

GUEST EDITORIAL

Robert N. Bellah's Theory of America's Eschatological Hope

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In 1967, Robert N. Bellah wrote an article entitled "Civil Religion in America,"¹ in which he claimed that there "actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well institutionalized civil religion in America."² This short article has become the seminal work leading to a new interpretation of the role of religion in American society. From this original article, there have come scores of subsequent articles, books, and lectures about most of the theories Bellah has mentioned, resulting in a vigorous debate within academe as to the existence and worth of this thesis. Bellah's concept of America's eschatological hope is one theme of major importance, however, that has been almost completely neglected by the scholars.

He has hypothesized that there have been three times of trial and that these crises have produced most of the symbols which are so crucial in understanding the concept of American civil religion. The first time of trial came during the American Revolution and the second occurred as a result of the Civil War. Bellah wrote that in the 1960s America has been "overtaken by a third great problem which has led to a third great crisis, in the midst of which we stand."³ Originally identifying the problem as responsible action by the United States toward a revolutionary world "seeking to attain many of the things, material and spiritual, that we have obtained,"⁴ he later expanded his definition of this crisis by explaining that far more serious than any of the events of the turbulent 1960s was the "massive erosion of the legitimacy of American institutions—business, government, education, the churches, the family—that set in particularly among young people and that continues . . . in the

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1. Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96 (Winter 1967):1-21.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
4. *Ibid.*

1970s."⁵ Because of this undermining of authority and the self-seeking utilitarian ethic that has precipitated it, Bellah has concluded that the civil religion has become an "empty and broken shell,"⁶ and, as a consequence, the United States is quite possibly heading "mildly and gradually into something like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*."⁷

The situation has not improved since the tumultuous times of the 1960s, according to Bellah, and the crisis of meaning has produced a deepening cynicism among the American people "and a good deal of anxiety about the future."⁸ Consequently, Bellah has predicted that if the civil religion is going to have a successful culmination of this third time of trial, there will have to be some type of "viable and coherent world order" that would gradually evolve out of this time of trial.⁹ The biblically oriented symbols of the civil religion no longer have the legitimacy nor the confidence necessary to meet the "desperate problems that beset us,"¹⁰ and, therefore, the American civil religion needs to reach out to other traditions and incorporate their symbols and their wisdom to successfully resolve the present crisis. Bellah has asserted that the American traditions derived from Christian symbols are rich, but he has also cautioned that "if we cling obstinately to them alone we will be guilty of a narrow and probably ultimately self-destructive parochialism."¹¹

By not exclusively identifying biblical symbols with ultimate reality, the American civil religion could borrow symbols from other cultures to fill the symbolic void that exists during the present time of trial. The result of this, according to Bellah, would be genuine pluralism in America and the emergence of some type of world civil religion. This world order "would precipitate a major new set of symbolic forms"¹² for the American civil religion including the addition of symbols from other cultures.¹³ According to

5. Charles T. Glock and Robert N. Bellah, eds., *The New Religious Consciousness* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 333-34. He also wrote, "I would thus interpret the crisis of the sixties above all as a crisis of meaning, a religious crisis, with major political, social, and cultural consequences to be sure" (p. 339).

6. Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 142.

7. Glock and Bellah, p. 350.

8. Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion: The Sacred and the Political in American Life," *Psychology Today* (January 1976):58.

9. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," p. 18.

10. Robert N. Bellah, "Liturgy and Experience," in *The Roots of Ritual*, ed. James D. Shaughnessy (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), pp. 229-30.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

12. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," p. 18.

13. Bellah, "Liturgy and Experience," pp. 222ff.

Bellah's theory, "the incorporation of vital international symbolism into our civil religion . . . would result in American civil religion becoming simply one part of a new civil religion of the world."¹⁴

Maintaining that a world civil religion is necessary for the successful culmination of the third time of trial, Bellah has also reasoned that the hope for a world civil religion has been an integral part of the tradition of America's civil religion since the colonial era.

A world civil religion could be accepted as a fulfillment and not a denial of American civil religion. Indeed, such an outcome has been the eschatological hope of American civil religion from the beginning.¹⁵

There has been a continuous tradition present in American history, according to Bellah, which has never completely acquiesced to the self-seeking utilitarian ethic that is so prevalent currently in the United States. He has called this the covenant tradition and has explained it as the tradition "in which we are in this thing through thick and thin . . . because of values that transcend our own interest."¹⁶ This tradition is communitarian in nature, part of the nation's foundational ethic, and epitomized by the sentiments expressed by John Winthrop's sermon aboard the *Arabella* in 1630.

[W]ee must be knitt together in this worke as one man, wee must entertaine each other in brotherly afeccion, wee must be willing to abridge our selves of our superfluities, for the supply of others necessities, . . . wee must . . . make others Condicions our owne, rejoyce together, mourne together, labour and suffer together, allwayes haveing before our eyes our Commission and Community in the worke.¹⁷

Conversely, the utilitarian tradition, which is characterized by the "idolatiuous worship of private pleasure and profit,"¹⁸ has also been present since the initial Puritan settlers. These two antithetical traditions have been in conflict in "every subsequent generation in America" with the utilitarian tradition gaining unprecedented ascendance since World War II and thus precipitating the current third time of trial.¹⁹ The problem, according to Bellah, is that the biblically oriented covenant tradition has been corrupted by the

14. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," p. 18.

15. Ibid.

16. Communications Commission of the National Council of Churches, "A Conversation with Robert N. Bellah" (New York: National Council of Churches, 1978), p. 11. Also see Robert N. Bellah, "Religion and Polity in America," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 15 (November 1974):108-9; and idem, "Reflections on Reality in America," *Radical Religion* 1 (1974):44.

17. John Winthrop, *Winthrop Papers* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1929), pp. 294-95.

18. Bellah, "Reflections on Reality in America," p. 41.

19. Ibid., pp. 41-43.

utilitarian contract tradition so thoroughly that the latter tradition has become almost completely dominant at this time.²⁰

Because the biblical symbols have lost much of their motivational power, the civil religion needs to incorporate vital international symbols for legitimacy, vitality, and the birth of a new myth. Bellah has stated that other generations of Americans would have been able to accept such concepts as a fulfillment of their eschatological hope.

Stating that throughout the entirety of American history there have been those who would have been able to accept the concept of a world civil religion as a fulfillment of their eschatological hope, Bellah has pointed out that "there have been Americans at every point in our history" who have tried to build an "ethical society in the light of a transcendent ethical vision."²¹ Many have never acquiesced to the utilitarian ethic, according to Bellah, and although there have been times when this tradition has been little more than the lonely voices of a few scattered prophets, there have also been times when this tradition has become quite visible and prominent. Bellah has described this as the old tradition that has been repressed in America.²²

He has linked the counterculture movement of the 1960s with this tradition and has written that the various movements within the counterculture have at least one thing in common: "Exotic as their background may be, all of these critics of the present are part of a tradition that goes back continuously to the beginning of the settlement of America."²³ This tradition has been present in American history, but it has been repressed.²⁴ This does not mean that it is insignificant, however, because the residue of the counterculture has produced a new religious consciousness which is free of dogmatic exclusivism of symbols. This new religious consciousness produces the type of disposition that would make a world civil religion possible, according to Bellah. He calls the remnant of the counterculture that has not been re-assimilated into the mainstream of the utilitarian-oriented American society the international moral community which is "immediately tangible when any two people feel that their mutual humanity transcends their commitment to any particular group."²⁵ Although this community is small and might be considered insignificant due to its size, Bellah would

20. Glock and Bellah, p. 335.

21. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant*, p. 142.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

24. Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 225.

25. Bellah, "The Sacred and the Political," p. 64.

reason that this is not necessarily true because the "quality of a culture may be changed when two percent of its people have a new vision."²⁶

This newly emerging international moral community, whose members generally come from the intellectual elites of the middle class has the religious consciousness that could produce a world civil religion. Bellah has maintained that their "experimentation with symbols and ways of experiencing reality from cultures once very alien to us has even begun to influence some of the established churches."²⁷ He has also predicted that this influence might increase and eventually produce a world civil religion that would ultimately bring the third time of trial to a successful culmination.

By stating that this international moral community, via the counterculture movement of the 1960s, goes back continuously to the colonial period, Bellah has attempted to give the concept of a world civil religion anchorage in America's historical past. He has viewed American history in such a way that there have been several distinct periods during which a communitarian ethic has been vigorously espoused only to be eventually repressed. These periods are all part of the covenant tradition, according to Bellah, and the emergence of a new world civil religion could be considered to be the fulfillment of this tradition.

The first period in this repressed tradition was the Puritan experiment in Massachusetts Bay Colony, in which Winthrop, John Cotton, and others wanted to build a society based on brotherly affection. The second time in which the repressed theme was profoundly expressed was the era from the Great Awakening through the American Revolution. This tradition again became a significant force during the Second Great Awakening of the first half of the nineteenth century. The thinkers during this period "held up a critical mirror to existing society and showed an alternative ideal of community that was yet to be fulfilled." The fourth time in which the repressed tradition was a major movement was during the period of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century when the Social Gospel, populism, and the Socialist party "attempted to bring industrial capitalism under some kind of control."²⁸ By examining the eschatological hope of representative thinkers in each of the historical periods referred to by Bellah, one should be able to assess the validity of his assertion about a continuous world civil religion theme. He has made his case by maintaining that this

26. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant*, p. 110.

27. Bellah, "Reflections on Reality in America," p. 41.

28. Ibid.

theme could have been accepted as the fulfillment of millennial expectations during each of these periods. This is how he has interpreted American history, and an examination of the validity of his hypothesis is in order.

THE PURITAN ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE

Bellah has emphasized that Winthrop's community, which was based on the Puritans being "knit together" in brotherly affection, contained the concepts necessary for constructing a new ethic that could eventually evolve into a world civil religion. There are some major questions, however, that need to be asked about the accuracy of Bellah's assessment concerning the purpose of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Was the brotherly affection which Winthrop mentioned really the beginning of a communitarian spirit in America, and was this the purpose of the Puritans being knit together as one man? Second, what exactly was the Puritan millennial vision or eschatological hope about the future of mankind? Finally, was the state of mind of the Massachusetts Bay Puritan one that could ever be considered to be the forerunner of an intellectual tradition that might evolve into a world civil religion?

One of the major reasons that the Puritans left England was that they had a "positive sense of mission."²⁹ According to Puritan thinking, God had called them to a mission of great consequence. They were "to carry the Gospel into those parts of the world, and raise a *bulwork* against the kingdom of Antichrist, which the Jesuites labor to rear up in *all* parts of the world."³⁰ Believing that it was God's will for a Puritan migration to America, these people were convinced that if they established a community based upon the purity of God's ordinances, ultimately all of Europe would imitate them and the rigorous ideals of the Reformation would be vindicated and fulfilled.³¹ Winthrop asserted that the Puritans would be a city upon a hill with the eyes of the whole world upon them.³² Likewise, the author of *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence* wrote that he had been "prest" for the service of the Lord to "re-build" Mount Zion in the wilderness, to "Prepare" for the coming of the Lord, and to help in the inevitable destruction of the "Antichrist."³³

29. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 4.

30. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana; Or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England, From Its First Planting, in the Year 1620, Unto the Year of Our Lord 1698*, 2 vols. (Hartford: Silas Andrus & Son, 1853), 1:69.

31. Miller, p. 12.

32. Winthrop, p. 295.

33. J. Franklin Jameson, ed., *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence, 1628-1651*, Original Narratives of Early American History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. 24.

Because of the way in which these Puritans interpreted history, they were convinced that the end time was rapidly approaching. Looking to the Scriptures for guidance in discerning the meaning of historic events such as the Reformation and the destruction of the Spanish Armada, these Puritans had high regard for what intellectual leaders such as John Cotton³⁴ preached concerning the true meaning of biblical prophecy. The thirteenth chapter of Revelation was a key passage for these Puritans and Cotton interpreted it in the same way as most Puritan ministers. According to the standard interpretation, the "Beast from the sea was the Antichrist and . . . the Antichrist was the Papacy with its episcopal paraphernalia."³⁵ Therefore, the Puritans perceived history as a struggle between the righteous, faithful, true Reformed churches of Protestantism and the evil, unfaithful, false churches of Roman Catholicism. Since the culmination of history was rapidly approaching, God was busy "Poring out the full Vials of his fierce wrath" upon the "lowest and basest sort of Catholics," their religion, their priests, the "Pope's supremacy," the episcopal form of government, and the "grosse Ignorance . . . and blind Superstitions" of the Catholics.³⁶

The reason that God had poured out his wrath upon the papacy and Catholicism, according to Cotton and most other Puritan biblical interpreters, was that Satan's worldly authority was being destroyed. These Puritans interpreted the forty-two-month authority of the beast over the world as a reign of twelve hundred sixty years. Calculating that each day in the forty-two months was equivalent to a year, Cotton concluded that the beast's power would expire in 1655.³⁷ The sovereignty of Satan began over the world, according to Cotton, in the year 395, and for the next twelve hundred sixty years the "Kingdom of Darkness"³⁹ had authority from God to rule the nations of the earth.

The importance of the Puritans' interpretation of these Scriptures cannot be underestimated. They maintained the belief that when the twelve hundred sixty-year authority of the beast was completed,

34. For an analysis of John Cotton's intellectual leadership, see Larzer Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton: Puritanism and the American Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 171, and James F. Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy: The Quest for the Millennium in Early American Puritanism," *William and Mary Quarterly* 32 (April 1975):231.

35. Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 23.

36. John Cotton, *The Poring Out of the Seven Vials: Or, An Exposition of the 16. Chapter of the Revelation, With an Application of It to Our Times* (London, 1642), p. 1.

37. John Cotton, *Exposition upon the Thirteenth Chapter* (London, 1655), p. 93.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

the “Seventh Trumpet” would sound and the “*Kingdoms of this world*” would become “the Kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.”⁴⁰ This was the event for which the Puritans longed; their eschatological hope was based firmly upon this intense millennial expectation; and they viewed themselves as essential participants in the last events before the destruction of the Antichrist. In essence, their migration to America had cosmic importance because in America the Puritans would be able to establish the “Kingdom of Light” that would prevail over the “Kingdom of Darkness” and help to bring history toward its final chapter.

The Massachusetts Bay Puritans took Cotton’s interpretation of biblical prophecy quite seriously and lived their lives in hopeful anticipation of the fulfillment of these events. Since the Puritans lived in anxious anticipation of participating in this eschatological event, they were determined to be prepared for them. Longing to establish a society that would function according to the laws of God, they covenanted among themselves to live under the principles of brotherly love. According to the Puritans, they needed to be molded together in their struggle to establish a godly community in a world that was still under the declining dominion of Satan.

The point to be stressed is this: the ethical society based on brotherly affection was a means to an end and not an end in itself. The Puritans did not come to New England simply to establish a religious society for the purpose of living in harmony with one another. Instead, they came to establish a harmonious society to be prepared for the Lord’s service in destroying the Antichrist.

The difference between these two concepts is real and significant. If Bellah was correct in his assessment of the purpose of the Puritan errand, the concept of a world civil religion based on a brotherly love of all mankind could be considered to be the fulfillment of the Puritan eschatological hope. If, however, the Puritan concept of an ethical society was secondary in importance to the eschatological hope of defeating the Antichrist and establishing the millennial kingdom, then Bellah was erroneous in his interpretation because there was most certainly no concept of the long-range brotherhood of man prior to the millennium in the Puritan system of belief.

It appears from the material examined that Bellah has placed an unfounded emphasis on the idea that the Puritans intended to produce a society based on harmony among men. Neglecting to show the complete scope of their eschatological hope, he has distorted his evaluation of the goals of their society. Although it is

40. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

accurate to say that they had a communitarian spirit that was entirely different from any utilitarian-contract tradition, it is inaccurate to say that their idea of community could extend to the rest of mankind.

Brotherly love was an important concept in the Puritan myth, but it was subjugated to the major emphasis of combatting the forces of Satan. The Puritans viewed history as a cosmic battle between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the Devil. The Puritans believed that they had a covenant with God to be his chosen people, and brotherly love was certainly one of the manifestations of God's people. This brotherly love, however, was experientially limited to the people of God and was not operational toward any people who were not of the chosen remnant.

These Puritans believed that their mission was so crucial to the Kingdom of God that they refused to compromise with those who were not of the same mind. Consequently, the Puritans showed a marked intolerance for any who attempted to thwart their purity, and one of the primary functions of early New England government was to suppress those who deviated from this myth. The mission of the errand into the wilderness was too important and the time was too short to tolerate those with opposing views. Therefore, the Puritans developed an extremely intolerant attitude toward all dissent which is why one Puritan concluded that "the Lord Christ hath said, *He that is not with us, is against us*: there is no room in his army for tolerators."⁴¹ If the Puritans of New England were to lead the world in establishing the type of community God commanded, they would have to act as guardians of the divine commission and punish deviations from the myth.⁴² The Puritans were so intent upon producing a pure church and government that they expelled from their midst those who disagreed with them. Winthrop was forthright in admitting that a "true Christian . . . may be denied residence among us, in many cases, without denying Christ."⁴³

The type of society which the Puritans sought to establish was unique, and their idea of a community based on brotherly affection has been emphasized often by Bellah. The Puritans, however, had a strong we-they concept built into their thinking. Seeing themselves as the Lord's vanguard in establishing the millennial kingdom, they

41. Jameson, p. 269.

42. Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), pp. 156-63.

43. John Winthrop, "A Defense of an Order of Court Made in the Year 1637," *Publication of the Prince Society* (Boston, 1865), 1:82, as quoted in Larzer Ziff, *Puritanism in America: New Culture in a New World* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), p. 71.

found it extremely difficult to identify with the remainder of mankind. Their commitment to world peace and justice was predicated upon the assumption that the forces of the Antichrist needed first to be destroyed. Consequently, it would not be inaccurate to say that the Puritans had a somewhat hostile attitude toward their nonregenerate fellow men.

The forces of the Devil and his Antichrist were strong, and the Puritans would never have considered those "Catholiks," who were within the realm of the Kingdom of Darkness, to be brothers under any circumstances. The Puritans even refused to tolerate individuals and groups that maintained many similar beliefs. They envisioned their community to be unique to the Lord in his battle against unrighteousness, and universal peace was only possible when the battle was victoriously decided. Clearly, the eschatological hope of the Massachusetts Bay Puritans did more to divide men than it did to unite them. Therefore, it is inaccurate for Bellah to assert that the hopes for a world civil religion can be traced to these men and their ideas.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE OF THE GREAT AWAKENING AND OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

It was not until the 1740s that the forgotten vision of the original Puritans was renewed by a significant number of people. According to Bellah, Jonathan Edwards called for regenerated Christians to construct a "genuine community."⁴⁴ Although Bellah has recognized that the "Great Awakening was a national movement,"⁴⁵ he has obscured the extent of the enormous impact of the we-they syndrome during this period. Attempting to show that the intellectual tradition of the newly emerging international moral community could be traced back continuously to the Massachusetts Bay Puritans via the New Light and the New Side Ministers of the eighteenth century, Bellah has neglected to show the significance of the we-they concept that was so pivotal to the eschatological hope of these later Puritan divines.

By effectively bridging the chasm that existed between the first generation of Puritans in America and their mid-eighteenth-century heirs, Edwards reinstated many of the concepts that were vital ingredients of the myth of the initial settlers. His beliefs were quite similar to theirs, and the myth which he articulated was clearly a continuation of the tradition of Winthrop and Cotton. Edwards

44. Bellah, "Reflections on Reality in America," p. 41.

45. Bellah, "Religion and Polity in America," p. 111.

envisioned a world that would be "united as one holy city" where "men of all nations shall as it were dwell together . . . as brethren and children of the same father."⁴⁶ According to Edwards, the millennium would be inaugurated by the preaching of the gospel, and it would be a time when there would be "universal peace, instead of confusion, wars, and bloodshed." During the millennium the world would be "united in one amiable society. All nations, in all parts of the world, on every side of the globe, shall be knit together in sweet harmony."⁴⁷

Edwards's concept of the millennial kingdom was certainly everything that Bellah could ever hope for any society to be. It gave the people who were involved in promoting it a sense of purpose and a strong motivation to action, and it accentuated all of the noble ideals that were present in the errand of the first generation. Edwards's vision even had a much more optimistic worldview. It would appear that Bellah could have used any one of a number of Edwards's statements to be the equivalent of Winthrop's appeal for brotherly love aboard the *Arabella*, but there was also another dimension to Edwards's eschatology that would impede the equation of his views with a world civil religion tradition. There was a strong element of the we-they syndrome that placed the people of God in a life-and-death struggle with the forces of the Kingdom of Darkness.

The millennial vision of Edwards was not one that would accept the beliefs and symbols of other religions and cultures. He believed that the Kingdom of God was in a spiritual struggle and that total victory over the enemy was necessary. Edwards wrote, "We must either conquer or be conquered."⁴⁸ The spiritual battle was real to him and the demonic enemy was "the spirit of Popery, the spirit of Mahometanism, and the spirit of Heathenism all united."⁴⁹ The struggle would ultimately be won, however, according to Edwards, and "doubtless one nation shall be enlightened and converted, and one false religion and false way of worship exploded, after another."⁵⁰ In the inevitable battle to follow, the wrath of God would be poured out, and "Christ and his church shall in this battle obtain a complete and *entire* victory over their enemies."⁵¹

46. Jonathan Edwards, "An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer," in *The Works of President Edwards*, 10 vols. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 2:458.

47. Edwards, "A History of the Work of Redemption," in *Works*, 5:252-53.

48. Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England," in *Works*, 6:82.

49. Edwards, "A History of the Work of Redemption," in *Works*, 5:241.

50. *Ibid.*, 5:238.

51. *Ibid.*, 5:242.

The conclusion that has to be reached concerning Edwards's eschatological position is this: he had a vision of a society that had the ethics of the New Testament ideals to which Bellah referred; however, he also perceived history "in terms of opposing forces of good and evil locked in a life-and-death struggle."⁵² Although Edwards expressed many of the themes which could be part of a world civil religion tradition, his statements embodying such themes need to be considered in the light of his dualistic conceptualization of history. When viewed in their entirety, it becomes evident that Edwards considered symbols from other traditions to be false and therefore enemies of the Kingdom of God.

According to Bellah, the Great Awakening prepared the way for the American Revolution and its "intense religious expectations of a new community in which the New Testament promises of freedom would be fulfilled."⁵³ The Calvinist ministers, who were the theological descendants of Edwards, certainly preached the promises of religious and political freedom, but they also preached a rigid dualism as well.

The American cause was God's cause, according to the Calvinist clergy in the colonies, and, therefore, by nature it had to be innocent. The British cause, on the other hand, was evil, and, consequently, it had to be equated with the cause of the Antichrist. Because the Calvinist theodicy was so rigidly dualistic, Great Britain needed somehow to be linked with the Devil and therefore the papacy. These ministers knew that the papacy was "crafty and subtle" and that popery was the "most cunning" instrument by which the Devil could accomplish "his purpose."⁵⁴ Knowing that Great Britain was not overtly a Roman Catholic nation, they postulated that popery somehow extended beyond the ecclesiastical realm. According to these ministers, popery had a political dimension to it, and consequently they equated arbitrary government with the cause of the Antichrist. Hence, the divines were able to complete the transformation of Great Britain from God's own nation to the nation of the Devil. According to the Reverend Samuel Sherwood, the British princes and rulers "have had a criminal converse and familiarity with the old mother of harlots; and [have] been sipping of the golden cup of her fornication."⁵⁵

52. Stephen J. Stein, "Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards on the Number of the Beast: Eighteenth-Century Speculation about the Antichrist," *American Antiquarian Society* 84 (October 1974):314.

53. Bellah, "Reflections on Reality in America," p. 41.

54. Samuel Sherwood, *The Church's Flight into the Wilderness: An Address on the Times* (New York: S. Loudan, 1776), p. 10.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

It was obvious to these Calvinist ministers that Great Britain was in confederation with the papacy because England had attempted to rule America despotically; "And as popery and arbitrary power, like two sister furies, go hand in hand; so wherever they fix their seat, they spread desolation around them."⁵⁶ Therefore, political tyranny became equated with the evil machinations of Satan in his ongoing attempt to destroy the Kingdom of God, and since Great Britain paid an "undue and sinful veneration to tyrants," it was concluded that the British had become "the servants of the devil."⁵⁷

By effectively linking the British with the traditional symbols of the Antichrist, the Calvinist ministers found it to be quite easy to justify open hostilities. Their revolution was depicted as the "cause of truth, against error and falsehood; the cause of righteousness against iniquity; the cause of pure and undefiled religion, against bigotry, superstition, and human inventions."⁵⁸ It became a black and white issue that clearly showed the we-they syndrome that existed at the core of the eschatological myth held by those men who followed in the wake of Edwards. The Revolution was

the cause of the reformation, against popery; of liberty, against arbitrary power; of benevolence, against barbarity, and of virtue against vice In short, it is the cause of heaven against the prince of darkness, and of the destroyer of the human race.⁵⁹

Once again it is clear that the concept of a world civil religion could not have evolved out of the eschatological hope of these Calvinist ministers if acceptance of the legitimacy of other symbols had been a prerequisite. It simply could not have happened. They viewed history in a rigid we-they framework, and the world order that they envisioned could only have been achieved by the "enemies" having rejected their symbols and simultaneously having accepted the "godly" symbols.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

According to Bellah, the "second Great Awakening of the first half of the 19th century mobilized support for an idealistic version of the national community as the first had for its creation."⁶⁰ This

56. William Symmes, *A Sermon Delivered at Andover, December 1st, 1768* (Salem, Mass.: Samuel Hall, 1769), p. 11.

57. Samuel West, *A Sermon Preached before the Honorable Council* (Boston: John Gill, 1776), p. 66.

58. Abraham Keteltas, *God Arising and Pleading His People's Cause* (Newburyport, Mass.: 1777), p. 30.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Bellah, "Reflections on Reality in America," p. 41.

period of American history can best be characterized by its belief in the inevitable progress of mankind, and consequently it was a time when millennial themes were articulated often and with great intensity. It was also a time when many Americans believed that God was preparing to use the United States to "finish off the Antichrist."⁶¹

According to the rationale of the eschatological hope of millenarian thinkers in this era, the millennium would begin as the inevitable result of the progress of society and the preaching of the gospel. In the struggle that was progressively being won, God was preparing the United States for leadership in converting the world and winning it back from antichristian control. The noble themes of the Massachusetts Bay Puritans were once again articulated in the nineteenth century by men such as Lyman Beecher and Henry Ward Beecher, and the political and religious emancipation of the world became the primary mission of the United States.

Lyman Beecher asserted that no nation upon earth was as favorably empowered by God to "evangelize the world"⁶² as was the United States. Henry Ward Beecher, the famous evangelist and son of Lyman Beecher, expressed a similar sentiment about the high destiny of the United States: "God Bless America. Not because I was born in it; . . . but because this continent carries such a burden of humanity that its weal or woe will be like an eternal weal or woe, infinite, endless." It was the divinely ordained responsibility of the United States to cast a magnanimous "example upon the poor" for the purpose of promoting the "brotherhood of man."⁶³

According to these men and other thinkers similar to them, the hope of the world rested upon the United States. The future cause of humanity depended upon the felicity of the United States as God's commissioned nation to establish the millennial kingdom of the Prince of Peace. Henry Ward Beecher succinctly expressed the twin themes of brotherly love and nationalism by advocating a love for his fellow-man that was reminiscent of Winthrop's appeal for a society "knit in brotherly love." The United States was to be the guardian of the Christianized democratic tradition that, according to Bellah, was so active during this epoch of American history. The greatness of the United States was for a benevolent purpose, accord-

61. Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 152.

62. Lyman Beecher, "A Plea for the West," in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 120.

63. Henry Ward Beecher, "The Tendencies of American Progress," in Cherry, pp. 242-43.

ing to Beecher; because "superiority is an ordination of God, and makes the superior class the nurses and helpers of the inferior."⁶⁴ Therefore, the mission of the United States as a superior people was to carry true religion and democratic government to the unenlightened peoples of the world.

The reason that God had selected the United States to fulfill his eternal purpose was, in Henry Ward Beecher's thought, his design that American nationalism should be benevolent and altruistic. Consequently, the United States was to assume a humble posture, and realize that its superiority was simply due to God's having appointed it to save mankind.

Henry Ward Beecher perceived that the time was indeed ripe for the era of the brotherhood of man, and many of his statements were similar to Bellah's theme of a world civil religion. These statements, however, need to be interpreted within the context of Beecher's conceptualization of America's destiny. The United States was to be the example for others to emulate. According to Beecher, "we have been put in the van among nations to develop principles in their practical forms that were only known as seed-corn in other lands."⁶⁵ The point that should be noted is this: other nations could learn from the United States because this was the model that was sanctioned and blessed by God. It was not necessary, however, for the United States to learn from the examples of other nations.

Therefore, one would have to conclude that during the first half of the nineteenth century the perceived role of the mission of the United States was that of being a benevolent example to other nations. Other lands were expected to adopt the symbols and institutions of the United States, and as this was progressively accomplished, the millennial kingdom would be inaugurated. On the other hand, the idea that the United States could learn from other peoples was not expressed; neither was there any mention by these thinkers of accepting the legitimacy of any symbols or institutions that were foreign. According to Lyman Beecher, if the job of providing an example for the rest of the nations was done well, the "world's hope" would be secure. Then the "government of force will cease . . . ; and nation after nation cheered by our example, will follow in our footsteps, till the whole earth is free."⁶⁶

The United States was not to follow the example of other nations, but non-Anglo-Saxon nations were expected to follow in the political and religious paths of the United States. Alexander Campbell

64. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

66. Lyman Beecher, p. 127.

expected other nations to emulate so closely the examples of the Declaration of Independence and of the English version of the Bible that even the English language would spread "all over the world."⁶⁷

These writers were typical of mid-nineteenth-century thinkers in that they anticipated the inevitable fulfillment of God's millennial kingdom and were convinced that God had ordained the United States as the leader of the Anglo-Saxon race to forge the new order. Such was their eschatological hope; they were firmly committed to it; and, they would not have been able to accept a Bellahian world civil religion theme as a fulfillment of their millennial vision.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE OF THE SOCIAL GOSPELERS

After the Civil War, the "evangelical ideology of the millennium emerged without a break into what came to be called the social gospel."⁶⁸ During this period the nature of the theology of the millennial hope had been considerably altered. The hope of a future millennial kingdom "ceased to rely on the language, doctrine, or exegesis of Scripture prophecy."⁶⁹ Instead, the social gospelers began to rely on biblical allusions such as the parable of the mustard seed to illustrate the advent and growth of the Kingdom of God. This change in emphasis had apologetic advantages because friction with biblical criticism and science was avoided, and "religious faith was brought closer to the idiom of the prevailing Darwinism."⁷⁰

During this era there was also another major change in the thinking of these clergymen. According to Washington Gladden, who was perhaps the most famous of the social gospelers, the nation, and not the church, was the key vehicle for inaugurating the millennium, and his ministry was directed to helping Americans "understand more perfectly what is the high calling of God to the American citizen."⁷¹ He explained that it was "through the nation that the kingdom of God was to be set up in the world," and all the promises of the prophets of how the Kingdom of God was to triumph over the world were "made to the nation and not to the

67. Alexander Campbell, *Popular Lectures and Addresses* (Nashville: Harbinger Book Club, 1861), p. 43.

68. Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 235.

69. James F. Maclear, "The Republic and the Millennium," in *The Religion of the Republic*, ed. Elwyn A. Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 206.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Washington Gladden, *Social Salvation* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1902), p. 232.

church."⁷² The nation was so important, maintained Gladden, that if men would only realize its "true divine character, we should need no other agency for the unification of society."⁷³ If men could only be taught to believe this, Gladden wondered "how long should we wait for the beginning of the thousand years of peace?"⁷⁴

Not just any nation would suffice as the divine model for the Kingdom of God, however. Gladden, like his mid-nineteenth-century predecessors, believed that the United States had been uniquely commissioned by God to establish the millennial kingdom. He wrote that God had "commissioned this nation . . . to show the non-Christian nations what Christianity means," and he maintained that it was the duty of the United States to "illuminate and enforce the message of the nation" to all other nations with "crowning light and constraining love."⁷⁵

The concept of brotherly love was a major theme to the social gospelers, and Josiah Strong, whose writings were widely read and well received by the American people in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, expressed the conviction that "God desires for the race . . . that men live in perfect harmony with all the laws of their being."⁷⁶ According to Strong, universal brotherhood was God's intention for mankind, and the United States had a special mission to help establish a world predicated upon this concept. Emphasizing civil liberty and spiritual Christianity as the two great themes of the Anglo-Saxon race for which the world had so long waited, Strong maintained that God was preparing the United States as the leader of this race to help the "world enter upon a new stage of its history." The United States was chosen because of its "unequaled energy," its "might of wealth," its purity of Christianity, and its breadth of liberty.⁷⁷

In essence, the social gospelers believed that the United States had been "divinely commissioned to be, in a peculiar sense, his brother's keeper."⁷⁸ In this period, as in earlier eras, the we-they syndrome was quite evident. The world needed to accept the American way in order for the millennium to begin and not vice versa. There was no concept of learning from other traditions, and it is not surprising

72. Washington Gladden, "The Nation and the Kingdom," in Cherry, p. 260.

73. Washington Gladden, *Social Facts and Forces: The Factory—the Labor Union—the Corporation—the Railway—the City—the Church*, 1897, Reprint (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1971), p. 203.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

75. Gladden, "The Nation and the Kingdom," in Cherry, p. 269.

76. Josiah Strong, *The New Era: Or, The Coming Kingdom* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1893), p. 230.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

that a social gospeler like Strong would conclude: "My plea is not, Save America for America's sake, but Save America for the World's sake."⁷⁹ His eschatological hope, like other social gospelers of his time, was totally dependent upon the American hope.

CONCLUSION

Bellah has conceptualized that American society is now in a crisis as severe to the nation as the Civil War. In seeking an answer to the problems that beset the United States during this third time of trial, he has envisioned a world civil religion as the most hopeful alternative to the utilitarian tradition. A world civil religion would generate hope and new vitality into the American myth, and he would like to see it materialize.

Bellah's theory is imaginative, stimulating, and idealistic. In his attempt to show historical precedence for such a theory, however, he has shown equal imagination in his interpretation of America's eschatological hope. Yet an investigation of his own examples does not corroborate his hypothesis. Instead, they dramatically illustrate that the traditions of Winthrop, Edwards, Beecher, and Gladden could not have accepted a world civil religion as their eschatological hope. The we-they syndrome was far too ingrained in the thinking of these men to have entertained such a concept. In fact, they consistently opposed the legitimacy of all alien symbols. In each era the idea of accepting other traditions was rejected, and one has to conclude that no conceptualization of a world civil religion theme previously existed in these traditions.

78. Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1885), p. 210.

79. Strong, *The New Era*, p. 80.