

THE ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS PRESS IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY, 1730-1830

by

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In 1830 the editor of a religious newspaper in New York declared with a rhetorical flourish that the Press was "the mightiest engine ever put in motion - the proudest of all human inventions." He was confident that it was an agent which would "never be succeeded by another equal power." Instead, it would "survive all the boasted pressures of steam, and the contrivances of men taken collectively." But best of all "the finishing touch" had now been put upon "this singular machinery." The "Union of the Pulpit with the Press" had been consummated.¹

A fellow religious editor in Philadelphia revealed just what the achievement of this "Union" meant to most church leaders when he concluded a prideful review of the contemporary healthy state of the American religious press with the gasconade: "It is not wonderful that immoral persons who desire to continue such, and yet enjoy public confidence and influence; and that all the avowed enemies of Zion in these U[nited] S[tates] should begin to dread the power of the religious press."² It appeared to many, about 1830, that "by lay[ing] her hand upon the PRESS as well as upon the PULPIT" American Christianity had found "the lever of Archimedes... that which the heathen philosopher could not discover, the pou sto, from which she can move the world."³ The churches believed that they had come upon the "power" that would assure their control of American culture.

The generating of this power had taken a century and its consummation had been achieved under great difficulty.

Nature of Growth Through 1830

Including pioneer beginnings dating back to 1730, a total of 574 distinct religious journals are known to have been founded in

America through 1830, involving in their several histories during this first full century of religious press activity the use of 822 titles.⁴ Of the 574 distinct journals, only 14 were begun in the sixty years which preceded the official formation of the American nation in 1789. Then the first forty years of national life which followed evidenced remarkable acceleration in the activity of the religious press, the number of new religious journals founded to 1830 by decades being a moderately impressive 21 for the years 1790-1799; a definitely impressive 51 for the years 1800-1809; a somewhat startling 99 for the years 1810-1819; an amazing 346 for the years 1820-1829; and 43 in the year 1830 alone - a greater number than had come into existence in all of the years of activity prior to 1800.

The influence which this large body of religious journals exerted upon the development of American culture was conditioned by their rate of mortality. In summary view this rate appears to have been high. One quarter of the 574 distinct foundings lived months only, failing to complete even one full year of publication. A second quarter completed their first full year successfully, then discontinued, either abruptly or at best a few weeks or months later, failing to achieve a second full year of existence. A third quarter persisted to a more respectable life span of two to four years. Only one-quarter extended life to a fifth year or more. However, two determinants worked to make this mortality rate less harmful to the influence of the American religious press than surface impression would suggest. First, short life did not in itself preclude the possibility of a worthy contribution, for as the contemporary Spirit of the Pilgrims remarked upon noting the abbreviated existence of many religious journals:

 this no more proves that they were not extensively useful, than the death or removal of a minister proves that his labors...were of no value to his people, or to the church at large. A periodical publication may have a certain great work to perform; and when that is accomplished, it may peacefully and honorably repose.⁵

Certainly many of the two to four-year, and even some of the one-year, religious periodicals did just that. A second factor which

offset the seemingly high mortality rate was the truly surprising longevity of the quarter of religious journals that lived five years or more: 71 of these were published from 5 to 14 years; 45 from 15 to 99 years; and 27 an astonishing 100 to 160 years, 13 of these last still being in existence today.

This type of longevity brought a significant increase in the cumulative annual output of religious journals, especially after 1790. Whereas to that year the highest number enjoying simultaneous publication was 3, by 1800 this number had increased to 10, by 1810 to 16, by 1820 to 56, by 1830 to 139. A nation having so many religious journals in simultaneous publication could not fail to feel their impact for better or for worse.

This impact was made the greater by significant concurrent developments which took place with regard to periodicity and format of publication, preferred patterns of content, geographical decentralization of press activity, and increasing circulation.

Developments in periodicity and format complemented each other closely. Particular frequencies of publication became associated with particular folds of the printer's sheet, and the resulting combinations came to signify specific patterns of content. Up to 1815 very few religious journals were issued more often than monthly, preference shifting gradually during the period from quarterly and bimonthly to monthly issuance; but after 1815 preference swung so quickly to publication at greater frequencies that the count by periodicity in 1830 was 79 weeklies, 19 biweeklies, 76 monthlies, 6 bimonthlies, 6 quarterlies, and 3 journals without this established configuration of frequency. As with periodicity, so with format, a marked change in preference became evident about 1815. Up to this year the octavo fold was the assumed dress of the religious journal, other formats were straying fashions, but following this year larger sizes came into such demand that the count of religious journals in 1830 showed that 69 were folio, 20 quarto, 68 octavo, 19 duodecimo, 2 sextodecimo, and 11 octodecimo or smaller.

Prior to 1815 the tendency to publish less often than weekly, and in octavo format, had predisposed religious journalism to

somewhat stuffy magazine content, generally the lesser the frequency the heavier the fare.⁶ About 1815 the joint turn to preference for weekly periodicity and folio format produced a new type of journal which ranged much farther afield in spheres of interest - the religious newspaper.⁷ Editors of monthly religious octaves pleaded for retention of their more intellectualized "magazine" content and viewed the religious newspaper as a usurping panderer to public taste: its essay matter was theological veneer, its religious intelligence too terse to be truly informative, its secular summary and advertising were out and out concessions to the world. But their opposition was futile. Even the hard-bitten conductor of the Methodist Magazine had to admit in 1823: "A religious newspaper would have been a phenomenon not many years since; but now the groaning press throws them out in almost every direction."⁸

The rise of the religious newspaper brought about a further significant change in religious press activity - a decentralization of publication effort. Journals issued from the large eastern publication centers which had been monopolizing the output of the press could not adequately supply local news to isolated outlying areas of settlement. The solution to this problem was to publish regionally and gear circulation to an area within which it was possible to keep subscribers adequately informed of all important local happenings. Sufficient news of national import could be added to the accounts of local events by the simple expedient of reprinting selected articles from exchange papers received regularly from the main eastern centers of publication. Thus whereas to the founding of the nation in 1789, with but a single exception, all American religious journals issued from one of three metropolitan eastern centers - Philadelphia (including Germantown), Boston and New York; thereafter through 1830 religious magazines and newspapers were published in 195 other cities and towns located in every state east of the Mississippi River except Mississippi and, in addition, in Michigan Territory (Detroit) and Louisiana (New Orleans). Although many of these new towns and cities were unable to sustain the public-

ation of religious periodicals for more than a year or so, still in 1830 nearly 70 were active in this regard, 33 of these centers situated on the seaboard side of the eastern mountains, 34 west of the eastern mountain range. As a result nearly 60 per cent of all religious magazines and newspapers were being published outside the immediate metropolitan areas of East's three biggest cities, making decentralization of the religious press a thoroughly established mode of operation, with results which shall be observed in the final section of this presentation.

Whatever their numbers, the widespread distribution of their publication centers, and the diversity of their interests, the influence of early American religious journals depended in last analysis on the size of the reading public they could command. Their eighteenth-century reading public appears to have been very small. Judging from reported circulation figures, religious periodicals published before 1800 averaged fewer than 500 subscribers each. This meant that to the late 1790's their total quarterly to weekly circulation could not greatly have exceeded a peak of 5,000 within a national population of 5,000,000.⁹ With the year 1800 the picture changed decidedly. The religious journal which reported fewer than 500 subscribers became relatively rare. Henceforth the trend was to individual subscription lists of 1,000 and upwards, to surprising figures. During the decade 1800-1809, 2 American religious journals are known to have achieved the patronage of 1,000 subscribers each; 3 of 2,000 to 2,500; 1 of 4,000; and 1 of 7,000. During the decade 1810-1819, the circulation of individual journals tended to level off at a 1,000 to 2,000 plateau, though that of some pressed on to a new height: 8 claimed a patronage of 1,000-1,900 subscribers; 2 of 2,000; 1 of 3,000; 1 of 4,000; and 3 of 10,000. The spectacular gains, however, came between 1820 and 1830, when the circulation of the individual journal levelled at an impressive 2,000 to 3,000 plateau, with that of some soaring toward astral figures for the day: 38 claimed a patronage of 1,000 to 1,800 subscribers; 12 of 2,000 to 2,900; 11 of 3,000 to 3,500; 3 of 4,000 to 4,700; 10 of 5,000 to 5,800; 2 of 6,000 to 7,000; 4 of 12,000 to 14,000, and 2 of 25,000.

The two publications acknowledging the last figure - the weekly Methodist Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion's Herald and the monthly inter-demoninational American National Preacher, both of New York City - were, in 1828 and 1829 respectively, circulating more copies of each of their issues than any other journalistic work in the world, magazine or newspaper, religious or secular. Their common 25,000 circulation figure was most closely approximated by two foreign religious monthlies published in London, England: the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, which claimed the patronage of 24,000 persons, and the Evangelical Magazine the patronage of 19,000.¹⁰ The reported circulations of other foreign magazines ranged downwards from 12,000, most distributing far fewer copies per issue;¹¹ and neither the London Times nor the Berlin Gazette, the leading newspapers in Great Britain and the Continent, had yet exceeded an average distribution of 11,000 copies per issue.¹² No American secular journal is known to have fared even so well as this; none reporting a circulation at this time higher than 4,500, a figure only one-fifth that of the Christian Advocate and the American National Preacher, and considerably less than that of the 15 other American journals known to have had circulations ranging from 5,000 to 14,000 copies.

All factors considered, known circulation figures appear sufficiently representative to justify the conjecture that in the 1820's American religious journals attracted on the average about 2,000 subscribers each. This meant a regular quarterly to weekly, mostly monthly and weekly, circulation of about 400,000 papers, in a nation nearing 13,000,000 people.

But the reading public to which the early American religious press appealed was not limited to one person per paper. The average subscriber was the head of a family. This fact, a contemporary editor judged, increased the number of readers of each journal to "an average of five", at least in the case of the religious newspaper which carried reading matter that appealed to children as well as adults.¹³ Further, in poverty-stricken areas, especially on the remote frontier, several families often shared the cost of subscribing to a single paper. From the beginning

as many as four immigrant families combined to subscribe to German-language papers in Pennsylvania.¹⁴ On the eve of 1830 the publisher of the Indiana Religious Intelligencer spoke as if this practice was still commonplace in the West by remarking, without showing concern for the circulation of his own paper, that "in many instances two families...were...united in subscribing for it."¹⁵ At the same time this practice was being extended ad infinitum into the outlying areas of New England. In 1828 a missionary-minded promoter of the religious press in Maine formed two "Newspaper Circuits" of 25 miles each and from a small village in Somerset County sent out 16 copies of the Boston Recorder (Congregational) and the Zion's Herald (Methodist Episcopal) along "8 lines". At the first stop a Congregationalist and a Methodist read each other's paper; then, on a Monday, each forwarded his paper to the next station on the circuit, until 200 families had been served, an average of 12 reading families per paper.¹⁶ By the year 1830 this plan had crystallized into what was called a "Religious Newspaper and Tract Travelling System", and was described as a means by which "from 10 to 30 destitute families can be supplied with religious reading by one person."¹⁷

Circulation was extended by less planned means as well. In a widely printed "Dialogue on Newspapers", questioner "B" asked: "Do you take the newspapers, neighbour?"; and received from "A" the answer: "No, sir, I do not take them myself, but I now and then borrow one, just to read...."¹⁸ This happened not only "now and then", but so regularly that one religious editor set out to study the behavior pattern of "the class of creatures, called Newspaper Borrowers" and submitted this report:

...We were astonished to find that they are not at all uncommon in their appearance --- and what is wonderful, they have no bristles on their backs, nor asses ears on their heads. We are told they generally come out before breakfast in the morning - watch an opportunity - dart into peoples's houses, shops and stores, and carry off the newspapers before the owner or his family have had an opportunity of reading it themselves. They are never seen near a printing office, but bore obliging neigh[bors] to death. - They are said particularly to prowl about banks, public offices, barber shops, etc.¹⁹

The editor of the Anti-Universalist, never lacking in direct speech, penned his prescription for such practices in a notice reading:

BORROW THIS PAPER NO MORE. But subscribe for it like men, and wrong us not of our just due longer. If it is worth reading, it is worth taking; and shame on the niggardly soul that will borrow it when he can have it himself by paying for it but a dollar a year.²⁰

But borrowers were neither possessed with shame nor dispossessed of the price of a subscription. They continued to be the bane of the publisher's existence.

The reading reach of the individual religious journal did not end with several families sharing a subscription, travelling over a lending circuit, or ubiquitous borrowing. It was often placed in a "Reading Room" where any who visited might read it. In 1829 the "Andover Reading Room" alone housed some 50 weekly and 20 monthly to quarterly religious journals, chiefly gift copies from editors.²¹ Inns provided religious papers as a convenience to customers.²² Even more significant in terms of wide outreach, an article or a piece of news appearing in one journal might be reprinted in so many others that it entered the homes of thousands more than the subscription list of the paper in which it first appeared would imply. Because of this the Boston Recorder, perhaps the most copied religious journal of its day, estimated in 1816 that although it had only 1,000 paying subscribers it was actually read by 50,000 people.²³ Copying of this sort was no clandestine religious practice. Secular editors poached materials from religious papers almost as freely as religious journals did from each other. As early as 1817 New England alone had some 20 to 30 country papers of a secular cast which gave space regularly to the printing of religious news.²⁴ Ten years later a Methodist editor in Philadelphia noted that secular papers were taking to the printing of moral essays as well as religious news, and remarked: "Political papers are beginning to act as moral monitors greatly to the advantage of the public. In several instances we have noticed articles correcting improprieties among even religious people..."²⁵ Finally, it was observed in 1830 that "many papers

professedly secular" were giving a "prominent place" to "all important" religious matter "except that which is of high revival character."²⁶ Since nearly all of the religious news and moral comment appearing in secular papers was extracted from religious journals, the net result was the furthering of the outreach of the religious press far beyond a point that can be accurately determined.

All facets of circulation considered, the conclusion becomes very clear. The estimated 400,000 regular subscribers to the American religious press about the year 1830 represented only a fraction of the actual public reached. Granting only that the average subscriber was the head of a family, the number of persons reached regularly would rise to 2,000,000 in a population of 13,000,000. Were it possible to compute the numbers of others touched by the customs of several families sharing the price of a subscription, the formation of lending circuits, open and covert borrowing, the founding of periodical reading rooms, and the reprinting of feature religious articles and religious news in the secular press, it might be found that 3,000,000 of 13,000,000 Americans were regular perusers of the religious press in 1830, about one of four of the population. This was a remarkable accomplishment considering that only thirty years before circulation had been limited to 5,000 subscribers in a population of 5,500,000, about one of every one thousand persons.

Some religious leaders sensed that they were standing on the threshold of the parousia and, like a correspondent of the Christian Advocate, predicted in 1827: "The time may come when every family will have a Bible, tract and a religious newspaper, lying together, near the sacred altar of their domestic peace; and that time will be very near the millenium glory of the church."²⁷

Situation Giving Rise to Growth

What was the historical situation which prompted this amazing growth of the religious press in the early national period of American life?

Briefly stated, the religious press was a means deliberately chosen to accomplish a specific end. A crisis had developed in American religious life and nothing short of coopting the service of an instrument like the press seemed to offer a solution to the crisis.

Second and succeeding generations of American settlers had so lost religious interest that by the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1776 only 5 per cent of the population of the colonies professed church attachment of any kind.²⁸ Developments of succeeding years to 1830 were to compound this religious problem greatly. Not only did population increase by leaps and bounds, but its manner of geographical distribution and its changing ethnic composition erected new obstacles to religious growth. The first official census of the new nation taken in 1790 showed that 5 per cent of a now 4,000,000 population had moved west across the eastern mountains into more or less wild frontier territory. So rapidly did this western movement continue that by 1830 a full 34 per cent of a tripled population of 13,000,000 was living in frontier regions ranging from the eastern mountains to the Mississippi, and some even beyond.²⁹ At the same time the center of population was thus moving steadily westward into undeveloped territories, the proportion of foreign-born settlers of new nationalities and races was making the country the melting pot of the world. Especially prominent in the new ethnic mosaic of 1830 were large numbers of Scotch, Irish and Germans; lesser but sizable numbers of Dutch, French and Swedish origin; and 2,300,000 negroes of whom 2,000,000 were slaves,³⁰ presaging a serious race problem.

Added to this erupting and increasingly diversifying population which was spreading out over 15 degrees of latitude and 30 degrees of longitude, over 90 per cent unchurched, was another most disconcerting factor. Bringing to fruition a policy that had been developing throughout the colonial period, the constitution of the new American nation formed in 1789 declared for the principles of religious liberty and separation of church and state. Although the various states of the Union were permitted to determine the terms upon which these principles would operate, all

existing churches faced the disturbing prospect of having to use voluntary means to attain voluntary ends. They were forced to become disciplined communities of convinced Christians, self-governing, self-supporting, capable of perpetuating their witness only by means of evangelism of their own devising.

Existing resources seemed quite unequal to the task. Dearth of leadership was so great that as late as 1815 Eliphalet Pearson in an Address of the American Society for Educating Pious Youth for the Gospel Ministry calculated that there were only 2,000 trained clergymen available to minister to a population of 8,500,000 persons. Assuming the minimum necessity of "one minister to a thousand souls" he estimated that 6,500,000 Americans were at this time devoid of a gospel ministry, with the great need being in the South where only 126 trained ministers were serving 2,000,000 people and in the West where only 116 were serving a continuously moving constituency of 1,000,000 adventurers. If the present trends persisted, he foresaw a country which would in 65 years have a population of 65,000,000 with 60,000,000 destitute of ministrations from an educated clergy.³¹ In the face of such circumstances a contributor to the Panoplist saw the immediate danger to be barbarism, explaining his view succinctly in the paragraph of an article entitled "Retrograde Movement of National Character":

The manner in which population is spreading over this continent has no parallel in history. The first settlers of every other country have been barbarians, whose habits and institutions were suited to a wild and wandering life. As their members multiplied, they have gradually become civilized and refined. The progress has been from ignorance to knowledge, from rudeness of savage life to the refinements of polished society. But in the settlement of North America the case is reversed. The tendency is from civilization to barbarism.³²

As if dearth of leadership was not a sufficient handicap in itself in the attempt to meet the catapulting rise of barbarism among the brawling brats of the frontier regions, another formidable harassment had to be faced as well. Until the very eve of 1830 means of communication between the various parts of

country were unspeakably primitive by modern standards. There were no automobiles, railroads or airplanes; no telegraph, radio or television. The only means of contact on land was by walking, horseback or carriage. Transportation was less speedy than it had been for the emperor Tiberius in the first century of the Christian era. Roman roads permitted him to travel 200 miles in 24 hours; but in 1825 when President John Quincy Adams wished to make the trip from Washington, D.C., to his home in Boston he could average only 50 miles per day by stage.³³ This was along the eastern seacoast where roads were relatively good. The first highway to the West the Cumberland Road planned to run from Baltimore (Maryland) to St. Louis (Missouri), was not begun until 1811, by 1815 could be used for travel for a distance of only 20 miles, by 1818 had barely been extended to Wheeling (West Virginia), and was not completed to St. Louis until about 1840.³⁴ Its bed was so cut through by the wheels of carriages and stages that passengers often had to get out to help push their conveyance through the rougher and muddier spots. If not this, progress was often slowed to near a snail's pace by fallen earth and rock which rolled down from new cuttings to clutter the road, or by washed embankments which so narrowed the road that two wagons could not pass each other at the spot.³⁵ There were, of course, a few ways of travelling or sending supplies and communications more rapidly. Especially important messages or very small parcels could be sent by Pony Express which, by means of establishing outposts at which horses were changed hourly, could average ten miles an hour;³⁶ but this type of service was not available for every day use by ordinary persons or groups. Water transport offered some improvement over travel by land, especially after 1810 when on the inland waterways the steamboat plodding five miles per hour upstream, but achieving greater speeds when going with the current, began to replace the crudely built floating barges that had been commonplace on the Ohio and Mississippi;³⁷ and after the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, whereby the time of travel from New York City to Buffalo was reduced from 20 to 6 days.³⁸ On the other hand water travel was open only eight months of the year.

As for the railroads, the budding Baltimore and Ohio system had laid 13 miles of test track by 1830, over which "waggon" could be drawn by horses at the rate of 10 miles per hour "through one of the most romantic and beautiful countries ... every minute presenting something new to be admired by strangers on the road"; and this "without danger of fatigue" to passengers.³⁹

It is small wonder that national leaders like John C. Calhoun, soon to be elected Vice President, viewed the contradictory features of vast national expansion and poor internal means of communication with great apprehension, remarking: "We are a rapidly - I was about to say a fearfully - growing country This is our pride and danger, our weakness and strength."⁴⁰ The best of minds, political and religious, were beginning to wonder if it were possible to hold so mobile and geographically expanding a population together in any form of governmental or moral order. Theorists were pointing back to the growth that had led to the fall of the city states of ancient Greece and were quoting from Plato's Laws the maxim: "A Republic must remain small enough numerically and compact enough territorially to permit a ready interchange of opinion throughout the citizen body."⁴¹ Others were dooming the American democratic experiment to failure on the basis of Frederick of Prussia's derisive comment (1782) to the ambassador of the United States, that "a republican government had never been known to exist any length of time where the territory was not limited or concentrated."⁴² Perhaps Montesquieu's judgment in his Spirit of Laws was right after all, viz.: "A large empire supposes a despotic authority in the person who governs. It is necessary that the prince's resolutions should supply the distances of the places they are sent to."⁴³

Whatever the future might bring, American political and religious leaders knew that any present emergency measures taken had to be carried out within the framework of a democratic constitution. For church leaders specifically this meant work within the voluntary principle of church organization, and that they would have to devise new means of evangelism accordingly. Seeing the issue clearly, Lyman Beecher, Puritan New England's most dis-

tinguished preacher of the day, urged his fellow clergy "no longer to trust Providence and expect God will vindicate His cause while we neglect to use the appropriate means."⁴⁴ The pulpit and its preaching ministry was no longer adequate of itself to meet the present American religious emergency. Other means had to be chosen by deliberate human calculation to remedy the posture of religious affairs.

Press as Emergency Means of Evangelism

The press was the new emergency means which religious leaders deliberately chose to bolster an ailing pulpit. The calculated manner in which it was chosen for this purpose is quite clearly reflected in an editorial article appearing in the Christian Herald of 1823, which declared:

The kingdom of God is a kingdom of means Preaching of the gospel is a Divine institution -- 'printing' is no less so They are kindred offices. The PULPIT AND THE PRESS are inseparably connected. . . . The Press, then, is to be regarded with a sacred veneration and supported with religious care. The press must be supported or the pulpit falls.⁴⁵

The reasons for the choice of the press, above other means, to bolster the faltering pulpit were many; but basic to all of these was the high degree of literacy of the American people. The Revolutionary War had had the beneficial effect of arousing a general demand for popular training in free public schools of the sort that would raise up an educated electorate capable of participating fully in democratic self-government. As a result as early as 1793 so trustworthy a witness as Noah Webster noted that: "Most of the Citizens of America are not only acquainted with letters and able to read their native language; but they have a strong inclination to acquire, and property to purchase, the means of knowledge."⁴⁶ Foreign travellers of about this date were deeply impressed by the amount of reading they observed taking place in homes, inns and taverns; and often contrasted the "mental alertness" of the average American with the "stolidity of the ignorant masses" of their own countries.⁴⁷ William Cobbatt, the

English political journalist, remarked with some surprise on an 1817 visit that he found every American Farmer, unlike the European peasant, to be a reader.⁴⁸ So true was this that the reported rate of illiteracy of the white population of America in 1830 was a very low 3.77 per cent.⁴⁹

Granted this high rate of literacy of the citizens of the new nation, the religious press offered many advantages as a means of evangelizing a widely-scattered people of whom over 90 per cent were unchurched. These advantages related particularly to the frequency with which periodical publications were issued, the timeliness and the regularity of their visitation, their low cost, the freedom and facility with which they could be circulated, and the adaptability of their content to every class and age of reader.

The advantage of frequency of publication was the warp and woof of all issues of the religious press, and became ever more real with the steady shift of emphasis from the quarterly to the monthly to the weekly interval of publication. When issued so frequently as this a periodical could visit an isolated parishioner many more times a year than the clergyman, ever short in supply and incessantly beleaguered with every manner of communication barrier. This frequency of publication also gave the periodical a decided edge over books as a medium of popular religious education. As the Massachusetts Missionary Magazine put the case of the book as opposed to the periodical as an educational medium: "Large publications are like large cannon, which are very necessary on some occasions; but small fugitive pieces are like small arms, which commonly do much greater execution."⁵⁰

The frequency with which the periodical visited its subscribers still again implied the element of the timeliness of its treatment of the issues that were placing the churches in their present position of crisis. "Many important subjects," observed the Quarterly Christian Spectator, could be taken up "at the very moment when public inquiry is awake, and discussion is imperiously demanded";⁵¹ and added the New Hampshire Observer:

A word spoken in season often accomplishes more than a volume would a month afterwards. Good impressions are made, at a time they need to be made for action; and errors and falsehoods, are promptly exposed, before opportunity is given them to diffuse their poison through the system.⁵²

One further major educational advantage accrued from frequency of publication. Issued regularly at quarterly to weekly intervals, the periodical introduced the needed factor of constancy into the educational process. It had all the power of repetition denoted in Edmund Burke's comment concerning the role that French newspapers had in inciting the French people to Revolution:

The writers of these papers, indeed, for the greater part are either unknown or in contempt, but they are like a battery, in which the stroke of one ball produces no great effect, but the amount of repetition is decisive. Let us only suffer any person to tell us his story morning and evening, but for one twelve-month, and he will become our master.⁵³

It was precisely this manner of thinking that brought the Christian Mirror of Portland, Me., into existence in 1822, its conductor giving as his reason for undertaking the venture: "All other modes of circulating intelligence, and making known the plans which are devised for the purpose of bringing the gospel to the destitute, are uncertain, tardy and inconstant."⁵⁴ He, like the earlier editor of the Massachusetts Missionary Magazine recognized that:

The best of men are extremely prone to forget and forsake the best of causes. Their zeal will cool, and their exertions abate, unless the proper means are incessantly employed to excite their compassion to the souls of men, and their sincere concern for the glory of God.⁵⁵

It was becoming increasingly clear that this "proper means" was "the circulation of a religious paper which by presenting regularly before the minds of the people truths of the most interesting nature exerts a moral influence which is so imperceptible and silent in its progress that very few duly estimate the amount of good which it is suited to effect."⁵⁶

The benefits of frequency, timeliness and regularity which were attributed to the periodical mode of publication scarcely

overshadowed the arguments of cost that could be mustered in its favor. Hardly a religious magazine or newspaper appeared through 1830 which did not speak of its "cheap rate", "little expense" or "moderate price." The scale of subscription rates ran all the way from 18 cents a year for the monthly duodecimo American Tract Magazine (begun 1824) to \$3.00 a year for a large octavo journal issued in 64 to 72-page monthly numbers; but the normal-sized monthly magazine (32 to 48 octavo pages) and weekly folio newspaper (4 pages) cost \$2.00 to \$2.50 a year. The normal rates were so cheap that the Congregationally sponsored Vermont Chronicle which circulated as a folio at \$2.00 a year claimed that its "quantity of printed matter" was "much more" than could "be obtained in any other way for the same price." To support this contention the publisher of the Chronicle argued that if the amount of printed matter that appeared in its 52 issues in one year were sold as a "London book" the cost would be \$22.50 advance; if as a "Boston book", \$10.60 advance; if as a secular periodical like the American Journal of Education, \$9.00 advance; or, if as a tract of the American Tract Society, \$2.28 advance.⁵⁷ Even the Panoplist which charged the highest price of \$3.00 a year for its monthly 72-page issues of solid theological content declared itself to "be the cheapest of ... [its] ... kind according to the labor bestowed upon it, ever published originally or republished in this country." Its content was greater in quantity than that of the Edinburgh Review which sold in America for \$5.00.⁵⁸ The purpose of underselling all other types of publication, even rival secular journals, was, of course, to make religious magazines and newspapers accessible and attractive to all income groups of the nation. Especially did editors wish to make their works available to the "millions who have not either money to purchase, or leisure to read large volumes";⁵⁹ to the "poor of our society";⁶⁰ to "those who are encountering the difficulty of new settlement";⁶¹ and "to the middling and industrious classes of citizens."⁶² And many were the suggestions made by publishers as to how these classes of persons could save the small amount of money needed to purchase a

religious journal. Each prospective subscriber was urged to take an inventory of the amounts he spent on "superfluities."⁶³ Each family "in the habit of drinking spirituous liquors every day" ought to "deny themselves a gill a day, and lay out the amount to purchase a newspaper."⁶⁴ The reading of a religious paper was held to be "a much more valuable, cheap, and pleasant diversion than that of chewing tobacco", for hereby one avoided the "sicken- ing of the stomach ... weakening of the nerves ... dizziness of head" that accompanied the use of the habit-forming weed.⁶⁵ One might also save the price of a paper by forgoing a "meal of vict- uals ... every week";⁶⁶ or the use of "sugar in ... tea and coffee";⁶⁷ or the baking of the weekly "mint pie";⁶⁸ or the decor- ation of the wife and children's clothing with "ribands."⁶⁹ Nor should it be overlooked that a newspaper was "worth half its cost in wrapping paper, if it is not thought best to preserve it."⁷⁰

The moderate price at which religious periodical publications could be purchased was made still more reasonable by the freedom and facility with which they could be distributed to subscribers. Immediately upon its formation in 1789, the American nation gave priority to the development of a postal system which could knit the wide-flung democratic politic into an organic unity. To this end the postal department in 1792 announced preferred rates for magazines and newspapers. Magazines were to be accepted for de- livery wherever the size of the mails and conveyance permitted at the rate of 1¢ per sheet for 50 miles; 1 1/2¢ for 50 to 100-mile distances, and 2¢ for over 100 miles. Newspapers were given even better rates. They could be sent any place within the state of their origin or any distance outside this state up to 100 miles for 1¢; any distance over 100 miles for 1 1/2¢; and all editors were given the privilege of free exchange of their papers, without any postal charge. Both magazine and newspaper rates were far cheaper than the 4¢ per sheet required for the delivery of non- periodical literature for distances under 100 miles and the 6¢ per sheet for distances over 100 miles.⁷¹

The freedom and facility of circulation that came to exist under these special rates led the editor of the Christian Watchman

and Baptist Register to declare with real insight that "the extensive circulation of a well conducted religious newspaper is calculated to aid the whole system of christian charities, more immediately and more efficiently than fifty living agents, who would travel from place to place on the same errand."⁷² Whereas adverse conditions of travel limited a stated pastor to a ministry within a small geographical area in which he could not influence more than 1,000 to 1,500 persons at the most, many of whom he might not see more than once or twice a year, a religious editor might "every week" address through the press "his five or ten or twenty thousands,"⁷³ perhaps even more. Therefore the Western Luminary concluded concerning the vocation of the religious editor: "We must be allowed to express the deliberate conviction that still higher and holier attainments could nowhere be more profitably employed."⁷⁴ By means of the press an editor could "preach the gospel to thousands whom his voice might perhaps never reach."⁷⁵

This is exactly what the religious editor did. His paper or magazine was read regularly in many types of situations where there was no settled or travelling minister within scores of miles because of wilderness conditions. Lonely families or groups of neighbors separated from all official church connection read the religious paper together on the Sabbath.⁷⁶ "Poor" or "destitute" congregations officially organized as churches, but unable to support a regular pastor, appointed members to read sermons and devotional pieces at Sunday worship except for the infrequent occasion when a visiting minister was passing through.⁷⁷ The religious journal was put to a similar use at the regional conferences of various church groups. To avoid the waste of time and expense of sending executive officers or other representatives from metropolitan centers to distant outlying areas where such conferences were being held, church executives prepared certified reports for publication in recognized papers with instructions that these be read before the conference.⁷⁸ In view of such practice it is not surprising that the Charleston Union Presbytery said of its official periodical organ, the Charleston Observer, that "it has been more efficiently useful than a much larger amount

of capital and labor employed in promoting any other benevolent object."⁷⁹ The facility with which it could be distributed made it an invaluable asset to the Presbytery's work.

A final major advantage of publishing in periodical issues remains to be mentioned. It was possible to provide a content sufficient in variety to appeal to every class and age of reader. As George Washington had said, magazines and newspapers were essentially "easy vehicles of knowledge."⁸⁰ Because of limitations of space their content had to be characterized by brevity. Thus in the relatively few pages of each issue the editor had to reduce "the ponderous tomes of antiquity ... to their elements in the modern literary laboratory."⁸¹ Hereby was provided light reading which in its great variety was adaptable to nearly every conceivable occupational situation. Issues of magazines and newspapers could be read easily "during a rainy day", or on "a long evening", or "sometimes while waiting for meals."⁸² Consequently they were well adapted to meet the reading needs of "the great body of the people, in any community" who "could not from the nature of their occupations, be expected to read voluminous writings";⁸³ especially "the man of business, released from the cares and tumults of the day" and "the husbandman and mechanic resting from their toils".⁸⁴ On the other hand they could also be made to appeal to more select audiences, if necessary, like the Christian Spectator which was "taken by most of the Literary and Theological Institutions in the country"⁸⁵ and gained a reputation at home and in England "such as no similar theological work in its day";⁸⁶ or the Boston Telegraph which believed its objects "alike deserving of the Statesman, the Scholar, and the Christian";⁸⁷ or the Spirit of the Pilgrims which designed its content to meet the needs of "the Orthodox clergy and the more intelligent part of the laity" and did "not expect" or "desire" a "general circulation."⁸⁸

Just as the periodical publication held appeal to all classes of readers, so too could it attract all ages of readers. It was basically a "family" visitor containing a compendium of religious instruction for grandparents, parents, youth and small children. Special point was made that it was "peculiarly fitted to excite the

attention of the young" and of great value in awakening their attention to reading.⁸⁹ Religious editors were so convinced of this that they printed again and again a piece which first appeared in the Long Island Star:

A child beginning to read becomes delighted with a newspaper, because he reads of names and things which are familiar; and he will make a progress accordingly. A newspaper in one year is worth a quarter's schooling, to a child, and every father must consider that substantial information is connected with this advancement.⁹⁰

In fact the educational value of religious magazines and newspapers in teaching children to read was so widely accepted that they were officially introduced into public schools in parts of New England and in New York state in the 1820's, it being hoped that the moral instruction in the reading matter would have beneficial effect upon the child; but advocates of the principle of separation of church and state were quick to point out the contradiction between this practice and the intention of the American constitution, and in time gained court decisions against it.⁹¹

Such reverses were, however, less setbacks than conclusive testimony that religious magazines and newspapers were being recognized as what they really were - powerful mediums of religious education. Their advantages of frequency, timeliness and regularity of visitation, low cost, freedom and facility of circulation, and adaptability in content to every class and age of reader had made them forces to be praised as heralds of the millenium or dreaded as enslavers of the human mind, according to the uses to which they were put.

Press as Agent of Socialization

Whether their influence was welcomed or feared, religious magazines and newspapers performed their primary function with telling effect.

By facilitating communication between isolated groups they set in motion the process of socialization by which detached congregations of wide dispersion were drawn together and organized

into state, regional or national bodies, sharing in these unions common activities, sentiments and beliefs. The main types of bodies in which religiously committed persons thus began to act in concert in America were essentially four: (1) the theological party; (2) the denomination; (3) the schismatic protest against tightening denominational organization; and (4) the voluntary benevolent, or human service, association.⁹²

The theological party, as here considered, was a religious group sharing a common creed, confession of faith or set of doctrinal ideas, but having no definite organizational structure. When the first American religious journals were founded in the early eighteenth century there were basically five such parties seeking to make converts to their views: (1) Calvinist, (2) Arminian, (3) Liberal, (4) Sacramental, and (5) New Testament Primitivists. Calvinism was the common foundation upon which Congregationalists, Presbyterians, the Reformed and the Baptists set their beliefs. Arminianism was the nurturing root of Methodism. Liberal theology was the wellspring of freethinking movements ranging from Unitarianism and Universalism to Deism and Scepticism. Sacramentalism was the priming force behind Anglicanism, Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism. New Testament Primitivism was the essential ingredient of the belief of numerous smaller groups beginning with the older off-shoots of the Reformation like the German Pietist and the Friends' conventicles in Pennsylvania and proceeding on to the rising newer "far out" groups like the Christian Connection, Disciples, Halcyonites, New Jerusalem Church and various wayward Baptist offshoots. Yet, despite this potential for specialization, of the 35 distinct religious journals issued in America to the year 1800 only two gave explicit evidence in their title or opening address of an intended denominational purpose - the Free Universal Magazine (1793-1794, Universalist) and the Methodist Magazine (1797-1798). All others, save perhaps the Arminian Magazine (1789-1790), which could be inferred to be Methodist, concealed their specific attachments in quite general discussion of the merits of existing theological systems or in

publication under highly noncommittal titles. German language journals took such broadly-conceived names as Geistliche Fama (1730-1731) or Geistliches Magazien (1764-1771 or later); English-language journals equally avoided indications of specific group affiliation by choosing to publish under such detached titles as General Magazine and Historical Chronicle (1741), Royal Spiritual Magazine (1771), Christian's, Scholar's, and Farmer's Magazine (1789-1791), Theological Magazine (1795-1799), United States Christian Magazine (1795-1796), Christian's Monitor (1798-1799), Religious Monitor (1799), etc.⁹³ The emphasis in this period was consistently upon gaining union of exertion by common theological orientation, particularly to Calvinism in one of its current Edwardsean, Hopkinsian, Emmonite, New Haven, or Princetonian variants; but also to Arminianism, Liberalism, Sacramentalism and Primitive Christianity in that general order of stress.

Slowly after 1800, then abruptly after 1810, the religious press shifted its interest from the promotion of the causes of theological parties to the advancement of types of union that could bring more immediate practical results. Chief among these more practical types of union was the denomination. It was a group organized in definite structured form. Its members shared not only common theological beliefs, but also common practical aims and activities and submitted themselves to fixed patterns of governmental control. The local congregation looked to the minister for authority, the minister to regional authorities, and regional authorities to national authorities, according to the structural form of the particular group. This more structured type of organization was much better adapted to meet the religious crisis at hand than was the loosely-knit theological party held ~~together~~ only by the association of common ideas. Theological discussion continued to compose a considerable portion of the content of every sort of religious periodical publication, but, from this time on, more strictly within the confines set by the polity, worship and practice of the particular denominational group. So rapidly did this fever of specialization of organization take hold

that whereas to 1800 only two American religious journals had declared openly their specific denominational attachments, well over half of those published simultaneously in the year 1830, 110 of 189, openly avowed denominational affiliation, either by title or by editorial declaration, while a number of others were so close to being denominational organs that to all intents and purposes they furthered the trend in that direction. A breakdown of this 1830 denominational output by specific groups provides an excellent index of the relative strengths that various denominations had gained by that year through the use of the press in conjunction with the pulpit. The Presbyterian and Reformed constellation of journals led all others in numbers, there being 28, all main line Presbyterian except 2 which were Reformed Dutch and 1 which was German Reformed. Of the other strictly denominational journals of this year 13 were Baptist; 11 Universalist; 11 Congregational; 10 Roman Catholic; 7 each of Disciples of Christ and Methodist persuasion; 6 Protestant Episcopal; 4 Unitarian; 3 each of Christian Connection and Lutheran Church; 2 each of Free Thought and Friends attachment; and one each devoted to the causes of the Moravians, the New Jerusalem Church and the United Brethren. In addition between the years 1800 and 1830 the Dunkers, the Halcyon Church and Judaism had published one or more periodicals to promote their views, though none had lived into the year 1830. In short the five main theological parties that had existed at the turn of the century had with the assistance of the religious press fragmented into structured denominational groups which mirrored not only the basis tenets of these main theological parties, but most of their deviant offshoots. Further there was no mincing of opinion on the part of editors as to the responsibility of church members in subscribing to their denominational papers. Said the Presbyterian Evangelical Guardian and Review of that body's periodical publications: "No others ought to be encouraged by her members than those which accord with her faith and practice."⁹⁴ The Protestant Episcopal Church Register was nearly as emphatic in advising strongly: "Let the members of our Church, first support their own

periodical press, and then, if they please, patronize others."⁹⁵ Editors of other denominational papers were no less outspoken in this regard.

The third major type of body into which the religious press drew isolated groups into concerted action was the schismatic protest against the ever-tightening denominational noose. The schism in its completed form was a type of division or separation from an established denomination; a breach of unity among people of the same basic theological faith caused sometimes by disagreement on fine points of doctrine but more commonly by differences of opinion rooted in concepts of polity, worship, race, language, nationality, politics, the conduct of revivals and other practical concerns. The leadership of persons possessing unusual charismatic gifts was also usually involved. These persons customarily turned to the religious press to gain a wider hearing, became editors of works which rallied followers to the cause, then within a very few years led the new group into a structural organization which differed only in kind, hardly in purpose, from that of the parent body from which the break had been made. Seven of the major denominations were rent by schisms of this sort through 1830. The first to suffer in this manner, in point of time, were the Presbyterians who had to contend with schismatic works founded by Associate Reformed Presbyterian (1806), Reform Presbyterian (1822), Associate Presbyterian (1824, after an insignificant previous attempt in 1798) and Cumberland Presbyterian (1830) groups, although all but the last were really groups of European origin which had brought their differences of belief to America to propagate. The next denomination to be so jolted was the Baptist which had to face the founding of journals of Free-Will (1811), Seventh-Day (1821), Primitive Anti-Missionary (1824), and Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit (1829) schisms. This Baptist ordeal was followed by that of the Episcopalians who were confronted with the bevy of "Evangelical" magazines and newspapers (1812) which led eventually to the formation of the Reformed Episcopal Church; and by that of the Universalists who entered into a heated journalistic controversy

over salvation (1820) that led to the Restorationist split. At this point Methodist schismatic journalism entered the scene to vie with the Presbyterians and Baptists for highest honors, Methodist Protestant dissent receiving first attention (1821), then the Stillwellite Methodist (1825), then the Reformed Methodist (1827). Not surprisingly in such an atmosphere the Roman Catholics were also harassed by dissident voices of Irish-American (1810), Hoganite (1812), and Cuban-American (1824) papers. Even the seemingly docile Friends were rent by a journalistic war conducted by the Hicksites (1824). Most significantly, except in instances of the Presbyterian, Protestant Episcopal and Roman Catholic schisms which were imported from Europe, the founding of the periodicals supporting these various schismatic protests preceded by months or years the withdrawal of the groups from their parent organizations, and were the chief vehicles of propaganda that led to eventual separations and the formation of what were really new denominational structures. In 1830 there were 18 journals devoting full attention to promoting one or more of the schisms above-named, the great majority founded after 1815.

By way of welcome relief the fourth and final main type of body into which the religious press tried to draw widely-dispersed people for united action was the voluntary benevolent, or human service, association. Made to order for a country in which the voluntary principle was a constitutional necessity in religious life, it was a type of religious organization in which religious persons of all persuasions could unite for the performance of definite tasks. Questions of doctrinal differences were waived or reduced to fundamental agreements which concerned the idealism of the Christian faith. The theological interest yielded to the practical and the service concept replaced the doctrinal concept. Thus support could cut in one grand sweep across the lines of theological parties, denominations and schismatic protests against denominationalism. About 1800 the religious press turned in earnest to the support of special causes sponsored by this type of voluntary association. In the order in which periodicals were

founded to support them, these causes were those of church music (1800, with one previous attempt in 1785), prison reform (1800), the tract movement (1806), women's rights (1806), the peace movement (1815), the Sunday School movement (1816), the Bible Society movement (1818), the anti-slavery cause (1819, including both abolitionist and colonizationist solutions), anti-missionism (1820), freemasonry (1820, pro and con), the seaman's movement (1821), "free meetings" agitation (1826), and the temperance movement (1828). In the year 1830 the number of journals in simultaneous publication devoted primarily to these various special interests were 57. These and their predecessors were the magazines and newspapers which established the national sentiment for the founding of the benevolent empire of the great "American" religious societies and then became their official organs. The societies of this description which had religious journals devoted primarily to their causes through 1830 were, in order of the date of the society's founding: the American Education Society (1815), the American Bible Society (1816), the American Colonization Society (1817), the American Society for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews (1822), the American Tract Society (1823), the American Sunday School Union (1824), the American Seaman's Friend Society (1826), the American Temperance Society (1826), the American Convention for the Abolition of Slavery (1828), and the American Peace Society (1828). Except for the case of the Colonization Society the journals advocating each of these causes were founded either before, or at the time of, the establishment of the society, with such great effect that Christian Examiner in commenting in 1829 on the weight of authority of the printed page of the religious periodical said:

So extensive have coalitions become ... and so various and rapid are the means of communication, that when a few leaders have agreed upon an object, an impulse may be given in a month to the whole country. Whole states may be deluged with tracts and other publications, and a voice like many waters be called forth from immense and widely separated multitudes. Here is a new power brought to bear on society, and it is a great moral question, how it ought to be viewed, and what duties it imposes.⁹⁶

The special causes above-mentioned as getting nation-wide attention through the religious press were only those benevolent movements supported by religious journals given more or less exclusively to their promotion. In addition scores of other special humanitarian causes were supported, almost from beginning of American religious journalism, without having any journal established solely to promote them until some time after 1830. Most editors of denominational and schismatic journals, as well as of journals devoted more exclusively to the special causes already mentioned, showed great solicitude for the care of the blind, the deaf, the dumb, the insane, the indebted, the pauperized, the orphaned, the widowed, the sick, and nearly all the other helpless wards of society for whose welfare voluntary national benevolent associations were also eventually to be founded. The same editors advocated more general moral reform with real passion, centering attention upon such questions as the propriety of attending teas, balls, masquerades, circuses or the theatre; upon the folly of fashion in women's dress and mourning apparel; upon the evils of gaming in its various expressions of card-playing, betting, horseracing and lotteries; upon the dangers of reading novels and risque poetry; and upon the intemperate use of profanity, snuff, spirituous liquors and tobacco. Social reform was by no means overlooked: civil and religious rights were strongly defended, especially separation of church and state, religious liberty, freedom of thought, freedom of speech and freedom of press; much consideration was given to the social and economic injustices inflicted upon the Indian, the Negro, the newly-arrived immigrant, and women; and despite growing national isolation there was real concern for establishment of some type of organization capable of enforcing a code of international justice. Less commendable, but adding substantially to the diversity of the special interests promoted in denominational and schismatic journals, were the various "anti" movements. In addition to the Anti-Mission and Anti-Masonic causes already mentioned as having journals devoted primarily to their causes, were the Anti-Catholic, Anti-Education, Anti-Free Thought, Anti-Priestcraft, Anti-Protestant, Anti-Revival, Anti-Unitarian and Anti-Universalist movements.

Conclusion

This is perhaps the place to leap to an abrupt conclusion of special significance to the historian. The degree of specialization of the American religious press during the first hundred years of its existence, which ended in 1830, makes it a coefficient of the religious mind of the day. It furnishes us with as near a complete index of the state of religious affairs of the time as we are ever likely to have, and furnishes us with our most accurate insight into the emotional instability of American religious life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century.

It provides this insight not only because of the completeness of its index of the religious happenings of the time, but also because of two additional features of the content of religious magazines and newspapers: (1) contemporaneity and (2) continuity. With regard to the contemporaneity of their content, because of their publication at frequent and regular intervals they were able, as the Long Island Star noted, "to catch the manners living as they arise";⁹⁷ or as the Latter-Day Luminary preferred to put it: "Like the painters of Montezuma they portray and transmit character and events as they daily occur."⁹⁸ With regard to the continuity of their content, as the Christian Register said, they were "a perpetual cyclopedia in endless numbers, ever various and new."⁹⁹ In these endless numbers, published contemporary to the events themselves, we are provided with a mirror which reflects the whole of the developing life of the day. This "view of the facts" mirrored in early American religious journals "may be and generally is, distorted by denominational and factional bias", but at the same time "their unconscious portrayal of the social background and their naive revelation of contemporary religious attitudes are unerring in their fidelity."¹⁰⁰ We find in the accounts of the events as they happen, a "constantly ... transforming energy upon mankind, beneath which society appears to be assuming new forms, and new human life .. novel ... and distinctive."¹⁰¹ In brief we may say, as did the editor of the Christian Watchman in 1827: "Whether it be the periodical press that forms the public taste, or the public taste that controls the

periodical press, they have been admirably adapted to each other;"¹⁰² for this instrument of culture both "reflects, as a mirror, and modifies, as an agent, the public sentiment."¹⁰³

Here we have an unusually diversified type of source material for the interpretation of early American religious history. Yet how little religious magazines and newspapers have been used up to now in the writing of this history! This means surely that early American religious history is going to have to be rewritten, in part at least, in keeping with the insights to the present locked in this vast body of unused information.

FOOTNOTES

¹Christian Intelligencer, I (August 7, 1830), 2.

²Philadelphian, VI (January 15, 1830), 10, italics mine.

³Western Luminary, IV (July 4, 1827), 1, which gave credit to the American Sunday-School Magazine.

⁴Another 115 titles were proposed for publication during this period, but apparently never actually published. For the list of titles and tables from which these and any later undocumented figures of this section are taken, see G.P. Albaugh "A History and Bibliography of American Religious Periodicals and Newspapers, 1730-1830, with Library Locations," scheduled for publication in 1970.

Literal historians date the beginnings of American religious journalism with the appearance of the weekly Christian History in Boston on March 5, 1743; but it is a mistake to exclude from consideration an earlier false start of 1730 and semi-religious beginnings of the years 1739 and 1741. In 1730 a small magazine entitled Geistliche Fama appeared, indicating in its imprint only that it was "compiled and put to press" in "Philadelphia". Its content allowed it to pass as a product of the German Pietist community settled at Germantown on the outskirts of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Succeeding numbers through 1731 continued to carry the "Philadelphia" imprint and gave attention to "Pennsylvania Christianity", but in later issues the imprints either gave no place of publication or named a place strange to the American scene - "Sarden" in 1732 & 1733, "Lacedicea" in 1736. No issue revealed the identity of the person immediately responsible for conducting the work, though the printer has since been identified as Johann Conrad Dippel of Büdingen, Germany. Apparently he felt that use of the New Testament imagery of the "seven churches of Asia" (Revelation, chapters i-iii) in designating the places of printing of his magazine would attract the patronage of German-American Pietists, especially those clustered about Philadelphia in Pennsylvania. His surreptitious journalistic effort deserves recognition both for its intent and for what it adds to our understanding of the religious life of colonial Pennsylvania.

This false start was followed by two semi-religious beginnings which merit consideration on similar counts: Christoph Saur's Hoch=Deutsch Pensylvanische Geschicht=Schreiber, Oder: Sammlung Wichtiger Nachrichten aus dem Natur=und Kirchen=Reich (Germantown, Pa., 1739-1745) and Benjamin Franklin's monthly General Magazine, and Historical Chronicle for all British Plantations in America (Philadelphia, 1741). The former gave in its subtitle a forthright declaration of religious intention, but ultimately, through changes of name and format which extended its life to 1778, it became increasingly secular in purpose.

The other, though ostensibly planned to be general in its scope, gave so much space to reports of the First Great Awakening - close to half of its content - that it can scarcely be excluded from a list of American religious journals.

⁵I (January, 1828), 4.

⁶When issued quarterly the religious octavo was composed of five to ten sheets (80-160 pages) and was devoted chiefly to the printing of erudite doctrinal essays, labored reviews and sermons, lengthy historical sketches of churches and associated institutions, and detailed pious biography; only a sprinkling of chaste anecdotes and poetry and tidbit notices of philosophical, literary, agricultural and scientific happenings forestalled complete capitulation to solemnity. When the religious octavo proceeded from quarterly to bimonthly and monthly publication the number of sheets used for the printing of each issue was scaled down to fit the greater periodicity, customarily to two or three (32 to 48 pages), though sometimes as many as four (64 pages) were used; and the ponderosity of quarterly content was relieved by giving regular space, in increasing amounts up to half of each issue, to "religious intelligence" - the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century term for current religious news in the form of proceedings of national and regional ecclesiastical bodies, accounts of the activities of their ancillary missionary and benevolent societies, educational summary designed to highlight the needs of colleges and theological seminaries, reports of revivals in progress or only recently terminated and a great variety of paragraph notices relating to ordinations, installations, dedications, baptisms, consecrations, deaths of outstanding ministers or laymen, and scores of kindred religious events. A journal published less often than weekly in a format smaller than octavo was usually one intended to cater to the simpler reading tastes of children, right down to the tiny tots.

⁷Published weekly on a single sheet first in standard folio size, later in elephant and atlas sizes as well, the content of each of its four-page issues became fairly set in arrangement. The first page was devoted to the printing of sermons and essays on Christian doctrines and duties, sometimes so long that they had to be continued from issue to issue. The second page was given about half to more essay matter, and half to editorial comment, either upon religious questions of the day or upon correspondence received since publication of the last number. The third page was composed in varying amounts from week to week of religious intelligence akin to that printed in the octavo monthly, but more pithy; capsule secular summary giving special attention to latest foreign news, congressional and local legislative proceedings, election data, marine arrivals, bank notices, current prices,

agricultural reports, natural catastrophes such as storms and fires, marriage and death records, etc.; and a modicum of general advertising. The fourth page carried spill-over from the first three; miscellany often departmentalized as "Literary", "Philosophical", "Moral", "Educational", "Family", "Ladies", "Youth", "Poetry", etc.; and additional bits of advertising, most commonly literary announcements relating to the sale of religious books or the conditions for attending various private schools. Any deviations from this basic arrangement of content was likely to be in the direction of the condensation of essay matter and miscellany so that more space could be given to editorial comment, religious news, secular summary or advertising, in that order of preference.

⁸VI (1823), 6.

⁹For reported circulations of individual religious journals for all years through 1830 see Albaugh, op.cit., Appendix II, Table 9. For population statistics see United States Bureau of Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Commerce, 1949), pp. 25ff; hereafter cited as USBC, 1789-1945.

¹⁰Religious Herald, II (January 9, 1829), 3.

¹¹Ibid., which also cited the circulation of seven other British religious journals giving that of the Quarterly Review as 12,000; of the Edinburgh Review as 10,300; of the Missionary Register as 9,500; of Blackwood's Magazine as 7,000; of the London Monthly as 4,200; of the Christian Observer as 3,000; and of the Westminster Review as 1,805.

¹²The History of the Times (London:Times Publishing Co., 1935-1952), I, 245, gives the number of the copies of the Times distributed in 1830 as 3,409,986; thus its daily distribution, calculated by excluding Sunday as a day of publication, would average 11,000. The Eclectic Recorder, I (October 19, 1827), 70, reported the circulation of the Berlin Gazette as 11,000.

¹³Boston Recorder, XIII (April 4, 1828), 54.

¹⁴James Owen Knauss, Social Conditions Among the Pennsylvania Germans in the Eighteenth Century, as Revealed in the German Newspapers Published in America. (Reprinted from the Proceedings of the Pennsylvania German Society, Vol. XXIX; Lancaster, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Society, 1922), p. 23.

¹⁵I (May 1, 1829), 167-168.

¹⁶Boston Recorder, XIII (April 4, 1828), 54.

¹⁷Ibid., XV (May 19, 1830), 76.

¹⁸Christian Watchman, XI (April 30, 1830), 72.

¹⁹Freedom's Journal, II (January 2, 1829), 310. He might also have added to the Post Office as a place of prowling, for what happened there could be equally exasperating, as the publisher of the Regular Baptist Miscellany of Zanesville, Ohio, explained in the complaint (I, August, 1830, 107):

It is not unfrequently the case, that after the arrival of newspapers and periodicals at their destined office, the neighbors will flock in, who never subscribe for a paper, and the good natured postmaster will suffer them to gather all the news they can from the papers and periodicals in the office, at the expense of the subscribers, and then throw the paper into the most convenient place, and when the subscriber calls, his paper is not to be found, and the postmaster will sooner suffer an editor to be blamed, and that, too, in his presence than to acknowledge that he has unlawfully permitted his neighbor to read the periodical, and that he knows not what he has done with it ... Sometimes the postmaster himself throws it aside after reading it, where he cannot readily find it when called for

²⁰IV (August 5, 1829), 7.

²¹Trumpet and Universalist Magazine, X (January 3, 1829), 107.

²²Watchman and Christian Repository, X (August 22, 1829), 67, where the editor reports finding a copy of his paper at an Inn.

²³Specimen copy of a proposed octavo edition, undated but probably issued November, 1816. The regular edition in publication was folio.

²⁴Boston Recorder, II (April 1, 1817), 55.

²⁵Religious Messenger of the Philadelphia Conference, I (November 30, 1826), 191.

²⁶New England Christian Herald, II (December 29, 1830), 52.

²⁷Western Luminary, III (May 30, 1827), 382, which gave credit to the Christian Advocate.

²⁸Franklin H. Littell, From State Church to Pluralism (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Book, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1962), p. 32.

²⁹USBC, 1789-1945, pp. 25ff.

³⁰Ibid.

- ³¹John R. Bodo, The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, 1812-1848 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. 13-14.
- ³²XIV (1818), 212-213.
- ³³Ralph V. Harlow, The Growth of the United States (rev. ed.; New York: Henry Holt & Co., Inc., 1932), p. 313.
- ³⁴Ibid. See also Eugene C. Barker, et al., The Building of Our Nation (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson & Co., 1941), pp. 327-329; and Homer C. Hockett, Political and Social Growth of the American People, 1492-1865 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1947), p. 338.
- ³⁵John B. McMaster, A History of the People of the United States (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1900), V, 149.
- ³⁶Frank L. Mott, American Journalism (New York: Macmillan Co., 1942), pp. 193-194.
- ³⁷Harlow, op. cit., p. 314.
- ³⁸Barker, op. cit., p. 367.
- ³⁹Miscellaneous Repository, III (May 29, 1830), 367, quoting from the Niles' Register.
- ⁴⁰Albert B. Hart, Formation of the Union, 1750-1829 (New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1926), p. 248.
- ⁴¹Plato, The Dialogues of Plato, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1873), IV, 262f.
- ⁴²Hart, op. cit., p. 110.
- ⁴³Charles L. Montesquieu, The Spirit of Laws, trans. Thomas Nugent (new ed., rev.; London: G. Bell & Sons, 1900-1902), Bk. VIII, chap. 19.
- ⁴⁴Sidney E. Mead, Nathaniel William Taylor 1786-1858: A Connecticut Liberal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), p. 76.
- ⁴⁵X (May 17, 1823), 1.
- ⁴⁶Mott, op. cit., p. 158.
- ⁴⁷Charles E. Beard and Mary R. Beard, A Basic History of the United States (Philadelphia: Blakiston Company, 1944), p. 64.
- ⁴⁸Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought (2d ed.; New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1951), p. 232.
- ⁴⁹Ibid., p. 317.

- ⁵⁰I (May, 1803), 3-4.
- ⁵¹Third Series, I (1829), 236.
- ⁵²XII (January 6, 1830), 4.
- ⁵³Edmund Burke, The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke (rev. ed.: Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1886), IV, 323.
- ⁵⁴Prospectus Number (July 13, 1822), p. 1.
- ⁵⁵I (1803-04), 4.
- ⁵⁶Religious Monitor, IV (September, 1827), 176.
- ⁵⁷Charleston Observer, II (January 12, 1828), 3.
- ⁵⁸Panoplist, IX (1813), 48.
- ⁵⁹Repository of Knowledge (April 15, 1801), inside back cover.
- ⁶⁰Gospel Luminary, New Series II (December 10, 1828), 1, announcing the purpose of a new periodical, the Christian Repository.
- ⁶¹Indiana Religious Intelligencer, I (May 1, 1829), 167-168.
- ⁶²Temple of Reason, I (April 22, 1801), 119.
- ⁶³Christian Advocate, I (September 9, 1826), 4.
- ⁶⁴Philadelphian, III (January 26, 1827), 15.
- ⁶⁵Western Luminary, IV (April 2, 1828), 313.
- ⁶⁶Vermont Chronicle, V (October 29, 1830), 173.
- ⁶⁷Ibid., III (November 21, 1828), 185.
- ⁶⁸Western Sabbath School Messenger, I (June 1, 1830), 44.
- ⁶⁹Vermont Chronicle, III (November 21, 1828), 185.
- ⁷⁰Western Monitor, VII (June 19, 1821), 1.
- ⁷¹For more detailed data on postal rates see S.M.D. North, "History and Present Condition of the Newspaper and Periodical Press of the United States, with a Catalogue of the Publications of the Census Year 1880," Tenth Census of the United States (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884), VIII, 139; also Mott, op. cit., p. 16.

- ⁷²New Series, I (April 22, 1820), 3.
- ⁷³Christian Journal, I (November 27, 1829), 206.
- ⁷⁴VI (January 20, 1830), 109.
- ⁷⁵Virginia and North Carolina Presbyterian Preacher, I (1828), preface, v-vii.
- ⁷⁶For the example of family reading see Religious Intelligencer, I (March 30, 1817), 704. For examples of reading at gatherings of neighbors see Connecticut Evangelical Magazine, I (April, 1801), 393; Gospel Visitant, I (1811-1812), "To the Agents and Patrons"; and Trumpet and Universalist Magazine, I (June 27, 1829), 205.
- ⁷⁷Baptist Preacher, I (1827-1828), preface; also Methodist Preacher, I (1830), preface.
- ⁷⁸For examples of such reading see Connecticut Evangelical Magazine, I (October, 1800), 124; Utica Christian Magazine, I (July, 1813), 11; and Missionary Herald, XXIII (January, 1823), 11-12.
- ⁷⁹Christian Journal, II (1829), 2.
- ⁸⁰Lyon N. Richardson, A History of Early American Magazines, 1741-1789 (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1931), p. 1.
- ⁸¹American Sunday School Magazine, IV (May, 1827), 130.
- ⁸²Zion's Advocate, II (December 4, 1829), 28.
- ⁸³Presbyterian Magazine, I (January, 1821), 3.
- ⁸⁴Christian Disciple, II (1814), prospectus, v.
- ⁸⁵V (1823), preface.
- ⁸⁶VII (January, 1825), inside cover.
- ⁸⁷I (January 1, 1824), 1.
- ⁸⁸III (December, 1830), inside front cover.
- ⁸⁹Panoplist, X (1814), 1.
- ⁹⁰For examples of reprintings by religious editors see Journal of Humanity, I (November 25, 1829), 108; Zion's Advocate, II (December 24, 1829), 28; Western Luminary, VI (January 27, 1830), 113; and Vermont Telegraph, II (February 16, 1830), 84.

- ⁹¹For instances of contemporary controversy over this question see Christian Register, IV (April 9, 1825), 54; Christian Watchman, VI (August 19, 1825), 147; Zion's Herald, V (February 28, 1827), 35; and Charleston Observer, II (January 12, 1828), 6.
- ⁹²In choosing this classification of late colonial and early national religious types I am following, with one major exception, that suggested by Howard E. Jensen, "The Rise of Religious Journalism in the United States" (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill, 1929), chap. ii. His fourfold classification includes: (1) theological party, (2) denomination, (3) sect, and (4) voluntary benevolent association. I have substituted "schism" for "sect" because early American religious dissent usually began as a theological party within a denomination and developed quickly into a structured schismatic group, exhibiting much more organization than is generally associated with sectarian protests.
- ⁹³All specific information given in this section, if not otherwise documented, is taken from Albaugh, op. cit., where lists of titles and statistical tables can be found to substantiate all data.
- ⁹⁴I (May, 1817), 14-15.
- ⁹⁵IV (April 24, 1829), 110.
- ⁹⁶VI (1829), 106-107.
- ⁹⁷Western Monitor, VII (June 19, 1821), quoting from the Long Island Star.
- ⁹⁸I (1818-1819), Introduction, v.
- ⁹⁹II (November 22, 1822), 60.
- ¹⁰⁰Jensen, op. cit., p. 1.
- ¹⁰¹Western Luminary, IV (July 4, 1827), 1, quoting the American Sunday School Magazine.
- ¹⁰²VIII (May 25, 1827), 100.
- ¹⁰³Evangelical Witness, I (1822-23), Prospectus, 3-4.