⁷ In contrast, in the recent paperback edition chapter titles with a somewhat less business flavor have been substituted. "The Executive" was changed to "The Leader"; "His Advertisements" became "His Work and Words"; and "The Founder of Modern Business" was de-commercialized to "His Way in Our World."³⁸

³⁴Current Biography Yearbook, 1961, pp. 31-33.

³⁵Hackett, op. cit., pp. 13, 133, 185.

³⁶John G. Cawelti, Apostles of the Self-Made Man (Chicago, 1965), pp. 197-199.

³⁷Bruce Barton, The Man Nobody Knows (Indianapolis, 1925).

³⁸Bruce Barton, The Man Nobody Knows (Indianapolis: Charter Books, 1962).

Much of Barton's interpretation of the meaning of Jesus' life is, however, a critique of business practice. In expressing Jesus' business philosophy, which includes the principles of service, losing oneself at the bottom, and traveling the second mile, Barton is implicitly criticizing commercial practices which do not embody this idealism. Although he never really applied his critique to the economic and social system as a whole, Barton's emphasis on service as the sole objective of a life of business could have had revolutionary implications for society. Barton must not be seen as simply an apologetic for his times but as a mild critic of a corporate society in danger of losing sight of personal magnetism and achievement.

Barton's emphasis on Jesus as a dynamic leader of men and a builder of a world-conquering organization grew out of the theme of spiritual power for abundant living. Reacting to a Sunday School Jesus who was "sissified," a "physical weakling," a "Kill-joy," and a "failure," Barton set out to write the truth about the "man nobody knows." That truth, although directed to a business-oriented society, was closer to the heroic Christ of "muscular Christianity" than to the feminine religion of the sentimentalists. Creative inner resources, as expressed in the personality of Jesus, were united with his physical manliness which

prompted women to worship him and "women are not drawn by weakness."³⁹

The God revealed in Barton's Christ was not unlike the God of most liberal Protestants. He was a God of Power who could utilize the divinity within men for abundant lives of ethical service. Unlike the stern judge, King, or accountant, of old orthodoxies, Barton's God was "a great Companion, a wonderful Friend, a kindly indulgent, joy-loving Father." If men could only hear this real message of Jesus, forget the hymn writer's "For such a worm as I" and develop the same inner consciousness of power that Jesus had, then they could make their own lives count "in this grand process of human betterment."⁴⁰

Best selling religion's antipathy to theology, creeds, dogma, or anything inhibiting vital, primitive faith, is found in every chapter of The Man Nobody Knows. If "stripped of all dogma," Jesus' life "is the grandest achievement story of all." "Theology has spoiled the thrill of his life by assuming that he knew everything" from birth. Theology's "graven image" of Jesus grew out of the "sad days" in which medieval men lived. The old creeds, with their harsh, vindictive God and their bloody sacrificed

³⁹ Barton, op. cit., (1925), pp. 37-48.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 96, 18, 86-87, 157.

Lamb of God, have shocked the sensibilities of generations of Sunday School children. Theological tests are in conflict with the open banquets of Jesus' crowd and "God wants mercy not sacrifice." Barton, then, has joined a long best selling tradition which protested "the numbing grip of ancient creeds."⁴¹

In his book on the Bible, The Book Nobody Knows (1926), Barton continued the theme of faith as a personal intimacy with the Bible's God, who was the source of abundant and powerful living. While this second effort of sermonizing failed to achieve more than seventh place on the 1926 best seller list, it added to the perennial list of books on practical religion. Much like The Calling of Dan Matthews, Barton's books interpreted all work as religious work. Discipleship was not measured by church membership, creedal orthodoxy, or pious vocation, but rather by the effective service to fellow man flowing from stewardship of one's wealth and talent.

In the years before the crash the popular culture revealed its conflict regarding religion by placing Elmer Gantry (1927) as well as The Man Nobody Knows on the annual best seller list. In 1927, Sinclair Lewis' satire on the ministry was the number one fictional seller. In spite of its success that year, Elmer Gantry's total popularity

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 8, 9, 58, 59, 132, 181.

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derived from later purchasers of paperback editions rather than readers in the between war years.⁴² Not designed as religious fiction, Elmer Gantry was such an intemperate attack on and caricature of ministerial failings that neither literary critics nor contemporary readers could take it very seriously. Yet the fact remains that its appearance on the 1927 list points to one of the many undercurrents of criticism in a period of religious uncertainty and change.

The inner tensions and conflicts of American culture in the twenties received a new shock with the stock market crash in 1929 and the depression that followed. The disillusionment and criticism which had been given voice by many during the prosperous years were now leading many to a deep pessimism in the thirties. Yet in the midst of protest and radical proposals, old themes of egalitarian democracy stirred a nostalgic note of nationalistic faith in the American dream. The protest novels of John Steinbeck and John Dos Passes reflected one mood while Margaret Mitchell and Lloyd Douglas represented another.

The social crisis of the depression years precipitated analyses and adherence to ideologies that ranged from Marxian radicalism to fascist authoritarianism. Most Americans, however, were caught in a debate covering much

⁴²Hackett, op. cit., pp. 26, 55, 135.

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narrower grounds. To the crisis of economic collapse and the resulting doubts and fears within American society, the New Deal responded with a new political alliance that focused on the public concerns. This emphasis on the public world implied a rejection of the attitudes of the 1920's. Roosevelt dismissed the twenties as "a decade of debauch," while others referred to the values of the previous decade as frivolous and escapist. In the midst of proposals for reconstruction, Archibald MacLeish wrote that "the public world with us has become the private world, and the private world has become the public." Thomas Wolfe's You Can't Go Home Again and John Dos Passos' The Big Money expressed the alienation of the thirties from the private world of the twenties.⁴³

In Muncie, however, the Lynds found, upon their return to "Middletown," that the depression had changed very little and that the people were overwhelmingly living by the values by which they had lived in 1925.⁴⁴ Popular culture, throughout the nation, displayed its continuing ties with the old business civilization with a vigorous reassertion of individualism and faith in progress through private

⁴³William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940 (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1963), pp. 342-343.

⁴⁴Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd, Middletown In Transition (New York, 1937), p. 489.

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efforts. The Saturday Evening Post, Liberty, Atlantic Monthly, Harper's Magazine, and Ladies' Home Journal, all scored the New Deal for its socialistic policies and class legislation, and attributed the depression to psychological forces rather than the economic system. Personal self-help remained a continuous theme in the literature of the popular periodicals. In the face of grim despairing reality, the popular mind was encouraged to "keep smiling" and to radiate the warmth and confidence which could conquer all fear.⁴⁵

The turn toward self-help, psychological, and mental health themes in the thirties was best illustrated by Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People (1936). The top nonfiction best seller in 1937, it continued to sell so well over the next two decades that its total sales reached over six and one-half million. Next in popularity to Gone With The Wind, Carnegie's best seller continued the successful sales personality theme of Barton and foreshadowed the positive thinking of Norman Vincent Peale.⁴⁶ Emphasizing heart-warming smiles and likeable personality traits, Carnegie promised "friends" and "influence" to those who patterned themselves after his descriptions of successful businessmen. Personal failure in an age of uncertainty

⁴⁵Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought (3rd, ed.; New York, 1964), pp. 721-727.

⁴⁶Hackett, op. cit., pp. 155-157, 12.

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could be conquered by practicing the psychology of "sincerity."⁴⁷

In a time of uncertainty and challenge to American institutions many turned to romantic re-creations of the American past. Mae West's movies of the gay nineties, Carl Sandburg's Lincoln and Zane Grey's frontier stories were all expressions of this historical quest. The best selling success of Anthony Adverse, Gone With the Wind, and Oliver Wiswell likewise evidence the appeal of the romantic past. Kenneth Roberts' Northwest Passage appealed to fiction readers in the manner that Carl Van Doren's Benjamin Franklin and Margaret Leech's Reveille in Washington attracted the nonfiction public. The past, whether portrayed in fiction or popular history, seemed to meet a need for roots in a stable or glorious period.⁴⁸

The interest in Americana was part of the patterns of increased reading during the depression. The inevitable slump in book buying and production was followed by a rise in library circulation.⁴⁹ In Middletown, fiction was still preferred but nonfiction works circulated faster than in

⁴⁷Donald Meyer, The Positive Thinkers (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1965), pp. 168-170.

⁴⁸James D. Hart, The Popular Book (New York, 1950), pp. 248-266.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 248.

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the previous decade.⁵⁰ Detective stories and "How to" books provided escape for those not inclined toward history or sociology. Life Begins at Forty and other forms of popular psychology rivaled the new market for mysticism and romance. Like the Reader's Digest, America's most widely circulated magazine, anthologies became popular during the Depression. Poetry, philosophy, and animal stories all could be found and read in keeping with the fast tempo of the times.⁵¹

The popular books of the Depression reflect the continued state of religion in the thirties. In spite of the expectations of many religious leaders, hard times did not bring a revival of religious enthusiasm or commitment. The decade of the thirties saw a gain of church membership at only one-half the percentage rate of the previous ten-year period. Even though church membership was approaching one-half the population by 1940, the decline in regular church attendance continued throughout the period. Church programs were drastically cut to fit reduced budgets, and extensive building programs were often left only partially completed in the wake of the economic crisis. Women's organizations, the organizational life blood of many churches, suffered from competing vocational and avocational

⁵⁰ Lynd, op. cit., pp. 252-254.

⁵¹ J. Hart, op. cit., pp. 248-266.

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interests. Youth groups continued to experience sharp drops in participation.⁵²

Although revivalism had declined sharply since 1915, the very conservative evangelical Protestant churches and sects grew phenomenally during the Depression. Continuing the pietistic revolt against modernity, many of these religious bodies appealed to those financially distressed who found hope and relief in perfectionist and emotional faith. Pentecostal and Holiness sects experienced membership increases of as high as 200 per cent.⁵³ Middletown's religious pattern in the thirties involved the appeal of faith as "an emotionally stabilizing agent" and growth confined largely to the sects.⁵⁴

The breakdown of the hegemony of main line Protestant churches and the rise of variant orthodoxies is reflected in the popularity of Mrs. Ellen G. White's Great Controversy (1926) and Emmet Fox's The Sermon on the Mount (1934). Neither book appeared on an annual list but both reached a substantial public--Mrs. White about one million and Mr. Fox approximately six hundred thousand.⁵⁵ Mrs.

⁵²Clifton E. Olmstead, History of Religion in the United States (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1960), pp. 562-564.

⁵³William G. McLoughlin, Jr., Modern Revivalism (New York, 1959), pp. 463-464.

⁵⁴Middletown in Transition, pp. 297, 318.

⁵⁵Hackett, op. cit., p. 85.

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White was the virtual founder and major theologian of the Seventh-day Adventists. A visionary who wrote prolificly, as part of a mass education of the faithful, she helped establish her churches' doctrines as a live option for the seeker. Her death in 1915 ended seventy years of earthly ministry but her writings continued to be read years later.⁵⁶

Emmet Fox, a major urban preacher, wrote for an audience of mind-cure cultists in the tradition of New Thought. In an era of renewed interest in psychological and spiritual "health," with the rise of Christian Science and Moral Re-Armament, Fox's treatment of the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Matthew was in the tradition of the "quest for health, wealth, and personal power."⁵⁷ Soon to be upstaged by Norman Vincent Peale, with "positive thinking," Fox described his The Sermon on the Mount as "a general introduction to Scientific Christianity." His faith in the essential Divinity of Man led Fox to expect "infinite growth and improvement and development up the rising pathway of divinity." With this spiritual consciousness, men can "transcend all bounds of human imagination." Fox's "spiritual key" for unlocking the Bible led him to

⁵⁶Elmer T. Clark, The Small Sects In America (rev. ed.; Nashville, Tenn., 1949), pp. 39-40.

⁵⁷Donald Meyer, The Positive Thinkers (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1966), pp. 222, 236.

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best selling religion's rejection of theology and doctrine and "rescues from the false positions of Ritualism, Evangelicalism, and Liberalism."⁵⁸

Henry C. Link's The Return to Religion (1936), one of the few titles in the nonfiction religious field to reach the annual lists in some time, was number three on the 1937 list. Link, a psychologist, described his return to religion as a result of the discovery that scientific psychology pointed to the truth of religion for abundant living. Convinced that psychology and religion endorse a "life of intense and self-sacrificing activity," Link portrays a Barton-like Christ who is socially aggressive and if present during the Depression, would have approved Hoover's neighborhood relief plan. Religion, then, is a practical activity, involving ascetic self-denial and extrovertish service to others.⁵⁹

The psychologist's return to religion not only reflects the quest for mental health through abundant living, but several best selling religious themes as well. Link was clearly bothered by many of the church's dogmas, and although his earlier agnosticism was rejected he defines

⁵⁸ Emmet Fox, The Sermon on the Mount (New York, 1934), pp. 134, 3, 13.

⁵⁹ Henry C. Link, The Return to Religion (New York, 1936), pp. 3, 7, 88, 16, 139.

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his religion in reductionist terms. Belief in God as a Supreme Being, a divine moral order expressed in the Ten Commandments and in the life of Christ, and the acceptance of the Church as the chief but imperfect vehicle of religious truth, was all the creed Link needed. An anti-intellectual strain was present also as Link attacked the elevation of reason above religious faith and counseled against the "introverted" or selfish practice of substituting "thinking for action, reason for faith, analysis for conviction." The book's sociological, as well as psychological, conservatism becomes clear as the immigrants are blamed for contributing to the "disintegration of the national character."⁶⁰

Religion, for Link, was the one source of unity in an age of conflicting council. As traditional individualistic values declined, and as the false faiths of reason and science betrayed men, a return to religion could produce busy, sociable, and unselfish people. Society could be saved from radical schemes for redistribution of wealth and the social planning of the New Deal. Only the Civilian Conservation Corps provided Depression youth with needed help which did not undermine character.⁶¹ The Return to Religion had succeeded in fashioning an eclectic faith

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 8, 14, 59.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 5-6, 58.

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which included traditional anti-creedal pietism, the new emphasis on personality and mental health, and the middle-class conservatism's opposition to the Social Gospel.

The emphasis on personality and mental health became the theme of Lloyd Douglas' Magnificent Obsession (1929), the only religious best seller to reach well beyond the annual lists during the period between the wars. Appearing on the 1932 list, Magnificent Obsession advanced from number eight to four on the 1933 Publishers' Weekly list. It eventually sold close to three million copies, of which over two million were in paperback sales.⁶² Douglas followed his first big success with Forgive Us Our Trespases which was number six in 1933, Green Light which was number one in 1935, White Banners which was number six in 1936, and Disputed Passage which was number six in 1939. Green Light and The Big Fisherman, which was a best seller in 1948, each sold over eight hundred thousand, placing them well above the other Douglas novels of the thirties but substantially behind The Robe and Magnificent Obsession.⁶³

Douglas was the last of that clerical novelist tradition that stretched from William Ware through J. H. Ingraham, E. P. Roe, Charles M. Sheldon, S. D. Gordon, to

⁶²Hackett, op. cit., pp. 145, 147, 86, 43.

⁶³Ibid., p. 86.

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Harold Bell Wright. Douglas was born in Columbia City, Indiana in 1877. After completing a B.A. and M.A. at Wittenburg College, and a B.D. from Hamma Divinity School, Douglas was ordained a Lutheran minister. He pastored churches in Indiana, Ohio, and Washington, D.C., before becoming director of the YMCA-sponsored religious work at the University of Illinois in 1911. In 1915 he became pastor of the First Congregational Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and later of First churches in Akron, Ohio and Los Angeles. His final pastorate was St. James United Church in Montreal, from which he retired in 1933 to write full-time.

Douglas' writing career did not begin until he was over fifty, and yet his twenty-eight year pastoral ministry had provided him with many opportunities to expand his sermons for religious publications. As a clergyman, Douglas had held a series of quite successful pastorates. His two daughters described their childhood in terms of comfortable, middle-class living standards and professional status.⁶⁴ Reverend Douglas seemed to have the optimistic, genial personality desired by large, urban Protestant churches. His published sermons, representing the years 1926-33, reveal the attitudes of a typical liberal Protestant. In

⁶⁴Virginia Douglas Dawson and Betty Douglas Wilson, The Shape of Sunday; An Intimate Biography of Lloyd C. Douglas (Cambridge, Mass., 1952).

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his 1926 farewell sermon to the Akron congregation, Douglas provided a summary of his liberalism. Departing from the dogmatic orthodoxies of the past, he had preached a new gospel of reconciliation with science and modern thought. Believing in the evolutionary progress of humanity, Douglas espoused a modernism that tolerated wide ranges of belief and unbelief. Altruistic service was the center of his religion, with little or no emphasis on the miraculous or supernatural elements of traditional Christianity.⁶⁵

Douglas' modernism, with its enthusiasm for science and its belief in progress, was quite explicit in Magnificent Obsession and the other novels of the thirties. Although his two historical-Biblical novels of the forties evidence a swing back to traditional religious patterns, Douglas' earlier writings express the material and mental rewards of ethical living. The sermon is much more muted and less central than that of Harold Bell Wright, but the message is still clear. Abundant living involves an expanded personality relying on the Major Personality. It was for the purpose of inspiring people with this message that Lloyd C. Douglas wrote novels.⁶⁶

⁶⁵Lloyd C. Douglas, The Living Faith (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), pp. 77-92.

⁶⁶Stanley J. Kunitz and Harold Haycraft, eds., Twentieth Century Authors (New York, 1942), p. 393.

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The success of Magnificent Obsession may well have been attributable to a search for spiritual security in an era of material insecurity. Published by Willet, Clark & Company, of Chicago, publishers of religious literature, the book sold rather slowly the first year. But as the advertising in religious papers and word of mouth recommendations had their effect, sales jumped dramatically by 1931.⁶⁷ Then Houghton Mifflin published it and helped create a demand for fifty editions. A screen version and a Pocket Books edition in the forties were a part of this best seller's history.⁶⁸ The Reverend Douglas' series of sermons on "The Secrets of Exultant Living" had now reached millions of people in fictional form.⁶⁹

The hero of his novel was a young brain surgeon, Bobby Merrick, who is transformed from a sceptic to a believer in the "Major Personality." Although most of the young doctor's energies are tied up with his brilliant career and with beautiful Helen Hudson, he is introduced to the religion of the Galilean--the "one man who apparently knew the principles imperative to an expanded personality." He bought a Bible which, in reading, he discovered to be

⁶⁷Dawson and Wilson, op. cit., p. 241.

⁶⁸Frank L. Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York, 1947), p. 281.

⁶⁹Dawson and Wilson, op. cit., p. 211.

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"the actual textbook of a science relating to the expansion and development of the human personality." Having discovered that religion is really a science of abundant living, Dr. Merrick has a conversion experience in which doors seem to open and the light shines through.⁷⁰

Merrick's experiment with this old, but new, science of expanded personality leads to a "magnificent obsession." It does not interfere with his rising career, involving the almost miraculous restorations of health to his patients, nor with his masterful love for Helen. But this Christ-like healer of the halt and blind does radiate the personal power of one in tune with the Major Personality. To a Depression or War torn generation, the appeal of faith in "the survival of personality" and the "power of it . . . quite independent of material things . . . " was strong. As Bobby tells old Nicholas:

Personality is all that matters! . . . Nothing in the world has any reality except as it is declared real by our personalities. Count personality out of the scheme, and there's no significance left to anything! . . . I'm tied up to the Major Personality! . . . like a beam of sunshine to the sun! . . . I'll not lose my power unless He loses His! . . . If that's religion, Grandpere, I'm religious! But I'd rather think of it as science!⁷¹

⁷⁰Lloyd C. Douglas, Magnificent Obsession (New York, 1929), pp. 144, 184-188.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 231-32.

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Magnificent Obsession's Christianity is largely the imitation of a Christ who revealed the possibility of an "ideal adjustment" to the Major Personality. Christ's life, then, promised Bobby Merrick an existence without fear and everything to be had for the asking. Rejecting orthodox theories of bent or diseased souls, Douglas' hero scores the churches for their sectarian pettiness and their neglect of personality power. Even modernists, who have done a creditable job of liberating people from the bondage of superstition, are criticised for not going beyond intellectual emancipation to provide people with the promise of power through religion as science.⁷²

The chronicling of spiritual progress can also be found in the life of Green Light's Dean Harcourt. The Dean of Trinity Cathedral adheres to Douglas' often preached thesis that the story of civilization is one of a long climb from the jungle to Paradise. In spite of the setbacks and plateaus, civilization and man's spiritual life, follow an upward course. If a man can free himself from the burdens of frustration and bitterness, he will get the "Green Light." The healing character of Dean Harcourt's advice to the troubled souls who came to his study seems to have been matched by the book's influence on many of its readers.⁷³

⁷²Ibid., pp. 232, 290-298.

⁷³Dawson and Wilson, op. cit., p. 259.

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The Depression novels of Lloyd C. Douglas reflect his own Protestant liberalism with its faith in progress and the power of an ethical religion. They were also a part of a mood that searched for spiritual security in a psychology of abundant living and a scientific religion. Although they reflected the loss of confidence in material security, they kept alive a faith in unlimited spiritual progress for the human personality. The non-creedal modern faith of the twenties and thirties, however, was yet to be challenged by the Second World War and the Cold War. The revival of religion in the forties and fifties involved a greater emphasis on pietism and miraculous faith. Douglas' The Robe appealed to this new mood.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE QUEST FOR AN HISTORICAL RELIGION

The end of the economic depression in the nineteen forties was accompanied by the end of the religious depression which had characterized the twenties and thirties. An upswing in religion, noticeable first during the wartime years, marked the late forties and early fifties as the period of an all-time high in religious identification and interest. In sharp contrast to the period immediately following World War I, the Second World War was followed by a religious revival that pervaded all aspects of American thought and society. The phenomenal growth of religious institutions and the diffusion of religious themes in politics, entertainment, radio and television, prompted a host of commentators and analysts into explanations of this apparent revival of religion. Popular literature, and particularly best sellers, reflected both the quantity and quality of this religious awakening.

This revival of religion was formed against the background of depression, a Second World War, and Cold War tensions. The faith in progress was severely challenged as the idealistic American mind faced the historical shocks

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of the thirties and forties. A quest for absolutes was pursued with renewed fervor by religious and secular thinkers alike. To many, the relativism and liberalism dominant in American thought during preceding decades was responsible for the evils threatening human civilization. This rise of a New Conservatism was evident in the writings of Russell Kirk, Peter Viereck, and John Hallowell. Drawing upon the traditions of Aristotle, St. Thomas, Edmund Burke, and the New Humanists of the twenties, the spokesmen of the New Conservatism attacked liberal democracy, relativism, and instrumentalism. Slow organic change within the framework of traditional morality was the conservative prescription. Walter Lippman, representing the older progressive tradition, joined the search for natural law and consensus in his The Public Philosophy (1955).¹

The religious phase of this quest for absolutes took the form of a general awakening of interest in religion.² One analyst attributed this "surge of piety" in a time of troubles to the fact that modern man felt spiritually displaced in an age when all gods had failed.³

¹Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought (3rd ed.; New York, 1964), pp. 767-773.

²William G. McLoughlin, Jr., Modern Revivalism (New York, 1959), pp. 472-473.

³Harry C. Meserve, "The New Piety," The Atlantic, June, 1955, p. 34.

Science's failure to guarantee social progress led many persons to the new forms of piety, particularly the "peace of mind" and "peace of soul" varieties.⁴ The problem of evil, particularly the cruelty of modern life, may also explain the turn to religion at mid-century.⁵ Paul Hutchinson, in appraising the new religious trend, maintained that this new piety was a "middle-brow" phenomenon which had become a "cult of reassurance." Searching for a renewal of confidence and optimism in an age of trouble was a modern version of the old quest for happiness and a satisfying life.⁶

One of the characteristics of this mid-twentieth century religious revival was its lack of deterrence of a rising secularism. Secularism and religiosity co-existed in this post-war period. Will Herberg suggests that both the religiousness and secularism of the American people derive from much the same sociological sources.⁷ Certainly the old Protestant hegemony over national culture had

⁴A. Roy Eckardt, The Surge of Piety In America (New York, 1958), p. 26.

⁵Herbert W. Schnieder, Religion in 20th Century America (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), pp. 189-90.

⁶Paul Hutchinson, "Have We a 'New' Religion?," Life, April 11, 1955, pp. 147-148.

⁷Will Herberg, Protestant--Catholic--Jew (rev. ed.; Garden City, New York, 1960), pp. 2-3.

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had largely disappeared. The tradition of Protestant culture had been successfully attacked by the social and intellectual currents of an urban, pluralistic, twentieth-century America. The final blow to the prestige of Protestant culture had been the failure of Prohibition.⁸

The New Immigration played a significant role in this loss of hegemony for Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. From 1820 to 1930 approximately fourteen million immigrants from southern and eastern Europe entered the United States. Most came after 1880, supplanting the Germans, Irish, Scandinavians, and other northern or central European stock as the major source of foreign-born Americans. Representing greater contrasts in language, customs, and ideologies, these New Immigrants boosted the Catholic and Jewish population immensely.⁹ The Catholic population in 1900 was about 12,000,000, whereas by 1956 it was estimated to be almost 40,000,000.¹⁰ In the years between 1900 and 1914 Jewish immigration was also at its peak. In 1927 East European Jews represented about 80 per cent of the 4,200,000 Jews in the country.¹¹

⁸Donald B. Meyer, The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941 (Berkely, 1961), pp. 10-11.

⁹Carl Wittke, We Who Built America (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1939), p. 405.

¹⁰John Tracy Ellis, American Catholicism (Chicago, 1956), pp. 122-123.

¹¹Nathan Glazer, American Judaism (Chicago, 1957), pp. 79, 82-83.

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The religious traditions of non-Protestant foreign-born presented a formidable challenge to native Protestantism, particularly in the rapidly growing urban areas. This initial impact of Catholic, Jewish, and Orthodox immigrants was followed by the restructuring of American society, with a pattern of cultural assimilation that produced an identity crisis for second and third generation immigrants. Will Herberg argues that religion, in the form of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism, functioned as a source of self-identity and social location in pluralistic America.¹²

Herberg also attributes the "turn to religion" to the change in American character structure in what David Reisman referred to as an "other-directed" society. Two final factors are cited by Herberg as being responsible for America's religious revival. The contemporary crisis of world civilization may be driving men toward a religion that provides peace of mind in the midst of revolutionary change and international conflict. Just as many "other directed" individuals may have sought church membership for social approval and a sense of belonging, many other people may have seen an inner religion as a "citadel for the self in a world in which personal authenticity is threatened on every side."¹³

¹²Herberg, op. cit., pp. 16-23.

¹³Ibid., pp. 62-63.

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The religious scene at mid-century involved both the pluralism expressed in Herberg's title, Protestant--Catholic--Jew, and a revival of interest in religion-in-general. The revival of religion involved at least three elements. First, there was a theological revival and a corresponding interest in religion on the part of intellectuals. Second, there was a churchly revival, which was expressed largely in the phenomenal statistics of church growth. And, third, there was a popular revival, in which all areas of popular culture were invaded by the new piety. The theological revival in America is usually associated with the "neo-orthodoxy" of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, who followed the European "crisis" theologians in their attacks on the easy optimism of liberal Protestantism. This re-examination of modernism, with its dialectical approach to theological issues, led to a renewed emphasis on a Biblical, prophetic faith and a "realistic" approach to social ethics.¹⁴

This return to orthodoxy (but not fundamentalism), on the part of Niebuhr and other religious liberals, was paralleled by a greater interest in religion on the part of many intellectuals. Colleges and universities began to establish or expand religion courses in response to a

¹⁴H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy, Lefferts A. Loetscher, American Christianity, Vol. II (New York, 1963), pp. 426-438.

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growing demand.¹⁵ This new respectability of religion on the campus was not confined to the "stirring" of students, but included the intellectual elite as well. In contrast to an earlier generation when "enlightened" intellectuals ignored religious perspectives, the avantgarde was now interested in religious interpretations and issues.¹⁶ Unlike his Civilization in the United States (1921), which omitted any discussion of religion among the thirty essays, Harold Stearns' 1938 collection of contemporary judgments about American society included a section on religion.¹⁷ Even the radicals of Partisan Review participated in a symposium on "Religion and the Intellectuals" in 1950. Although many of the twenty-nine participants were still hostile, the symposium revealed a revival of interest in religion among intellectuals and the actual conversion of some to religious faith.¹⁸

The churchly revival was marked by the "extraordinary pervasiveness of religious identification" among

¹⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, "Varieties of Religious Revival," The New Republic, Vol. 132 (June 6, 1955), pp. 13-16.

¹⁶ Herberg, op. cit., pp. 53-55.

¹⁷ Harold Stearns, ed., America Now: An Inquiry Into Civilization in the United States (New York, 1938).

¹⁸ James Agee, ed., Religion and the Intellectuals: A Symposium (New York, 1950).

Americans. Almost everyone in America identified himself with one of the three great religious communities. This identification seems to have represented an all time high, even though such data for the nineteenth century is unavailable. The decline of the militant secularist, the atheist or "free thinker," as an important cultural figure also gave testimony to the pervasiveness of religion in America by the mid-twentieth century. Anti-religion or even non-identification with a religious community had succumbed to the upswing in religion.¹⁹

Church membership figures underline this phenomenon in greater detail. Recognizing that religious statistics are often inaccurate and therefore difficult to compare, it is still possible to chronicle a trend in the twentieth century. In 1900 church membership was approximately 36 per cent of the total population; in 1926, it was about 46 per cent; in 1958, 63 per cent.²⁰ In the years between 1926 and 1950 the population of the United States increased 28.6 per cent, while membership of religious bodies increased 59.8 per cent. In other words, church membership grew more than twice as fast as the population. The growth

¹⁹Herberg, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

²⁰Benson Y. Landis, "Trends in Church Membership in the United States," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, CCCXXXII (November, 1960), p. 4.

of church membership in the nineteen fifties was also phenomenal. In 1950 total church membership was reckoned at 83,319,000 or about 57 per cent of the total population. In 1958 it was 109,557,741, or about 63 per cent, an all time high in the history of America.²¹

Pollsters found that more people identified with the various religious communities in the 1950's than were reflected in the church membership figures. Only about 5 per cent of the American people considered themselves outside of the religious fold altogether. Church attendance grew considerably in the nineteen forties and fifties. Sunday School enrollment showed a marked rise in this period. Church construction expanded at a rapid rate. The value of new "religious buildings" jumped from \$76,000,000 in 1946, to \$409,000,000 in 1950, to \$868,000,000 in 1957. Religious leaders experienced an enhanced standing as reflected in public opinion polls between 1942 and 1957. Clergymen were seen by the public as "doing more good" than any other group. Institutional growth and enhanced public status indicated a notable increase in the popularity of religion in mid-twentieth century America.

The revival of religion, then, was not limited to a theological and a churchly phase but involved a popular

²¹Ibid., pp. 4-5.

movement as well. In fact, many analysts concluded that the awakening was not a revival of evangelical Protestantism or the two other historic Biblical faiths, but rather a revival of "religion-in-general" or a "civic religion."²² The vogue of religion went beyond the religious institutions and their spokesmen to penetrate all areas of popular culture. Piety became a renewed partner of politics. Chaplains in Congress, prayer breakfasts, Congressional prayer groups, Presidential support for special church services, "In God We Trust" on coins, and the words "under God" added to the Pledge of Allegiance, all signified a new relationship between piety and public life.²³ Radio and TV stations encouraged listeners to "go to Church on Sunday" and then provided meditation periods as part of their regular programming. The "Religion in American Life" campaign, directed by a layman's committee with support from the Advertising Council of America, received millions of dollars worth of advertising free for promoting religious institutions as the foundation of American life.²⁴

²²Martin E. Marty, The New Shape of American Religion (New York, 1959), p. 10; Eckardt, op. cit., pp. 30-39; Herberg, op. cit., p. 75.

²³William Lee Miller, "Piety Along the Potomac," The Reporter, August 17, 1954, p. 25.

²⁴Eckardt, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

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One of the most revealing and oft cited evidences for the popular revival of religion can be found in the reading patterns of the American public. Religious books and articles seemed to be at an all time high. The entries under Religion in the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature rose dramatically during the forties and fifties. The sales of religious books as compared to the total output went up sharply from 1935 to 1945. In 1953, Eugene Exman, who headed Harper's religious book department, cited the increased religious book volume as evidence of a boom in the popularity of religion.²⁵ The increased religious book production only revealed part of the trend, for some inspirational books and all religious novels were absent from these statistics.

The best seller figures are even more revealing of this trend toward religious interests. In the two decades between the wars (1919-1939), religious books appeared on the annual best seller lists sixteen times. Only four books sold over one million copies during that same period--Egemeier's Bible Story Book, White's Great Controversy, Douglas' Magnificent Obsession, and Cowman's Streams in the Desert. Only one of those, Magnificent Obsession, was a work of fiction. During the years 1939-1959, religious books appeared on the annual best seller

²⁵Eugene Exman, "Reading, Writing, and Religion," Harper's Magazine, Vol. 206 (May, 1953), pp. 84-90.

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lists fifty-eight times. Fifteen religious best sellers topped the one million mark; five of which were works of fiction. The Robe, The Cardinal, and Exodus all equaled or surpassed three million copies sold. In the years 1941 to 1951 only one year, 1946, failed to see a religious novel in first or second position on the annual list. In 1949, The Big Fisherman, Mary, the Seven Story Mountain, The Greatest Story Ever Told, Peace of Soul, and A Guide to Confident Living all appeared on the list. In 1953, The Robe, The Revised Standard Version of the Bible, The Power of Positive Thinking, Life is Worth Living, A Man Called Peter, This I Believe and The Greatest Faith Ever Known were among the annual best sellers.²⁶

The religious best sellers of the nineteen forties and fifties illustrate the popular revival of religion not only by their quantity but by their themes as well. The continuity of demand for inspirational books blended with a rising cult of "Peace of Mind," "Peace of Soul," and "Positive Thinking." Harry Emerson Fosdick's On Being a Real Person (1943), Joshua Loth Liebman's Peace of Mind (1946), Norman Vincent Peale's A Guide to Confident Living (1948) and The Power of Positive Thinking (1952), Fulton J. Sheen's Peace of Soul (1949), and Billy Graham's Peace with God (1954) represent this convergence of the old and

²⁶ Alice Payne Hackett, 70 Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1965 (New York, 1967). Unless otherwise indicated, all following references to best selling status or sales totals is derived from Hackett.

new in this latest great awakening. Although this "Peace with God" theme is the center of discussion in the next chapter, it parallels and informs much of this chapter's treatment of the revival of best-selling religion.

One neglected aspect of the popular religious revival is the renewed interest in the historical elements of Biblical faith. Following in the Christ-story tradition of Ben-Hur, and paralleling neo-orthodoxy's recovery of Biblical themes, novelists Sholem Asch and Lloyd Douglas created popular fictional portraits of the life and times of Jesus Christ. Asch's The Nazarene (1939), The Apostle (1943), and Mary (1949) provide a trilogy of first century faith. Lloyd Douglas' The Robe (1942) and The Big Fisherman (1948) follow Lew Wallace's successful formula--a romantic version of New Testament history.

The historicity of the miraculous life of Christ and the early church was the theme of the best-selling apologist, Fulton Oursler. His The Greatest Story Ever Told (1949), The Greatest Book Ever Written (1951), and The Greatest Faith Ever Known (1953) were ecumenical testimonies to the popularity of historical Christian faith. Just before the revival began to wane, Jim Bishop produced his best-selling religious history, The Day Christ Died (1957).

The interest in the miraculous elements of faith was evident in Franz Werfel's nineteenth century tale, The

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Song of Bernadette (1942) and Russell Janney's The Miracle of the Bells (1946). The church and the clergy's roles in the traditional faith were explored in Agnes Turnbull's The Bishop's Mantle (1948) and Henry Morton Robinson's The Cardinal (1950). Although not always treated as religious novels, Thomas B. Costain's The Silver Chalice (1948) and Leon Uris' Exodus (1958) are both supportive of the interest in the historical dimensions of religion.

The decline in Protestant hegemony and the corresponding rise of religious pluralism is also reflected in religious best sellers since 1939. Will Herberg's analysis of the American religious scene as one of equality for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews can be supported by the best seller lists. Just as the names of Herman Wouk, J. D. Salinger, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and Jack Kerouac gave evidence of the ethnic pluralism in the larger world of professional writing, so the religious best sellers represented a new pluralism. Along with Protestants like Lloyd Douglas, Norman Vincent Peale, and Billy Graham, appeared Catholic writers Russell Janney, Thomas Merton, Fulton Oursler, Fulton J. Sheen, and Henry Morton Robinson. Judaism's contribution to best-selling religion was embodied in the writings of Sholem Asch, Franz Werfel, Joshua Liebman, and Leon Uris.

The Yiddish novelist Sholem Asch led the quest for an historical faith with his portrait of Jesus in The

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Nazarene, published in 1939. The Polish-born Asch brought to this work a thirty-year career as a novelist, dramatist, and poet. Well known as a literary figure among Yiddish-speaking Jews in Europe and America, he immigrated to the United States at the outbreak of the First World War. He was naturalized as an American citizen in 1920 and, except for a few years in the late twenties, spent the remaining years of his fruitful writing career in the United States. He died in 1957 at seventy-seven years of age.

Asch continued to write in Yiddish even after New York became his home. His translated work shares the distinction of translation with only one other best seller, Quo Vadis (1896), also written by a Pole. Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel was, of course, written in Polish rather than Yiddish and had a Christian perspective of the first century. Asch's Jewishness, or lack thereof, became a source of some controversy. His clearly sympathetic treatment of Jesus and the Jewish Christians, raised the question of his own religious commitment. His departure from the traditional historical record was criticized by some in the Jewish community.²⁷ He was also cited as an example of the modern Jew's "yearning for status," which endangered the transcendent quality of Jewish character.²⁸ Christians

²⁷J. L. Teller, "Unhistorical Novels," Commentary, Vol. 21 (April, 1956), pp. 393-96.

²⁸Harry Slockower, "Franz Werfel and Sholem Asch: The Yearning for Status," Accent, V (Autumn, 1945), pp. 73-82.

took him to task for his interpretation of the trial and execution of Jesus, which Asch blamed on the Romans. This departure from the Gospel accounts and traditional Christian accusations against the Jews was considered an extremist effort to claim Jesus of Nazareth for the Jews.²⁹

Asch's treatment of Christian origins in The Nazarene, and the other two novels in the trilogy, grew out of a conviction that Judaism and Christianity were part of a common culture and civilization. A European Jew, Asch clearly felt the influence of Western Christendom. He responded to the threats of Bolshevism and Fascism, by identifying himself with Christian civilization. In his published religious testimony, What I Believe (1941), Asch revealed his horror of the collapse of the Western democracies and his conviction that Biblical faith was the only sound source of hope in such a calamitous world. He felt that Jews and Christians, alike, had sinned in failing to build a world incarnating the ethical principles of their common religious heritage.³⁰ It is quite clear that his Biblical novels were intended to be vehicles for calling Western man back to faith in the one God, common to both Israel and Christendom.

²⁹Ernest Sutherland Bates, "The Gospel In a Modern Version," The Saturday Review, October 21, 1939, p. 5.

³⁰Sholem Asch, What I Believe (New York, 1941), pp. 135-136, 149, 165-201.

The Nazarene, written at a time of renewed clash between Jew and Gentile and renewed messianic yearnings, pursues the meaning of Jesus of Nazareth against the backdrop of Old Testament history. Asch's "Nazarene" becomes the focus of Jewish and Christian commonality and an historical foundation from which the modern world can be judged. The Old and New Testaments are blended in such a way as to diminish old hatreds and animosities, and faith in God and man transcends narrow sectarianism or dogmatic creedalism. Pluralism is affirmed by Asch, in his writings, not because there is value in radical alternatives to truth but because the historical framework promises ultimate unity and salvation for a lost generation.

Ranked number nine on the 1939 best seller list and five on the 1940 list, The Nazarene did not reach the 500,000 mark. The critical reviews were more favorable to this masterfully written novel than to the work of Lloyd Douglas, whose novels sold much better. The complicated character structure of Asch's romantic tale appealed to one critic as a skillfully contrived series of perspectives.³¹ The narrator of this fantastic tale, a Polish Jew, is drawn into a strange ambivalent relationship with a learned anti-Semitic scholar, Pan Vidomsky, who has discovered genuine documents from the time of Christ.

³¹Bates, op. cit., p. 5.

Vidomsky's detailed knowledge of some of the events of that period surpass that which is possible for the finite historical scholar. The author eventually has Pan Vidomsky declare himself to have been the Roman centurian, Cornelius, who is able to narrate the events surrounding the rule of Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem.

The ministry of Yeshua of Nazareth is seen from the perspective of this modern anti-Semite who, in the role of the Roman Cornelius, sounds very much like the fascist voices of Asch's contemporary experience. Judah Ish-Kiriot is included as the writer of the long-lost Gospel, which provides us with another perspective, which in turn includes a narrative of Miriam, the mother of Yeshua. Finally, the Polish narrator, himself, recalls his own experience as Jochanan, one of the disciples of Rabbi Nicodemon the Pharisee. Jochanan's narration picks up from Cornelius at the entry of Yeshua into Jerusalem, and describes his master's defense of the Nazarene before the Sanhedrin, and gives an account of the crucifixion as reported by Rufus, who was one of the disciples actually present at the scene. This climax is followed by a gradual return to modern Warsaw and the book concludes with the death of Pan Vidomsky.

In the midst of these narratives and sub-narratives, and picturesque descriptions of the bustling Palestinian Capital, Asch's Jesus emerges as a Jewish messiah who can

appeal to all but the sectarian literalists within the Judao-Christian tradition. The poignant account of the crucifixion is climaxed by the explanation for Jesus' death at Golgotha; "it was in order that he might begin the ascent to the highest salvation out of the nethermost pit of human wickedness, from ultimate depth to ultimate glory."³² Jesus' death and life had illustrated the Pharisees' central belief in the commandment to love God and neighbor. Pan Vidomsky's deathbed conversion to this common foundation of Jewish-Christian faith confirms the triumph of the Nazarene.³³

Rabbi Nicodemon, and his Polish narrator-disciple Jochanan, seem consistently to express Asch's interpretation of Jesus. Viewing the body of the Nazarene as the body of a saint, Rabbi Nicodemon helps pay for the burial of Jesus. When asked by Jochanan if he were a convert to the sect of the Messianists, the Pharisee replies:

It is enough that Rabbi Yeshua lived like a righteous man sought after God, drew men nearer to heaven, and died in utter purity, that I shall bow my head to his memory and recall his with benediction.³⁴

In life, the Nazarene is depicted as primarily an ethical teacher. Reports of his miraculous healings

³²Sholem Asch, The Nazarene, trans. Maurice Samuel (New York, 1939), pp. 679-680.

³³Ibid., pp. 694-697.

³⁴Ibid., p. 692.

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are dutifully reported but the narration is replete with extra-Biblical accounts of the sick and afflicted seeking and receiving spiritual health rather than physical restoration. In one scene, Yeshua teaches the unfortunate that:

Suffering . . . is the fount of love. Suffering is the grace, the great grace, which our Father in heaven pours down upon us. For suffering gives men submissive hearts.³⁵

The Nazarene's fictional license with the Gospel account serves the essentially Jewish purpose of the novelist. The power of faith, which Asch finds in the Rabbinical tradition and in which he includes Jesus, is primarily one of hope in the eternal transcendent God and a prophetic faith which champions the suffering victims of injustice. Asch's life of Christ condemns religious disputes and sectarian claims in the tradition of best-selling religion. In an age of crisis, not unlike that of Jesus' day, what is needed is the ethical faith found in the spirit of the Torah and the Sermon on the Mount.

The two remaining novels in Asch's New Testament series, The Apostle (1943) and Mary (1949), preach the same gospel found in The Nazarene. The Apostle, a story based on the life of Paul of Tarsas, was number seven on the 1943 annual list and number ten the following year. It eventually sold in excess of five hundred thousand copies. Mary had a brief best-selling career as number

³⁵Ibid., p. 512.

three in 1949. Asch returned to the Old Testament in a less successful novel, Moses, which was published in 1951. Still seeking to reconcile Christians and Jews in these novels, Sholem Asch stressed the common moral good the two faiths had contributed to the world. The Apostle, in particular, traced Paul's indebtedness to the Rabinnical tradition. Theological reconciliation does not seem to be his concern; rather it was to demonstrate that mutual understanding derives from common and equally valid purpose. In an age of conflict, Asch contributed to the upswing of religious interest a best selling plea for faith in the God who transcends historical divisions.

Lloyd Douglas' success may have been partially due to those qualities which he shared with Sholem Asch. One critic argued that the appeal of Asch and Douglas was " . . . to people who seek ordinary ground for spiritual truth, not dogma, established church, or elaborate theology."³⁶ The attributing of these best sellers' success to their emphasis on the simple ethical teachings of Jesus is not a surprising viewpoint to be found in the magazine of the American Ethical Union. Yet the appeal of noncreedal, undogmatic, ethical faith has already been established as a significant strain in best selling religion. Douglas' The Robe, presents a more orthodox Christ

³⁶Horace Bridges, "Jesus in Fiction: 'The Robe' and 'The Nazarene,'" The Standard, Vol. XXXI, No. 6 (March, 1945), p. 168.

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than Asch's The Nazarene, but the anti-theological approach to discipleship is common to both best sellers.

The Robe rivals Ben-Hur among the top half dozen best sellers. In 1942, the year it was published, The Robe was number seven on the annual list; number one in 1943; number two in both 1944 and 1945; and, responding to the success of the movie version, it appeared again as number one on the 1953 list. Total sales exceeded 3,300,000, making it Douglas' most successful novel. Douglas, in turn, had become the best selling novelist of the century. Excluding his other novels, Magnificent Obsession (1929), The Robe, Green Light (1935), and The Big Fisherman (1948) gave Douglas a best selling total of almost 8,000,000 copies.³⁷

Marcellus, a Roman Tribune, is the hero of Douglas' Christ-story. With his Greek slave, Demetrius, the youthful tribune was assigned to an obscure Palestinian fort where he encounters the strange stories concerning the Jewish prophet and healer, Jesus. Following the trial of Jesus, Marcellus' military detachment was ordered to conduct the crucifixion, and by casting lots at the foot of the cross he came into possession of the victim's robe. This robe soon evidenced strange and miraculous influences on those with whom it came into contact. Marcellus was

³⁷Hackett, op. cit., p. 86.

physically enfeebled and spiritually debilitated as a result of his agreement to wear the robe at the post-crucifixion party. Demetrius and others found the touch of the robe a source of strange power and comfort.

Marcellus' strange physical weakness and his mental and spiritual despondency were just as suddenly cured by another contact with the Galilean's robe. These strange occurrences surrounding the seamless robe prompted Marcellus, with Demetrius, to return to Palestine and search for the meaning and significance of its crucified owner. The slow process of interviewing disciples and others that knew Jesus ultimately led to the conversion of the two young men. Marcellus' conversion occurred as Stephen saw a vision while being stoned to death for his faith in Christ.

Having been ordered to report on these happenings to the old Emperor Tiberius, Marcellus returned to Rome where he affirmed his new faith. This identification with the despised new Jewish sect placed his standing at court and his love for beautiful Diana in jeopardy. Forced to flee Rome, he was aided by his faithful slave, Demetrius, who was now treated in the brotherly equality practiced in their new Christian fellowship. Marcellus and Diana were eventually reunited physically and religiously, but arrested soon thereafter for blasphemy by the mad new Emperor, Caligula. Their new life together as husband

and wife is brought to a premature end as the novel closes with their execution. The Robe is surreptitiously passed on to Jesus' most prominent disciple, Peter--better known as The Big Fisherman.

The Big Fisherman, Douglas' last novel, was not as successful as The Robe, but it was first on the 1948 list, the year it was published. It remained on the list in 1949 as the number two best seller for that year and eventually sold over 800,000 copies. Not simply a sequel to the first Douglas tale of Christ, The Big Fisherman covers the life of Jesus from a closer vantage point. Simon Peter, the Big Fisherman, is central to the story and his struggle toward triumphant discipleship provides one of the chief perspectives on the life of Jesus. The romantic element of the story, however, revolves around the adventures and love affair of Fara and Voldi, two young Arabians. Fara vowed to assassinate her father, Herod Antipas, for the injury and unhappiness the short marriage and divorce had brought on her mother, an Arabian princess. In order to carry out the vow to avenge her mother and Arabia, Fara traveled to Palestine disguised first as a boy then later as Esther, a half-blooded Jewess. Voldi, her Arabian suitor, followed her, amid violent adventures, and eventually found her in the home of the Big Fisherman.

Fara's conversion to faith in Jesus, the miracle-worker, as the Messiah, provides another perspective. Seen

through the eyes of Fara, the activities of Jesus and Peter are chronicled by Douglas from miracle to miracle and from sermon to sermon. Jesus' ministry to the poor and oppressed does not end with his death, resurrection, and ascension, but is carried to Rome by the Big Fisherman and back to Arabia by Fara and Voldi. The novel ends with the Arabian romance satisfyingly complete but with the knowledge that the Big Fisherman is on his way to being martyred for his faith.

As Carl Bode has pointed out, Lloyd Douglas' two historical novels in the forties, were much more traditional in their religious themes and were significantly in contrast to his early writings.³⁸ The easy optimism of his prior writing is gone and the problem and power of evil permeate The Robe and The Big Fisherman. The temporal triumph of evil over good is illustrated by the martyrdom of Marcellus and Diana in the first and Peter in the second. By contrast, the young Doctor Merrick of Magnificent Obsession gets earthly rewards for his sterling adherence to a liberal faith.

As the times changed, Douglas' approach to religion changed as well. Years after leaving the ministry, Douglas' religious experience became more traditional, almost as though the conversion of Marcellus was also the conversion

³⁸Carl Bode, "Lloyd Douglas: Loud Voice In the Wilderness," American Quarterly, II (1950), pp. 340-352.

of Lloyd Douglas to orthodox Christian faith.³⁹ His published sermons, preached during the twenties and early thirties, reflect his modernism, with a strong faith in progress and the triumph of good over evil. The miraculous was explained away or reconciled with modern science.⁴⁰ In The Robe and The Big Fisherman, the miracles of Jesus play a large part in the description of the origins of Christian faith. Marcellus, the sceptic, is slowly brought to belief in miracles, although one disciple declares that belief in the wisdom and goodness of Jesus does not depend on accepting the miraculous.⁴¹ The Big Fisherman is unreservedly an apologetic for the supernatural, as it chronicles almost all of the Biblical accounts of Jesus' miracles.

Although the problem of evil and the miraculous play a larger role in Douglas' last two novels, his characters are still unconvincing sinners. His return to tradition does involve emphasizing deeply demanding, even life-risking, conversions, rather than the quick altruistic expressions of personality expansion found in his novels

³⁹Carl Bode, "Lloyd Douglas: Minority Report," Christian Century, Vol. 67 (July 5, 1950), pp. 817-818.

⁴⁰Lloyd C. Douglas, The Living Faith (Cambridge, Mass., 1955).

⁴¹Lloyd C. Douglas, The Robe (Cambridge, Mass., 1942), p. 254.

of the thirties. Yet, Marcellus, Demetrius, Peter, Fara, and Voldi are not wicked creatures who sing "such a worm as I," but are strong, admirable personalities who are in need of faith and purpose rather than repentance and grace. The truly wicked creatures, Emperors Tiberius and Caligula, Herod Antipas, and scores of lesser persons, are left untouched by Christian conviction and grace. In the age of Hitler and Stalin, it would seem that Douglas had focused the problem of evil on a few villains while keeping his basic faith in the goodness of man.

The force of Christ's personality is a continuous theme in Douglas' historical novels. In The Robe, Jesus is not portrayed as directly as in The Big Fisherman but Demetrius' first sight of the "enigmatic Jew" left him with an unusual impression. Just as in the case of Fara's and Peter's first contact with Jesus, it was the man's eyes that fascinated Demetrius. Described as "meditative" and "brooding," those eyes moved over the crowd until they rested on the young Greek slave.

The eyes calmly appraised Demetrius. They neither widened nor smiled; but, in some indefinable manner, they held Demetrius in a grip so firm it was almost a physical compulsion. The message they communicated was something other than sympathy, something more vital than friendly concern; a sort of stabilizing power that swept away all such negations as slavery, poverty, or any other afflicting circumstance. Demetrius was suffused with the glow of this curious

kinship. Blind with sudden tears, he elbowed through the throng and reached the roadside.⁴²

The mysterious power of Jesus' look and the "vital force" of his personality were emphases in harmony with Douglas' fascination with the Major Personality in his earlier novels. Yet his Jesus of The Robe was described as a "lonely man whom nobody understood" and whose power was mediated to the book's main characters by way of the seamless Robe. In The Big Fisherman Jesus had become a forceful leader with a large following. The lost sheep had been provided with a shepherd, who in turn passed on the mantle (literally the Robe) of strong leadership to the Big Fisherman. Peter's personality evolved, then, through a series of crises to become forceful and power-giving.

The message of Douglas' Christ was one which promised freedom from spiritual bondage and despair. Faith was the source of abundant living and even peace of mind. Personal contact with Jesus or the Robe brought peace and contentment to slaves like Demetrius and Marcipor, who became no longer restive over their servitude, with the conviction that everything would turn out all right. Personal happiness, peace, and security, amidst the decadence of the age was the promise of a life lived by faith.

⁴²Ibid., p. 74.

Although Douglas' Jesus is primarily a personality of power and a miracle worker, his teachings are not neglected. In The Robe, Christ's teachings are conceived as "The great idea" that when planted as a seed will eventually bear fruit in a new world. Jesus' rule or kingdom is described as deriving from the faith of the common people and building a world of justice and goodwill. The emphasis upon freedom and justice in The Robe provides a sharp critique of the Roman world, and implies that the early Christians were truly subversives who were planting seeds of revolution.

However, in The Big Fisherman, the spiritual nature of the Kingdom is emphasized more than the ethical dimensions of a new world. The Kingdom is now, a matter of the spirit of love, goodwill and peace, not material things. In fact, Douglas' gospel became quite anti-revolutionary in this last novel. The oppressed were frequently counseled to reject efforts at attaining social justice and to find happiness inside themselves. In an extra-Biblical account, the author has Jesus responding to a social revolutionary by retelling the banquet story in order to indicate that the poor should show no contempt for the king and his benefits. Peaceful submission was counseled by the Master to those wishing to rebel against the government. To those who interpreted Jesus' teachings as critical of the economic system of private contract and barter, his disciples quickly

endorsed business practices that were ethical. The radical communal experiment by the Christians in Jerusalem was also judged harshly by the author in his conservative description of the early church.

Discipleship, for Douglas' Christians, was a matter of being possessed by such faith and power that they were willing to give up everything. Wealth, influence, friends, and life itself were willingly sacrificed in loyalty to their faith in Jesus. Practicing the principles of Jesus was not enough for Marcellus who felt he had to associate himself with the outlawed Christian movement in Rome. His and Diana's death were depicted as the almost necessary result of total commitment to Christian discipleship in a hostile world. Simon Peter's martyrdom in The Big Fisherman, adds to the portrayal of the life of faith as one of spiritual security but material insecurity.

Best selling religion's criticisms of churchly, creedal religion is also characteristic of Douglas. The appeal of the Gospel accounts to many moderns may, of course, arise from the pre-church or primitive dimension of original Christian discipleship. Explicit criticism of the church was included by Douglas, however. The Jerusalem church was presented as a place of conflict and ill-will, where people came to loaf after saying an easy "I believe." Jewish sectarianism and religious support for exploitation of the poor, were also sharply condemned.

A discussion between Jesus and David, the Sadducee, surrounded "the tendency of any ancient establishment of laws or doctrines" to gradually accumulate "signs, symbols, tokens, amulets, sanctified vessels and enchanted words, until the life of the institution was smothered and its purposes forgotten. . . . " Endless debates over trivialities or splitting hairs over rites and ceremonies were judged evidences of the need for total reformation through a rebirth.⁴³

Lloyd Douglas' best selling quest for an historical faith had added to the evidence of a revival of interest in religion in the forties. Fulton Oursler provides strong evidence for the strength of that religious revival in the nineteen fifties. His best selling trilogy on the Christian faith indicated that a Catholic apologetic for the Christian faith had strong appeal in a period of religious revival and pluralism. The Greatest Story Ever Told, a narration of the life of Christ, was number six on the 1949 non-fiction list and eventually sold over 3,800,000 copies. Ourslers' second Bible narration, The Greatest Book Ever Written (1951), was a modern version of the Old Testament. It eventually sold almost 2,300,000 copies. The last volume of this trilogy, The Greatest Faith Ever Known, the story of the early church under Peter and Paul, was not as

⁴³Lloyd C. Douglas, The Big Fisherman (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), pp. 343-344.

successful as the first two, but it did rate number eight on the 1953 best seller list.

Fulton Oursler completed the three-faith contribution to the best selling interest in the life of Christ. Following Asch and Douglas, Oursler wrote best selling religion that drew praise, not only from his own Catholic community, but from Protestants and Jews as well. A journalist, novelist, mystery writer, playwright, and radio commentator, Fulton Oursler reflected in his personal life the "turn to religion." In 1934, he wrote A Skeptic in the Holy Land, the least successful of his books, which he attributed to the change his mind was undergoing. His last chapter reflected a less sceptical position than that of the earlier portions of the book.⁴⁴ By 1942, he was writing that in an age of anxiety, he had found "A Formula for Peace of Mind." Insecurity, fear, indecision, and the "need to believe," led him to advocate a faith worth dying for. The "three things we can believe in" were:

We can believe in a orderly universe and in a supreme being who is its governor, the source of the human spirit.

We can believe in ourselves, in having been created by infinite wisdom and mercy, and in our capacity through faith and good will to make this a better world.

⁴⁴ Stanley J. Kunitz, ed., Twentieth Century Authors: First Supplement (New York, 1955), pp. 746-747.

And we can believe in our Americanism as the finest expression of that capacity and that good will to make this a better world.⁴⁵

Oursler's wartime advocacy of belief in God, Ourselves, and Our Way of Life marked his own conversion to religious faith and the beginning of the best selling religious phase of his writing career. His complete adoption of Christian faith has been attributed to his reading of the works of the early Church Fathers. His return to religion was climaxed by his acceptance into the Roman Catholic Church. The eleven-year task of writing a life of Christ, which he hoped would lead men to the Christian character necessary for the survival of democracy, culminated in The Greatest Story Ever Told.⁴⁶

This "tale of the greatest life ever lived," had been first aired on a radio program in 1947. The ecumenical support for that program was a preview of the wide popularity the published version was to receive among Christians of many denominational ties. The book's close adherence to the literal Gospel accounts largely accounts for its classification as nonfiction. Yet the author felt free to dramatize the story through narration and dialogue not found in the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

⁴⁵Fulton Oursler, Three Things We Can Believe In (New York, 1942), p. 41.

⁴⁶Twentieth Century Authors: Supplement, p. 747.

The preministerial period of Jesus' life, in particular, was narrated in length and quantity not found in the Biblical stories. Yet Oursler's obvious devotion to the traditional episodes in the life of Jesus Christ, resulted in an interpretation of the Christian faith quite acceptable to Catholics and Protestants alike.

Oursler described the Sermon on the Mount as the speech which summed up "all His teachings, a complete and formal statement of His message, which the Apostles would learn by heart." The Beatitudes were eight rules to keep a man happy and blessed.

Not that He promised them security against the misfortunes of the world; He had no guarantee for any against pain, loss, grief, or disgrace. No such thing lay in the teaching whose revelations those twelve were to start reverberating in every land. All that Jesus had to offer was happiness. That was a state of mental well being by which a man could remain tranquil and yet with an eager zest for life, no matter how poignant his loss, how deep his sorrow, how excruciating his pain. Here were eight rules to keep that man serene and capable in the midst of any disaster.⁴⁷

This life of Christ was clearly directed to an age confronted with crisis and a predilection for religious security. In contrast to Bruce Barton's Christ, Oursler had presented a Messiah unencumbered by modern cultural heroes. Peace of mind, as promised by the first century

⁴⁷Fulton Oursler, The Greatest Story Ever Told (Garden City, N.Y., 1950), p. 139.

Carpenter, had more appeal at mid-twentieth century than models of business leadership.

The Greatest Book Ever Written, was Oursler's version of the "Old Testament Story," which was published in 1952. Written with the same purpose as the first best seller--that "readers might be filled with a desire to read the original message for themselves"--the author stressed the theme of God the Father and His great plan of creation. The drama of the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph was followed by the exodus and kingdoms of Israel. The trials of Babylonian captivity and the prophetic judgments of Elijah, Elisha, and Ezekial are woven into a unified fabric by the triumphant faith of God's chosen people. Oursler, of course, had built upon the abundant resources of the all-time best seller, yet it seems significant that the story, retold, had continued best selling success.

Oursler's Old Testament story, as well as his other works, could have been written without any awareness of critical-historical scholarship. At no point does the narrative reveal the presuppositions or conclusions of much of modern Biblical studies. The evolution of primitive faith, as revealed through multiple-authored accounts of early oral traditions, and the acceptance of symbolic religious interpretations rather than the historicity of Divine action, are themes not to be found in Oursler. The

quest for an historical religion was pursued by him with traditional devotion to the literal texts and assumptions cherished by most within the church. The last of the series, The Greatest Faith Ever Known, based largely on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, carried the Christian story to the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. Relying on more extra-Biblical traditions than in his previous works, Oursler's Catholicism was more obvious. Whether due to this fact or to the posthumous publication of the book or to inevitable dissipation of an author's popularity, The Greatest Faith was not a major success beyond 1953.

The best selling status of the Bible was re-emphasized by the appearance of the Revised Standard Version as number one on the nonfiction lists of 1952, 1953, and 1954. It had sold over four million copies in the first three years of its issuance. In 1958, The New Testament in Modern English, translated by J. B. Phillips, was a best seller, ranking number seven on the list. In those same years, Abingdon's Interpreters Bible and Zondervan's The Amplified Bible had large sales. When added to the perpetual best seller status of the Holy Bible in its many editions, these new versions dramatized the continuity as well as the revival of a religious reading public.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Hackett, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

N. B. Keyes' Story of the Bible World, with its beautiful illustrations and maps, was published in 1957 and sold almost 1,200,000 copies over the next several years. Jim Bishop followed his successful The Day Lincoln Was Shot with a similar account of The Day Christ Died, which was number ten on the 1957 list and eventually sold over a million and one-half copies. Much like Fulton Oursler, Bishop was concerned with bringing to life the Biblical account through dramatized and modern narration. Concentrating on the last twenty-four hours of Christ's life, Bishop wrote a semifictional account of that day around the skeleton of the Gospel accounts. Unlike Oursler's strict adherence to the New Testament text, Bishop's account freely imagined the moment by moment thoughts and dialogue of the major participants. The book's classification as nonfiction did not do justice to the rich, imaginative narrative and the subservient role in which the Gospel records were placed. When Bishop did try to follow the literal text, his narrative became wooden and crude, losing the dramatic and the paradoxical elements of this Incarnation story.

The quest for an historical religion produced not only lives of Christ, Biblical narrations, and first century tales, but also a number of works which capitalized on the renewed interest in traditional religious themes. Although not religious novels in any purposeful

sense, the works of A. J. Cronin did emphasize the themes of spiritual integrity versus corrupt materialism. The Citadel, the story of an idealistic Scottish doctor corrupted by a large and lucrative city practice, was number three in 1937 and number two in 1938. The Keys of the Kingdom was more successful and placed number one in 1941 and remained on the list in number ten spot in 1942. This story of a young Scottish priest, who went to China as a missionary, eventually sold almost 1,400,000 copies. Father Francis, Cronin's hero, stumbles on the keys to the kingdom of heaven by simply remaining steadfast to the deep purpose of his life through thirty-five years of constant hardship and danger in the China mission.

Franz Werfel's The Song of Bernadette (1942), out-sold The Robe in the first year of their publication. Number one in 1942 this tale of miracles was still on the list in 1943 and had a total sales of over a million and one-half. A German-Czech novelist, poet, and playwright, Werfel was born into a wealthy Jewish family in Prague. A "coffee house Messiah" during World War I, he was known in pacifist circles for his anti-militarist writings. A religious mystic rather than an orthodox Hebrew, Werfel escaped from the Nazi army in France by hiding in the city of Lourdes. It was while hiding in Lourdes that he became acquainted with the story of Bernadette Soubirous and the healing miracles at the grotto outside of the city in the mid-nineteenth century. His vow to sing the song

of Bernadette, if he ever reached safety in America, was kept as he portrayed the legendary life of the young girl who saw Our Lady of Lourdes.

The story was described by the author as a novel, yet not fiction. Somewhat like Oursler and Bishop, Werfel claimed to be providing only narration to historical records. To the Sceptic, the author answers:

All the memorable happenings which constitute the substance of this book took place in the world of reality. Since their beginning dates back no longer than eighty years, there beats upon them the bright light of modern history and their truth has been confirmed by friend and foe and by cool observers through faithful testimonies. My story makes no changes in this body of truth.⁴⁹

A Jew had been captivated by the authenticity of a Catholic saint and the miracles surrounding her vision of the Lady. Like Sholem Asch, Werfel was seen by some within the Jewish community as a symbol of a "yearning for status" and a loss of Jewish character and identity.⁵⁰ In an age of best selling religion, The Song of Bernadette provided another version of the quest for historically verified faith in the supernatural. The film version was one of the top ten pictures of the year, won five academy awards, and launched an acting career for Jennifer Jones.

⁴⁹Franz Werfel, The Song of Bernadette, trans. Ludwig Lewisohn (New York, 1943), p. viii.

⁵⁰Slockower, op. cit., pp. 74-75.

Miracles continued to be the theme in Russell Janney's The Miracle of the Bells (1946). A theatrical producer and playwright, Janney wrote a novel about faith that was number four in 1946 and the top best seller in 1947. Its sales reached 790,000. The story of Olga Treskovna and Bill Dunnigan, who brings Olga's body home to Coaltown for burial, is centered on the transforming power of faith, particularly faith in miracles. Almost a Catholic In His Steps, Janney's novel dramatizes the change in Coaltown as a result of Olga's funeral and the miraculous events engineered by Holywood "press agent" Bill Dunnigan. The continuous ringing of the town's churches' bells provided the publicity necessary to fashion a local miracle, an easily explained shift in two statues in Father Paul's church, into a means for reviving the influence of faith in the community.

The transformation of Father Paul and St. Michael's church into major forces of renewal in Coaltown, rather than obscure relics of an immigrant culture, was paralleled by transformations in the lives of capitalists, union radicals, and saloon keepers. The old criticism of the church's sanctimonious insincerity found expression in Father Spinsky of St. Leo's, whose "religion had hardened into a shell of brick and mortar" rather than spreading "charity, solace, forgiveness, inspiration" as the historic church had done. Fear and self-interest rather than love and friendship

characterized the successful ministry of Coaltown's largest parish. It was only when Olga's funeral successfully avoided Father Spinsky's greedy grasp and yet benefited his parish through the revenue for ringing the bells, that the priest was challenged with his failure to minister to the poor. "What would the Master have done?" became the question for Coaltown.⁵¹

Janney's best seller combined the old theme of faith that transcends institutions and creeds, with the renewed interest in the power of faith in miracles and the transforming influence of sacrificial discipleship. Even the "clean strength" of muscular Christianity was expressed in Dunnigan's fighting victory over the radical atheist, Jan Rubel. The pluralism of modern American religion was also reflected in this novel. Polish miners sang "Onward, Christian Soldiers"; a Jew built the Polish Catholics a new church; a Presbyterian mine owner was converted to social reform; and the Irishman, Dunnigan, remained an unconfirmed, unaffiliated bearer of joy and happiness.

Agnes Turnbull's, The Bishop's Mantle was number four in 1948 and sold over 600,000 copies. A novel about the professional ministry, it was somewhat in the tradition of Robert Elsmere and The Inside of the Cup. Hilary

⁵¹Russell Janney, The Miracle of the Bells (New York, 1946), pp. 203, 212-215.

Laurens, the young cleric who accepted the pastorate of St. Matthews Protestant Episcopal Church, was faced with the problem of ministering to a large, fashionable city church located in a neighborhood of poor tenement dwellers. Much like Reverend John Hodder of Churchill's novel, the young priest is confronted with the conflict between his Christian responsibilities and the powerful influence of a conservative tenement-owning vestryman. Yet Turnbull's treatment of social issues is much less forthright than the social gospel novel tradition. Her chief theme is really sex and religion, "the two most powerful forces in live." Laurens had much less trouble dealing with the vestryman than he did handling his socialite wife and a seductive widow. Ministry to the immediate neighborhood was relegated to the old assistant rector's wife, while Hilary Laurens struggled with the women in his life.

The theological modernism of The Bishop's Mantle does stand out in an age of traditionalism in best selling religion. Heavy attacks on creedalism and small, narrow-minded theologians abound in the book. Hilary follows Robert Elsmere and John Hodder in rejecting much of the literal nature of the Bible and religious truth. Tolerant, ecumenical, and anti-creedal, he followed an ethical gospel that beseeched "men to love God as their Father and all men as their neighbors, to feed the hungry, clothe

the naked, and visit the sick and the poor."⁵² Indebted to the progressive openness of William James, the authoress' cleric is pragmatic and assured in his faith in "the Guiding Hand" of providence. Yet the book ends on a note of affirmation and realism. Still committed to the institutional church, but under the cloud of the Second World War, the cleric chose to leave his parish and loved ones to minister in the face of death as a military chaplain.

The same year of The Bishop's Mantle, 1948, Thomas B. Costain's The Silver Chalice was published. Primarily a writer of historical romance, Costain had written another of that genre but with a Biblical setting. Not really a purpose novel, the story about the Holy Grail did deal with the faith and persecution of the early Christians. The young Greek artist, Basil, after being rescued from slavery by Luke the Physician, was commissioned by Joseph of Arimathea to fashion a fitting case for the cup Christ used at the Last Supper. In order to portray the figures of Christ's disciples on the chalice, it was essential that Basil should travel far and wide to seek out Paul, Peter, John, Mark, Luke, and James. Only through a vision was Basil able to complete his work on the head of Christ.

⁵²Agnes Sligh Turnbull, The Bishop's Mantle (New York, 1948), p. 183.

Basil's quest for the men to be immortalized on the chalice shared the stage with his romantic attachment to Deborra, Joseph's granddaughter. The background of the drama involved life in Antioch, Jerusalem, Ephesus, and Rome. The corruption of the civilized world is contrasted with the simple integrity of the early Christian communities, in much the same manner as in Lloyd Douglas' novels. It is the mystery surrounding the chalice, however, that is central to the story. The persecution of Christians remained a small part of the colorful narrative. Yet the reverent treatment of the faith of the first Christians certainly did not detract from the book's popularity to a generation in quest of an historical faith. It reached the top best selling spot in 1952, remained in second place the following year, and sold over 2,300,000 copies.

A Catholic version of the novel about the professional ministry appeared in 1950. Henry Morton Robinson's The Cardinal, the story of Father Steve Fermoye, was number one in 1950, number four in 1951, with a sales total of almost three million. A lengthy, but warm story of a young priest's spiritual, intellectual, and social development, The Cardinal dealt with a panorama of contemporary issues. The most thoroughly Catholic best seller to appear in America, Robinson's novel faced the challenges of international conflict and intellectual

revolution with sophistication and depth. The author's indebtedness to the Great Books emphasis of his Columbia Teacher, John Erskine, was apparent in Father Fermoy's struggles about the nature and destiny of man and society.

The Cardinal's treatment of the church in Rome and America was not uncritical. Cardinal Glennon and other clerics were described as politically ambitious men who used others in their selfish pursuits. Jealousy, greed, unconcern, and gluttony were all present within the sanctified hallows of the church. The religious bigotry on the outside, particularly in the South, was also painted in all its ugliness. Father Steve's eventual elevation to the Cardinalate, marked his triumph as a disciplined servant of the Church. The author's description summarized this development:

Possessor of a mind seasoned by reality and fortified by long experience of men and affairs, Stephen Fermoy was the ripe product of religious faith, spiritual discipline, and intellectual energy. Courage to speak and discretion to keep silence were equally balanced on his tongue. A quarter century of priestly obedience had not impaired his independence as a man, nor had the instinct for authority blunted his still deeper instincts to worship and love. Now at fifty-one, tender of heart, staunch of soul, and well conditioned in body, he was being called upon to exert his full powers in the service of the Holy Roman Catholic Church.⁵³

⁵³Henry Morton Robinson, The Cardinal (New York, 1950), p. 561.

How best should he use those powers? What was the essential function of the church? What positions and actions should it take in a world beset by wars and evil men? Should the church retreat to the catacombs? The answer, of course, in Stephen's mind was a strong NO!

Such a withdrawal would be contrary to the injunction Christ had laid upon His Apostles: "Go ye, and teach all nations." All nations! None to be favored, none neglected, none exempt. The divine mission to preserve and extend the faith was universal, constant, binding upon all. If this mission were to be performed the church must manifest itself clearly, actively, militantly, in a world sorely needing some accent of the Holy Ghost.

The sacraments were to be the primary instrumentalities by which the work of the church should be carried on. To administer these sacraments, a tremendous organization was necessary. The Visible Church, "with its ceremonial observances, its laws and revenues, its spiritual head, the Pope, and under him the bishops--successors of the Apostles--must be vigorously maintained."⁵⁴

Cardinal Stephen Fermoye reasoned on:

Of necessity this visible organization must work within the existing pattern of society. It was legitimate therefore, by means of concordats and other diplomatic measures, to arrive at agreements with civil governments that recognized the rights of God and the claims of Christian conscience.

For the present, since nationalism dominated the structure of human society, the Church had to function within that

⁵⁴Ibid.

frame. Eventually, in God's time, the church would be able to disclose and follow the larger design of his plan. Then the counsels of blessedness in the Sermon on the Mount might be realized and the cruelty and discord of this age would be past.⁵⁵

Robinson's sympathetic treatment of the priesthood and the vision of the Church Militant is in harmony with both the renewed interest in traditional religious security and the new stature of Roman Catholicism in America's religious pluralism. The author's literary skill in developing complex, realistic characterizations no doubt explained much of The Cardinal's best selling status. But the strong apologetic for historic Christian faith, as expressed in the Apostolic tradition and in the modern priestly task, may also have been a key explanation for its high rank among mid-century's best selling religion.

Best selling religion in the nineteen fifties, in contrast to the forties, was predominantly found in works of nonfiction. Fulton Oursler, Norman Vincent Peale, Fulton J. Sheen, Billy Graham, and Catherine Marshall are the dominant names on the list of popular religious writings of that recent decade. After The Cardinal, in 1950, religious fiction was confined to lesser successes such as Asch's Moses (1951), Cardinal Spellman's The Foundling

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 562.

(1951), and Kathryn Hulme's The Nun's Story (1956). As the decade ended, Leon Uris' novel about the making of modern Israel, Exodus, occupied first place on the 1959 list and Taylor Caldwell's Biblical novel about Luke, Dear and Glorious Physician, ranked number seven. The quest for an historical religion had not disappeared from the best seller lists.

CHAPTER IX

PEACE AND POWER

Best selling religion during the post World War II religious revival was characterized by themes of peace and power as well as the quest for an historical religion. It was the period of religious best sellers with titles such as Peace of Mind, Peace of Soul, Peace With God and The Power of Positive Thinking. Such themes reflected a central characteristic of what Will Herberg had documented as "an upswing of religion."¹ A best selling religious public was not surprising at a time when opinion polls indicated that pervasiveness of religious identification had become a significant feature of American life.²

Other quantitative assessments of religious life supported this conclusion. Figures for church membership detailed the successful growth patterns of the churches. Growing more than twice as fast as the population, church

¹Will Herberg, Protestant--Catholic--Jew (Garden City, N.Y., 1960), p. 56.

²Ibid., pp. 46-47.

membership reached 63 per cent of the population in 1958.³ Church attendance and Sunday School enrollment increased substantially. Church expansion and construction jumped noticeably, with large sums of money donated for these projects. Giving was at an all-time high, as public opinion placed increased value on religious institutions and their leaders.⁴

However, there were other cultural evidences of this religious revival. Magazine articles, syndicated clerical columnists in the newspapers, Presidential prayer breakfasts, "In God We Trust" on the coins, Billy Graham "crusades," and Biblical films from Hollywood all evidenced an "upswing of religion."⁵ Faith had become fashionable, as millions followed President and Mrs. Eisenhower in their newly acquired habit of regular church attendance. Jane Russell was quoted as having found God to be "a livin' doll."⁶ Broadway's Tin Pan Alley provided the hit parade with Miss Russell's reported favorite, "The Man Upstairs."

³Benson Y. Landis, "Trends In Church Membership in the United States," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 332 (November, 1960), p. 4.

⁴Herberg, op. cit., pp. 50-52.

⁵Paul Hutchinson, "Have We a 'New' Religion?," Life, Vol. 38, April 11, 1955, p. 138.

⁶Harry C. Meserve, "The New Piety," The Atlantic Monthly, June, 1955, p. 34.

"It Is No Secret What God Can Do" and "I Believe" added record and sheet music sales to the increasing popularity of "pop" religious songs. Whether on the radio, TV, or juke box, the theme of faith and heaven pervaded popular culture.⁷

The surge of piety went beyond church statistics, the Billy Graham crusades, political prayer breakfasts, and the entertainment world to include many of the "high brows" as well as "middle" and "low brows." The interest in religion on college and university campuses was reflected in the curriculum and in the extra-curricular activities.⁸ The new intellectual prestige of religion was evident on all levels of cultural life. The theological revival and the popular revival became serious issues for intellectuals both within and without the religious community. Whether a matter of vogue and fashion or deep concern and interest, religion had become a renewed force in American life.⁹

The nature of that renewed force was a matter of interest to analysts and commentators. Whatever the

⁷Hutchinson, op. cit., pp. 138, 140.

⁸Reinhold Niebuhr, "Varieties of Religious Revival," The New Republic, Vol. 132 (June 6, 1955), pp. 13-16.

⁹Herberg, op. cit., pp. 53-55.

socio-psychological roots of the religious revival, the commentators seemed to agree that "peace of mind," or "peace with God" was the main theme. The new piety may have been a response to the apparent anxieties of mid-century, for a gospel of adjustment rather than transformation was the form cited first by several critics.¹⁰

Patriotism and the "emotional shock treatment" of revivalism were other forms the new piety took in these anxiety-ridden days, yet the most pervasive quest was for peace of mind and soul.¹¹ To one critic, it was largely a "cult of reassurance." This cult was described as:

. . . a blocking to religion, especially in middle-class circles, for a renewal of confidence and optimism at a time when these are in short supply. It is turning to the priest for encouragement to believe that, despite everything that has happened in this dismaying century, the world is good, life is good, the human story makes sense and comes out where we want it to come out.¹²

This turning from frustration to reassurance was set against the background of what Martin Marty called "the second great revolution in American religion." The first revolution, associated with the eighteenth century Great

¹⁰ Meserve, op. cit., pp. 34-35; A. Roy Eckardt, "The New Look In American Piety," The Christian Century, November 17, 1954; Herberg, op. cit., p. 266.

¹¹ Meserve, op. cit., pp. 34-36.

¹² Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 140.

Awakening, had terminated the Puritan age and inaugurated the Pietist or Methodist age of American religious history. The recent revival of interest in religion-in-general was seen as terminating the Pietist age and inaugurating the post-Protestant age. This revival of generalized religious interest was part of what Marty called "a maturing national religion."¹³

The revival of interest in religion, or "faith in faith," encountered the problems of relativism, pragmatism, and the common "American Way of Life" creed by developing a reassuring "religion-in-general." Reflecting an erosion of distinctive Christian doctrine, in the face of pluralism and secularism, the God of religion-in-general became a "harmless little divinity." Understandable and manageable, God had become, to some, a "jolly good fellow" who was primarily in the business of bringing comfort to the anxious. To Martin Marty, this comfortable familiarity with a chummy God explained the coincidence of a great revival of religious interest with a major outburst of secularism.¹⁴

It was against this background of revival of religious interest, in the form of peace of mind, peace of

¹³ Martin E. Marty, The New Shape of American Religion (New York, 1959), p. 28.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 31-40.

soul religion-in-general, that the names Joshua Liebman, Norman Vincent Peale, Fulton Sheen, and Billy Graham appear. The forties and fifties had experienced a quest for historical religion as reflected in the best selling status of The Nazarene, The Robe, The Big Fisherman, The Greatest Story Ever Told, and The Cardinal. Those same years experienced a flood of inspirational and religious "How to" books that stressed the theme of peace and power. Liebman's Peace of Mind, Sheen's Peace of Soul, Peale's The Power of Positive Thinking, and Graham's Peace With God give best selling support to the recent "cult of reassurance" as well as some old themes in popular religious thought.

Two war-time books led off the list of nonfiction religious best sellers. Norman F. Nygaard's Strength For Service to God and Country (1942) and General Robert L. Scott's God Is My Co-Pilot (1943) failed to make the annual lists but each sold over one million copies. Combined with the popularity of The Song of Bernadette (1942), The Robe (1942) and The Apostle (1943), these Second World War best sellers provide a sharp contrast with the nonreligious nature of World War I best sellers. H. G. Wells' God the Invisible King (1917) was the only religious book on the war-time lists. The adage "there are no atheists in the foxholes" seemed to be more applicable to the temper of the forties than it had been twenty-five years earlier.

The foxhole analogy has been applied to the continued Cold War religious revival. D. W. Brogan, in describing the American character in the mid-fifties, argued that "refusal to give lip service, at least, to the American religion is a kind of treason and is punished as it was in the America of a century ago."¹⁵ This foxhole situation was part of the shattered illusions of American superiority and the insecurity in facing competing ideologies which had been brought by the period of Hot and Cold War. It was at the time of these literal and figurative foxholes that Harry Emerson Fosdick's On Being a Real Person (1943) reached the best seller list.

Fosdick was one of the best-known liberal preachers in America. Pastor of Riverside Church in New York City, Fosdick had a national reputation as a leader in the struggle against the fundamentalists. As he recounted in his autobiography, he presented the case for a tolerant liberalism that avoided the narrowness of intellectual "modernism" as well as an impersonal, obscurantist fundamentalism. Desiring to maintain the "priceless values" of the Christian heritage, he and the evangelical liberals fought to preserve their liberty from creedalism of both left and right. In fact, Fosdick's anti-creedalism and

¹⁵D. W. Brogan, The American Character (New York, 1956), p. xii.

anti-sectarianism place him squarely in the tradition of best selling religion.¹⁶

In his early books, Twelve Tests of Character (1922) and Adventurous Religion (1926), Harry Emerson Fosdick had stressed a Jamesean antipathy to logic over life. Religion, for Fosdick, was not a matter of theological correctness but of a life of action. A capacity for getting beyond one's willed self, a readiness for new things, and avoidance of psychological stagnation were his counseled goals. He worried about the fact that multitudes of people were living "frittered" lives. Religion was the source of vitality, of more life. Therefore his conviction was that the business of religion was to unlock inner resources, with the result that lives would be courageous and fruitful.¹⁷

Fosdick's most popular book, On Being a Real Person, was number four on the 1943 best seller list. In it he warned against a Puritanism that resulted in a willed, rigid, radically rationalized character. He counseled "shouldering responsibility" for the development of an integrated, focused personality. Psychological "wholeness" was essential to happiness in the face of conflicts arising from desires, ambitions, and other forms of egocentric

¹⁶Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Living of These Days (New York, 1956), pp. 144-176.

¹⁷Donald Meyer, The Positive Thinkers (Garden City, N.Y., 1965), pp. 194-199.

impulses.¹⁸ Successful achievement of "coherent, steady, one-directional" real personality was primarily an inward and spiritual process. Fosdick's call for personal responsibility, in spite of hereditary and environmental forces, was not unlike that of the classic inspirational best seller, Hannah Whithall Smith's The Christian's Secret of a Happy Live (1875).¹⁹

Fosdick's approach to "real personhood" or the happy life was, unlike most of the older inspirational works, deeply indebted to the new depth psychologies and the new emphases in personal counseling. Fosdick received considerable tutoring in psychiatric theory from Dr. Thomas W. Salmon, medical director of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene. The new methods of psychotherapy and psychosomatic medicine informed his own dedicated counseling ministry as well as his writings.²⁰ On Being a Real Person revealed those influences at a time when professional resources for clergy and laymen were still quite limited. Donald Meyer described this best seller as:

. . . pure therapeutic psychology, a layman's guide, written with perfectly reasonable lay sophistication,

¹⁸Harry Emerson Fosdick, On Being A Real Person (New York, 1943), pp. 1-33.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 47.

²⁰Fosdick, The Living of These Days, pp. 218-219.

to the sorts of psychological problems in depth from which people suffered without knowing what was wrong. Their way out was to come to know--to recognize conscience's tyranny, locate pervasive anxiety's origin, comprehend the displacement of instinct. As a criticism of the old Puritan, Victorian and fundamentalist habit of meeting psychological woes with legalistic, impersonal, moralistic prescriptions, On Being a Real Person was a liberating book indeed.²¹

Positive faith, for Fosdick, "awakens listless minds, expels negative moods, releases dormant energy, breaks through the isolating walls of lonely selves, and creates in insecure souls a basis for steadiness and poise" and even results in physical healing.²² Yet Fosdick's "practical use of faith" avoided the mystical dimensions of Hannah W. Smith's pietism and the "mind cure" promise of Ralph W. Trine's In Tune With the Infinite (1897). Peace, Power, and Plenty were certainly a part of Fosdick's message, but not in the context of effortless union with Truth. In fact, Fosdick's examples of true religious energy were persons, both famous and obscure, who had triumphed over obstacles in lives of real struggle. Peace and power were fruits to be enjoyed only as part of tension-racked lives of real struggle. Fosdick's view of the healthy-minded personality, owed more to William James (as evidenced by his numerous Jamesean quotes) than to the "positive thinkers" both past and present.

²¹Meyer, op. cit., p. 199.

²²Fosdick, On Being a Real Person, pp. 252-253.

Fosdick's use of psychology was a harbinger of religion's turn to psychology in the years to follow. The depression years had, of course, heard from popular religious psychologies other than that of Fosdick. Emmet Fox and Henry C. Link had offered mixtures of the old individualism and the new psychology. In an age when Moral Re-Armament was blossoming with its promises of peace and power, even Lloyd Douglas' novels dealt primarily with the subject of healing. Yet it was not until the late forties and fifties that modern "pastoral counseling" and religious psychology came into its own. At a 1948 conference on religion and psychiatry, representatives from both the religious and medical communities were present. The new journal, Religion and Health, joined the ranks of the older journal, Pastoral Psychology. In 1954 an Academy of Religion and Mental Health was founded to stimulate the professional development of young clergymen.²³

The new popularity of psychology corresponded with a flood of mind cure books and cults. In the tradition of Phineas P. Quimby, Mary Baker Eddy, and Charles Fillmore, "thinking the thoughts of God" as a means toward health and happiness, numerous books and magazines appeared after World War II. Hilde Black Shaffer's The Eternal Miracle (1954), Joel Goldsmith's The Spiritual Interpretation of

²³Meyer, op. cit., pp. 222-233.

Scripture (1947), Gardner Hunting's The Word Beyond Words (1953) and others poured forth. Mind cure churches flourished also. New Thought, Christian Science, and Unity grew along with the renewed interest in the healing power of religion.²⁴ But the significance of both professional and cultish movements was evident only as the broader popular culture sought psychological and physical healing through best selling books on peace and power.

Joshua Loth Liebman's Peace of Mind (1946) established the best selling pattern for inspirational books following World War II. Peace of Mind was number two on the 1946 list; one in 1947; and three in 1948. It eventually sold in excess of 1,100,000 copies. Liebman, a rabbi of Temple Israel in Boston, became a nationally known religious leader and one of the leading radio preachers in America. In addition to his sermons on national radio networks, Rabbi Liebman lectured at Harvard, Cornell, Vassar, Dartmouth, Wellesley, Smith, and other prestigious institutions of higher learning. He even became visiting professor of Jewish Philosophy and Literature at Andover-Newton Theological Seminary, a pioneering venture for a Christian theological school.

Peace of Mind was primarily an attempt to integrate the perspective of Freudian psychoanalysis with the

²⁴Ibid., pp. 24-27, 236.

perspective of the religious community. Writing "in the conviction that social peace can never be permanently achieved so long as individuals engage in civil war with themselves," Liebman addressed himself to the "average person" who struggles with guilt, inner confusion and conflict. Modern psychology, he argued, had discovered enough about human behavior to explain why people hate themselves and others and why men fearfully lose faith in life and God. It was to "perplexed moderns," who could not wait for necessary social change and justice to deal with their neuroses and maladjustments, that Peace of Mind was directed. Emotional and spiritual insecurity needed the healing influence of Freudian psychology and faith.²⁵

Liebman was concerned with proving the need for psychology as an ally of religion. Therefore, he had sharp words for both religionists and scientists who denied the desirability of that alliance. Prophetic religion, he argued, had stressed through the ages the values of forgiveness and tolerance; the importance of free will and human responsibility; the danger of rigid pride, insincerity, and cynicism; the belief in divine resources available for change and growth and man's untapped inner resources for goodness and creativity; and, finally, the unity of God and the unity of man within himself.

²⁵Joshua Loth Liebman, Peace of Mind (New York, 1946), pp. xi-xiv.

Psychotherapy supports these values, he said, and parallels the work of religion by "creating in man an emotional and psychological togetherness that makes him one as God is one." It was to be, therefore, "the mighty confluence of dynamic psychology and prophetic religion" that would lead modern man to peace of mind.²⁶

Religion did come in for some sharp criticism by the Freudian popularizer. Self-hatred and morbid feelings of guilt were often attributed to the taboos of organized religion. Christianity, in particular, was accused by Liebman of unhealthily calling thoughts as well as acts sin and employing the strategy of repression in the battle with evil. Psychotherapy, in contrast, could liberate men by encouraging them to acknowledge and face their anti-social impulses. Inner anxieties, conflicts, angers, and desires, as well as physical ills, sometimes disappeared miraculously under psychoanalysis. Self-understanding rather than self-condemnation was the way to inner peace and mature conscience.²⁷

Liebman was, in actuality, calling for a new theology as well as an acceptance of modern psychology. Sounding an almost Coxian note, he followed Whitehead in his view that God needs the active collaboration of men in the evolution of a better world. Liebman felt that

²⁶Ibid., pp. 18-20.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 23-33.

America's democratic heritage equipped this country for the creation of a new idea of God; "a God reflected in the brave creations of self-reliant social pioneers; a religion based not upon surrender or submission, but on a new birth of confidence in life and in the God of life."²⁸ This idea of people thinking of themselves as "responsible co-workers with God" was quite within the pluralistic and activistic tradition of Jamesean pragmatism.

Liebman's Jewishness is so pervasive in his best seller that it becomes another piece of evidence for the success of religious pluralism in mid-twentieth century America. Although critical of the emotional barrenness of liberal religion, Liebman's indebtedness to Reformed Judaism is quite obvious. That Peace of Mind should so do well in a traditionally Protestant culture might also be attributable to the quest for "peace and power" at a time when traditional Christian doctrine had experienced an erosion under the flooding impact of a revival of religion-in-general. In any case, it was clear that the temper of the times was supportive of Rabbi Liebman's lucid reconciliation of the new psychology and religion.

One of the most unique attempts to deal with the post-war problems of peace and power in a conflict-ridden world was Pierre Lecomte du Noüy's Human Destiny.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 171-173.

Published in 1947, it ranked sixth on that year's non-fiction list, and sold 560,000 copies. Although it is not usually classified as a religious book, one critic estimated that more clergymen probably read and quoted from Human Destiny than from any two religious books published during the same period.²⁹ The quotability of this French scientist's best seller was certainly limited by his tendency to use an exotic collection of scientific vocabulary. Yet his paradoxical criticism of scientific progress while affirming the progressive evolution of mankind certainly could have appealed to clergymen trying to reconcile their "modernism" with the post-war disillusionments.

Lecomte du Noüy was primarily concerned about inner resources too. Addressing himself to the intelligent non-believer, he set out to fight "paralyzing skepticism and destructive materialism" which he attributed to a faith in the unlimited power of reason and science. Only by an appeal to scientific thinking could the limits of reason and empiricism be exposed, he argued. Knowledge of modern scientific thought, particularly the philosophy of science, could help the layman avoid uncritical acceptance of the reasoning of materialistic scientists. The destiny of man, then, was dependent on men freeing themselves from the

²⁹Eugene Exman, "Reading, Writing, and Religion," Harper's Magazine, Vol. 206 (May, 1953), p. 85.

limiting bonds of atheism and materialism and reaffirming free will, moral responsibility, and spiritual hope.³⁰

Human Destiny traced the elements of subjectivity and relativity in the scientific method as well as the evolutionary origins of man. It was the author's use of evolutionary theory that had significance for religious thought. He argued that man was evolving toward spirituality, as revealed in the perfect life of Jesus. Man's struggle with his natural environment was part of the theistic evolutionary process. This "telefinalist hypothesis of evolution" was identified as essentially that of Christian morality. If men, individually, considered themselves active, fundamental factors in the improvement of the organisms, peace and justice would follow. Collective efforts to educate the young in their moral, spiritual, and intellectual responsibilities would promote the evolution of a society based on "Christian mysticism," and the resulting principles of liberty and human dignity.³¹

Human destiny depended, according to Lecomte du Noüy, on the individualistic libertarianism incorporated in his religious view of man's evolution. His eclecticism of ideas and his universalist explanations aided, no doubt, his best

³⁰Pierre Lecomte du Noüy, Human Destiny (New York, 1947), pp. xiii-xix.

³¹Ibid., pp. 176-187; 266-273.

selling efforts. The defense of a nondenominational, anti-creedal, Christian mysticism would have appealed to a continuous best selling religious public. The critique of scientism would have appealed to disillusioned "neo-orthodoxy," yet his theistic evolutionism could still attract religious liberals. What tied the work together in this anxious post-war world was its endorsement of the inner quest for peace as part of the larger human destiny.

The high priest of the cult of peace and power was the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale. He made his first appearance on the best seller lists in 1948 with A Guide to Confident Living. Number nine on the nonfiction list of that year, it remained on the list in 1949 as number ten, and sold a total of 612,000 copies. His The Power of Positive Thinking, published in 1952, was second only to Fulton Oursler's The Greatest Story Ever Told in nonfiction sales during the period, and third on the all-time, religious nonfiction list behind Hurlbut's The Story of the Bible (1904). The Power of Positive Thinking was sixth on the 1952 list; second in 1953, 1954, and 1955, with sales that reached 2,505,000. In 1957 Peale was back on the list in third place with Stay Alive All Your Life.

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale was a small town Ohioan and a Methodist preacher who had succeeded Dr. Daniel A. Poling as pastor of New York's Marble Collegiate Reformed Church, the oldest continuous Protestant pastorate in the

country. Like his fellow Ohioan, Lloyd Douglas, Peale had been a University town preacher (Syracuse) before switching denominations in accepting the prestigious Fifth Avenue pulpit. His nonseccratian, noncreedal theology was no barrier to such a change. When a friend suggested that he was too much the unsophisticated Ohioan to minister to the New York congregation, he replied much as a Harold Bell Wright character would:

I know. . . . But maybe they're tired of sophistication on Fifth Avenue. Maybe New Yorkers are fed up with intellectualized sermons. Maybe the reason so many of those churches are half empty is that nobody is telling the Gospel story in language that people can understand.³²

Much like his fellow New York preacher, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Peale saw his pastoral ministry result in successful church growth and an endless amount of personal counseling. As he became deeply involved in the counseling of troubled souls and the administration of church affairs, Peale found himself frequently unable to effectively handle the tensions and frustrations of such responsibilities. His mother's faith and his wife's guidance led him to practice the message he preached: Faith and self-surrender. The whole secret of effective living he found summarized in nine words: "Trust God and live one day at a time."³³

³²Arthur Gordon, Norman Vincent Peale: Minister to Millions (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1958), p. 152.

³³Ibid., p. 165.

As his interest in counseling grew, Peale found himself unequipped to utilize the new psychological knowledge. Therefore he sought out a psychoanalyst, Dr. Smiley Blanton, who agreed to be a consultant on difficult cases. Over a period of twenty years, these two men wedded religion and psychiatry into a large busy clinic, which had a staff of ministers, psychoanalysts, psychologists, physicians, and social workers. Peale's money-raising efforts for the church's religio-psychiatric clinic and the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry were highly successful. Yet Peale's interests eventually tended more toward mass counseling, as he wrote, traveled, and spoke to national audiences by way of magazines, newspapers, radio, and television. In 1954 he was appropriately named one of the "Twelve Best U.S. Salesmen."³⁴

In 1940, Peale and his psychiatrist friend, Blanton, wrote Faith Is the Answer, a description of their clinical successes with the therapeutic use of applied religion. Following the war, he launched the magazine Guideposts, which reached 800,000 circulation in the late fifties. In contrast to his first two books, The Art of Living (1938) and You Can Win (1939), his post-war writings hit a best selling public. A Guide to Confident Living, a collection of sermons on "the principles of happiness and success,"

³⁴Ibid.

soon established him as one of the leaders of the age's quest for peace and power. The Power of Positive Thinking and Stay Alive All Your Life made him the best selling exponent of the peace of mind cult.

In reviewing Peale's work, one critic has "some negative thinking about Norman Vincent Peale" and his idea "that affirmative attitudes help to make their own affirmations come true." Accusing him of erecting "a complete and infallible philosophy, psychology, and religion, so that he can solve every problem just by denying it really exists," William Lee Miller went on to charge Peale with promising "that every wish can be fulfilled just by 'thinking' it."³⁵ By following such formulas as: "Believe in Yourself"; "Try Prayer Power"; "Expect the Best and Get It"; "Don't Believe in Defeat"; and "Draw Upon That Higher Power," the reader could expect "A Peaceful Mind" that "Generates Power."³⁶

Peale certainly promised everything. His emphasis on status and success clearly placed him in the long line of self-help success books dating back to the nineteenth

³⁵William Lee Miller, "Some Negative Thinking About Norman Vincent Peale," The Reporter, Vol. 12, No. 1 (January 13, 1955), pp. 19-24.

³⁶Norman Vincent Peale, The Power of Positive Thinking (New York, 1952).

century.³⁷ In spite of "breaks," hardships and tragedies, Peale counseled not allowing obstacles to control one's thought patterns.

By learning how to cast them from the mind by refusing to become mentally subservient to them, and by channeling spiritual power through your thoughts, you can rise above obstacles which ordinarily might defeat you. By methods I shall outline, obstacles are simply not permitted to destroy your happiness and well-being.³⁸

The examples Peale cites, of successful converts to positive thinking, are largely salesmen and executives whose peace of mind has given them greater efficiency and power over others with whom they work and associate. Paradoxically, Peale's examples of success are illustrated largely in material terms, yet his professed concern is with inner certitude and serenity rather than conquest of the external world. This ambivalence in positive thinking suggests the dual nature of the post-war religious revival: a quest for peace of mind in the midst of rising secularism.

It may be that positive thinking was less a traditional "how to" book on social mobility than an indication of the failure of the dream of success. At one time success had been cited as evidence of religious standing and respectability, but in modern America such goals had lost

³⁷ John G. Cawelti, Apostles of the Self-Made Man (Chicago, 1965), p. 209.

³⁸ Peale, op. cit., pp. ix-x.

their force. Instead of proclaiming that the quest for success would lead to those moral and religious ends which alone create true happiness, Peale was affirming the opposite. Happiness itself is the means to success.³⁹ Peale's Fifth Avenue counselees were evidence of the fact that social status did not bring happiness. Success was still to be valued, but subordinated to the quest for inner peace and power.

Peale's religious thought is difficult to isolate from the many "principles," "steps," and "formulas" for vital living. Nowhere in his books does he systematically outline his theological presuppositions. Faith in God and the practical fruits of that faith is the only consistent religious affirmation made by Peale. Religion is frequently described as "a scientific procedure for successful living" and prayer is also a "scientific religious practice."⁴⁰ Peale's "scientific religion," with its promises of wish fulfillment, was clearly in the tradition of the mind cure. In fact, Donald Meyer refers to the Power of Positive Thinking as the "Bible of American autohypnotism."⁴¹

³⁹Cawelti, op. cit., pp. 217-218.

⁴⁰Peale, op. cit., p. 46.

⁴¹Meyer, op. cit., p. 245.

The absence of traditional elements of Christian doctrine may explain Peale's popularity as the leader of a "cult of reassurance." Peale's many formulas and spiritual exercises remind the reader of both psychological conditioning and transcendental union with the Oversoul. But the problem of sin and the complexity of human motivation is absent from Peale's concept of a personality controlled by positive thinking. Peale's gospel also failed to deal with real limitations, failures, tensions, in the way more traditional prophetic religion had done. In contrast to both Fosdick and Liebman, Peale seemed unable to include the psychological and religious perspectives that counseled repentance and saw constructive uses of anxiety.

His failure to be traditional may explain his best selling success. His proverbs, stories, and sermonettes appealed, no doubt, to the childhood memories of many religiously disorganized Americans. He had so many elements in his writings that there was something to please everybody, with little to displease. But his chief appeal was the reassurance he could give to those seeking peace and power. As Wayne E. Oates put it:

Dr. Peale has reaffirmed two basic ideas that men and women are desperately eager to believe: (a) the reality of hope, i.e., that in the midst of despair there is such a thing as hope for them as individuals;

(b) the ability and responsibility of each man and woman to do something tangible about his own situation.⁴²

Since many people like to hear that they can and must do something about controlling and guiding their own destiny, they were receptive to the news that God was readily available for handling the problems and perplexities of everyday life. Norman Vincent Peale was a master at reassurance and his sermons became "the paregoric of the tense, unloved, lonely, fearful, purposeless, fretful masses who buy, read, and wear out his books."⁴³

The quest for peace and power received support from the writings of Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk. The most unapologetic Catholic writings to reach best seller proportion, The Seven Story Mountain was published in 1948 and reached the third spot on the 1949 list, and Seeds of Contemplation (1949) eventually sold 710,000 copies. The Seven Story Mountain was Merton's autobiography, with his conversion to the Catholic faith as its central theme. His intellectual and spiritual journey, as chronicled in this best seller, took him from his native France and a vacuous Protestantism through Columbia University and a short-lived Communist experience to his conversion to

⁴²Wayne E. Oates, "The Cult of Reassurance," Religion in Life, Vol. XXIV (Winter, 1954-1955), p. 75.

⁴³Ibid., p. 76.

Christian faith. The crises of his personal life and the European crisis of the thirties, combined to precipitate a soul-searching that carried Merton beyond an aspiring literary career to a Trappist Monastery. Rejecting "a kind of intellectual and esthetic gluttony," he accepted the superiority of the life of faith and contemplation.⁴⁴

The presence of The Seven Story Mountain on the best seller list added strong evidence for the assertion that religious pluralism was now a reality in America. Following The Song of Bernadette (1942) and The Miracle of the Bells (1946), Merton's autobiographical defense of the Catholic faith shared the 1949 best seller list with Fulton Oursler and Fulton Sheen. Henry Morton Robinson's The Cardinal followed on the next year's list, and was followed in turn by The Foundling, a novel by Cardinal Spellman. This substantial contribution by Catholic writers, when combined with the works of Asch and Liebman, revealed a decline in the hegemony of Protestant writers of religious best sellers.

Merton's writings, in particular, were in an orthodox Roman Catholic tradition. The Seven Story Mountain was a strong apologetic for the contemplative life of faith as expressed in the doctrine, ritual, and history of the Roman

⁴⁴Thomas Merton, The Seven Story Mountain (New York, 1948), p. 242.

church. His Seeds of Contemplation was considered, by the author, to be in the tradition of Pascal, St. John of the Cross, Guigo the Carthusian, and Thomas à Kempis. In an age of "too much passion and too much physical violence," Merton placed himself in the mystical and ascetic traditions to write about the peace and power that springs from the inner life devoted to God.⁴⁵ However, unlike Peale and the mind cure cults, Merton did not focus on status and power in successful worldly pursuits. Nor did he criticize theological or creedal emphases. There was room for dogma, creed, and ritual within the historic faith professed by Merton. But like the ascetics before him, the contemplative focus on the inner life was the real source of peace in this troubled world.

The year 1949 was also the year of Fulton Sheen's appearance on the best seller list. His Peace of Soul was ninth on the nonfiction list which carried works by Merton, Oursler, and Peale. The fiction list of that year included Lloyd Douglas' The Big Fisherman and Sholem Asch's Mary. In 1953, another big year for religious best sellers, Sheen's Life Is Worth Living was fifth on the nonfiction list. In an age of Catholic self-affirmation, as evidenced by Father Keller's Christophers, Fulton Sheen introduced

⁴⁵Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation (Norfolk, Conn., 1949), p. 13.

a concept of peace in contrast to the Freudianism of Liebman and the mind cure of Peale.

Sheen's emphasis on the inner life, the soul, was part of the continued individualism of post-war religion. The frustration of the failure to achieve peace and justice in the world had turned many back to individual reformation. As Sheen put it:

Unless souls are saved, nothing is saved; there can be no world peace unless there is soul peace. World Wars are only projections of the conflicts waged inside the souls of modern men, for nothing happens in the external world that has not first happened within a soul.⁴⁶

He was, then, addressing himself to the "postwar frustrated man, or the modern soul." Since men no longer search for God, and have abandoned rationality in the face of the "invisible frustrations, complexes, and anxieties of his own personality," Sheen's message was directed to the modern soul through the language of "man as a problem."⁴⁷ What followed, in Peace of Soul, was a thinly veiled attack on popular Freudianism (probably Leibmanism) and the emphasis on frustrated urges.

Sheen's approach to the problem of anxiety was that of the medieval ascetic. Since anxiety and frustration "invariably follow when the desires of the heart are

⁴⁶Fulton J. Sheen, Peace of Soul (New York, 1949), p. 1.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 1-2.

centered on anything less than God," he counseled "an act of proper abandonment, in which the body is disciplined and made subject to the spirit, and the whole personality is directed to God." Anxiety, then, could be overcome and peace of soul could be achieved by: (1) controlling desires; (2) transferring anxiety from body to soul; and by (3) surrender to the "Will of God." Peace of soul would come to those who subordinated their anxiety over the things of this world and who cultivated an anxiety about attaining perfect happiness, which is God.⁴⁸

In his last chapter, "The Effects of Conversion," Sheen describes peace of soul as largely the result of Baptism into the Mystical Body of Christ. All doubts, fears, despair and struggle disappear for the convert to Catholic faith. The internal totalitarianism of Church membership brings peace of soul and the ability to resist the political totalitarianism of the external world. In Life Is Worth Living, Fulton Sheen carried this anti-communism much farther. Under Divine Providence, America was destined to fulfill the role of restoring the freedom and liberties of the peoples of the world. The "false peace" of Communism was contrasted by Sheen with the "true peace" of God-dominated hearts. Peace of soul, then, had become part of the arsenal of Cold War defense against the

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 26-33.

Soviet Union. And peace of soul was most perfectly found in the faith proclaimed by the Catholic Church.⁴⁹

The popularity of clergymen like Rabbi Liebman, Dr. Peale, and Fr. Sheen, was matched by Peter Marshall, the pastor of Washington's New York Avenue Presbyterian Church and chaplain of the United States Senate. His preaching had become well known for its humor, poetic imagery, and dynamic delivery, all couched in the accent of a Scottish parson. His ministry in Washington covered the years 1937 to his untimely death in 1949. Having preached to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, this Scottish immigrant did not appear on the best seller lists until after his death. A collection of sermons and prayers, edited by his widow, Catherine Marshall, appeared in sixth place on the 1950 list under the title, Mr. Jones, Meet the Master. This inspirational collection of Marshall's thoughts sold 600,000 copies. The next year, 1951, Catherine Marshall published a biography of her late husband, A Man Called Peter, which was number two on the 1952 best seller list; six in 1953; and four in 1955. It eventually sold well over one million copies in hardcover and paperback editions. In 1954, The Prayers of Peter Marshall was seventh on the nonfiction list. In 1957,

⁴⁹Fulton J. Sheen, Life Is Worth Living (New York, 1953), pp. 263-268, 243.

Catherine's own spiritual autobiography, To Live Again, was fourth on the annual list.

The best selling status of the Marshall's work may have been due to a number of factors. Certainly A Man Called Peter was one of the classic American success stories. Arriving at the Battery of Ellis Island, the immigrant from Scotland had only enough money to last two weeks. Ten years later he was pastoring one of the large, prestigious Washington, D.C. churches. Hard work and good fortune had made Peter Marshall a modern Horatio Alger hero. A Man Called Peter was also a well-written story of a warm, loveable man, whose short career and sudden death added pathos to his widow's account.

Yet the obvious appeal of the Marshall books was the inspirational theme. The sermons and prayers in Mr. Jones, Meet the Master reveal not only the preacher's skill with verbal imagery and story telling, but are supremely thoughts for inspiration, hope, and instruction. It is the evangelical message of Peter Marshall's writings that is predominant in the reader's reaction. The preacher's sense that he was "tapped on the shoulder" by the almighty power of God to preach repentance and forgiveness, was a central motif in his "calling." Most of Peter Marshall's sermons were reassuring proclamations of "an old, old story" familiar to many of Protestant heritage.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Catherine Marshall, ed., Mr. Jones, Meet the Master (Westwood, N.J., 1950), pp. 28-29.

In the sermon which provided the title for the collection of sermons and prayers, Marshall related the story of a conversation between Mr. Jones, a successful businessman and a pastor. The businessman's superficial questions about the morality of social drinking were countered by the preacher's uncompromising insistence on the disciplined life of one who knows God personally. The Master, introduced to Mr. Jones, is capable of straightening out the mess in personal lives and thereby furthering the reformation of the country. He is a God willing and able to handle any problem. Yet that personal communion does not result from "positive thinking" but from repentance and obedience. The daily presence of Christ in the midst of life's struggles is reassuringly promised but demands uncompromising moral obedience. The central theme is, however, the hope and assurance of "fellowship with this living Lord." Peace can be yours, Mr. Jones!

For if you let Him take control of your life completely, if you are willing to bow to His will for you, then you will enter into that transforming fellowship which brings with it that glorious exhilaration, that indescribable peace, and escape from all bondage promised in the New Testament.⁵¹

Peace of mind, heart, and soul were also themes in Catherine Marshall's writings. Her avowed purpose in writing A Man Called Peter, was to demonstrate through the life story of her husband that "Christianity can be fun,

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 121-132.

that fun can be Christian, and that it is the King's joy to share our good times."⁵² Peter's colorful life did seem to demonstrate that joy, fun, and religion went together. Yet it was peace that was of utmost importance to both Peter and Catherine. Peter once told his congregation that he thought of them gathered "to hear the still small voice of God whispering peace and pardon for weary troubled souls."⁵³ Catherine's battle with tuberculosis led her to a spiritual renewal, after submission and surrender to God's will had brought "a strange deep peace" into her heart.⁵⁴

Catherine's account of her physical struggle with illness was part of her testimony to the power of God. She related her difficulties in seeing the power of God in everyday practical matters, as did her husband, and then attributed her miraculous healing to a revitalized faith. She even had a vision of Christ, after asking the question, "Lord, what would You ask me to do?"

Past all credible belief, suddenly, unaccountably, Christ was there, in Person, standing by the right side of my bed. I could see nothing but that deep, velvety blackness, but the bedroom was filled with an intensity of power, as if the Dynamo of the Universe were there.⁵⁵

⁵²Catherine Marshall, A Man Called Peter (New York, 1951), p. 141.

⁵³Ibid., p. 41.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 175.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 176.

This power of God's presence remained a theme throughout her spiritual autobiography, To Live Again. Struggling with the problems of death, immortality, peace and happiness, Mrs. Marshall found a faith that could trust God for anything. Physical, social, and economic problems were solved as a result of a personal, trusting relationship with God.

Peter's religion, and Catherine's, was the evangelical Pietism of America's Protestant heritage. Like much of best-selling religion, Marshall's faith was of the heart, not the mind. While he did not disparage scholarship or human intelligence, he rather felt that "Christianity is a matter of perception, not a proof."⁵⁶ His sermons rarely, if ever, appeal to reason or logic but rather to the emotions. Stirring the emotions, in his judgment, seemed the best way to get action. The robust, virile language of faith that he employed in order to preach a decision-oriented Gospel, makes Peter Marshall an heir of Muscular Christianity and a forerunner of Billy Graham.

During the nineteen fifties, the religious awakening reached its peak and began its decline.⁵⁷ But best selling religion had been at its strongest "surge" as the

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 204-205.

⁵⁷A. Roy Eckardt, The Surge of Piety In America (New York, 1958), p. 19.

decade opened. The 1949 list included two fiction and four nonfiction religious volumes. 1950 had been the year of Robinson's The Cardinal and Marshall's Mr. Jones, Meet the Master. It was also the year of Nevin C. Harner's most successful contribution to his field of Christian Education, with I Believe, A Christian Faith For Youth, which sold over 600,000 copies. In 1952, the year that the Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible, A Man Called Peter, and The Power of Positive Thinking were on the list, Edward P. Morgan edited a collection entitled This I Believe. Seventh on the nonfiction list, this collection of "the living philosophies of one hundred thoughtful men and women in all walks of life" was written for Edward R. Murrow, who also contributed the foreword. Although few of the contributions were religiously orthodox, they were a powerful testimony to the new "belief in belief" as an antidote to the complexity, anxiety, and conformity of the times. The 1952 list also included in ninth place, Whittaker Chambers' Witness, which was an almost religious interpretation of "the treason of the Intellectuals." Anti-communism had focused on belief as the antidote to subversion and revolution.

The 1953 list reached an all-time high with books about faith. The Robe, the RSV Bible, The Power of Positive Thinking, Life Is Worth Living, A Man Called Peter, This I Believe, and The Greatest Faith Ever Known were

joined by Dale Evans Rogers' Angel Unaware. In fourth place, this sixty-three page story of Robin, the two-year-old retarded daughter of Roy and Dale Rogers, sold 800,000 copies. The introduction of Angel Unaware was written by Norman Vincent Peale, who described this story of Robin's brief life and the lessons it taught as one of "sweetness," "touching humor and spiritual understanding." The appeal of this book by the "Queen of the West" and wife of the "King of Cowboys," was no doubt due to the message of peace and reassurance in the face of personal tragedy. The story, told as though it were Robin's narrative to her Heavenly Father, was one that corresponded with the Rogers' favorite song, "There Will Be Peace In the Valley." Yet it was a peace in the midst of pain and "crosses" rather than the promise of heaven on earth.⁵⁸

The emphasis on peace and power reached a final peak in the writings of the evangelist Billy Graham. Peace With God (1953) was his first book and, although it failed to make the annual best seller lists, its continuous sales added up to over 1,800,000 copies. Graham's The Secret of Happiness, a short inspirational book on the Beatitudes, was seventh on the 1955 list. Six other books by Graham

⁵⁸Dale Evans Rogers, Angel Unaware (Westwood, N.J., 1953), pp. 6, 62-63.

sold well between 1953 and 1958 but did not reach best selling figures. His daily newspaper column, "My Answer," was syndicated in 110 newspapers by 1957. Magazine articles, radio and TV appearances, and his evangelistic films added to the audiences of his "Peace With God" message.⁵⁹

Billy Graham was a product of a realignment in Protestantism as well as a reflection of the post-war tension which had shifted the nation's mood from liberalism to conservatism. Graham's roots were in the fundamentalism of the thirties and his successful revivalism emerged with the support of the "new fundamentalism" of the National Association of Evangelicals. This NAE "Bible-believing," "born-again" Christianity was expressed in the rapid growth of pietistic sects and the popularity of Billy Graham's preaching. With the support of groups like the NAE, "Christian Businessmen," and Youth For Christ, Graham's neo-fundamentalism became part of a renewal of the mass revivalist tradition, and part of the general re-orientation of American religious life, referred to as the "fourth great awakening." The resurgent activity of neo-fundamentalists like Graham coincided with the vast social and economic change during and following the Second World War. Rural migration into the cities at a time of great anxiety over the spread of "atheistic" Communism

⁵⁹William G. McLoughlin, Jr., Modern Revivalism (New York, 1959), p. 498.

and international tension, contributed to the popularity of the "old time religion."⁶⁰

Billy Graham's personal role in this awakening of old time pietism can be dated largely to the celebrated tent revival in Los Angeles in 1949. The favorable coverage in Hearst newspapers and the conversion of several minor Hollywood celebrities resulted in national publicity. From Los Angeles Graham and his team were invited to Park Street Church in Boston by Harold J. Ockenga, an NAE founder. The Boston crusade was followed by a Portland, Oregon revival, out of which grew his weekly radio broadcasts and a series of documentary and fictional motion pictures featuring Graham's revival sermons. In the years 1950 to 1954, Graham conducted city-wide meetings in Minneapolis, Atlanta, Fort Worth, Shreveport, Memphis, Seattle, Hollywood, Greensboro, Washington, Houston, Jackson, Pittsburgh, Albuquerque, Chattanooga, St. Louis, Dallas, Syracuse, Detroit, and Asheville. Modeling his technique upon Billy Sunday, Graham utilized new techniques to become a nationally known expert in "the engineering of mass consent."⁶¹

Peace With God was a mixture of the old-time religion and the new emphases on peace in an anxiety-ridden world. Convinced that "there is a great hunger of mind and

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 472-482.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 489-495.

thirst of soul on the part of the average man for peace with God," Graham addressed himself to the masses rather than the theologians and philosophers.⁶² In the tradition of best selling religion, Peace With God avoided creedal dogmatism and denominational claims, while authoritatively presenting an old pietistic solution to the problems of peace and power.

Billy Graham was convinced that all men were on a quest. Not just the reader, he assured, but all mankind was on this same quest.

All humanity is seeking the answer to the confusion, the moral sickness, the spiritual emptiness that oppresses the world. All mankind is crying out for guidance, for comfort, for peace.⁶³

With the fears and uncertainties of this "age of anxiety," men turn to the blind alleys of political freedom, education, and higher standards of living. Yet America's success in achieving these goals did not bring "the joy and satisfaction and the reason for living that we were seeking." Boredom, sin, sorrow, and the certainty of death still plagued modern man as he faced the future. In a world of enduring problems and changing circumstances, Graham preached the message that "Christ remains unchangeable."⁶⁴

⁶²Billy Graham, Peace With God (Garden City, N.Y., 1953), p. 7.

⁶³Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 15-22.

Graham's religion was that of Protestant fundamentalism and pietistic individualism. His premillennial adventism shaped the urgency of his preaching. Men were "even now living on borrowed time" and since "time is running out" before the human race takes "the fatal plunge," Graham preached a return to the authority of the Bible and the peace and security promised to the believer, in that historic Book. Graham then, was dealing with sharp, "life and death" issues. In Peace With God there was none of the recognition of moral ambiguity found in the "realistic" writings of Reinhold Niebuhr and the neo-orthodox. The world was under God's judgment as the Devil reigned over the sinful hearts of rebellious men. Jesus came to call men to repentance and faith, promising a "new birth" which brought the fact of salvation, faith in God, and a feeling of inward joy and peace.⁶⁵

The individualism of Graham's Christianity was not tempered substantially by a chapter on "social obligations of the Christian." Emphasizing Christian "attitudes" toward "the race question," sex, "labor-management problems" and "tolerance," Graham's social ethics was summed up in the conviction that "Jesus taught that we are to take regeneration in one hand and a cup of cold water in the other." Proper attitudes, philanthropic ventures,

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 23-149.

service through church and clubs, and resistance of moral evil was Graham's counsel on social obligations. In the pietistic tradition, Graham's gospel was a mixture of pessimism regarding the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth and the hope that enough people would be converted to bring reformation to the society.⁶⁶

In summing up the superiority of the Christian life over all other ways of living, Graham included the new ideals, the new fellowship, and even the physical benefits available to the faithful. But his central theme was peace --the peace that comes through divine pardon. Since sin played a larger role in Graham's theology than in Liebman's or Peale's, repentance of sin and the release from contamination were prerequisites for "peace with God." Yet assurance and hope remained the final note of his best seller. He promised:

In Christ we are relaxed and at peace in the midst of the confusions, bewilderments, and perplexities of this life. The storm rages, but our hearts are at rest. We have found peace--at last!⁶⁷

Billy Graham was a fitting climax to the history of best selling religion. His nondenominational pietism was in the tradition of Susan Warner, E. P. Roe and Harold Bell Wright. While his theme of Peace corresponded with that of his contemporaries, Liebman, Peale, and Sheen,

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 187-202.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 222.

Graham was also preaching an inner peace found in the best sellers of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Hannah Whithall Smith, and S. D. Gordon. His anti-creedal Biblicalism was in the tradition of Charles Sheldon and many others. His emphasis on the authority of Biblical history place him along with Lew Wallace, Lloyd Douglas, and other advocates of an historical faith. Continuity as well as change was expressed in the history of best selling religion.

CHAPTER X

POSTSCRIPT, THE NINETEEN SIXTIES

The popular religious revival of the nineteen fifties was followed by a revolution in religion in the nineteen sixties. The mass evangelism of Billy Graham and the promise of peace and power continued into the next decade, but the popular religion-in-general was faced with a dramatic cultural shift in the sixties. The decade of space explorations, third World aspirations, Civil Rights movements, and the Vietnam conflict was also the decade of a Secular Theology, the Death of God movement, and New Breed social activists. The guardians of religious faith were confronted with a generation obsessed with themes of race and peace, university life, "soul," and spiritual values.

In contrast to the premillennial social pessimism of modern revivalism, several new religious writings stressed a postmillennial social activism. In his popular avante-garde The Secular City (1965), Harvey Cox treated the modern metropolis as the workshop of God and his creative partner, Man. Celebration of this world and the pragmatic, technological style, characterized Cox's

new progressivism. The Anglican Bishop John Robinson popularized the man-come-of-age theme in Honest to God (1963). A new wordly or secular Protestant faith in alliance with Pope John's Second Vatican Council challenged the pietistic otherworldliness of the revival's faith-in-faith.

An even more radical challenge to popular religion appeared in the Death of God movement. Christian atheists William Hamilton and Thomas J. J. Altizer announced a new optimism in Radical Theology and the Death of God (1966), which rejected traditional concepts of God and called for a secular Gospel. Catholic writers Daniel Callahan and Michael Novak also participated in the movement for "honesty" and "secularity." In an age of leadership from men such as John F. Kennedy, Pope John, and Martin Luther King, Jr., religion was increasingly interpreted in pragmatic, secular, and activist ways.

Despite the revolutionary challenges to American religious patterns, religious best sellers continued to reflect many of the old popular religious perspectives. The all-time best seller appeared in a new translation in the sixties. The New Testament portion of The New English Bible, issued jointly by Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press, easily led the nonfiction list in 1961 and within three years had sold almost 2,300,000 copies. The remaining religious best sellers represented a variety of familiar themes. Catherine Marshall's

Christy (1967) resurrected the mountaineer setting of Harold Bell Wright, as well as many of the traditional themes of best selling religion. David Wilkerson's The Cross and the Switchblade (1963) told the story of a Pentecostal preacher's work with New York City street gangs. The Shoes of the Fisherman by Morris West was another 1963 publication which reached a best selling reading public. A Catholic novel, it also had the broad appeal of a story of international intrigue and power politics. The Gospel According to Peanuts was Robert Short's use of Charles Schulz's cartoons to illustrate major themes in Christian Theology. It reached an amazing sales total of 879,553 within three years of its 1965 publication.

The Publisher's Weekly annual best seller lists included these titles (except The Cross and the Switchblade which sold close to two million without appearing on an annual list) and several others of less lasting popularity. The 1963 fiction list was led by The Shoes of the Fisherman and Taylor Caldwell's Grandmother and the Priests was sixth. Billy Graham's premillennial World Aflame was fourth on the 1965 nonfiction list, while Dag Hammarskjöld's spiritual autobiography, Markings, was sixth. Among best selling Trade Paperbacks in 1965 were The Gospel According to Peanuts, The Secular City and Pierre Teilhard du Chardin's The Phenomenon of Man. In 1966 there were no hardcover

religious best sellers, but The Secular City sold 300,000. Hugh J. Schonfield in The Passover Plot, argued that Christianity had originated as a result of a plot by a sincere but deluded Jesus of Nazareth. The Episcopalian Coffee House Priest, Malcolm Boyd collected his Hip prayers in Are You Running With Me, Jesus?

Christy was number five on the 1967 hardcover fiction list while Father James Kavanaugh's A Modern Priest Looks at His Outdated Church held the same place on the non-fiction list. Religious mystics and clairvoyants could read Jesse Stearn's Edgar Cayce--the Sleeping Prophet. Nineteen sixty-nine was the year of continued best selling status for Christy and The Gospel According to Peanuts.

It was Catherine Marshall's Christy that led all religious books of the decade, except the Bible. With a total sales of 2,250,000 by the end of 1969, Christy had surpassed all of Mrs. Marshall's other best sellers including A Man Called Peter. To the surprise of the reviewers, this rather old fashion mix of religion and romance reached a much larger public than the one which could be counted on to buy any Marshall book. It was her first work of fiction (although based largely on the early life of her mother), yet it included so many sermonettes that it maintained the Marshall tradition of preaching and praying.

The setting and themes were familiar also. Covering an eleven-month period in the life of Christy, a nineteen-year-old missionary-teacher, the story is located in an isolated cove in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. Although Christy finds more vice (feuding and moonshining) in the Tennessee mountains than found in Harold Bell Wright's Ozarks, yet there is spiritual strength to be drawn from those hills in much the same way as in The Shepherd of the Hills. There is also, a shepherd in Christy--a Quaker missionary lady. She becomes the only outsider to be truly accepted by the mountain people and the only one who can provide a spiritual leadership. Miss Alice shepherds her flock, which includes Christy and the young seminarian, David, into the discovery of a joyful faith in a personal God who is adequate to meet human problems. In fact the novel, Christy, embodies most of the familiar themes of best selling religion: conversion to the personal piety of an anti-creedal, anti-denominational faith which can withstand the torment of intellectual doubt and calls disciples to lives of stewardship and service.

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Western Reserve University, 1947). Contemporary views of Harold Bell Wright can be found in Grant Overton, American Nights Entertainment (New York, 1923) and Hildegard Hawthorne, "The Wright American," in The Bookman Anthology of Essays, 1923, ed. John Farrar (New York, 1923), pp. 104-112. Winston Churchill has been studied in Richard and Beatrice K. Hofstadter, "Winston Churchill: A Study in the Popular Novel," American Quarterly, vol. II, no. 1 (Spring, 1950); Warren I. Titus, Winston Churchill (New York, 1963); and Robert W. Schnieder, Five Novelists of the Progressive Era (New York, 1965).

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Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd, Middletown (New York, 1929) is a classic sociological study of Muncie, Indiana in the twenties and a source of great value to any student of popular culture. Gaius Atkins, Religion In Our Time (New York, 1932) is a contemporary judgment regarding the mixed nature of the church's status. Robert T. Handy, "The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935," Church History, vol. XXIX, no. 1 (March, 1960), pp. 3-16, assesses the evidence for a religious decline. Donald Meyer, The Protestant Search For Political Realism, 1919-1941 (Berkeley, 1961) stresses the impact of neo-orthodoxy, while Paul A. Carter, The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel, 1920-1940 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1954) and Robert Moats Miller, American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919-1939 (Chapel Hill, 1958) are good for Protestant Liberalism. Fundamentalism in this period is best treated in Norman F. Furniss, The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931 (New Haven, 1954).

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(Cambridge, Mass., 1952) is a remarkably perceptive study of the minister-novelist by his daughters.

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The post-war religious revival is touched on in Herbert W. Schneider, Religion in 20th Century America (Cambridge, Mass., 1952). The most thorough sociological study of the popular religious revival is Will Herberg, Protestant--Catholic--Jew, rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y., 1960). A Roy Eckardt, The Surge of Piety In America (New York, 1958) and Martin E. Marty, The New Shape of American Religion (New York, 1959) are suggestive and heavily judgmental. Other contemporary judgments include Harry C. Meserve, "The New Piety," The Atlantic, vol. 195 (June, 1955), pp. 34-37; Paul Hutchinson, "Have We a 'New' Religion?," Life, vol. 38 (April 11, 1955), pp. 138-158; William Lee Miller, "Piety Along the Potomac," The Reporter, vol. XI (Aug. 17, 1954), pp. 25-28; and Reinhold Niebuhr, "Varieties of Religious Revival," The New Republic, vol. 132

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The impact of religion on literature is the subject of Eugene Exman, "Reading, Writing, and Religion," Harper's Magazine, vol. 206 (May, 1953), pp. 84-90. The critical reaction to Sholem Asch is represented in J. L. Teller, "Unhistorical Novels," Commentary, vol. 21 (April, 1956), pp. 393-396; Harry Slockower, "Franz Werfel and Sholem Asch: The Yearning For Status," Accent, V (Autumn, 1945), pp. 73-82; Ernest Sutherland Bates, "The Gospel In a Modern Version," The Saturday Review, October 21, 1939, p. 5; and Horace Bridges, "Jesus in Fiction: 'The Robe' and 'The Nazarene,'" The Standard, vol. XXXI, no. 6 (March, 1945), pp. 165-171. Sholem Asch, What I Believe (New York, 1941) and Fulton Oursler, Three Things We Can Believe In (New York, 1942) are personal creeds. Lloyd Douglas is analyzed in Carl Bode, "Lloyd Douglas: Loud Voice In the Wilderness," American Quarterly, II (1950), pp. 340-352.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Living of These Days (New York, 1956) is an autobiography which captures the mood of Protestant liberalism. Arthur Gordon, Norman Vincent Peale: Minister to Millions (Englewood Cliffs,

N.J., 1958) is a biography that is partisan in its defense of Peale. Much less sympathetic to the apostle of positive thinking are William Lee Miller, "Some Negative Thinking About Norman Vincent Peale," The Reporter, vol. 12, no. 1 (Jan. 13, 1955), pp. 19-24; and Wayne E. Oates, "The Cult of Reassurance," Religion In Life, vol. XXIV (Winter, 1954-1955), pp. 72-82.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

RELIGIOUS BEST SELLERS, 1850-1960

- 1850 Warner, Susan. The Wide, Wide World. New York: G. P. Putnam.
- 1854 Cummins, Maria S. The Lamplighter. Boston: John P. Jewett.
- 1855 Ingraham, J. H. The Prince of the House of David. New York: Pudney & Russell.
- 1859 Evans, Augusta J. Beulah. New York: Derby & Jackson.
- 1867 Evans, Augusta J. St. Elmo. New York: George W. Carleton.
- 1872 Roe, E. P. Barriers Burned Away. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co.
- 1874 Roe, E. P. Opening A Chestnut Burr. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co.
- 1875 Smith, Hannah Whitall. The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company.
- 1880 Wallace, Lew. Ben-Hur. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- 1888 Ward, Mrs. Humphry. Robert Elsmere. New York: Macmillan.
- 1896 Sienkiewicz, Henryk. Quo Vadis. Boston: Little, Brown, & Company.
- 1897 Sheldon, Charles M. In His Steps. Chicago: Advance Publishing Company.
- 1897 Trine, Ralph Waldo. In Tune With the Infinite. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

- 1898 Connor, Ralph. Black Rock. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company.
- 1904 Hurlbut, Jesse Lyman. The Story of the Bible. Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company.
- 1907 Wright, Harold Bell. The Shepherd of the Hills. Chicago: Book Supply Company.
- 1909 Wright, Harold Bell. The Calling of Dan Matthews. Chicago: Book Supply Company.
- 1913 Churchill, Winston. The Inside of the Cup. New York: Macmillan.
- 1923 Egemeier, Elsie E. Egermeier's Bible Story Book. Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press.
- 1925 Barton, Bruce. The Man Nobody Knows. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
- 1926 White, Ellen G. Great Controversy. South Bend, Ind.: Review & Herald.
- 1929 Douglas, Lloyd C. The Magnificent Obsession. Chicago: Willet, Clark & Company.
- 1931 Cowman, Mrs. Charles E. Streams in the Desert. Vol. I. Grand Rapids: Zonderman.
- 1935 Douglas, Lloyd C. Green Light. Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin.
- 1939 Asch, Sholem. The Nazarene. New York: Putnam.
- 1941 Cronin, A. J. The Keys of the Kingdom. Boston: Little, Brown.
- 1942 Douglas, Lloyd C. The Robe. Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin.
- 1942 Werfel, Franz. The Song of Bernadette. New York: Viking.
- 1942 Nygaard, Norman F. Strength for Service to God and Country. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- 1943 Scott, General Robert L. God Is My Co-Pilot. New York: Scribner.

- 1946 Janney, Russell. The Miracle of the Bells. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- 1946 Liebman, Joshua L. Peace of Mind. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- 1948 Douglas, Lloyd C. The Big Fisherman. Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin.
- 1948 Costain, Thomas B. The Silver Chalice. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- 1949 Oursler, Fulton. The Greatest Story Ever Told. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- 1950 Robinson, Henry M. The Cardinal. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- 1951 Oursler, Fulton. The Greatest Book Ever Written. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- 1951 Marshall, Catherine. A Man Called Peter. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- 1952 Peale, Norman Vincent. The Power of Positive Thinking. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- 1953 Rogers, Dale Evans. Angel Unaware. Westwood, N.J.: Revell.
- 1954 Graham, Billy. Peace With God. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- 1957 Keyes, N. B. Story of the Bible World. New York: Hammond.
- 1957 Bishop, Jim. The Day Christ Died. New York: Harper & Row.
- 1958 Uris, Leon. Exodus. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.