Monday June 28, 2004

Thursday July 1, 2004

July 6, 2004

8/31/2004

Congregationalists Encounter the "Other":
The Church and Four Waves of Immigration

New England is the one of the classic examples of a region transformed by its experience with the "Other". Beginning with a handful of small colonies, founded by English Puritans fleeing Charles I and his Archbishop William Laud, the Puritans and their successors have had to adjust their theology and their social understanding to four successive waves of immigration: the colonial wave that threatened to make them "non-conformists" in their own colonies, the first nineteenth century wave of immigration from Ireland and Germany, the second nineteenth century wave from Eastern and Southern Europe, and, finally, the recent influx of immigrants from around the world. Today, the descendents of the Puritans are a small religious and ethnic minority in a region that continues to become increasingly religiously and socially diverse. It is the expectation of this paper that an overview of this history and of the various adjustments that the Congregational churches made to their changing social location may be of value to other

Christian bodies, especially those who share a common Reformed theological tradition.

I.

Puritan Theology

Puritans, whether in England or in the American colonies, understood themselves to be heirs to the Reformed tradition. Although a vast literature exists attempting to define Puritans and Puritanism, the movement is best understood as those who wanted to move the Protestant Church of England more in the direction followed by the Reformed Churches on the continent. During the epic struggle to establish the Protestant church in the reigns of Henry VIII, Mary, and Elizabeth I, many Protestant advocates were in exile in Switzerland and southern Germany. The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England reflect their interest in Reformed theology. Once the basic Protestant character of the church was secured, many of these exiles continued to press for further reformation along continental lines. The Puritans of New England were among those advocates of further Reformation.

Deleted: spent a good deal of time in

Holland played a particularly important role in the formation of this minority. England supported the Dutch rebellion against the Spanish both directly and indirectly, and educated English theologians were well aware of the Dutch reputation for theological tolerance. The story of the Pilgrim exiles in the Netherlands is well known, but fewer are aware that between 1620 and 1635 an English-speaking classis was part of the Dutch Reformed Church. Not only did those who later were called Pilgrims make their way from Leiden to London to Plymouth, Massachusetts, but many of the Puritans who went to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s had first spent time in semi-exile in Holland. Although the stated purpose of the English classis

Deleted: There had always been

was to provide English-speaking churches for merchants and chaplains for English military units, the classis also brought together Puritan pastors and congregations who were prohibited from worshipping according to their conscience in England proper. In addition, William Ames, perhaps the most influential 17th century Puritan theologian, was Professor of Theology at the University of Franeker in Friesland and a member of the Synod of Dort. Much New England Puritan theology was an elaboration of his thought.

Federal or Covenant theology lay at the heart of the life and practices of these English Puritans. Following Ames, they believed that God usually worked by summoning people to enter into covenant with Godself and that God had finally acted decisively in Jesus Christ to establish a covenant of grace. This divine action had ecclesiastical implications. Although they had fewer arguments with the other aspects of the sacramentology of the Church of England, many Puritans believed that reliance on baptism and confirmation discouraged people from making a personal religious commitment. Each individual Christian needed to experience the covenant of grace whereby God assured the individual believer of their salvation. By 1630, many Puritan immigrants to New England believed that in order to join a particular Christian congregation, one had to provide public evidence of one's personal Christian experience. There are many excellent copies of the testimonies that persons gave in worship. The presumption was that the covenant was two-fold: with God and with the local church. God covenanted with the individual by acting in such a way the person knew that their life was marked by the grace of God. Then the person, if male, gave witness to this before the congregation, or, if female, before the deacons or elders of the congregation, and was received into the membership in the congregation by owning the congregation's own covenant. There are a number of accounts of

Deleted: in certain circumstances

Deleted: full

Deleted: of

the formation of individual churches in the Massachusetts Bay Colony where the people of the town elected the deacons who formed a standing committee and then heard testimonies, and voted on whether people should be allowed to give said witness before the congregation in order that they might be voted into the membership of the Church proper. This entire process meant that there was only a little room for dissent. These were strong fences to be sure, but they were never as narrow as later Scottish understandings of subscription to the Westminster Confession. To own the covenant was understood to include an assent to the Reformed understanding of the Christian gospel.

Deleted: no

Early on the Massachusetts Bay Colony found conflicted over persons who dissented from the teachings and practices of the Puritan divines. Roger Williams, Anne Hutchinson and John Wheelwright are examples of the ways in which the Massachusetts Puritans dealt with dissent. All were banished from the colony. Quakers were less fortunate. They were hung publicly on Boston Common, if they returned after banishment. The reputation of the Puritans in England was that of an ultra-Orthodox group, non-conformists who brooked no other non-conformists. During the English Civil War, Richard Saltonstall, whose family has been one of the most distinguished in the history of the commonwealth of Massachusetts for several centuries, wrote from England to the pastors of the First Church in Boston to inquire as to the truth of the assertions that a variety of groups whom English Puritans would tolerate were not being tolerated in England and to further inquire about the actual practices of the Massachusetts Bay Colony regarding other dissenters.

Deleted: some of

Deleted: Long before anyone was ever executed for being a dissenter, a number of persons had been fined, jailed, otherwise punished or banished from the colony.

Deleted: Quite quickly t

Deleted: American

Deleted: non-conformists

The Reverends Cotton and Wilson cordially responded to Saltonstall's concerns, and carefully laid out the argument that people were welcome to dissent so long as they went

somewhere else to do so. Rather speciously they added that dissenters were like people breaking into someone's home. The picture was that the entire colony was a family committed to a particular ideal, and that others might visit it but only persons willing to subscribe to the thought and practice of the American Puritans were welcome to remain in the colony. Wilson and Cotton were not defending contemporary Reformed Orthodoxy. Like many New England divines, both had reservations about the newly minted Westminster Confession, and New England theologians delighted in battling each other over points of doctrine. Consequently, they argued that a lack of unanimity of opinion differed from the toleration of open dissent. Uniformity was urged for the great truths of Christian belief and practice. New England represented a great opportunity to put the New Testament into practice, and, hence, had the right to insist that all who came participate in the great adventure. Ironically, New England theologians would find themselves isolated from some Reformed Churches, including some Presbyterians and the Christian Reformed Churches, because their terms of subscription were too loose, not because they were too rigorous.

Deleted: . They did not desire to open up the debate that they had lost in England about the desirability of enforcing their practice on the whole of society

Following the Glorious Revolution in 1689, the Massachusetts Bay Colony was re-chartered. Although the power of the established churches was limited somewhat, they still functioned as established churches in many ways. It was not possible to incorporate a town in Massachusetts Bay Colony until provision had been made for a church, a pastor and their support. The annual meeting of the citizens of the parish incorporated the annual meeting of the church itself as well. The oldest churches in New England do not have possession of the records of their earliest meetings because they are in possession of the towns where they were held. They are a part of the minutes of the annual town meeting.

With the exception of Boston where voluntary contributions supported the churches, the churches depended on the taxes levied on the members of the parish. Everyone in town was required to pay taxes for the support of the congregation whether they belonged or not. For many years all persons were required to attend, but even after those laws were dropped, taxation supported churches until 1818 in Connecticut and 1833 in Massachusetts

Nonetheless, Puritans had to cope with Anglican, Scottish and Scotch-Irish immigrants who migrated to serve the new "royal" governments established after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. New England's population remained overwhelmingly British, however, throughout the century. The same was not true of the colonies to the south that received new immigrants from Germany and other European countries and were significantly more pluralistic.

In New Jersey and on Long Island, migrating Puritans had their first taste of minority status. The heavy wave of Scottish and Scotch-Irish immigration meant that the Presbyterian Church, which the New Englanders had thought they might dominate, had a distinctly Celtic flavor. The same would be true throughout much of the new western areas that New Englanders were settling. While New Englanders more or less accepted the fact that Celtic people would form the Presbyterian majority, they tended to do so by proposing a cultural exchange. They would concede political and other rights to the new comers, but they would be the senior partner in matters of cultural influence. This division only lasted for a season. For example, Connecticut Congregationalists provided much of the capital and expertise needed to establish the College of New Jersey (later Princeton), but the leadership of the school passed into Irish and Scottish hands a generation later.

The other major confrontation between Congregationalism and the "Other" in the eighteenth century was the American Revolution. In New England, the Revolution was a civil war that pitted Congregationalist against Anglican, old settlers against new people. The fact that the British army early moved to New York gave the New England radicals almost complete control of their region, and they used their power to persecute the remaining Church of England clergy in the region. The mob was used more often than the courts. While such sectarian groups as the Baptists used the Revolutionary crisis to extend their rights and privileges, by the end of the War, the Anglican church was almost completely destroyed. In an act of almost sarcastic mockery, King's Chapel, the former symbol of Anglican wealth and growth in Boston, was transformed into the region's first "unitarian" church and given to an insignificant Harvard graduate, James Freedman, to pastor. The losers responded with a great migration to Canada began that marked the real birth of Ontario. Others suffered from the Patriotic victory as well. Slaves, for example, although emancipated in a wave of democratic sentiment, were often sold South or encouraged to migrate. If now much more secular than religious, the Congregational hegemony, at least in Connecticut and Massachusetts, was more intact than it had been for a century or more. But it was a temporary victory at best. As religious diversity in Connecticut and Massachusetts increased, the Anglicans—now a much smaller minority—became advocates of disestablishment, using the revolutionary philosophy pioneered by the Congregationalists as their justification.

The Revolution came in the midst of the Congregationalist struggle with the new thought of the Enlightenment and may have delayed the eventual split between the orthodox and the Unitarians. Harvard, blessed by the gifts of Thomas Hollis, a Baptist, established the first

collegiate chair in science in the New World, and New Englanders were avid readers of the latest philosophical and scientific texts from England. The new thought had clear theological implications. The earliest Unitarians, such as Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Mayhew, were Arminians. Arminians were not so likely to deny the divinity of Jesus (although some did in their private diaries and unpublished essays) as to question how one is saved (do one's own efforts contribute to salvation) and in particular, the doctrine of double predestination. In various other ways, the Arminians sought to moderate the rigors of orthodox thought. Fear of Arminianism contributed to the Evangelical revival movements of the 1730s and the 1740s that stressed the traditional doctrines of justification by faith.

Deleted: , Calvinist

Both schools of opinion in the established Puritan churches embraced the radical political philosophy of the Revolutionaries with unqualified enthusiasm. Almost effortlessly, the enlightenment understanding of human autonomy, confidence in reason and rationality, trust in virtue and civil society were written into New England's public theology. New England's troubled history was rewritten as the history of the human quest for liberty, civil and religious, and Plymouth Colony—in its time a much distrusted colony that harbored Roger Williams and other open critics of Massachusetts Bay—was made into a New England icon. The Puritans became the Pilgrim fathers.

Early encounters with the "Other" were to be very important for Congregationalism's later experiences with immigration and with its minority status in its own heartland. The most evident change was the widespread assumption that the American Revolutionary ideology was

itself a product of theological as well as philosophical reflection. God intended to create a nation that was blessed by liberty, civil and religious, and this implied that every individual had the right and obligation to decide religious issues for themselves. While this was a variation on the enlightenment's belief in religion as a private matter, it had one important modification. Congregationalists accepted the sanctity of religious and conscientious decisions; they did not believe that these had only personal import. Religious decision, in contrast, had clear public consequences. In effect, the nature of religion was separated from the effects or consequences of religion. But this private decision was not socially or politically barren. That religious decision had important political and social consequences was a fruitful formulation. Not only did it enable Congregationalists to deal with the swirling confusions of a denominational society that included Unitarians, Baptists, and Methodists, but the Congregationalist link between private and public would be foundational for later Congregational attempts to deal with diversity of all kinds.

II

The Nineteenth Century.

One easily overlooked consequence of disestablishment was that Congregationalism was no longer the spiritual heart of New England or the voice of its elites. Unitarians and Episcopalians claimed many of the top rungs on the social ladder, and Baptists, Methodists, and the almost ubiquitous "unchurched" claimed much of the rest. Congregationalists became a part, a very significant part to be sure, of the region's religious ecology, but their prominence was more a matter of tradition than of wealth or membership. Much of the history of Congregationalism in the 19th century is the story of these churches' attempt to find a religious

and theological voice that was not simply a reflection of New England public opinion or confined in its implications to that region.

The Congregational response to the new nineteenth century immigrants had two foci. It was an encounter with Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Judaism, and Islam as the religions of the persons resident in a given state, but it was also an encounter with racial and ethnic groups. It was difficult to separate religious and cultural issues. The encounter with French Canadian Catholicism, often a heated one in New England, provides an important case in point. When French Catholics fled the Revolution and many very sophisticated priests and bishops arrived in Maryland and Pennsylvania, they were well-received and quickly incorporated into upper class culture. Georgetown College, the Jesuit school in Washington, D. C., was never a school designed to help “poor” immigrants. The school wanted to train a Catholic elite that had considerable cultural power. In contrast, the French Canadians who entered New England were often the children of peasants, forced off their land by economic change. Their Catholicism lacked much of the intellectual and religious sophistication of their émigré cousins, and they suffered from class as well as religious discrimination. Clearly, the Catholic Irish who entered New England in the 19th century were, like the Protestant Irish who entered America in the 18th and 19th centuries, of peasant stock. Both Catholic and Protestant Irish immigrants faced distrust and discrimination, and the Protestant Irish were among the first Americans to cross the mountains in search of new opportunities. The English in the South tended to see the Irish and Welsh as human buffers that protected them from the Indians. In New England, the nineteenth century Irish replaced the slaves and other servant classes that had been available in the eighteenth century. The diary of a pastor in Brunswick, Maine (which had been a part of the

State of Massachusetts until 1820) indicates that when he needed domestic help in the 1840s and 50s, he routinely went looking for an Irish girl. He does not express a great deal of hostility toward the Irish, but he automatically assumes that an Irish woman is part of the servant class.

The Irish and French Canadians also presented particularly sharp religious contrasts to the prevalent New England understanding of faith. Both the Irish and the French Canadians were part of a worldwide Catholic revival. In the eighteenth century, Irish Catholicism had fallen on hard times as many Irish men and women drifted into Protestantism, unbelief, or indifference. The French Revolution led to a reversal of this trend into two ways: first, the Revolution's attacks on the Church suggested to many that the Church had to marshal and gather its forces for a titanic struggle against unbelief. In Ireland, this ultramontanist impulse inspired the establishment of new seminaries and new religious orders, and launched effective parish missions. Catholic apologists forged links with Irish nationalism that suggested that to be Irish was to be Catholic and helped to stay the number of defectors to the Protestant ranks. Although it is an exaggeration, nineteenth century Ireland went through a second conversion as new Saint Patricks labored to keep them close to Rome. Likewise, the aftermath of the Revolution in France led Catholic authorities to target Quebec for special attention. The French Canadian Church was not to drift into infidelity as the Church in Metropolitan France had done; as in Ireland, a rebirth took place that was linked with nationalism. Secondly, in response to the Revolution, European Catholic leaders adopted an increasingly critical stance toward democracy, freedom of the press, and social equality. Although American Catholic leaders tried to distance themselves from this political trend, many Protestants found it difficult to separate American Catholics from their bellicose European counterparts.

Both the Irish and the French Canadian immigration need to be put in a larger context. The 19th century was an age of immigration to America. Increasingly, the two prerequisites for intensive immigration were in place: inexpensive and relative safe travel and popular knowledge of what America was like. The transportation revolution was foundational. As ships crossed both the Atlantic and later the Pacific with increasing rapidity and efficiency, ordinary people found it easier to cross the sea in search of a better life or even a temporary position. By the time of the Columbian World's Fair in 1893, immigration into the United States was steady and apparently limitless. The various steamship companies competed with each other; the money of those in "steerage" as immigrants provided the profit for many an economically marginal voyage. Once in America, the immigrant increasingly was able to move easily across the nation as railroads turned Middle America into a vast inland sea that moved goods and people as efficiently as any ocean. Cheap printing and an increasingly useable world postal system took care of the immigrant's need for information. Letters, the product of the increase of literacy throughout Europe, kept family ties intact and encouraged those at home to follow the first pioneers. If a handful had unrealistic dreams of streets lined with gold, most had a clear picture of what lay ahead.

Although native born, New England's Congregationalists also illustrate the world-wide process of immigration. By the 1820s, many New England Congregationalists were on a great trek west that would take them to the Pacific shore by mid-century. This out migration from New England is significant for the story of those who entered New England from Europe. As more and more New Englanders poured into the world cities of New York, Chicago, and, later,

San Francisco, the so-called native-born population of New England thinned out on the home turf, leaving empty physical and social space behind them. As with immigrants from Europe, Yankee emigrants were often rural people searching for economic independence. In a sense, the lower classes and those whose middle class status was threatened were the first to leave the New England Zion. Consequently, the Congregationalists who remained in New England were middle and upper class individuals whose needs for service required them to replace their countrymen who had fled west. The new European immigrants were, thus, essential economically. Not only did the new factory system demand a constant supply of new workers who could be trained to run the new machinery, but the outmigration (and the end of slavery) left many of the less glamorous social roles unoccupied. The young men and women, for example, who might have entered what was called "service" went west, leaving the jobs as maids, cooks, and nannies to the newcomers. In simple terms, the pull of Chicago, New York, and San Francisco meant that the English Reformed stock of New England would eventually become a minority, albeit a privileged one. As in other areas of the world, empire was the natural enemy of homogeneity.

The conflict between Old Yankee and Irish and French Immigrant was not pretty. Social religious and political issues combined to give the pre-Civil War conflict a particularly nastiness. Such Congregational ministers as Lyman Beecher and Horace Bushnell, two otherwise very modern pastors, found themselves resurrecting sixteenth and seventeenth century language about the Anti-Christ and about the papal, especially Jesuit, scheme to rule the world. In addition to the creation of the American Party, the so-called Know Nothings, the new wave of Anti-Catholicism led to riots, to individual incidents of persecution, the raising of mobs led by "men

of property and standing," and to deeply held bad will. At the same time, both the Irish and the French Catholics dreamed of a Catholic America that would eventually replace the Protestant ruling classes.

The American Civil War did not ease these conflicts. Much of American religion, including Congregationalism, acquired an apocalyptic tone as the battle was increasing pictured as a titanic conflict between Good and Evil. Relations with the Irish were not helped by the draft riots in which they emphatically protested the Yankee crusade against the South. To the Yankees, the Irish appeared to be aiding and abetting the Rebellion. Roman Catholicism had always seemed an aristocratic religion, and now it was apparently allied with the Southern Aristocracy. The refusal of Rome to condemn slavery served to further embitter an already embittered relationship.

By the end of Civil War, however, people became aware that a great change had taken place socially. The Catholic Church was now between one fourth and one third of the American religious population, and its percentage was rising in New England where both immigration and out migration were continuing to transform the demographic composition. Moreover, the same pattern was becoming common across the North and West where the New England out migration found itself only part of a vast polyglot that included representatives from every European nation and creed as well as handfuls from Asia and Africa as well.

American religious historians have often seen the period from 1870 to 1920 as American Protestantism's golden age. The image is apt. The churches grew rapidly, they filled in the areas

between the seas, and they established organizations to promote the common good. Congregationalists, while they did not experience the same rate of numerical growth as the Baptists, Methodists, or Presbyterians, were major benefactors of this period of growth and adjustment. Congregationalists took the lead in establishing various missionary agencies to do good, many of which predated the Civil War, and these organizations gradually changed their theological perspective on what it meant to encounter the "Other."

By 1870, The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was the largest American missionary agency with missions through much of the world. With a strong network of local and national meetings as well as a number of widely read missionary magazines, the ABCFM made its presence felt in every Congregationalist church and home. While some of the missionary reporting of different religions and peoples was poor by the later standards of anthropology, the average Congregationalist knew much more about the world than the average American of similar or higher class. Significantly, this knowledge often included both Congregationalism's great foreign victory and its most significant defeat.

The great victory was Hawaii. In the early nineteenth century, the island kingdom, almost midway in the Pacific, received its first Congregationalist missionaries. Over time, most of the native Hawaiians became Christians and accepted some version of American Calvinism. But the story of Hawaii was not only the story of its native people. Hawaii quickly became the most pluralistic of American possessions as Asians, particularly, the Japanese, poured on the island. By the First World War, Congregationalists found themselves in the midst of the most pluralistic society in the Pacific region, and such theological schools as Pacific School of Religion

established departments to train leaders to work with the Japanese and other Orientals who made up the islands' majority.

The great defeat was, of course, missions to the Muslims of the Middle East. Of all areas entered by American missionaries in the 19th century, the Muslim Middle East was the most resistant to religious change. But the Islamic resistance brought American Congregationalists into close relationship with the various Christian groups that still survived in Muslim lands, and through such agencies as Roberts College and the American University in Beirut (originally the Syrian Protestant College), American Congregationalists learned much about the region and its people. The Kennedy School of Missions, established in the 1890s as a part of Hartford Theological Seminary, became a noted American center for teaching and research about Islam and the Middle East. Many Christian immigrants from the Near East, especially Armenia and Syria, would be directed to the New World by Congregational missionaries.

Congregationalism's most dramatic confrontation with the "Other" came closer to home thorough the American Missionary Association. The AMA was originally founded as a response to the plight of escaped slaves before the Civil War, but once the War had ended, it became the most important Protestant organization working with African-Americans in the South. Although a present-day historian can detect many of the prejudices of the time among its ranks, the AMA was a new departure in American missions. The Christian workers, many of them women, who poured into the South, labored at putting the needs of African-Americans at the center of their work and prayers. Education was featured as the AMA established Sunday schools, schools, and colleges. Interestingly enough, there was almost no attempt to establish Congregational churches

or to remake African-American religion in the image of the Yankee schoolteachers who conducted the mission. The goal was to educate ministers and people to the highest degree possible so that they would be effective citizens. Congregational officials would often adopt similar language about the goal of their mission to the immigrants and, eventually, also to their foreign missionary labors.

One of the most important byproducts of Congregational experience with the AMA was the development of an early ministry of advocacy. Led and inspired by the AMA leadership, Congregational clergy were the most vocal white advocates of African-American civil rights from 1865 to 1920. In the controversy racked 1920s, when the Ku Klux Klan inspired a particularly strong version of anti-black, anti-Jewish, and anti-Catholic prejudice, Congregationalists were rarely members of the organization. In fact, Congregational opposition, especially in states such as Maine, contributed to the Klan's eventual marginalization.

Experience with the AMA, also, prepared Congregationalists for the Christian social work that was an integral part of their mission to the immigrant communities. Congregationalists established settlement houses that brought college and seminary students into direct contact with immigrant and workers communities, and they were enthusiastic supporters of the YMCA and its various programs, including English and literacy classes. Although they did not invent the "Institutional Church," an urban congregation that devoted much of its resources to various kinds of social service, they developed several such congregations. Congregationalists also worked toward the provision of education for immigrants, especially, immigrant pastors. Carleton College in Minnesota and Oberlin in Ohio developed special

departments for immigrants, and Chicago Theological Seminary had programs for German, Swedish, Norwegian, and Slavic students. New International College in Springfield, Massachusetts, an experimental school originally devoted entirely to immigrants, was largely led and supported by Congregationalists. At one point, it had almost twenty nationalities in attendance, including a handful of Islamic students.

Congregational evangelistic approaches to the immigrants developed, not out of the initial encounter with the Irish and French Canadians, but from their experience in ministering to New England's emigrants in the West. The American Home Missionary Society, a largely Congregational missionary agency that became the denomination's home missions' arm, developed ways of reaching the "unchurched" on the frontier. Like European missionary organizations interested in preserving the faith of German or Scandinavian immigrants, the Congregationalists noted that people often left their faith and morals behind them when they moved into new territory. The AHMS strategy had two clear objectives: the establishment of self-sufficient congregations and the establishment of schools. To accomplish these goals, the Society provided the pastors of new congregations with some salary support, made grants toward new buildings, and initiated cooperative work with other denominations. Perhaps because Congregationalists did not sharply distinguish themselves from other Protestant Christians, however, little effort was made to hold these congregations in the denominational fold. Many churches, established by Congregationalists, became Presbyterian or "community churches." In addition, the American Home Missionary Society supported a number of social service ministries as well. These included missionaries assigned to Ellis Island who were to greet immigrants at the gate and help them through the process, the establishment of storefront

congregations and community centers, and the appointment of women missionaries who helped immigrant mothers with the details of housekeeping in a new environment.

This strategy worked well with immigrant groups. By the 1890s, there were churches established among more than a dozen nationalities that received a measure of support from the Society, and some of these missions were remarkably successful. By 1920, over five percent or one in every twenty Congregationalists used a language other than English in worship. The work among the Russian Germans was particularly successful. German Congregational Churches dotted the American Midwest and deep ties of friendship were established between American and German Congregationalists. And like the work with the African-Americans, German work with the Congregationalists continued to have impact on the larger church. In the 1920s, for example, when anti-German hysteria was part of American life, Congregationalists quietly merged with their German congregations, who had their own Conference, and they continued to investigate merger with the German Reformed and the Evangelical Churches until. those churches joined with the Congregationalists to become the United Church of Christ. Similar close ties were established with Hungarian and Bohemian Churches, although union did not result.

The Home Missionary Society, like its foreign counterpart, was a major educator of American Congregationalists. In addition to its own publications, it had a monthly section in the *The American Missionary*, a joint publication with the ABCFM and the AMA. The articles published covered every area of immigrant church life and highlighted the achievements of churches in incorporating the new Americans into their churches. The Society also sponsored

many programs and exhibits. One exhibit traveled around the country with three trunks of material that included descriptions of the homelands of the immigrants, flags, a pageant that reenacted the Ellis Island experience, photos and a stereopticon show.

The First World War was a shock to the American soul. The armies that America sent to Europe were often polyglot in composition, and the officer corps, largely of British stock, found command difficult. Needless to say, many of the immigrant troops were as ignorant of the causes of the War as conscripts on the other side. America did not respond to this public display of its diversity with gratitude. Instead, wave after wave, of hostility erupted. One mark of this was the closing of mass immigration and the limitation of immigration to people of the “right” racial background. In response, the Congregationalists firmly stood—along with many Catholics and many Jews—for a program of Americanization that insisted that the immigrants could, given proper support and aid, become part of the general American populace. While this was not an auspicious time to close America’s gates, the ending of mass immigration at this time did give this process needed time to achieve many of its goals. While many marks of ethnicity remained, the nation faced World War II significantly more culturally and linguistically united.

III

Theological Implications.

Congregationalists were among the most theologically literate of American denominations, and the various encounters with the “Other” had profound effects on Congregational theology. It is no accident, for example, that many of those who were active in

the American Missionary Association were among the first Americans to advocate a "Social Gospel" that sought to re-interpret many inherited theological categories in terms of social, rather than individual, concepts. From the beginning, to know the "Other" was to change theologically.

Not all theological change was good. Josiah Strong, whose *Our Country*, went through many editions, was as jingoistic a Christian as America produced. Although Strong believed in the mission to the immigrants and to foreign countries, he was convinced that the goal of missionary activity was to give the benighted people of the world the bright light of Anglo-Saxon ideas and enterprise. Like many contemporary American intellectuals, Strong was aware of the racist ideologies that were becoming popular in Europe. He spoke about lesser races and stated that unless they changed they were destined to be overwhelmed biologically by the superior Anglo-Saxon peoples. Strong was not alone in his passionate racism, of course. Many Americans shared it, and it took institutional form in the establishment of Jewish quotas at New England colleges and universities, strong residential covenants, and the other trappings of northern white society.

But while many white Americans joined Strong in dreaming of a racial utopia, his consistent racism was unusual among Congregationalists. The customary Congregationalist response to the "Other" had more theological and less Darwinian and racial content. The root of all Congregational theologies of the "Other" was the theological questioning that accompanied disestablishment. From 1750 to 1850 Congregational theologians struggled with the seeming abstract question of the relationship between the divine and human wills. Beneath the skilled logical dialectics, the question was whether the churches would be able to accept the ideas of

freedom and autonomy that were enshrined in the American Revolution and in Enlightenment thought in general. After many a convoluted argument, the New England theologians, as they were called, concluded that the free human will was itself a center of religious meaning and possibly even of revelation. The exercise of will was particularly sacred to God, and no appeal existed from the court of human conscience. Whatever else the "Other" might be, they were beings with free will and free conscience whose decisions were to made and judged by themselves.

This anthropology had important implications for soteriology. By 1880 Congregational theologians were passionately debating whether a person had to make a conscious decision for Christ in their lifetime in order to be saved. In part, the question came out of a long term Congregational interest in German theology. Isaac Dorner, a follower of Schleiermacher, had put forth a theory that those heathen who died without accepting Christ would have an eventual chance to do so before the judgment. Much of the American debate was cast in terms of the categories of Dorner's thought. But the issue was not an abstract one. Missionaries encountered many people of high culture whose religious practices sustained high ideals. Congregationalist missionaries abroad could not believe that the God that they confessed would arbitrarily drop such people into hell without even informing them of the possibility of redemption. And they wondered whether many who heard their preaching had been given a real chance to confess Christ or whether cultural and other barriers had kept them, in fact, from the Savior.

Once the issue was raised, the ABCFM was immediately caught in a theological firestorm. Andover Seminary, the oldest and best financed of the Congregational schools, was

almost destroyed as candidate after candidate was rejected by the Board. Pastors drew the natural conclusion from that and recommended that young men attend other seminaries. While other seminaries stood tried to stay aloof from the battle, this proved impossible. By 1894, when the conservatives in the ABCFM capitulated to demands to appoint candidates who held the new views, the denomination had changed its mind. If "second probation' was not yet orthodoxy, it was far from heresy.

The "second probation" question highlighted the whole question of the religious teachings of other religions.   In many ways, Catholicism, the most difficult socially and politically, posed fewer problems theologically. Reformed theology had historically recognized Catholic baptism, and the Catholic Church confessed almost every item of the Congregational creed. Grudgingly, the Congregationalists came to the conclusion that Catholics were Christians who had a role to play in the Kingdom. But Catholics could not and did not return these overtures. Rome hastily informed all the American Bishops who had participated in the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893 that inter religious dialogue was not acceptable, and by the 1920s, the official stance of the Vatican was that Rome, the true church, had no need to dialogue or cooperate with others. Congregationalist theologians did read Catholic theologians and seek to find patterns of cooperation, and the more radical, including Newman Smyth and Washington Gladden, believed a reborn Catholicism, freed of its superstitions, might be the future model for American faith! Nonetheless, such efforts were largely a "one-sided" ecumenism until Vatican II dramatically changed the rules.

The deepest problem for Congregationalists (and one that has lasted almost to this day) was not the question of whether they should labor to convert practicing Catholics. Even at the height of the anti-Catholic feeling in the 1840s and 1850s, open proselytizing was suspect, and by 1910, such leading Congregational theologians as Lyman Abbot and Washington Gladden were clear that such evangelism was both improper and unwise. The dilemma was what to do with the large number of former or inactive Catholics. Under Catholic teaching, these were still Catholics, albeit, non-practicing. For Congregationalists, who firmly believed in the American free market in religion, such people were "unchurched" who could and should be "churched." The issue was further complicated by the fact that many of the "unchurched" among Catholic immigrants had strong reasons—often similar to those voiced by American Protestants—for staying outside of the Roman Church. Italian men, for instance, were highly critical of the Pope's official opposition to Italian nationalism and democracy and often stayed away from Church for that reason.

Since religion for Congregationalists was a private matter that had public implications, Congregationalists found it difficult, almost impossible, to separate religious identity from personal choice. After all, one of the most important of Congregational affirmations was that the church was composed of regenerate people, and they had come to believe that this meant that a person had chosen faith for themselves. Interestingly, Catholics counted all baptized persons in their official statistics, while Congregationalists only counted adult (confirmed) membership. Similar problems confronted Congregationalists in their attempts to work with Eastern Orthodox Christians.

The struggle with Judaism was less visible and less intense. Conservative Congregationalists, such as Dwight L. Moody, were among the architects of the Jewish mission in the 1880s and 1890s, and they tended to understand the Jews in terms of the popular dispensational interpretation of prophecy that saw the conversion and return of the Jews as part of the Biblical promise. But, most Congregationalists rejected this position. The Bible, especially when it was interpreted historically, did not support dispensationalist exegesis, and few Congregationalists understood the Kingdom of God as a future event.

Experience ran ahead of theory. American Jews, especially Reform Jews, often modeled their religious and charitable institutions on Protestant institutions, and Protestants often felt at home with their Jewish friends. Rarely, for example, was a large Temple dedicated without several Protestant pastors present. Perhaps more significant, America's Reformed Jews, like American Protestants, threw themselves into social service with a passion. Rarely did a new organization for social reform or amelioration begin without one or more prominent Jews as members. To many Congregationalists, it seemed that American Judaism was becoming Christianized or that it was another form of the same religious impulse. By 1920 Congregationalism had abandoned the idea of converting the Jews, although it persisted among other members of the Federal Council of Churches, especially, Baptists and Presbyterians. Congregationalists were very active participants in the various "Good Will" agencies, including the National Conference of Jews and Christians, established in the 1920s to fight prejudice.

Ironically, American Congregationalists and American Hindus and Buddhists early felt an affinity. Following the World's Parliament of Religion in 1893, Buddhist and Hindu

missionaries entered the United States and began an active program of constructing temples and churches. Often these were modeled on Congregational Churches and the "clergy" often dressed and spoke with the decorum expected of a Congregational leader. Moreover, the two religions, like Congregationalism, tended to stress spirituality and experience more than doctrine or teaching. It was easy for Congregationalists to see themselves as the "crown of the world's religions" and yet, not be offended when Buddhist and Hindus used the same language to describe their own faith. To each, their own faith was best, and, hence, each could allow the other the right to boast about its own achievements.

Despite continuing social and political tensions, then, American Congregationalists had largely settled their theological accounts with the "Other" by 1925. Salvation and revelation were present in all of the world's faiths, and the most important aspect of religion was that it express itself in a social and religiously fulfilling life. God, the ultimate good, could be counted upon to take care of people of all faiths at the last judgment, which was, after all, God's to administer. Representatives of other groups often distrusted Congregational motives in adopting this position, and the Jewish representative to the various Good Will committees that the Federal Council of Churches established wondered what it meant, especially, as Anti-Semitism triumphed in Europe with few protests from America. And the problem of the "unchurched" would not go away. Who after all were the consumers in the great American religious market if not those who "bought" this or that expression of faith?

IV

Contemporary Situation

The original mission to the immigrants declined with the decline in immigration that followed the various immigration acts of the 1920s. Congregationalists and their ethnic allies consolidated their position in this period as the former immigrant communities, often united by language, found themselves gradually becoming English-speaking communities. Although these communities retained some coherence—and the revival of interest in ethnicity following the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s showed the depth of feeling that still remained—the children of immigrants became more like the older American communities. This is not to say that there were no rocky periods. Tensions between Congregationalists and Jews increased. The twin experiences of the holocaust and the establishment of Israel transformed American Judaism. Reformed Jews, who had stressed the importance of a rational Judaism that dispensed with many traditional ideas, discovered the tradition in a new light, and the older claim that Jews no longer were concerned with peoplehood or with Israel evaporated. At the same time, Congregationalists, long familiar with the Middle East, had serious questions about Israel's policies.

But the more serious problems came with the new wave of immigration from Asia and Africa that followed the revision of the Immigration Laws in the 1960s. The new immigration differed from the old. The earlier migrations were primarily from Europe; this migration is largely from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Diana Eck in her *New Religious America* has dramatically told the story of these new immigrants, pointing to Mosques in Boston, Hindu Temples in many suburbs, and a number of signs of Asian and African religions.

In some cases, the adjustment to these recent immigrants has been complicated by events abroad, especially, terrorism and the war in Iraq. Contemporary estimates of Muslim strength in the United States range from 2% to 4% of the population, and, if current trends continue, Islam will soon displace Judaism as the largest non-Christian religion in the United States. New England's Hartford Theological Seminary Foundation, a historically Congregational school, is the most important center for the study of Christian/Islamic relationships. The heir to the old Kennedy School of Missions, Hartford's long ties to the Islamic world run through the American College in Beirut and Roberts College in Istanbul.

The current religious mix in the United States is also encouraging the formation of new religious configurations. Some of these are simply traditional syncretism. An individual or group will take this or that element from two or more religious traditions and blend them into an idiosyncratic mix. Even among those related to a traditional religious body, such syncretism is commonplace. Many Christian practice Yoga; others experiment with different forms of Eastern meditation, and, if the polls are to believed, many hold non-traditional beliefs, such as reincarnation. But this is not the whole story. There may be some genuine new directions in religious faith, and many responsible religious leaders are expecting the current global world to be a new Axial Age in which new directions in human spirituality are discovered.

For all the emphasis on the new immigrants from the Middle East and Asia, the largest number of new Americans are from Latin America. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, such immigrants were almost exclusively Roman Catholic, but the last fifty years has seen a transformation in the religious composition of Latin America as Latin American Protestant and

Latin American Charismatic churches have grown rapidly.   A significant proportion of the new immigrants represent these faiths, and almost all Latin American communities have experienced some tensions as these religious communities vie for members in the United States. Again, as in the nineteenth century, the issue of birth right membership versus voluntary religious affiliation is a major issue dividing American believers.

As in the past, the Congregational churches, now part of the United Church of Christ, are responding with open hands, hearts, and wallets. As in the 1920s, there is a new diversity, if not in the local churches, as congregations composed of new immigrants, especially, Latin Americans, request standing in the denomination. Many of these churches with their enthusiastic forms of worship, claims of contemporary miracles, and emphasis on the biblical promises seem far from traditional Reformed practice, no matter how similar they might seem ecclesiologically. And the Congregational tradition of providing a “voice” for the “voiceless” continues even in this time of considerable social tension.

Continuing Theological Questions

Are the theological resources inherited from the past sufficient and what help might they provide other Reformed churches as they struggle with the presence of world wide immigration in their midst. Let me list the three primary lights that Congregationalist/ United Church of Christ theologians have followed:

1. Religion is a private matter that has public consequence. This simple statement lies at the heart of the United Church's understanding of pluralism. As a private matter, religious decisions lie within the heart and the conscience of the individual. For Congregationalists, this remains holy ground, a place hopefully beyond social, political, or economic pressure. Yet, like most decisions that touch the depths of human personality, religious decision cries out for social expression. To have a Gospel is to have a Social Gospel; to have a religion is to have a Social Religion. The first part of this paradigm makes religious pluralism inevitable; the second may make religious and political conflict inevitable. In embracing difference, the United Church accepts both the sanctity of religious life and the importance of social dissent.
2. Monotheistic religion implies that theological statements are relative absolutes. Clearly, western religion has always seen faith as connected to an ultimate concern or a passionate devotion to being itself, or to the good, the true, and beautiful. For those who hold religious conceptions, the concepts themselves partake in the holiness of the One affirmed; they are themselves sacred and central to faith. Lukewarm faith is unacceptable. Yet, monotheism also implies that God is finally not bound by any human conception about God, and, in fact, that every affirmation is always incomplete and partial. There is always "more light to come from God's Word." Congregationalists' refusal to surrender either of these poles may been uncomfortable, both for themselves and those who live with them, but they have allowed them to share their faith confidently without denying the faith of others or their right to hold their own faith with equal confidence.

3. The experience of the “Other” is the key to a pluralistic world. Congregationalists and members of the United Church of Christ have consistently reformulated theologies of the “Other” in the context of their corporate and personal experience of the “Other”. Thus, for example, Congregational experience in Hawaii led many Congregational-Christian leaders to oppose the internment of the Japanese just as the experience of the Arabs led many United Church of Christ leaders to question Israeli policies. Experience of the “Other” has always proved richer than anticipated experience of the “Other”.

Are there theological questions that the Congregational/United Church of Christ tradition has left unanswered that might influence contemporary attempts to relate to the other. We would suggest four areas that need further exploration.

1. The Congregationalist/United Church of Christ has had most difficult with those aspects of other people’s faith that stress the corporate identity of faith. Since this tradition tends to assume that a person’s religion is determined by their practice and voluntary assent to religion, the tradition has had its greatest difficulty with religions like some forms of European Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam who see those who do not practice their faith as nonetheless included in the religious community and subject to its norms. While some Congregational theologians, such as Washington Gladden, appreciated the social solidarity of the immigrant parish, even Gladden had difficulty with religious traditions that claimed the unwilling as well as the willing.

2. Closely related to the above question has been the vexing issue of the public value of religious organizations. Both theologically and practically, Congregationalists and their United Church successors have treated religious organizations as essentially voluntary bodies. As we have seen, this has enabled Congregationalists to embrace much diversity in the larger culture. But and the "but" is significant, this is one place where many other religious traditions demur. Islam thinks in terms, not of individual communities or even nations, but in terms of all practicing Muslims everywhere, and it sees the corporate expression of this unity as essential to its understanding of faith. To a lesser extent, despite the Enlightenment, many Jews likewise have a corporate and communitarian perspective. While these traditions often use Congregationalism as a model for the organization of their American churches, whether consciously or not, they are aware of the limits of the model. A rabbi is not simply a minister with a different theology nor is an Imam a pastor in disguise. Furthermore, since some religious traditions see this corporate character as fundamental, the Congregational preference for personal interfaith and inter religious dialogue between individuals can cause offense before the discussion begins. To those who believe in corporate communities, the leaders of those communities are the most appropriate participants.

3. Perhaps most difficult theologically is the problem of monotheism. As H. Richard Niebuhr, a leader in a church that joined the United Church of Christ, argued so ably, western culture in all its aspects rests upon monotheistic assumptions. The Congregational approach to the "Other" is firmly rooted in

monotheism. The great God, the God who is always more, cannot be described completely by any theology or creedal affirmation. Hence, it is possible for many religious traditions to be right in their affirmations about this God. Yet, the current religious mix in the world cities and their tributaries includes many who are not monotheists in a western sense and, perhaps, in any sense. Such believers tend to view religious pluralism in terms of a larger system in which all the gods are arranged in their proper place, given their proper task, or assigned their proper character. Congregational theologians have often ignored the reality of polytheism or failed to take the polytheistic insistence on plurality with seriousness. "They" must have a hidden "high god" somewhere. But, the fact that the high god must be sought out may be good evidence that the high god is either a philosophical abstraction or non-present.

4. The new religions are also likely to pose serious theological questions. If nothing else, the question of the value of deliberate syncretism is important. Are there limits to what Christians may borrow from other religions without losing their own soul? But the question is not only one of integrity. It is also the question of openness. The axiom that cultural contact between people leads to the sharing of basic ideas, social, religious, and economic, seems to be confirmed daily. We are being changed by the religious diversity in our society and we will continue to be changed by it. How we manage that openness will determine how well we respond to the new "Other's" in our midst.