THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

HETERODOXIES AND THE HISTORICAL JESUS:

BIBLICAL CRITICISM OF THE GOSPELS IN THE U.S., 1794-1860

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

DAVID FRANCIS MIHALYFY

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, who first started talking about the historical Jesus on a wide scale? Between the publication of the 1792 subscription edition of Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible* and the Society for Biblical Literature's 2006 *HarperCollins Study Bible*, a major change arose in how Americans could piece together Jesus's life; while the former bible propounds harmonious narratives written by apostles and their followers and maximal alignment of verses in any potential ordering, the latter assumes unknown authors, textual dependence, and the necessity of sifting out distortions, all hallmarks of the innovative interpretative paradigm of the historical Jesus.[1] For almost fifty years, scholars have relied on studies that locate the historical Jesus at the intersection of biblical studies and Protestant theology, usually due to a "trickle down" effect from Germany.[2] For example, James Turner's standard 1985 delineation of the cultural origins of atheism uses Jerry Wayne Brown's classic 1969 monograph *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars* to narrate how the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed "stolid, solid Teutonic scholarship" radiating outwards to students and ministers.[3] A recent emphasis on the relative conservatism of American schools due to their tight links to the church, however, complicates the claim that these institutions served as launching pads for the historical Jesus; it simply seems dubious that persons so heavily invested

---

[1] John Brown, *The Self-Interpreting Bible*.... (New York: Hodge and Campbell, 1792). This lengthy book is unpaginated; the relevant material is found in the Introduction and the gospels' forewords. C. Clifton Black, "The Gospel According to Mark," rev. Adela Yarbro Collins, in *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, rev. ed., gen. ed. Harold W. Attridge (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), 1722-1724. Throughout this analysis, the adjective "biblical" is always uncapitalized, but a differentiation is made between "Bible" as scripture and "bible" as material object.

[2] For this and competing historiographic conceptualizations of intellectual change, see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), 4, 10, and 36-39.

[3] James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985),146, 147-149; 289n16 indicates its reliance on Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969).

in the *status quo* would spread an unorthodox form of biblical interpretation.[4] Thus, in order to more accurately trace the spread of this paradigm, this analysis turns its focus away from the academy and instead identifies overlapping subcultures of malcontents as the primary antebellum advocates of the historical Jesus.[5] Instead of finding a home among respectable institutions, this heterodoxy in biblical interpretation first found a home among a startling variety of people who were often heterodox in so many other striking ways.

For a few more details about and a bit more perspective on the benefits of this reorientation of historical research, Harvard Divinity School graduate, Unitarian minister, and notorious Transcendentalist and abolitionist Theodore Parker (1810-1860) can be evocatively and productively compared to "Unitarian Pope" Andrews Norton (1786-1853) and prominent spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910), respectively. Although representative major research analyzes Parker within Unitarian institutions on the basis of his learnedness, he is more tellingly contextualized as a member of the continuous cultural underbelly containing other figures who also made unconventional biblical claims within relatively unusual normative systems.

As a source of comparison for the multiple learned practices and innovative theological inclinations of Parker, Andrews Norton looms large in the major study on biblical criticism in antebellum America, Brown's tellingly titled 1969 monograph on the "rise" of biblical criticism.[6] Known as the "Unitarian Pope" among that subset of Calvinists at the relative vanguard of

[4] Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 215-220. For additional recognition of such pressure in period New Testament literature reviews, see Benjamin Wisner Bacon, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (London: MacMillan, 1900), 22-24; and Henry S. Nash, *History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament* (London: MacMillan, 1900), 159-160.

[5] For sociological theorization of cultural heterodoxy, contemporary applications of Colin Campbell's still largely standard cultic milieu theory are covered in Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, "Introduction," in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), ed. Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, 1-11. A reprint of the classic essay is Campbell, "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization," in ibid., 12-25.

[6] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 75-93.

theological liberalism, Norton became Harvard's Dexter Professor of Sacred Literature in 1819, soon after this historic position's 1810 founding for the sake of advancement of "a critical knowledge of the Holy Scriptures."[7] During his time at Harvard and then during independent work after his 1830 retirement thanks to the money of his wife's family, Norton produced *The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels* (1st volume 1837, 2nd and 3rd volumes 1844), a hefty multi-volume opus that could be considered the epitome of a learned text: containing more than a thousand pages, Norton's *Evidences* was replete with not only Greek and Latin, but also relatively thorough dialogue with German professors whose works had been read in their mother tongue.[8] Above and beyond its impressive learnedness, too, it also served as a theological intervention between the Unitarian and Trinitarian factions of Calvinist New England, shoring up Norton's normative vision of the New Testament in what Brown terms "efforts… to stabilize and consolidate the forces of American religious liberalism."[9] Thus, thanks to facts such as these, Norton well represents the dominant historical narrative about biblical criticism, one that gestures towards the working out of modern Protestant theology as it foregrounds academic developments, especially the early nineteenth century importation of German-language books and scholarly priorities to a smattering of schools on the New England seaboard.[10]

Within this narrative of the twinned development of learning and liberalism, Parker is presented as a product of Unitarian institutions and a theological interlocutor of greater insight than Norton; having studied at Harvard, Parker continues his work in his ministerial study,

[7] Ibid., 10, quoting the will of Samuel Dexter from "Dexter Fund at Harvard University," *General Repository and Review* I (1812), 204-209 (11n1).
[8] Andrews Norton, *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, vol. I (Boston: John B. Russell, 1837); vols. II and III (Boston: John Owen, 1844).
[9] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 93.
[10] Interestingly, keeping the same narrative focus on antebellum academic institutions, albeit in the area of patristics, is Elizabeth A. Clark, *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

uncovering "a critical vulnerability" in thinking since he "foresaw the day when the progress of biblical criticism would make impossible" theological claims centered on assumptions of a monovocal Bible.[11] Since Brown's study chooses to exclude other groups like the deists because they "stood outside the realm of church life," it thus leaves the distinct impression that the only story worth following is how liberal Protestantism inevitably came to terms with mounting academic developments.[12]

Raised outside the antebellum hothouse of Harvard, "Poughkeepsie Seer" and eventual Spiritualist "John the Baptist" Andrew Jackson Davis at first appears much too different to bring into conversation with and downplay the obvious connections between Norton and Parker. In the early 1840s, while Norton was busy in Massachusetts with putting the final touches on the last two volumes of his *Evidences* and Parker was tending his Boston congregation, Davis was a shoemaker's apprentice in Poughkeepsie, New York, discovering at that time a knack for being hypnotized thanks to the experiments of a local tailor who had been inspired to imitate a travelling demonstration.[13] Turning this talent into a trade in clairvoyant medical diagnoses, Davis soon claimed in accord with broader cultural understandings of hypnotism that he could "see things past, present, and to come," and by 1845 he had moved to New York City in order to deliver a series of trance lectures from the same rented rooms out of which he also ran a medical

[11] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 159-160. For a similar tracking of Norton as someone who "opened the door to history," see Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 224.

[12] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 6. This narrative of the development of Protestant theology only holds for the classic studies of biblical criticism. Other, more recent narratives focusing on the development of Protestant theology situate its evolution within broad social debates such as those over slavery. See E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 494-504; Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 134-138; and Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight Against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[13] No full biography of Davis exists. Robert W. Delp, "Andrew Jackson Davis: Prophet of American Spiritualism," *Journal of American History* 54, no. 1 (June 1967): 43-56, is the most helpful treatment, although at times it is overly dependent on Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Magic Staff, An Autobiography of Andrew Jackson Davis* (New York: J.S. Brown & Co.; Boston: Bela Marsh, 1857), especially for colorful accounts of visions. A similar overreliance on Davis' accounts of visions marks *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Davis, Andrew Jackson" (by Robert S. Ellwood), http://www.anb.org/articles/08/08-01868.html (accessed 5 November 2012).

practice.[14] Attributed to special knowledge shared by spirit visitors from higher cosmic levels, these lectures became the lengthy but otherwise accessible 1847 book entitled *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind*, but better known as *Nature's Divine Revelations*.[15] Encompassing everything from the purpose of humanity and the structure of the cosmos to the origins of the Bible and the life of Christ, the lectures and the book soon assembled from them caused a stir in nationally-circulating newspapers, a buzz that caused copies of the earliest book edition to travel by rail out to Milwaukee, the Wisconsin Fourierist commune of Ceresco, and even the senate floor of this very new state's capitol.[16] Interestingly, although originating outside of learned conversations, portions of Davis's book dealt with similar issues of gospel authorship and harmonization. Even more interestingly, in comparison to Norton's endorsement of relatively standard gospel traditions, Davis's spirit channelings paralleled Parker's approach and broached rather new territory on this front, and thus mark an underappreciated site of cultural innovation outside of the seminary and college settings typically examined for shifts in biblical interpretation.

---

[14] Although not highlighting knowledge of the past and the future in his list of paranormal phenomena, Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 65 and 69, calls attention to these phenomena already in the important eighteenth century works of the Viennese physician Anton Mesmer and the French nobleman the Chevalier de Barberin, respectively. Gibson Smith, *Lectures on Clairmativeness: or Human Magnetism* (New-York: Searing & Prall, 1845), 33-34, gives transcriptions of Davis' lectures, including professions of his possession of these powers of clairvoyance.

[15] Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind* (New York: S. Lyon, and Wm. Fishbough, 1847).

[16] One example of contemporary coverage is T[aylor] L[ewis], "Professor Bush and Davis," *New-York Daily Tribune*, September 7 1847, 1. Early circulation in Wisconsin is primarily described in [Warren Chase], *The Life-Line of the Lone One; or, Autobiography of the World's Child*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Bela Marsh; New York: S.T. Munson, 1861), 167. For more on Chase, see Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 102-104; Ernest Joseph Isaacs, "A History of Nineteenth Century American Spiritualism as a Religious and Social Movement" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1975), 53-54, 121-123, and 241-242; and R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 91-92. Notably, Chase was elected to the Wisconsin Constitutional Convention in 1847 and served a term in the state senate. In his second autobiography, *Forty Years on the Spiritual Rostrum* (Boston: Colby & Rich, 1888), Chase uses the title page to proclaim that his name was "first on the list of calls for copies of 'Nature's Divine Revelations' when in Press in 1847" ([1]). Isaacs, *History*, 53, identifies Chase's "senator-friend" who brought *Nature's Divine Revelations* to the senate floor as Southport (present day Kenosha) newspaper editor Christopher L. Sholes.

Davis also suggests another productive way of considering Parker. Although very learned, Parker was a social misfit at Harvard Divinity School due to his background as the child of farmers from Lexington, Massachusetts, and by 1841 his propensity for questioning the theological mainstream had begun to lead to social exclusion within his denomination in the form of denied publication venues and terminated pulpit exchanges, the most that could be done given Congregationalism's non-hierarchical structure.[17] Much as Davis threw open his rented rooms to all and sundry and transformed his channelings into a book, so too did Parker maintain a church open to curiosity seekers and derive much-reprinted pamphlets and books from transgressive talks such as those underlying his 1842 *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion*, what with its scandalous identification of religion with a progressive, universal religious impulse.[18] Revealingly, just as Davis's works were read within a Fourierist commune, so too did Parker's works travel to unexpected places, giving rise, for example, to an independent reading group receiving approving notice in an 1844 Freethought newspaper.[19] Also similarly, much as Davis moved in his life from folk medicine to channeling, so too did Parker eventually undertake a personal journey resulting not only in the ardent abolitionism for which he is also remembered today, but also spiritualist dabbling.[20] In other words, rather than automatically group with the "Unitarian Pope" because of his learnedness, Parker can also be justifiably compared with Davis in terms of actual innovation in biblical interpretation, within their mutual, fluid world of oppositional subcultures. In this diverse and interlinked world, a seeker like

---

[17] *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Parker, Theodore" (by Henry Warner Bowden), http://www.anb.org/articles/08/08-01925.html (accessed December 2, 2015). Although only extending through 1846, the currently standard and most helpful account of Parker's life is Grodzins, *American Heretic*, especially in its careful, perceptive attention to the development of Parker's theology (e.g. 59-73, 137ff., and 248ff.).

[18] Theodore Parker, *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1842), 29-30.

[19] "A Good Sign," *Boston Investigator*, January 31, 1844.

[20] For Parker and spiritualism, see Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Theodore Parker: A Biography* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874), 371-375; and John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker*, vol. 1 (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1864), 333-334.

Parker considered cultural oddities like abolitionism and séances that stood in tension with the mainstream, and fresh ideas like the interpretative paradigm of the historical Jesus could find themselves considered and then combined with viewpoints ranging from Davis's spirit channelings to Parker's controversial evolutionary theology.[21]

Given how these otherwise quite different figures of Davis and Parker patterned strikingly alike in their heterodox biblical interpretation and general heterodoxy, the sources warrant an alternate proposal to the current scholarly narratives foregrounding learned developments and their intimate relation to Protestant theology. Thus, this dissertation argues that from 1794 through 1860, advocacy of a historical Jesus amidst abandonment of long-standing traditions around the gospels was vitally present outside of American learned discourse, surfacing among the overlapping milieu of oppositional subcultures and causing even larger controversies associated with some of the era's most well-known and distinctive movements. Importantly, as an explanation for the nature of this cultural presence, this dissertation also argues that these movements were tied into expanding social possibilities associated with the increasing religious diversity of the Early Republic in three ways. First, in light of standard sociological theorization, this era's well-known increase in freedom and religious diversity is conceptualized as an expanded horizon for the oppositional subcultures that constitute a variegated but continuous underside to all societies, a milieu with many unexpected connections and in which any number of unconventional ideas could spread and take hold. Second, it is shown that the questioning of long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions that formed the heart of this change in biblical interpretation occurred among movements adopting relatively

[21] For a similar call to broader perspectives on change within liberal Protestantism, see Leigh E. Schmidt, "Introduction: The Parameters and Problematics of American Religious Liberalism," in *American Religious Liberalism*, ed. Leigh E. Schmidt and Sally M. Promey (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 1-14.

innovative forms of religious authority, whether these forms of authority emerged from or were resonant with major intellectual currents that helped form customary thinking about the nature of Christian revelation; in essence, these different innovative forms of authority provided a foundation from which unconventional forms of biblical interpretation could be contemplated and even adopted by persons within the assorted movements. Third, despite the norms of tolerance for alternative viewpoints within the milieu of oppositional subcultures, this questioning of traditions most often surfaced within disputation, as members of these groups entered debate against the mainstream and variously sought to attain greater religious dominance or to reform society via undermining fundamental tenets of widespread thought. Consequently, as a result of these attempts to change public opinion on other and sundry larger issues, their print and platform challenges also began changing minds and creating discussion around the matters of biblical interpretation so often used as a strategic weapon in their bigger battles, paving the way for these ideas to eventually become less contested elements within the wider culture. In sum, then, this dissertation not only broaches and dissects underappreciated social locations that display an important shift in biblical interpretation, but also highlights within a sociological lens the increasing religious diversity that helps explain some of these locations' striking characteristics, especially the surprising ties among them and their disproportionately high cultural profile.

Indeed, in the United States towards the end of the eighteenth century, different elements of a fairly standard theological repertoire faced a challenging convergence of forces ranging from newly protected freedoms to liberty-facilitating technological improvements in print and transportation, all of which created greater social space for subcultural growth and attendant intellectual disruptions and shifts. In what historian E. Brooks Holifield has described as a "quest for theological rationality," the thinking of the time roughly taught that reason should lead

anyone to believe that the historical personage of Jesus of Nazareth figured in an epochal revelation of divine will signaled by the miraculous and mandating everything from particular ecclesiastical forms to the highest possible level of morality; in other words, signs and miracles drew attention to a messiah-centered book thought to contain a binding blueprint teaching everything from the ideal form of a church to how a person should behave.[22] In various times and places, then, different elements of this repertoire were turned against it and its conception of the gospels by members of emergent, rather marginal movements whose controversial claims brought them some adherents but even greater amounts of attention. For instance, in order to advocate the vilified creed of deism, Tom Paine (1737-1809) wrote his bestselling *Age of Reason* (1794 and 1795, in two parts), turning on its head the culturally widespread reliance on reason by claiming that reason undermined Christianity. Accordingly, as he separated reason from Christian revelation in order to preach a more reasonable deistic creed, this larger intellectual move also allowed him to re-evaluate and demolish the gospels as a privileged repository of insight. From roughly 1825 onward, people from labor advocate Abner Kneeland (1774-1844) to abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879) and woman's rights activist Ernestine Rose (1810-1892) would essay forth in print and on platform to claim morality for their chosen causes but deny its tight alignment with a presumably monovocal Bible, all in attempts to turn the tables on Christians who were resisting their reforms via appeal to Scripture's purportedly ethical support for opposite political positions. Hence, as they parried what they deemed retrogressive social stances, they also frequently presented the Bible as a "mixed bag" of thought, a challenge that destabilized their opponents' assumption of its ultimately singular morality, while simultaneously providing them with some elements for its polemical rehabilitation. As part of an

[22] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 5.

endeavor to re-found Christianity on what seemed to be a more lasting basis, rogue Unitarian-cum-Transcendentalist minister Theodore Parker produced his 1842 *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion*, developing the oft-assumed reliance on intuitive recognition of the true and moral into the summit of theology. As he argued for recognition of revelation's nature as progressive rather than "once and for all," he now and then contemplated other ways of thinking about the gospels, momentary and often tentative flights of thought punctuating his jabs against hidebound traditionalists. Last but not least, clairvoyant Andrew Jackson Davis's 1847 *Nature's Divine Revelations* attempted to levy a faith in the wonders that once surrounded Jesus into acceptance of disconcerting present-day spirit communications giving alternate origins of sacred Christian texts alongside sweeping cosmological revelations. All in all, as the members of these various movements sought to achieve their assorted goals, they also questioned related portions of the mainstream thinking that could have consequences for biblical interpretation. Thus, they often questioned long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels, sometimes as part of personal journeys, but most often as part of the contestations accompanying the country's increasing religious diversity.

In the often impressive reach of their contestations, the movements created few converts but much controversy. Although more accessible than learned works like the multi-volume, multi-language work of Norton's *Evidences*, their works reached far but translated most frequently into general commotion. Paine's work managed only scattered approval, but it became a bestseller and garnered over fifty separate responses and multiple translations.[23] Abner

[23] John Keane, *Tom Paine: A Political Life* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1995), 396-400, gives a brief overview of American and foreign editions (including translations into French, German, Hungarian, and Portuguese, though he relatively neglects French translations and editions and does not distinguish between translations of the first and second parts), as well as select responses. Although not the subject of intensive study, Paine's reputation in the nineteenth century seems to have been largely negative, apart from scattered freethinkers and the favorable biographer Moncure Daniel Conway. Herbert M. Morais, *Deism in Eighteenth Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934). Albert Post, *Popular Freethought in America, 1825-1850* (New York: Columbia

Kneeland's *Investigator* had maximal weekly print runs of three thousand issues and William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* around the same number of subscribers at its peak, but both constituted lightning rods marking out the radical boundaries of public debate, much like the many platform appearances of Ernestine Rose.[24] Similarly, Parker had his ecclesiastically isolated Unitarian congregation and a handful of lyceum venues for his talks, and Davis performed his spirit channelings in front of small and changing audiences, but their respective *Discourse* and *Revelations* both went through multiple editions and were discussed nationwide.[25] On top of this large circulation, the way in which their authors often became bywords for styles of thought also indicate the large degree to which their ideas were known to exist and were often engaged, even if they were not widely accepted. For example, one newspaper termed Davis's published channelings "an infidel book" cribbing its "biblical criticism from Tom Paine," while another remarked that "[t]he Bible is taken to pieces much after the manner of [David Friedrich]

University Press, 1943). G. Adolf Koch, *Republican Religion: The American Revolution and the Cult of Reason* (New York: Henry Holt, 1933). This aspect of the deist movement is further stressed in Martin E. Marty, *The Infidel: Freethought and American Religion* (Cleveland, OH: Meridian Books, 1961); and Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). See also Holifield, *Theology in America*, 159-172, which notes that deists like Paine "had an influence on Christian thought in America far out of proportion to their numbers" and resulted in "by way of reaction, a renewal of interest in the Christian evidences" (159). For similar dynamics of outsize radical presence in later periods, see the case studies assembled in Dan McKanan, *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011).

[24] Roderick Stuart French, *The Trials of Abner Kneeland: A Study in the Rejection of Democratic Secular Humanism* (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1971), 225, notes that weekly print runs of the *Investigator* reached 3000 by the beginning of 1837. The newspaper's audience was national in scope and probably larger than the print run because an issue could be read by multiple readers; French, *Trials of Abner Kneeland*, 161-162, provides evidence for this phenomenon. William Cain, "Introduction: William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery", 5, in William E. Cain, ed., *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery: Selections from the Liberator* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995), 1-57. Honing in on the deist and later freethought movement's outsize presence in religious and political discourse are Martin E. Marty, *The Infidel: Freethought and American Religion* (Cleveland, OH: Meridian Books, 1961); and Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

[25] Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 239ff. Davis, *Magic Staff*, 337-338. Slater Brown, *The Heyday of Spiritualism* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1970), 84, corrects long-standing exaggerations about the still sizeable edition numbers of *Nature's Divine Revelations*. The anonymous author of "The Poughkeepsie Seer," *American Freeman*, September 15, 1847, 1, gives a sense of how New York newspapers spread awareness that aided the success of *Nature's Divine Revelations*. Although living in Waukesha, Wisconsin, the author notes that they had been "anxiously waiting to see the book of young Davis, or some *notice* of it, ever since seeing in the New York papers, the glorious and almost impossible objects which it promised to realize" (italics in original).

Strauss" and thus compared its theology "to that of Mr Theodore Parker."[26] In other words, even if the immediate concrete result for the ideas' acceptance seemed to have been on the smaller side, a splash was still a splash, and these splashes still marked an important shift in the intellectual landscape, establishing on a wide scale the possibility of a different way of thinking about the gospels.

As an illustration of the nature of this splash, very telling is woman's rights activist Ernestine Rose's speaking appearance at the 1853 Hartford Bible Convention. There, she propounded what was in effect a more transgressive position on gospel origins, and she did so not only to some staunch opponents who hissed at her and turned off the gas lighting, but also to "blacks" and "women of a very quarter-of-a-dollarish air," including "two ladies of color, who… judg[ing] from the frequent exhibition of their 'ivories,' thought the whole matter the best joke in the world."[27] Although lost to history are the names and fates of these audience members, including their thinking on matters of biblical criticism, it is indisputable that they engaged and reacted to this intellectual shift through a popular discourse occurring apart from the learned one offered by someone like Norton. Moreover, also taking the stage during the convention were none other than William Lloyd Garrison and Andrew Jackson Davis, a speaker slate that along

---

[26] L[ewis], "Professor Bush and Davis," *New-York Daily Tribune*, 1. "Davis's Principles of Nature," Boston *Daily Evening Transcript*, September 29, 1847, 2.

[27] Andrew J. Graham, phonographic reporter, *Proceedings of the Hartford Bible Convention* (New-York: Published by the Committee, 1854), 274, found also in Ernestine Rose, *Mistress of Herself: Speeches and Letters of Ernestine L. Rose, Early Women's Rights Leader*, with a preface and introduction by Paula Doress-Worters and foreword by Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2008), 140-141. A diverse audience that included black women can be inferred from contemporary hostile accounts of the Hartford Bible Convention. "Anti-Bible Convention," *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 9, 1853, quotes a letter from an attendee describing the "assembly" as "not numerous" and "motley, there being a sprinkling of blacks, persons with unshorn beards, women of a very quarter-of-a-dollarish air, and men of longing and enthusiastic aspects." "The Hartford Ismite [sic] Convention," *Liberator*, June 17, 1853, 96, reprints a hostile account from the *New York Herald* subtitling the convention a "Meeting of Philosophers, Theologians, Thinkers, Strong-minded Women, Spiritual Rappers, Atheists, and Negroes" and stating that "[t]he sable portion of our population was but feebly represented by two ladies of color, who, if we may judge from the frequent exhibition of their 'ivories,' thought the whole matter the best joke in the world." The first account may have minimized attendance. Rose, "Hartford Bible Convention," 2, corresponding to Rose, *Mistress of Herself*, 145, notes that the hall "was well filled at every session" and "[i]n the evenings, especially, it was crowded, every standing-place being occupied even to the outside of the doors."

with the audience led to a hostile newspaper account piquantly subtitling its subject as a "Meeting of Philosophers, Theologians, Thinkers, Strong-minded Women, Spiritual Rappers, Atheists, and Negroes."[28] Although the combination of groupings underlying this polemical description may seem odd, standard sociology teaches that oppositional subcultures bear connections amidst all their dispersion, and especially overlap when it comes to consideration and issuance of challenges to the *status quo*.[29] Thus, it should be absolutely no surprise that this one convention's audience heard from persons often conceptually slotted a bit too neatly into apparently discrete movements like woman's rights, abolitionism, and spiritualism.[30] As the atypically atheistic Rose's allergy to belief in both God and spirits demonstrates, differences both within and between movements could be pointed.[31] Yet, similar opposition to the cultural mainstream drew people together in remarkably tolerant events at which fringe ideas were aired, airings retrospectively noteworthy for helping to send out ripples to discomfit the larger society and provide exposure to some important ideas that would eventually manage to enter it.

Overall, then, it is demonstrated via these various, variously intersecting movements and their hazily discernible audiences that important developments in biblical interpretation did not solely gestate within the staid, rather homogenously Protestant seminaries and colleges of the antebellum United States. Instead, in an arena of expanding freedom and cultural possibilities, the heterodoxy of the historical Jesus took root amongst a striking multiplicity of creative groups also opposed to the mainstream in other ways: mostly non-Christian groups like deists,

---

[28] Graham, *Proceedings*, 11-13. *Liberator*, June 17, 1853, 96, reprinting the *New York Herald*
[29] Campbell, "The Cult," 14. Kaplan and Lööw, "Introduction," 4.
[30] In contrast, Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 3, terms such connections "elusive."
[31] Carol A. Kolmerten, *The American Life of Ernestine L. Rose* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 155-156. Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 71-72.

freethinkers, and Davis's deistic spiritualists, but also an emerging array of Christians like Parker and Garrison who operated largely outside of hierarchical control.

A Detailed Overview: Elaborations of and Connections between Key Concepts

Reorienting research towards the heterodox demands clear definitions of key concepts such as "biblical criticism," the "harmonized" versus the "historical" Jesus, and "learned" and "popular" texts, as well as summaries of and justifications for the crucial contexts of the milieu of oppositional subcultures and the dominant theological repertoire of the Evidences. These concepts and contexts especially merit a detailed overview because previous studies lack analytic clarity and neglect the major background for this change of paradigms in biblical interpretation.[32]

Within the many subjects that can fall under the term "biblical criticism," one of the most prominent is treatment of authorship and harmonization traditions, both of which lie at the heart of perhaps the most recent substantial shift in Christian biblical interpretation. Roughly, what began to shift on a wide scale were attributions in authorship (that is, who wrote which books), as well as the intimately related propensity for harmonization (that is, the resolution of apparent theological and narrative discrepancies into an ultimately monovocal normative work, including through incorporation and endorsement of contemporary concerns like communication with beneficent spirits, to take one example from spiritualism).[33] As a result of this shift, a distinct and lasting cultural possibility opened up, whereby people could conceive an ultimately

[32] For a fuller review of literature, see the Appendix. A general sense of the analytic categories and contexts of the literature can be gained from the standard study of Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1991); and the recent work of David Burns, *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[33] Evocatively, a dispute on whether spirit contact forms part of the singular biblical theology is contained in Melinda A. Ball, "Bigotry vs. Spiritualism," *Christian Spiritualist*, June 10, 1854, 4, in an article reprinted from the Troy *Daily Whig*.

*poly*vocal Bible containing *truly* different messages and *actual* narrative discrepancies, behind which discrepancies lay some degree of real events and persons.

Given the sheer number of biblical books, people could hold a range of positions on authorship, mixing both traditional and innovative positions. Nevertheless, even though intense disputes could arise from issues such as the effect of positing multiple authorship on the validity of Isaiah's messianic prophecies, still often at play among Christians was a dynamic of "centrality," where the gospels were typically the last place in the Bible where traditions were questioned due to the pervasiveness of Jesus in those narratives and his theological importance as a focal point of revelation.[34] In terms of authorship traditions, these most important books of the gospels were most often attributed to apostles (Matthew and the "beloved disciple" John) or to followers of apostles (Mark a follower of Peter and Luke a follower of Paul), though these traditions were not entirely monolithic and some variance existed just beneath the surface to those who would plumb them, both then and now.[35] In terms of harmonization traditions, any apparent discrepancies between the gospels would be minimized and ideally explained away

[34] This helpful vocabulary of "centrality" is adapted from Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 137 ("The New Testament was central [so] Strauss's work, which undermined the historical credibility of the Gospels, was therefore much harder for [Parker] to accept"). This widespread dynamic of the centrality of the gospels is also readily observable in other circumstances like the culmination of Abner Kneeland's deconversion from Universalism in *A Review of the Evidences of Christianity….,* 6th ed. (Boston: Office of the Investigator, [1829?]), not to mention the gospels' extreme prominence in culturally important, much reprinted texts ranging from William Paley's *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794) to both parts of Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* (1794, 1795). Brown, *New England Scholars*, 56, details the theological importance of unitary authorship of Isaiah to Andover Seminary's Moses Stuart.

[35] For especial recognition of the importance of authorship traditions, see Holifield, *Theology in America*, 187 and 190; James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1981), 86; and Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 166. For partial recognition of the importance of these traditions, see Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 25; Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 210-211; and Vincent Crapanzano, *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench* (New York: New Press, 2000), 63 and 78. Clark, *Founding the Fathers*, 4, highlights both in relation to the gospels, but states that in her subjects' understanding "the Gospels… provide *eyewitness* accounts of the Savior" rather than accounts of eyewitnesses and their followers (italics added). In regard to this material, a helpful collection and point of reference is the culturally important source of Nathaniel Lardner's *Credibility of the Gospel History* (17 vol., 1727-1757), a work that attempts to comprehensively present a variety of early traditions, and which informed other touchstones like Paley's *Evidences* and Andrews Norton's *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels* (1st volume in 1837, 2nd and 3rd volumes in 1843).

through a relatively uniform set of methods – for example, explanations that apparent discrepancies were different but not contradictory perspectives about the same events.[36] Although occasionally resulting in the production of a single definitive narrative, these traditions more often functioned as an *ad hoc* apologetic technique for meeting concerns as they arose. In terms of the overall shift away from these authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels – this most analytically precise but sadly unwieldy terminology, thus occasionally described as a move within larger discussions of "biblical criticism" from "traditional biblical criticism" to "anti-traditional biblical criticism" – people typically began positing unknown evangelists whose narratives were undependable to some degree because of reasons like significant distance from events due to dependence on previously-existing documents, and behind whose undependable narratives some actual personage of Jesus stood as their source.[37] Although different people could produce a different Jesus through differing harmonizations or

[36] For presumption or discussion of harmonization traditions, see Holifield, *Theology in America*, 187; Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 69; Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 166; Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 210-211; Clark, *Founding the Fathers*, 4; John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 9-30; and Isabel Rivers, "Philip Doddridge's New Testament: *The Family Expositor* (1739-56)," passim, in Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones, eds., *The King James Bible after 400 Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 124-145. For additional recognition of harmonization in New Testament literature reviews, see also F.C. Conybeare, *History of New Testament Criticism* (London: Watts & Co., 1910), 15-29; Neill and Wright, *Interpretation of the New Testament*, 6; and Dennis Nineham, "Foreword to the Complete Edition," xiv, in Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, First Complete Edition, edited by John Bowden and with a foreword by Dennis Nineham (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), xiii-xxxii. Harmonization traditions are a fruitful area for further research, since they form a discernible thread in Christian biblical interpretation over two millennia: the ideas about harmonization surfacing in Lardner, Paley, and Norton are of a piece with those in Augustine's *De Consensu Evangelistarum*, for example. For the Latin text, see Augustine, *De Consensu Evangelistarum*, ed. Franciscus Weirich, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 43 (Vienna: F. Tempsky; Leipzig: G. Freytag, 1904). Holifield, *Theology in America*, 500, implicitly touches on this practice of harmonization in his observation that "[a]ll [proslavery theologians] agreed that revelation was progressive insofar as the New Testament fulfilled the Old..." – in other words, that apparent discrepancies could harmonize into the more recent dispensation.

[37] Importantly, the term "biblical criticism" should not be automatically allied with anti-traditional positions or the intent to polemically adduce such positions, a common phenomenon occurring both now and during the nineteenth century. Note H[ermann] Olshausen, *Proof of the Genuineness of the Writings of the New Testament*…., trans. David Fosdick, Jr. (Andover, MA: Gould & Newman; New York: Corner of Fulton and Nassau Streets, 1838), who prefaces his relatively traditional findings with the observation that "[i]t will, at the same time, be my endeavor to correct the views of many not very clear-sighted though well-meaning persons, who appear to think that all critical investigations of the genuineness or spuriousness of the books of the Bible are, as such, wrong, and take their origin from unbelief" (viii).

through differing suggestions about the figure underlying the gospel narratives that they perceived as undependable, and although the harmonized product was indeed a figure from an admittedly different historical era, the heart of this shift is nevertheless not inaccurately described as people coming down on the side of either a "harmonized Jesus" or a "historical Jesus," to adopt terminology reflective of two rough methods of textual use of the gospels. Indeed, however much these two interpretative paradigms are still present in schools, churches, and the populace at large, two useful guideposts help show that some such innovative cultural possibility like the historical Jesus arose on a mass scale and lastingly established itself within the past two hundred years: whereas in the 1830s a pre-eminent learned work like Andrews Norton's *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels* would hold to traditional evangelist biographies and the harmonization of apparently varying renditions of similar events, in our own day the Society of Biblical Literature-produced Harper Collins Study Bible makes proposals such as that Mark's gospel has no clear attribution, likely relied on "oral traditions about Jesus," and served as a written source informing the gospels of Matthew and Luke.[38] As these intellectually prominent works demonstrate, at some point the historical Jesus took hold among Americans, kicking piles of long-standing traditions out of the way and finding a lasting place in the interpretative landscape.

In an analytic distinction interwoven with this analysis's ultimate reorientation of attention towards oppositional subcultures, this historical Jesus can surface on a spectrum of "learned" and "popular" discourse, a categorization that is preferable to previous studies' unscrutinized discussion of "scholarship."[39] Prior to the rise of the research university ideal in

[38] For example, Norton, *Evidences*, vol. I, [c]ff. The work's importance in its time is recognized in Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 94. Black, "Gospel," 1722-1724.

[39] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, likely established the dominance of the word "scholar" and various related forms with his book title and accompanying usage (e.g. 3, 7, 8). Also including this preferred term in his book's title, Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, mostly relies on "scholarship" as the product of "the professional

the U.S., a trend symbolized in the 1876 inauguration of Johns Hopkins, words such as "professor" and "scholarship" existed, but not in quite the same way as now, in a period after the intensive establishment of specialized research areas, journals, and the like.[40] In this earlier era, especially prior to the rapid rise of seminaries through approximately the 1830s, the boundaries between the professoriate and the ministry were much more fluid, with ministers and professors easily changing from one position to the other and a member of either office helming the widespread apprenticeship model of "reading divinity."[41] Accordingly, in place of the category "scholarship", which can edge into anachronism to the extent that a more discrete and specialized professoriate is understood and projected backward onto this earlier period, a more helpful terminology is found among the vocabulary of some of this earlier era's figures, that of a "learned" versus a non-learned discourse, the latter termed "popular" in many texts and often termed "accessible" in this analysis to avoid unintended connotations like the mass circulation of texts or a necessarily non-learned status of authors. In any case, these terms distinguishing learned and popular discourses can be found as early as 1796, when in his *Apology for the Bible*, former Cambridge divinity professor and then Bishop of Llandaff Richard Watson presented himself as a member of "[t]he really learned" and a mediator of knowledge through his book written "in the popular manner."[42] Later, as an aside in the *Scriptural Interpreter* (1831-1836) publication co-edited by Theodore Parker and intended for the use of Unitarian families, an 1835 article notes its dependence on a work of "one of the most learned men of Germany," while

community" of "scholars" (e.g. 1, 7). Wacker, "Demise," begins the heart of his discussion with an opposition between "ordinary people" and "biblical scholars" (122).

[40] Christopher J. Lucas, *American Higher Education: A History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 170-174. Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 264-286. See also Clark, *Founding the Fathers*, 1-94.

[41] Clark, *Founding the Fathers*, 21-54. W. Clark Gilpin, *A Preface to Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), especially 1-80.

[42] R[ichard] Watson, *An Apology for the Bible, in a Series of Letters, Addressed to Thomas Paine*…. (New York: John Bull, 1796), 7-8. Quotes are taken from the first American edition, which appeared in the same year as the first English edition.

several footnotes of Parker's 1842 *Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* explicitly contrasts "popular" texts with lengthy works penned by holders of church and university offices.[43] In terms of likely connotations of this decades-spanning terminology, a translator's preface of one of the works identified as "popular" within Parker's *Discourse* provides greater insight into these helpful categories through dwelling on the contrast at length: as appropriate for "[t]he unlearned… Christian" who has not undertaken "the toil of severe study," the translated work of a German professor "concisely and simply… present[s] the state of investigation" so as to "exhibit results, rather than the processes by which they were obtained," doing so in "an almost utter absence of philological display" and without an "erudite, cumbrous mode" of exposition.[44] Concise versus cumbrous style, cut-and-dry results versus thorough recapitulation of the process of study, English alone versus the range of languages necessary for philological investigation – all of these differences helped create two rough levels of discourse discernible not only then, but also now as we look back to then. Pointedly, these levels of discourse are not cleanly dichotomous, and are better thought of as common extreme positions on two ends of a spectrum; for example, the American Unitarian Association put forth an 1871 abridged edition of Norton's *Evidences* by removing "its more obscure, collateral developments" and making it more amenable to "the general reader," an implicit demonstration of textual malleability along such a spectrum.[45] Furthermore, although frequently aligning with author intent about reaching a certain type of audience, these levels of discourse are best identified with the text itself; as the abridged edition of Norton's *Evidences* shows, a text may undergo changes that violate author

[43] Editor, "Translations from Eichhorn," *Scriptural Interpreter*, vol. 5 (Boston: Leonard C. Bowles: 1835), 32. Theodore Parker, *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1842), 357n3 and 359n1, which cite works of Lardner, Paley, and Norton.
[44] David Fosdick, Jr., "Preface", [iii]-iv, in Olshausen, *Proof of the Genuineness*, [iii]-vi.
[45] Andrews Norton, *The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, abridged edition (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1871), [v].

intent, not to mention that author intent can exist beyond the bounds of historical recovery with someone like Andrew Jackson Davis, with whom irresolvable issues of channeling and charlatanism rear their heads. In any case, although the categories deployed by historical actors do not always align with the categories most analytically useful for historians, this category of "learned" and its opposite "popular" or "accessible" are preferable to the terminology of previous studies and are indeed used at various points throughout this analysis, since they helpfully prevent an overly artificial division between the ministry and the professoriate while also suggesting the significant differences that tend to be found among texts. One might only add that so many popular portraits of Jesus were so often attempts to score points in debate rather than attain historical understanding, hence a certain exaggerated crudeness sometimes manifested in blunt polemical repossession of Jesus as a holder of the debater's values but not the opponent's, and even careless inconsistency about his portrait within the same text.

Furthermore, even as this analysis seeks to strike out in a new direction and emphasize the importance of oppositional subcultures to cultural change, this more accurate categorization nevertheless helps to clearly articulate and make subject to evaluation previous claims of a major "trickle down" effect from learned to popular discourse; rather than inaugurating popular discourse, learned discourse existed apart from and surfaced alongside it, and thus was a less important agent of cultural change than has been previously assumed. Logically, people with learning can produce both learned and popular discourse, whereas people without learning are limited to the production of popular discourse – that is, someone like Parker could write both a learned tome and a popular pamphlet, whereas someone who knew no Greek could only write a popular pamphlet. Unjustifiably, major previous studies have tended to focus on the role of the learned as the primary agents of change in the broader culture; within the previous historiography's narrative of technical developments and intellectual achievements, an idea like

the historical Jesus was assumed to naturally emerge within learned settings, and thus learned people were implicitly assumed to be the ones who had access to it and who could disseminate it more broadly.[46] However, in accordance with the arch but rather apt observation of one modern-day New Testament scholar that "the work of the deists could have been accomplished by any bright skeptic with the aid of a King James Bible," it seems best to push back the start of a widely recognized "historical Jesus" paradigm in the U.S. to the very end of the eighteenth century with Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* (1794 and 1795, in two parts), as part of the larger recognition that this innovative interpretative paradigm could exist in popular works entirely separate from the "trickle down" effect.[47] Tellingly, Paine's polemic would eventually be drawn into explicit comparison with Parker's *Discourse* upon that work's publication, and, alongside works like Parker's, it helped people like abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison accept the innovative paradigm of the historical Jesus.[48] In another telling and slightly later example, a popular work like Davis' 1847 *Nature's Divine Revelations* would make claims about a

[46] With its start date of 1800, Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 6, 8, and 181, helped establish a dominant narrative where "biblical study" was at first prevented from affecting "American church life" (181). Citing Brown, (228n6), Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 11, calls attention to how "academic" developments "from the Continent" eventually shifted the general views of "American Protestants" after the Civil War. Also following Brown (134n5), Wacker, "Demise," 123, highlights "[p]rofessional biblical scholars" of the post-Civil War period as "the field marshals who led the revolution."

[47] Baird, *History of New Testament Research – Volume One*, 56. Richard Wrightman Fox, *Jesus in America: Personal Savior, Cultural Hero, National Obsession* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 162-172, treats both Paine's *Age of Reason* and Jefferson's bible as early American reflections on the historical Jesus. Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 32 and 40-41, casts Thomas Jefferson's bible as the inauguration of a "legacy in American religion" due to his status as "the first U.S. citizen to go on a quest for the historical Jesus" and further notes that "he was not a trained Bible critic," but he provides insufficient substantiation of this attributed causation. In this regards, pertinent but underappreciated are the Jefferson Bible's later date and minimal circulation. Although remembered today as a famous deistic interpretation of the bible, Thomas Jefferson's *Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* was a very private production and relatively late, likely dating to around 1820. See E. Forrester Church, "The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson," in Thomas Jefferson, *The Jefferson Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, with an introduction by E. Forrester Church and an afterword by Jaroslav Pelikan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 1-31.

[48] For an extended, explicit comparison of the thought of Paine and Parker, see J.HM., "Art. III. – *A Discourse of matters pertaining to Religion*….", *Christian Examiner and General Review* (July 1842), 392. [William Lloyd Garrison], "Theodore Parker," *Liberator*, April 4, 1845, 55. [William Lloyd Garrison], "Thomas Paine," *Liberator*, November 21, 1845, 186.

historical Jesus that invited comparisons to Paine on the one hand and Strauss and Parker on the other.[49] Unfortunately, because the most extensive reviews of learned works from this period are intellectual genealogies rather than delineations of cultural influence, the culturally important learned texts of the time are not entirely apparent.[50] As the works of Norton and Parker attest, learned texts composed in or translated into English seem to have noticeably dominated both sides of the American interpretative divide around the gospels, with England an apparently underappreciated center of learning in its own right, even apart from mediation of learning from Germany.[51] For traditional authorship attributions and harmonizing tendencies, the most prominent learned works seem to have been Nathaniel Lardner's *Credibility of the Gospel History* (17 volumes, 1727-1757), William Paley's *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794), and Andrews Norton's *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels* (1st volume in 1837, 2nd and 3rd volumes in 1844). For innovative historical Jesus ideas, the most prominent learned works seem to have been Cambridge professor Herbert Marsh's very early nineteenth century translation and augmentation to "John David" Michaelis' *Introduction to the New Testament* (3 volumes, 1802), then David Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* (2 volumes, 1835-1836, reaching America by at least 1836; later translated in 1846 by Mary Ann Evans [George Eliot] as the 3 volume work *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*).[52] From these learned works operating with an

[49] L[ewis], "Professor Bush and Davis," *New-York Daily Tribune*, 1, calls Davis's work "an infidel book" cribbing its "biblical criticism from Tom Paine." "Davis's Principles of Nature," Boston *Daily Evening Transcript*, September 29, 1847, 2, not only states that "[t]he Bible is taken to pieces much after the manner of [David Friedrich] Strauss," but also compares its theology "to that of Mr Theodore Parker."

[50] The most extensive reviews of learned works from this period are William Baird, *History of New Testament Research - Volume One: From Deism to Tübingen* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992); and *History of New Testament Research – Volume Two: From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), both of which emphasize development of ideas over time, as opposed to various works' cultural influence in their own time. In comparison, relatively more limited in terms of number of works treated are the more historically sensitive reviews of Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, and Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*.

[51] Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 215-220. For additional recognition of such pressure in period New Testament literature reviews, Bacon, *Introduction*, 1900, 22-24; and Nash, *History*, 159-160.

[52] These preliminary judgments are made on the basis of examination of footnotes of the first volume of Norton's *Evidences* (1837) and the first edition of Parker's *Discourse* (1842), each of which is judged to be a landmark contribution in the domains of biblical criticism and biblical criticism-informed theology, respectively (for which

idea of the historical Jesus, the biggest cause of the "trickle down" effect seems to have been the later and more epochal work of Strauss, which after repeated engagement provoked Parker's similar stances in his 1842 *Discourse* and with which the work of Andrew Jackson Davis was explicitly compared.[53] Thus, between the explosive debut of Paine's *Age of Reason* at the end of the eighteenth century and what is currently known to be the much later effects of Strauss's learned discourse on popular discourse, the "trickle down" effect definitely occurred, but had relatively less social impact than previously assumed.

In moving away from the primacy of such textual categories in defining thinking, this analysis instead conceptualizes both learned and popular texts as part of the same shift, and alternately focuses on oppositional subcultures as the foremost places of cultural innovation. Although apparently unknown in the evolving Religious Studies subfield of the History of Religions in America, one relatively standard sociological theory from the subfield of New Religious Movements is the highly applicable idea of the "cultic milieu," a cultural underbelly of persons and organizations in which non-mainstream forms of knowledge are traded and reconfigured, some enjoying a temporary vogue but ultimately dying away, and others eventually

see Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 94, and Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 275ff.). Pointing to the importance of Marsh and his influence are Michael J. Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty: Battles over Authority and Interpretation in America* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 230n48; Stephen Neill and Tom Wright. *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5-7; and Turner, "'Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 216. According to Grodzins, Parker gained access in 1836 to a German copy of Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* thanks to "a student who had been studying in Germany" (137). In an interesting reversal of the typical "trickle down" effect, David Hempton, *Evangelical Disenchantment: Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 31-34, describes the influence of an accessible text of Englishman Charles Hennel on George Eliot's thinking by 1841, prior to her epochal translation of Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*. Scholarship does not seem to have definitively identified or even paid much attention to looking for the first American learned work presenting the historical Jesus. Presumably, this work was published before the Civil War and little known in its time, or it was published after the Civil War.

[53] Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 137-138, 150ff. Parker perhaps may have also indirectly absorbed some positions of the earlier and lesser known Marsh introduction via the work of Norton. "Davis's Principles of Nature," Boston *Daily Evening Transcript*, September 29, 1847, 2, states that in Davis's work,"[t]he Bible is taken to pieces much after the manner of Strauss."

emerging into the mainstream and becoming tolerable social variants or even new orthodoxies.[54] Ideally rephrased to eschew the outdated sociological terminology of "cult," what might be more aptly called a "milieu of oppositional subcultures" is posited as a permanent space within all societies, albeit one with shifting boundaries, interconnections, and contents. Mostly attracting seekers of various types, it consists of a network of individuals and groups opposed to the mainstream, as well as their various fora that typically tolerate and disseminate any unconventional idea. Since heterodoxies can quickly circulate from one corner of the milieu to another, members of any corner of the milieu are exposed to a variety of thought, although the overall milieu is not homogenous; any given person likely only practices a few peculiarities of the many with which they are familiar, and the various pockets within the milieu may not directly associate with one another. Indeed, within such a sociological framework, one prominent line of questioning is not whether such connections among oppositional subcultures exist, but what pockets constitute the milieu's different regions and what causes certain ideas find acceptance or resistance in these different pockets.[55]

In its concrete application to the antebellum United States, this sociological framework of the milieu of oppositional subcultures reframes recurring, apparent oddities as standard characteristics and raises important new questions of how exactly the subcultures intersected. First, even apart from the presence of the historical Jesus paradigm, the startling array of oddities found within this analysis finds a common denominator in their challenge to the dominant

[54] For a history of the abandonment of "cult" terminology, see J. Gordon Melton, "An Introduction to New Religions," 17-24, in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, ed. James R. Lewis (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16-35. Campbell, "The Cult." Kaplan and Lööw, "Introduction." In its highly compatible conceptualizations and conclusions but lack of any references to this general framework, Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 3-4, 56-81, and 197-202, best points to its absence within the History of Religions in America.
[55] For example, Bron Taylor, "Diggers, Wolves, Ents, Elves and Expanding Universes: Bricolage, Religion and Violence from Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front to the Antiglobalization Resistance," in *Cultic Milieu*, ed. Kaplan and Lööw, 26-74, concludes that racist environmental subcultures cannot cross-fertilize with radical environmental subcultures due to the latter's egalitarianism and extremely strong boundary-setting.

culture: politics like abolitionism and woman's rights were quite radical, and religious oddities like Freethought and spirit contact were quite transgressive. Second, the striking presence of the historical Jesus among odd oppositional subcultures rather than school and ministerial settings becomes eminently explicable as the adoption of yet another countercultural position by open-minded persons enjoying a relative degree of social freedom. Although an overall increase in religious freedom is a standard theme of scholarship on this era, recent specialized studies have begun emphasizing hierarchical strictures on professors, particularly within the United States' tight church-academy alignment, as compared to the institutions of England and especially Germany.[56] In a telling example combining the insights of this recent historical research and the sociological framework of this analysis, Theodore Parker's vilification for theological experimentation and his location in a congregation operating largely outside of hierarchical control perfectly fit within the milieu of oppositional subcultures; Parker could not have plausibly found a lasting home at Harvard due to his heterodoxy, and thus was pushed to the edge within his relatively learned denomination. Also within this framework, the presence of innovative ideologies with which anti-traditional biblical criticism is associated can be conceptualized as a positive predisposing factor within this greater arena of freedom; although people at large had negative freedom through the increasing diminution of social pressure, an

[56] For example of classic treatments containing this theme, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); and Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). See also Catherine L. Albanese, "Understanding Christian Diversity in America," in Catherine A. Brekus and W. Clark Gilpin, eds., *American Christianities: A History of Dominance and Diversity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 214-241. For a recent reflection on freedom within seminary and college settings, see Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 215-220. Additional recognitions of such pressure in period New Testament literature reviews are Bacon, *Introduction*, 22-24; and Nash, *History*, 159-160. Intriguingly, Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, [3]-10 and 165-169, points to the inherited disciplinary subject of New Testament origins as the increasingly ironic result of a German political strategy to move state universities away from divisive creedal disputation and onto the then-less controversial subject of common Christian beginnings.

innovative ideology seems to have been a factor predictive of who would potentially act on this freedom. Third, the marked openness of the characteristically combative fora of print and oratory becomes understandable, as do the frequent collision of ideas and persons often kept separate by later history.[57] For example, the 1853 Hartford Bible Convention issued an open invitation "to the friends of free discussion" and was apparently attended by people for, against, and merely curious about attacks on "the Bible," while disagreements between speakers like the spiritualist Davis and the atheist Rose were papered over in favor of their more vehement opposition to their common enemy of mainstream thought.[58] Within such a milieu of oppositional subcultures, expected too are striking peregrinations of single texts and persons; Parker's 1842 *Discourse* received a reading group that made the pages of the seminal Freethought newspaper the Boston *Investigator*, for example, while he himself became a famous abolitionist and sampled trends like spiritualism.[59] Fourth and last, a sense of where and why the particular idea of the historical Jesus adhered can be provisionally gleaned, at least up through the Civil War. From Paine onward, the most consistent home was with non-Christians of the deist movement, the deist movement's later Freethought heirs, and Andrew Jackson Davis's deistic portion of spiritualism, due to the importance of authorship and harmonization traditions to most mainstream Christian theology of the time. Among Christians, it also began to lodge among those outside of or averse to hierarchical control: with Theodore Parker and some members of his go-it-alone Unitarian congregation, for example, but also with independent-minded Christians like William Lloyd Garrison and some of the lesser known Christian

[57] For treatment of debates, see E. Brooks Holifield, "Theology as Entertainment: Oral Debate in American Religion," *Church History* 67, no. 3 (Sept. 1998): 499-520
[58] For a reproduction of the open invitation, see Graham, *Proceedings*, [9].
[59] "A Good Sign," *Boston Investigator*, January 31, 1844. Frothingham, *Theodore Parker*, 371-375. Weiss, *Life and Correspondence*, 333-334.

spiritualists whose words and ideas dot mostly forgotten periodicals. Among these transgressive Christians, a certain heightened radicalism and greater marginality may have predisposed them to go a step further than their mostly liked-minded companions and abandon mainstream theology; Parker was more willing to upset the system than his fellow Unitarian Transcendentalist Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, a woman comfortable in elite circles and possessed of a strong sense of propriety, and the lower class Garrison propounded an abolitionism opposed to the more genteel Harriet Beecher Stowe and her more decorous anti-slavery solution of colonization. Unfortunately, too little is known about innovative Christian spiritualists or the full range of oppositional subcultures to try to turn this line of thinking into anything more than a tentative possibility. Nevertheless, within this framework of the milieu of oppositional subcultures, a rough picture begins to coalesce of the historical Jesus taking root alongside a variety of non-mainstream ideologies, mostly among non-Christians, but also eventually among an increasing number of Christians wherever they were outside of hierarchical control.

In any case, among the oppositional subcultures and their debate partners, a key point of reference was the broader theological repertoire, in particular the dominant Christian framework of the Evidences and its propagation of a certain understanding of authorship and harmonization traditions. A mainstream in theology is by no means a stable or even a given state; pieces of this mainstream shifted over time as with the nineteenth century rise of scientific empiricism, for example, and at any given moment different degrees of dissent can be located.[60] Nevertheless, for the antebellum U.S., a theological mainstream posited by previous scholars serves as a useful point of reference, because the controversies that arose over anti-traditional biblical criticism are strongly linked to transgressions of a number of its elements.

[60] For example, for a treatment of how increasing respect for empiricism factored into spiritualist appeals, see Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 18ff.

At its most fundamental – and at a level that the works featured in this dissertation did not transgress – this dominant Christian framework of the Evidences was built on a broader base of theism, the idea that some supreme supernatural entity created the world and a common human purpose.[61] Most familiarly, this idea was presented via another book of William Paley's, his *Natural Theology* (1803), which most famously made the influential argument from design, wherein the presence of a watchmaker is implied by an accidentally discovered watch and thus too the created world is analogously assumed to demonstrate the existence of a divine creator.[62] Although receiving more recent circulation in response to the advent of Darwin's theory of adaptation by natural selection, this type of thinking was commonplace in the antebellum United States with not only different varieties of Christians, but also the still theistic deists and even many of their freethinking heirs, since denial of a divine creator did not occur on any notable scale until after the Civil War.[63] For example, although the country's most notorious infidel due to his brash criticisms of Christianity, Tom Paine adhered to a line of thinking similar to Paley's, propounding in 1794 in the first part of his controversial *Age of Reason* a deity not identified with Christianity but still "manifested in the structure of the universe, and in all the works of creation."[64] Interestingly, as the exception that proves the point, the much later feminist Ernestine Rose was in fact an atheist, but tended to avoid the topic and eventually had to give a specific 1861 address in order to correct misperceptions of her beliefs, even there ultimately emphasizing her "unbounded, unshaken faith in the principles of right, of justice, and humanity,"

[61] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 5-6. Turner, *Without God*, xiv-xv. Conrad Wright, *The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarian History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 1-4.
[62] In the first English edition, William Paley, *Natural Theology: Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (London: R. Faulder for Wilks and Taylor, 1802), [1]-18.
[63] Turner, *Without God*, xiv-xv and 205-206.
[64] Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason, Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (New York: T. and J. Swords, for J. Fellows, 1794),

the same common denominator republican ideology that was a hallmark of her work and so susceptible to theistic misconstrual.[65]

If these handful of deists and their freethinking heirs are momentarily set aside from consideration, however, many different varieties of Christians still constituted a remarkably broad consensus on further details of this theism, since they largely thought that reason demonstrated the occurrence of an epochal disclosure of divine will in the personage of Jesus of Nazareth, whatever particular theology and institutions the different groups associated with him.[66] Importantly, to understand this revelation made in and through Jesus, these Christians relied heavily on the Bible, and even more importantly for the history of biblical criticism, on a mode of thinking about the gospels that was widespread among not only Calvinist Protestants, but also Lutherans and even Catholics.[67] Still surviving all the way until the present day, this mode of thinking was crystallized in a rough set of stock arguments termed the "Evidences," a theology that is fairly surprising today in its prevalence then.[68]

What were these Evidences? In the late eighteenth and through the nineteenth century, the most vocally professed source of authority of many Christians was "the Bible" or even "the Bible alone," but the authority of various particular biblical interpretations typically depended on standardized, well-known arguments that possessed deep historical roots and had become

[65] Kolmerten, *American Life of Ernestine L. Rose*, 208-231, which also suggests the peculiarity of Rose's atheism in its observation that her "speech, reprinted several times as a broadside, is Rose's most frequently found extant speech in libraries across the United States" (228). Ernestine Rose, "A Defence of Atheism," 300, as reprinted in Ernestine Rose, *Mistress of Herself: Speeches and Letters of Ernestine L. Rose, Early Women's Rights Leader*, with a preface and introduction by Paula Doress-Worters and foreword by Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2008), 295-300.
[66] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 6-8. Wright, *Liberal Christians*, 4-21.
[67] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 397-414 and [415]-433, where is detailed the presence of such theology in tension with Lutheran confessional and Catholic ecclesiastical authority, respectively.
[68] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 505-511. Holifield's narrative traces continuities through the first several decades of the twentieth century, but their survival in present-day evangelicalism can be seen in cultural touchstones like Josh McDowell's *Evidences that Demand a Verdict* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999).

especially prominent as rebuttals to eighteenth century English deists.[69] Called "the Evidences" at the time and most influentially collected in but by no means limited to Paley's much-reprinted *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794), these stock arguments explicitly appealed to rational scrutiny of revelation, since it was believed that reason would lead any examiner to the truth found in the Christian scriptures – in other words, that via engagement with these stock arguments, reason would lead a person to not only see the "inspiration" of the Bible and grant "authority" to it, but also give credence to the larger Christian revelation identified with it.

The culminating and typically normative scriptural interpretation of course varied, even in spite of claims to biblical clarity, and the bulk of the era's religious discussion occurred here among fellow Christians in "the region of Controversy," to quote an 1823 didactic letter written by Unitarian Elizabeth Palmer Peabody to her sister.[70] Of the many prominent controversies of the era, the one that most occupied Peabody at that point in her life was that between Unitarians and Trinitarians – that is, between on the one hand a Christian like Andrews Norton who could argue that the Trinity is not "taught in the scriptures" and that the divinity of Christ is not "what the scriptures teach," and on the other hand a Christian like Andover Seminary professor Moses Stuart who could also argue from the "authority of the Bible" a much different position, namely that the Trinity and both divine and human natures in Christ.[71] In other words, both of these Christians professed an ultimately monovocal Bible and saw that monovocality as a binding

[69] Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3-18, 227-233, and 367-385. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 1-19 and 508-511, convincingly describes "the evidential temper" as a uniting feature of antebellum Christianity that persists through postbellum theological diversification and even into the twentieth century.
[70] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Letters of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: American Renaissance Woman*, edited by Bruce A. Ronda (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 61-62.
[71] Andrews Norton, *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians, Respecting the Nature of God and the Person of Christ*... (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1819), 16-17. M[oses] Stuart, *Miscellanies*, vol. 1 (New York: Van Nostrand & Terrett, 1851), 53.

normative blueprint, but the one perceived in it a divine unity and a solely human Christ, while the other saw in it standard Trinitarian positions.

To linger on that major area of commonality rather than the disagreements, however, both Norton and Stuart, not to mention Peabody and most other Christians of their day, viewed the Bible as a normative adjudicator of beliefs and held similarly concordant underlying rationales for doing so. In terms of historically rooted theological nomenclature and channels, these stock arguments were known as and travelled under the name of the Evidences, and it was this "middle level" of mainstream Christian agreement between theism and sectarian disputation that furnished the arena for debates about matters of biblical criticism like the authorship and harmonization of the gospels.[72]

To explore this theological dynamic further, it was as if for the vast majority of Christians their holy book rested on a stool with a multitude of legs consisting of different arguments; kick out a leg or two, and the supporting edifice risked tumbling, taking the Bible and thus Christian revelation along with it. Concretely, what were these stock arguments, though? A look to some divisions and select content of Paley's classic work can give a sense of the relatively standard arguments that circulated more broadly throughout the period. One set of arguments rested on an assumed intuitive response to the quality of the Bible and the fruits of the religion stemming from it: on the one hand, a favorable reaction to the "morality of the Gospel" and the "Originality of Christ's Character," and on the other hand, a favorable reaction to the "Effects of Christianity" in the world after its inception.[73] Another set of arguments appealed to what we

[72] Hatch, *Democratization*, 179, notes the "distinctive way that many populists chose to read the Bible," where "[a]ny number of denominations, sects, movements, and individuals between 1780 and 1830 claimed to be restoring a pristine biblical Christianity free from all human devices." Along similar lines, Noll, *America's God*, 17, observes about prooftexting debates over slavery in the years preceding the Civil War, "[S]hort of warfare, no means seemed to exist for adjudicating these self-evident, but conflicting, interpretations of Scripture."

[73] William Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, 2nd ed., vol. II (London: R. Faulder, 1794), v and vii (Part II, Chapters II and V; Part III, Chapter VII). Page numbers have been taken from the earliest available edition, but

might term supernatural events surrounding special revelation, events inclusive of subjects like how Christ not only wrought "miracles" of sounder believability than those "alleged" elsewhere, but also fulfilled "Prophecy" in his life and actions.[74] To the degree that these argument relied on sections of Scripture, the gospels themselves had to come under defense: their "Authenticity" was maintained, not only in terms of their attributed, trustworthy authorship and harmonious narratives, but also how "many, professing to be original witnesses… passed their lives in labours, dangers and sufferings," then afterwards their accounts received early circulation, whether as read in "religious assemblies" of which we have accounts, or as surfacing in "[c]ommentaries," or as even passing into the hands of "the adversaries of Christianity."[75] Thus, as can be seen from a glance at Paley's text, authorship and harmonization traditions surfaced within the stock arguments of this larger theological edifice, a fact that meant that challenging these traditions ultimately disturbed accustomed understandings of the Bible as revelation and consequently whichever forms of Christianity to which this view of the Bible was integral.

In terms of this disturbance, scattered but telling references to the Evidences dot decade after decade of writings featured in this analysis, showing that this framework so foreign to us now was indeed the major, concrete theological fault line crossed by the different controversial proponents of anti-traditional biblical criticism and maintained by those who would resist and rebut them. A memoir celebrating the author of the 1795 bestselling rebuttal to Paine's *Age of Reason* notes "his acknowledged ability, in displaying the evidence of revealed religion" versus his deist opponent.[76] As a beginning teacher in Maine prior to her friendship and uneasy

---

section divisions have been noted to aid location in other editions. Content headings but not content seem to vary in small ways between editions, as is evident from examination of copies such as Paley, *View of the Evidences* (New York: Thomas Bakewell, 1814).

[74] Ibid., vol. I, [ix], and vol. II, [v] (Part I general heading and Part I, Chapter I; Part II, Chapter I).

[75] Ibid., vol. I, [ix], x, (Part I, Chapters IX, I, V, VI, and IX).

[76] R[ichard] Watson, *An Apology for the Bible – In a Series of Letter, Addressed to Thomas Paine, Author of the Age of Reason* (New York: J. Collord, for T. Mason and G. Lane, 1837), 7.

theological dialogue with Theodore Parker, Unitarian Elizabeth Palmer Peabody wrote that 1823 didactic letter mentioning not only "the region of Controversy," but also advising her sister to consult Paley's "Evidences of Christianity" and "believe without hesitancy what ever [sic] you think the N. Testament authorizes."[77] As part of his deconversion from Universalism on his path to Freethought and labor advocacy, Abner Kneeland worked through a magazine serial entitled "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," eventually to present his new thinking in a series of 1829 lectures published as *A Review of the Evidences of Christianity*.[78] Prior to his mature views on the gospels, a young Theodore Parker co-edited during 1835-1836 a scriptural publication for Unitarian families that offered articles like "The Internal Evidence for the Genuineness of the New Testament," and he would later list Paley as providing opposite views on the identity of the evangelists in a footnote to the first edition of his famous 1842 *Discourse*.[79] Still later, in her 1853 correspondence with William Lloyd Garrison over the disturbing trajectory of his theology, fellow anti-slavery reformer Harriet Beecher Stowe asked him, "Do you examine *both* sides?", confidently pointing out her gladness that "[d]iscussion of the Evidences and of [the] Authenticity and Inspiration of the Bible, and of all theology, will come more and more."[80] In light of such pervasive, explicit references, this framework forms context to more allusive references; for example, the more biblically traditional spiritualist Nathaniel Tallmadge's 1855 statements on the "testimony on which the Sacred Scriptures themselves have been handed down to us... and without which we should have no authentic evidence of their

[77] Elizabeth Peabody to Sophia Peabody, March 31, 1823, in Peabody, *Letters*, 61-62, 60, and 61, of 59-64.
[78] For example, Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: On Historical Evidence," *Correspondent*, May 2, 1829, 225-232, which underlies most of the second lecture of Kneeland, *Review of the Evidences of Christianity*.
[79] Ed[itor], "On the Internal Evidence for the Genuineness of the New Testament," *Scriptural Interpreter*, vol. 5 (1835), 38-44. Parker, *Discourse*, 357n3.
[80] Harriet Beecher Stowe to William Lloyd Garrison, [December 1853?], in [Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison], *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life, Told By His Children*, vol. III (1841-1860) (New York: The Century Co., 1889), 400 (italics in the Garrisons' printing of the manuscript letter).

existence."[81] Although so foreign to us now, the Evidences indubitably constituted a widespread reference point in conversations about the gospels in the antebellum United States.

Importantly, when disputing the Evidences, those who chose to dispute did not necessarily dispute more than one strand. In a famous case otherwise not surfacing in this analysis, David Hume did his best to deny the possibility of or at least asserting the severe improbability of the miraculous.[82] Later, the necessity of miracles to belief became an object of heightened debate among Unitarians during the Transcendentalist controversy of the late 1830s and 1840s.[83] Consequently, the disputation of authorship and harmonization traditions sometimes could but did not necessarily occur in conjunction with multilateral disputation of other arguments from the Evidences; for example, Tom Paine undertook a broad attack against the Evidences in his *Age of Reason*, but other disputations like Parker's *Discourse* could be much narrower on the whole.

Furthermore, those who disputed authorship and harmonization traditions seem to have been strongly rooted in competing forms of religious authority, very often developed from within the Evidences, but at the expense of the other concepts or even severed from them and independently constituted as part of the expanding religious possibilities of the Early Republic. Deists ran with the idea of reason and rational investigation, social reformers ethics and morality, Transcendentalists intuitive responses to truth, and spiritualists the miracles marking moments of special revelation. Although none of these forms of authority mandated leaving authorship and harmonization positions behind, they opened up that potential, and some individuals could

[81] Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, "Introduction," 8-9, in Charles Linton, *The Healing of the Nations* (New York: Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge, 1855), [3]-71.
[82] Paley, *View of the Evidences*, vol. I, 1-15, repeatedly mentions Hume by name in his book's opening remarks ("Preparatory Considerations").
[83] For a convincing interpretation of this debate within the framework of the Evidences, see Holifield, *Theology in America*, 444-447.

become grounded in them to such an extent that they could take a vertiginous leap in biblical interpretation and entertain a historical rather than a harmonized Jesus. True, a sharp division would be overly schematic, especially among so many open-minded individuals; as has already been noted, Theodore Parker, for example, not only issued lengthy defenses of intuition, but also became increasingly involved with abolitionism and even somewhat sympathetically contemplated the truth of spiritualism.[84] And yet, even despite such nuance, certain particular emphases among certain groups of people are discernible, and they all point in one direction – away from the Evidences and sometimes even away from the harmonized Jesus, as there opened up a cultural possibility that merges into the present day and is now traceable as the interpretative paradigm of the historical Jesus.

Chapter Logic and Content

This dissertation proceeds chronologically by oppositional subculture via representative figures, with preference given wherever feasible to the earliest possible figures who produced broadly circulating texts. These chapters have been ordered chronologically according to the approximate starting point of the earliest major activity mentioned, and all deeply scrutinized periods of activity happen to occur prior to the start of the Civil War. Additionally, much important intellectual work occurs through discussion of Transcendentalists in the third chapter, since the previously emphasized "trickle down" effect of learned to popular discourse is best traced and put into perspective through the activities of Parker. All movements are well-known and historically important, but this dissertation has not exhaustively identified movements whose members entertained anti-traditional biblical criticism and essayed it during debate against the

[84] Frothingham, *Theodore Parker*, 371-375. Weiss, *Life and Correspondence*, 333-334.

mainstream. That said, enough movements are treated to show the existence and importance of the milieu of oppositional subcultures amidst the Early Republic's increasing religious diversity. Within that framework, primary emphasis rests on the accompanying ideological project of particular movements, and apart from an examination of tension among anti-slavery and woman's rights allies in the second chapter, the expected openness and incidental connections among them are not rigorously collated or discussed, but rather appropriately highlighted wherever they appear.

The first chapter examines Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* (1794 and 1795, in two parts) to show how anti-traditional biblical criticism could but did not necessarily occur alongside the wider cultural commitment to rational investigation, when that commitment was channeled through and on behalf of deism rather than the Evidences. First, it examines the traditional authorship and harmonization traditions of a prominent bible and a prominent biblical adaptation prior to the *Age of Reason*, in order to give a sense of the common culture that Paine challenged as part of his advocacy of deism. Second, the anti-traditional biblical criticism of Paine's *Age of Reason* is parsed in order to show that Paine used the historical Jesus to advocate deism. Lastly, Richard Watson's bestselling 1796 rejoinder *An Apology for the Bible* is treated, in order to demonstrate how authorship and harmonization traditions of the Evidences were re-asserted against Paine's challenges. As a minor point within the chapter, the debate's dichotomy between a Christianity with the Evidences or a deism without the Evidences will be noted, in order to show how mainstream texts lacked awareness of a self-identified Christian theology capable of incorporating a historical Jesus.

The second chapter treats several social reform movements from roughly 1825 through the 1850s to show how anti-traditional biblical criticism could but did not necessarily occur alongside humanitarian advocacy of social causes, as well as to give a sense of the tensions that

could arise when anti-traditional biblical criticism did surface. Through Abner Kneeland and his newspaper the *Boston Investigator*, the deist-descended Freethought movement of the 1830s is examined, to show how anti-traditional biblical criticism surfaced alongside advocacy for labor. Through William Lloyd Garrison and his newspaper the *Liberator*, the abolitionist movement of the 1830s onward is examined to show how anti-traditional biblical criticism surfaced alongside advocacy for that particular social reform. Lastly, through freethinker and early feminist Ernestine Rose, the woman's movement of the 1850s is again examined for the anti-traditional biblical criticism. With both abolitionism and woman's rights, the abandonment of long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions is analyzed as a point of tension demanding negotiation between allies for the sake of both mutual good will and advocacy; this tension is especially seen between the historical Jesus-accepting Christian Garrison and harmonized Jesus-accepting Christian Harriet Beecher Stowe, and between the freethinker Rose and the Evidences-endorsing eventual minister Antoinette Brown. As a minor point within this last argument and the entire chapter, Garrison is seen to be an early self-identified Christian who operated outside of hierarchical control and whose theology could incorporate the historical Jesus.

The third chapter discusses the Transcendentalist movement through the figures of Theodore Parker and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, to show how anti-traditional biblical criticism could but did not necessarily occur alongside an innovative theology of intuition that explicitly allowed truth to be located anywhere. Through Parker's co-edited *Scriptural Interpreter* production of 1835-36 and his 1842 *Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion,* the presence of anti-traditional criticism is demonstrated and the relation of learned and accessible discourse is clarified, with the presence of a previous accessible discourse being acknowledged even at the time. Through Peabody's mid-1830s documentation of the Temple School and some scattered theological translations and productions, interest in a theology of intuition is shown to co-exist

with the authorship and harmonization traditions of the Evidences. As a minor point within this chapter, Parker is seen to be an early self-identified Christian who largely operated outside of hierarchical control and whose theology could incorporate the historical Jesus.

The fourth chapter covers the spiritualist movement, to show how anti-traditional biblical criticism could but did not necessarily occur alongside an innovative theology of spirits. Through clairvoyant Andrew Jackson Davis's massive 1847 channeled tome *Nature's Divine Revelations* – a product demonstrated to emerge from strains of mesmerism that then fed into nascent spiritualist culture – anti-traditional biblical criticism is seen to occur with spirit knowledge in order to challenge and displace forms of Christianity reliant on the Evidences. Several productions of the short-lived 1850s Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge such as those touted by conservative spiritualist Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, however, show that spirit knowledge could co-exist with the authorship and harmonization traditions of the Evidences. As a minor point within this chapter, letters surfacing within some spiritualist newspapers tantalizingly hint at the existence of self-identified Christians whose spiritualist theology could incorporate the historical Jesus.

Cumulatively, then, this dissertation's chapters show that the interpretative paradigm of the historical Jesus appeared from 1794 through the 1850s among oppositional subcultures closely tied to various innovative forms of authority that were found amidst the increasing religious diversity of the Early Republic: mostly non-Christian groups like the deists, the deist-descended Freethought movement, and Andrew Jackson Davis's deistic spiritualists, but also an emerging array of Christians who acted largely outside of hierarchical control.

CHAPTER ONE: BIBLICAL CRITICISM AND DEISM

"The probability, however, is, that there were such persons, or at least such as resembled them in part of the circumstances, because almost all romantic stories have been suggested by some actual circumstance; as the adventures of Robinson Crusoe, not a word of which is true, was suggested by the case of Alexander Selkirk."

– Tom Paine, *Age of Reason - Part the Second* (1795).

After the end of the American War for Independence, famed pamphleteer Tom Paine drifted back to his native Britain and then to revolutionary France, where he received citizenship and a 1792 National Convention deputyship before the factional chaos of late 1793 awarded him confinement in prison and near certain death by guillotine.[1] At the beginning of the next year, in the "[s]econd year of the French Republic" in the recently renamed month of "Pulvoise [sic; actually 'Pluvôise']" – that is, in January of 1794 – the imprisoned Paine dedicated to his "fellow citizens of the United States of America" a new pamphlet entitled the *Age of Reason* and containing his "opinion upon religion," defiantly stating that "[t]he most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is Reason."[2] In the pamphlet that followed, Paine decried the out-of-control revolution that had failed to adequately replace its enemy of the previously regnant religion:

---

[1] John Keane, *Tom Paine: A Political Life* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1995). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Paine, Thomas (1737-1809)" (by Mark Philp), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21133 (accessed January 13, 2012).

[2] Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason, Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (New York: T. and J. Swords, for J. Fellows, 1794), [v]-vi (463). Numbers in parentheses following citations from the first copyrighted American edition of the *Age of Reason* and Paine's printing of the *Age of Reason, Part the Second* correspond to the pagination of the reprints widely available in the first volume of *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: Citadel Press, 1945), 463-604. It should be noted that the texts in Foner are mildly discrepant from these earlier editions in capitalization, punctuation, and even some minor wording. Paine's printing of the second part is Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason, Part the Second, Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* ([Paris?].: Printed for the Author, 1795).

> The circumstance that has now taken place in France [has] rendered a work of this kind exceedingly necessary; lest, in the general wreck of superstition, of false systems of government, and false theology, we lose sight of morality, of humanity, and of the theology that is true.[3]

In good form, Paine then outlined both a creed and an anti-creed, that is, what he himself believed, and what he himself thought was bunk. "I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life," he stated, before proceeding to the contents of his other "I believe" – that is, "the equality of man" and the "religious duties" of "doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring [sic] to make our fellow creatures happy."[4] In a strikingly long and comprehensive string of opposition, he juxtaposed, "I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish Church, by the Roman Church, by the Greek Church, by the Turkish Church, by the Protestant Church, nor by any church that I know of."[5] Although proceeding to assault all of these enemies through means like denying the plausibility of historic revelation, Paine nevertheless honed "this bold investigation" in on his major enemy of Christianity, ridiculing from memory both the Old and the New Testaments in turn.[6] In fact, when unexpectedly released from prison and assured of his survival, Paine even revisited the themes of this pamphlet in a second version. In that second version, he devoted still more attention to the Bible, obtaining the scriptures and finding "them to be much worse books that I had conceived," snidely informing his readers that "[i]f I have erred in anything in the former part of the *Age of Reason*, it has been by speaking better of some parts than they deserved."[7]

Whatever his own judgments on the quality of his writings, however, Paine's work was something remarkable, especially because amidst its many-pronged opprobrium toward

---

[3] Paine, *Age of Reason*, [7]-8 (464).
[4] Ibid., 8-9 (464).
[5] Ibid., 9 (464).
[6] Ibid., 31ff. (472ff.).
[7] Paine, *Age of Reason, Part the Second*, vii (517).

Christianity lay some culturally very unusual claims about those most important biblical books of the gospels. Effectively, rather than targeting a lasting, normative Christian revelation unveiled in that religion's messiah as depicted in the singular portrait of the gospels, Paine's intended deathbed testimony went further and bucked long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions and advocated a historical Jesus whenever it broached the subject of this seminal figure so dear to his polemical opponents. Thus, not only of interest in terms of Paine's writings, the age of revolutions, or the development of deism, the two parts of Paine's *Age of Reason* constitute a landmark in biblical interpretation in the United States, the country that cemented the author's celebrity and in which this work of his became yet another bestseller. In other words, thanks to a project initiated in a Parisian prison, the historical Jesus was broadly presented to the American public within a scant two decades of the revolution that birthed the United States, and on the basis of the very same common sense that had questioned monarchy. In fact, by challenging the confidence of so many of his fellow citizens that reason was on their religion's side, Paine would draw on this shared value in order to turn attention to little recognized foundations of biblical interpretation and stoke a new controversy, albeit with less success than in his other revolution of reason.

In total, this chapter will examine the late eighteenth century controversy over both parts of Paine's *Age of Reason* to show not only that authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels formed part of the mainstream theology that Paine challenged, but also that in propounding his alternate belief system of deism Paine drew on the common value of rational investigation as part of his disputation. First, it will be argued that long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels were presumed by a mainstream late eighteenth century bible and biblical adaptation, a dynamic indicative of their commonplace status within

the mainstream theology. Second, it will be argued that Paine sought to undermine these traditions in both parts of the *Age of Reason* as part of his larger project to establish a rational conception of God and human behavior. Lastly, the prominence of the long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions will be shown again by another means, since it will be demonstrated that Paine's bestselling respondent Richard Watson rebutted him by reasserting the older traditions. Tellingly, as can be seen throughout these arguments, the main polemicists of Paine and Watson each blithely assumed that Christianity depended on the fate of the authorship and harmonization traditions found in the larger culture, a subtle contrast to later decades in which at least some Christian theological alternatives could absorb such methods of biblical interpretation.

The Commonplace Status of Authorship and Harmonization Traditions

At the end of the eighteenth century before Paine would even begin the first version of the *Age of Reason*, material contained within popular bibles and biblical adaptations in the United States demonstrates the commonplace presence of authorship and harmonization traditions among Christians at large, material forming part of a *status quo* against which Paine would issue his disturbing challenge.[8] In fact, if at all mentioning authorship or reflecting on the

[8] Overall, although examination of bibles printed in America before the controversy over Paine's *Age of Reason* cannot substitute for the study of the imported bibles that were predominant before the Revolutionary War, there is no reason to think that any paratextual material found in them would greatly differ from the material found within earlier, imported bibles. The identification of editions of the Bible or the New Testament alone that were widely used in the United States is difficult for most of the eighteenth century because they were imported from England due to the state of American printing and the royal printers' monopoly on the King James Version. Because of breaks in trade and allegiance caused by the Revolutionary War, however, American printers began to meet the demands of the home market starting in 1777, primarily issuing not more than a handful of bare-bones versions of the New Testament a year, with the occasional whole Bible or fancier edition here and there, until the number of editions noticeably increased in the beginning years of the next century. See Margaret H. Hills, "The English Bible in America," in Margaret H. Hills, ed., *The English Bible in America: A Bibliography of Editions of the Bible & the New Testament Published in America 1777-1957* (New York: American Bible Society and the New York Public Library, 1961), xv-xvii. Note that Hill limits her discussion to English-language bibles, which excludes the earlier "Indian" bible of John Eliot and the German bible of Christopher Saur (xv). According to Hills' tabulations, annual

relation of the four gospels to one another, American bibles and biblical adaptations from the end of the eighteenth century reference the traditional set of evangelist biographies and harmonization techniques, as well as display concrete instances of harmonization and even explicit recognition of the necessity of these traditions to viewing the Bible as having a divine origin. Although inconsistently provided, with sometimes minor, little-noticed variation among them, these traditions were thus culturally available and provided a framework in which most biblical interpretation took place.

The best evidence for the cultural importance of these traditions can be found in the evangelist biographies and harmonization techniques given by *The Self-Interpreting Bible* of John Brown, a book going through many printings and the subject of a landmark American 1792 subscription edition receiving support from prominent citizens as well as people from a range of professions and geographical regions. A self-educated Scottish weaver turned Presbyterian minister, Brown produced an annotated bible that was first published in Edinburgh in 1778 and enjoyed wide popularity in the Anglophone world for more than a century afterward.[9] Within the United States, the first edition appeared in 1792 in New York, and was reissued with various modifications at least eighteen more times, all the way into the early twentieth century.[10]

---

numbers of editions were in the single digits until 1801, and most years saw 5 editions or fewer, and occasionally none at all. In terms of long-term changes in paratextual material, Hills notes only American printers' understandable "hesitancy about including the flowery seventeenth-century dedication to King James" due to the tensions with Britain (xvii).

[9] Hills, *English Bible*, 9, under entry 36.

[10] John Brown, *The Self-Interpreting Bible*.... (New York: Hodge and Campbell, 1792). Hills 37. Because this book is unpaginated but quite lengthy, no page numbers will be given; rather, descriptions of the locations of quotations should be adequate for their location. Words that were rendered entirely in upper case letters have occasionally been rendered partially or entirely in lower case letters. Known American editions of the *Self-Interpreting Bible* include Hills 37, 394, 432, 433, 546, 665, 727, 812, 924, 1322, 1691, 1889, 1897, 1928, 1951, 2021, 2068, and 2070. Although the last edition in Hills bibliography is from 1896, she gives partial descriptions of bibles and testaments as late as possibly 1908 and 1922, respectively (see entry 2070). As early as 1822, editions were stereotyped (see entries 432 and 433). According to Hills' bibliographical descriptions, not all editions contained the same paratextual material; the notes of some later editions have been expanded and re-edited by other ministers (see entry 1889, for example). Unique material includes an 1847 Baltimore edition's self-advertisement as "[t]he cheapest

Although not containing attestations to its effectiveness as a family bible like nearly contemporaneous British editions, the subscription list in the first American edition proudly calls the product "Brown's Family Bible."[11] In addition to this very mainstream intended audience, subscriptions to the first American edition also show its mainstream acceptability: leading the list in violation of alphabetical order is "George Washington, Esq. President of the United States of America," but other notables also make their appearance, including "Hon. Alexander Hamilton, Esq. Secretary of the Treasury of the United States," 'Hon. John Jay, Esq. Chief Justice of the United States," and "Hon. Henry Knox, Secretary at war," not to mention the local potentate "Richard Varick, Esq. mayor of the city of New-York." Despite the prominence of these subscribers and the bible's presumably relatively high cost as a large one-volume folio with multiple engravings, however, its audience was not limited to elites; the list of mostly male subscribers is dominated by tradesmen like butchers, bakers, carpenters, ropemakers, tanners, bookbinders, brewers, and distillers, with students, merchants, and attorneys putting in only occasional appearances. Although most subscribers seem to have come from New York City or elsewhere in that state, occasional subscribers can be found from Virginia, Maryland, and Georgia, and even outside of the states proper, in "the territory of the United States south of the river Ohio." Thus, although containing both much more and much more luxurious paratextual material than other American editions printed before the appearance of the first part of Paine's *Age of Reason*, Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible* appears to have been read by a wide range of people from different professions and geographical regions, and thus its paratextual material was

Family Bible ever published" (see entry 1322) and an 1881 Philadelphia edition's inclusion of a wedding certificate and family record (see entry 1951).

[11] For example, the second, sixth, and seventh testimonies in the similarly unpaginated John Brown, *Self-Interpreting Bible*...., vol. 1 (London: T. Bensley, 1791), respectively term it "the best Family Bible we have in our land," recommend it "both to families and private Christians," and declare that it holds "the first place in my esteem as a Family Bible."

mainstream, even if was relatively less affordable than other bibles on the market. Thus, the material within it serves as a helpful point of reference to grasp the commonplace status of the authorship and harmonization traditions eventually challenged by Paine as part of the broader patterns of thought held by most Christians of the time.

Indeed, despite the work's title, Brown provided much help in interpreting the bible. In addition to the types of tables present in many other bibles of the time, the first American edition of Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible* contained prior to the biblical books a lengthy "Introduction to The Right Understanding of the Oracles of God", while the biblical books themselves contained small forewords, "Reflections" printed within the textual column at the end of many chapters, and occasional "Explanatory Notes" set off at the bottom of the page by chapter number.[12] Of these materials, the introduction and book forewords are the primary location of the long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions.

Somewhat unusual among American bibles of that time, Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible* is quite explicit in noting that recognition of the Bible's divine origin and thus the validity of normative claims drawn from it depends on such authorship and harmonization traditions, a dynamic characteristic of the Evidences. In the lengthy Introduction, Brown's terminology for the Bible's divine origin varies: the Introduction's first chapter title refers to scripture's "divine authority," while elsewhere in that chapter he refers to "divine inspiration" and the status of the

[12] In "The Author's Address" following the title page, Brown states the intended function of much of the prefatory material: "The Contents of the sacred books, and their respective chapters, are an accurate, full, and explicatory, representation of their subject... The Explanatory Notes are chiefly confined to the *figurative*, the *prophetic*, and the *practical*, parts... [T]he contents of each chapter, which are often in an explicatory manner, are in the Reflections practically summed up, and directed home to the reader himself, for enlightening his understanding, awakening his conscience, warming his heart, and for directing and animating his practice." Tables similar to those in other bibles include "Weights, Monies, Measures, and Times, mentioned in Scripture," which included the Jewish names of months; "Tables of Scripture Measures, Weights, and Coins"; "A Table of Offices and Conditions of Men," which contained definitions of such terms as "Judges," "Maccabees," and "Tetrarchs"; and "A Table of Kindred and Affinity" giving permissible marriages among blood relatives.

Bible as "a revelation from God." Apart from any differing nuances to these terms, Brown is clear that this recognition of the Bible as a source of normative claims is constituted through proofs. For example, regarding "the books of the Old and New Testament," he states, "It is their DIVINE INSPIRATION... that we now attempt to demonstrate." Accordingly, ten separate headings lead off stock arguments from the Evidences proving that the Bible comes from God, including the lofty and unexpected subject matter, its "most marvellous [sic]" preservation, the miracles related within it, and the fulfillment of prophecy. Notably, among these too are "[t]he manifest CHARACTER OF THE PENMEN" and "the marvellous HARMONY of all the parts." Thus, despite the title of *The Self-Interpreting Bible* and occasional statements such as in the prefatory "Author's Address" that "every Protestant must allow the scripture itself to be its own best interpreter," Brown himself acknowledges that Christian use of the Bible rests within and presupposes authorship and harmonization traditions. As was typical for the theology of the era, Brown's recognition of inspiration emerges from reason's acceptance of long-standing traditions thought to uphold the Bible's divine origin.

In terms of authorship traditions, the importance of the evangelist biographies are explained in the Introduction, but they themselves are contained within the forewords to several of the gospels. Quite simply, Brown sees these authorship traditions as essential to entertaining the idea of scriptural revelation. Stressing the truthfulness of the gospels' authors in his discussion of the "character of the penmen," he emphasizes their "utmost candour and disinterestedness" and lack of any apparent gain through their writings, ultimately making a link of authorial character and scriptural content:

> Such is the true character of Jesus Christ, drawn by the four evangelists... that the delineation thereof... without a real and exactly answerable model, would, to every unbiassed [sic] free-thinker, appear more incredible and impossible than even the incarnation, obedience, and death, of the Son of God, therein attested, however astonishing.

Although the concrete identities of the evangelists go unelaborated within the introduction, conceptions of these "penmen" directly affect the theological proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God that is necessary to Brown; if the evangelists' identities fall under suspicion, so too does the divine origin of the scriptures and the proclamation that Brown derives from and roots in it. In terms of the concrete long-standing traditions, the evangelists are haphazardly identified in the forewords. Oddly, the evangelist Matthew receives little attention, although the foreword to his gospel contains a preliminary discussion of all four gospels. Although Mark's gospel lacks a foreword, the foreword to Matthew's gospel identifies Mark as someone "who often shortens, but sometimes adds to, Matthew's account." The forewords to Luke's and John's gospels contain more detail: Luke is identified as a physician and a follower of Paul, while John, to whom three epistles and Revelation are attributed, is identified as a fisherman who was the "peculiar favorite" of Jesus, lived to a long time, and wrote his gospel in his old age. Apparently unconcerned with the sources of these traditions and the variance among traditions, Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible* nevertheless provides them within a framework wherein they are necessary to uphold the divine origin of the Bible.

In terms of harmonization traditions, Brown also relates them to the divine origin of scripture within his Introduction: the harmony of the gospels and even the entire Bible "irrefragably demonstrates that these penmen must all have been directed by the same Spirit of God." Under this conception, then, signs of contradiction directly affect recognition of the divine origin of the Bible. Accordingly, Brown not only explicitly asserts the harmony of the Bible, but also reproduces interpretative traditions by means of which apparent discrepancies among the gospels can be engaged without ultimately declaring the gospels disharmonious or contradictory. The forewords to the gospels provide some descriptions of the gospels that

neutralize recognized differences between them. The foreword to Matthew's gospel acknowledges one content division: regarding Jesus, Matthew and Mark are said to "chiefly insist on his acts," while Luke and John stress "the divine discourses which he delivered." The foreword to John's gospel picks up a similar content argument, noting how that evangelist focuses especially on "our Saviour's Divinity." In light of these explanations, apparent discrepancies can be traced to different emphases, thus defanging their potential threat.

The foreword to Matthew's gospel also contains reflections on the gospels' dependence and interdependence, reflections that also allow for the easy accounting of apparent discrepancies. Incredibly, three different explanations are offered: that "Matthew, Mark, and Luke, seem to have written their histories... without having previously seen one another's narrative"; that Mark adapted Matthew; and that "what is explained in one gospel is not explained in those which follow," presumably from their having read each other's gospels. Apart from how tensions between these explanations go unacknowledged, what is most striking is the provision of means by which differences might be recognized and contemplated while ultimately maintaining the assumption of harmony that Brown views as necessary to the divine origin of the Bible.

The importance of the harmony assumed for the Bible particularly emerges when Brown provides harmonization techniques in his Introduction's second chapter, "Of Rules for understanding the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments." Programmatically, Brown denies the possibility of contradiction, describing the application of harmonization techniques as the discovery rather than the creation of harmony. Already in his brief discussion of harmony he had stated that "[w]hen there is an appearance of contradiction, it will be found that the different passages do not respect the *same thing* or *person*, in the *same respect*, and in the *same*

circumstances of time, place, or manner; and so there is no contradiction at all." Similarly, in the lengthy discussion in the second chapter, Brown provides an enumeration of helpful traditional harmonization techniques for "seeming contradictions." For contradictory narratives, Brown provides a number of techniques:

> The apparent contradictions in the history appear owing to the same person's having different names, or the deed being done by different persons : to the one of which it is ascribed in one text, and to another in the other text : or deeds similar being really different.

Through provision of such explanations, Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible* provides a number of tools to neutralize a broad range of apparent contradictions. Given the importance that he places on harmony, it is no wonder that Brown himself also creates a detailed "Chronological Harmony" in the Introduction's fifth chapter and tells his readers in the foreword to Matthew's gospel to go back to and consult it in order to reconcile "[a]ny apparent contradictions." In effect, in its identification or differentiation of similar sections from different gospels, this Harmony anticipates a troubled readership and attempts to provide a prepackaged reconciliation above and beyond general tools. Incredibly, this discovery of harmony within the Bible is so essential that it proves necessary even in instances when no harmony can be discovered:

> Where Scriptures at first sight seem to contradict one another, we must, by a serious consideration of them, labour [sic] to discover their harmony. But, if we should not be able to reconcile them, we ought not to pronounce them irreconcileable [sic], but rather attribute a deficiency to our own understanding.

In other words, Brown proves the divine origin of the Bible by making it depend on something that cannot be disproven, since a solution lying in the future cannot be disputed. In any case, Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible* provides traditional harmonization techniques and actual instances of harmonization, both of which allow any troubled readers to think through contradictions and not be troubled by them.

Although much smaller and simpler than Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible*, a slightly earlier children's biblical adaptation includes evangelist biographies and instances of harmonization and thus provides additional evidence for the commonplace nature of the long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions, here tellingly deemed suitable material for the instruction of children by both author and printer.[13]

Likely as a competing product to the extremely popular *History of the Holy Jesus*, which had been around since the 1740s, Worcester printer Isaiah Thomas published in 1788 the first American edition of the popular English biblical adaptation for children, *A Curious Hieroglyphick Bible; or, Select Passages in the Old and New Testaments, Represented with Emblematical Figures, for the Amusement of Youth: Designed Chiefly To familiarize tender Age, in a pleasing and diverting Manner, with early Ideas of the Holy Scriptures*.[14] The intended function that may be gleaned from the book's title is further elaborated in the editor's dedication and the preface. After a prominent dedication of the book "to the parents, guardians, and governesses, of the United States of America," the preface expounds upon the importance of

[13] As neither a bible nor a testament, biblical adaptations do not appear in Hills, *English Bible*.

[14] *A Curious Hieroglyphick Bible; or, Select Passage in the Old and New Testaments, Represented with Emblematical Figuress, for the Amusement of Youth*.... (Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1788). The earliest and latest English editions that could be consulted were *A Curious Hieroglyphick Bible*…., 2nd ed. (London: T. Hodgson, [1784?]) and *A Curious Hieroglyphick Bible*…., 13th ed. (London: Robert Bassam, [1796?]), which indicate a burst of multiple editions over roughly the span of a decade. *The Hieroglyhick* [sic] *Bible*…. (Boston: Isaiah Thomas, 1814) and *The Hieroglyphick Bible.*… (Hartford, CT: S. Andrus & Son, 1855) suggest that fewer American editions of this biblical adaptation were published, but over a greater span of time. The slightly later, imitative biblical adaptation *A New Hieroglyphical Bible*…. (Boston: W. Norman, [1794?]), which also provides lives of the apostles, seems to have been more popular in the United States and enjoyed more editions, including *A New Hieroglyphical Bible*…. (New-York: Samuel Wood & Sons, 1818) and *A New Hieroglyphical Bible*…., 11th ed. (Chiswick, [England]: C. Whittingham for William Jackson, New-York, 1836). Frank Luther Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1947), 304, identifies the pseudonymous *The History of the Holy Jesus* as a best seller of the 1740-1749 (minimum required sale of 10,000, according to his standards), but printing continued through the nineteenth century; editions that span almost a century include *The History of the Holy Jesus*, 3rd ed. (3rd ed.; Boston: B. Gray, 1746) and *The History of the Holy Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Leominster, MA: Salmon Wilder, 1813). Mott, *Golden Multitudes*, 6-11, calls a book a bestseller if it sells at least one book per one per cent of the U.S. population in the decade in which it was published, according to known and estimated edition size. He excludes "all bibles, prayer-books, hymnals, almanacs, cookbooks, 'doctor-books,' textbooks, dictionaries, and manuals," as well as "little books or pamphlets, the contents of which would ordinarily fill only twenty or thirty fair-sized pages" (9, 11).

"[t]he pious and early Instruction of Children" by "those persons who have the constant Care and Inspection over young Children, and therewith gain an Ascendency or Power over such tender Minds, to guide their Thoughts and Inclinations as they please."[15] After the recommendation that such instruction be made enjoyable, the book's signature selling point is immediately detailed: the book quotes "the most remarkable Places in the *Old* and *New Testaments*" from Creation through "the Redemption of Mankind" and illustrates them by the substitution of crucial words with pictures, "to teach and instruct even the youngest Children with proper ideas of the most important Doctrines, and make them early acquainted with the momentous truths in the Word of God."[16] Such crucial moments included the temptation of Adam and Eve by the serpent, Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac, and, of course, the crucifixion of Jesus.[17]

Besides these woodcut-illustrated biblical passages making up the bulk of the book, the *Hieroglyphick Bible* also includes several poems, a list of questions and answers about the Bible, and four illustrated pages advertised on the title page as "A Short Account of the Lives of the Evangelists."[18] The page treating "St. Luke, the Evangelist" is illustrative: in addition to identifying Luke as a physician from Antioch who was a companion of Paul, other biographical details are related. Jerome's mention of Luke's death at the age of 84 is the sole named tradition, but explicitly and interestingly mentioned, too, is how "[t]he Time or Manner of his Death is not very well agreed on by the Ancients."[19] Thus, the *Hireoglyphick Bible* endorses an apparent

[15] *Curious Hieroglyphick Bible*, [vi] and [vii]-viii.
[16] Ibid., viii.
[17] Ibid., 15 (referencing Genesis 3:4, 6), 22 (referencing Genesis 22:9, 10), and 105 (referencing John 19:16-18). Other passages traditionally understood to have Christological signification include the sacrifice of a goat as "the People's Sinoffering [sic]" (36, referencing Leviticus 16:15) and Moses' placing a serpent upon a pole to heal the Israelites of deadly snakebites (39, referencing Numbers 31:6, 8).
[18] Ibid., [v], 136-139.
[19] Ibid., 138. A similar mention is made of Matthew's death: its nature "is not certainly known, though the general Opinion is that he was slain with an Halbert" (136). With Mark as well, variance is tradition is noted, albeit about which of the apostles converted him, emphasis being given to Peter (137).

compilation of patristic traditions that presents Luke as a follower of an apostle, but does not resolve or even acknowledge as a major problem the recognized variance in some details. Accordingly, while left unmentioned in Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible*, such variance was demonstrably known during the period and at least here deemed unproblematic, just like the lack of specificity about sourcing many of the patristic traditions. All in all, despite the variance and much lack of sourcing, these traditions nevertheless still presented children with their theologically necessary conception of the gospels as the products of apostles and the followers of apostles.

In terms of harmonization traditions, the *Hieroglyphick Bible*'s presentation of the narrative of Jesus's crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and ascension demonstrate a tradition of reading in which verses are assumed to correspond to actual events and to index into a single narrative of Jesus's life. Although the life and teachings of Jesus occupy only thirteen pages, verses from all four gospels are represented.[20] Regarding the crucifixion onward, the *Hieroglyphick Bible* specifically references John for the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, then Luke for the discovery of the empty tomb and the ascension.[21] The presence of similar narratives in the other gospels is not addressed, nor is the ascension's unique presence in Luke. Rather, much as with the Chronological Harmony of Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible*, desired verses are extracted and put in chronological order, and a single narrative is created without recognition of how similar narratives from each of the gospels contain apparent contradictions – for example, the series of events at the empty tomb, of which much would be made by Paine. Presumably, the larger guiding assumption was that all gospel verses were capable of

[20] Ibid., 96-108.
[21] Ibid., 105-106 (referencing John 19:16-18 and 40, respectively) and 107-108 (referencing Luke 24:1ff. and 50-51, respectively).

incorporation into a single chronological narrative, an assumption made all the easier given the small number of verses treated. Also presumably, such an instance of harmonization allowed for recognition of difference within the gospels, without superseding the individual gospels or necessitating engagement in a level of detail that would put into question the assumptions of harmony and thus any theological claims rooted in the gospels.

Overall, the long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions were not limited to Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible* and the *Hieroglyphick Bible*. For example, a relatively common chronological table that appeared in late eighteenth century printings of the entire Bible and that bore the title "An Index to the Holy Bible; Or, an Account of the most remarkable passages In the Books of the Old and New Testament : pointing to the Time wherein they happened, and to the Places of Scripture wherein they are recorded" presumes references to traditional evangelist biographies and contains a single composite narrative of Jesus's life.[22] Although evangelist biographies and instances of harmonization are by no means present in every late eighteenth century American bible, such paratextual material as is found in these books appears to be the only explicit reflections on authorship and the relation of the four gospels to one another and thus is presumably commonplace.

[22] Of the 45 English-language bibles (30 testaments, 15 full bibles) printed in America before the 1794 advent of the first part of Paine's *Age of Reason*, according to Hills' tabulations, at least 6 were found to contain the same chronological table: Hills 29, 30, 31, 37, 38, and 39. Not every work listed in Hills could be consulted through the online resource Early American Imprints, but these 6 were all full bibles, likely indicating that the chronological table was more common in the longer, more work-intensive editions of the entire bible rather than the stripped-down, more numerous editions of the New Testament alone. One of the earliest bibles featuring the table is the unpaginated *Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments*... (Trenton, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1791) (Hills 31). Within the table, John's authorship of Revelation and then his gospel at the end of his life is mentioned for the year 96, although the tradition is unsourced. Tellingly, two entries previous is a similar entry recording how "St. Peter and St. Paul are said to have suffered martyrdom at Rome towards the later end of Nero's reign," but this entry is explicitly labeled in the place reserved for scriptural references as "Euseb. Hist. Ec. I.2.c.24" – that is, Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History, with reference divisions directing the reader to the source of information as with the standard citation of a biblical verse. The section of the chronological table dealing with Jesus's life extracts and chronologically orders verses in the manner of Brown's *Self-InterpretingBible* and the *Hieroglyphick Bible*.

Thus, in general, despite occasionally acknowledged variance and lack of clarity about the sources of the traditions, the authorship of the gospels by apostles and followers of apostles was known and fed into culturally available proofs wherein these attributions of authorship were a necessary precondition for the divine origin of the gospels. Likewise, the harmony of the gospels was also assumed and culturally reproduced through means such as chronologies of Jesus' life and harmonizing techniques such as those given at length throughout Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible*. That said, the lack of centralized dissemination for these authorship and harmonization traditions and their varied and partial attestations may give the impression of marginality or unimportance. The attack and counterattack within the controversies over both parts of Tom Paine's bestselling *Age of Reason*, however, reveal how important these traditions were indeed for Christians of this era.

Deism, Tom Paine, and the *Age of Reason*

Tom Paine's deism caused an international stir. Although he was not unusual in his beliefs within the larger movement called deism, too, he was very unusual in the extent to which he circulated and caused people to discuss them.

Nurtured during the eighteenth century primarily in England and France but also to some extent in Germany, deism was a theistic, proudly rational non-Christian movement typically associated with parlor musings or brash singular challenges like those of Voltaire.[23] In terms of

[23] Although very old, the standard historical treatments are Herbert M. Morais, *Deism in Eighteenth Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934); Albert Post, *Popular Freethought in America, 1825-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); and, to some extent, G. Adolf Koch, *Republican Religion: The American Revolution and the Cult of Reason* (New York: Henry Holt, 1933). Honing in on the movement's outsize presence in religious and political discourse are Martin E. Marty, *The Infidel: Freethought and American Religion* (Cleveland, OH: Meridian Books, 1961); and Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). See also E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 159-172, which notes that deists like Paine "had an influence on Christian thought in

America, scattered texts stemming from the English movement sporadically made their way across the Atlantic during the course of the eighteenth century. Yet, any adherents remained scattered and relatively silent until the social discombobulation of the post-revolutionary period allowed deists like Ethan Allen and Paine to gain a high profile thanks to their respective books *Reason the Only Oracle of Man* (1784) and *The Age of Reason* (1794 and 1795, in two parts), not to mention the jarring contrast of their patriotic service. Early institutionalization efforts by deists also began in the 1790s, but associations such as New York's Deistical Society (1796 until at least 1805) remained small, local, and of relatively brief duration, a lifespan matched by newspapers like Elihu Palmer's *Temple of Reason* (1800-1802) and New York's *Theophilanthropist* (1810-1811). Perhaps due to generational turnover and heavy backlash tied to the election of Jefferson and the growth of revivalism, the very early years of the nineteenth century saw almost total dissolution of institutions and then a period of quiescence until the mid-1820s immigration of English working class radicals revived the same type of thinking, albeit typically under the name of Freethought. In any case, throughout this period, and as would also be true for the later, related Freethought movement, the deists were small in numbers but outsize in presence, calling forth disproportionate amounts of both disgust and discussion over the limits of religious tolerance. Interestingly, this dynamic of outsize presence even occurred with deistic works prior to Paine's that had much less circulation, even when they made similarly controversial claims about the Bible. For example, in the 1750s some copies of English deist Thomas Morgan's *The Moral Philosopher* (1737) raised a ruckus around Worcester,

---

America far out of proportion to their numbers" and resulted in "by way of reaction, a renewal of interest in the Christian evidences" (159). Scholarship is cautious in its characterizations of popular adherence to deism and freethought in the Early Republic, and difference among characterizations seems largely a matter of emphasis. Keane, *Tom Paine*, 201, stresses that Paine was "not a lonely deist" or "isolated," but rather "had numerous supporters," including the widely-travelled Methodist preacher Lorenzo Dow. Conversely, Marty, *Infidel*, 12, stresses "popular failure of the freethought impulses" and recognition of that failure in the complaints of freethinkers.

Massachusetts, but the book's circulation seems to have remained restricted to the area and to have had no lasting effect, despite assertions directly resonant with Paine's stances in the *Age of Reason*; for example, Morgan's book straightforwardly stated that portions of the gospels are untrue.[24] Thus, within this larger perspective, Paine's *Age of Reason* is notable for having an outsize presence among a movement already possessing an outsize presence, even if his work's high sales were more likely attributable to his prior celebrity and the shocking nature of his humor rather than the originality of his thought.

Because of its complicated publishing history, Paine's epochal *Age of Reason* had a staggered, diffusive influence that must be carefully teased apart before broaching how it attacked long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels as part of its goal of converting people to deism.[25]

Almost twenty years apart, Tom Paine (1737-1809) authored books that were among the handful of American bestsellers of those decades.[26] Born in rural England to the family of a stay-maker, Paine worked in his father's trade apart from a brief experience at sea, then primarily

---

[24] Morais, *Deism*, 70. Thomas Morgan, *The Moral Philosopher*, 2nd ed., with an introduction by John Valdimir Price (1738; London: Routledge, 1995), 411. Although remembered today as a famous deistic interpretation of the bible, Thomas Jefferson's *Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* was a very private production and relatively late, likely dating to around 1820. See E. Forrester Church, "The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson," in Thomas Jefferson, *The Jefferson Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, with an introduction by E. Forrester Church and an afterword by Jaroslav Pelikan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 1-31.

[25] Scholarship can have a tendency to elide the distinction between the First Part and the Second Part. For example, see Keane, *Tom Paine*, 389-401, which discusses the work's history but then does not differentiate the parts in discussing its reception; Edward H. Davidson and William J. Scheick, *Paine, Scripture, and Authority: The Age of Reason as Religious and Political Idea* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1994), which throughout mostly refers to Paine's *Age of Reason* and does not differentiate between the two parts even in its appendix of responses (108-116) despite the presence of another appendix discussing the work's composition history (105-107); and Marty, *Infidel*, 19-26. In contrast, Holifield, *Theology in America*, 159ff., carefully notes that he discusses the second part and states that its publication "Paine touched a nerve" (159), but omits discussion of any response to the first part.

[26] Mott, *Golden Multitudes*, 303-315, provides a list of bestsellers on a decade-by-decade basis, and includes *Common Sense* as one of nine bestsellers of 1770-1779 (required minimum sale of 20,000, according to his standards) and the *Age of Reason* as one of eleven bestsellers of 1790-1799 (minimum required sale of 40,000, according to his standards). Ibid., 315-329 provides a list of "Better Sellers" – that is, "runners-up believed not to have reached the total sales required for the over-all best sellers" (315) – which includes Paine's 1791 *Rights of Man* , as well as Richard Watson's 1796 *Apology for the Bible*, the most prominent response to *The Age of Reason*.

moved into work as an excise officer prior to his 1774 emigration to the United States, where he not only worked as an editor and within the army and the government, but also produced the best-selling writings that made his name a legend and then an object of scorn. Of the two writings most affecting his fame, the first, *Common Sense*, was a publishing phenomenon when it made its first appearance in 1776, and was admiringly credited by a range of notable contemporaries with making colonial opinion amenable to the cause of revolution.[27] The second, the *Age of Reason*, addressed the topic of religion and changed Paine's fame into notoriety: the *Age of Reason* not only sold multiple editions of both its parts following their 1794 and 1795 debuts and received translation into at least four other languages, but also called forth over fifty separate English-language responses, became the object of prosecution in Britain, and lastingly marred Paine's reputation. In fact, after his 1802 return to the U.S., he not only suffered regular derision all the way through his 1809 death, but also became a byword for infidelity and even underwent posthumous humiliation such as Teddy Roosevelt's famous dismissal of him nearly a century later as "a filthy little atheist."[28]

[27] See the discussion of Keane, *Tom Paine*, 108-114, which includes the reflections of George Washington, Benjamin Rush, and Thomas Jefferson.

[28] Davidson and Scheick, *Paine, Scripture, and Authority*, 88-97 and 108-116, describe and catalogue responses to the *Age of Reason* from 1794-1798, respectively. These catalogued responses include books, pamphlets, and contributions to periodicals, but exclude political cartoons. Keane, *Tom Paine*, 396-400, gives a brief overview of the prosecution of British booksellers; American and foreign editions (including translations into French, German, Hungarian, and Portuguese, though he relatively neglects French translations and editions and does not distinguish between translations of the first and second parts); and select responses. Although not the subject of intensive study, Paine's reputation in the nineteenth century seems to have been largely negative, apart from scattered freethinkers and the favorable biographer Moncure Daniel Conway. See Michael Kammen, *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 41 and 286-287n17; Keane, *Tom Paine*, 455-463 and 495-503; and the "Reputation" section of the entry in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Paine, Thomas (1737-1809)." Roosevelt's remark surfaces in scholarship (e.g. Keane, *Tom Paine*, 393), despite its appearance in a minor book and not a major forum such as a prominent political speech: Theodore Roosevelt, *Gouverneur Morris* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1888), 289. Less noted is Roosevelt's following remark, "There are infidels and infidels; Paine belonged to the variety – whereof America possesses at present one or two shining example – that apparently esteems a bladder of dirty water as the proper weapon with which to assail Christianity." Kathleen Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 115-119, details how Roosevelt undertook the biography of the Revolutionary War leader Morris in his late 20s after the honeymoon of his second marriage, between his time in the New York State Assembly and his

In terms of the *Age of Reason*, after the successful close of the Revolutionary War, Paine had drifted back to his native Britain and then to revolutionary France, where he was granted honorary citizenship and elected deputy in the National Convention in 1792.[29] For years Paine had hazarded the ideas of publishing his thoughts on religion, and in 1793 he passed off a version of the *Age of Reason* to his friend and fellow deputy François Lanthenas, who translated it into French, and under whose name it reached publication during that year or perhaps the next in a edition that appears to have drawn little attention.[30] Paine, however, continued to work on the *Age of Reason*, including through late 1793, when he became caught up in the French Revolution's increasing factionalism and violence and was imprisoned.[31] Later, he would claim to have finished a new version on the same day that he was arrested; at the very least, Paine added in a dedication while in prison.[32] In this new version, which eventually came to be known as the First Part, Paine began to reflect on the revolutionary dechristianization efforts that had since taken place.[33] Accordingly, he proffered his work as the necessary antidote for a society that had rightly done away with Christian superstition, but may have begun to "lose sight of morality, of humanity, and of the theology that is true."[34] The work itself, however, consisted

appointment to the Civil Service Commission. She also quotes his much less famous but no less harsh judgment of Henry James as a "miserable little snob" (555n18).

[29] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Paine, Thomas (1737-1809)."

[30] One undated copy of this version may have partially survived. See Richard Gimbel, "The First Appearance of Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*," *The Yale University Library Gazette* 31 (1957): 87-89, where Gimbel assembles indirect evidence for a 1793 publication, including the absence of passages referring to anticlericalism and a 1794 letter of Lanthenas. Keane, *Tom Paine*, 389, suggests but does not provide evidence for suppression of this printing.

[31] David Freeman Hawke, *Paine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 291-296, gives a more detailed account, but incomplete citations do not allow for easy verification of the statement that Paine continued to send manuscript pages to Lanthenas for translation through fall 1793, after a pause in work during late summer (293).

[32] Paine, *Age of Reason, Part the Second*, [v]-vi (514-515).

[33] For the wider context, see Hawke, *Paine*, 291, and Keane, *Tom Paine*, 391-393.

[34] Paine, *Age of Reason*, 8 (464). Paine's statement that "[i]t has been my intention, for several years past, to publish my thoughts upon religion" (7 [463]), meshes with the historical evidence presented in Keane, *Tom Paine*, 389ff., on how Paine's earlier statements came to fruition in the middle of the formal and informal dechristianization efforts of the French Revolution.

mostly of an extended attack on Christianity, followed by his alternative, a deist theology; Paine raises such commonplace deist objections to Christianity as the implausibility of particular revelation and the irrationality and ridiculousness of Christians' conception of God, then argues that God's "goodness and beneficence" are perceptible through creation and proposes the imitation of those divine qualities as "the moral duty of man."[35] Initially published while in prison, the First Part would circulate in England and the United States before Paine's release in November 1794.[36] By that time, many authors had already written responses, some of which had quickly gone through multiple printings in both countries.[37]

Paine was not content to rest with the version published in prison, however, and he soon delighted that a new version had forced his respondents to "return to their work, and spin their cobweb over again," for their work had been "brushed away by accident."[38] Indeed, as a houseguest of then-ambassador James Monroe after his release, Paine had undertook a related work with similar goals but a much greater focus on attacking the Bible, to which he claims not to have had access during the composition of the First Part.[39] This new work, which he titled *Age of Reason, Part the Second*, is comprised of two halves, going through many books of first the Old and then the New Testament, respectively, before culminating in a short, final conclusion recommending Paine's deist theology.[40] Having finished the Second Part by the fall of 1795,

---

[35] Paine, *Age of Reason*, 150 (512).
[36] Hawke, *Paine*, 312.
[37] Particularly popular in the United States was Gilbert Wakefield's *An Examination of the Age of Reason, or an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology, by Thomas Paine* (London: Kearsley, 1794), which went through at least five editions in 1794 after its initial publication in Britain.
[38] Paine, *Age of Reason, Part the Second*, viii (517).
[39] Hawke, *Paine*, 307ff. Paine, *Age of Reason, Part the Second*, [v] and viii (514-515, 517). Paine's claim seems odd, given the fact that the first published version of the *Age of Reason* was composed in freedom, as well as portions if not all of the first part, except for the forward. Paine's version of events, however, has become standard in scholarship. For example, see Foner, *Complete Writings*, vol. 1, 461; Hawke, *Paine*, 31;, and Davidson and Scheick, *Paine, Scripture, and Authority*, 105.
[40] Paine's own printing of this work notes the structural division. Although the first half of Paine, *Age of Reason, Part the Second*, is untitled, the second half begins with an all-capitalized heading "The New Testament" (86), and

Paine would later relate that he financed the printing of fifteen thousand copies in Paris, then sent them to the United States for distribution by noted Republican newspaperman Benjamin Franklin Bache.[41] Although sharing a title, goals, and many arguments with the First Part, the Second Part of *The Age of Reason* was nonetheless distinct from it and, for the most part, seems to have circulated separately.[42] Again, too, this version of *The Age of Reason* met with responses, including the most famous one, that of Anglican minister Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff. His *Apology for the Bible*, which responded to the Second Part alone, had strong sales in America and became a point of counterattack for Paine. In response, Paine composed but never published a Third Part, instead raiding the manuscript for minor pamphlets and short pieces adapted for deist periodicals after the demise of his reputation and until the end of his life.[43]

Estimating the degree of sympathetic reception of the two parts of Paine's *Age of Reason* is difficult in the absence of forms of knowledge such as modern social scientific polling data, but evidence suggests that some small, inestimable minority approved. The numbers and influence of "infidels," of course, were exaggerated by Protestant ministers for well over a

---

the conclusion is similarly labeled with an all-capitalized heading "Conclusion" (127). Foner, *Complete Writings*, 463-604, contains many more and differently-worded headings than the two American editions consulted.

[41] Thomas Paine to [John Fellows], Paris, January 20, 1797, in Foner, *Complete Writings*, vol. 1, 1384-1385

[42]The huge printing financed by Paine was typical of American editions and contained only the second part. Less typical were a 1796 edition printed to accommodate binding with the first part and a 1796 edition of Paine's collected works in which the two parts appeared together: Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason… Part the Second* (London: Mott & Lyon, for Fellows & Adam, 1796), [201], which advertises the First Part "fitted to bind with this edition"; and Thomas Paine, *The Works of Thomas Paine* (Philadelphia: H. and P. Rice, James Rice, and Co., 1796).

[43] Mott, *Golden Multitudes*, 317. Additional, indirect evidence for the widespread American circulation of Watson's reply is Paine's assumption that both Thomas Jefferson and Samuel Adams had both heard of it. See Thomas Paine to Thomas Jefferson, Paris, October 1, 1800, in Foner, *Complete Writings*, vol. 2, 1406-1412; and Thomas Paine to Samuel Adams, Federal City, January 1, 1803, 1434, in Foner, *Complete Writings*, vol. 2, 1434-1438. Paine to Jefferson, *Complete Writings*, 1412, relates that he began "a third part" upon receipt of Watson's reply, to which he is "still making additions,", and above that elaborates, "The Bishop's answer, like Mr. Burke's attack on the French Revolution, served me as a background to bring forward other subjects upon, with more advantage than if the background was not there." As of early 1802, Paine was still hoping to publish this third part, as demonstrates Thomas Paine to Elihu Palmer, Paris, February 21, 1802, in Foner, *Complete Writings*, vol. 2, 1426. Portions of this third part were published in 1810 after Paine's death, in the *Theophilanthropist*. See Thomas Paine, "Extracts from a Reply to the Bishop of Llandaff," in Foner, *Complete Writings*, vol. 2, 764-788.

century in order to incite congregants and foment piety.[44] Additionally, deist and freethought institutions such as organizations and newspapers were marginal and frequently short-lived.[45] That said, scattered sources of the period attest to some presence of sympathizers from different social strata, even when overreaction and polemical and retrospective exaggeration are taken into account. Most famously, on the elite end, a Harvard classmate of William Ellery Channing would remember how in 1796 the Harvard Corporation furnished copies of Watson's *Apology for the Bible* to counteract undergraduate infatuation with the *Age of Reason,* while at Yale, it was remembered that undergraduates had adopted nicknames of English and French infidels at the time that Timothy Dwight took office.[46] Outside of these schools, a Methodist circuit rider from far western Massachusetts would later recall that in 1797-1799 "deism was prevailing," commenting that "Mr. Thomas Paine's 'Age of Reason' was highly thought of by many who knew neither what the age they lived in, or reason, was."[47] In light of the failure of the deist and freethought movements to achieve any significant long-lasting institutional form, however, the number of such individuals who felt compelled to realize their beliefs in such traceable forms must have been relatively small. Beyond that, the number of sympathizers is unclear.

What is clear, though, is twofold: such unconventional belief received tremendous circulation, and such unconventional belief received tremendous social stigma. Paine himself would realize this after his 1802 return to the United States, where newspapers would popularize social snubbings and attacks on him by hostile crowds, and Christians would seek him out to

---

[44] Marty, *Infidel*, esp. 11-16 and 194-204.
[45] Ibid., 20.
[46] William Ellery Channing, *Memoir of William Ellery Channing, with Extracts from his Correspondence and Manuscripts*, vol. 1 (Boston: W.M. Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1850), 61-62 (excerpted from an undated letter by Judge Story). "Memoir of the Life of President Dwight," in Timothy Dwight, *Theology; Explained and Defended, in a Series of Sermons*, vol.1 (Middletown, CT: Clark and Lyman, for Timothy Dwight, 1818), xxvi.
[47] J.E.A. Smith, *The History of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, from the Year 1800 to the Year 1876* (Springfield, MA: C.W. Bryan, 1876), 145-146, also quoted in Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 22.

convert him right up until his 1809 death.[48] Such hostile reception, however, had understandable causes, among them how both parts of *The Age of Reason* sought to destabilize major currents of mainstream theology at that time, a set of attacks important for the history of biblical interpretation because it included advocacy of a historical Jesus.

Indeed, among the hodgepodge of arguments, Tom Paine suggested an alternative to the harmonized Jesus found at the typical nexus of the long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels: instead of this harmonized Jesus, he proposed a historical Jesus sifted out with probabilistic thinking from the actual contradictions of the gospels.[49] Specifically, he disputed the attribution of the gospels to apostles and followers of apostles, posited distortion in the transmission of narratives about Jesus, and explicitly acknowledged that a historical Jesus lay beneath and had to be reasoned out from the actual narrative discrepancies.

This advocacy of a historical Jesus of course occurred haphazardly among a larger work designed to recommend deism as a replacement for adherence to religion, in particular Christianity. Of the two portions of this project, one positive and one polemical, the positive vision was relatively brief in both versions of the *Age of Reason*, appearing as important bookends sandwiching pages upon pages of polemic. In the first part of the *Age of Reason*, Paine's creed of theism, an afterlife, and moral responsibilities to all humans leads off the work and then caps it off again at the end, to reappear in between in only slightly expanded passages of reasoning establishing God as a "first cause" discernible from the fact of creation, as well as the necessity of benevolent human behavior in "a practical imitation of the moral goodness of God [by] contributing to the happiness of the living creation that God has made."[50] In the second

[48] Keane, *Tom Paine*, 478-482, 495-503, and 535-536.
[49] In this regard, note the prescient but underelaborated discussion of Richard Wrightman Fox, *Jesus in America: Personal Savior, Cultural Hero, National Obsession* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 162-163.
[50] Paine, *Age of Reason*, 8-9 (464), 149-150 (512), 68 (484), and 132 (506).

part of the *Age of Reason*, Paine's discussion of his positive vision is even more brief, mostly consisting of culminating observations on how "creation, the universe we behold, preach[es] to us the existence of an Almighty power," as well as the fact that "[a]s for morality, the knowledge of it exists in every man's conscience."[51] Although consisting of the stated purpose of his work and placed at the most important structural junctures, these statements of positive vision are not given the same amount of space as Paine's polemic against other beliefs.

In terms of this polemic, the *Age of Reason*'s quest to undermine revealed religion and set up deism in its place employs many tactics: it not only reviews the Old Testament as well as the New, but also recycles charges like the irrationality of miracles and testimonial mediation of divine revelation, all in frequent combination with a brash, quotable wit. As a consequence, the intellectual challenges it issues to authorship and harmonization traditions are scattered in a few places between the two parts of the *Age of Reason*. Unfortunately for an author so concerned about discrepancies in the gospels and other biblical books, Paine's primary attention to polemic resulted in mildly inconsistent views on the gospels, despite his self-satisfied later claims that his writings "need no commentator to explain, compound, derange and rearrange their several parts, to render them intelligible," since he is able to "relate a fact, or write an essay, without forgetting in one page what he has written in another."[52] That said, even when the inconsistencies are taken into account, his views were entirely at odds with the stances on authorship and harmonization traditions that were otherwise commonplace in the broader culture, as appropriate to a work written to challenge the dominant culture.

Instead of sticking with the authorship traditions that Matthew and John were apostles and Mark and Luke were followers of apostles, Paine typically declared that the gospels were

[51] Paine, *Age of Reason, Part the Second*, 134 (599).
[52] Thomas Paine, "Prosecution of *The Age of Reason*," 732, in Foner, *Complete Writings*, vol. 2, 727-748.

written by unknown Christians in a period well after that of Jesus's life. In the first part of his *Age of Reason*, Paine declares that "[w]ho were the authors of [the story] is as impossible for us now to know, as it is for us to be assured that the books in which the account is related were written by the persons whose names they bear."[53] Oddly, Paine then goes on to state several definite things about them in a later section – namely, that the evangelists met Jesus during his ministry as well as knew his parents, since "it is most probable" that they heard the "anecdote" of the twelve year-old Jesus asking questions in the temple "from his parents," "[a]s this was several years before their acquaintance with him began."[54] In the second part of his *Age of Reason*, however, Paine returns to his earlier and more typical position and briefly explores how the gospels got their names. In an inaccurate reference to the traditional biographies where he terms all of the evangelists "apostles," he suggests that the "contradictory" status of the narratives show that "the men called apostles were impostors, or the books ascribed to them have been written by other persons and fathered upon them."[55] Similarly, he later takes up his second suggestion about their origin and states that the "presumption" should be "that they are impositions" and "the productions of some unconnected individuals, many years after the things they pretend to relate, each of whom made his own legend; and not the writings of men living intimately together, as the men called apostles are supposed to have done."[56] Although eliding the typical distinction between apostles and followers of apostles, Paine nonetheless questions an eyewitness or near-eyewitness identity for the authors as part of a larger, more essential argument: distance between events and their narrators allows for the possibility of distortion,

[53] Paine, *Age of Reason*, 21-22 (468).
[54] Ibid., 49 (478).
[55] Paine, *Age of Reason, Part the Second*, 89 (572).
[56] Ibid., 92 (574).

and thus undermines how Christians root a large part of their religion in the Jesus that they harmonize off the pages of the gospels.

When describing the material underlying the gospels, Paine refers to its composition from oral tradition – namely, from narratives that are passed on between people – and often implies the possibility or fact of distortion occurring through this process. Most explicitly, he refers to it in the first part of his *Age of Reason* as "detached anecdotes" rather than "a history of the life of Jesus Christ," a characterization partially reflected in his division of New Testament books into "anecdote" and "epistolary correspondence."[57] Although presumably anecdotes can be faithfully related, Paine himself associates that genre with undependability, noting about the evangelists that "in several instances they relate the same event differently."[58] In the second part of the *Age of Reason*, Paine relates that the narrators were distanced from events, because "[e]ach writer told the tale as he heard it, or thereabouts, and gave to his book the name of the saint, or the apostle, whom tradition had given as the eye witness [sic]."[59] In speculating that the material of the gospels can be traced to eyewitnesses, however, Paine does not use its ultimate eyewitness status to assert the trustworthiness of the material, as someone asserting Mark or Luke as followers of apostles might do. Instead, he makes this assertion since "[i]t is only upon this ground that the contradiction in those books can be accounted for," the other option being "down-right impositions, lies, and forgeries, without even the apology of credulity."[60] Even in endorsing the more charitable of the two options that he lays out, Paine nonetheless maintains that distortion in tradition is the source of the gospels' contradictions, a move appropriate to his larger polemical goal of decentering mainstream theology.

[57] Paine, *Age of Reason*, 49 (478) and 55 (480).
[58] Ibid., 56 (480).
[59] Paine, *Age of Reason, Part the Second*, 177 (589).
[60] Ibid.

Distinct from yet similar in effect to the former is Paine's characterization of the gospels' relation of supernatural phenomena. Most notably, Paine dwells on the birth, resurrection, and ascension narratives, which he generally cites but does not attribute to any particular gospel. As Paine stated in the first part of the *Age of Reason* and would reiterate in the second, "the story of Jesus Christ being Son of God" and his miraculous birth narratives are from "when the heathen mythology had still some fashion and repute in the world" and "[a]lmost all the extraordinary men that lived under the heathen mythology were reputed to be the sons of some of their gods."[61] Curtly, Paine notes that the resurrection and ascension were "the necessary counterpart to the story of his birth" and "[h]is historians, having brought him into the world in a supernatural manner, were obliged to take him out again in the same manner, or the first part of the story must have fallen to the ground."[62] Paine extrapolates his disbelief to all miracles, noting that "[t]he story, so far as relates to the supernatural part, has every mark of fraud and imposition stamped upon the face of it."[63] In this way, Paine again short-circuits the pieces that would fit into harmonization, since he conceives of the pieces that make up the gospels as flawed due to their relation of impossible events.

Although stemming from naturalistic assumptions, the result is the same as Paine's attack on distortion through oral tradition: the pieces are distorted, and the messiah that he discerns beneath them is an inadequate foundation upon which to erect a religion. Nevertheless, despite the role of naturalistic assumptions in undermining certain events in the gospels, Paine's attack on harmonization and accompanying reconstruction of the historical Jesus is not reducible to naturalism; rather, he fundamentally views the gospels as containing contradictory narratives,

[61] Paine, *Age of Reason*, 16 (466-467), referenced in Paine, *Age of Reason, Part the Second*, 87 (571).
[62] Paine, *Age of Reason*, 19 (468).
[63] Ibid., 21 (468).

and relations of supernatural events are just one more element caught up in these contradictions. In the second part, in which Paine most closely treats the biblical text, Paine's first attack on the discovery of the empty tomb is notable because of its exclusive focus on the decidedly non-miraculous differences between the times and witnesses named in the four gospels; Paine sarcastically notes how "well do they agree" before dismissing the appearance of Mary Magdalene in all four, since "she was a woman of large acquaintance, and it was not an ill conjecture that she might be upon the stroll."[64] Paine's second attack on the discovery of the empty tomb is even more telling: instead of focusing on the reported presence of angels at the tomb, he immediately attacks discrepancies among the gospels about the number and position of these angels, for the moment thinking through this "alibi" about "the absence of a dead body by supernatural means" prior to rejecting it for its "contradictory manner" that would put the evangelists at risk for "having their ears cropt [sic] for perjury."[65] Although dismissive at times of such phenomena, Paine most often zeroed in to attack contradictions, whether in miracles or the mundane, and thus his overall interpretative assumptions are best described as non-harmonizing, not naturalistic, although naturalism played a part in the interpretation of certain passages.[66]

---

[64] Paine, *Age of Reason, Part the Second*, 98 (577-578).
[65] Ibid., 99 (578).
[66] Scholarship can have a tendency to equate dismissal of the supernatural with anti-traditional biblical criticism as if that formed the entirety and not an occasional part of it. For example, in describing similarities between the English deists and the famous writings of Reimarus, William Baird, *History of New Testament Research - Volume One: From Deism to Tübingen* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 172, notes their "ridicule" of "supernatural details." In discussing the later Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, Grant Wacker, "The Demise of Biblical Civilization," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 121-138, notes the distinctive difference in biblical interpretation as a naturalistic "recognition that the meaning of events is given not from outside history, not anterior to and independent of the process, but forged wholly from within the process" (127). Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 100-101, adopts Wacker's analysis and uses it as a point of departure to examine slavery debates and their use of the Bible. This characterization of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy likely stems from some Christians' replacement of traditional evidentiary proofs for the divine origin of the Bible with a belief in the progress of history, yet it does not

In opposition to harmonization, which circumvents the necessity of reconstructing a historical Jesus by severely minimizing or completely eliminating perceived discrepancies, Paine obliquely offered a discernible alternative among his polemic – namely, that a historical Jesus could be reconstructed by probabilistically reasoning through the gospels. "That such a person as Jesus Christ existed, and that he was crucified, which was the mode of execution at that day, are historical relations strictly within the limits of probability," Paine declared in the first part of his *Age of Reason*, before filling in the picture in rapid, broad brushstrokes: the "virtuous reformer and revolutionist" Jesus " preached most excellent morality and the equality of man," but he also preached "against the corruptions and avarice of the Jewish priests," who therefore brought accusations of "sedition and conspiracy" to the "Roman government," which "it is not improbable… might have some secret apprehension of the effects of his doctrine."[67] Suggestively, Paine immediately adds, "[N]either is it improbable that Jesus Christ had in contemplation the delivery of the Jewish nation from the bondage of the Romans," a charge echoed in his later statement that Jesus Christ did not intend "to establish a new religion," else "he would undoubtedly have written the system himself, or *procured it to be written* in his life time."[68] Necessarily, this historical core implies later distortion: as Paine states, "[U]pon this plain narrative of facts… the Christian mythologists, calling themselves the Christian church, have erected their fable" of sin and redemption.[69]

Apart from this most general reconstruction, Paine outlined little about the character and teaching of Jesus, excepting one act of polemical repossession whereby the messiah highly

adequately describe the fundamental shift in biblical interpretation, the displacement of long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions.

[67] Paine, *Age of Reason*, 22-23 (469).

[68] Ibid., 23 (469) and 48 (477 [italics in original]).

[69] Ibid. , 23 (469).

resembled a well-meaning cosmopolitan republican like Paine himself: Jesus was "a virtuous and amiable man," while"[t]he morality that he preached and practiced [sic] was of the most benevolent kind" and "has not been exceeded by any."[70] Similarly, he "called men to the practice of moral virtues, and the belief of one God," and he displayed "philanthropy" as "[t]he great trait in his character."[71] In addition to the reason for Jesus's crucifixion, though, Paine only descended once more into the particulars of Jesus's life, in a short section of reflections on unspecified passages from the gospels. As to background, "[m]ost probably he was working at his father's trade" before "his time of being a preacher," and "it does not appear that he had any school education, and the probability is that he could not write, for his parents were extremely poor, as appears from their not being able to pay for a bed when he was born."[72] As to the nature of his ministry, Paine estimates that "the whole time of his being a preacher was not more than eighteen months," but he also reflects on it slightly more at length in two paragraphs worth quoting in full, as the longest and best example of his application of some sort of criterion of probability to the discrepant material of the gospels:

> The manner in which he was apprehended shews [sic] that he was not much known at that time; and it shews [sic] also, that the meetings he then held with his followers were in secret: and that he had given over, or suspended, preaching publicly. Judas could no [sic] otherwise betray him than by giving information where he was, and pointing him out to the officers that went to arrest him; and the reason for employing and paying Judas to do this, could arise only from the causes already mentioned, that of his not being much known, and living concealed.
>
> The idea of his concealment not only agrees very ill with his reputed divinity, but associates with it something of pusillanimity; and his being betrayed, or in other words, his being apprehended, on the information of one of his followers, shews [sic] that he did not intend to be apprehended, and consequently that he did not intend to be crucified.[73]

[70] Ibid., 18 (467).
[71] Ibid., 50 (478).
[72] Paine, 49-50 (478).
[73] Ibid.

Although supposedly without the aid of a bible when he wrote these words, Paine would not return to any similar reconstruction when he began to write the second part of his work. Paine could have examined the four different accounts within the canonical gospels and reasoned through the differences in details, even under his assumption of the gospels' textual independence from one another as literary accounts. Rather, he made his general probabilistic argumentations off a single narrative strand blended or pieced together from unspecified gospels. It was enough for Paine to propose a hastily-sketched picture of Jesus with whose preaching he could agree, in an act of polemically repossessing Jesus from the broader theology that he sought to undermine. Whereas Christians of the time had the gospels and underscrutinized harmonies of Jesus's life, Paine put forward a reconstruction that superseded its sources and thus put them into doubt, according to the mode of biblical interpretation common at that time.

In any case, reconstruction was only one further, largely superfluous step upon the more troubling abandonment of long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels, a shocking move that disconcerted Christians such as Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, and as a result caused the production of a rebuttal that also became a bestseller in the United States.

The Reassertion of Traditions in Richard Watson's *Apology for the Bible*

Richard Watson's *Apology for the Bible* was the most noteworthy response to either part of Paine's *Age of Reason* and a bestseller in its own right, though not on the magnitude of the several parts of Paine's own work.[74] Watson was a priest in the Church of England who had

[74] Mott, *Golden Multitudes*, 317, includes Richard Watson's 1796 *Apology for the Bible* in its list of "Better Sellers", "runners-up believed not to have reached the total sales required for the over-all best sellers" (315), but does not

served as chemistry professor at Cambridge before being appointed Regius Professor of Divinity in 1771; while holding that chair, he issued two defenses of Christianity, the *Apology for Christianity* in 1776, in reply to the 1776 first volume of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and the *Apology for the Bible* in 1795, in response to the 1795 second part of Paine's *Age of Reason*.[75] Like Paine, Watson aimed at mass persuasion through production of an accessible text; he himself would later remember that initial printings in England and Scotland were "at a small price, without any profit or wish of profit to myself," and reflected that "[t]his little book, I have reason to believe, was of singular service in stopping that torrent of irreligion which had been excited by [Paine's] writings."[76] In addition to any British editions that may have been imported, the United States saw at least nineteen printings, most in the several years following initial publications, but even two in the nineteenth century.[77] Thus, in its massive circulation and it reiteration of the long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels, Watson's *Apology* shows their importance for American culture at large. The evangelist biographies and instances of harmonization in bibles and biblical adaptations were not cultural detritus, and Paine's attacks on them were not the chance targets of the random flailings of a malicious deist. Rather, these traditions were deemed worth defending, and that defense sold as part of the larger controversy instigated by Paine.

---

include an estimate of edition size, which was presumably under the minimum of 40,000 required for a best seller of that decade (305). Elsewhere, Mott clarifies that this designation affirms that the books "have not, so far as the compiler has been able to determine, topped the hurdle set for best sellers, but… have come close to it" (8).

[75] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Watson, Richard (1737-1816)" (by Robert Hole), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28857 (accessed May 8, 2012).

[76] [Richard Watson], *Anecdotes of the Life of Richard Watson, Bishop of Landaff* [sic]*; Written by Himself at Different Intervals, and Revised in 1814* (London: J. M'Creery, for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1817), 287-288.

[77] Richard Watson, *Apology for the Bible* (Dayton, OH: R.J. Skinner, 1819). R[ichard] Watson, *An Apology for the Bible – In a Series of Letter, Addressed to Thomas Paine, Author of the Age of Reason* (New York: J. Collord, for T. Mason and G. Lane, 1837). Also similarly to the *Age of Reason*, Watson's *Apology for the Bible* had an international presence thanks to translations into German and French, although the work never seems to have circulated in great numbers outside of the Anglophone world. WorldCat searches discovered Richard Watson, *Apologie der Bibel gegen Thomas Paine*…. (Hannover: Hahn, 1798) and the oddly late Richard Watson, *Apologie ou défense de la Bible*…. (London : C.J.G. and F. Rivington, 1829).

As was the case with Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible*, though, Watson's self-description of interpretation only occasionally matches his practice of reasserting long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions, although both self-descriptions rely on claims of rational investigation similar to Paine's. In this vein, Watson presents himself in his first letter to Paine as someone writing an accessible book since he is writing "in the popular manner" so as to mediate the results of "deep disquisitions" of "[t]he really learned" to "that class of readers, for whom your work seems to be particularly calculated, and who are most likely to be injured by it."[78] Almost immediately, however, he explicitly rebuts Paine's attempt to "disclaim all learned appeals to other books, and undertake to prove, from the Bible itself, that it is unworthy of credit" and states, "I hope to shew [sic], from the Bible itself, the direct contrary."[79] Since Watson then proceeds to state that "a learned appeal to all the ancient books in the world" would support him if one were made, he thus allows to stand side-by-side without resolution two interpretative self-descriptions, the one of dependence on and deference to learned tradition as he repeats it in accessible form, and the other of spontaneous argument from solely the biblical text. Importantly, whether the one description or the other, either description places front and center the same stress on rational investigation of revelation that was characteristic of larger cultural currents and to which Paine also appealed, albeit to different and more disturbing ends.

Similarly, a glance at later reception of Watson shows how these two interpretative self-descriptions could continue to be reaffirmed without resolution under the same tagline of rational investigation, and thus along with Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible* this reception suggests a wider cultural tendency to profess adherence to the Bible alone while also passing on the long-

[78] All quotes from the body of the work are from the first American edition. R[ichard] Watson, *An Apology for the Bible, in a Series of Letters, Addressed to Thomas Paine*…. (New York: John Bull, 1796), 7-8.
[79] Ibid., 8.

standing authorship and harmonization traditions of the gospels. In a small 1837 pocket edition of Watson's *Apology* printed for "the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church," the author's letters were preceded by a short, anonymously-written "Memoirs of Bishop Watson" that summarized and extracted his posthumously-published 1817 autobiographical reminiscences.[80] Quoting at length, the Memoirs repeat Watson's professed aims at ascending to the Regius Professorship, a ringingly eloquent Protestant disavowal of obscurantist tradition and affirmation of intellectual independence in reading the Bible:

> I determined to study nothing but my Bible; being much unconcerned about the opinions of councils, fathers, churches, bishops, and other men, as little inspired as myself... My mind was wholly unbiased; I had no prejudice against, no predilection for the church of Christ, and an insuperable objection to every degree of dogmatical intolerance. Holding the New Testament in my hand, I used to say, 'En sacrum codicem!' There is the fountain of truth, why do you follow the streams derived from it by the sophistry, or polluted by the passions of man? If you can bring proofs against any thing [sic] delivered in this book, I shall think it my duty to reply to you; articles of churches are not of divine authority: have done with them; for they may be true, they may be false; and appeal to the book itself.[81]

Indeed, the Memoirs immediately thereafter applaud Watson's "deference to the sacred volume." Yet, like Watson himself, the Memoirs continue on to mention "our author's acknowledged ability, in displaying the evidence of revealed religion to advantage" – that is, the types of arguments on authorship and harmonization traditions by then already available in Williams Paley's influential 1794 *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*.[82]

Also importantly, the Memoirs' praise of Watson's "skill and vigour" and decision "to guard the outworks of the temple of divine truth" co-exists with an underspecified jab at Watson because of "an awful deficiency" in his understanding of "the grand doctrines of the gospel." In other words, admirers of Watson such as the anonymous author of the Memoirs could depend on

[80] Watson, *An Apology for the Bible* (1837), [3], [5]-8.
[81] Ibid., 6-7, which extracts [Watson], *Anecdotes*, 39. 'En sacrum codicem' is Latin for "Behold, the sacred codex."
[82] Holified, *Theology in America*, 7-8.

him for his restatement of traditions as part of the larger theological repertoire and agree that a single normative Christian theology should be derived from the Bible, but then disagree with him on the contents of this theology. Together in self-presentation, they differ in theology witnessed in exegetical practice; together in adherence to some overarching interpretative practices, they close ranks and stand in opposition to challenges such as those brought by Paine. Although by that time Paine's challenge had abated and the later edition likely fought an infidel scarecrow in order to more clearly reassert the interpretative traditions, such reception suggests how Watson's *Apology* could be read by Christians of different stripes in order to maintain the foundations upon which all their theologies stood.[83]

Indeed, the necessity of certain authorship attributions of the gospels was an important part of this foundation and presumed traditional evangelist biographies, as Watson's *Apology* demonstrates. Although from the start of his letters Watson distinguishes between "that class of readers" who would peruse "letters in a popular manner" and "[t]he really learned" who have access to "deep disquisitions concerning the authenticity of the Bible," Watson in fact assumed that his readership knows the identity of the evangelists and so only tangentially references traditions about their status as apostles or followers of apostles.[84] In these letters, only Luke and John are mentioned: Watson chides Paine for not knowing that "Luke was no apostle," as "he tells you himself, in the preface to his gospel," while elsewhere Watson identifies John with "the disciple whom Jesus loved."[85] Watson also asserts such traditions when saying that "it is well known" that John wrote his gospel last, "as a supplement to the other gospels."[86] Interestingly,

[83] See Marty, *Infidel*, which treats more fully such uses of the infidel by Christians in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
[84] Watson, *Apology for the Bible*, 7-8.
[85] Ibid., 174 (referencing Luke 1:1-4), 154.
[86] Ibid., 158.

Watson does not give attributions to any traditions or modern compendiums of them, although he does reference "the positive testimony of all antiquity" to composition by apostles and followers of apostles.[87] In this manner, Watson presumes background knowledge on the part of his accessible text's audience, while referencing earlier learned works that would provide further details.[88]

In contrast to Paine, who posited unknown evangelists who wrote at a distance from events in order to dwell on the events' distortion, Watson invokes traditions about the identities of the evangelists in tandem with other arguments about the reliability of eyewitness testimony. Whereas Paine emphasized that a process of oral tradition led to several unreliable accounts, Watson emphasized how the closeness of the evangelists to events led to trustworthy accounts that could often be taken in their given state without any unnecessary probing. Several times, Watson compares the gospels to eyewitness testimony. In the most extended passage, Watson responds to Paine's charge that the contradictory testimony of the evangelists would result in punishment for perjury by wishing that "the witnesses of the resurrection had been examined before any judicature" and immediately creating an imaginary courtroom in which to further examine "the brevity with which the account of the resurrection is given by all the evangelists, which has occasioned the seeming confusion."[89] After a series of short questions and answers

[87] Ibid., 170.

[88] Watson likely depended on the well-known multi-volume work *The Credibility of the Gospel History* of English minister Nathaniel Lardner, who had collected testimonia about the evangelists from over the course of a millennium. See, for example, Nathaniel Larder, *The Works of Nathaniel Lardner*…., vol. V (London: William Ball, 1801), which includes the latest testimonium, that of Nicephorus Callisti in 1325 A.D. In his summation of the second part of his work, Lardner concludes "In this second part we have had express and positive evidence, that these books were written by those whose names they bear... It is the concurring testimony of early and later ages, and of writers of all countries in the several parts of the world" (243). Holifield, *Theology in America*, 170, notes a tendency of late eighteenth century American anti-deists to use "familiar arguments, drawing heavily on earlier English apologists" (170). He proceeds to note that Watson was a source for some Americans, but Watson himself likely relied on earlier Englishmen like Lardner.

[89] Watson, *Apology for the Bible*, 163.

about who found the tomb empty, whether the body had been robbed, and how they recognized the resurrected body as Jesus, Watson shows how details would be cleared up and triumphantly declares that such an inquisition "would sufficiently establish the alibi of the dead body from the sepulchre [sic], by supernatural means."[90] Interestingly, although Watson had chided Paine for his ignorance of how Luke was a follower of an apostle, his very courtroom scene glosses over the distinction between apostles and their followers and treats followers of apostles as eyewitnesses themselves. Tellingly, at this important moment of polemical interpretation, the bits of narrative are categorized as testimony, not as anecdotes, as Paine would have them; anecdotes allow for much more distortion than testimony, and were not suitable for Watson's purposes of refutation.[91]

Correspondent with this affirmation of the dependability of eyewitness and near-eyewitness testimony is Watson's consistent minimization of contradictions among the gospels and active harmonization of them in select instances. Just as Paine sought to point out contradictions and find a polemically amenable Jesus underneath them or simply let the contradictions stand in indictment, so Watson sought to do away with contradictions as much as possible. Conceivably, Watson could have produced a harmonized life of Jesus or a chronology like those found in popularly-available bibles. Instead, he harmonized only here and there,

[90] Ibid., 164.

[91] The resort to testimony seems to be a feature of eighteenth century English apologetics. Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 21, attributes to Samuel Johnson a description of "that Old Bailey theology in which… the Apostles are being tried once a week for the capital crime of forgery," but that quote is the wording of a later edition of the cited source, Mark Pattison, "Tendencies of Religious Thought in England, 1688-1750," *Essays and Reviews* (London: W. Parker and Son, 1860), 260, which references "that Old Bailey theology in which, to use Johnson's illustration, the Apostles are being tried once a week for the capital crime of forgery," but does not provide any source for whichever part of the quote originates with Johnson. Helpfully, May, *Enlightenment in America*, 364n21, calls attention to the popularity of Bishop Sherlock's *Trial of the Witnesses*, "which applied English legal procedure to the evidence for the Resurrection." Originally published in 1729 in response to the deist Thomas Woolston, library catalogue searches indicate that the *Trial of the Witnesses* went through multiple editions but does not appear to have received an American edition until 1788.

which demonstrated that the gospels *could* be harmonized. As a result, he could then relate passages and events from them without having to linger much over what Paine would view as actual contradictions.

Indeed, complementary to the actual use of traditional harmonization techniques, Watson regularly reframes contradictions as apparent or minimal rather than actual or major. For example, Watson mentions "apparent disagreement," "disagreement in points of little consequence," disagreement "in minute points" and "certain trifling particulars," and "a thousand little objections," not to mention the indisputable "pith and marrow of the story," which he opposes to "particular" contradictory details that are "not essential."[92] By deploying such terminology, Watson dismissively frames the variances upon which Paine would fixate.

In relation to this reframing, Watson invokes how his audience would read more contemporary biographies or receive more contemporary accounts without fixating on seemingly contradictory details. Memorably, he compares the gospels to the lives of Samuel Johnson by John Hawkins and James Boswell, noting the inevitability of "a considerable difference... with respect to the number and order of incidents in his life," yet asserting that "real or apparent difficulties, in minute circumstances, will not invalidate their testimony as to the material transactions of his life, much less will they render the whole of it a fable."[93] Hypothetically discussing a more recent event from the French Revolution, he makes a similar remark:

> [A]gain, if several honest men should agree in saying, that they saw the king of France beheaded, though they should disagree as to the figure of the guillotine or the size of his executioner, as to the king's hands being bound or loose, as to his being composed or agitated in ascending the scaffold, yet every court of justice in the world would think, that such difference, respecting the circumstances of the fact, did not invalidate the evidence respecting the fact itself.[94]

[92] Ibid., 162, 149, 144, 156, 144.
[93] Ibid., 142, 143.
[94] Ibid., 143-144.

Although never explicitly saying so, Watson strongly implies that if a person wants to know about a person or event, read all the accounts available – and so read all four gospels in order to know the single life of Jesus.

Naturally, this same permissiveness with details deemed inessential is explicitly extended to the gospels. When discussing the resurrection, he remarks in the same vein, "It does not seem to me to be a matter of any great consequence to Christianity, whether the accounts can, in every minute particular, be harmonized or not; since there is no such discordance in them, as to render the fact of the resurrection doubtful to any impartial mind."[95] Even more explicitly, he goes on to restate the point at greater length:

> I think it better then, in arguing with you, to admit that there may be (not granting, however, that there is) an irreconciliable difference between the evangelists in some of their accounts of the life of Jesus, or his resurrection. Be it so; what then? Does this difference, admitting it to be real, destroy the credibility of the gospel history in any of its essential points? Certainly, in my opinion, not.[96]

In this manner, the apologetic stance of Watson becomes quite clear: contradictions may not exist at all, and even if they do, they are minimal and do not greatly affect the gospels' importance to the Christian theology that he thinks is necessary. Since contradictions are said to be only apparent, they can be lightly skipped over, especially when discussed in such a general manner.

Sometimes, though, Watson did go beyond minimizing language, which sought to pre-empt contradiction and defuse the expectation of it, and proceed to actual harmonization, which sought to combat specific instances of contradiction that Paine adduced. Indeed, Paine himself recognized both aspects of Watson's work when he later noted that "the Bishop of Llandaff and

[95] Ibid., 184-185.
[96] Ibid., 185-186.

others" use "cant language of the day" when they "explain the obscure and reconcile the contradictory, or as they say, the *seemingly contradictory*, passages of the Bible."[97]

Two examples of contradiction – one among natural personages, the other among supernatural personages – suffice to again demonstrate that the major difference in reading technique between Paine and Watson was not naturalistic assumptions, but rather the choice for or against harmonization of contradictions. Just as Paine had brought up discrepancies in accounts of witnesses at the empty tomb, so Watson feels compelled to respond to those same discrepancies. In order to resolve them, Watson declares that "there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the persons who went to the sepulchre [sic]," and reads the details from one gospel into another and provides an explanation for the omission of some details in one:

> John states that Mary Magdalene went to the sepulchre [sic]; but he does not state, *as you made him state*, that Mary Magdalene went alone; she might, for any thing [sic] you have proved, or can prove to the contrary, have been accompanied by all the women mentioned by Luke: is it an unusual thing to distinguish by name a principal person going on a visit, or an embassy, without mentioning his subordinate attendants?[98]

In much greater detail, Watson feels compelled to address in a similar manner the discrepancies that Paine raises about the number of the angels at the empty tomb and the circumstances in which they appear. After asserting that all the gospels but Matthew "omit the mention of" an angel rolling away the stone and sitting upon it, Watson begins to give what is by far his lengthiest and most involved harmonization, worth quoting in full:

> [H]ence it is evident that that the stone was rolled away *before* the women arrived at the sepulchre [sic]; and the other evangelists, giving an account of what happened to the women *when* they reached the sepulchre [sic], have merely omitted giving an account of a transaction previous to their arrival. Where is the contradiction? What space of time intervened between the rolling away the stone, and the arrival of the women at the sepulchre [sic], is no where mentioned; but it certainly was long enough for the angel to have changed his position; from sitting on the outside he might have entered into the sepulchre [sic]; and another angel might have made his appearance, or, from the first, there might have been

[97] Paine, "Prosecution," 732.
[98] Watson, *Apology for the Bible*, 167 (italics in original).

> two, one on the outside rolling away the stone, and the other within. Luke, you tell us, "says there were two, and they were both standing; and John says there were two, and both sitting." – It is impossible, I grant, even for an angel to be sitting and standing at the same instant of time; but Luke and John do not speak of the same instant, nor of the same appearance—Luke speaks of the appearance to all the women; and John of the appearance to Mary Magdalene alone, who tarried weeping at the sepulchre [sic] after Peter and John had left it. But I forbear making any more minute remarks on still minuter objections, all of which are grounded on this mistake—that the angels were seen at one particular time, in one particular place, and by the same individuals.[99]

Notably, Watson does not provide a single definitive harmonization: he very much allows for two angels from the start, or a second one to have made a later appearance. As is often typical for deployment of harmonization traditions, Watson provided multiple explanations for one discrepancy, since the goal is not to solve the discrepancy *per se*, but rather to demonstrate that the discrepancy can be solved and thus preserve readers' trust in the gospels and the Christian revelation identified with them.

Nevertheless, Watson does address Paine's outright dismissal of the supernatural, but he does so at much less length, describing the bare outline of an indisputable career of Jesus and noting that "if these things be facts, they will, when maturely considered, draw after them so many other things related in the New Testament concerning Jesus, that there will be left for your fable but very scanty materials."[100] For Watson, the primary battleground with Paine over the gospels is not a naturalism that rules out the supernatural, but rather contradictions among the gospels that can be pressed to preclude the verisimilitude and theological use of the gospels.

Overall, Watson's *Apology for the Bible* reiterated and deployed long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions found in works preceding the publications of Paine's *Age of Reason*. First, it repeated attributions of the gospels wherein Matthew and John were apostles, and Mark and Luke followers of apostles. Second, it minimized or denied discrepancies in

[99] Ibid., 168-169.
[100] Ibid., 140-141.

general and explained away using set techniques in particular cases. By taking the opposite side of Paine and defending Christianity through defense of these traditions, Watson helped reinforce the same widespread dichotomy: to leave behind these traditions was to leave behind Christianity altogether. In a very telling fact about the limitation of anti-traditional biblical criticism to non-Christians at this point in time, neither Watson nor Paine could conceive of professed Christians who denied the authorship and harmonization traditions so central to most theology of their day.

In terms of the history of biblical interpretation in the United States, Paine is more important than Watson since he got people talking on a large scale about a different way of thinking about the gospels. Against a backdrop in which long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions were presumed in mainstream bibles and biblical adaptations as part of mainstream thought, Paine rejected traditional evangelist biographies and harmonization techniques, and painted a picture of a historical Jesus who could have given rise to the discrepant, distorted narratives found in the gospels. In response to this challenge, Watson reasserted the traditions as part of the older paradigm. Interestingly, both appealed to the same authority of reason and claimed a rational investigation, an instantiation of the common dynamic wherein persons and movements questioning the long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions did so in conjunction with appeal to a form of authority either developed from within or also found within mainstream thinking. Even more interestingly, such abandonment of traditions seems to have been largely limited to the oppositional subculture of non-Christian deists, since absent from the controversies at this time is recognition of Christians who can still theologically use the gospels after abandoning these traditions. As will become clear, such absorption of a historical Jesus would take place in later decades among Christians operating free

of hierarchical control – and, interestingly enough, it would often take place along with mention of Paine, whose name became a byword for unconventional religion and unorthodox biblical interpretation.

CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL CRITICISM AND SOCIAL REFORM

""Don't quote the Bible at me that way… To quote Bible to a fellow in my circumstances, is enough to make him give it up altogether."

– The escaped slave George Harris, in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

The 1852 international bestseller *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) presents a number of scenes of ordinary Americans reflecting on biblical interpretation and its relation to slavery. On a riverboat journey, nameless passengers debate slavery's morality, resulting in two parsons adducing "plain" text for and against: "Cursed be Canaan," declares one, to which the other rebuts, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them."[1] In another scene, the escaped slave Eliza finds refuge with a man whose biography suggests the possibility of a moral life conducted apart from proof-texting. As he relates how the separation of slave families made him doubt familiar forms of Christianity, he weeps and declares:

> I tell yer what, stranger, it was years and years before I'd jine the church, 'cause the ministers round in our parts used to preach that the Bible went in for these ere cuttings up, - and I couldn't be up to 'em with their Greek and Hebrew, and so I took up agin 'em, Bible and all. I never jined the church till I found a minister that was up to 'em all in Greek and all that, and he said right the contrary; and then I took right hold, and jined the church…[2]

---

[1] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed., intro., and annot. by Jean Fagan Yellin, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 129-130, from Volume I, Chapter XII, "Select Incident of Lawful Trade," and quoting Genesis 9:25 and Matthew 7:12.

[2] Ibid., 98, in Volume I, Chapter IX, "It Appears That a Senator is But a Man." Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 42-44, briefly discusses biblical interpretation in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, arguing for Stowe's portrayal of "a divided usage" wherein her "own sentiments obviously lay with the antislavery use of the Bible" (43). Accordingly, Noll, *Civil War*, 42, uses this episode to highlight how "Stowe… intimated the cynical conclusion… that the Bible was easily manipulated to prove anything with regard to a problem like slavery that readers might desire." Noll, however, overlooks the character's willingness to take "up agin 'em, Bible and all" and instead portrays him as less adversarial and "at arms' length from church" until he could find "experts on the other side… to attack slavery as effectively as others had used such knowledge to defend it." Instead, Stowe builds actual episodes of temporary doubt into her novel, above and beyond reception in which "her portrayal of a divided usage" might have helped to "awaken uncertainty about the supposedly perspicuous authority of the Bible" (43). Before returning to a church, then, Stowe's character

Later, Stowe briefly suggests the possibility of such a life again, when a former employer tells the escaped slave George Harris to submit to his master like Hagar to Sarah and quotes the paradigmatic example of how "the apostle sent back Onesimus to his master":

> "Don't quote the Bible at me that way…" said George, with a flashing eye, "don't! for my wife is a Christian, and I mean to be, if I ever get to where I can; but to quote Bible to a fellow in my circumstances, is enough to make him give it up altogether. I appeal to God Almighty; - I'm willing to go with the case to Him, and ask Him if I do wrong to seek my freedom."[3]

Just like Eliza's benefactor, George entertains dispensing with "the Bible" because of his moral objections to the pro-slavery biblical interpretations identified with it.[4]

Importantly, characters in a near-contemporary novel, Orestes Brownson's 1854 *The Spirit-Rapper*, explicitly suggest how similar, occasional objections to "the Bible" could transform into determined opposition to it. In a chapter entitled "A Lesson in World-Reform," Brownson's protagonist encounters a motley crew of social reformers in a vivid depiction of the

---

actually parallels what Noll describes as William Lloyd Garrison's "willingness to jettison the Bible if the Bible was construed as legitimating slavery" (32).

[3] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 115, in Volume I, Chapter XI, "In Which Property Gets into an Improper State." Stowe develops George's opposition to the Bible later in the novel. After being reunited with his wife Eliza, he tells her, "I'll forget all the past, and put away every hard and bitter feeling, and read my Bible, and learn to be a good man," but when he discovers that slavehunters are pursuing them, he expresses "bitter thoughts" and asks "Is God on their side?", remarking, "And they tell us that the Bible is on their side; certainly all the power is" (193 and 198, in Vol. I, Chap. XVII, "The Freeman's Defence").

[4] As in the case of the man who harbored Eliza, Stowe consistently treats such periods of doubt caused by close contact with slavery as preludes to evangelical conversions. For example, Tom's lenient owner Augustine St. Clair is presented as fallen through "years of worldliness and skepticism" (ibid., 286, in Vol. II, Chap. XXIV, "Foreshadowings") and confesses to Tom that he cannot "believe this Bible" because of "the habit of doubting" (309-310, in Vol. II, Chap. XXVII, "This is the Last of Earth"), later adding that "the apathy of religious people on [slavery]... engendered in me more skepticism than any other thing" (322, in Vol. II, Chap. XXVIII, "Reunion"). After a lethal stabbing, he is converted with the help of Tom's prayers (325-326, in Vol. II, Chap. XXVIII, "Reunion"). Cassy, a slave of the brutal plantation owner Simon Legree, says because of her experiences "there isn't any God... or, if there is, he's taken sides against us," laughing at a new female slave who "brought her Bible here" (368, in Vol. II, Chap. XXXIV, "The Quadroon's Story"), but she is finally converted through the influence of her Christian daughter after reunion in Canada with her long-lost family (439, in Vol. II, Chap. XLIII, "Results"). Likewise, George Harris is seen praying upon arrival in Canada (395, in Vol. II, Chap. XXXVII, "Liberty"), and calls himself a Christian by the end of the novel (442, in Vol. II, Chap. XLII, "Results"). Somewhat similarly, upon the Legree plantation, Tom undergoes a "dread soul-crisis" because he sees "souls crushed and ruined, evil triumphant, and God silent" and because he experiences "atheistic taunts of his cruel master" to burn his Bible when he finds that "the word lost its power" (397-399, in Vol. II, Chap. XXXVIII, "The Victory"). Overall, all of these characters are of a type, displaying similar periods in which doubt in "the Bible" coexists with strong moral objections to slavery.

collision of various heterodoxies of the time. "All were of course abolitionists," he dryly notes.[5] Yet, when one reformer espouses a vegetarian diet on the precedent of God's dealings with "antediluvians," that reformer inadvertently sets himself apart from the rest of the company, as "[a]ll stared, and many broke out into a loud laugh, at the joke of citing the Bible and tradition as authority in an assembly of philanthropists and reformers."[6] Immediately, several people step forward to correct the man, including "Miss Rose Winter, a strong-minded woman, and a decided reformer, of Jewish descent," who declaims to general approbation:

> The first thing for all reformers to do is to destroy the authority of the Bible and emancipate the Christian world from its morality. It is the great supporter of all abuses, and it and the church are almost our only obstacles to overcome. It sanctions the use of wine and animal food, slavery and the restitution of the fugitive slave, war and capital punishment. It asserts the divine right of government, and forbids resistance to power. It is the fountain of superstition, and the grand bulwark of priestcraft. It calls women the weaker vessel, forbids her to speak in meeting, and commands her to be in subjection to her husband. We are fools and madmen to talk of our reforms as long as we regard the Bible as anything more than a last year's almanac.[7]

To paraphrase this character's words, since "the Bible" endorses immoral positions on pressing social issues, "the Bible" itself must be opposed.

As might be expected from the pointed resemblance of Brownson's "Miss Rose Winter" to well-known social reformer Ernestine Rose, these fictional passages from the mid-1850s highlight an actual, under-recognized antebellum constituency for the acceptance of anti-traditional biblical criticism: individuals so committed to social reform that they could operate outside of the assumptions of Christianity as understood through the theological framework of the Evidences. Up to and beyond the Civil War, most forms of American Christianity presumed

---

[5] O[restes] A[ugustus] Brownson, *The Spirit-Rapper; An Autobiography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1854), 91, which observes in full, "All were of course abolitionists, or friends of the blacks, and therefore excluded studiously the negroes from their social gatherings." Christopher Grasso, "Skepticism and American Faith: Infidels, Converts, and Religious Doubt in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Early Republic* 22 (Fall 2002): 465-508, helpfully places Brownson and his novel in a larger context of doubt.
[6] Brownson, *Spirit-Rapper*, 99-100.
[7] Ibid., 100-101.

the Evidences, an increasingly codified set of traditional theological arguments that included proofs like the patency of Christian revelation due to the pinnacle of moral norms claimed to be found in the Bible.[8] Also implicit within the Evidences was the assumption of an ultimately monovocal Bible – that is, a Bible that contained a single position for or against a given cause. Thus, when presented with an ultimately monovocal Bible interpreted as supporting immoral positions on pressing social issues, some reformers were led by confidence in their causes not only to deny the religious truth of "the Bible," but also to undermine it through thoroughgoing attacks on the Evidences, including the long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions associated with the gospels. In this way, the attacks of these social reformers renewed the assault of Tom Paine's bestselling *Age of Reason*. Recapitulating in part the mid-1790s exchange between Paine and his opponent Richard Watson, the reformers and their opponents overwhelmingly agreed that acceptance of Christianity depended on reasoned scrutiny of the Evidences – and some social reformers, like Paine, could claim that the Evidences failed the test. Whereas Paine had engaged in controversy to establish a more reasonable conception of God, however, these reformers more often appealed to a broader cultural commitment to moral behavior, emphasized that the Christianity of their opponents was an obstacle to the social reforms that morality demanded, and last but not least issued anti-traditional biblical criticism against their opponents. Overall, as previous scholars have noted, it was as if social reform became an anchoring locus serving the same cultural function as religious groups, and thus allowing grounded independence from and the distance to critically evaluate and attack more customary forms of religion.[9]

---

[8] E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), esp. 5-8 and 505-511.

[9] For example, Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), notes the existence of "a highly generalized, all-encompassing religion of

In this chapter, it will be argued that anti-traditional biblical criticism was presumed and often disseminated by individuals committed to the various crusades of social reform, primarily under the auspices of the Freethought movement, but also to a lesser degree within movements devoted to particular causes such as abolitionism and woman's rights. This argument will be accomplished by examining in turn the prominent mid-nineteenth century social reformers Abner Kneeland, William Lloyd Garrison, and Ernestine Rose, to show how they recognized biblical interpretations made within the Evidences as obstacles to social reform and thus sought to disseminate anti-traditional biblical criticism for its destabilizing effects. In other words, these three reformers recognized that the Bible seemed to speak against them, and so they tried to undermine the Evidences upon which that nay-saying Bible rested. In other words yet again, from an overriding commitment to morality, each sought to exploit anti-traditional biblical criticism to establish what morality demanded.

Furthermore, it will also be argued that issuing anti-traditional biblical criticism in debate could cause tensions within movements, to the extent that Christians operating within the framework of the Evidences were present; although on the one hand Abner Kneeland moved largely within the world of Freethought, on the other hand Evidences-abandoning Christian William Lloyd Garrison had to work with Evidences-accepting Christian Harriet Beecher Stowe, and freethinker Ernestine Rose collaborated with Evidences-accepting Christian Antoinette Brown. Thus, pragmatism as well as the tolerance typical of oppositional subcultures could

---

humanity" (51). Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), [vii]-viii, programmatically expands on such previous scholars' recognition of "the 'religious' tone or substance of reform" in order to concretely incorporate analysis of cosmologies, ritual, and the division between the sacred and profane. More broadly, Dan McKanan, *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), reflects that "leftist activism is almost a form of religion [since] [i]t occupies much of the same psychological and sociological space. People are drawn to religious communities and radical organizations in order to connect their daily routines to a more transcendent vision of heaven, salvation, or a new society" (4).

temper acceptance and dissemination of anti-traditional biblical criticism within the abolitionist and woman's rights movements. For example, reformers could minimize or elide anti-traditional biblical criticism in order to avoid controversy among their ranks, or they could strategically deploy it alongside Evidences-based arguments that "the Bible" actually spoke in favor of their chosen reform. Ultimately, for reformers who accepted anti-traditional biblical criticism, their overriding commitment within movements was to advance their cause, not necessarily to further certain ways of interpreting the Bible.

Lastly, as an incidental point having resonance with both Transcendentalism and spiritualism, it will be seen that the ranks of social reform could harbor Christians who managed to fit anti-traditional biblical criticism into their theologies, a new constituency joining the more typical non-Christian advocates. Effectively, this morally righteous humanitarianism served as a grounding theology permitting people like William Lloyd Garrison to abandon harmonization traditions and edge towards contemplation of a historical Jesus, even as he had to negotiate his views with anti-slavery advocates like Stowe who still held to the Evidences.

The Freethought Movement

The most dependable antebellum constituency for acceptance of anti-traditional biblical criticism was the Freethought movement, a loose association of non-Christian iconoclasts united by local organizations and print from the late 1820s onward.[10] At the end of the eighteenth and

[10] The most helpful treatments of deism and freethought are Herbert M. Morais, *Deism in Eighteenth Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934); G. Adolf Koch, *Republican Religion: The American Revolution and the Cult of Reason* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1933); Albert Post *Popular Freethought in America, 1825-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); and James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). In particular, Morais, *Deism*, 13-25 and 54-84, elaborates a useful difference between aristocratic and popularizing deists and gives many eighteenth century examples of the former, respectively; Koch, *Republican Religion*, 74-184, details the institutionalization efforts of popularizing deists and their failure by the second decade of the nineteenth century; Post, *Popular Freethought*, sketches the emergence of Freethought organizations and provides rich descriptions of

the beginning of the nineteenth century, deism had enjoyed widespread attention thanks to a handful of people like Tom Paine, but due to their deaths and the relatively quick failure of institutionalization efforts such as newspapers and societies, the movement's public profile quickly faded by the mid-1810s. By the mid-1820s, however, immigrants and visitors shaped by British radicalism revivified and built upon what remained of the movement: annual celebrations of Tom Paine's birthday began in New York in 1825, reformist speakers from Great Britain like Robert Owen and Fanny Wright drew large audiences and received wide publicity, and efforts at institutionalization began again, leading to the establishment of not only a number of prominent newspapers such as Owens' and Wright's *New-Harmony Gazette* (1825-1829, becoming the 1829-1835 *Free Enquirer*) and Abner Kneeland's *Boston Investigator* (1831-1850), but also societies such as New York's Moral Philanthropists (1829-1839, with some variance in organizational name) and Boston's Society of Free Enquirers (1830-1840).[11] Praising and self-

---

their activities; and Turner, *Without God*, places both deism and Freethought within larger intellectual and social currents. Additionally, Martin E. Marty, *The Infidel: Freethought and American Religion* (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Company, 1961) helpfully provides a concise but thorough discussion of how Christian ministers of many eras exaggerated and exploited the threat of infidelity. Turner, *Without God*, 35ff., calls attention to a widespread eighteenth century concern for reasonable religion and thus serves as a helpful corrective to Morais and Koch, who often treat some trends within liberal Protestantism as unequivocal expressions or harbingers of deism (for example, Morais, *Deism*, 29ff., and Koch, *Republican Religion*, 3ff.; Post, *Popular Freethought*, 15, explicitly critiques this tendency in other scholarship). John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*…. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), takes up in part "antebellum religious history in terms of an unacknowledged and often invisible consensus" (21) and examines a number of case studies around 1851, with "inquiries into the local effects of secularism rather than universal causes" (12). Defining secularism as "processes… in which religion becomes naturalized as an option rather than an obligation" (3), Modern nevertheless highlights as its causes "the affective compatibility between Scottish Common Sense reasoning and republican principles of governance" (22). For this line of inquiry into causes, however, Turner's *Without God* is preferable; it convincingly provides a larger number of cumulative historical developments that allow for the existence of sustained unbelief and its open profession by the mid-nineteenth century.

[11] Both Morais, *Deism*, 173-176, and Koch, *Republican Religion*, 275-284, credit the abatement of deism to an upsurge in early nineteenth century revivals and Christian evangelization efforts but give little evidence. Koch, who argues more thoroughly, mostly relies on a handful of early nineteenth century conversion accounts and retrospective descriptions from post-Civil War denominational and institutional histories. Because of the failure of deist institutionalization efforts and the death of the movement's leaders, not to mention the difficulty of estimating the number of adherents in the population at large, a more cautious assessment would point to a gap in leadership and institutionalization efforts without positing a reduction in adherents attributable to revivalism and evangelization efforts. In this respect, note the judgment of Koch, *Republican Religion*, 281n118, "Not that every freethinker was converted in the revivals, but after [Elihu] Palmer they remained so as individuals and there was no attempt to carry on as religious societies." Similarly, Post, *Popular Freethought*, gives a narrative of a resurgence of "organized

consciously developing the legacy of the deists in their populist affirmation of reason and questioning of received traditions, freethinkers nevertheless tended to move beyond deists in two ways. First, belief in an Enlightenment watchmaker God sometimes became agnosticism, pantheism, or occasionally even outright atheist materialism. Second, anti-hierarchical denunciations of priestcraft frequently became more expressly linked with advocacy of social reforms in a variety of arenas. With this change in thought and emphasis, too, came a change in the reception of anti-traditional biblical criticism. Like Paine, freethinkers attacked the Bible as understood through the Evidences in favor of a more rational system of belief, but they more explicitly conceived of their actions as removing the obstruction of Christianity and advancing human progress for laborers, slaves, women, and others. Thus, freethinkers formed a distinctive constituency among social reformers of this period, and the one most consistently amenable to acceptance and dissemination of anti-traditional biblical criticism.

Prominent antebellum freethinker Abner Kneeland particularly captures how freethinkers continued deist objections to the reasonability of the Evidences and disseminated anti-traditional biblical criticism in conjunction with advocacy of their favored social reforms. First, as an individual, Kneeland grappled with the Evidences and ultimately rejected them on his journey towards Freethought. Next, Kneeland waged war against them both in print and as a speaker, and helped make anti-traditional biblical criticism an unavoidable part of involvement with the Freethought movement. Whereas after Paine any adherents to anti-traditional biblical criticism

---

infidelity" (28) attributable to an influx of British immigrants (32-33) after "a period of quiescence" (232). That said, Post, *Popular Freethought*, 27-28, partly attributes the abatement of deism to revivalism and evangelization efforts, in part due to contemporary testimonies, though he also provides from 1801 and 1822 conflicting testimonies attesting to the growth of unbelief. Roderick S. French, "Liberation from Man and God in Boston: Abner Kneeland's Free-Thought Campaign, 1830-1839," *American Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 202-221, interestingly suggests that members of the previous generation were "submerged and intimidated" and gives the examples of John Fellows (1764-1844) and Thomas Hertell (1771-1849), whose explicit allegiances were rekindled with the advent of new leadership (202).

quickly fell silent, after people like Kneeland any adherents formed a discernible and lasting constituency within the United States.

Abner Kneeland's Engagement with the Evidences

Abner Kneeland had a remarkably varied career before achieving national notoriety as the defendant in a series of Boston blasphemy trials, becoming in 1838 the last man in the United States jailed for that charge.[12] Born in Massachusetts in 1774, Kneeland had some schooling and worked as a carpenter before becoming a licensed Baptist preacher in 1801 and then a Universalist preacher in 1803. As a leading figure within that denomination, Kneeland served over 25 years in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, central New York, and finally Philadelphia and New York City. Around 1816, prior to his time in Philadelphia, Kneeland had some doubts about the truth of Universalism and Christianity as a whole, and corresponded with fellow minister and foremost American Universalist Hosea Ballou in order to address his concerns. Allayed for around a decade, his concerns nevertheless resurfaced during his stint in New York City in 1826; Kneeland led a secession in a Universalist congregation after being forced to resign in part due to controversial preaching. After inviting Fanny Wright to lecture to his new congregation in early 1829, he was quickly dismissed from his post and became increasingly involved with reform circles, a typical path of interest in and travel among various oppositional

[12] A good general overview of Kneeland's life is *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Kneeland, Abner (by Olive Hoogenboom), http://www.anb.org/articles/15/15-00383.html (accessed August 7, 2012). The most thorough overall treatment is Roderick Stuart French, *The Trials of Abner Kneeland: A Study in the Rejection of Democratic Secular Humanism* (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1971), but Harry M. Sherman, *Abner Kneeland: Religious Pioneer* (B.D. thesis, Tufts College, 1953) is worth consulting for Kneeland's Universalist phase. Mary R. Whitcomb, "Abner Kneeland: His Relations to Early Iowa History," *Annals of Iowa*, 3rd ser., 7, no. 5 (April 1904): 340-363, is the best treatment of Kneeland's time in Iowa. Roderick S. French, "The Published Writings of Abner Kneeland," *Bulletin of Bibliography* 31, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1974), 170-172, provides a useful bibliography of Kneeland's writings. Post, *Popular Freethought*, 52ff. and 89ff., respectively, not only describes the *Boston Investigator* and the second breakaway Universalist group (ultimately known as the Moral Philanthropists), but also evaluates their success in comparison with other Freethought institutionalization efforts.

subcultures. Repeating history, he took with him another breakaway group, which would eventually become the nucleus of the city's most successful Freethought organization. After delivering a series of successful lectures, Kneeland received an invitation in late 1830 to become the salaried lecturer of Boston's First Society of Free Enquirers, which had formed in the wake of Wright's forays there. Boston then became the base for Kneeland's frequent lectures and trips, as well as publication of his *Boston Investigator*, an epochal Freethought newspaper that lasted under various incarnations all the way into the twentieth century. Indicted for blasphemy in early 1834, Kneeland went through no less than four trials before being jailed for sixty days in 1838. The next year, Kneeland left for Iowa as part of the vanguard for a community of freethinkers that never quite got off the ground. Somewhat of a local celebrity, he participated in Democratic politics before passing away in 1844.

Tracing these theological twists and turns of Kneeland's life in a bit more depth produces a discernible pattern: in his years in the ministry, he alternately endorsed and questioned Universalism in conjunction with the Evidences and the traditional biblical criticism for which that theological framework was a vehicle. Although Universalism was an unusual form of Christianity due to its professed belief in universal salvation, it nevertheless partook of the widespread Protestant self-conception of restoring the original teaching of Christ and his church as discerned in the New Testament, and thus relied upon the Evidences.[13] One of Kneeland's earliest publications as a Universalist was an 1804 compendium of Universalist and Christian tracts presented with an original introduction; of these tracts, Charles Leslie's *The Evidences of Christianity, Considered: Or, a Short and Easy Method with the Deists*, polemically deployed

[13] Most helpful is Holifeld, *Theology in America*, 218-233. Ann Lee Bressler, *The Universalist Movement in America, 1770-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23-29, touches on the biblical interpretation of Hosea Ballou.

the Evidences, while an anonymous tract defended universal salvation as a "Bible-doctrine" and declared that "[t]he apostles and prophets all taught it."[14] Kneeland's concerns about the truth of Universalism and Christianity as a whole in the summer of 1816 had found him working through many strands of the Evidences, including the identities of the apostles, with Hosea Ballou.[15] After this period of doubt, Kneeland's wholehearted return to that theology is best captured in a polemical pamphlet entitled *Ancient Universalism, as Taught by Christ and his Apostles….*, which contains affirmations that the titular doctrine "differ[s]... in no respect from *modern universalism*" and that both are "contained in the Bible."[16] Unsurprisingly, the resurfacing of his doubts in 1829 again is linked with questioning of the Evidences; to the consternation of many in his first Universalist congregation in New York City, Kneeland preached on Easter that even without the gospels, Christianity could rely on the witness of Paul to the resurrection of Jesus.[17]

Most notably, after Kneeland's forced resignation and further tensions with his breakaway congregation, he made his definitive 1829 split with Universalism by means of a

---

[14] Abner Kneeland, compiler, *The Columbian Miscellany; Containing a Variety of Important, Instructive, and Entertaining Matter*…. (Keene, NH: John Prentiss, 1804), 30-75, reproducing Mr. [Charles] Leslie, *The Evidences of Christianity, considered : Or, a short and easy Method with the Deists*….; and ibid., 230, reproducing *A Course of Letters on the Subject of Universal Salvation, to a Friend who desired Information*…..

[15] Hosea Ballou, *A Series of Letters in Defence* [sic] *of Divine Revelation; In Reply to Rev. Abner Kneeland's Serious Inquiry into the Authenticity of the Same...* (Boston: Henry Bowen, 1820), 35-36, 94-95, 106-107, and 146-149, for example. Ballou, *Series of Letters*, iii-iv, only notes that the letters were exchanged before Kneeland left for Philadelphia, but Abner Kneeland, *A Review of the Evidences of Christianity…..,* 6th ed. (Boston: Office of the Investigator, [1829?]), 24, specifies that his reading "Dr. [Joseph] Priestley's Disquisition on Matter and Spirit, in the summer of 1816... occasioned my letters of correspondence with the Rev. Hosea Ballou... which have since been published." French, *Trials of Abner Kneeland*, 30, dates Kneeland's doubts to "late in 1814 or early in 1815" during the period of his third marriage and absence from the ministry, as does Sherman, *Abner Kneeland*, 13, but neither provides evidence for this. The *American National Biography Online* entry places his doubts slightly earlier, as the cause of leaving the ministry in 1814, again without providing evidence for this determination.

[16] Abner Kneeland, *Ancient Universalism, as Taught by Christ and His Apostles*…. (New-York: Office of the Gospel Herald, 1825), 10 (italics in original).

[17] Abner Kneeland, *Three Sermons; Delivered in the First Universalist Church, in the City of New-York, on Easter Sunday, March 26, 1826*…. (New-York: J. Finch, 1826), especially the entire second sermon, 18-29. Writing about himself in the third person, Abner Kneeland, *An Appeal to Universalists, on the Subject of Excommunication, or the Withdrawing of Fellowship, on Account of Diversity of Opinion* (New-York: George H. Evans, 1829), 14, notes that "this discourse gave considerable alarm" and that "though it has been acknowledged, by some of the most timid, that Mr. K. ... used the best arguments in favor of the resurrection, and which seem to be the most conclusive of any that they had ever heard... the objections... were stronger than they could bear."

series of lecture actively repudiating the Evidences. In the published version of the lectures, he prefaced them with the assertion that all religion thwarts social reform:

> When men shall discover that nothing can be known beyond this life, and that there is no rational ground for any such belief, they will begin to think more of improving the condition of the human species. Their whole thoughts will then be turned upon what man has done, and what he can still do, for the benefit of man.[18]

Remarking upon Christianity in particular, he notes the waste of contributions to churches, and "the immense labor that is devoted daily, yearly, and constantly, in making Bibles and a thousand foolish tracts, that scatter moral darkness, rather than light, and do not serve to improve the condition of man at all, at least on the whole."[19] Accordingly, he presents "these lectures... as an antidote to the *poison* of others," declaring forthrightly that "[m]ankind have [sic] been deceived, and these lectures are necessary to undeceive them."[20] His antidote, of course, was nothing other than criticism of the Evidences.

As Kneeland admitted in his opening lecture, his criticisms of the Evidences were "[n]othing new... for what can be offered new on this subject." And indeed, he openly borrowed almost all of his lectures from pseudonymous freethought newspaper articles of South Carolina College professor Thomas Cooper.[21] As with other anti-traditional biblical criticism, rather than

---

[18] Kneeland, *Review of the Evidences*, [5]-6. Although the lectures were delivered in August 1829, the preface is dated November 2nd of the same year. French, *Trials of Abner Kneeland*, 63-67, most thoroughly places the lectures within the context of Kneeland's life and thought.

[19] Kneeland, *Review of the Evidences*, 6.

[20] Ibid., 7 (italics in original).

[21] Ibid., 28-42 (most of Lecture I), follows Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, April 25, 1829, 209-213; ibid., 45-57 and 57-68 (almost all of Lecture II), follow Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: On Historical Evidence," *Correspondent*, May 2, 1829, 225-232, and Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: On Historical Evidence, Continued," *Correspondent*, May 9, 1829, 24-29; ibid., 69-86 and 86-92 (almost all of Lecture III), follow Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, June 6, 1829, 305-315, and Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, June 13, 1829, 321-324; ibid., 94-111 (almost all of Lecture IV) follows Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, June 20, 1829, 337-346; ibid., 113-123 and 123-134 (almost all of Lecture V), follow Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, June 27, 1829, 353-358, and Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, July 4, 1829, 369-374; and ibid., 135-146 and 146-157 (almost all of Lecture VI), follow Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence:

positing the gospels as the harmonious production of apostles or their followers, Kneeland like Cooper saw them as the contradictory productions of anonymous editors containing distortions obscuring the historical Jesus.[22] In other words, he attacked the long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions associated with the gospels, and substituted an understanding of their origins much different than the standard one typically present in the culture.

Over the course of three, mostly borrowed lectures, Kneeland attacked "the historical authenticity" of the gospels by disputing not only traditional evangelist biographies, but also the "characters" of some of the traditions' tradents, including Irenaeus, Eusebius, Jerome, and Augustine, "whose evidence alone is the basis on which the authenticity of our New Testament rests."[23] Under the conceit of a courtroom, he made not the evangelists themselves the objects of scrutiny, but "[t]he men by whose testimony the authenticity of the four evangelists must stand or fall" in order to "see whether we can establish the respectability of their characters for veracity, good morals, good sense, and competent learning."[24] Within this framing, Kneeland labeled Irenaeus "too ignorant and silly to exercise any judicious discrimination"; Eusebius, "a forger on principle, and by profession"; Jerome, the possessor of a "passion for fiction and

---

Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, July 11, 1829, 385-391, and Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity, Concluded," *Correspondent*, July 18, 1829, 401-406. Ibid., 158-160 (the first section of Lecture VII), follows the unpublished "conclusion of my worthy friend" as an expansion of the lectures for the printed edition (158). Under his pseudonym, Thomas Cooper was not an infrequent contributor to the *Correspondent*. See, for example, Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "On the Authenticity of the Scripture Books," *Correspondent*, August 25, 1827, 68-71. *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Cooper, Thomas" (by Seymour S. Cohen), http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-01956.html (accessed August 7, 2012), gives an overview of Cooper's life, provides much discussion of his scientific achievements, and even make several references to his materialism, but none to his involvement in Freethought. French, *Trials of Abner Kneeland*, 66-67, relates the newspaper articles to Cooper's expertise and career. Post, *Popular Freethought*, 44-48, states that New York City's *Correspondent*, founded under the auspices of British immigrant George Houston and lasting from 1827-1829, was the first "exclusively infidel paper" in the United States since the burst of ultimately failed institutionalization efforts in the early 1810s.

[22] Kneeland, *Review of the Evidences*, 30.

[23] Ibid., 95, 129. The corresponding passages are found in Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, June 20, 1829, 337, and Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, July 4, 1829, 372.

[24] Ibid., 92. The corresponding passage is found in Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, June 13, 1829, 324

imposture"; and Augustine, a "grand patriarch of persecution."[25] After this attack, he only extensively discussed the evangelist Matthew's biography. Especially dwelling on the gospel's presumed translation into Greek and how it lacks a declaration, "I, Matthew, wrote this," Kneeland challenged its attribution, noting "we know neither the author nor the language in which it was written, nor when originally published, nor who translated it, nor when it was translated."[26] Accordingly, he immediately terms the "deficiencies in the evidence" "fatal" and asks, "Does this lame account savor of divine origin?" In a concluding section to the three related lectures, Kneeland, still following the words of Cooper, briefly notes that nothing much can be known of Matthew and John, and that Luke "says he was a compiler [and] Mark is supposed to have written what he heard from Peter."[27] In sum, Kneeland began to deny some of the authorship traditions necessary for recognition of the gospels' divine origin under the reasoning of the Evidences.

By doing this, Kneeland also prepared to knock down harmonization traditions. Indeed, coeval with the shift away from Kneeland and Cooper's attribution of the gospels to apostles and followers of apostles, these works become importantly categorized as "hearsay" – that is, their contents could not "be accurately related" since they were told "from memory" rather than being "written down quickly."[28] Associated with this is a tendency to harmonize, treated by inference and in passing; a note in the second lecture on historical evidence states that "[w]here the evidence is direct, and conflicting, the effect is destroyed on both sides," and a concluding point

[25] Ibid., 121, 130, 131, 136. The corresponding passages are found in Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, June 27, 1829, 357; Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, July 4, 1829, 372 and 373; and Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, July 11, 1829, 385.
[26] Ibid., 141. The corresponding passage is found in Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, July 11, 1829, 388-389.
[27] Ibid., 148. The corresponding passage is in Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity, Concluded," *Correspondent*, July 18, 1829, 402.
[28] Ibid.

lists how the evangelists "contradicted each other in several important particulars, especially as to the resurrection."[29] Once unknown authorship at a distance from events is posited, harmonization of the gospels soon falls.

This challenge having been executed, Kneeland follows Cooper's alternate explanation for the origins of the gospels, the limited observation that "[n]one of [the evangelists] seem to know any thing [sic] of the existence of the rest, except that Mark and others seem to have borrowed from Matthew, without acknowledgement or reference."[30] Likewise, he almost wholly ignores the identity of Jesus beneath the gospels' hearsay and contradictions, apart from stating the fact "[t]hat some seditious fanatic may have been put to death under the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate... may have had disciples, like Johanna Southcote [sic], or Jemima Wilkinson... and... the Gentile followers of this Jew malefactor may have named him *Christos*, anointed."[31] As with Paine, Kneeland via Cooper sought to destabilize the Evidences through the introduction of anti-traditional biblical criticism, rather than explore the origins of the gospels and the identity of the historical Jesus.

Why summarize, however, when Kneeland can summarize himself? Between the delivery of his lectures and their publication, Kneeland wrote an understated, three paragraph

---

[29] Kneeland, *Review of the Evidences*, 53 and 151. The corresponding passages are in Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: On Historical Evidence," *Correspondent*, May 2, 1829, 230, and Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity, Concluded," *Correspondent*, July 18, 1829, 403.
[30] Ibid., 142. The corresponding passage is in Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity," *Correspondent*, July 11, 1829, 389.
[31] Ibid., 152 (italics in original). The corresponding passage is in Philo Veritas [Thomas Cooper], "Correspondence: Evidences of Christianity, Concluded," *Correspondent*, July 18, 1829, 404. Joanna Southcott (1750-1814) was an Englishwoman who began having visions in 1792 and eventually led a well-known movement gathered together in part by her prolific prophetic writings. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Southcott, Joanna (1750-1814) (by Sylvia Bowerbank), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26050 (accessed August 22, 2012). Jemima Wilkinson (1752-1819) was an American who began identifying herself as the "Publick Universal Friend" after a severe illness in 1776 and proceeded to preach widely and gather groups of followers. *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Wilkinson, Jemima" (by Henry Ward Bowden), http://www.anb.org/articles/08/08-01657.html (accessed August 22, 2012). See also Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 80-97.

letter detailing his unbelief to the *Free Enquirer*, a notorious New York City freethought newspaper founded by Fanny Wright and Robert Owen's son Robert Dale Owen.[32] After identifying himself as having spent "twenty eight years' labor in the gospel ministry," Kneeland goes over the same ground as his lectures in two sentences:

> [T]wo of the most important, and most essential *facts* on which the truth of Christianity is based, to wit, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, although susceptible, and such as ought to be capable of proof, if true, cannot be proved. That is, they cannot be proved by any evidence that would be admitted in a court of justice, nor by any that ought to be admitted in any well authenticated history, that is worthy of being kept in a well selected library for the instruction of children. [33]

With that, he helped to close one chapter in his life and open another, because even more important than this personal history is how Kneeland subsequently helped circulate anti-traditional biblical criticism as part of a larger movement. Although the details of Kneeland's long journey from Universalism to freethought were undoubtedly unique, his biblical interpretation and larger set of beliefs were representative of a much larger population than a single Massachusetts carpenter. Far from being singular, such a stance was typical of the Freethought community that he joined and that he helped to create.

Abner Kneeland and the Evidences within the Freethought Movement

Both social reform and anti-traditional biblical criticism were circulated widely and without controversy throughout the Freethought movement. In this respect, Kneeland's mutually reinforcing publication and organizational activities give a sense of the breadth and regularity of this advocacy and dissemination. Although the logical connection between social reform and

[32] Post, *Popular Freethought*, 39-44, details the history of the *Free Enquirer* and the involvement of Wright, the younger Owen, and others.
[33] [Abner Kneeland], "To the Clergy Throughout the World," *Free Enquirer*, September 23, 1829, 379 (italics in original).

anti-traditional biblical criticism was only infrequently articulated, the connection between them reflected the one made in Kneeland's introduction to his *Review of the Evidences of Christianity*: religion and "the Bible" must be opposed because they are barriers to social reform.

In a pointed example of overlap among oppositional subcultures, calls for a wide range of social reform were pervasive within Freethought publications. The prospectus for the *Boston Investigator* enumerated many such causes among the paper's mission:

> [This newspaper] will advocate a general system of education as a public good... It will contend for the repeal, or modification of all unequal and oppressive laws, the abolition of slavery, the abolishment of imprisonment for debt... In a word, it will advocate the liberty, the rights, and the privileges of each and every individual in the community, and particularly espouse the cause of the laboring and producing classes; and last, though not least, it will advocate the rights of women.[34]

Concrete advocacy followed upon such general statements of support. For "the laboring and producing classes" alone, Kneeland soon began a "Working Men's Department" in the *Investigator* and used it to fight against problems like monopolies and debtor imprisonment, though local labor organizations were wary of support from freethinkers because of their ignominy.[35] Such print advocacy also extended to books. Out of a concern for workers, Kneeland prominently advocated birth control, placing regular advertisements in the *Investigator* for Robert Dale Owen's *Moral Physiology*, the first work on birth control printed in the United States, as well as Charles Knowlton's slightly later and much more popular *Fruits of Philosophy*.[36] In the case of the latter, Kneeland supported Knowlton by publicizing and

---

[34] *Boston Investigator*, April 2, 1831, quoted in French, *Trials of Abner Kneeland*, 95. French judges, "Subsequent issues were to disclose that Kneeland had at once found a formula... for editing a paper expressive of his manifold interests... What is remarkable is that he did pursue every one of the announced objectives and yet managed to maintain a reasonably coherent constituency."

[35] For example, see "Working Men's Department," *Boston Investigator*, April 23, 1831, 15. French, *Trials of Abner Kneeland*, 102-106, describes the Freethought and labor movements.

[36] For example, "Books," *Boston Investigator*, April 23, 1831, 16, lists for sale the fourth edition of Robert Dale Owen, *Moral Physiology; or A Brief and Plain Treatise on the Population Question*; while "Notice," *Boston Investigator*, June 14, 1833, 3, advertises Charles Knowlton's *Fruits of Philosophy, or the Private Companion of Young Married People*. Advocacy of birth control in the early nineteenth century was largely embedded within

questioning his imprisonment, even publishing one of his letters from jail.[37] These books were very likely among those sold at Kneeland's weekly lectures in Boston as well as his periodic lectures in other cities; at the very least, they were sold nationally by the scattered agents of the *Investigator*.[38]

As might be expected from how books were sold at lectures, print intersected with a variety of characteristically open organizational activities advocating social reform. First and foremost were Kneeland's weekly lectures themselves, for which he had been hired by the First Society of Free Enquirers to come to Boston. Every Sunday featured two different lectures, and topics included a printed declaration of New York's "Farmers, Mechanics, and other Working-Men," for example.[39] When traveling, Kneeland expounded on social reforms concerning that and other constituencies, with the *Investigator*'s coverage of those lectures later amplifying their impact.[40] Invited speakers also addressed gatherings of freethinkers; for example, Knowlton addressed the Boston society following his release from jail.[41] Although the attention and energy devoted to any particular social reform effort of course varied, advocacy of a reform, when taken up, radiated outward from lectures to newspapers and book publishers.

---

discussion of economist Thomas Malthus's claims about overpopulation and poverty. Peter C. Engleman, *A History of the Birth Control Movement in America* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), 5-9. In this respect, note the frontispiece of a mother abandoning her infant in Owen, *Moral Physiology*, 2nd ed. (New-York: Wright & Owen, 1831), as well as his programmatic question "[i]s it desirable, that [the reproductive instinct] should never be gratified without an increase to population?" (17; capitals removed) and an entire chapter devoted to discussion of "the question in its connexion [sic] with political economy," with explicit reference to Malthus (22-31).

[37] "Original Communications," *Boston Investigator*, January 11, 1833, 2-3.

[38] Samuel Gridley Howe, "Atheism in New-England," *New-England Magazine* (December 1834), 500-509, describes a visit to freethought services in Boston and notes that "[i]n the entry-way is spread a table, on which are paraded for sale a numerous collection of books, pamphlets, and tracts… Among these books are some which take away even that poor inducement to virtue,-- a fear of the consequence of crime" (506-507). With respect to Kneeland's lectures away from home, "Visit to Woonsocket Falls and Cumberland Hill," *Boston Investigator*, April 20, 1832, 3, notes about Cumberland Falls, Rhode Island, "We sold and distributed a number of liberal books, pamphlets, and other tracts." *Boston Investigator*, November 29, 1833, 2, publishes a notice requesting agents to return unsold copies of Knowlton's work, "as we have not a single copy on hand."

[39] For example, "Sunday Lectures at Lower Julien Hall," *Boston Investigator*, April 23, 1831, 15.

[40] For example, "Visit to Woonsocket Falls and Cumberland Hill," *Boston Investigator*, April 20, 1832, 3

[41] "Sunday Lectures at Julien Hall," *Boston Investigator*, March 29, 1833, 2.

Importantly, advocacy of anti-traditional biblical criticism occurred side-by-side with advocacy of social reforms in these Freethought circles. In terms of print, much of Kneeland's *Review of the Evidences* originated from the earlier series of newspaper articles written by Thomas Cooper. Then, that same book of Kneeland's became regularly advertised for sale in the *Investigator* alongside similar works like the deist polemics of the *Ecce Homo!* and William Nicholson's *Doubts of Infidels*, as well as Robert Taylor's more recent *Diegesis*, all of which tacked like Paine's *Age of Reason* and sought to undermine Christianity by undermining the Evidences.[42] Moreover, Kneeland's *Review of the Evidences* was even published out of the office of the very newspaper that carried ads for it, representative of a larger tradition of Freethought publishing books of anti-traditional biblical criticism.[43] In its early years, too, the *Investigator* also carried notice of a singular yet telling event: a prize offer for "any Clergyman who will produce any positive proof, or show any conclusive evidence that either of the Gospels

[42] In terms of book advertisements for Kneeland's *Review*, "A New Recruit of Books....", *Boston Investigator*, June 22, 1832, 4, also advertises *Ecce Homo! or, A Critical Inquiry into the History of Jesus of Nazareth*…. (edition unspecified, but perhaps that of the New York Free Press Association), while "A New Recruit of Books....", *Boston Investigator*, July 6, 1832, also advertises [William Nicholson], *The Doubts of Infidels: Or, Queries Relative to Scriptural Inconsistencies and Contradictions*…. (edition unspecified). Sale of Robert Taylor's *Diegesis* (edition unspecified; Kneeland would not print an edition until 1834) at the office of the *Investigator* is regularly mentioned within notices of the premium contest. See, for example, "One Hundred Dollars Premium," *Boston Investigator*, April 13, 1832, 2. In terms of anti-traditional biblical criticism, traditional authorship of the gospels and their harmony are questioned in *Ecce Homo! or, A Critical Inquiry into the History of Jesus of Nazareth*.... (New-York: New-York Free Press Association, 1827), 9-10 and 168-183, respectively; [William Nicholson], *The Doubts of Infidels: Or, Queries Relative to Scriptural Inconsistencies and Contradictions*... (London: Printed for the Author, 1781), 43-48; and Robert Taylor, *The Diegesis; Being a Discovery of the Origin, Evidences, and Early History of Christianity*…. (Boston: Abner Kneeland, 1834), 136-138, which proposes that the gospels are later creations "endeavouring [sic] to put an appearance of history and reality upon the creations of fiction and romance" (138). The frontispiece portrait of Taylor labels him as "Founder of the Christian Evidence Society and of the Society of Universal Benevolence." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Taylord, Robert (1784-1844)" (by Alexander Gordon, rev. K.D. Reynolds), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27078 (accessed October 16, 2012), gives an overview of Taylor's activities in England after an 1818 conversion to deism, in part from reading the writings of Paine.

[43] For example, British immigrant and prominent American freethinker George Houston obtained American copyright for and then published *Ecce Homo!* as part of a series "under the patronage of the New-York Free-Press Association," as indicated by its title page. Post, *Popular Freethought*, 44-46 and 76-80, respectively, note that Houston had printed a Scottish edition of the work in 1799 and a British edition in 1813, incurring prosecution for the latter, and that he lectured for the Association, under the auspices of which were published both books and the newspaper *Correspondent*, which Houston also edited.

were written by the persons whose names they bear… or… that they were written within half a century of the time the events therein recorded are said to have taken place," in addition to a challenge to prove the very existence of Jesus and his apostles and the occurrence of "the most principal and most important facts and events as therein recorded."[44] Increases in the prize amount were occasionally printed, along with infrequent responses from across the United States and accompanying notices of their inadequacy.[45] The contest even spilled out beyond newspapers into the streets of Boston, as handbills were posted in its early days to general remark and even an opposing, parodic contest from the non-Freethought press, complete with competing handbills.[46] In terms of other, non-print organizational activities, anti-traditional biblical criticism also furnished topics for lectures of official gatherings of Boston's freethinkers, at which gatherings books proposing anti-traditional biblical criticism also likely surfaced for sale.[47] In line with the larger tradition of antebellum public theological debate, too, invited speakers included Christians who were called upon to defend the Evidences.[48] In sum, activities

[44] "One Hundred Dollars Premium," *Boston Investigator*, April 13, 1832, 2.
[45] Although "One Hundred Dollars Premium," *Boston Investigator,* April 13, 1832, 2, set the original amount of the prize, "Increase of Premium," *Boston Investigator,* July 6, 1832, 2, raised the premium from $100 to $500, while "Increase of Premium," *Boston Investigator*, July 20, 1832, 2, raised the premium from $500 to $1000. For examples of responses, "The Premium," *Boston Investigator*, September 7, 1832, 2, confidently outlines procedures for a jury trial of the Evidences in response to a purported answer from an Ohio resident, while "The $1000 Premium Again," *Boston Investigator,* March 22, 1833, 2-3, rebuts a Maine Methodist journal's appeal to Christian experience and evidence from Josephus.
[46] "Orthodoxy," *Boston Investigator*, July 27, 1832, 2, reprints and remarks upon an undated article from the *Boston Telegraph* that notes how the *Investigator*'s "premium, with its multifarious conditions, has... been posted up in a hand-bill, at the corners of the streets, and other public places, in this city," and counteroffers a thousand dollar premium to anyone who can prove the existence of Abner Kneeland and facts from his biography in two hundred years. Kneeland notes this premium has also been printed up "in a large handbill, about the size of our's [sic]" and placed in Boston's streets.
[47] "Sunday Lectures at Julien Hall," *Boston Investigator*, April 20, 1832, 3, promises an evening lecture "[o]n the subjects embraced in the Premium offered the Clergy in our last number, calling upon them and upon the people to attend to the same; or else to give up their pretensions." Post, *Popular Freethought*, 78, notes that George Houston delivered a lecture series "on the Inconsistencies, Contradictions, and Absurdities of the Bible" to the New York Free Press Association.
[48] An untitled notice in *Boston Investigator*, July 13, 1832, 2, remarks upon failed invitations to clergy "to preach in Julien Hall – to prove to us, Infidels, the truth of divine revelation, and the validity of the scriptures, as the word of God." Post, *Popular Freethought*, 86 and 90, give examples of contemporary debates held at Christian and Freethought organizations, respectively. Richard J. Cherok, *Debating for God: Alexander Campbell's Challenge to*

around Kneeland demonstrate that anti-traditional biblical criticism was consistently promulgated through all the same Freethought channels that rallied support for different social reforms, all in the open fora typical of many oppositional subcultures.

Although appearing in the same newspapers columns, in books printed by the same press, and in lectures at the same venues, calls for social reform and anti-traditional biblical criticism were proffered separately, with the connection between the two – that biblical interpretations of the Evidences hindered social reform – only occasionally being made explicit. Once, for example, an advertisement promised an afternoon lecture "On Exod. xxiii.3, 'Thou shalt not countenance the poor man in his cause'" and then immediately asks, "How, then, can the poor expect to obtain their rights so long as the bible is made a rule of life?"[49] Another time, an announcement of Knowlton's upcoming lecture before freethinking Bostonians becomes an occasion to remark upon attempts to "suppress knowledge of any kind by law": "If any may be suppressed, all may ultimately be suppressed, except what *mother Church* will *graciously* permit."[50] Elsewhere and a bit less explicitly, one article might impugn the Bible as having "no fixed system in morals" and "[i]n the present day no moral support" and thus demand its "annihilation as a creed and a code [as] the wish… of all GOOD MEN AND WOMEN," while another article notes the need to sort through and judge heterogeneous revelatory claims such as the injunction against wearing mixed material clothing like "a linsey-woolsey coat", as part of a larger argument that humans should seek on their own to create "better laws."[51] Such

Skepticism in Antebellum America (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2008), details the famous 1828 debate in Cincinnati between Christian Alexander Campbell and British reformer Robert Owen. E. Brooks Holifield, "Theology as Entertainment: Oral Debate in American Religion," *Church History* 67, no. 3 (September 1998), 499-520, puts such debates in the context of a long-standing American tradition and provides tentative arguments for its antebellum prominence.

[49] "Sunday Lectures at Julien Hall," *Boston Investigator*, September 7, 1832, 2.

[50] "Sunday Lectures at Julien Hall," *Boston Investigator*, March 29, 1833, 2 (italics in original).

[51] Common Sense [pseud.], "The Holy Bible," *Boston Investigator*, April 27, 1832, 1. "The Claims of God's Law," *Boston Investigator*, July 27, 1832, 1.

pronouncements repeat Kneeland's thoughts upon leaving behind the Evidences, however, and seem to represent the thinking of many individuals among the readership of the *Boston Investigator* and amidst Boston's First Society of Free Inquirers. Since the anti-hierarchical impulse of the freethought movement was funneled into support of social reform, anti-traditional biblical criticism, which sought to destabilize the assumptions of the Evidences and bring new members into the movement, accordingly worked in tandem with these explicit calls to reform.

In any case, anti-traditional biblical criticism was constitutive for the identity of the Freethought movement. Polemical activities such as the premium contest and debate invitations for Christian ministers acknowledged and were premised on a firm divide: freethinkers and anti-traditional biblical criticism on one side, and Christians and their Evidences on the other. Under Kneeland's leadership, Boston's First Society of Free Enquirers had around 1,000 dues-paying members and the nationally-circulating *Investigator* reached weekly print runs of three thousand issues.[52] Whatever the size of the movement, though, participants could be almost certain that fellow reformers known through these channels held similar views on biblical interpretation. In the case of reformers in other movements, however, that assumption simply would not hold, and would affect how anti-traditional biblical criticism was spread.

Two Social Reform Movements: Abolitionism and Woman's Rights

Within particular social reform movements, people also held and circulated the view that interpretations identified with the Bible were a barrier to social reform. Unlike within the Freethought movement gathered around Abner Kneeland's *Boston Investigator*, however, this

[52] French, *Trials of Abner Kneeland*, 169 and 225, respectively note dues-paying membership of 900-1000 in 1834 and that weekly print runs of the *Investigator* reached 3000 by the beginning of 1837. The newspaper's audience was national in scope and probably larger than the print run because an issue could be read by multiple readers; French, *Trials of Abner Kneeland*, 161-162, provides evidence for this phenomenon.

view could cause tension within and require tolerance from the membership of a movement, because the movements drew support from adherents to the Evidences as well as members who had moved beyond them. In the case of abolitionism, famed newspaperman William Lloyd Garrison's moral decisions emerged from Christianity but were not dependent on the Evidences. Thus, when he presented anti-traditional biblical criticism in the *Liberator*, he met resistance, including from none other than Harriet Beecher Stowe. In the case of woman's rights, famed reformer Ernestine Rose, an avowed and notorious freethinker, could selectively downplay similar views at conventions or when speaking to governmental bodies, a dynamic on display when she collaborated in advocacy with eventual Congregationalist minister Antoinette Brown. In the face of such resistance, both Garrison and Rose also displayed a politic openness to the view that the Bible ultimately spoke monovocally – in favor of their chosen reform, of course. Unlike with the Freethought movement, which consisted of non-Christians deeply sympathetic to reform, principle could cede to pragmatism when it came to anti-traditional biblical criticism among broad-based movements devoted to advocacy for particular social reforms.

Abolitionism and William Lloyd Garrison

The immediate abolitionism of which William Lloyd Garrison became perhaps the most famous proponent was a late development within the history of organized American anti-slavery movements.[53] During the colonial era, Quakers had begun to eliminate the slave trade and eventually slaveholding among themselves, but they turned outward with the seminal 1774 foundation of a separate organization specifically devoted to anti-slavery efforts. Typical of the

[53] Recent helpful overviews of American anti-slavery organizations and strategies are Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), and James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

first wave of organized activity, tactics focused on establishing gradual abolition through laws on a state-by-state basis, which approach was largely successful for the North by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Another landmark was the 1816 foundation of the American Colonization Society, which focused on voluntary emancipation and resettlement of former slaves in Africa. Although popular for a time, colonization largely fell out of favor due to its unfeasibility and accusations of racism. Emerging from the failure of colonization was a vital movement for immediate abolition. Beginning to crystallize in the late 1820s, it drew on the increasingly popular tactics of mass appeals and local organizations. Among the institutions that resulted were William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, the first issue of which appeared in January 1831, and the American Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1833. Although riven by organizational divides over issues like the standing of women and participation in party politics, sympathizers with the cause came to see their voice become increasingly powerful by the eve of the Civil War.

Although best known as an advocate of immediate abolition, Garrison had held other anti-slavery positions before coming to the cause to which he dedicated his life.[54] Born in 1805 in Newburyport, Massachusetts, to a Baptist mother and a father who would abandon the family, Garrison was apprenticed in 1818 to the owner of a local newspaper, and would spend the rest of his life in the profession. Failing in a series of editorships in several states, Garrison advocated colonization as late as 1829, but soon became an advocate of immediate abolition, which he ceaselessly advanced from the time of the *Liberator*'s first issue. A founding member of the

[54] Helpful biographical sketches are *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Garrison, William Lloyd" (by James Brewer Stewart) http://www.anb.org/articles/15/15-00256.html (accessed September 10, 2012); and William Cain, "Introduction: William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery", in William E. Cain, ed., *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery: Selections from the Liberator* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995), 1-57.

American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, he saw factions emerge in the late 1830s over the equality of female members and, after a crucial 1840 meeting in which a woman was elected to leadership, the secession of disaffected members to form a rival organization. Increasingly devoted to ideological purity, Garrison recommended nonviolence and warned against the compromise inherent in political participation, both of which positions were tested and modified in the years immediately leading up to and during the Civil War. With the passage of the constitutional amendment abolishing slavery in December 1865, Garrison ended publication of the *Liberator* and retired from public life, to die in 1879.

Although also an advocate of other reforms as was typical of members of oppositional subcultures, Garrison was most devoted to anti-slavery, and this fervency provided a firm moral grounding that allowed him to accept anti-traditional biblical criticism and edge towards contemplation of a historical Jesus while remaining a Christian, a type of thinking found among the most radical immediate abolitionists.[55] Although details of the development of his thinking are unclear, by the 1840s he began to use the pages of the *Liberator* to recognize popular acknowledgement of the inspired Bible – that is, affirmation of the Bible upon the basis of the

[55] James Brewer Stewart, "Abolitionists, the Bible, and the Challenge of Slavery," in *The Bible and Social Reform*, ed. Ernest R. Sandeen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 31-57, sketches out the post-1840 tendency of some abolitionists to join "the trend away from biblicism in American radical thought" (51), an analysis intriguingly echoed in his *William Lloyd Garrison and the Challenge of Emancipation* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1992), 154-155, both of which build on Walters, *Antislavery Appeal*, 37-53. Although discussing several versions of religious heterodoxy among Garrisonian and non-Garrisonian abolitionists, Walters, *Antislavery Appeal*, 45-53, singles out Garrison and James G. Birney as the two most prominent abolitionists whose religion moved beyond typical thinking about the Bible. Walters states, "The logic of reform was driving antebellum Americans like Birney toward secularism and skepticism, but they were too fundamentally Christian to go beyond the point where piety and religious formalism parted company" (50). Accordingly, he notes the existence of "a highly generalized, all-encompassing religion of humanity" (51) and raises the possibility of "the reform commitment" as "another religion available" (52). Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 53-67, treats this phenomenon as part of the larger trend of Southern clergy to label abolitionists as infidels. He states that "[t]he logic of the antislavery interpretation of the Bible led easily toward a fundamental questioning of its moral authority" among "abolitionists, usually those radicals associated with William Lloyd Garrison," a group that included Henry C. Wright, Nathaniel Peabody Rogers, and Charles B. Stearns (64).

Evidences – as a barrier to immediate abolition.[56] Unlike with Kneeland and Boston's First Society of Free Enquirers, however, Garrison faced pushback from reformers within his ranks and was forced to defend his views. Outside of the Freethought movement, challenging the Evidences could reveal rifts within a coalition and point out the necessity of norms of tolerance.

At the beginning of the decade, Garrison spread but did not publicly support the sentiment that the Evidences and some revelations that they were thought to endorse hindered social reform. November 1841, the year following the schism in the American Anti-Slavery Society, found Garrison using the *Liberator* to publish his own sonnet that bemoaned the challenge of "skepticism" to the Bible's "sacred origin," but also the proposal of fellow abolitionist Edmund Quincy to follow up one recent eccentric convention on the Sabbath, church and ministry with another examining biblical authority, in part "in consequence of the use which has been made of the Scriptures to hinder the progress of practical reformation."[57] By 1843, however, a letter by Quincy was already noting gossip that "Garrison's opinions… have been greatly modified of late with regard to the Bible" and pragmatically lamenting that change of events:

---

[56] The most recent and overall most helpful biography, Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), largely overlooks Garrison's changing views of the Bible, explicit discussion being mostly limited to repeated observations of his twin endorsement of the Bible and the Constitution (e.g. 53, 115, 445, 475). More detailed attention, however, is paid to aspects of Garrison's theology like perfectionism (e.g. 224-226) and populism manifested in "come-outism" (e.g. 301-304). For the evolution of Garrison's thinking, most helpful is [Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison], *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life, Told By His Children*, vol. II (1835-1840) and vol. III (1841-1860) (New York: The Century Co., 1889), esp. 421-431 and 1-10, 95, 144-147, and 378-401, respectively. John L. Thomas, *The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison – A Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), attributes Garrison's "rationalism" to contact with Theodore Parker and Thomas Paine (351ff.), while Walter M. Merrill, *Against Wind and Tide: A Biography of Wm. Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 183ff., calls attention to contact with Paine and Henry Clarke Wright. Merrill, *Against Wind and Tide*, 356n19, furthermore notes that in his 1845 guarded approbation of Paine Garrison "really avows himself a moderate deist, though he would perhaps have been shocked that anyone should use this term in reference to his religious views."

[57] W[illiam] Lloyd Garrison, "Sonnet. – The Bible," *Liberator*, November 5, 1841, 179. E[dmund] Q[uincy], "Bible Convention," *Liberator*, November 12, 1841, 183.

> As a man I rejoice at his progress, but I don't know whether I do as an abolitionist. It was so convenient to be able to reply to those who were calling him an infidel, that he believed as much as anybody, and swallowed the whole Bible in a lump, from Genesis to Revelation, both included. They say that in Connecticut they always keep one member of every pious family unconverted to do their wicked work for them. I suppose my policy is something of the same sort.[58]

The content of this change in opinions is obscure, but apparently Garrison had already begun to privately cease to endorse "the Bible" and the set of teachings those words represented.

By the spring of 1845, Garrison was more directly pitching a big tent capable of holding those who bucked the Evidences. In a defense of controversial local minister and early adopter of anti-traditional biblical criticism Theodore Parker, for example, he acknowledged but minimized Parker's opinions on subjects like "the account of the resurrection of Jesus, as recorded by the evangelists," instead emphasizing how "his heart is in the various reforms of the age."[59]

More importantly, an autumn 1845 encounter with Paine's *Age of Reason* became occasion for Garrison to reflect on the relation of biblical interpretation to slavery and demonstrate an openness to anti-traditional biblical criticism. As Garrison relates, "[w]e had never perused a single page or paragraph of all the writings of Mr. Paine, whether theological or political," until he received a new edition from fellow Boston agitator J.P. Mendum, a freethinker who became longtime publisher of the *Boston Investigator* after Kneeland's departure to Iowa.[60] Claiming to have been educated "to regard him as a monster of iniquity," he conceded that "occasionally he gives utterance to sentiments which we regard as reprehensible

---

[58] Edmund Quincy to R.D. Webb, November 27, 1843, in [Garrison and Garrison], *William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. III, 95.
[59] [William Lloyd Garrison], "Theodore Parker," *Liberator*, April 4, 1845, 55.
[60] [William Lloyd Garrison], "Thomas Paine," *Liberator*, November 21, 1845, 186. The *Boston Investigator* had changed hands several times until coming into the ownership of Mendum. Post, *Popular Freethought*, 55-57 and 125-131, briefly examine his tenure as newspaper and book publisher, respectively, the latter in light of frequent attempts of the Freethought movement to disseminate Paine's *Age of Reason*.

and injurious," but Garrison also found much to praise, including Paine's "uncommon share of mental and moral intrepidity" and his willingness to appeal to reason.

Although not mentioning the Evidences by name, Garrison allied himself with Paine against their end product, the belief "in the Bible as the inspired word of God." Accordingly, he endorsed the explicit use of reason to evaluate many aspects of the Bible, including "what is historically true, and what fabulous," and he boldly claimed that "[w]hen the various books of the Bible were written, or by whom they were written, no man living can tell." Oddly, he stereotyped believers in inspiration as blind followers for whom investigation "is made a criminal act" and "appeals are made to human credulity, and not to the understanding"; in this way, he did not acknowledge as Kneeland did that the framework of the Evidences justified the dominant traditions on the basis of their reasonability. Nonetheless, in his willingness to question longstanding authorship and harmonization traditions, Garrison was clearly a different type of Christian, one not operating within the Evidences.

Within the short confines of his article's evaluation of Paine, Garrison assumes that what morality demands is accessible to reason and therefore the contents of the Bible can judged in light of it. These contents include "teachings" that "it is lawful to go to war, to sustain governments of brute force, to strangle criminals on the gallows or shut them up in prisons, [and] to enslave human beings," all of which Garrison terms "monstrous." To set himself apart from "Paine and his followers," however, he also explicitly notes that reason is capable of "selecting the wheat from the chaff" and of recognizing "those portions of the Bible which inculcate the most stringent morality, the noblest sentiments, the most expansive benevolence, the purest life – and which contain the wisest admonitions, the best instructions, the brightest examples, the most cheering prophecies, and the richest promises." Especially by endorsing prophecies, Garrison

pointedly sets himself apart from the deists and their successors the freethinkers, despite his agreement on anti-traditional biblical criticism.

Nevertheless, Garrison at this time more or less implicitly conceded an ultimately monovocal Bible endorsing slavery when he painted a picture of how biblical interpretation functions. At first, he stated his estimation of general practice:

> The priesthood have imposed on the people the belief, that the entire Bible is divinely inspired, even every chapter and verse; that they must submit their reason to its teachings, not its teachings to their reason; that it is to be their master, not their servant; that whatever it inculcates or allows, or any portion of it, must be from God.

Seguing into the objectionable teachings like slavery, however, Garrison then stated that such teachings are endorsed "on the strength of a text, or a number of texts," a description creating the impression that although he encountered a clear set of teachings like other Christians, he sifted through them according to standards of morality known to universal reason.

In discussing interpretation in such a way as to acknowledge an ultimately monovocal Bible that he himself did not believe, Garrison opened himself up to the charge of picking and choosing from God's teaching rather than accepting it whole cloth. As he was wont to do, Garrison gave space in the *Liberator* to criticism, and soon reprinted an abolitionist attack charging him with rejecting whatever would "militate against his peculiar views" and demanding that "[w]e must receive the whole as Holy Writ, or reject the whole," since "[e]very attempt, from whatever source, to bring into disrepute the word of God… lowers the standard of public morals and does an irreparable injury to the race."[61] On a note of pragmatism, the writer continued on to express the regret that "pro-slavery parties find it convenient, in order to counteract the efforts and destroy the influence of abolitionists, to raise the cry of 'infidelity.'"

[61] "Thomas Paine," *The Liberator*, December 5, 1845, [193]. The subtitle indicates a reprint from the "Worcester County (Liberty party) Gazette".

Indeed, by oddly seeming to state that the Bible had a single set of teachings that he rejected, Garrison more or less gave himself the detested title of an infidel of which attackers accused him.

Despite the contentiousness of the topic, however, Garrison tolerantly allowed other authors to publish similar pieces in the *Liberator*. Abolitionist Henry Clarke Wright, for example, published an 1848 piece "The Bible a Self-Evident Falsehood, If Opposed to Self-Evident Truth," in which he remembers "clergy… throwing the Bible across my Anti-Slavery pathway" and makes various forceful reiterations of the titular theme, including that "[i]f we cannot have the Bible without slavery, then away with the Bible and slavery together."[62] Soon, Garrison and others would admit but defend the controversial nature of his letter, while later letters of Wright's recycling deist jabs at the Evidences would receive explicit rebuttal within the pages of the *Liberator*.[63]

Within this 1848 exchange, Garrison's defense of Wright witnesses a significant development of thinking, where the Bible is viewed as a collection of polyvocal books onto which harmony was imposed through selection and prioritization of passages. Although touching on "obscurity" of authorship as in his appreciation of Paine, Garrison discusses the

---

[62] H[enry] C[larke] Wright, "The Bible a Self-Evident Falsehood, If Opposed to Self-Evident Truth,", *The Liberator*, September 29, 184[8], [153]. The issue in which Wright's letter is printed oddly has the wrong year (1847) on the masthead. Wright's life is related in *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Wright, Henry Clarke" (by Lewis Perry), http://www.anb.org/articles/15/15-00862.html (accessed August 29, 2012), though without attention to his unconventional views on the Bible. In his thematic treatment of Wright, Lewis Perry, *Childhood, Marriage, and Reform: Henry Clarke Wright, 1797-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 96-170, treats Wright's religious views, but their evolution is difficult to follow because the narrative is not strictly chronological and because of the difficulty of the source material. About this difficulty, Perry writes, "Even when the give and take of an agitator's life is fully considered, there remains an unmistakable note of hedging in Wright's religious beliefs" (154), noting that they were "especially fuzzy from the mid-1840s until his death" (155).

[63] Defenses include [William Lloyd Garrison], "The Bible," *The Liberator*, November 24, 1848, 186; and Seward Mitchell, "The Bible a Self-Evident Falsehood," *The Liberator*, November 24, 1848, 188. Garrison's piece begins by acknowledging that Wright's letters "will probably alarm some and offend others who may chance to read them… but it cannot be denied that the subject is one of vast importance, and therefore worthy of searching investigation." Rebuttals to later letters include William C. Goodell, "To Henry C. Wright," and Henry Grew, "Is the Bible a Lie, or Is Henry C. Wright Mistaken?", both in *The Liberator*, December 22, 1848, 201.

phenomenon of biblical interpretation at greater length. After noting how "[m]en equally sincere arrive at diametrically opposite views as to its teachings," he proceeds to diagnose the problem:

> We think that much of this confusion arises from the common error of regarding the Bible as a unit – a work prepared by one mind, (and that a divine one,) consecutively, for the guidance of all mankind; instead of realizing the fact, that it is a compilation of Jewish and Christian manuscripts, written in different parts of the world, in ages more or less remote from each other… As it is not one production, but many productions… it is easy to see why it is that, treating it as a unit, and every portion of it as alike sacred, so many jarring sentiments and so many conflicting practices are attempted to be justified from its pages. A dexterous theologian, having full liberty to range, in the name of God, from Genesis to Revelations, finds it an easy matter to cull out such passages as seem to substantiate the doctrine, or defend the practice, that he is zealous to maintain. It is true, he may be beaten with his own weapons, and yet neither the victor nor the vanquished be enlightened as to the truth.[64]

Floated in defense of Wright, who conceded that "the Bible" advocated slavery, this nuanced view resurfaced and was defended by Garrison in the 1850s in an important exchange with Harriet Beecher Stowe over biblical interpretation and anti-slavery, even as he downplayed radical abolitionist adherence to anti-traditional biblical criticism in order to maintain cordial relations with a famous and very influential fellow opponent of slavery.

Upon returning from a triumphal European tour following upon the international success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, prominent colonization advocate Stowe wrote Garrison several private letters expressing admiration for the *Liberator* but hesitancy to support him and some otherwise admirable positions of his movement because of the *Liberator*'s treatment of the Bible. She elliptically stated in her first letter:

> In regard to you, your paper, and, in some measure, your party, I am in an honest embarrassment. I sympathize with you fully in many of your positions; others I consider erroneous, hurtful to liberty and the progress of humanity… I am a constant reader of your paper, and an admirer of much that is in it. .. At the same time I regard with apprehension and sorrow much that is in it. Were it circulated only among intelligent, well-balanced minds, able to discriminate between good and evil, I should not feel so much apprehension… What I fear is, that it will take from poor Uncle Tom his Bible, and give him nothing in its place… In this view I cannot conscientiously do anything

[64] [William Lloyd Garrison], "The Bible," *The Liberator*, November 24, 1848, 186.

> which might endorse your party and your paper, without at the same time entering protest against what I consider erroneous and harmful.[65]

Although which exact content troubled Stowe is unclear, Wright's letters seem to have been at least partially at fault, as she later confessed that "[i]f I understand H. Wright's letters in the *Liberator*, he openly professes to be what is called commonly an infidel."[66] In any case, Stowe's concern for "Uncle Tom" was probably not for slaves, but rather for the Northern free black population among whom the *Liberator* had always circulated, in part due to her fears of disrupting the cultivation of their innate religiosity.[67]

---

[65] Harriet Beecher Stowe to William Lloyd Garrison, [November 1853?], in [Garrison and Garrison], *William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. III, 395-396. Stowe's support of colonization around this time is especially evident in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one of the final chapters of which finds many characters not only emigrating to Liberia, but also an extensive defense of their decision to do so (Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 436-443, in Vol. II., Chap. XLIII, "Results"). Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 236-252, describes how after the publication of her novel Stowe also attempted to bridge the sometimes rancorous divides among opponents of slavery.

[66] Harriet Beecher Stowe to William Lloyd Garrison, December 12, 1853, in [Garrison and Garrison], *William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. III, 397-398.

[67] Cain, "Introduction," 5, concisely describes the importance of free blacks for the original subscription list and initial years in print. Mayer, *All on Fire*, 107-109 and 115-117, further elaborates the importance of this constituency for the paper's early years, but notes a decline by the late 1840s due to increased competition (373). As the course of her letters makes clear, Stowe found the Evidences convincing, but she also assumed an opposition between "Uncle Tom" and "intelligent, well-balanced minds" that possess or have developed the faculty of discrimination and so can grapple with questioning of the Evidences. As Harriet Beecher Stowe to William Lloyd Garrison, [December 1853?], in [Garrison and Garrison], *William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. III, 398-400, further elaborates, "the poor and lowly" among whom the *Liberator* circulate "have no means of investigation [and] no habits of reasoning," and so while "*Uncle Tom*" has "*witness in himself*" and "cannot be shaken," the "paper breaks the bands of reverence and belief" among his "family whom he is trying to restrain and guide by the motives drawn from this book" (399; italics in the Garrisons' printing of the manuscript letter). Besides displaying her tendency to argue the immorality of actions from effects on families, Stowe's thinking echoes her belief that the African race has highly developed emotional virtues and the Anglo-Saxon race highly developed rational ones. In a comparison from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, the grieving Roman orator Cicero is hypothetically unable to derive comfort from the Bible, because "he must fill his head first with a thousand questions of authenticity of manuscript, and correctness of translation," while "to poor Tom, there it lay, just what he needed, so evidently true and divine that the possibility of a question never entered his simple head," to the point where "[i]t must be true; for, if not true, how could he live?" (Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 150-151, in Vol. I, Chap. XIV, "Evangeline"). Elsewhere, Stowe enumerates the "aptitude to repose on a superior mind" as part of the nature of "the negro race" (ibid., 186, in Vol. I, Chap. XVI, "Tom's Mistress and Her Opinions"). Taken all together, such statements raise the possibility that Stowe saw both lack of educational access and typical racial characteristics creating a situation in which many former slaves would be vulnerable to the *Liberator*'s skeptical questioning of the Evidences. Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 36-41, contextualizes Stowe's conception of the African race within a larger discussion of romantic racialism.

In response to these privately expressed concerns, Garrison published a rambling letter in the *Liberator* to one whom he termed "a highly esteemed friend, who is deeply interested in the cause of the oppressed, and sincerely desirous that nothing should be said or done, by any of its advocates, needlessly to alienate any from its support."[68] In a flurry of defensiveness, he brought forth numerous justifications for the contents of the *Liberator*. Towards the start, he appealed to principle and highlighted how his newspaper has "treatment of all conflicting opinions," as is proper for "the freedom of the human mind" and "the existence of a free press." Then, he continued on to an understated analogical defense of the objectionable views; he stated that "the more the Bible is sifted, the more highly it will be prized, if it be all holy and true," just like how the strength of anti-slavery and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are proven through assaults upon them. Later, he attempted to minimize the transgression of rejecting the Evidences by elevating the deviancy of other Christian groups who "are not Orthodox":

> You might as properly express 'grief and sorrow of heart,' because there are Unitarians, Universalists, Quakers, &c. &c.,-those who reject the ordinances, those who deny the doctrine of everlasting punishment, those who do not believe in the trinity, - to be found among the abolitionists….

Soon after this, he contested the prevalence of any objectionable views, first outright denying the existence "of a single member of the American Anti-Slavery Society, who admits that the Bible sanctions such a system as that of American slavery," then acknowledging "the convictions of a few individuals in the anti-slavery ranks, as to the pro-slavery character of some parts of the Bible." In closing, he even claimed that "the American Anti-Slavery Society is the only organization in this country, that has ever caused to be written, and circulated broadcast

[68] William Lloyd Garrison, "The Liberator – Free Discussion – The Bible Question," *Liberator*, December 23, 1853, 202, which is almost entirely reprinted in Cain, *William Lloyd Garrison*, 134-140, as selection 25, "Uncle Tom's Cabin Reconsidered".

throughout the land, a defence [sic] of the Bible against all its pro-slavery interpreters."[69] Lost in the shuffle of overlapping justifications, of course, is an explicit statement of Garrison's own views, as he attempted to allay Stowe's concerns and minimize the threat to "the Bible."

In another, subsequent private letter, Stowe responded to Garrison's piece in the *Liberator*.[70] On the one hand, she reiterated her concerns about his paper's "circulation among many of the poor and lowly [who] have no means of investigation, no habits of reasoning": "The Bible, as they at present understand it, is doing them great good," she stated, then again told Garrison that "[t]he whole tendency of this mode of proceeding is to lessen their respect and reverence for the Bible while you give them *nothing in its place*."[71] On the other hand, she asserted her confidence that the Evidences would hold up to the increased scrutiny that Garrison's actions had brought upon them:

> Discussion of the Evidences and of [the] Authenticity and Inspiration of the Bible, and of all theology, will come more and more, and I rejoice that they will… As to your views of the Bible: Do you examine *both* sides? Do you take pains to seek and to find the most able arguments against your views as well as for them? I take pains to read and study all upon your side—do you do the same as to mine?[72]

With that, the correspondence apparently ended in an impasse, and despite a cordial meeting at Stowe's home soon after, Garrison proceeded to use the *Liberator* to spread anti-traditional biblical criticism, even when presented in an inflammatory way. In 1860, for example, Garrison sporadically advertised a short book *Self-Contradictions of the Bible*, said to demonstrate "the utter absurdity of the dogma of plenary inspiration, showing as it does… the multitudinous self-contradictions of the Bible, which no ingenuity of interpretation can reconcile, excepting that

[69] Garrison was referring to Theodore Dwight Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery*…. (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838).
[70] Harriet Beecher Stowe to William Lloyd Garrison, [December 1853?].
[71] Ibid., 399 (italics in the Garrisons' printing of the manuscript letter).
[72] Ibid., 400 (italics in the Garrisons' printing of the manuscript letter).

which can prove white to be black, and black white"; beyond this, he even expressed "hope [that] its circulation will be extensive" and rejoiced "that a second edition has soon been called for."[73] Despite occasional resistance from and acquiescence to anti-slavery stalwarts like Stowe, Garrison had a lasting commitment to abolitionism, and thus to the use of anti-traditional biblical criticism to dismantle advocacy for slavery.

Because Garrison admitted that his views were controversial even when compared with other anti-slavery advocates, the number of similar sympathizers is difficult to estimate. The *Liberator,* which enjoyed a circulation of twenty five hundred to three thousand subscribers at its height, surely had some sympathizers among that number, including among free blacks.[74] Interestingly, Wright's letters to the *Liberator* contain accounts of resolutions passed at some anti-slavery conventions in northeastern Ohio in 1848. At one, in Painesville, two-thirds of an audience of both men and women reportedly voted without opposition in favor of Wright's resolution that "the Bible, if it sanctions slavery as the pro-slavery Church and Clergy of this nation declare that it does, is the enemy of man, and *must* be and *ought* to be spurned by every friend of Justice and Humanity."[75] At another, in Columbiana, a similar resolution was reportedly adopted by a smaller margin of approval, but before an audience of four thousand people.[76] Thus, even if the conventions attended by Wright were full of self-selecting radicals or

[73] Untitled review in the *Liberator,* September 14, 1860, 146. Garrison was referring to William Henry Burr, *Self-Contradictions of the Bible* (New York: A.J. Davis, 1860), which has also been reprinted with an introduction by R. Joseph Hoffmann in the series Classics of Biblical Criticism (n.p.: Prometheus Books, 1987).
[74] Cain, "Introduction," 5.
[75] Henry C[larke] Wright, "Is This Infidelity and Atheism? Then am I an Infidel and an Atheist," *The Liberator,* August 11, 1848, 127.
[76] H[enry] C[larke] Wright, "The Bible a Self-Evident Falsehood, if Opposed to Self-Evident Truth," *The Liberator,* September 29, 184[8], [153]. C.K.W., "Self-Contradictions of the Bible," *Liberator,* October 5, 1860, 160, praises the book and reiterates positions of anti-traditional biblical criticism, including unknown authorship. In response, [William Henry Burr], "Self-Contradictions of the Bible," *Liberator,* October 12, 1860, 162, endorses many views expressed in the previous letter. Further ads include "Self-Contradictions of the Bible," *Liberator,* April 12, 1861, 60, which advertises a seventh edition.

many who put great weight on the careful wording "if," his sentiments nevertheless almost certainly found traction among some noticeable portion of adherents to the abolitionist cause. Garrison, then, likely massaged the truth when writing to Stowe and minimizing the number of adherents. In any case, thanks to abolitionists like Garrison and Wright, anti-traditional criticism found circulation if not necessarily acceptance among their fellow reformers.

In comparison, the case of *Frederick Douglass' Paper* is instructive. The escaped slave and orator Frederick Douglass had begun an anti-slavery newspaper *The North Star* in 1847 with the support of international friends after over a year of lecturing in Britain.[77] Becoming *Frederick Douglass' Paper* in 1851, his paper endorsed use of party politics to end slavery, a stance that served to separate him from Garrison and his supporters. Nevertheless, because of the prominence of Garrison and like-minded people in the broader anti-slavery movement, Douglass was forced to deal with anti-traditional biblical criticism within the pages of his newspaper. After an Ohio minister attended an anti-slavery convention in Cincinnati, he wrote to Douglass declaring that "[e]very convert to Garrisonianism, here, as far as I know, has become more or less infidel to the Bible."[78] After a later letter from the same minister about a purportedly infidel speech of a prominent supporter of Garrison, Douglass himself stepped into the fray to allow clarification of the libeled speech just once, stating very clearly that "we have no intention to open our columns for a general discussion on the merits or claim of the bible to be regarded as a divine inspiration."[79] Nevertheless, within the year Douglass again had to address the mixed composition of the movement, when the absence of reformers like Henry

[77] *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Douglass, Frederick" (by Roy E. Finkenbine), http://www.anb.org/articles/15/15-00186.html (accessed October 11, 2012), helpfully summarizes Douglass' publishing activities in the context of disagreements in the anti-slavery movement.
[78] "Letter from A.R. Dempster." *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, June 3, 1852.
[79] A.R. Dempster, "Garrisonianism – Infidelity," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 24, 1852, upon which follows an untitled letter by Joseph Barker, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, November 12, 1852; and an untitled letter by A.R. Dempster, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, January 14, 1853. Douglass's statement introduces Barker's letter.

Clarke Wright from a New York anti-slavery meeting raised speculation that they stayed away to prevent damaging accusations of infidelity. "The Anti-Slavery platform is broad enough for the world to stand upon; and we have an interest in maintaining its breadth," Douglass declared. "The genuine abolitionist has little time to spend in examining the creeds of his companions… [H]e neither endorses nor passes judgment upon any man's creed."[80] Although holding to the view that the Bible advocated against slavery and thus almost certainly presuming traditional biblical criticism within the framework of the Evidences, Douglass tried to negotiate differences and prevent unnecessary division within the larger movement, as Garrison would with Stowe later that same year.[81] Without giving undue attention to the anti-traditional biblical criticism that he found objectionable, Douglass was also forced into tolerance and pragmatically pitching an anti-slavery tent big enough to provide room for the reformers who propounded it, when their biblical interpretation risked dividing anti-slavery ranks.

Woman's Rights and Ernestine Rose

In 1853, the Hartford Bible Convention convened in response to a call from those "solicitous for the advancement of the cause of Truth and Humanity" for a four-day "free discussion... for the purpose of freely and fully canvassing the ORIGIN, AUTHORITY, AND INFLUENCE OF THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES" among "all who feel an interest in this question."[82] There, two days after Andrew Jackson Davis opened the convention,

[80] [Frederick Douglass], "Infidelity," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, May 27, 1853.
[81] See, for example, [Frederick Douglass], *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, May 26, 1854, which is an untitled review of Thomas Wentworth Higginson's discourse "Scripture Idolatry." There, Douglass terms the Bible "an anti-slavery book" despite the fact that "slaveholders… pervert the Bible, catch up isolated passages, and torture it into a support of slavery."
[82] Andrew J. Graham, phonographic reporter, *Proceedings of the Hartford Bible Convention* (New-York: Published by the Committee, 1854), 9-10 (capitals in original), which reproduces the call since it was read into the minutes at the convention's opening.

beginning on the third day right after the first speech of William Lloyd Garrison, Ernestine Rose took the floor, and a dispute arose about speakers exceeding allotted time. "It seems to me that if any one [sic] has had any reason to find fault with regard to time, and has a right to claim the rest of the time during which this Convention shall sit, it is woman," she said to a cry of "Hear!" from the audience. "I think you ought to leave us, out of four days, at least one."[83] That very evening she gave her first speech of the event, starting out by claiming that "the errors of the Bible have been palmed off upon society as emanations from some superior wisdom" and that due to educational inequalities, "as woman has received less of the light of knowledge, superstition has had a stronger hold on her mind, and has enslaved her far more than man."[84] Continuing on, she noted both the Bible's "inconsistencies, vices, and cruelties" and how "it inculcates war, slavery, incest, rapine, murder, and all the vices and crimes that blind selfishness could suggest," uniting men "in nothing but persecution," while "to woman it has been like a millstone tied to her neck to keep her down."[85] Her speech proceeded to mixtures of hissing and applause, and was interrupted when someone opposed to her views "gained access to the gas-meter" and turned out the lights.[86] Unperturbed, she began speaking again when order was restored. "When the lights were extinguished, it reminded me of one of the true things we find in the Bible, that some there are 'who love darkness better than light,'" she declaimed to laughter and applause, referencing the Gospel of John. Resuming her speech, she continued her sentiments, building to a final climax in which she addressed "my sisters" and declared that

[83] Ibid., 256.
[84] Ibid., 268., corresponding to Ernestine Rose, *Mistress of Herself: Speeches and Letters of Ernestine L. Rose, Early Women's Rights Leader*, with a preface and introduction by Paula Doress-Worters and foreword by Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2008), 136. The full speech is in ibid., 267-279, and is fully reprinted in Rose, *Mistress of Herself*, 135-144.
[85] Ibid., 270 and 271, corresponding to Rose, *Mistress of Herself*, 138 and 138-139.
[86] Ibid., 274, corresponding to Rose, *Mistress of Herself*, 140-141.

"[t]he Bible has enslaved you, the churches have been built upon your subjugated necks."[87] "[D]o you wish to be free?" she asked in conclusion. "Then you must trample the Bible, the church, and the priests under your feet." As the transcriber then noted, "Mrs. Rose took her place amidst deafening applause, hisses, and confusion," upon which point the convention adjourned for the night. Soon afterwards writing to the Freethought newspaper the *Boston Investigator*, Rose remembered with satisfaction that speech and a subsequent one on the following day – "on the latter occasion without the Hall being darkened, for the priests could not turn off from us the light of the sun, or depend upon it, they would!"[88] If they had, Rose's memorable views on the Bible would have been kept from her sisters in the audience, including several black women.[89]

Quite a different path than Garrison's led Rose to appear at the Hartford Bible Convention.[90] Born to the Jewish Susmond Potowski family in Poland in 1810, she moved by herself in her late teens to Berlin, where she likely adopted the name Ernestine and where she supported herself in part by selling room-deodorizing papers of her own invention. A move to

---

[87] Ibid., 279, corresponding to Rose, *Mistress of Herself*, 144.

[88] Ernestine L. Rose, "The Hartford Bible Convention," *Boston Investigator*, June 29, 1853, 2, corresponding to Rose, *Mistress of Herself*, 145-146, quote appearing on 146.

[89] A diverse audience that included black women can be inferred from contemporary hostile accounts of the Hartford Bible Convention. "Anti-Bible Convention," *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 9, 1853, quotes a letter from an attendee describing the "assembly" as "not numerous" and "motley, there being a sprinkling of blacks, persons with unshorn beards, women of a very quarter-of-a-dollarish air, and men of longing and enthusiastic aspects." "The Hartford Ismite [sic] Convention," *Liberator*, June 17, 1853, 96, reprints a hostile account from the *New York Herald* subtitling the convention a "Meeting of Philosophers, Theologians, Thinkers, Strong-minded Women, Spiritual Rappers, Atheists, and Negroes" and stating that "[t]he sable portion of our population was but feebly represented by two ladies of color, who, if we may judge from the frequent exhibition of their 'ivories,' thought the whole matter the best joke in the world." The first account may have minimized attendance. Rose, "Hartford Bible Convention," 2, corresponding to Rose, *Mistress of Herself*, 145, notes that the hall "was well filled at every session" and "[i]n the evenings, especially, it was crowded, every standing-place being occupied even to the outside of the doors."

[90] The most thorough helpful recent source on Rose's life is Carol A. Kolmerten, *The American Life of Ernestine L. Rose* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999). Paula Doress-Walters, "Introduction: Ernestine L. Rose, Early Women's Rights Advocate," in Rose, *Mistress of Herself*, 1-55, takes account of Kolmerten's work and is a more concise account of Rose's life and its contexts. Yuri Suhl, *Ernestine L. Rose and the Battle for Human Rights* (New York: Reynal & Company, 1959) treats some aspects of Rose's life in greater depth than Kolmerten's more recent biography, but his book is less useful because of the lack of footnoting to quoted sources.

England in 1830 resulted in a fateful exposure to the socialist philosophy of industrialist Robert Owen, as well as marriage; in 1836, she and her husband left for the United States as part of a larger group resolved to set up an Owenite utopian community. That dream did not survive the voyage, and the couple settled in New York's Lower East Side, he running a silversmithing shop, she selling perfume, and both participating at Freethought functions, including the notorious Tom Paine birthday celebrations. Although not learning English until her twenties, Rose very quickly began lecturing at these functions. Soon enough, in a pattern that would last the rest of her time in America, Rose left her husband behind in New York to work as she undertook itinerant lecturing across most of the U.S., treating a staggering array of oppositional subculture-typical topics like freethought, socialism, and social reforms such as woman's rights and abolitionism – incidentally, causes for which she and Garrison often shared the platform. Both writing to and being written about in innumerable papers, Rose was nationally renowned as a platform orator. Apart from occasional periods of rest for health reasons, she maintained her high level of activism until her move back to England in 1869, where she severely ratcheted back her activities, only occasionally lecturing and writing to newspapers. Apart from an 1873-1874 trip back to the United States, she spent the rest of her life in Europe, dying in England in 1892, having directed a friend to keep religious adherents away from her deathbed in case she became addled and they took advantage of her illness to convert her.

Importantly, during her time in the United States, Rose's life frequently intersected with the activities that coalesced into a recognizable movement for woman's rights in a variety of arenas.[91] The early decades of the nineteenth century saw scattered efforts to expand educational

[91] Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Right Movement in the United States*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), esp. 23-102, is a helpful survey of the early stages of the American woman's rights movement. Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Women's Rights Emerges within the Antislavery Movement, 1830-1870: A Brief History with Documents*, The Bedford Series in History and Culture (Boston:

opportunities for women through private academies and public education, and eventually through access to or creation of colleges with curricula similar to men's, a theme Rose would take up in her speeches. In fact, her public speaking was a controversial and politicized activity for women, as it had been for the slightly earlier immigrant and fellow freethinker Fanny Wright.[92] Furthermore, since women were still largely prevented from owning property, making wills, or retaining guardianship of children during the 1840s, Rose was active in early efforts to change state laws, including through the successful use of petition drives in New York. Roughly concurrently, abolitionism indirectly helped such efforts to professionalize and institutionalize, both because women formed and ran female auxiliary organizations and because the refusal to seat American female delegates at an 1840 international anti-slavery convention in London was an impetus to convene the famous Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, which led to successive conventions at which suffrage eventually became established as the dominant goal. Although not present at Seneca Falls, Rose soon attended succeeding conventions, including the first explicitly national ones, and frequently spoke, served in official capacities, and garnered publicity through letters to newspapers, which also sometimes printed transcripts of her speeches. Thus, although Rose's concerns and contributions were not limited or even primarily devoted to what became a recognizable woman's rights movement, she prominently participated in these circles and has been remembered and honored as an early feminist, from the nineteenth century through today. Accordingly, her careful advocacy of anti-traditional biblical criticism

---

Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), gathers many important documents and is especially helpful in drawing attention to the role of freed black women and the development of anti-black and anti-immigrant justifications for suffrage. Doress-Worters, "Introduction", in *Mistress of Herself*, 1-55, sets out and thoroughly contextualizes many aspects of Rose's life. Note the observation that Rose "was among the first to embrace and lecture on the controversial 'Higher Criticism' of the Bible" (37), although Doress-Worters attributes only German academic rather than acknowledges any deist and freethought origins to this development.

[92] Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 278-283, discusses the relationship of an earlier, more widespread tradition of female Christian preaching to the more radical and reform-minded platform speakers.

within official forums of the woman's rights movement is representative of how once again anti-traditional biblical criticism and recognition of "the Bible" as a barrier to social reform could co-occur with commitment to a particular social reform, as was the case with William Lloyd Garrison and abolitionism. Similarly, as was also the case with Garrison and abolitionism, anti-traditional biblical criticism met with tension within the movement, and thus necessitated tolerance as well as pragmatic decisions about when or even whether to bring up the subject, out of a concern to avoid dissensions in the ranks of reformers.[93]

Although Rose could deliver strong and memorable "trample the Bible" rhetoric in a forum like the Hartford Bible Convention, several national conventions and a speaking tour show that she could choose to be much more judicious and circumspect when speaking on behalf of woman's rights.[94] In fact, she could at times sidestep the question of what "the Bible" said and welcome the aid of "the Bible" on behalf of women, then nevertheless oversee adoption of a resolution that recognized popular interpretations of "the Bible" as a hindrance to reform.

At the Third National Woman's Rights Convention, held in Syracuse, New York, in 1852 (four years after Seneca Falls and Susan B. Anthony's first national convention, in fact), Rose was on the business committee, but her most memorable contribution came in response to a speech and resolution of Antoinette Brown.[95] Brown, a graduate of Oberlin College who had received theological training and who would become America's first female ordained minister within the year, "took up the Bible argument" on the evening of the second of three days, as the

[93] David Hempton, *Evangelical Disenchantment: Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 113, likewise notes this diversity in biblical interpretation within the early American feminist movement, in his case study of Sarah Grimké, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Frances Willard.
[94] Kolmerten, *American Life*, 222, observes, "Although many believed Rose herself was detrimental to the woman's movement and had frightened people from the platform because of her atheism, Rose had been careful to avoid talking about religion on the woman's rights stages, saving her freethought comments primarily for Infidel and Owenite conventions and for the pages of the *Boston Investigator*. She had avoided controversial topics like divorce for the same reasons."
[95] Ibid., 94-101, covers this event.

Convention's *Proceedings* relate.[96] For the consideration of the assembled body, she at once offered a resolution:

> *Resolved,* That the Bible recognizes the rights, duties and privileges of Woman as a public teacher, as every way equal with those of man; that it enjoins upon her no subjection that is not enjoined upon him; and that it truly and practically recognizes neither male nor female in Christ Jesus.

As with anyone pronouncing the Bible a unity with a singular position on an issue, Brown could brook no contradictions, or she could acknowledge them momentarily, only to show them as seeming contradictions within a greater harmonizing interpretation. Accordingly, her following speech showered her listeners with arguments for contextualizing away problematic verses, whether to interpret female submission in light of other commands for "a Christian submission due from man towards man, and from man towards woman," or to see injunctions against female teaching as recognizing that "teaching in a dictatorial spirit... is prohibited both in public and private" while "a proper kind of teaching is not prohibited."[97] Although not facing off against an advocate of the opposite position, Brown was squarely arguing within the Evidences, the implicit framework of the dueling parsons whom Stowe would soon portray in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Rose, however, would have none of that, as she got up to speak immediately after Brown. "For my part, I see no need to appeal to any written authority, particularly when it is so obscure and indefinite as to admit of different interpretations," she said, and, tacitly pointing out its contradictory nature, she speculated on how the Bible could have been quoted against seekers of justice such as the "the inhabitants of Boston [who] converted their harbor into a tea-pot, rather

---

[96] *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Syracuse, September 8th, 9th & 10th, 1852* (Syracuse, NY: J.E. Masters, 1852), 66. *American National Biography Online* , s.v. "Blackwell, Antoinette Louisa Brown" (by Carol Lasser), http://www.anb.org/articles/15/15-00064.html (accessed October 16, 2012), is complemented by Elizabeth Cazden, *Antoinette Blackwell Brown: A Biography* (Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press, 1983).
[97] *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention*, 67 (noting 1 Peter 5:5, Ephesians 5:21, and Romans 12:10) and 68 (discussing 1 Timothy 2:12).

than submit to unjust taxes," as well as the American rebels who "rose in the might of their right to throw off the British yoke."[98] In response, she offered a different resolution that did not mention the Bible at all, but rather asked "not for our rights as a gift of charity, but as an act of justice... in accordance with the principles of republicanism."[99] Shortly after Rose finished speaking, and before adjournment for the day, Rose's resolution – not Brown's – was adopted.[100]

On the next and final day of the convention, Brown's resolution resurfaced. In the morning session, Congregational minister Thomas Wentworth Higginson bluntly stated that "[t]he question is, whether this Convention recognizes the paramount authority of the Bible," because "[t]here is a contrary impression abroad... and it is likely to do this cause great injury."[101] At the next session, Brown stood forth again to recommend her resolution, recognizing that "our cause was based on the law of right – the equality of humanity itself," and that "though we believe the Bible is in harmony with this idea, we do not base it upon the Bible." Nevertheless, she continued, "[S]till there *must* be some right interpretation of the Bible."[102] Rose again responded:

> But there is no time for such discussion; we have met here for nobler purposes than to discuss Theology. We need no such authority. Our claims are on the broad basis of Human Rights, irrespective of what Moses, Paul, or Peter, may say. Those who have nothing better to do, may dispute about these authorities. It has done mischief enough.[103]

At that point, the convention's vice president, Paulina W. Davis, stepped into the fray, remembering that "[i]n the early days of Anti-Slavery, great pains were taken to show that the Bible was against Slavery," but "opponents coming forward, the time of Conventions was too

[98] Ibid., 68 and 68-69.
[99] Ibid., 69.
[100] Ibid., 74.
[101] Ibid., 88.
[102] Ibid., 91 (italics added).
[103] Ibid., 91.

much occupied by the bandying of Scripture texts."[104] President Lucretia Mott then declared herself to have "some familiarity with the Scriptures," but she then went on to say that she "should have no objection, at a suitable time, to discuss this question."[105] Her following move to table Brown's resolution met with unanimous approval. How many of those present accepted anti-traditional biblical criticism is unclear, but the convention agreed with Rose insofar as they thought that the issue was best left unaddressed, at least for the moment.

Rose's response to Brown, however, also demonstrated her appreciation for having an ally who could support woman's rights through biblical interpretation within the framework of the Evidences. As she had first gotten up to speak at the convention, Rose had briefly recalled a legislative battle in Indiana that was thwarted by "the influence of a minister... bringing the whole force of the Bible argument to bear against the right of woman to her property."[106] Although disdaining to make any such argument herself, Rose regretfully reflected, "Had Miss Brown been there, she might have beaten him with his own weapons." Less than two years later, Rose would cooperate with Brown in a spurt of political activism perhaps founded upon these regrets. At the beginning of 1855, the two travelled and lectured together in upstate New York, along with Susan B. Anthony, who primarily devoted herself to gathering signatures for legislative petitions.[107] Although few texts or transcriptions from the speeches of such tours survive, their appearance together before a committee of the New York Assembly in Albany is likely representative of their approach.[108] Although questioning her non-Unitarian Congregationalism around that time, Brown apparently had no qualms about allowing herself to

[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid, 92.
[106] Ibid., 68.
[107] Kolmerten, *American Life*, 164-170.
[108] "Just and Equal Rights of Woman," *Boston Investigator*, March 14, 1855; and *Lily*, June 15, 1855, 95, reprinting an article from the *Albany Register*.

be understood as a Christian, citing the plight of woman and telling the men before her to "not cast contempt into her face and that of her God" and that "the justice of her claims... are in accordance with the law of God."[109] Rose, on the other hand, stuck to appeals to the principles of "our Revolutionary fathers," a system that included women, in her eyes. At the Third National Woman's Right Convention, Rose had stated that because she supported "perfect freedom of thought and expression," she could not object "to Miss Brown's expression of her opinion on the Bible, provided only, I am not required to acquiesce in it, if I do not agree with it; and I do not."[110] When touring with Brown, however, Rose was content to let any difference in opinions on the Bible stay in the background, as each spoke for woman's rights on the basis that she thought best.[111]

Despite this frequent pragmatism, Rose's stated view that "the Bible" opposed progress did seem to have occasionally surfaced and found acceptance within the woman's rights movement. Just prior to her lecture tour with Brown, Rose had presided over the Fifth National Woman's Rights Convention, held in Philadelphia in the fall of 1854.[112] In response to a combative minister who "quoted numerous texts... and asserted that no lesson is more plainly and frequently taught in the Bible, than woman's subjection," lengthy discussion ensued, including from vice president Lucretia Mott, who lamented that "the Bible has been ill-used [and] turned over and over as in every reform."[113] Although observing that "the practice has

---

[109] Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell*, 74-94, discusses Brown's ordination and increasing doubts, as well as her debate with Stephen Foster about the Bible at the 1853 national Woman's Rights Convention.
[110] *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention*, 91.
[111] At least for the papers published during the duration of their lecture tour, the woman's rights paper the *Lily* also did not encourage disputes over biblical interpretation. The only real discussion is Anemone, "The Bible," *Lily*, March 1, 1855, 36, which defends biblical interpretation upon the foundations of the Evidences after first observing, "Many reformers of the day speak lightly of the Bible."
[112] Kolmerten, *American Life*, 161-164.
[113] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1 (1848-1861), 2nd ed. (Rochester, NY: Charles Mann, 1889), 380, from a full discussion of the convention on 375-386. No proceedings seem to exist for this convention, as mentioned by Kolmerten, *American Life*, 161n6.

been, to turn over its pages to find example and authority for the wrong, for the existing abuses of society," Mott had not apparently given up hope that the Bible had a single true voice, and offered several rebuttals to establish its support for woman's rights.[114] Rather than move beyond Mott's positive evaluation of the Bible, however, the convention moved toward a negative one, recognizing how the Bible had been used to obstruct woman's rights. After a typical statement of the Bible's mixed nature, which necessitates that "[t]he mind sits in judgment" and "[i]f there be truth... we take it; if error, we discard it," William Lloyd Garrison, a member of the convention's business committee, offered a dual-part resolution recognizing that "the most determined opposition... is from the clergy generally, whose teachings of the Bible are intensely inimical to the equality of woman with man" and that "whatever any book may teach, the rights of no human being are dependent upon or modified thereby."[115] His resolution passed unanimously, and thus under Rose's presidency, the convention equivocally ceded "the Bible" to the opponents of woman's rights. Although Rose was unusual because of her Jewish background, immigrant status, and Freethought adherence, at least Garrison and likely some others at the convention were equally disposed to the anti-traditional biblical criticism referenced in his speech and in accord with the resolution's sentiments.

The presence of anti-traditional biblical criticism in the woman's rights movement seems to have been more muted than within Freethought and in abolitionism. Positions such as Rose's and Garrison's that were premised on the recognition of contradictions and the mixed nature of the Bible suggest a larger, unexpressed set of beliefs that can be found in other reform circles. Similarly, Brown's insistence on finding a single pro-or-con position within the Bible suggests the framework of the Evidences that had been broadly established within American culture.

[114] Stanton et al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 380.
[115] Ibid., 382 and 383.

However submerged this fundamental difference in biblical interpretation was, however, it ultimately was no different from its expression within the contemporary anti-slavery movement, and reformers of different stripes had to figure out how to negotiate these differences as they worked to advocate for their cause. Unlike the pro-reform Freethought movement, which was ultimately non-Christian, movements devoted to particular reforms such as woman's rights attracted a range of members with a wider range of views on the Bible. Because of this, anti-traditional biblical criticism could be contested among these movements and had to be negotiated as a source of tension while working norms of tolerance were established.

Overall, the grounding humanitarianism of various social reform movements could occur alongside an accessible discourse of anti-traditional biblical criticism, which was issued as part of advocacy in order to destabilize opposing positions of an ultimately monovocal Bible propped up upon the arguments of the Evidences. This commitment to moral behavior towards other people was also found in the Evidences and claimed there to be found in the highest form in the Bible, but among many social reformers it almost constituted its own religion from which more prevalent forms of religion might be critiqued. In an organ like Abner Kneeland's *Boston Investigator*, such advocacy did not give rise to tension, since the authorship and readership consisted primarily of Freethought adherents. In an abolitionist paper like William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* or in the conventions and fora frequented by woman's rights advocate Ernestine Rose, however, tension could more easily arise due to the presence of allies who were Evidences-believing Christians like Harriet Beecher Stowe or eventual minister Antoinette Brown. These allies clashed with the variant Christian views of Garrison, who disputed major parts of the Evidences like the long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions associated

with the gospels, and of course the Freethought of Rose. Nevertheless, all parties sought to negotiate these tensions for the sake of the larger cause, and would even participate in otherwise intellectually schizophrenic advocacy wherein an ultimately monovocal Bible was claimed on behalf of their chosen social reform at the same time that the Evidences that supported an ultimately monovocal Bible were attacked in order to challenge an opposing position also associated with it. In any case, anti-traditional biblical criticism appeared within these movements, and gained circulation if not always acceptance. Furthermore, amidst such a change in biblical interpretation, there began to emerge among the non-Christians from Paine to Kneeland and Rose certain Christians like William Lloyd Garrison, who could contemplate the possibility of and even accept a historical Jesus.

Thus, for their acceptance of anti-traditional biblical criticism, figures like Kneeland and Rose are more important to the history of biblical interpretation in the U.S. than their opponents, and someone like Garrison is doubly important, once for anti-traditional biblical criticism, and once more for his barely glimpsed, in some ways novel Christian theology that was capable of incorporating the resultant historical Jesus. Altogether, the humanitarianism typifying various social reforms could be but was not necessarily associated with the abandonment of long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels, an important change in biblical interpretation occurring at this time.

CHAPTER THREE: BIBLICAL CRITICISM AND TRANSCENDENTALISM

"The Bible, said Mr. Alcott, is God in words. But the Bible is not the only Revelation of God. There are many Bibles to those who think."

– From an 1835 Boston school lesson recorded by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody.

"All the free-thinking in the world could not destroy the Iliad; how much less the truths of the Bible."

– From an 1842 Boston discourse by Theodore Parker.

Of approximately the same generation, New Englanders Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (1804-1894) and Theodore Parker (1810-1860) shared more than personal connections, and partook in many of the same organizations and intellectual interests.[1] Connected through the woman who would become Parker's wife, a former student of Peabody's, the schoolteacher and the minister were acquainted by 1835, and would maintain a close friendship and exchange personal letters through 1842, when Peabody's well-intentioned defense to others of Parker's troubled marriage led to a quiet coolness from him. Each attended meetings of Boston's Transcendental Club, which bequeathed its name to the movement with which each would become associated. Each wrote for the *Dial*, the legendary Transcendentalist journal published out of a bookshop begun and run by Peabody in a new phase of her career. Furthermore, each participated in the professional activities of the other, with Parker buying books from Peabody's shop, and Peabody attending services to hear Parker's sermons. Each in command of many languages, they both read and thought widely, too, with special attention to the latest in theology.

[1] Most helpful in detailing concrete connections between Peabody and Parker is Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Choice quotes from their most famous works show this apparently similar interest in and attention to theology. Through Peabody's 1835 *Record of a School*, she passed on a resonant observation of her close collaborator Bronson Alcott's, that "[t]here are many Bibles to those who think," which parallels the implication from Parker's 1842 *Discourse on Matters Pertaining to Religion*, that resilient truths can be found in both the Iliad and the Bible.[2] And yet, their fundamental agreement that theological truth could be found in many places hid a great divide between them: Peabody avowed this fact within the widespread theological framework of the Evidences, whereas Parker had moved beyond the Evidences. Tellingly, the lesson from Peabody and Alcott's school moved from affirmation of the Bible to affirmation of truth outside of it, a move from the sure to the unsure, whereas Parker's *Discourse* made the Bible a preeminent source of truth and took great pains to state its worth, a defensive move because he was already threatening many Christians of his time by jettisoning the harmonization and authorship traditions that they held. In other words, although each distinctly favored the same particular argument positing a universal intuitive recognition of truth, Peabody held this conception as part of the overall set of arguments that Parker came to largely abandon.

Within this chapter, both Parker and Peabody will be used to examine how biblical criticism could surface in the Transcendentalist movement.

First, Parker will be examined, to show the presence of anti-traditional biblical criticism within Transcendentalism. Because of his great learning, his early thought will also be used to establish the similarity between learned and accessible forms of biblical criticism and add nuance to the nature of German learned criticism: through Parker's writings, learned positions can be

[2] [Elizabeth Palmer Peabody], *Record of a School: Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture* (Boston: James Munroe and Company; New York: Leavitt, Lord, and Co.; Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1835), 125. Theodore Parker, *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1842), 375.

seen to exist on a spectrum with accessible forms of the same ideas, and the positions of learned Germans can be seen to not necessarily include abandonment of harmonization and authorship traditions, despite blunt polemics about "German infidelity" that were typical of learned contexts of the time and that also surfaced in Parker's early thought.[3] Parker's later thought will be examined to show the presence of anti-traditional biblical criticism, as well as how he made his accompanying theology of intuition the polemical line of battle, not anti-traditional biblical criticism *per se*. Additionally, his rendering anti-traditional biblical criticism accessible will also be nuanced and its presumed influence somewhat diminished, since scattered evidence suggests that some part of his audience had already been exposed to similar material through other channels.

Second, Peabody will be examined, to show how theological inclinations similar to Parker's could co-exist with adherence to the Evidences, as part of a range of theologies existing within Unitarianism.[4] Thus, contrary to the occasional perception of Transcendentalism as a theological movement standing in strong tension to much of the Evidences, its distinctive theological emphases will be shown to co-exist with the more traditional framework of the Evidences, even as locations of truth noticeably broadened beyond the Bible and led to other claims causing controversy.[5]

---

[3] Elizabeth A. Clark, *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennyslvania Press, 2011), 3-5.

[4] For example, see William R. Hutchison, *The Transcendentalist Ministers: Church Reform in the New England Renaissance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 207, which perceptively argues that "the religious discussions of the Transcendentalist period must be viewed as a spectrum rather than as a polarized field."

[5] For the best treatment placing treatment placing Transcendentalism into conversation with the Evidences, see E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 434-451. A figure such as Peabody, however, calls into question Holifield's overly dichotomous position that "[t]he transcendentalist controversy… pitt[ed] defenders of the external evidences against proponents of the internal" (434). Thus, a broader reexamination of the movement seems warranted, to determine how many other figures like Peabody existed – that is, to see how representative her thinking was among the broader spectrum of views associated with Transcendentalism, a spectrum perceptively noticed by scholars like Hutchison in an era before Holifield's contributions.

All in all, these case studies will show the abandonment of authorship and harmonization traditions in favor of a historical Jesus within a larger movement where theology created room for but did not necessitate its adoption. Unlike earlier deist adherents, this adoption took place amidst a mixed constituency like the roughly contemporary social reformers and the later spiritualists, some of whom like Parker constituted a major development because they were self-professed Christians who worked with the idea of a historical Jesus. Thus, these Christians outside of hierarchical control joined the long-standing non-Christian constituency of historical Jesus advocates, and provided more variegation in the domain of oppositional subcultures.

Transcendentalism

Although Unitarianism absorbed its once transgressive theological emphases by the very end of the nineteenth century, the Transcendentalist movement of the 1830s predominantly functioned as a loose liberalizing reform movement within Unitarianism, itself an earlier liberalizing reform movement within the New England Congregational churches among which Calvinist theology had held sway.[6] Largely a regional network of people sharing a literate and progressive bent and bearing associations to mercantile aristocracies, Unitarianism bequeathed these rarified characteristics to the Transcendentalist movement, the social outreach efforts of which never managed to bridge class divides of the industrializing seaboard cities and flower

[6] The most helpful general overviews are Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (1966; Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1976); and Hutchison, *Transcendentalist Ministers*. The relationship of Unitarian and Transcendentalist theology to the Evidences is best delineated in Holifield, *Theology in America*; and Grodzins, *American Heretic*, both of which tend to rely on a more accurate and less confusing "Evidences" terminology, in comparison to Wright's "supernatural rationalism" (4). More detailed treatments include Conrad Edick Wright, ed., *American Unitarianism, 1805-1865* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society and Northeastern University Press, 1989); Conrad Wright, *The Unitarian Controversy: Essays on American Unitarian History* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1994); and Anne C. Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), which helpfully examines charity and evangelism attempts within a movement too often analyzed solely in terms of intellectual history.

into successful evangelism. In any case, because their polity included congregational calling of ministers but no large-scale denominational body that could exert formal authority over local decision-making, these churches became sources of theological innovation and thus places where some could and did question harmonization and authorship traditions.

In terms of Unitarianism, liberalizing currents initially took root *within* the theological framework of the Evidences. Theologically, an increasing emphasis on free will and virtuous behavior came to couple with the belief that the Trinity was not part of the monovocal Bible – that is, the normative, ultimately singular revelation contained within the New Testament. Ministers who held these beliefs especially came to the fore among Congregational churches through the 1805 election of Henry Ware as Harvard's Professor of Divinity, the increasing prominence of organizations of like-minded individuals such as the Boston Ministerial Association, and the subsequent creation of characteristic publications like the *North American Review* (1815) and *Christian Examiner* (1824). Unitarians also were a visible constituency within various polemical exchanges, as well as through widely recognized theological statements like William Ellery Channing's 1819 sermon "Unitarian Christianity".

In terms of Transcendentalism, further liberalizing currents originating *within* but sometimes moving *beyond* the theological framework of the Evidences arose to prominence in the mid-1830s, jarring some Congregational churches just after the Unitarian movement had coalesced and quieted. Much more loosely constituted than the Unitarians, this Transcendentalist movement nevertheless had its own associated organizations such as the Transcendentalist Club (1836), publications such as the *Dial* (1840-44), and even some characteristic theological statements such as Emerson's 1838 Divinity School Address. In general, their theology typically took one strand of the Evidences – namely, that Christian truth

could be intuitively recognized by all people – and then emphasized this strand to a degree unusual among Unitarians at large. To the extent that arguments about intuition were carefully developed amidst benign neglect of other strands of the Evidences, this Transcendentalist theology could be relatively uncontroversial, as in the work of Peabody. Yet, this innovation tended to eclipse and compete with the other strands, most famously the convincing power of the miracles described in the New Testament, a focus of particular disbelief and thus polemical attack by many Transcendentalists. Other strands were affected, too, though, and these strands included the harmonization and authorship traditions passed on as part of the Evidences and eventually questioned by Parker and others like him. During the course of the nineteenth century, theologies such as Parker's were excluded decade after decade by Unitarian associations and theological statements, only to merge with the tradition as stalwarts died and generational change allowed for their recognition during the 1890s. In this early period, however, the heavy emphasis on intuition was a Transcendentalist distinctive, and could provide theological room for questioning of harmonization and authorship traditions by people like Parker, even as others like Peabody endorsed the overall set of the Evidences.

Theodore Parker: The Learned Made Accessible

Best known for his study of the Bible, innovative theology, and abolitionist activities, Theodore Parker (1810-1860) overcame an atypically modest background and other unusual circumstances to become a successful but peculiar and ostracized Unitarian minister, the singular vocation giving birth to his multiple legacies.[7] Born a child of farmers in Lexington,

[7] *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Parker, Theodore" (by Henry Warner Bowden), http://www.anb.org/articles/08/08-01925.html (accessed December 2, 2015). Although only extending through 1846, the currently standard and most helpful account of Parker's life is Grodzins, *American Heretic*, especially in its careful, perceptive attention to the development of Parker's theology (e.g. 59-73, 137ff., and 248ff.).

Massachusetts, Parker nevertheless went to study at Harvard. He never stayed in residence or received a collegiate degree, but passed all examinations in 1830-31, thus gaining entrance to Harvard Divinity School, from which he graduated in 1836. There, he also took over and co-edited the *Scriptural Interpreter* (1831-1836), a subscription journal aiming to provide Unitarian families with informed exegesis of the Bible. Both ordained and married in 1837, he was settled at a church in West Roxbury, from which he was able to stay in contact with the intellectual life of Boston, including the activities of the epochal Transcendental Club. Exposed during the late 1830s to biblical criticism undermining some foundations of evidential theology – most notably, Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*¸ which he read in 1836 and studied more deeply in 1839-40 – Parker eventually accepted these positions and responded to them by developing intuition into an independent basis for theology in the style of Wilhelm Martin Leberecht De Wette, a figure more important to Parker than other theologians like Friedrich Schleiermacher who are more remembered today.[8] Famously essaying these ideas in his 1841 sermon "A Discourse on the Transient and Permanent in Christianity," Parker also stated them at greater length and more lastingly in his *Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion*, first delivered as well-attended lectures in 1841-42 and then in multiple editions from 1842 onward. Because his radicalism resulted in exclusion from typical Unitarian publication venues and many pulpit exchanges, Parker relied on atypical publication outlets like the *Dial*, not to mention the support of the public at large, who packed the pews and even the seats of the rented theaters that at times constituted his church, as well as patronized his appearances on the lecture circuits that came to dominate his life; in a sense, Parker's relatively peculiar background for a Unitarian minister became mirrored by the relative peculiarity of his audience and congregation, all together

[8] Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 70.

constituting an oddly heterodox openness even among the elite but otherwise numerically small and regionally limited Unitarians. Increasingly involved with abolitionism due to vagaries of his personal path among oppositional subcultures, Parker tremendously deepened his radicalism during the 1850s, participating in vigilante committees resisting the Fugitive Slave Law and aiding insurrectionist John Brown. Seeking to recover from overwork through travel, Parker died of tuberculosis in Italy in 1860 while on a recuperative journey overseas.

Due to how his great learning translated into accessible efforts like the *Scriptural Interpreter* (1831-36) and the *Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* (1842), Parker constitutes a helpful figure from which to give nuance on two points to the nature of learned biblical criticism: learned biblical criticism figured into a wider conversation also including accessible biblical criticism; and learned biblical criticism, even that of Germans, did not necessarily constitute biblical criticism undermining the Evidences, since it could be quite traditional and thus did not entirely live up to the reputation of "German infidelity." In fact, the *Scriptural Interpreter* and the *Discourse* are useful moments of insight into this range of possibilities, as the *Scriptural Interpreter* under a more youthful Parker is relatively traditional in its stances on authorship and harmonization, while the *Discourse* moves beyond these same positions on authorship and harmonization.

In its details, the two co-edited later volumes of the *Scriptural Interpreter* provide a helpful glimpse into Parker's intellectual environment and development. In that work's pages is visible his access to both learned and accessible criticism presuming the framework of the Evidences, as well as a milieu in which a concern with German infidelity is belied by the traditional nature of much translated material and the relatively traditional beliefs of Parker himself about biblical authorship and harmonization.

First, the writings constituting the *Scriptural Interpreter* includes not only learned opuses of professors still known today, but also other forgotten accessible works and even polemics, all of which presume the theological framework of the Evidences. A ten-page span in the fifth volume is especially telling in the variety of articles and their unanimity in presumption of the era's dominant theological framework. An editorial comment not only introduces "an unpublished manuscript… translation… of a portion of [J.G.] Eichhorn's Introduction to the Old Testament," in which "the Professor at Jena and at Göttingen and one of the most learned men of Germany… discusses the question of the genuineness of the books of Moses, and shows that they must have been composed at the time and by the person to whom they are commonly ascribed," but also does so in rebuttal to objections "made by infidels among ourselves."[9] Close on its heels follows an introduction from an 1830 London octodecimo named *A Guide to the Practical Reading of the Bible* under a sectional heading "On the Internal Evidence for the Genuineness of the New Testament," a footnote of which even mentions the particular infidel "author of the Diegesis… Robert Taylor."[10] Amidst this new translation of a previously inaccessible learned production and glancing references to better known infidel objections, the Evidences were clearly under attack.

Second, these same writings evinced concern for the blanket infidelity of Germans, despite the simultaneous use of German works to buttress the Evidences. In at least one article, the concerns with broader infidelity become modulated into a briefly aired concern to bolster "the evidences of our religion" against specifically "German Infidelity."[11] Despite this unqualified suspicion of Germans, however, the translated work of Germans found in the

[9] Editor, "Translations from Eichhorn," *Scriptural Interpreter*, vol. 5 (Boston: Leonard C. Bowles: 1835), 31-32.
[10] Ed[itor], "On the Internal Evidence for the Genuineness of the New Testament," *Scriptural Interpreter*, vol. 5, 38 and 40.
[11] W. Silsbee, "The Resurrection of Christ," *Scriptural Interpreter*, vol. 5, 262, [263].

Scriptural Interpreter actually largely upholds the Evidences, a trend already visible in the editorial discussion of excerpts from Eichhorn's treatment of the Pentateuch, since that excerpt evinces a larger commitment to long-standing authorship traditions, wherein biblical books "must have been composed at the time and by the person to whom they are commonly ascribed."

Third, Parker's work at this point in his life largely upholds older authorship and harmonization traditions in both his original prose and his published translations.

As was true more broadly, adherence to such traditions necessary to the Evidences could occur on a spectrum, with the gospels serving as the last non-negotiable biblical bulwark. In fact, the opening editorial essay of the fifth volume of the *Scriptural Interpreter* acknowledged this phenomenon amidst assurances of the triumph of the Evidences. In an essay "On Inspiration," the very first paragraph accepts that theological framework's logic and portrays its titular subject as the natural outcome of inquiry, or, in other words, that "the end at which those who question the correctness of… views are looking… is the establishment of Christianity as a divine religion."[12] Within this logic, continuity of authorship traditions such as those of the gospels is assumed, since "[t]he question of the truth or authority of the Bible rests on the credibility of the writers [who] may be regarded as witnesses testifying to facts which fell under their observation or to communications with which they were favored."[13] Importantly, the essay acknowledges that "the Bible was not written at once"; instead, it states that "[e]ach part should be examined on its own merits… on the ground of its own claims to reverence," and then it raises a few examples of varied positions on authorship such as how "I may hesitate about the divine origin of the last book of the New Testament, while I maintain… the Evangelical

[12] Editor, "On Inspiration," *Scriptural Interpreter*, vol. 5, 2.
[13] Ibid., 6.

narratives and the Apostolical [sic] Epistles."[14] Quite explicitly, some advocates of the Evidences recognized that fungible canonical edges did not necessarily endanger their larger mode of thinking about what constituted true religion.

As far as can be determined from the writings surfacing in the *Scriptural Interpreter*, Parker's positions on authorship and harmonization firmly fit within this paradigm as expressed by the co-authored editorial essay and visible elsewhere. Although he doubted the "genuineness" of a book like Job in accordance with "opinions expressed… in the commentaries of ancient and modern German writers," he firmly supported traditional apostolic authorship of an epistle like First Thessalonians.[15] In terms of the typically most important books of the gospels, he definitely supported the harmonization of apparent discrepancies that was so important to the Evidences. For example, in explaining a detail of the Gospel of Matthew, he not only treats the narrative as representing actual events, but provides two explanations for an apparent discrepancy in the number of blind men in comparison with parallel passages in Mark and Luke.[16] Similarly, a German commentary on Matthew translated by Parker treats the narrative likewise, explaining away differences in Luke as "several additional features."[17] Although specific authorship positions on the gospels are not directly attested in these writings of Parker, they are undoubtedly traditional, given the tenor of the publication and his adherence to the more important harmonization traditions.

All in all, then, as these glimpses show, Parker's 1835-36 accessible works for Unitarian families take place amidst an awareness of larger cultural debates and show an engagement with

---

[14] Ibid., 7-8.
[15] Theo[dore] Parker, "The Book of Job," *Scriptural Interpreter*, vol. 5, 251. Theo[dore] Parker, "Introduction to the First Epistle to the Corinthians," *Scriptural Interpreter*, vol. 6 (Boston: Otis, Broaders, and Company: 1836), 160-170.
[16] Theo[dore] Parker, "Translation and Exposition," *Scriptural Interpreter*, vol. 6, 241-247.
[17] Theo[dore] Parker, from the German of Christopher Friedrick Ammon, "The Temptation of Jesus," *Scriptural Interpreter*, vol. 6, 81.

German thought, albeit largely in service of the authorship and harmonization traditions so crucial to the Evidences.

After his time at Harvard Divinity School, however, Parker's views changed because his voracious reading habits led to a deep encounter with and eventual adoption of the anti-traditional biblical criticism of Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*.[18] Library records and journals indicate that Parker was engaging in extensive reading about theology and the Bible during his time at Harvard Divinity School, including a cluster of like-minded theologians from whom he seems to have eventually formed his theology of intuition, the then-influential but now relatively forgotten German De Wette at the fore. At some point during 1836, though – the tumultuous year that saw both Parker's graduation and the beginning of a search that would end in a ministerial position at West Roxbury – he obtained and read a copy of Strauss thanks to a student returning from Europe, although he did not begin to grapple with anti-traditional biblical criticism and its theological implications at that time. Instead, over two years later, in the midst of his time at West Roxbury during the winter of 1839-40, Parker began to not only think more deeply about Strauss, but also to essay new ideas in bits and pieces in various writings and sermons, some emphasizing the role of introspection and moral intuition, others gingerly pointing out the presence of scriptural contradictions that would make such a theological emphasis necessary. In comprehensive effect, all these scattered indications of Parker's change in thinking hovered around the idea of rooting Christianity in typical human feelings after the buttresses of the gospels had given way.

The most public debut of this change in Parker's thinking, however, occurred in two of the writings for which he is most famous, the 1841 sermon "The Transient and Permanent in

[18] Grodzins, 59-73, 137-165, and passim.

Christianity," and the 1841-42 lectures that became his 1842 *A Discourse on Matters Pertaining to Religion*.[19] Preached at the South Boston ordination of Unitarian minister Jared Sparks, "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity" was not intended by Parker to shock or to stake out new territory in theology; he merely pulled it out of the general stew of ideas with which he had been toying, then post-delivery newspaper notices led to scandal, his full publication of it in the first of many editions, and a general demand to present his ideas in even fuller, more systematic form. In oral and written forms characteristically open to the seekers who flock to oppositional subcultures, his fuller and more systematic statement of his views occurred through five lectures, first advertised in newspapers and then delivered to the ticketholders who flooded Boston's Masonic Temple; next of all taken on the lyceum circuit in Massachusetts and Rhode Island; and lastly expanded into the dense 1842 *Discourse*, which would go through many editions both during and after Parker's life.

Although principally remembered as a theological milestone, the *Discourse* contains an accessible form of anti-traditional biblical criticism alongside the positive theological vision and presentation of the logic of its underpinnings, the two subjects that actually constitute most of the work.

Overall, Parker initially details his views of an "innate religious sentiment" forming "the basis and cause of all religions" and constituting a "universal" feature "essentially laid in the very foundation of man" and "limited to no sect, age, or nation."[20] Then, he proceeds in stages to identify an ideal form of Christianity as "different from all other forms of religion" because "it is ABSOLUTE RELIGION and ABSOLUTE MORALITY," doing so through discussion of an

[19] Ibid., 239ff.
[20] Parker, *Discourse*, 29 and 30.

evolutionary framework resulting in the reinterpretation but nevertheless ultimate exaltation of Jesus.[21]

In terms of the sentiment that forms the basis of his thinking, Parker identifies it through a few logical steps allowing him to prioritize both reverence to a transcendent divine unity and ethical behavior towards fellow humans. First, he assumes that all social behavior is rooted in drives, or, in his words, that "institutions out of man are but the exhibitions of what is in him."[22] On this basis, he next sweepingly declares the presence of trans-historical phenomena like worship and moral behavior, both of which he traces back to "the RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT OF MAN," however much this sentiment is imperfectly expressed through phenomena like idols or conduct marked by selfishness.[23] In other words, having assumed as his goal what amounts to the biblical commandment to love God and neighbor – "love to God, and love to man" are in fact the work's culminating definition of "one real Religion" – Parker is thus able to find expressions of these two loves in history and thus locate them internally in all humans, discounting any contrary evidence as aberrations.[24]

As proof alongside such assertions, Parker especially draws on ethnographic evidence in order to construct a teleological scheme of religions with a hyper-Protestant non-ritualistic and non-imagistic Christianity of progress as the pinnacle. In giving proof of a religious consciousness, he not only relies on developmental historical treatments such as those of Hume, but also martials "historical arguments" through observations from the works of "travelers" and others on cultures of peoples like "the North American Indians," "the Esquimaux," and "the

[21] Ibid., 230 and 232 (capitals in original).
[22] Ibid., 13.
[23] Ibid., 18 (capitals in original).
[24] Ibid., 504. Although not attributing this formulation to Scripture, Parker is referencing Mark 12:28-34 and parallels.

Bushmen of South Africa."[25] Then, as part of a "scale of progress," he outlines a heuristic "classification" ranging from "FETICHISM" through "POLYTHEISM" to "MONOTHEISM."[26] As the height of monotheism, he lauds "[t]he religious teachings of Jesus," which have parallels elsewhere in all other respects except for their peculiarity that they are not "bounded" and "definite" as in "Judaism and Mahometanism," but rather allow for "progress" through "the Spirit of God in the soul of man, speaking through Reason, Conscience, and the religious Sentiment."[27] Thus, amidst all these glimmers of truth, Parker highlights a self-conscious recognition and harnessing of the dynamic power of religion thanks to an epochal teacher who staked out its principles in fullest form.

What did Parker specifically say about the Bible, though? In fact, Parker explicitly publicized anti-traditional biblical criticism as a minor note in this presentation of his larger theological framework of universal intuition; because of this larger commitment to intuition and the concomitant relativizing of Christ, the Bible was de-emphasized but not discounted as a source of truth, and anti-traditional biblical criticism was only tentatively broached in peripheral discussion of the Bible, a marked contrast to its typical use as a weapon among other oppositional subcultures.

In his explicit statements about the Bible, Parker made a few notable jabs but mostly danced around this delicate subject. In his preface to the first print edition of the lectures, he names "the design of this work" as "to recall men… to the permanent substance of Religion," and in fact he explicitly notes that he has "not sought to pull down, but to build up," as part of which he "found it necessary – though painful – to speak of many popular delusions."[28] In line

[25] Ibid., 31, 32, and 34n1.
[26] Ibid., 51 (capitals in original).
[27] Ibid., 282-283.
[28] Parker, *Discourse*, [iii]-iv.

with this introductory sentiment, he uses very rare and strikingly harsh words to state that "we have two Idols, the Bible… and Jesus of Nazareth," but in the actual project that follows Parker does not at all wield biblical criticism as a blunt weapon by which to destroy other forms of Christianity, but rather tends to tiptoe around his acceptance of it, at some points creating room for his audience to hold other views, and at other points emphasizing the merits of the Bible when read on his terms. Tellingly, at the beginning of his examination of the gospels as part of his redefinition of Christianity, Parker gently asks "for the sake of argument" to assume that "the books in our hands come really from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and that they bore the relation to Jesus which they claim."[29] Similarly, when speaking of the Bible in general, Parker effusively lauds its "wide and deep influence" prior to his discourse reconceptualizing it as just one source of truth, and then caps off that discourse with further praise and the assurance that "[t]he truths of the Bible, which have fed and comforted the noblest souls for so many centuries, may be trusted to last to our day."[30] Ultimately, in Parker's view, the Bible has "profound religious significance," yet, because its "truths are old as the creation, repeated purely in every tongue," he does even go so far as to raise the rare, implicit denigration of it through a statement like "[m]an is greater than the Bible."[31] As this last statement suggests, Parker could and did bluntly state his theology's implications for conceptions of the Bible, but that should not obscure how he also anticipated and sought to downplay the shock of anti-traditional biblical criticism through skirting his acceptance of it and his continuous accentuation of the Bible's positive qualities when viewed through his theology.

[29] Ibid., 248.
[30] Ibid., 320 and 375.
[31] Ibid., 375, 377, and 376.

Nevertheless, Parker did sometimes use his *Discourse* to present innovative positions on harmonization and authorship of the gospels. In place of harmonization of seeming discrepancies, he affirms their actuality and posits the equivalent of a historical Jesus lying behind and giving rise to the truly conflicting accounts. Most prominently, almost directly after granting for the sake of argument the traditions about the evangelists, he proceeds to note that "[t]he most careless observer sees inconsistencies [and] absurd narrations," and he then acknowledges that "[s]till there must have been a foundation of fact for such a superstructure."[32] Specifically, he assumes that in their treatment of Jesus the gospels "describe the main features of his life… and set down the great principles of his doctrine," but [t]he condition and nature of the Christian records will not allow us to go farther than this, and be curious in particulars." In fact, in a footnote to the printed *Discourse,* Parker elaborates still further on what can be known of this historical Jesus, stating that no confidence can be placed in "particular actions attributed to Jesus" beyond that "he lived a divine life, suffered a violent death, [and] taught and lived a most beautiful religion," in light of which his gathering of disciples and the opposition that he faced "lay in the nature of things." In accordance with the idea that Jesus's religion was "most beautiful," he concedes that Jesus's "loftiest sayings seem... the most likely to be genuine," but this speculation also goes no further and thus constitutes a brief detour from his theological project, not a destination in and of itself. In this vein, for example, when the main of the discourse touches on the gospels' representation of Jesus bidding "the disciples teach all nations," he merely notes that since the specific words of the command went unnoted and "it is opposite to the general spirit of his precepts, it must be put with the many other things which are to be examined with much care before they are referred to him."[33] In terms of authorship

[32] Ibid., 250-251.
[33] Ibid., 260.

traditions, Parker in general treats the gospels as if they were written by the evangelists whose identities were known. Nevertheless, in the appropriate place in his briefest of reviews of the origin and nature of the various biblical books, Parker pauses to linger over how "we have, apparently, the works of Matthew and John, two of the immediate disciples of Jesus, and of Mark and Luke, the companions of Peter and Paul."[34] Then, he not only directly poses "[t]he first question…, have we really the works of these four writers?" but also acknowledges that it "can by no means be readily and satisfactorily answered in the affirmative," providing resources for and against these identifications in a footnote. Having backgrounded that issue, he then again highlights the issue of how "their testimony does not agree" – a direction of inquiry leading into assertion of the Bible's mixed nature and the accordant necessity of his theological project of universal religious intuition.[35]

Importantly, just as with the *Scriptural Interpreter*, moments in Parker's work recognize the existence of learned and accessible discourses across which similar ideas were issued. For example, in his footnote appended to his observation about the identity of the evangelists, Parker lists the famous works of Nathaniel Lardner and William Paley as well as "the masterly Treatise of Mr. [Andrews] Norton, Genuineness of the Gospels," opposing these works' intellectual positions to books such as Strauss's Life of Jesus and "the popular but important remarks of [Charles] Hennel," an English work questioning evangelist attributions and seeking "separation of truth from fiction" in the gospel accounts.[36] A previous footnote on New Testament epistles

[34] Ibid., 357.
[35] Ibid., 358.
[36] Ibid., 357n3. Charles C. Hennel, *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (London: Smallfield and Son, 1838), [iii] and [ix]. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Hennel, Charles Christian (1809-1850)" (by Ian Sellers), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12939 (accessed July 28, 2016). Interestingly, David Hempton, *Evangelical Disenchantment: Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 31-34, describes the influence of Hennel's text on George Eliot's thinking by 1841, prior to her translation of Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu.*

also includes an observation recognizing multiple levels of discourse, where "Introductions" by well-known "critics" of the time like Johann David Michaelis are primarily emphasized, though the reader is also put on notice that "[s]ome information may be found in a popular shape" and given references to these other works.[37] Although deriving from an intellectual impetus of engagement with Strauss, then, Parker's *Discourse* struck out on an accessible approach and thus would have fallen into his category of "popular" due to its easy presentation of research.

Although the identification of culturally important learned works and their readers' propensity to render their positions on biblical criticism accessible has not yet received the attention that the subject deserves, this *Discourse* of Parker's is intriguing in its implications for the spread of anti-traditional biblical criticism in the United States. First off, as Parker's history shows, acceptance of biblical criticism did not remain in the study, but soon showed in the pulpit. Second off, in terms of number of adherents, the instigating works likely had less impressive effects than any accessible works inspired by them, and even these effects were mitigated by overlap with audiences previously exposed to accessible forms not necessarily directly grounded in learning.

A sampling of newspaper and periodical reception of Parker's *Discourse* confirms what can already be inferred from a careful reading of the *Scriptural Interpreter*, that any anti-traditional biblical criticism leaking out from those with exposure to learned works would join a pre-existing and less learned stream.

The clearest instance of reception acknowledging this broader phenomenon is the July 1842 review of Parker's *Discourse* from the *Christian Examiner and General Review*, a Boston-based Unitarian publication known in its time for coverage of Unitarian history, defense of

[37] Parker, *Discourse*, 353n1.

Unitarian doctrine, and high quality literary reviews.[38] With Parker, the review makes a direct and justifiable comparison to Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*. In its concluding sections, the review notes "extreme reluctance" to "institute any comparison between Parker's Discourse of Religion and Paine's Age of Reason," then proceeds to make exactly such a comparison:

> [W]e feel bound to say, that, having looked through the latter work with special reference to this point, we find there hardly a charge, however gross, against Christianity, the Scriptures, and the prominent characters of the Jewish and Christian dispensation, which is not either expressed, or directly implied, in the former.[39]

Indeed, the review first identifies Parker's "undermining the authority… of the Scriptures" and "striving to make us think even the most authentic of the sacred writings – the gospels – [are] entitled… to but a low degree of historical credibility," and then in course of its lengthy reflections adduces the touchstones of Lardner and Norton in order to reassert traditions about the identities of the evangelists and thus "the genuineness of the gospels."[40] Next up, of course, was rebutting Parker's Paine-like fixation on "alleged discrepancies between the four evangelists."[41] Of course, Parker's objections to the authority of Scripture as understood through the Evidences were not limited to rejection of authorship and harmonization traditions; for example, the review singles out Parker's questioning of the divinely ordained "Destruction of the Canaanites" as another mark against him, for which readers are referred to Watson's rebuttal of Paine's *Age of Reason* "for a confutation of most of Mr. Parker's severe remarks upon the Scriptures".[42] Interestingly, the direct comparison of Parker to Paine is not only restricted to "charge[s] against Christianity," but also includes recognition of the works' common

---

[38] Edward E. Chielens, ed., *American Literary Magazines: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 103-106.
[39] J.HM., "Art. III. – *A Discourse of matters pertaining to Religion*….", *Christian Examiner and General Review* (July 1842), 392.
[40] Ibid., 338 and 363.
[41] Ibid., 365.
[42] Ibid., 379, 380.

preservation of "the doctrines of morality and religious worship," and how with Parker "God is a spirit, ever present in the soul, pure and holy, most communicating with those, who love and serve Him best."[43] In other words, this lengthy review not only keyed into major features of Paine's and Parker's biblical interpretation that constitute a larger change definable as anti-traditional biblical criticism, but also touched on Parker's distinctive accompanying theology.

Furthermore, this accessible content essentially similar to that found in Paine very likely had resonance with the intertwined communities of freethinkers and social reformers, among whom authorship and harmonization traditions surrounding the gospels had been out of vogue for years. For example, at the time of Parker's delivery of the *Discourse*, the post-Abner Kneeland Boston *Investigator* put in a notice praising Parker and thanking him "for the instruction and edification we have received from his teaching."[44] Several years later, the *Investigator* carried another notice approvingly reprinted from a "Liberal paper published at Concord, N.H." under the title "A Good Sign" and alongside the aphorism "Straws show which way the wind blows."[45] The subject of the notice? A reading group held at the town hall to discuss Parker's *Discourse*, which "are *the* Discourses of this age." In another review of Parker's career from an 1845 issue of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, the specific similarity of Parker's acceptance of discrepancies even surfaces, since the furor around him is explained due to his evaluation of the Bible as "a mixture of truth and error," thanks to his discounting of material "recorded by the evangelists."[46] Thus, to some degree, Parker's audience seems to overlap with audiences previously receptive to anti-traditional biblical criticism, in a typical instance of work travelling among the milieu of oppositional subcultures.

---

[43] Ibid., 393.
[44] "Rev. Theodore Parker," *Boston Investigator*, November 2, 1842, 4.
[45] "A Good Sign," *Boston Investigator*, January 31, 1844 (italics in original).
[46] "Theodore Parker," *Liberator*, April 4, 1845, 55.

Beyond these circles, reception was mixed. On the one hand, the label "infidel" was infamously attached to Parker and his work through his life even by people like his Unitarian ministerial brethren, likely reflecting his positions in biblical criticism, his stance towards the Evidences, or even just the unthinking dislike sometimes attendant upon such terms.[47] Perusal of any contemporary sources on Parker easily turns up examples of jibes like "Parkerism, alias Deism," and some polemical sources even hint at his positions within biblical criticism, such as an article that appeared in Vermont and Ohio papers and noted that in his view, "The Bible is a book containing many good things; but the wheat must be separated from the chaff."[48] On the other hand, papers praised him, sometimes even with praise acknowledging the contours of his thought. For example, in reviewing his career, a newspaper from outside of Boston noted that Parker "has had to encounter the sneers and coldness of many who style themselves *liberal* Christians… but… his admirers are more numerous at the present time, than they have ever been"; it then further goes on to defend him against the charge of "infidel" by excerpting his effusive praises of the Bible, drolly noting that "[i]f this is 'infidelity,' we wish there was much more of it in the world."[49] From these notices, it stands to reason that even if Parker's audience overlapped with pre-existing audiences for anti-traditional biblical criticism, he nevertheless reached some new people to some unascertainable degree with works like his *Discourse*, and among them perhaps changed some minds.

From one angle, then, Transcendentalism constituted a movement like deism and various social reforms where rejection of harmonization and authorship traditions found a home alongside an innovative conception of authority.

---

[47] Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 362 and passim.
[48] "Creeds," *Boston Recorder*, April 17, 1845, 62. "Parkerism in Boston," *Vermont Chronicle*, September 13, 1848, 146; and *Ohio Observer*, September 27, 1848, 1.
[49] "Theodore Parker," Dedham *Democrat*, March 17, 1843 (italics in original).

From another angle, however, Transcendentalism is more revealing than the other movements, because the encounters with both learned and accessible materials by people like Parker provides insight into how some historical figures themselves recognized an intellectual shift present in both sets of materials, as well as the chronological precedence of the accessible material in comparisons like that of Parker to Paine.

From yet a third angle, Transcendentalists also displayed a diversity of views about the abandonment of authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels. In this regard, one very important moment of reception of Parker's *Discourse* took place in Orestes Brownson's *Boston Quarterly Review*, which provided space for a lengthy and slightly outdated letter that addressed Parker's theology from the jumping off point of "the lecture, into which he amplified his South Boston Discourse."[50] Amidst its many reflections, the letter defensively remarks on the attacks on Parker by "the Unitarian conservatives, without asserting whether or not he has stated, or even discerned the deepest secret of Life, which lies in seeing and partaking the Freedom of God."[51] Although small, this moment tellingly shows a fundamental point of continuity between Parker and the letter's author, fellow Transcendentalist Elizabeth Palmer Peabody – namely, their common emphasis on the importance of exploiting "the Freedom of God" to seek truth wherever it might be found, and its identification via a universal, predictable resonance with individual souls. Examination of Peabody's own work, however, shows that she advocated this same theology of intuition while still maintaining allegiance to the older harmonization and authorship traditions associated with the gospels. Even in Transcendentalism, varying views on biblical criticism created a discernible divide within the movement.

[50] [Elizabeth Palmer Peabody], "Art. III. – Mr. Parker and the Unitarians. – Reply to a question concerning the Doctrine of Immortality, Repentance, Remission of Sins, &c.", *Boston Quarterly Review*, vol. V, no. XVIII (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1842), 204.
[51] Ibid., 208.

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: A Transcendentalist of the Evidences

Unlike with Theodore Parker, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's innovative theologies were in continuity with mainstream Unitarianism and the Bible as read through the traditional biblical criticism of the Evidences. As with Parker, however, Peabody's theologies also de-emphasized the Bible as the sole source of truth. Of the many theologies stemming from or inspired by her voracious reading, perhaps the two most prominent during her long life were her idea of innate moral intuition and her similar idealist theories of language, in which the proper conception and use of words could allow universal and more direct access to all phenomena, including religion. In particular, Peabody's involvement with Boston's Temple School of 1834-1836 and a range of her activities from the early 1830s to the early 1840s show how these two theologies could spur young and old alike to locate truth independent of engagement with the Bible, not to mention alight on other claims causing controversy.

Throughout her long and varied life, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (1804-1894) labored to improve children's education and to develop and spread Transcendentalist thought.[52] Her parents had met as teachers at a New Hampshire academy; her mother came from a privileged but recently impoverished Massachusetts family, while her father came from a long-standing but less respectable family of New Hampshire farmers. When Peabody was born in Billerica,

[52] The best treatment of Peabody's life is Bruce A. Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: A Reformer on Her Own Terms* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Although helpful in their brevity, the autobiographical sketches in Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Letters of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: American Renaissance Woman*, edited by Bruce A. Ronda (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984) are divided by decades and hinder recognition of continuities in Peabody's life and thought. Descriptions like that of *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Peabody, Elizabeth Palmer" (by R. Baird Shuman), http://www.anb.org/articles/09/09-00577.html (accessed October 30, 2013), focus mainly on Peabody's educational activities, passing over much of her other work and writing. Interesting is historians' relative neglect of Peabody compared to other Transcendentalists. Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 1-5, suggests multiple plausible factors including perpetuation of her contemporaries' condescension towards her appearance and absentmindedness; historians' elevation of women like Margaret Fuller who more directly challenged gender roles; her traditional status as a historical source rather than subject proper due to her long life and eventual commemoration of her peers; and her greater success at writing on praxis (e.g. schools and education) rather than "speculative" topics.

Massachusetts, her father was already shifting into medicine, and after the family moved to Salem, he worked as a doctor, while her mother ran a school out of their house. There, like the other girls that her mother taught, Peabody took the same college preparatory curriculum as boys. After the family moved to a farm in nearby Lancaster in 1820, she opened her first school at the age of 16 and followed her mother's example by offering the same studies to both males and females. Moving to Boston in 1822, Peabody opened another school, worked on French and German, and began to study classical Greek with young Harvard graduate Ralph Waldo Emerson. In 1823-25 she taught in Maine, including the subject of Latin, then she moved to the Boston suburb of Brookline in 1825 and opened yet another school with her sister, shifting it to Boston proper in 1826, which she later termed "the first year of my intellectual life properly speaking."[53] Comfortable in elite circles despite her eternal money troubles, she began a lifelong friendship with the well-respected Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing at the same time that she worked on a series of essays on language and thought in the Hebrew Scriptures. The early 1830s saw a mix of activities: more schools, the publication of several translations and original pedagogical books, and conversation circles for women on historical and literary topics. From 1834-1836, she was instrumental to Bronson Alcott's experimental Temple School; there, she helped gather and retain students, taught several subjects, and not only recorded and occasionally intervened in Alcott's spiritual conversations with the children, but also helped prepare two books of them for publication. After her 1836 dissociation from the school, she joined family in Salem and shifted away from teaching, instead writing more and aiding the literary career of acquaintance Nathaniel Hawthorne. She kept in close contact with Boston's literary and theological *avant garde*, however, even attending an 1837 Transcendental Club

[53] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody to Orestes Brownson, [ca. 1840], reprinted in Peabody, *Letters*, 248-249. This quote is also highlighted in Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 75.

meeting at Emerson's invitation. From 1840 to 1850, she was back in Boston running the West Street Bookshop; this vital Transcendentalist institution not only imported and circulated literature and published epochal works like the *Dial*, to which Peabody also contributed, but also served as the site of some of Margaret Fuller's conversations and of planning meetings for George Ripley's utopian community Brook Farm, a notable achievement of their oppositional subculture. Subsequently, Peabody lastingly re-devoted herself to education, most notably opening the United States' first English-language kindergarten in Boston in 1860 as she began championing the theories of German educator Friedrich Froebel. In her later years, she also tried to perpetuate the legacy of her deceased friends, publishing reminiscences of Channing, Emerson, and Hawthorne. In 1894, she died in a Boston residential hotel, and was buried in Concord.

Importantly, despite her role as a leading Transcendentalist and her advocacy of innovative theologies, Peabody was not radical in her approach to authorship and harmonization traditions. An 1823 didactic letter written by Peabody as an independent young teacher in Boston pointedly captures her intellectual formation in the broader American milieu of the Evidences. "Theology, my dear Sophia," Peabody began the letter to her sister, "is a science of all others the most interesting, the most absorbing, and the most important."[54] Initially recommending acquaintance "with that science which points out the evidences of a future state" in order to help doubting children and show up skeptics, Peabody ended with a brief self-disclosure that also suggests the Evidences' long-standing function of strengthening one's own attachment to Christianity through standardized rational investigation. "It is not necessary you should begin this enquiry now," Peabody advised her sister. "Wait till you have time and feel

[54] Elizabeth Peabody to Sophia Peabody, March 31, 1823, reprinted in Peabody, *Letters*, 59, of 59-64.

like it – for it should absorb your whole soul as it did *mine* when I pursued it... and may God grant that your results whatever they may be may give you as bright & cheering a view of God's government as my results have given me."[55] The volumes necessary for Peabody's recommended "enquiry" would fill a library shelf, though she admittedly restrained herself since "[a] long string of books would frighten you from beginning this course"; most saliently, she advised that her sister should begin with Paley's "Natural Theology & Evidences of Christianity" to firm up general belief in Christianity, then, in terms of particular manifestations of that religion, she counseled her to "believe without hesitancy what ever [sic] you think the N. Testament authorizes."[56] The preferred manifestation, of course, was Unitarianism, and Peabody lastly recommended to her sister that "having possess'd yourselves [sic] of the reasons which Unitarians think they have for believing as they do," she should descend "into the region of Controversy" and read polemics of prominent contemporary Unitarian intellectuals like Andrews Norton, Henry Ware, and Jared Sparks.[57] Given Peabody's wholehearted acceptance of this type of theology, she undoubtedly accepted traditional biblical criticism propounded by Paley and assumed by Norton and the others: harmonized gospels held forth one mandatory set of teachings that were to be believed because of dependable witnesses. Although Peabody would soon become amenable to other less mainstream and more innovative theologies, she apparently never wholly abandoned this way of reading the Bible, at least during the heyday of Transcendentalism.

Almost a decade after the telling letter, Peabody's involvement with Boston's Temple School of 1834-1836 clearly captures how she encouraged an idea of innate moral intuition that

[55] Ibid., 59 and 64 (italics in Ronda's edition).
[56] Ibid., 63, 60, and 61.
[57] Ibid., 61-62.

could identify truth independent of engagement with the Bible: along with her collaborator Bronson Alcott, she did no less than set up an institution in which truth could be elicited from the cultivated spiritual goodness of children within their charge.

In the fall of 1834, Bronson Alcott had returned to Boston after a sojourn in Philadelphia since he pined for a reform-minded city and William Ellery Channing had promised him aid in opening a school.[58] Peabody had known and even gained favor with Alcott from his previous residence in Boston; because as far back as 1826 she had posited "a communication" between a child's "conscience" and God and had expressed a desire "to find out a means of opening this communication," she had understandably praised Alcott's educational methods of facilitated self-development in a short 1829 article that she wrote for the *American Journal of Education*.[59] Ultimately lamenting how "arbitrary and mechanical methods, which leave the mind little voluntary influence over itself, and but a small share in its own advancement," render "little pupils... little else than animated machines" that "receive impressions in a passive way," she related an afternoon spent in his Boston school of that time and described lessons involving children's guided identification and adoption of appropriate behavior: Alcott, for example, let a "little boy" divide an apple for everyone during lunch, then exposed the child's unequal partitioning of the food to the censure of his peers, who cried out that it was "stingy" and "selfish."[60] Motivated by her admiration for his kindred ideas as well as perhaps a need for money, Peabody now began to recruit children for Alcott's new venture, and then offered her

[58] Careful accounts of the Temple School are offered in Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 112ff., and Frederick C. Dahlstrand, *Amos Bronson Alcott: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Associated University Presses, 1982), 103ff. Throughout, both scholars appropriately stress the fundamental intellectual agreement of Peabody and Alcott and acknowledge Peabody's importance to the project.
[59] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody to Sarah Sullivan, September 1826, as quoted in Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 87. [Elizabeth Palmer Peabody], "Account of a Visit to an Elementary School," *American Journal of Education* IV (1829): 74-76.
[60] [Peabody], "Account," 76, 74.

services as an assistant, which Alcott gladly accepted. Lessons began on September 22nd, 1834, in rented rooms on the upper floors of Boston's Masonic temple, with an inaugural class consisting of a mixture of boys and girls who were as old as twelve and who came from respectable parents and a variety of religious backgrounds, mostly Protestant denomination, but even including Swedenborgians and "Free Inquirers" in a telling example of the confluence of oppositional subcultures.[61] Characteristic methods of instruction included abundant use of personal journals and group conversations primarily directed by Alcott; subjects included reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic, and geography, as well as Latin for those who desired it. Peabody primarily taught several subjects in the afternoon, including Latin, but she soon took on a more historically important duty. In December 1834, she began to chronicle the school day, especially the morning conversations, a task resulting in the much reprinted *Record of a School, Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture* (1835) and the multi-volume and much more controversial *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* (1836, 1837), which picked up on the previous book chronologically as the school entered a slightly new phase and the gospels became the especial subject of collective reflection.[62]

In the thinking of Peabody and Alcott, thanks to the emergence of innate spiritual goodness through proper cultivation, the assembled children could spontaneously utter spiritual

[61] Quoting at length from a letter from the unnamed drawing instructor at "Mr. Alcott's school," "Correspondence – Education; Description of Mr. Alcott's School," *Western Messenger*, September 1835, 223-225, notes, "There are children in the school of almost every denomination, even to Free Inquirers... There are Unitarians, Calvinists, Baptists, Swedenborgians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Universalists, and Free Inquirers. Mr. A. now wants to have a Catholic and a Quaker, and he will be satisfied that all are represented there" (223). The author of this letter may be Peabody's sister Mary, as Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 120, notes that she was involved with afternoon instruction at Temple School.

[62] [Peabody], *Record of a School*. A. Bronson Alcott, conductor and editor, *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, vol. I-II (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1836-1837). A third volume of *Conversations* never materialized, though it was promised in places like the advertisement following the title page of the second volume. The unity of *Record of a School* and the two volumes of *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* is noted in [Peabody], *Record of a School*, 179, and in [Peabody], "Recorder's Preface," [iii] and x, in Alcott, *Conversations*, vol. I, [iii]-x.

truths in harmony with that of the revelation of the Bible as read through the Evidences.[63] As children participated in one of the lessons that Alcott taught, Peabody jotted down their words, occasionally intervening to add an insight or challenge an interpretation that she thought had strayed too far. The great significance that each placed on the children's utterances especially emerges in the published versions. In *Record of a School*, Peabody's modest prefatory allusions to "those great principles of spiritual culture" and the necessity of "removing inward and outward obstacles to their full and harmonious development" become weightier in light of the book's epigram, "He that receiveth a little child in my name, receiveth me.—*Jesus Christ*."[64] In her preface to the first volume of *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, she spoke even more directly and asserted of the project's premise "that what the children should freely say, would prove to be a new order of Christian Evidences, by showing the affinity of their natures with that of Jesus."[65] In other words, the instructors revered the children as living expressions of Christ and expected that contact with this truth would shore up people's belief in Christianity, a phenomenon complementing the standard arguments of the more common bookish "enquiry" that Peabody had recommended to her sister years earlier.

In retrospect, "what the children should freely say' was limited to a small range of truths about spiritual virtues like selflessness and beauty and their opposition to more carnal individualistic impulses.[66] Although the instructors saw these utterances as spontaneous, they were usually elicited by Alcott's leading questions, and alternate viewpoints could be directly

---

[63] Dahlstrand, *Amos Bronson Alcott*, 110-114.
[64] [Peabody], *Record of a School*, iv, [i] (italics in original).
[65] [Peabody], "Recorder's Preface," iv.
[66] As Dahlstrand, *Amos Bronson Alcott*, aptly observes, "The children were free to express their opinions, but only as long as they agreed with Alcott's basic assumptions... The children had to consider carefully each question within Alcott's paradigm of the spirit. They could not learn Alcott's stock answers by rote memorization. Rather, they were forced to use their own minds to synthesize their thoughts within the spiritual principle. Alcott gave them a general framework, but not a catechism" (113).

dismissed as insufficiently spiritual or even corrected by the other children.[67] Overall, although usually related from some fresh angle on some fresh subject, the ultimate insights offered were very predictable and thus quite repetitive.

Oftentimes, these utterances arose in discussions about the Bible. For example, after Alcott read some relevant verse from the gospels, a discussion of John the Baptist's baptism of water and its relation to Jesus's baptism of "the Holy Ghost" and fire produced multiple observations.[68] That of an older child "Samuel R" was typical: "John cleansed the body; Jesus the spirit," he said, and Alcott affirmed this in his closing reflection, that "[n]o one could understand the subjects upon which Jesus was to preach, till his mind was purified."[69] So long as they employed the ideas approved by the instructors, however, even symbolic interpretations were allowed. A younger child "Welles," for example, asserted that "[w]ater is an emblem of spiritual purity," while another younger child "Martha" thought that "[f]ire means the punishment of conscience."[70] Both remarks presumably met with the instructors' approval since they merged unchecked into the general flow of conversation.

Importantly, these utterances arose from reflection on the Bible as specifically read through the Evidences: the class took the evangelists as apostles or their followers and narrative sections as actual events, a reading practice enabled by harmonization. Regarding authorship, much evidence shows that Alcott explicitly taught the children traditions rooted in the Evidences alongside the larger understanding that independent rational investigation would affirm the truth of Christianity. Most prominently, in the lessons preceding the intensive discussion of the Bible

---

[67] Ibid., 124-127.
[68][Alcott], *Conversations with Children*, vol. I, [139]ff., which explicitly uses a pastiche of Matthew 3:1-13, Mark 1:2-9, and Luke 3:1-19.
[69] Ibid., 143, 144. [Peabody], "Recorder's Preface," vii-viii, divides children up into age groups of 10-12, 7-10, and those under 7 as of October 1835, and places Samuel R. among the 10-12 year olds.
[70] [Alcott], *Conversations with Children*, vol. I, 142 and 143. [Peabody], "Recorder's Preface," viii, places both Welles and Martha among the 7-10 year olds as of October 1835.

that would come to form both published volumes of *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, Alcott stressed with regard to Jesus that "those who saw and knew him, - his friends, - wrote down what he said and did," an observation mirrored in Alcott's subsequent traditional identification of "St. John the Evangelist" as the disciple whom Jesus loved.[71] Furthermore, in these subsections later entitled "Credibility of Witnesses" and "Authenticity of the Gospel Record" in accord with the commonplace designation of these lines of argumentation, Alcott rehearsed "that there had been a great deal of dispute concerning these writings in the early ages; and that it was now an undisputed fact, - except by an individual here and there, - that these writings all belonged to the persons by whom they were said to be written."[72] Alcott even told an older child "Charles" who was skeptical about the reliability of the transmitted text that "this was a subject he might examine for himself, when he was older," and in closing the lesson, Alcott recognized his theological outlook when he reiterated "the subject of to-day's [sic] conversation" as "the Evidence for the Gospel Record."[73] In accordance with these authorship stances, each bit of the gospels was related as an undistorted portrayal of actual events, even in the earliest days of the school; for example, in discoursing to the children on why "the New Testament [is] so interesting," Alcott once stated that "it is full of the conversations of Jesus," and later that same week he read sections from the Gospel of John on the raising of Lazarus and paraphrased the narrative as if it were a straightforward relation of actual events.[74] Accordingly, harmonization of apparent contradictions was both explicitly discussed and executed in practice. During the same discussion of the evidences on authorship, Alcott broached the topic of how "sometimes all the gospel writers described the same event [but] there were slight differences in

[71] [Alcott], *Conversations with Children*, vol. I, 16 and [18].
[72] Ibid., 16-17.
[73] Ibid., 17. [Peabody], "Recorder's Preface," viii, places Charles among the 10-12 year olds as of October 1835.
[74] [Peabody], *Record of a School*, 86 and 88-90.

the manner in which things were described" – a situation that he compared to the children all seeing something happen "on the Common" and then "each would describe it according to his own way of looking at it."[75] In line with this way of thinking, Alcott then mixed verses from Matthew, Mark, and Luke into a continuous whole when he read aloud about John the Baptist, for example.[76] Taken all together, for all of the innovation of the Temple school, the lessons were as traditional in their biblical criticism as Peabody's viewpoint expressed in the 1823 letter to her sister.

Nevertheless, lessons could even prioritize introspection over the Bible in accord with the instructors' views. In a long and telling lesson on "conscience" that took place on February 24th, 1835, Alcott opined that "the Spirit not only loves, and trusts, but obeys," then asked the children, "What should we obey?"[77] Individual children gave multiple answers including one boy's response of "the Bible and conscience," which vein of ideas Alcott pursued.[78] "What is it within you to which the Bible speaks?" he asked that same boy. "The conscience, said he, at last." After describing a hypothetical "country where the true God's commands were not known... but the laws of an imagined wicked god were the law of the land, as in some heathen countries," Alcott pressed the children if they would know in such a case that it was wrong to murder. In affirmation of the idea that introspection could lead to truth, those who spoke said that they would know that moral truth, one child even saying that "there is some of the true God in every body's [sic] conscience." Having gotten his answer, Alcott pivoted back to discuss obedience, although at the time Peabody apparently wished that he had stressed the point further. As she wrote in the published record, "I hoped Mr. Alcott would tell him that this vision of the

[75] Alcott, *Conversation with Children*, vol. 1, [195].
[76] Ibid., [139]-141.
[77] [Peabody], *Record of a School*, 134.
[78] Ibid., 135.

true God, which is in every conscience, more or less, is the spontaneous reason; and that the feeling of conscience which gives it authority, is the Absolute being which we share with all spirits, even God." As this recorded exchange makes clear, both instructors thought that introspection resonated with the contents of the Bible and was even a sufficient replacement for it where the Bible was unavailable.

Furthermore, given Alcott's professed perspective that "[t]here are many Bibles to those who think," then, it is not surprising that he also employed a range of means other than the Bible to elicit utterances from the children.[79] Some were simple images apparently thought up by Alcott, like that of "a man born into this beautiful world, and all his life long he was running round to catch bubbles, every one of which broke in his hand."[80] "Who says pleasure is a bubble?" Alcott then asked the children, and as Peabody records, "All held up their hands." Likewise, more sophisticated literature, both devotional and non-devotional, could inform the children's thinking. For example, Peabody reported that the children not only loved John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, but also heard Wordsworth's poetry, as when Alcott recited the "Ode to Immortality" and opened up conversation on how reflection led to changed perception of objects.[81] Beyond modern fiction, Peabody also noted that the use of pre-Christian authors. For example, the children "themselves explained the allegory of the cave from Plato," and the Phaedo's account of "the death of Socrates... called forth their tears... and was only second in effect to the story of the Crucifixion; which was very powerful, not so much by its pathos, as by its life-enkindling sublimity."[82] This non-Christian material subsumed into the classroom's

[79] Ibid., 125.
[80] Ibid., 175.
[81] Ibid., 17 and 110ff. Memorably, a contemporary account has Alcott turning down prospective students whose mother railed against "novels as wicked deviations from truth," since he could not seem to "make her understand that a spiritual truth might be best conveyed by fiction." See "Correspondence – Education; Description of Mr. Alcott's School," *Western Messenger*, September 1835, 224.
[82] Ibid., 18.

theology was even reflected in its setting, which Peabody described in a September 1834 letter as "Plato on a pedestal in one corner – Socrates on a pedestal in the other" and "Christ in bas relief larger than life over Mr [sic] Alcott's head."[83] One day, Peabody records, Alcott even made an impromptu lesson on a bust:

> Now look at that bust of Socrates. A lady who came in here once, said; What an ugly thing that is! I want to put it under ground! Put Socrates under ground! [sic] said several, with surprise. Yes, so she said; - but I think of the mind of Socrates; his thoughts about beauty, his beautiful life, his beautiful death; did you not think his death was beautiful, when he drank the hemlock? Yes. Perhaps there is not a bust in the world that brings to mind so many thoughts of beauty, as that does... He was the teacher of Plato, the very philosopher of beauty. Here Mr. Alcott went towards the bust and touched the capacious cup of brain. What a brow this is! They all looked very reverent.[84]

Under Alcott's guidance, all these non-biblical sources could provoke thought and lead to children's recognition of truth just as much as the Bible could.

Reception of the Temple School ranged from outright acceptance to straightforward disgust and even suspicion that lessons detracted from the importance of the Bible.

Peabody, of course, agreed with its teachings on the whole; when she disagreed with Alcott, she did so over rather incidental particulars, like his teaching that evil had individual substantive existence, or that capital punishment was incompatible with mercy.[85] When she left the school on August 1st, 1836, she did so because she presciently feared the impropriety of publishing in *Conversations* a discussion of circumcision and "a remark of young Josiah Quincy's about the formation of the body out of 'the naughtiness of other people'," although an additional factor was Mrs. Alcott's reading her mail.[86] Even at the moment of separation,

[83] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody to Mary Peabody, September 14-19, 1834, in Ronda, *Letters*, 134.
[84] [Peabody], *Record of a School*, 161.
[85] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody to Bronson Alcott, October 8, 1835, in Ronda, *Letters*, 152-153. [Peabody], *Record of a School*, 157-158.
[86] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody to Amos Bronson Alcott, August 7, 1836, 181, in Ronda, *Letters*, 180-181. Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 128ff., details Palmer's departure from Temple School.

however, she admitted her previous "exaggerated feeling which made every detail of [the School] seem so very important to the great course of Spiritual Culture," and when almost thirty years later she wrote a preface to the third edition of *Record of a School*, she also declared at that time "a sacred respect for the experiment made by Mr. Alcott" and distinguished her "own maturer ideas of education" mostly by difference of method, lauding "Froebel's method of cultivating children through artistic production" over Alcott's pedagogy of "self-inspection."[87]

From what Peabody described of the schooling, children too seemed receptive on the whole, whether offering their thoughts on the gospels or looking reverently at a bust of Socrates. In a letter from the time of Temple School, she told of how the children looked shocked and "'too bad' – began to be said all round [sic]" when she "asked Mr. Alcott yesterday afternoon – to say to the children – that he thought of giving up conversation about mind – and soul - & spirit and conscience - & such things; - and teach them exclusively about rocks – and trees – and mountains - &c &c and machines & engines."[88] A visitor confirmed Peabody's impression, stating in a letter published in 1836 that "[m]ost of the boys and girls... appear very happy there," loving "the school room as well as they do their own homes" and not waiting "with all the patience they could muster, to hear the master say, 'You may walk out,' or 'The school is dismissed.'"[89] Such a schooling experience was not limited to the children of Boston, either. After publication of the books on Temple School, a man named Hiram Fuller began a similar school in Providence, Rhode Island, enrolling 150 students in 1837 and even employing Margaret Fuller as a teacher. An account of a visit to that school tells of how the morning gospel

[87] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody to Amos Bronson Alcott, August 7, 1836, 181, in Ronda, *Letters*, 180-181. E[lizabeth] P[almer] Peabody, "Preface to the Third Edition," 4, in [Elizabeth Palmer Peabody], *Record of Mr. Alcott's School, Exemplifying the Principles and Methods of Moral Culture* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1874), [3]-5.
[88] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody to Elizabeth Davis Bliss, [1835 or 1836?], 151, in Ronda, *Letters*, 150-152.
[89] Ed[itor], "About Mr. Alcott's School," *Parley's Magazine*, January 1, 1836, 131-132, with quote on 132.

reading was followed by "a charming little poem... from one of the great English poets" that "corresponded with the Scripture in its topics – love and sympathy" in what amounted to "a sanctifying of the secular muse for Christian and immortal uses."[90] Although not detailing children's reaction to lessons, the students were presumably receptive to such innovative methods, if anything like the students of Temple School.

Circulation of Peabody's documentation of the schooldays called forth the greatest response, and positive reviews ranged from enthusiasm to guarded praise of attention to the moral development of children. Ralph Waldo Emerson read the manuscript of *Record of a School* "with greatest pleasure" and wrote Peabody that he thought "[i]t will bear to be tried by the test of all speculation, practical value," his only criticism being that incidental mentions of student disruptions "might be forefended by a premonition that truth is always jocose to such as do not apprehend it."[91] A reviewer for a Maine journal called into question the achievements and attentiveness of the students and even openly suspected the published book's "fair Secretary of being over head and ears in love with Mr. Alcott," but nevertheless praised the move away from rote memorization and the students' study "of that Microcosm, their own body" because of its untapped opportunities for "admiration and religious elevation of the mind."[92] A review of *Record of a School* in the Unitarian *Western Messenger* praised not only Alcott's methods, but also how consideration of them makes every possible reader "rise wiser and better from the task," while a later review of *Conversations* in that same newspaper reiterated the "natural and beautiful exposition of... great religious principles" and approvingly excerpted conversations on

[90] "Greene Street School, Providence," *American Annals of Education* (November 1838): 513-517.
[91] Ralph Waldo Emerson to Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, June 12, 1835, reprinted in Eleanor M. Tilton, ed., *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 7 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 243, also quoted in Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 122.
[92] F., "Record of a School," *The Portland Magazine, Devoted to Literature*, September 1, 1835, 372-377, with quotes on 373 and 375.

"appeal to conscience" and the "faith in Christ this system produces."[93] Indeed, even with the more controversial *Conversations*, another reviewer called "[t]he true value of the book" the "method [of] find[ing] out in what forms all the great truths of nature and religion arise in the mind of a child; and out of those forms to unfold the whole system," although that reviewer also levied criticism of the school's class size and Alcott's personal tendency to direct conversation to "the most speculative and least practical views."[94] Orestes Brownson's *Boston Quarterly Review* also sought to defend Alcott's methods against "as severe a persecution as the times allow," calling his "religious and metaphysical system" "neither absurd nor alarming" and recognizing the value of "the Inward" and "Instincts" (so long as "we do not become exclusively devoted to them"), not to mention the value of acknowledging God's presence in the universe (so long as the two are not collapsed as in Alcott's "more pantheistic" views).[95] On the whole, printed reviews were surprisingly receptive.

That said, other readers praised Temple School's concern for children's spirits but had doubts about excessive speculation. A lengthy discussion of *Record of a School* in New York's *Knickerbocker* magazine again praised the school's attention to student's "moral and intellectual advancement" and declared "there was a need perhaps of something as striking, and, we may add, as strange, as Mr. Alcott's method of teaching, to rouse both parents and teachers," but warned against imaginative excesses and ill-defined ideas, especially as encouraged by Peabody, who "suggest[s] to us, whenever she endeavors to improve upon him, the idea of a person

[93] J.H.P., "Record of a School: Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture," *Western Messenger*, November 1835, 365-366. Ed[itor], "Religious Education of Children," *Western Messenger*, March 1837, 540-545, with quotes on 540, 542, and 545.
[94] "Conversations with Children on the Gospels," *Christian Examiner and General Review*, November 1837, 252-261, with quotes on 256 and 260.
[95] "Conversations with Children on the Gospels," *Boston Quarterly Review*, October 1838, 417-432, with quotes on 418, 431, and 432.

endeavoring to render a dim glass clearer, by wiping it over with a wet cloth."[96] A woman's magazine explicitly seconded the *Knickerbocker* review's overall "strain of quiet good sense," but again tempered criticism of Alcott by praising his attention to children as "spiritual" beings and wishing him and the like-minded "God speed."[97] Such magnanimity echoed too a published account of a visitor to the school who also took note of and praised the school's attention to spiritual formation of children.[98] Interestingly, the *Western Messenger* had identified Temple school as a manifestation of the same attention to children's spirits found in the Sunday School movement and regular religious instruction schools, and thus these various reactions suggest that Alcott and Peabody partook in the zeitgeist, albeit in an offbeat way that did not draw consistent approval.[99]

Although few in number, strident critics can have an outsize effect, and such was the case with *Conversations* because of tangential topics that were perceived as improper, as Peabody had rightly feared. In a March 1837 review of that book, the *Boston Daily Advertiser* recognized but rebuked the theological framework of the school, declaring "the new attempt to draw wisdom from babes and sucklings" "a signal failure" and recommending against "any longer perseverance in the experiment."[100] The review highlighted the conversations' indignity and possibility for error, where "the fundamental truths of religion as recorded in the gospels of our Saviour" suffered "without any discrimination or reserve all [the pupils'] crude and undigested thoughts upon it." Of the two examples offered, however, one was a range of odd speculations

---

[96] [E.E.] S[edgwick], "Record of a School: Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture," *The Knickerbocker, or New York Monthly Magazine*, Feburary 1836, 113-130, with quotes on 113 and 129. "The Boudoir," *Southern Rose*, March 5, 1836, 108-109, identifies the reviews author.
[97] Ibid., 109.
[98] "Correspondence – Education; Description of Mr. Alcott's School," *Western Messenger*, September 1835, 223, praises the school's "*express purpose* of... moral and spiritual influence" (italics in original).
[99] Ed[itor], "Religious Education of Children," *Western Messenger*, March 1837, 540-545, with discussion on 540.
[100] "Conversations with Children on the Gospels," *Boston Daily Advertiser and Patriot*, March 21, 1837.

on the Holy Ghost – but the other was an "offensive" discussion on the "favorite topic" of birth, the discussion containing Josiah Quincy's remarks on the formation of the body from "the naughtiness" of other people. Concluding remarks on the good judgment of the "young lady... regularly employed as a reporter" to omit these sections in contrast to Alcott's worries that "the whole [was] too precious to be lost" again place greater stress on the book's perceived impropriety rather than method of theological speculation. Several shortly ensuing *Boston Courier* articles agreed, calling *Conversations* "a more indecent and obscene book... than any other one we ever saw exposed to sale on a bookseller's counter" and objecting to the disrespectful treatment of Scripture.[101] In a criticism of the tendency to find truth in all places, one review in an Episcopal paper reduced the work to "a gross attempt to spread the doctrines of... *Pantheism*" and went on to rebuke trust "in the consciousness of childhood," but that review's more theological criticism was unusual given the amount of attention paid to impropriety.[102]

Indeed, these few negative reviews reflected and perhaps helped cause the pernicious whispers that led to a large drop in the number of students – only eleven remained by the summer of 1837 – and eventually the closure of Temple School in June 1838.[103] Already several weeks before the *Boston Daily Advertiser* review, a newspaper noted that the first volume of *Conversation*s served as "a favorite subject of literary gossip" and "has been met with smiles in some quarters, sneers in others, and perhaps with no more than very equivocal commendation in any."[104] A defensive April letter likely from Peabody incidentally mentioned "the waves of

[101] As quoted on Dahlstrand, *Amos Bronson Alcott*, 141. Ibid., 159n34 and 159n36, also identifies a series of *Boston Courier* articles on March 29 and 30 and April 4, 1837, but these were unable to be located, perhaps attributable to that author's use of (mislabeled?) article clippings of Alcott.
[102] "Double Dealing – Annals of Education," *Episcopal Recorder*, May 13, 1837, 28.
[103] Ibid., 143, 47.
[104] "Conversations on the Gospels," *Christian Register and Boston Observer*, March 4, 1837, 34. Similarly, "Discipline and Studies in Mr [sic] Alcott's School," *American Annals of Education* (May 1837): 234, observes that

excitement that Mr [sic] Alcott's book has raised in this easily alarmed community," in the end affirming "the value of Mr [sic] Alcott's school" "in putting the Aeolian harp of the soul into this breeze of nature's own," even if "[i]t is a wild and capricious breeze, perhaps."[105] As far as specific whispering objections, one article noted that the charge of indecency was levied against *Conversations*.[106] Similarly, the *Western Messenger* explicitly defended *Conversations* against the *Boston Daily Advertiser* and noted that "[t]he Conservatives... are always the first to stone the Prophets and hale [sic] them into the prison of misrepresentation and abuse," likely an oblique reference to the gossip's distortions and thus slanderous nature.[107] This secondhand knowledge even led English writer and social critic Harriet Martineau to produce the most memorable and widespread critique of Temple School.[108] Although never visiting it, she used *Society in America* to deride "a school in Boston" where "[t]he master presupposes his little pupils possessed of all truth, in philosophy and morals; and that his business is to bring it out into expression; to help the outward life to conform to the inner light; and, especially, to learn of these enlightened babes, with all humility."[109] Very matter-of-factly, Martineau then observed, "If he should retain any pupils long enough to make a full trial of his methods with them, those who survive the neglect of bodily exercises and over-excitement of the brain, will be found the first to throw off moral restraints."[110] Quite originally among the critics, Martineau managed to

---

the work has "of late been published and made the subjects of much remark, and of considerable severity of criticism."

[105] "A Frequent Spectator," Mr [sic] Alcott's Book and School," *Christian Register and Boston Observer*, April 29, 1837, 65. Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 132, identifies the writer as Peabody, but does not provide evidence for this attribution.

[106] "Mr [sic] Alcott," *Christian Register and Boston Observer*, April 29, 1837, 66.

[107] Editor, "Mr. Alcott's Book," *Western Messenger*, May 1837, 678-683, with quote on 678-679.

[108] *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Martineau, Harriet" (by Valerie Kossew Dunn), http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-02145.html (accessed May 10, 2016). Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 131-132, also quotes Martineau's *Society in America*, from an American edition.

[109] Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, vol. 3 (London: Saunders and Otley, 1837), 175.

[110] Ibid., 175-176.

unite the disparate objections about theology and impropriety: in her view, misguided theology caused misguided behavior.

Compared to her idea of innate moral intuition, Peabody's related idealist theory of language was much headier and received a much more restricted circulation among New England elites. In this theory, the proper conception and use of words could allow universal and more direct access to all phenomena, including religion. Nevertheless, it attests to the range of her theological interests, and was much more tightly tied to traditional biblical criticism, at least in its original conception.

Around the time of Temple School, Peabody not only finally published three essays on the "Spirit of the Hebrew Scriptures" that she had written in 1826, but also began a translation of a French theological tract *Le Vraie Messie,* which she eventually published in 1842 out of her West Street bookshop as *The True Messiah.*[111] Oddly, each presumed traditional authorship and harmonized narratives despite a new theology that seems separable from them. Her own opening essay on Genesis programmatically stressed a fundamental difference between poetry and prose: poetry expressed "abstract and spiritual truth by sensible objects" and thus "naturally" fit "primitive languages" of earlier times, but also had "more force, and impressiveness, and exciting power" than the "more precise" prose and languages of later times.[112] With this "key of interpretation," the spiritual truths of Hebrew Scripture could be unlocked and their truths allowed to speak to and thus develop a universal spiritual "nature."[113] Side-by-side with this

[111] Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 74-77 and 120-121. [Elizabeth Palmer Peabody], "Spirit of the Hebrew Scriptures. – No. I. The Creation," *Christian Examiner and General Review*, May 1834, 174-202; "Spirit of the Hebrew Scriptures. – No. II. Temptation, Sin, and Punishment," *Christian Examiner and General Review*, July 1834, 305-320; "Spirit of the Hebrew Scriptures. – No. III. Public Worship: Social Crime, and its Retribution," *Christian Examiner and General Review*, September 1834, 78-92. G[uillaume] Oegger, *The True Messiah; or Old and New Testaments, Examined According to the Principles of the Language of Nature* (Boston, MA: E[lizabeth] P[almer] Peabody, 1842).
[112] [Peabody], "The Creation," 175.
[113] Ibid., 192.

exposition of mankind's universal predisposition to truth, however, Peabody affirmed traditional authorship of Genesis and stressed its relevance despite geologic objections to the account of creation.[114] A similar concern for properly conceiving primitive language in order to unleash the force of truth pervades the French tract, which posited an original, universal "language of nature" where "a spiritual and moral side" inhered to "visible nature" and provided humankind a ladder to God.[115] As with Peabody's essays, this French tract also backed away from this universalism and oddly lurched towards exclusiveness; it claimed that such language underpinned "the greater part of our holy books" and that "this new method of studying the holy books" would put down deism once and for all, especially when applied to "Saint John, the most sublime of the evangelists."[116]

Peabody of course leaned towards and advocated these traditional views of the Bible offered up with these theologies, but her readership did not, necessarily. Reading the French translation in manuscript in 1835, Emerson seems to have ignored its overly Christian nature and was struck by "good things," burbling that he was "taken with the design of his work."[117] Peabody herself in yet another original essay on language, in her ill-fated 1849 periodical *Aesthetic Papers*, would yearn for a "key" by which words could be "transparent vases of realities of nature" – but she did not mention the Bible, hinting at the potential of the theology to be disentangled from allegiance with authorship and harmonization traditions.[118]

---

[114] For example, ibid., 185, where Peabody states that the "professed object" of "writings of these early ages... was to communicate *moral truth*, not natural science," and that "the unambitious Moses was led by the inspiration of God to write the Pentateuch."
[115] Oegger, *True Messiah*, 5.
[116] Ibid., 4, [3].
[117] Quoted on Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, 121.
[118] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, "Language," 214, in Elizabeth P. Peabody, ed., *Aesthetic Papers* (Boston: The Editor; New York: G.P. Putnam, 1849), 214-224.

This unacknowledged direction in theology is tellingly seen in an interesting albeit non-representative book review appearing in an 1842 issue of the *Dial*, the classic Transcendentalist publication that was published under Peabody's auspices. The subject? A collection of a British Unitarian minister's six sermons responding to Strauss's *Life of Jesus*. The anonymous reviewer criticizes how "Mr. Strauss... underrates the historical element" and the minister "accepts the conclusions of his author more entirely than reasonably," but then oddly proceeds to include as part of his harangues over two uninterrupted pages of the minister's concluding remarks on the necessity of treating the gospels and Christianity "as a portion of spiritual reality," "the same as other religions, other doctrines and moralties [sic], other philosophies of life, man and God."[119] Although falling on opposite sides of biblical critical questions, both the reviewer and the minister had larger and explicitly inclusive notion of spiritual truth similar to Peabody's. In her publication of the review, Peabody was not averse to bringing more attention to anti-traditional biblical criticism, but neither did she seem to pay it much attention in all of her activities. For her, these different views about authorship and harmonization traditions were less important than the theologies agreeable to persons from both sides.

Several visits by Jones Very in the fall of 1838 forced Elizabeth Peabody to carefully reflect on the boundaries of theological acceptability. The Salem-born Very had been a precocious undergraduate at Harvard and then began working as Greek tutor there in 1836 while beginning to attend to study Divinity; a literary lecture that he delivered at the Salem Lyceum in 1837 became the occasion for acquaintance with Peabody, who took an interest in his prospects

[119] "*German Supernaturalism*….", *Dial* 8 (April 1842): 535-539, with quotes on 535, 536, and 537.

and introduced him to Emerson.[120] Since then, however, a religious crisis combined with an intense fixation on annihilation of self-will and on complete submission to God had not only made Very a self-proclaimed prophet, but also lost him his job and forced him to move in with his mother. As he had with a Unitarian clergyman from Salem, Very expounded apocalyptic sections of the New Testament and prayed over Peabody that she "might have witness of the Holy Ghost," him using "Christ's words all the time & in the whimsical manner an insane person might," as Peabody wrote Emerson soon after.[121] Very's behavior was also a very serious matter, however, since Peabody acknowledged that "some people have taken it all – as nothing but *transcendentalism*" since "the community – sees no difference between... the most manifest insanity and the Ideas of Reason!"[122] In the same letter, she also noted "difference between trusting the Soul & giving up one's mind to these *individual illuminations*" – an idea echoed less than a month later in another letter to Emerson, where she related that she had informed Very to his face that "he does say much not inconsistent with the truth," but that she did "not on a general principle expect *personal* prophets – or regard God as dealing *personally*."[123] These interactions forced Peabody to distinguish her perspective from that of Very: for Transcendentalists, capital-R reason and its dictates were ultimately the same throughout every soul, a much different phenomenon than fresh original communications to discrete individuals.

Nevertheless, during his two year bout of mental illness, from 1838-1840, Very understandably piqued the interest of many Transcendentalists, including Peabody's friend Emerson, who helped him edit and publish the single volume upon which his reputation has

---

[120] Helen R. Deese, "Introduction," in Deese, ed., *Jones Very: The Complete Poems* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), xi-lviii, is a concise but careful examination of Very's life that uses much original research to fill in gaps from previous biographies.
[121] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody to Ralph Waldo Emerson, September 24, 1838, 209, in Ronda, *Letters*, 208-213.
[122] Ibid., 209-210 (italics in Ronda).
[123] Ibid., 209. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 215, in Ronda, *Letters*, 215-217 (italics in Ronda).

rested, *Essays and Poems* (1839). The sentiments of some poems would not have been out of place in Temple School; for example, "Thy Beauty Fades" laments how earthly beauty can "for a season turn the soul's pure eyes/ from virtue's changeless bloom that time and death defies," while "Enoch" laments the exclusion of God from the "heart-built temple" of "the soul forgetful of her nobler birth."[124] Beyond this literary appeal, Emerson in particular liked Very's strong earnestness and the confusion that it worked on pompous people whom he met.[125] Just as Unitarianism could bleed into Transcendentalism, so too could this discomfiting man turn both into yet a new mix, as a Unitarian who thought the Bible contained a single unique theology that established him as a prophet authorized to go around and propound platitudes, some socially acceptable, some not.[126]

Moreover, Very had insights beyond theologizing, including into the characters of those around him during the years of his mental illness. Apparently, just as Peabody judged him, he judged Peabody. In an 1880 reminiscence sent to a biographer of Very's, Peabody recalled her relationship with the man, regretting the inexplicable lapse with "a Spirit so rare" and omitting any mention of an 1842 disagreement about money owed to him from sales of his *Essays and Poems* at her West Street bookshop.[127] During one of their visits in Salem in 1838, Very had apparently expounded on the necessity of every individual's "final sacrifice" in order to attain submission to and unification with God.[128] After he spoke of his sacrifice of "the bosom Idol" of

[124] Jones Very, *Essays and Poems* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1839), 121, 129. Deese, "Introduction," xxiv-xxvii catalogs reception of Very's work by a range of New England cultural elites.
[125] Deese, "Introduction," xxiii-xxiv.
[126] Ibid., xxix-xxxv, judiciously examines the categorization of Very's heterodoxy and convincingly places it within the Unitarian - Transcendentalist trajectory, in line with David Robinson, "Jones Very, the Transcendentalists, and the Unitarian Tradition," *Harvard Theological Review* 68, no. 2 (April 1975): 103-124, which rightfully notes the importance of the Bible for Very (120ff.).
[127] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody to William P. Andrews, November 12, 1880, 409, in Ronda, *Letters*, 404-409. Deese, "Introduction," xxiv.
[128] Peabody to Andrews, 407.

"Beauty," Peabody said that she asked "what *I* had to sacrifice in order to be *a filial obedience* (which he said was the highest attitude for a finite spirit to attain)." The mad poet replied simply, "Spiritual Curiosity." With his peculiar insight, Very historically identified the constitutional element that in retrospect separated out Peabody from many of the Unitarians with whom she identified and belonged, an openness to new theologies that allied her with Parker and the others who swayed people away from the older conceptions of the Bible to which she still held. Each in their own way, both Very and Peabody were liminal figures not entirely aware of their actions.

In this vein of "Spiritual Curiosity," however, Parker was more important to the history of biblical interpretation in the United States than Peabody, despite their many similarities in theological outlook. Both shared a commitment to a putatively pure universal intuition that was the height of truth, though Parker's *Discourse* presumed the intuitional contents discerned from historical and ethnographic surveys and Peabody's pupils underwent watchful cultivation in order to arrive at the seeds of something purer. Through this intuition, both self-consciously resorted to other locations of truth beyond the Bible; for example, Parker could speak highly of the Iliad, while Peabody noted the raptures of her collaborator Alcott as he told the children to admire a bust of Socrates' "capacious cup of brain." When it came to the Bible, however, Parker was grounded enough in universal intuition to abandon long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions, whereas Peabody preferred to maintain them. Because of this difference in approach to biblical interpretation, only Parker is part of the vanguard in terms of a shift in concrete biblical interpretation, holding to the idea of a historical Jesus in conjunction with his reorientation in theology, and forming a newer constituency alongside the non-Christians who had propounded the historical Jesus since Paine. As the combined pair of Parker

and Peabody show, the reliance on universal intuition found among the Transcendentalists could but did not require the abandonment of long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions that was the hallmark of this important shift.

CHAPTER FOUR: BIBLICAL CRITICISM AND SPIRITUALISM

"Pray, then, young man, tell me – what do you think of the Bible?"

"I hav'n't lectured on the Bible yet," I replied. "So I don't know what I think."

– A conversation related by clairvoyant Andrew Jackson David in his 1857 memoir.

Universalist minister William Fishbough did not know what the increasingly famous clairvoyant Andrew Jackson Davis would say about the Bible. In the late fall of 1845, Davis had summoned Fishbough from Connecticut to New York City to act as a scribe. From rented rooms out of which he ran a medical practice, Davis began to give an astounding, extended series of trance lectures. "He associates familiarly with the inhabitants of the spirit-world, and the diversified knowledge cultivated by them is rendered accessible to his mind," a still wonderstruck Fishbough later explained. "The associated spirits and angels of the 'Second Sphere' are... in sympathetic communication with him to transmit knowledge to mankind on earth, which they perceive the latter are for the first time prepared to receive."[1]

That knowledge – ultimately to encompass the birth of the universe, the structure of the cosmos, and the fate of human society – dribbled out in a painfully piecemeal way, however. When in a trance state, Davis claimed, his spirit flew up to the Second Sphere, where it received an impression. Then, his spirit descended again and he intoned a few words, waiting for them to be repeated back to him by another attendant for verification before Fishbough transcribed them. A few more words, more verification and transcription, still more words, still more verification

[1] William Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction: Biographical Sketch of the Author, and History of the Production of This Volume," xvi, in Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind* (New York: S. Lyon, and Wm. Fishbough, 1847).

and transcription, and at last one sentence was complete – and then back up to the Second Sphere for more knowledge. A single lecture lasted anywhere from forty minutes to four hours, but given the halting nature of communication, progress was slow.[2] Despite the tedium, Fishbough was an ideal audience; as he would reminisce about Davis not long after the lectures were completed, "His enunciation was characterized by a peculiar breathing solemnity as though every word gushed from the depths of the soul; and his simple, pure, and unaffected manner, was impressive in the extreme."[3] Other witnesses, however, were not so kind. Davis always spoke with a number of people present, some who came regularly, others odd curiosity seekers of the sort who often frequent forums of oppositional subcultures and in this case turned up to listen and examine previous transcripts.[4] As Davis's reputation spread, these latter witnesses even included rude one-time guests who arrived late and irreverently whispered to each other throughout whatever remained of the very unusual lecture upon which they had intruded.[5]

Since Davis gave an incredible number of lectures – 157, to be exact, between November 28th, 1845, and January 25th, 1847 – he must have held forth for at least several months before he began to discourse on the Bible.[6] By that time, he had covered the nature of trance, the beginning of the universe in "one boundless, undefinable, and unimaginable ocean of LIQUID FIRE!", and the inhabitants of other planets, including a seal-like species of Jupiter with a "secretive, retiring, and apparently submissive" disposition and a tendency to be "extremely tyrannical over other animals within its power."[7] But what would Davis say about the Bible?

---

[2] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction", xvii-xviii.
[3] Ibid., xviii.
[4] Ibid., xiv-xv.
[5] W[illiam] F[ishbough], "Professor Lewis and Davis's Revelations," *New-York Daily Tribune*, January 14, 1847, 1.
[6] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xviii.
[7] Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 28-50, [123]ff., and 187-188 (capitals in original). Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xviii-xix, specifies that the published book largely reproduced the lectures as given and in the same order, apart from Davis's closing "Address to the World," which was delivered last but leads off the book.

Apparently, Fishbough was confident that Davis's spirit would come down from the Second Sphere and shore up traditional biblical criticism typically linked to claims of Christian revelation – or, to use the language of the Evidences, he thought that "the lectures will endorse the Scriptures as given of God." Instead, as Davis would later relate, Fishbough experienced "the loss of the darling idea of his affectionate mind" upon hearing Davis's "impressions of the origin of the Bible."[8] Indeed, once Davis spoke, he modified or did away with authorship and harmonization traditions, offering in their place a historical Jesus constituted on the authority of claims to spiritual knowledge.

Importantly, Davis's spiritual knowledge confronted not only those present for his initial performances, but also a nationwide audience, once his lecture transcripts were published in 1847 in a massive volume grandiosely entitled *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind*, but mostly known as *Nature's Divine Revelations*. An "infidel book" cribbing its "biblical criticism from Tom Paine," accused one New York paper, while a Boston paper compared its theology "to that of Mr Theodore Parker" and stated that "[t]he Bible is taken to pieces much after the manner of [David Friedrich] Strauss."[9] As these early reviews suggest, Davis was not unique in his innovative biblical interpretation, and people of the time saw a justifiable resemblance between accessible and learned texts. Moreover, as time would quickly show, Davis was not even unique in grounding his anti-traditional biblical criticism on appeals to spiritual knowledge. Working within understandings of trance capabilities popularized by

[8] Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Magic Staff, An Autobiography of Andrew Jackson Davis* (New York: J.S. Brown & Co.; Boston: Bela Marsh, 1857), 337-338.
[9] T[aylor] L[ewis], "Professor Bush and Davis," *New-York Daily Tribune*, September 7, 1847, 1. "Davis's Principles of Nature," Boston *Daily Evening Transcript*, September 29, 1847, 2. "'The Poughkeepsie Seer'," Waukesha (WI) *American Freeman*, September 15, 1847, 1, also notes resemblances in "the most important truths" to the writings of Theodore Parker and several others.

mesmerism, Davis was just barely at the forefront of a number of similar claims that would start to bubble up throughout the nation with the advent of spiritualism in late 1847.

In this chapter, it will be argued that claims to spiritual knowledge deriving from mesmerism and spiritualism provided some antebellum Americans with a source of authority that enabled them to leave behind the Evidences and adopt anti-traditional biblical criticism.[10]

First, it will be argued that *Nature's Divine Revelations* not only provided some enthusiasts of mesmerism and spiritualism with anti-traditional biblical criticism, but also was representative of a general tendency within spiritualism after it emerged beginning in the very late 1840s. As an important preliminary step in this argument, it will be established that popular knowledge of mesmerism included an awareness of rare clairvoyant phenomena in which a mesmerized person was understood to view past events, and that this context helps explain Davis's early career, including the delivery, publication, and initial reception of *Nature's Divine Revelations*. Then, a detailed analysis will be provided of how *Nature's Divine Revelations* presented anti-traditional biblical criticism in opposition to the dominant theological framework of the Evidences.

[10] Spiritualism's relation to changing ideas about the Bible has been noted by many scholars. Following observations in primary sources and the analysis of R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 40-69, Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 8-9, calls attention to "Christian and rationalistic wings" of spiritualism: "Some Spiritualists defended what they called 'Christian Spiritualism' and felt that spirit communications would revivify the faith and support the authenticity of the Bible," while "[o]thers subjected the Bible to severe criticism, rejected its claims to authority, [and] welcomed latter-day inspiration as a supplement or even replacement for it." Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 4, sees adoption of spiritualism following upon theological disillusionment when she observes, "For those no longer convinced by the 'evidences' of Christianity, Spiritualism provided 'scientific' evidence of religious truth," adding that it provided a postbellum home "for those disillusioned by... biblical criticism." She also implies that spiritualism caused disillusionment when she notes that "[b]y aggressively asserting radical positions on the spectrum of contemporary cultural trends, Spiritualism dislodged the center of public opinion from traditional views and contributed to the success of religious and social liberalism" (199).

Second, it will be argued that the publications of the short-lived mid-1850s organization the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge show the existence of a wing of spiritualism in accord with the Evidences, and thus demonstrates that spiritual knowledge was not inherently coupled with anti-traditional biblical criticism.

Overall, spiritual knowledge disputing traditional biblical criticism emerged from rare clairvoyant phenomena within mesmerism, which became popular in the United States during the mid-1830s. But, beginning in the late 1840s, spiritualism took mesmerism's place as a widespread object of curiosity. Then, as with the humanitarianism of the anti-slavery and woman's rights movements and the intuition of the Transcendentalist movement, spiritualism could but did not necessarily occur with anti-traditional biblical criticism, creating a mixed constituency with a non-Christian contingent and even producing a form of Christianity that could work with the idea of a historical Jesus. Despite their exalted state, spirits could disagree just as much as humans – including those humans who were increasingly being forced to discern among conflicting communications from on high.

Spiritualism and its Antecedents in Mesmerism

Because of the early and continuing influence of his writings, especially the 1847 tome *Nature's Divine Revelations*, "the Poughkeepsie Seer" Andrew Jackson Davis provides insight into how spiritual knowledge could enable some Americans to leave behind the Evidences and posit a historical Jesus in the void left by authorship and harmonization traditions. Davis's life and visions were located at the intersection of mesmerism and spiritualism; he rose from humble beginnings to lay claim to rare clairvoyant phenomena in mesmerism, and then found his largest and most lifelong audience among spiritualists. Thus, the general contours of the mesmerist and

spiritualist movements are necessary background to Davis's life – and, as his audience already suggests, one movement could slip into the other like a calmed person effortlessly and at first unnoticeably drifting into trance.

Beginning in Europe during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, mesmerism – that is, the antecedent of modern hypnotism – was very occasionally associated with spirit contact and sometimes even with spiritual knowledge of the past, even before its mid-1830s arrival in the United States. Starting in the late 1840s, spiritualism would inherit and develop these aspects of mesmerism, and its religious culture would put many more Americans in contact with spirits who were authorities about the past.

The name "mesmerism" and the famous hypnotized state are the legacy of two of its greatest early exponents, the Viennese physician Anton Mesmer and a French nobleman, the Marquis de Puységur.[11] By 1774, Mesmer, a physician trained and then practicing in Vienna, claimed that he could treat people by using magnets and magnetized objects to manipulate an invisible fluid and beneficially affect bodies. Leaving Vienna in 1778 because of controversy, Mesmer moved to Paris, where he set up and maintained a successful practice in what he termed "animal magnetism." Interesting others in his claims, Mesmer inspired both confidence and criticism. By 1783 he collaborated to establish Societies of Harmony, elite chartered membership organizations that transmitted the secrets of his trade, but two commissions appointed by the French king in 1784 failed to endorse animal magnetism. The dispirited physician chose to leave Paris in 1785, eventually settling on Lake Constance and playing less and less a role in the development of his art. At that time, foremost among animal magnetism's

[11] Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 1-53 and 63-67. Robert C. Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 1-15.

advocates was Armand Marie Jacques de Chastenet, the Marquis de Puységur, whose experiments of 1784 led him to describe a "magnetic somnabulism" or "magnetic sleep" in which people were induced into a trance condition midway between sleep and wakefulness – in other words, what would now be called a hypnotic state. Although both Mesmer and the royal commissions had observed a similar phenomenon, Puységur drew especial attention to it, even visiting Mesmer twice in 1784 with the peasant from his estate upon whom he had performed his seminal experiments.

The late eighteenth century European experiments of Mesmer, Puységur, and others established a further range of phenomena that became part and parcel of mesmerism alongside the hallmark of the hypnotized state.[12] The most common of these other phenomena were associated with healing, whether the direct healing of mesmerized persons, or mesmerized persons' ability to diagnose and predict the course of disease and then make effective prescriptions. Less common but still well-known were more general clairvoyant phenomena such as thought reading or the ability to describe distant places and events. Even rarer but not unknown were cases of clairvoyance in which a mesmerized person seemed to possess uncanny knowledge of the past and the future, even apart from knowledge of the history and course of diseases.[13] Mesmer himself mentioned such cases in a 1799 book that he wrote to clarify the relation between animal magnetism and the hypnotized state. Acknowledging that people in a certain type of sleep state "were able to foresee the future and make the remotest past present," he proffered the explanation that because they were "in contact with all nature" they could survey "the sequence of causes and effects" and accurately discern "cause through effect [and]

[12] Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, 171-178.
[13] Although not highlighting knowledge of the past and the future in his list of paranormal phenomena, ibid., 65 and 69, calls attention to these phenomena in eighteenth century works of Mesmer and another French nobleman, the Chevalier de Barberin, respectively.

effect through cause," much as someone on a height observing a boat's course on a river could discern where the boat had been and where the boat was going.[14] Accumulating through case studies published by elite experimenting enthusiasts, these phenomena constituted the heart of a tradition that would cross the Atlantic and take root in the United States in the mid-1830s.

Springing up alongside the case studies was new terminology and, more importantly, other explanations for the observed phenomena. Early on, Mesmer's "animal magnetism" met with the somnambulism vocabulary of Puységur; later terms would include the eponymous "mesmerism" and, by 1842, the "hypnotism" vocabulary that is now predominant.[15] More importantly, this profusion of names paralleled a profusion of explanations. Mesmer himself posited the existence of an invisible magnetic fluid.[16] The French royal commissions of 1784 raised the possibility of suggestibility and imagination.[17] In his work, Puységur emphasized the role of rapport between the mesmerizer and the mesmerized person and the importance of the will of the mesmerizer.[18] Others revived the antiquated idea of sympathies between natural bodies, albeit in a more scientific fashion.[19] Still others suggested outright fraud, either by the mesmerizer or the devil.[20] Acknowledging the supernatural in another way, a Swedenborgian organization from Stockholm theorized in 1789 that mesmerized people were susceptible to influence from spirits, who then worked the marvels known from so many cases.[21] Although

[14] F[[ranz] A[nton] Mesmer, *Mémoire de F.A. Mesmer, docteur en médicine sur ses découvertes* (Fuchs: Paris, 1799), 60 and 87-88 (translation my own). Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, 65-67, discusses this work of Mesmer's in greater detail.
[15] Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, 39n3, collects Puységur's early terminology, while 156-158 covers the early 1840s hypnotism terminology of physican James Braid. Ibid., 222, 224, 225, 226, and 227 mention a large range of American terms innovated from the 1840s on, including "mental electricity"; "phreno-magnetism" and "psychography"; "somnipathy"; "psychometry"; and "etherology", respectively. To this stock, Fuller, *Mesmerism*, 38-39, adds "psychodynamy," "psycheism," "electrical psychology," and "pathetism."
[16] Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, 4ff.
[17] Ibid., 23-29, with later figures mentioned in 122-126.
[18] Ibid., 41-42 and 49-53.
[19] Ibid., 120-122.
[20] Ibid., 178-184.
[21] Ibid., 70-72, with later figures mentioned in 119-120.

never predominant, this last explanation nevertheless endured, and would resurface in the United States, most notably with Andrew Jackson Davis.[22]

The variety of terms and explanations clustering around the rough body of phenomena that had been codified in late eighteenth century Europe moved in earnest to the United States in the mid to late 1830s.[23] Some Americans had been aware of mesmerism earlier during its initial period of popularity among European elites. Most notably, Benjamin Franklin chaired the first French royal commission of 1784, with some of the experiments taking place on his estate in that country.\ Mesmer himself, moreover, tried to interest Franklin and George Washington. The disinterest of these statesmen during the mid-1780s and into the 1790s was initially matched elsewhere in America; American Philosophical Society lectures in 1784 failed to spark much interest, and a Connecticut physician's healing techniques resembling mesmerism had only a mild vogue beginning towards the end of the 1790s. Around three decades later, however, mesmerism resurfaced, and many less elite Americans responded much more enthusiastically. In 1829, a French professor at West Point named Joseph Du Commun delivered and then published three lectures that drew some interest. More importantly, a French medical student Charles Poyen toured New England in 1836, inspiring broad-based experimentation and inaugurating a lasting tradition of traveling mesmerist demonstrations.

Just as in Europe, the phenomena most commonly exhibited by mesmerized persons included medical and other forms of clairvoyance, like seeing at a distance. Publications,

---

[22] John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 66ff., programmatically distinguishes "therapeutic Mesmerists" from "spiritualist Mesmerists" in 1840s France, a helpful distinction that could likely be extended to the earlier history of mesmerism as well as to the 1840s United States.

[23] Crabtree, *From Mesmerism to Freud*, 23-29 and 213-231. Fuller, *Mesmerism*, 14-15, helpfully distinguishes between mesmerism's earlier, more elite European phase, and its later, more popular American phase. For the very early years of mesmerism in America, see Eric T. Carlson, "Charles Poyen Brings Mesmerism to America," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 15 (April 1960): 121-132.

however, also circulated awareness of the uncanny mesmeric knowledge of the past and future to which Davis would eventually lay claim. The 1840 British book *Facts in Mesmerism, with Reasons for a Dispassionate Inquiry Into It* became the most popular book on the subject in the United States.[24] Although deliberately eschewing the treatment of "anything miraculous," its author Chauncy Hare Townshend admitted that he could "give a zest to my pages by recording circumstances which were passing strange."[25] As a taste of that zest, he related a single provocative case of "a sleepwalker" accurately giving a "prophecy" of her brother's return from Cuba, which Townshend hypothesized was due to either "extraordinary knowledge and prescience" or her "calculat[ing] on probabilities, perhaps more acutely than in her natural state."[26] One 1843 American book, *Psychography, or, The Embodiment of Thought*…., by physician Robert H. Collyer, even went so far as to explicitly define this sort of clairvoyance and place it in a comprehensive typology. In "that exalted condition of mind, called CLAIRVOYANCE," Collyer intoned, "the faculties seem to have hardly a limit of action; time and space are annihilated; the secrets of the past, present and future are brought within the immediate range of THOUGHT."[27] He emphasized this sort of clairvoyance again by recognizing "three kinds of clairvoyance," including "the highest or lucid condition," a condition termed "the only true *clairvoyance*," and one in which "the recipient recognizes [occurrences] independent of the knowledge of the operator or correspondent."[28] Like Townshend, however,

[24] As noted by Fuller, *Mesmerism*, 40, which gives the book's publication date as 1844 rather than 1840.
[25] Chauncy Hare Townshend, *Facts in Mesmerism, with Reasons for a Dispassionate Inquiry Into It* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1840), 50.
[26] Ibid., 51-52. In new material to the second edition, Townshend furthermore alludes to mesmerism's "reasoning of things beyond the tomb" and "the most striking revelations regarding... moral destiny," albeit without any examples. Chauncy Hare Townshend, *Facts in Mesmerism, with Reasons for A Dispassionate Inquiry Into It*, 2nd ed. (London: Hippolyte Bailleire; Paris: J.B. Bailliere; Leipzig: T.O. Weigel, 1844), xv.
[27] Rob[er]t H. Collyer, *Psychography, or, the Embodiment of Thought; with an Analysis of Phreno-Magnetism, "Neurology," and Mental Hallucination, including Rules to Govern and Produce the Magnetic State* (Philadelphia: Zieber & Co.; New York: Sun Office; Boston: Redding & Co., 1843), 26 (capitals in original).
[28] Ibid., 32 (italics in original).

Collyer mainly discussed other phenomena, in particular an experiment in which two people transferred thoughts by positioning themselves at set angles and staring into a bowl of molasses.[29] Nevertheless, these offhand references mirrored some degree of widespread knowledge during the early 1840s. For example, Nathaniel Hawthorne took note of these extreme clairvoyant phenomena, recording in an 1842 journal his idea for a list of "questions as to unsettled points of History and Mysteries of Nature to be asked of a mesmerized person."[30]

Just as it encompassed the same range of observed phenomena, American mesmerism also mirrored European mesmerism by encompassing the same range of causal explanations – including that of spirit communication, which was most manifest in Andrew Jackson Davis's claims about the Second Sphere and which easily segued into the advent of spiritualism in the late 1840s.

From the late 1840s, many Americans asserted and assumed that they were in communication with spirits. Since the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the United States had seen similar claims in charismatic groups such as the Shakers and the Mormons.[31] In comparison, however, spiritualism was especially distinctive because spirit contact was the linchpin of the religion and its continuing practice; although spiritualists were largely averse to formal organization, belief in the importance of spirit contact was one of a handful of

[29] Ibid., 31-38, with illustrations of the experiment on 31 and the title page.
[30] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebook*, ed. Randall Stewart (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1932), 93 (also quoted in Fuller, *Mesmerism*, 34-35). Hawthorne apparently never wrote this list, but Fuller, , 295n157, links this idea to his incorporation of mesmerism into the plot of *The House of Seven Gables*. For other ways in which mesmerism influenced literature, see Bruce Mills, *Poe, Fuller, and the Mesmeric Arts: Transition States in the American Renaissance* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006).
[31] Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 7-9, mentions precedents. Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion from the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) helpfully contextualizes the early years of the Shakers in England and America against the backdrop of other charismatic Christian phenomena such as prophecy and visions.

characteristics uniting all or most people who identified as spiritualists or sympathized with spiritualism.[32]

Within the United States, spiritualism takes its start as a movement from the onset of mysterious rappings in the house of the Fox family in Hydesville, New York, in late 1847. After regional attention and the discovery that the raps would occur in response to announced codes – so many raps for yes or no, or raps given in relation to recitation of the alphabet – investigation continued on the conviction that the young Fox sisters Kate and Margaret were mediums, because the raps happened in their presence. In time, their older sister Leah proved to be a medium as well, and while word spread, the spirits demanded a public demonstration, which occurred in Rochester's largest hall in the fall of 1849. By the summer of 1850, the girls were giving demonstrations in New York City, and other mediums giving séances and public demonstrations had sprung up across the United States, with expanded methods of communication including trance writing and trance speaking.[33]

On the whole, spiritualism drew on and in turn developed widespread respect for empiricism, as well as the populist and anti-hierarchical ethos present in the ideologies of social reform, republicanism, and many popular Protestantisms.[34] Because of this, it especially drew interest from people with affiliations in groups like the Universalists and Quakers, not to mention the anti-slavery and woman's rights movements.[35] For many, however, belief also extended beyond mere acceptance of the truth of spirit contact into the truthfulness of some

---

[32] Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, convincingly claims as part of his larger set of arguments for a rough coherence to spiritualist thought and practice: "Only the Spiritualists... built an entire religious system around a belief in spirit activity and the practice of spirit communication... A fully elaborated religion of the spirits was their distinctive contribution to the history of American religious culture" (8).
[33] Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 10-31. Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 3-18.
[34] Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 18ff., especially argues for spiritualism's appeal to empiricism. Ibid., 70-101, and Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 56-81, treat social reform in general and woman's rights in particular, respectively. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 35-59, discusses "spiritualist republicanism" in detail.
[35] Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 3-4 and 10ff., and Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 3-4.

communications and the postulation of a wider multi-tiered cosmos with no hell, eternal progression of souls, and inter-penetration of the spirit realm with earth.[36] Bits of such ideas were floating around among Swedenborgians, mesmerists, Universalists, and others, but were especially crystallized into a distinctive amalgamation through Andrew Jackson Davis, whose *Nature's Divine Revelations* preceded the bulk of spiritualism but became exceptionally popular when spiritualists cast about for a broader system of thought in which to view spirit contact.[37] Along with widely shared social practices of organizing circles and popular newspapers such as the *Spiritual Telegraph* (1852-1859) and the later *Banner of Light* (1857-1907), these ideas linked spiritualists together in a way that formal organizations did not.[38]

Because spiritualist practice was decentralized, the object of casual interest, and not necessarily exclusive from other churches, estimating levels of participation is difficult, although it was indubitably national and very well-known.[39] In general, however, spiritualism is thought to have experienced its peak after the Civil War, then a noticeable decline from the 1870s on because of the publicized exposure of fraudulent mediums and increased competition from new groups like Theosophy and Christian Science.[40] For all these reasons, the year 1875 especially marked a turning point: that year saw not only the foundation of Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society and the publication of Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health With a Key to the Scriptures*, but also the humiliation of famous convert Robert Dale Owen, who discovered the fraudulency of a spirit materialization when his article attesting to it was already past the

[36] Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 60-84.
[37] Most helpfully, see ibid., [16]-34. Davis's importance is also stressed in Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 10-12, and Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 34-35.
[38] See especially Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, [120]-176, which convincingly teases out commonalities among spiritualists despite frequent lack of formal organization.
[39] Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 25-28.
[40] Braude, *Radical Spirits*, [162]-191; Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 177-179; and Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 64ff.

point of retraction.[41] Spiritualism survived, however, and camp meetings and a proliferating number of organizations defined its presence in the twentieth century.[42]

In any case, spiritualism continued and developed the legacy of mesmerism throughout its history; just like Andrew Jackson Davis's friends from the Second Sphere, its spirits too, it turns out, could reveal knowledge of the past.

Andrew Jackson Davis and *Nature's Divine Revelations*

The reception of Andrew Jackson Davis's *Nature's Divine Revelations* shows how some American who were open to mesmerism and spiritualism could accept claims of spiritual knowledge, leave the Evidences behind along with authorship and harmonization traditions surrounding the gospels, and ultimately posit a historical Jesus.[43]

Born in southeastern New York in 1826, Davis became a shoemaker's apprentice in Poughkeepsie by the early 1840s.[44] Although he received minimal schooling, he also "possessed an inquiring mind [and] loved books, especially controversial religious works, which he always preferred, whenever he could borrow them and obtain leisure for their perusal," according to a local ministerial acquaintance who provides acute insight into a stereotypical seeker.[45] In 1843,

---

[41] Ibid., 178, 179-180, and 182ff.
[42] Helpful for the later history of spiritualist organizations is J. Stillson Judah, *The History and Philosophy of the Metaphysical Movements in America* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 50-91.
[43] No full biography of Davis exists. Robert W. Delp, "Andrew Jackson Davis: Prophet of American Spiritualism," *Journal of American History* 54, no. 1 (June 1967): 43-56 is the most helpful treatment, although at times it is overly dependent on Davis's *Magic Staff*, especially for colorful accounts of visions, as is Robert S. Ellwood. "Davis, Andrew Jackson", *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Davis, Andrew Jackson" (by Robert S. Ellwood), http://www.anb.org/articles/08/08-01868.html (accessed November 5, 2012).
[44] In the introduction to transcribed lectures of Davis, Smith, *Lectures on Clairmativeness*, [iii], places the start of Davis's time as a shoemaker's apprentice to around 1839, but a reproduced letter by shoemaker Ira Armstrong and a general timeframe given in William Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," ix and xi, respectively, dates it to either 1841 or 1842. Much later, Davis, *Magic Staff*, 188, places the start of his apprenticeship to "spring of 1842."
[45] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," x, reprinting an 1847 letter from a certain minister named A.R. Bartlett, who claims acquaintance with Davis from 1842 onward and vouches for his character. Bartlett also notes that Davis was often inarticulate "through a misuse of words" and that '[h]is orthography and syntax were often faulty." The

Davis discovered an ability to become easily mesmerized, at the hands of a local tailor who was inspired to experiment by the demonstrations of a traveling mesmerist.[46] Soon leaving his trade and taking up with his self-made mesmerizer, Davis built a regional reputation primarily upon medical diagnoses, but also would occasionally give descriptions of distant places and events, as well as future occurrences.[47] By 1845 at the latest, Davis claimed for himself the highest known mesmerist powers while in trance. "I possess the power of extending my vision throughout all space,– can see things past, present, and to come," Davis intoned in the fourth and last talk of a short series written down by a Universalist minister and published as *Lectures on Clairmativeness*. "I have now arrived to the highest degree of knowledge which the human mind is capable of acquiring."[48] As if these extravagant generalities were not already enough, Davis even specified that he was a "master of the general sciences" and could "speak all languages."[49]

---

presence of this observation as an aside in an otherwise friendly source seems evidence of its truthfulness, as well as Davis's persistent later efforts to emphasize his ignorance of books.

[46] The rough timeframe of Smith, *Lectures on Clairmativeness*, [iii], and the dates of Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction", [x], and Davis, *Magic Staff*, 201-203, all place Davis's first attempt at trance in1843. Although an earlier source, Smith provides no details about how Davis's ability was discovered or in conjunction with whom his medical practice was conducted. Fishbough and Davis, however, relate that in autumn a traveling mesmerist named Grimes gave a public demonstration in which Davis took part without any success, but in early December a local man named William Levingston took inspiration from Grimes's visit and successfully experimented on Davis. Davis refers to Levingston as a tailor.

[47]Although Smith, *Lectures on Clairmativeness*, [iii]-iv and 37-40, does not specifically mention with whom Davis worked, Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction", xi-xiii, clarifies that Davis left employment with Armstrong to work with Levingston, was working with Levingston as Fishbough became acquainted with him in New York and Connecticut in 1844 and 1845, and stopped working with Levingston in August 1845, around the time of his removal to New York with Lyons. In the appendix of Smith, *Lectures on Clairmativeness*, 37-40, the author relates that by 1845 he had not only been given an accurate personal medical diagnosis and a phrenological exam by Davis, but also witnessed remarkable occurrences such as "his examination of 70 or 80 persons," clairvoyant descriptions of Maine and England, and an eventually fulfilled predication of the return of a man "long absent at sea." Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xii, relates that from March 1844 "until April 10, 1847, after which time he ceased to be magnetized for an indefinite period," Davis "sustained himself" in "a career of medical practice."

[48] Smith, *Lectures on Clairmativeness*, 33-34. The lectures are undated, but the 1845 copyright ([ii]) and a May 1845 letter quoted in the appendix (39) indicate that they cannot have been delivered later than 1845. The review "Clairvoyance," *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 23, 1845, 1, demonstrates that Smith's *Lectures on Clairmativeness* must have been published by the summer of 1845. Davis, *Magic Staff*, 279, identifies Smith as a Universalist minister.

[49] Smith, *Lectures on Clairmativeness*, 36. Davis's strongest claims for his powers appear entirely in the fourth lecture, which Smith specified "is EVERY WORD as given by the Clairvoyant... [H]e charged me most decidedly and repeatedly not to alter a word, or deviate at all from the course which he arranged and determined" (iv; capitals in original). Fisbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xi, notes that around this time "by progressive stages" Davis began

Despite their bombast, these claims nevertheless received some acceptance. The transcribing minister, for example, avowed that Davis's "vision and knowledge, when in the transic [sic] state, seem perfect and unlimited."[50] More notably, Horace Greeley's *New-York Daily Tribune* published a July 1845 front page review that gave a tentative, broad endorsement to the genuineness of "the Clairvoyant of Poughkeepsie."[51] To Davis's benefit, both of these positive reviews presumed and helped establish a long-lasting rewritten biography of Davis as an unlearned man who became learned when in trance.[52]

Already by May of 1845, Davis had apparently begun to predict that he would undertake a more comprehensive series of lectures, and by August, shortly after the positive *Tribune* review, he had abandoned his mesmerizer from Poughkeepsie and made his way to New York City in the company of a Dr. S.S. Lyon, a Connecticut physician and mesmerist whom he had met during occasional medical forays into the neighboring state.[53] On November 27th of 1845, William Fishbough, another Connecticut resident and yet another Universalist minister of Davis's acquaintance, received a summons; while in trance, Davis had appointed him as scribe for the awaited lectures that would become *Nature's Divine Revelations* – which lectures began the very next evening, after Fishbough's quick arrival in the city.[54] Davis and Lyons had been running a clairvoyant medical practice out of rented rooms. Now, the mesmerized Davis began to give his lectures, very frequently in the presence of observers. Simultaneously, newspaper

---

to discourse on "the general principles and much of [the] minutiae" of many sciences, as well as "from time to time presented many novel and highly-interesting ideas concerning the nature and powers of the human soul."

[50] Smith, *Lectures on Clairmativeness*, [iii].

[51] In "Clairvoyance," *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 23, 1845, 1, the anonymous reviewer declares that "[t]he statements given in this pamphlet... appear miraculous" and adds that "the impression made by the book is favorable," especially "the Fourth lecture... for it corresponds to our own impressions as to spiritual facts."

[52] Smith, *Lectures on Clairmativeness*, [iii], notes that Davis was "unlearned, five months having been the extent of his schooling," an observation echoed in the statement of "Clairvoyance," *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 23, 1845, 1, that Davis "has received scarce any instruction from books or school."

[53] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xiii-xiv.

[54] Ibid., xiv.

publicity spread Davis's reputation as an uneducated clairvoyant, not to mention charges of plagiarism, since the emerging portions of his lectures resembled passages from works such as those of Swedenborg and geological treatises.[55] Although Davis's proponents viewed these correspondences as establishing the genuineness rather than the fraudulence of Davis's clairvoyance, some striking resemblances in thought and unusual vocabulary indicate that Davis was accessing these sources either through direct reading or through conversation and then riffing on them while mesmerized – a very plausible and judicious explanation also offered by some of Davis's contemporaries.[56] Davis himself and his immediate circle, however, famously said that he ascended to a higher sphere and acquired his knowledge by accessing and receiving impressions from the minds of its more intelligent spiritual inhabitants, a claim that they and the press circulated.[57]

---

[55] For example, Geo[rge] Bush, "Magnetic Marvels – Letter from Prof. Bush," *New-York Daily Tribune*, November 14, 1846, 2, portrays Davis as an uneducated clairvoyant and endorses "the higher and more important phenomena of Mesmerism." W[illiam] F[ishbough], "Professor Lewis and Davis's Revelations," *New-York Daily Tribune* (14 January 1847), 1, briefly reviews some of the charges of plagiarism that were circulating at one point: namely, Davis had plagiarized works of Swedenborg, Robert Chamber's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, and lectures of Orestes Brownson, among other writings.

[56] For example, Geo[rge] Bush, "Magnetic Marvels – Letter from Prof. Bush," *New-York Daily Tribune* (14 November 1846), 2, observes that "without ever having read a page of Swedenborg, [Davis] has reproduced... the leading features of his philosophy of the Universe, and in several instances the coincidence is all but absolutely verbal," then goes on to offer a reward for anyone who can prove that Davis "has ever read or seen a copy of the 'Principia,' the 'Animal Kingdom,' or the 'Economy of the Animal Kingdom.'" In a front page review of the published lectures, the anonymous author of "Davis's Revelations," *New-York Daily Tribune*, August 3, 1847, 1, gives a "remarkable" exemplary instance of how Davis resembles Swedenborg, reproducing bits of *Nature's Divine Revelations* and Swedenborg's *Animal Kingdom* in parallel columns, although without affirming either the fraudulence or the genuineness of Davis's clairvoyance. The anonymous author of "Davis's Principles of Nature," Boston *Daily Evening Transcript*, September 29, 1847, 2, however, goes further and ventures that "notwithstanding his limited attainments, [Davis] dictated this work from his own naturally acquired knowledge," suggesting that he did so in good faith through inadvertent use of a tenacious memory that summoned forth scraps of knowledge that he had glancingly encountered. Slater Brown, *The Heyday of Spiritualism* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1970), 86ff., helpfully details possible sources for Davis's knowledge, although he implausibly ascribes them to unwitting telepathy with observers who had read the books in question.

[57] During the course of the lectures, William Fishbough, "Discovery of an Eighth and Ninth Planet by an Interior Light," *New-York Daily Tribune*, November 11, 1846, 1, publicized Davis's clairvoyance and explained that "his mind, while in the abnormal state, receives the influx of the science understood in the *spiritual spheres* with which his mind associates" (italics in original). Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 40-41, and Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xvi, give similar explanations. "Davis's Revelations,", *New-York Daily Tribune*, August 3, 1847, 1, depends on and further circulates the claims of Fishbough's "Scribe's Introduction," for example.

After a time, the long cycle of channeled lectures was published in 1847 in the U.S. and England with the cumbersome title *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind*, but was more popularly known as *Nature's Divine Revelations*. The work provided Davis with national publicity, lifelong celebrity, and a path to more and greater opportunities.[58] For a time, Davis was publicized by a small group who put out the short-lived newspaper the *Univercoelum and Spiritual Philosopher* (1847-1849), but the almost simultaneous rapid rise of spiritualism provided him with a broader audience who may not have given credence to him alone, but nevertheless identified with his conception of the spheres and spirit contact and was willing at the very least to give him a hearing if not always their full belief or support. He struck out independently and combined writing and lecturing with dependence on the generosity of benefactors and two controversial marriages. His antebellum writings included the five-volume *Great Harmonia* (1850-1855) and the *Penetralia* (1856), not to mention an autobiography, *The Magic Staff* (1857). Successively, these writings helped him to successfully rewrite his life before the rise of spiritualism. On the one hand he disowned his bombastic claims to unlimited clairvoyance found in *Lectures on Clairmativeness*, but on the other hand he also filled in his early life with striking descriptions of visions and marvels that have become standard features of his biography up to this very day.[59] He also explained away his continuing

[58] The anonymous author of "The Poughkeepsie Seer," *American Freeman*, September 15, 1847, 1, gives a sense of how New York newspapers spread awareness that aided the success of *Nature's Divine Revelations*. Although living in Waukesha, Wisconsin, the author notes that they had been "anxiously waiting to see the book of young Davis, or some *notice* of it, ever since seeing in the New York papers, the glorious and almost impossible objects which it promised to realize" (italics in original). David Hempton, *Evangelical Disenchantment: Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 70-91, presents Davis's works as representative of a general interest in spiritualism, in the life of reformer Theodore Dwight Weld.

[59] Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Great Harmonia*…., Vol. III (New York: J.S. Redfield; Fowlers & Wells, 1852), 210-211, says that he was "profoundly ignorant" when he made that statement in *Clairmativeness*, and that "the more my mind is illuminated with the high influxion of light and truth from the inner life, the more do I shrink from the authorship of such rhapsodical and pedantic language." Davis, *Magic Staff,* 274-276, gives the circumstances of *Clairmativeness*, directs the reader to his explanations in the third volume of *The Great Harmonia*, and apologizes again for his "extravagant exclamations and enthusiastic professions at that moment," declaiming, "Oh, how much I thought I could comprehend!" (276). Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xi, mentions a duration of two days

fondness for books; as a youth in Poughkeepsie, he used to only borrow theological tracts on behalf of others, he demurred, and other books more recently sighted on his shelves during the publication of the *Univercoelum* simply came with his furnished apartment.[60] He also provided his side of scandals, describing how the recently divorced woman who became his first wife stayed overnight in his room the second time that they met simply because her nearby room was too cold.[61] Already described as the spiritualist "John the Baptist" in the earliest history of the movement in 1870, Davis nevertheless consistently differentiated his clairvoyance from spirit contact *per se*, and he pointedly distanced himself from the movement during the exposes of that decade.[62] He eventually moved to Boston, where he ran a medical practice until his death in 1910.

Because of *Nature's Divine Revelations*, Davis deserves a place in not just the spiritualist pantheon, but the pantheon of anti-traditional biblical criticism as well. Like other American

---

beginning "[o]n the 7th of March, 1844," in which Davis was in "a strange abnormal state.... travelled [sic] a long distance [and] received information of a very general character, of his future and peculiar mission to the world." Fishbough also notes, "The process by which this information was received, with many other things of intense interest, shall be made public after questions by which the phenomena may be rationalized shall have been more thoroughly discussed on independent grounds." Davis, *Magic Staff*, 228ff., develops this allusion into a vision of a shepherd and sheep and encounters with Swedenborg and Galen, which become related in later biographies like that of *American National Biography Online*. Davis, *Magic Staff*, includes many other memorable youthful experiences such as hearing heavenly music while working in a field (164-165) and a voice crying out "No!" when he hears a verse in a Methodist hymn about the dead lying in their graves (191), both of which that autobiographical volume may have related for the first time.

[60] Immediately upon the publication of *Nature's Divine Revelations*, "Davis's Revelations," *New-York Daily Tribune*, August 3, 1847, 1, called attention to how a letter published in Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," x, incidentally mentioned how Davis used to borrow theological tracts. Additionally, it related an early version of Davis's apologetic, that "[t]his Mr. Davis explains, as we learn, by saying... that he borrowed one or two books... for another man, but did not read them himself." Davis, *Magic Staff*, 200, explains slightly differently, "I would get the loan of books for others who wished to read, but did not sufficiently know the pastor to borrow for themselves," adding, "My own time was too much occupied for reading, even if I had realized any inclination to do so." Davis, *Magic Staff*, 393, describes how his "furnished apartments" that were funded by his early benefactor and eventual first wife included "a case of valuable books, which, like the profusion of other objects, were new and quite beyond my needs and wishes." He notes that "[t]he existence of these book... gave rise to a foolish report" that he consulted them, but states that his knowledge that "these suspicions were baseless" led him to "neither attempt to hide the books nor to avoid the existence of appearances unfavorable."

[61] Davis, *Magic Staff*, 397-398.

[62] Emma Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years' Record of the Communion Between Earth and the World of Spirits* (New York: Published by the Author, 1870), 21-27.

forays in this evein, Davis's work took on the Evidences and offered a historical Jesus to fill in the gap left by the displacement of traditional biblical criticism of the gospels. First, Fishbough and Davis presented *Nature's Divine Revelations* as a replacement for the Evidences. Second, like other anti-traditional biblical criticism of the gospels, Davis's specific revelations put in doubt long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions, necessitating a historical Jesus. Third, reception of *Nature's Divine Revelations* show that Davis's anti-traditional biblical criticism met with some degree of sympathy, and thus helped anti-traditional biblical criticism find traction among Americans who accepted claims to spiritual knowledge.

The presentation of *Nature's Divine Revelations* as a replacement for the Evidences is most apparent in the "Scribe's Introduction."[63] Written by scribe William Fishbough and subtitled "Biographical Sketch of the Author, and History of the Production of This Volume," this introduction minutely details the circumstances of the revelation's origins and transmission in twenty pages of very small type. As an American living in the nineteenth century, but especially as a trained Universalist minister, Fishbough was undoubtedly very familiar with the Evidences, that century's dominant mode of Christian theology.[64] In the Evidences, recognition of Christian revelation was explicitly predicated upon rational investigation of a roughly codified set of overlapping arguments, many dealing with the origins and transmission of the Bible. In encouraging rational investigation and choosing to address the origin and transmission of *Nature's Divine Revelations*, then, Fishbough tried to anticipate his audience's concerns and parley them into acceptance of Davis's revelations.

---

[63] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," [iii]-xxii.

[64] Ernest Joseph Isaacs, "A History of Nineteenth Century American Spiritualism as a Religious and Social Movement" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1975), 35ff. details Fishbough's previous career and involvement with Davis. For an overview of theological tendencies in early Universalism see E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 218-233.

First off, Fishbough explicitly acknowledged that he wrote his introduction in order to support rational investigation into corroboratory circumstances. After straightaway admitting that the book was "[a] work of unprecedented character," Fishbough quite candidly stated that he wrote his introduction to support investigation:

> [I]t is certainly more than just that the world should be furnished with a plain, concise, yet circumstantial account of the author of the book, with a history of its origins and production, and with means of either verifying or refuting what is said concerning the *source* from which it sprang, and the means employed in its production.[65]

For Fishbough, since reason was a sure guide to truth, examination of the provided material would lead to acceptance of Davis's revelations. More than just an isolated conceit of Fishbough, this emphasis on rational investigation was echoed not only in quotes praising investigation and reason on the work's title page, but even in choicely placed exhortations of Davis himself.[66] In his opening "Address to the World," for example, Davis encouraged his audience to "press onward!" and "[e]xercise your choicest gift, which is *Reason*"; "[y]our duty is to *search*," he said.[67] Similarly, in the opening sentences of the book's first part, which correspond to the very first words that Davis intoned at his very first lecture, he ascribed reason "to man alone" and declared that "the only hope for the amelioration of the world is free thought and unrestricted inquiry."[68] The eighteenth century had birthed a widespread cultural sensibility in which rational investigation was highly valued, even to confirm revelation; with *Nature's Divine Revelations*, Fishbough and Davis appealed to that common inheritance in order to move their audience from an old revelation to a new one.

---

[65] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," [iii] (italics in original).
[66] Davis, *Principles of Nature*, [i], which has three quotes, one of which states that "[a]ny theory, hypothesis, philosophy, sect, creed, or institution, that fears investigation, openly manifests its own error," and another of which states that "[r]eason is a flower of the spirit, and its fragrance is liberty and knowledge."
[67] Ibid., [1] and 4 (italics and capitals in original).
[68] Ibid., [5]. Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xviii-xix, specifies that all lectures were presented in the order received, apart from several small modifications, including the transposal of Davis's "Address to the World," which was the very last lecture, to the opening of the work.

More specifically, Fishbough commented on many particular aspects of the origin and transmission of *Nature's Divine Revelations* because he was in implicit dialogue with the culturally dominant arguments of the Evidences. Although the comparison was left unstated, Fishbough provided information in order to equate or even favorably contrast *Nature's Divine Revelations* with the gospels. As the most popular and definitive statement of the Evidences in the nineteenth century, William Paley's *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794) can give a sense of against what sort of imagined combatant Fishbough made his thrusts and parries in the air, as he sought to match or best everything typically asserted about the origins of the gospels. Might the ascription of the gospels to the evangelists seem admittedly "arbitrary or conjectural," with nothing of the identities of Mark and Luke even mentioned in the gospels?[69] *Nature's Divine Revelations* is preceded by an entire "Scribe's Introduction" signed "William Fishbough." complete with the place and time of "Williamsburgh, N.Y., July, 1847."[70] Are the gospels found in "a great number of *ancient* manuscripts, found in many different countries, and in countries widely distant from each other"?[71] Fishbough asserts that the original manuscripts of Davis's lectures have been "carefully preserved."[72] Did Jesus have "many… original witnesses" whose veracity is proved by their willingness to undergo persecution?[73] At his lectures, Davis had not only three specified witnesses whose names and current place of residence are provided, but also twenty-three "incidental" witnesses, twenty-two of whom are still alive, and all of whose names and place of residence are provided as well.[74] Even more than that, the witnesses' signatures are

[69] William Paley, *View of the Evidences* (New York: Thomas Bakewell, 1814), 75-76 (quote on 75). Quotes are taken from an earlier American edition of this much-reprinted text.
[70] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," [iii] and xxii.
[71] Paley, *View of the Evidences*, 73 (italics in original).
[72] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xv.
[73] Paley, *View of the Evidences*, 15.
[74] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xiv-xv (quote on xiv). Ibid., xiv, refers readers to Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 2, which in a lengthy footnote provides a list of names and place of residence for the twenty-three witnesses. There, statistics are also given, specifying that there were 157 lectures, 140 of which had manuscripts bearing a total

directly stated to be affixed to the original manuscripts of the lectures for which they were present.[75] On top of all that, too, Fishbough attests that all of these witnesses whom he is "familiarly acquainted with… are men of irreproachable character."[76] Was Jesus "[a] young man of mean condition," whose status of "divine lawgiver" met with surprise?[77] Davis's humble character and biography is also related, complete with three corroborating "testimonies from respectable citizens."[78] Moreover, the deflating possibility that Davis "received much of this book by sympathetic influx from the minds of those associated with him" is denied, in favor of the proposition that he was "in sympathetic communication" with "the Second Sphere."[79] To state the contrast of seer and seen more explicitly:

> During the past year, this uneducated, unsophisticated, and amiable young man, has been delivering verbally, day by day, a comprehensive, well-planned, and extraordinary BOOK – relating to all the vast questions of the age, to the physical sciences, to Nature in all her infinite ramifications, to Man in his innumerable modes of existence, to GOD in the unfathomable abysses of his Love, Power, and Wisdom.[80]

Did miracles attend Jesus?[81] With Davis, "[p]erhaps over four thousand different persons who have witnessed him in his medical examinations or in his scientific disclosures, live to testify to the astonishing exaltation of mind possessed by Mr. Davis in his abnormal states."[82] Did prophecies attend Jesus?[83] "The two new planets of our system recently conjectured were described in Davis's manuscripts fourteen months ago [March 15 and 16, 1846]."[84] Do the

---

of 297 witness signatures, and that any given witness heard 1 to 73 lectures. Of the remaining unattested lectures, it is stated, "There is here and there a lecture (amounting to seventeen in all) which does not contain any signatures as a witness; but the identity of the source of these with that of the others will not be doubted by any one on proper investigation."

[75] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xv, and Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 2.
[76] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xv.
[77] Paley, *View of the Evidences*, 49.
[78] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," viff. (quote on viii).
[79] Ibid., xvi, xvii.
[80] Ibid., xv (capitalization in original).
[81] Paley, *View of the Evidences*, 15ff.
[82] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xv.
[83] Paley, *View of the Evidences*, 153-161.
[84] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xv.

gospels contain apparent "discrepancies" needing minimization?[85] Fishbough broaches perception of a similar problem with Davis's book:

> [I]t can scarcely be expected that the *many* particulars and minutiae involved in this work of eight hundred pages are in every individual case nicely accurate. But whatever inaccuracies of this kind, apparent or real, may be discovered (and the *real* ones will be few if any), these can not [sic] have any effect upon the great *general* principles and truths which it is the only aim of this work to establish...[86]

All in all, for an audience raised on the Evidences, Davis looks very remarkable – as long as he and his production are seen from Fishbough's point of view.

Whereas Fishbough acknowledged the Evidences by reproducing their form of argumentation, Davis himself acknowledged the Evidences (albeit obscurely) by alluding to the differences between them and his channelings after he spoke about the evangelists, the gospels, and most of all Jesus's life:

> These historical accounts, concerning which I in common with others have had mysterious impressions, now appear entirely transparent, even to their origin, and their confirmation in the minds of mankind. And I now rejoice to know that this superficial theology has not the least connexion [sic] with the Divine Essence, or Great Creative Cause, with his laws, or with the great system of material and spiritual worlds…
>
> *Now* my affections are directed entirely by that wisdom which discards a theology so impure and superficial… Hence, while I am in this condition, I am knowledging [sic] that which is opposed to the present affections of men, in the department of theology and philosophy.[87]

In other words, whereas Fishbough gave new and improved replacement contents to the customary form of argumentation, Davis saw himself as opposing the Evidences by doing away with "historical accounts" through "knowledging [sic] that which is opposed to the present affections of men." Indeed, although interpretative self-descriptions can often fall short, what

[85] Paley, *View of the Evidences*, 261ff.
[86] Fishbough, "Scribe's Introduction," xx.
[87] Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 572 (italics in original).

Davis proposed in *Nature's Divine Revelations* did by all means oppose long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions about the gospels that the Evidences had culturally institutionalized.

Davis's treatment of the evangelists appears in a surprisingly large section of *Nature's Divine Revelation* that deals with the Bible. Although the Table of Contents innocuously lists "Former Revelations" as one of forty subheadings, Davis's treatment of the Bible accounts for one out of every four of the book's pages – and the Bible is just one of those "Former Revelations."[88] Going through the biblical books more or less in order in the style of the second part of Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*, Davis gives a discourse almost twice the length of that of his august predecessor in anti-traditional biblical criticism.[89] Although they were occasionally unexpected to listeners, Davis explicitly presented his historical pronouncements on the Bible as definitive. As a footnote in the printed version clarifies about his claim that Genesis was written by exiled Jews in Persia, "In answer to an inquiry… the author subsequently stated that this was a captivity… of which we have no *historical record*."[90] For Davis, impressions from the Second Sphere trumped all other proof, or lack thereof, and he received a good deal of impressions about the Bible.

Almost all anti-traditional biblical criticism posited obscure evangelists who were distanced from events, but a few occasionally mixed eyewitness status or access to accounts originating close to events with some mechanism of distortion, since the quest for the historical

[88] Davis sometimes intermixes discussion of other religions with his discussion of the Bible, as with his proclamation that Genesis was derivative. Ibid., 387ff., begins by arguing that "Genesis was written by the Jews in Persia, at which time a branch of this people were held in captivity," and thus "the accounts therein… present a general reflection of the theology of the Persians as received from the traditional history and systematized by Zoroaster" (387-388).

[89] Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason, Part the Second, Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* ([Paris?]: Printed for the Author, 1795), 6-127. Although covering 121 pages in the American first edition, Paine's work has 30 lines per page to the 40 lines per page of *Nature's Divine Revelation*, and thus contains approximately half the verbiage.

[90] Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 388 (italics in original).

Jesus cannot take place without such an assumption. With the pronouncements of *Nature's Divine Revelations*, Davis fell into the latter camp, presenting evangelist biographies about which he sometimes conceded eyewitness status, but which nevertheless differed from those of long-standing authorship traditions, and which always crucially included a mechanism of distortion.

Because of their distinctive blend of recognizable references and farfetched facts, Davis's channelings about the identity of the evangelists and the origins of the gospels are worth quoting at length. Material from the supplement of evangelist biographies found in the popular Brattleoboro bible editions give a sense of upon which sort of commonplace traditions Davis likely drew, whether consciously or subconsciously.[91]

For Matthew, the popular Brattleboro bible described him as an apostle and thus eyewitness, by profession a tax collector for the Romans, by audience an author in Hebrew for Judaea, and ultimately a martyr in Ethiopia.[92] Oddly, Davis maintained the Matthew's status as an apostle, but not as an eyewitness, and seemed to reference the common knowledge of Matthew's government work and martyrdom in an exotic locale:

> Matthew was certainly not capable of being an eye-witness to those miraculous works of which he speaks, because he was an officer under the Roman government many years after the death of Jesus, and did not become an apostle until he was greatly advanced in life. He then only wrote a few accounts, and at last died a martyr in Persia… Besides this, no information is given of Matthew by any historians who lived in those days, because he deserted the Jewish and adopted the Christian religion in the latter part of his life, and did not become in any degree popular, except from the fact

[91] Paul Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 60ff., describes the popularity and development of the Brattleboro bibles, named for their place of publication in Vermont. For illustrative purposes, a representative example is the early edition *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments*…. (Brattleborough, VT: 1816), which includes as part of its long title, "And, What has Never Before Been Added, an Account of the Lives and Martyrdom of the Apostles and Evangelists."

[92] *Holy Bible*, as stated in the unpaginated supplement "An Account of the Lives, Sufferings, and Martyrdom, of the Apostles and Evangelists."

that he suffered martyrdom under the government of Persia.[93]

Conversely, under Davis's account, Mark became an eyewitness but not an apostle, even though the Brattleboro bible remembered him as a later convert, probably of Peter:[94]

> JOHN MARK… was born and brought up, and resided through his life, in the city of Jerusalem. He lived at the time John the Baptist and Jesus were preaching. He was a believer, and felt anxious to have the new faith promulgated and believed; but he can not [sic] be properly termed an apostle. He had a small family, and was pleasantly situated, both as to the capacity of his residence and his financial affairs. He was accustomed to keep open his house as a place of entertainment and resort for Jesus and the apostles; and this continued during the whole public life of Jesus, and especially from about the time he began to preach until his crucifixion. After this event, John Mark compiled some of the remarks of Jesus, and some impressions concerning him, from a few registered notes which he had kept, into the form of a manuscript, which he designed and intended only for the reading of some converts, mainly from paganism.[95]

Davis's description of Luke's life wove in new and startling details around the familiar passage of Luke 1:1-4, in which the evangelist dedicated his gospel to a Theophilus, and traditions such as those seen in the Brattleboro bible that he was a companion to Paul:[96]

> Luke… was of Jewish birth – was educated in the Jewish religion, and this continued nearly to the time of Paul's conversion from the Jewish to the Christian religion. Luke in his early life learned a trade, which was the custom among the Jewish people, whether the parents of the young were or were not wealthy. He succeeded eminently in his profession, which was that of an *artist*. He is said to have painted the first portrait of Christ, which is to be seen at the present day in the Roman Academy of Design. After Luke embraced the Christian religion, he was a constant co-worker with many of the apostles and believers in various portions of the eastern world. He obtained his information principally from communications received from those who were eye-witnesses of the things related concerning Jesus. He wrote not from actual knowledge, but from that which he received from others. One of his particular friends was THEOPHILUS, whom he felt anxious to convince of the truth of Christianity.[97]

[93] Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 509.
[94] *Holy Bible*, unpaginated supplement.
[95] Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 532.
[96] *Holy Bible*, unpaginated supplement.
[97] Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 534-535 (capitals in original).

With John, finally, Davis termed him an apostle in passing, but did not discuss his eyewitness or apostolic status in detail, whereas the Brattleboro bible identified him as his gospel's Beloved Disciple, the author of Revelation, and ultimately a resident of Ephesus until his death:[98]

> JOHN was born, and resided the greater portion of his life, in Ephesus. His early religious impressions were few : and when these things were presented to his mind, he exercised a great deal of judgment and reflection upon their merits, and afterward adopted and promulgated them with a great deal of sanguine confidence and energy. His manuscripts, like Mark's, were a long time concealed from public observation, but were subsequently translated into the Hebrew language, were sanctioned by the council of Nice, sealed as canonical by Constantine, and thus were presented to the world as constituting the fourth book of the New Testament.[99]

All together, these new authorship traditions discombobulate by mixing old with new, and ground the heady mixture on the visionary authority of Andrew Jackson Davis.

Despite his willingness to admit identities of the evangelists that are non-standard to a noticeable degree, Davis nevertheless wavered about harmonization of the gospels. In terms of narrative, he conceded that Matthew is "discrepant" with the other gospels and that Luke differs "in the grouping of the historical accounts of the life, preaching, and crucifixion of Jesus."[100] When it comes to theology, however, Davis saw the gospels as uniform, despite the absence of collusion among the evangelists.[101]

That said, in place of active harmonization according to long-standing traditions, David nevertheless gave a handful of disordered and partially overlapping reasons why the gospels present a distorted picture of Jesus – or, to use his words, he gave an "account for the origin of those unjust statements in relation to him recorded in the New Testament."[102] First, "the customs

---

[98] *Holy Bible*, unpaginated supplement.
[99] Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 535-536 (capitals in original).
[100] Ibid., 523 and 524, 534.
[101] Ibid., 526, 534, and 535 declare that "Mark contains no distinct doctrines that are not in Matthew," Luke "advances no particular doctrine which in any way needs an explanation or comment," and John "establishes no proposition that differs from those heretofore noticed," respectively. Ibid., 524, briefly discusses and excludes the possibility of "designing plot" and "collusion" among the evangelists.
[102] Ibid., 566.

of society... the rules and ordinances of nations, and the modes and habits of thinking" – for example, the attribution of any present state of affairs to God's will – affected the evangelists and led to "so many very mysterious, unjust, and unreasonable things."[103] Second, much time elapsed "before any inquiries were instituted concerning the peculiarities of [Jesus's] birth and early life, or concerning the circumstances attending the same."[104] Third, Jesus's apparent miracles and fulfillment of prophecy trace back to misguided relations of "his immediate companions and followers" and "general belief."[105] Fourth, many of Jesus's deeds, especially miracles, "were written more from hearsay than from actual knowledge," whereby since "[v]ery few persons were able to write... the constant verbal delivery of these accounts subjected them to constant modification."[106] Working together, these mechanisms resulted in the distorted writings of the gospels and imply an original, historical Jesus lying behind the surviving accounts.

So who is this Jesus lying behind the unreliable accounts of the gospels? On the whole, Davis most often portrayed Jesus's life and activities in broad brushstrokes, rather than descending into the nitty-gritty of combing through the particularities of conflicting gospel texts. At most, he only occasionally named a particular gospel in reference to a choice detail.[107] Born "[i]n Nazareth in Galilee" to Joseph, "a carver and sculptor... frequently engaged in various branches of carpentry," and Mary, "a very gentle and kindly-disposed woman," Jesus entered "an undisturbed and happy home" whose inhabitants "neither possessed an affection for literature,

[103] Ibid., 566-569 (quote on 568).
[104] Ibid., 569.
[105] Ibid., 570.
[106] Ibid., 571.
[107] For example, ibid., 561 and 563-563, mentions and discounts Herod's command to slaughter young children and quotes several beatitudes, respectively. In contrast, ibid., 560, does not reference Matthew as the source of the journey into Egypt. Ibid., 561, wrongly attributes to all the gospels what is only found in Luke when stating, "Matthew and others speak of his birth, and then are silent until they introduce him into the presence of learned doctors and philosophers, in the temple."

nor for the study of any science or philosophy."[108] "[A]n unfavorable report that became extant through the agency of some designing and evil-disposed persons" led to the eviction of the family, and a dream led Joseph to take the family to Egypt – before which, Davis stated, "necessary circumstances compelled Mary to temporarily lay her child in a manger."[109] Jesus's admittance "at the age of twelve years... to the presence of the learned doctors" led him to manifest a multitude of impressive characteristics foreshadowing how the adult "Jesus was perfectly constituted, both as to his physical and spiritual organization."[110] From his youth onward, Jesus displayed "an intuitive knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants, of mineral and animal substances – of their use, and of the proper time and manner of their application in the curing of various diseases."[111] In conjunction with "a great *physical soothing power* over the disordered or disconcerted forces of the human system," this knowledge allowed Jesus to cure people and produced both accusations of evil powers and reception of the title "the Son of God."[112] From youth onward, Jesus also "preached for the purpose of consoling and instructing multitudes of those who were depressed in spirit, and unfortunately situated in the world."[113] Jesus did indeed preach a kingdom, but one exemplifying the "spirit of reform" and "the yearnings of all naturally-philanthropic bosoms": through the institution of "a general harmony of interests and action, such as would join in one the whole race of mankind," "prudence and industry" would "reign throughout this material sphere" and result in "the establishment of the

[108] Ibid., 559-560.
[109] Ibid., 560.
[110] Ibid., 561 and 562. Ibid., 561, lists the young Jesus's powers as "discernment, interior and natural philosophy, unsophisticated love, simplicity of expression, kindness of disposition, and universal sympathy and benevolence." To this is added "naturalness and spontaneousness resulting from the promptings of an uncorrupted and purely-organized spiritual principle," as well as "great benignity, promptitude, and freedom of conception and expression."
[111] Ibid., 562.
[112] Ibid., 562 and 563 (italics in original).
[113] Ibid., 563.

spiritual Zion."[114] Because of obedience to the "beneficent monitions of his mind," however, "prejudice became so strong against him, that he was unable to proceed any further in his career of purity in benevolence," instead meeting an unjust condemnation resulting in crucifixion:

> He was censured by various learned, and, as they were thought to be, very *great*, theologians, and was persecuted to a great extent by the multitudes, who were exasperated from the workings of religious prejudice against him. So he was captured, brought before a council of judicature, who were all disposed to condemn him without a hearing, for disturbance of the peace, for interference with their long-cherished religious faiths, their social organization, their modes of worship, their rites and ceremonies, their long and loud prayers…, for blasphemy, and for doing deeds that were good on the sabbath-day.[115]

As if the echoes of a humanitarian crusader with an unconventional theology were not already strong enough, Davis called Jesus a "noble and unparalleled Moral Reformer" and "a great and good Reformer," stating that he encountered "a spirit of persecution that will be ere long fully exemplified in the nineteenth century."[116] More explicitly, Davis created a man in his own image and in sympathy with his own goals when he told his audience about Jesus's true history, in what amounts to polemical repossession resembling the debating approach of other advocates of anti-traditional biblical criticism like Tom Paine.

Two further aspects of this presentation of the historical Jesus deserve note.

First, although consonant with an explanation of how a historical Jesus led to the portrayals of the gospels and thus with reason, Davis's reconstruction ultimately relied on spiritual knowledge. Yes, his reconstruction explicitly showed how Jesus's facility in the healing arts intersected with a superstitious culture so that the "general impression" among "the ignorant and uniformed" led to "a trembling veneration" at the miracles of the gospels.[117] Yet

[114] Ibid., 564.
[115] Ibid., 565 (italics in original).
[116] Ibid., 565, 566, and 565.
[117] Ibid., 563.

while certain features of the gospels can be derived from this Jesus, this Jesus was not grounded on the authority of a reasoned examination of the gospels, but rather on the authority of Davis's impressions received while in communion with the Second Sphere, as becomes quite explicit at times in this section of *Nature's Divine Revelation*. Why did Davis omit Herod's order to slaughter young children from his narration of Jesus's early life? As he stated, "I am presented with no such an occurrence as the command related by Matthew to have been issued by Herod."[118] Conversely, these impressions could give Davis insight into historical details otherwise beyond recovery. Davis affirmed that Jesus did indeed lay in a manger, peremptorily adding, "in which place, as I am distinctly impressed, he lay not over forty minutes."[119] In this fashion, Davis continued with the gospels an approach that he began in his treatment of Genesis, giving visionary pronouncements for matters about which "we have *no historical record*."[120]

Second, despite his disputation of some miracles and prophecies, Davis's reconstruction was not naturalistic. Davis, of course, would quibble with that wording, since for him anything existing was part of nature and therefore natural; to take one memorable statement of his on the subject, "supernaturalism… is by nature *unnatural*."[121] Admittedly, he denied miracles found in the Bible. For example, the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea was enabled by a combination of timing and opportunely shifted sand, which means also allowed "*Bonaparte*, at a similar manner and at the same place," to cross "the dry bottom of the sea on the recession of the tide."[122] With Jesus's healing miracles, Davis attributed many to a deep understanding of the natural properties of animals, vegetables, and minerals, although, unlike Davis, Jesus did not apparently need to

[118] Ibid., 561.
[119] Ibid., 560.
[120] Ibid., 388 (italics in original).
[121] Davis, *Magic Staff*, 446, quoting a lecture delivered in Hartford in the spring of 1853 (italics in original).
[122] Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 437 (italics in original).

resort to clairvoyance to cook up treatments.[123] Besides that, however, Davis categorized as natural phenomena what then or now would take many atheists aback. For example, he posited a universe of seven spheres in which the spirits of the dead figured large: after death, the spirits of humans as well as the inhabitants of other planets pass over to and form societies within the Second Sphere, the source of Davis's impressions.[124] More interestingly, Davis even admitted some forms of prophecy. On the one hand, he put "entirely beyond the reach of all prophetical minds of divinely-instructed persons" all things that "flow from the corrupted and evanescent tendencies of human society and of physical existence," accordingly denying that "early prophets" of the Bible foretold events "with certainty."[125] On the other hand, prophets who "were instructed concerning the interior workings and tendencies of Nature and who proclaimed upon the unchanging principles of cause and effect" issued true and trustworthy prophecies.[126] Numbered among these true prophecies were predictions of the restoration of social harmony and Jesus's birth as "a great Exemplifier of the true moral and spiritual qualities of man."[127] In this way, he could claim Isaiah "foresaw the birth, the life, and the preachings of Christ," but still discount particular prophecies surrounding his birth as Christian misapplications of inauthentic prophecies issued by Isaiah in regard to circumstances of his time.[128] Overall, then, although Davis viewed spirits and true prophecy within the domain of explicable natural laws, he nevertheless maintained belief in spirits and prophecy at the same time that he offered

[123] For example, Davis, *Magic Staff*, 238-242 and 255-258, in which Davis respectively claims to have received a natural system of healing from the spirit of Galen (the spirit is named on 248) and tells anecdotes of several unconventional natural remedies (e.g. a frog's skin to save a finger from lockjaw and oil boiled out from the middle joints of the hind legs of weasels for deafness).
[124] Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 639-677, in which 647-649 especially detail the immediate fate of many beings post-death.
[125] Ibid., 425.
[126] Ibid., 425-426.
[127] Ibid., 427.
[128] Ibid., 466 and 495-496, which explicitly discusses the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 as foretelling Jesus's birth from a virgin.

viewpoints tantamount to anti-traditional biblical criticism. Although often associated with methodological naturalism and Hegelianism, anti-traditional biblical criticism was not inherently linked to these ideas. If accepted, Davis's religious system would deprive Christians of their view of the divine origin of the Bible as understood within the framework of the Evidences – what they would term the Bible's inspiration – but it would not deprive them of belief in spirits and prophecy. Davis's thought proves that these ideas were and are eminently separable.

Davis's *Nature's Divine Revelations* is an incredibly large and verbose book treating a vast amount of subjects. With any text, but especially with a text so large and varied, readers key in to different parts, and perhaps some readers did indeed only pay attention to more exotic sections like those detailing the seal-like species of Jupiter. Surviving instances of reader reception, however, demonstrate that many who encountered Davis's lectures did in fact have strong and sometimes even sympathetic reactions to his claims about the Bible.

In his autobiography *The Magic Staff*, Davis remembered very early reception of his lectures. As noted earlier, none other than his scribe William Fishbough had expressed confidence that "the lectures will endorse the Scriptures as given of God," only to experience "the loss of the darling idea of his affectionate mind" upon hearing Davis's "impressions of the origin of the Bible."[129] Similarly, as his "lectures on theology progressed, one witness after another began to withdraw; so that, out of some eight or ten who were often present, only two or three continued to the end."[130] Although in retrospect Davis was pessimistic and emphasized "this openly-expressed subsidence of their friendship," he could have presented this development in a more positive light, since roughly a quarter to a third of his regular witnesses appear to have

[129] Davis, *Magic Staff*, 337-338.
[130] Ibid., 338.

weathered his heterodoxy, the tedium, or whatever other factors drew the others away.[131] Some witnesses seem to have been even more enthusiastic, like the future spiritualist poet and communitarian Thomas Lake Harris, whom Davis remembers exclaiming in his hearing, "When that Book is published, I shall lock up the Bible in the drawer under the desk, put the key in my pocket, and preach the angel-utterances of the New Philosophy!"[132] Although Davis judged that resolve "rather too sudden," he did so not because Harris made wrong determinations about the Bible, but rather because he was unfamiliar with the entire body of lectures. Davis professed confidence in all his revelations, including those about history, and some wholeheartedly and perhaps foolhardily joined him in this confidence. For the period after the completion and publication of *Nature's Divine Revelations*, Davis later recalled an interminable bombardment of inquiries, including "letters of every conceivable shade of scientific, historical, and philosophical inquiry – never imparting a particle of information, but asking innumerable questions about all sorts of out-of-the-way and never-to-be-thought-of subjects."[133] Undoubtedly some wrote from skepticism and some from curiosity, but others wrote from confidence in Davis's mesmerist ability to access and dependably relate true versions of otherwise inaccessible historical occurrences.

Others besides Davis also remembered positive reception of *Nature's Divine Revelations*, including a man from the West with a variety of interests typical of those involved with oppositional subcultures. Wisconsin reform politician, Fourierist communitarian, and eventual spiritualist lecturer Warren Chase, who eccentrically titles himself "The Lone One" in his early

---

[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid., 342. Although only termed "the Poet" in this brief episode (343), later sections identify the man as Thomas Lake Harris when detailing his further interactions with Davis (355-357 and 420-422) before his final break with him (425-426). Later separating himself from Davis, Harris is best known for his spiritualist poetry and his involvement with the spiritualist Mountain Cove commune. See Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 20-21, 32, and 162-176.
[133] Ibid., 353.

autobiography, there recalls at length a hungry and approving audience in his phalanx and beyond:

> In the winter of '45-6, the experiments of a company of investigators, in Cincinnati, with one or more clairvoyants, were closely followed by the Lone One and several others at the Phalanx-home, and they were also deeply interested in all they could learn of the wonderful powers of A.J. Davis, in New York and elsewhere. They learned, by occasional newspaper reports, of his delivering a series of lectures in a clairvoyant state, which were said to be rare and very remarkable productions, but not fraught with marvelous [sic] stories, for such to the Lone One would have ended all interest in them. But these were said to be natural, or nature's revelations; and hence he became intensely interested in them, and with much impatience watched every week for a notice of the book, and no sooner received news of its publication than one dozen copies were ordered by express to Milwaukie [sic], the end of the express line, by the secretary of the Phalanx, and most of them were read and re-read, lent and borrowed, sold and re-sold, until many minds were fed by these new truths, who could get no food from what Christians call God's revelations. The Lone One had now a firmer and more substantial basis for his lectures and strictures than ever before, and he boldly took up the defence [sic] of this book, - of its philosophy, in the main, and the truly divine manner of its revelations, - with his senator-friend, who was also up to the time in the philosophy. He ever had one or more copies with him at the capitol, to call out remarks and ridicule, and give him a chance to defend it, and compare it with Moses' revelation, &c.[134]

Although Chase's "senator-friend" met with ridicule in the early years of Wisconsin's statehood, Davis's book met with extraordinary exposure since copies and discussion of it nevertheless wormed their way across America and into a western legislature. Favoring the book's "philosophy" over that of the Bible, Chase and his fellow senator likely had no qualms in accepting Davis's alternative account of biblical origins. In fact, after the "Rochester Knockings" and the formation of a local spiritualist circle, Chase explicitly remembers digging down into "scepticism and Infidelity," using "the term Infidel in the sense that the Christians do,

---

[134] [Warren Chase], *The Life-Line of the Lone One; or, Autobiography of the World's Child*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Bela Marsh; New York: S.T. Munson, 1861), 167. For more on Chase, see Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 102-104; Isaacs, *History*, 53-54, 121-123, and 241-242; and Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 91-92. Notably, Chase was elected to the Wisconsin Constitutional Convention in 1847 and served a term in the state senate. In his second autobiography, *Forty Years on the Spiritual Rostrum* (Boston: Colby & Rich), Chase uses the title page to proclaim that his name was "first on the list of calls for copies of 'Nature's Divine Revelations' when in Press in 1847" ([1]). Isaacs, *History*, 53, identifies Chase's "senator-friend" as Southport (present day Kenosha) newspaper editor Christopher L. Sholes.

- unbelievers in their doctrines," in order to "defend the cause of truth" against a swarm of persecuting Christians.[135] As Davis's book and then spiritualism took him into controversial doctrines, Chase became allied against the Bible as understood by the Evidences, and thus likely against the Evidences' typical accounts of biblical origins.

Such reactions were undoubtedly multiplied throughout the United States over the years, especially as Davis's works found traction among the developing spiritualist movement. Other antebellum writings of Davis contained anti-traditional biblical criticism similar to that of *Nature Divine's Revelations*.[136] In fact, almost a quarter century after that seminal publication, Davis was still recognized as the most popular spiritualist author.[137] Upon Davis's death in 1910, his obituary in the Boston *Globe* in particular remembered the ubiquity of *Nature's Divine Revelations* on spiritualist bookshelves, a plausible enough claim, given how the book went through at least fourteen American editions.[138] Davis's influence was not only limited to print, however; he was also an active lecturer, and spoke about anti-traditional biblical criticism in at least some of his forays onto the platform, another method characteristically open and amenable to the seekers who typically populate the milieu of oppositional subcultures.[139]

---

[135] Ibid., 174-177.

[136] For example, Davis, *Great Harmonia*, vol. III, [27]-41 ("Lecture III: On the Philosophy of Clairvoyance and Inspiration"), 79-81 (portions of "Lecture VII: A General Consideration of Man's Psychological Condition and Powers"), and [363]-376 ("Lecture XXVI: The Authority of the Harmonial Philosophy"), although compare [139]-152 ("Lecture XII: Concerning the Historical Evidences of the Psycho-Sympathetic State"), in which Davis cites biblical narratives for examples of clairvoyance without largely casting into doubt their verisimilitude. Andrew Jackson Davis, "Author's Preface," [5]-6, in Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Great Harmonia*…., Vol. I (Boston: Benjamin B. Mussey, 1850), [5]-10, identifies the *Great Harmonia* as the more detailed work promised in and thus in continuity with Davis, *Principles of Nature*, 553-554 and 589.

[137] Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 63 and 217n22, quoting the *American Booksellers Guide* 3 (1871): 61-62.

[138] Delp, "Andrew Jackson Davis," 55, quoting the Boston *Globe*, January 13, 1910. Judah, *History and Philosophy*, 54, discusses Jackson's corpus. Brown, *Heyday of Spiritualism*, 84, corrects long-standing exaggerations about edition numbers of *Nature's Divine Revelations*.

[139] Davis, *Magic Staff*, 439-446, 448-453, 473, 477-478, 479-482, 512, 528, and perhaps 547, mention public teaching and lectures across New England, New York, and Ohio, often about the subject of reform. In the early 1850s, Davis remembers delivering weekly lectures in Hartford to specially hired halls, including a spring 1853 lecture, the reprinted version of which rails against "*onesided* evidences and arguments strictly sectarian" and how "the Bible... claims supernatural origin and authority" (444, in 443-446; italics in original). Speeches of Davis's with similar sentiments against the Evidences can also be found in Andrew J. Graham, *Proceedings of the Hartford*

Davis's appeal to spiritual knowledge for authoritative declarations about the Bible is also representative of broader trends within spiritualism. In 1851, for example, prominent social reformer Henry Clarke Wright attended a séance over which presided one of the famous Fox sisters, who enabled a rapping spirit who self-identified as Jesus to clarify that he was born like other humans and that not all that was written by the evangelists in the New Testament was true.[140] Prominent medium and early historian of spiritualism Emma Hardinge would remember that her first encounter with the spirits in New York in 1855 went well enough, until "a sentence was 'spelled out,' which seemed... to comment irreverently on the Bible," at which she fled into the streets, since "the 'Holy Word of God' was lightly spoken of in that company of 'ghouls.'"[141] Newspaper articles preserve the memory of other people who took such messages more seriously, like a Philadelphia medium whose lecture touched upon "contradictions of the writers in the Old and New Testament" and was approvingly described in a letter from an attendee.[142]

In retrospect, Davis had claimed that *Nature's Divine Revelations* was delivered in part to answer typical questions asked on the mesmerist circuit, including "Is the Bible all true, or in part only?"[143] Apparently, such questions continued to be asked through the blossoming of the spiritualist movement, and the answers sometimes taken seriously.

Bible Convention (New-York: Partridge & Brittan, 1854), 13-27 and 280-295. Delp, "Andrew Jackson Davis," 47-48, briefly touches on Davis's lecturing.

[140] Lewis Perry, *Childhood, Marriage, and Reform: Henry Clarke Wright, 1797-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 160-161, quoting the *Practical Christian*, September 13, 1851, 4.

[141] Hardinge, *American Spiritualism*, 136, quoting from an earlier printed autobiographical sketch. Margaret Wilkinson, ed. and rev., *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten* (London: John Heywood, 1900), 17, explains that a spirit said through a writing medium, "Immortality would be a mere fiction were there no other evidence of it than Bible teaching," which Hardinge perceived to be like "infidels… pitching into the Bible" since the words "fiction" and "Bible" were "jumbled up together in a slighting and irreverent way."

[142] Cora Wilburn, "Lectures by Thomas Gales Forster," *Banner of Light*, April 30, 1859, 5.

[143] Davis, *Magic Staff*, 286.

The Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge and "Christian Spiritualism"

As Davis related, Fishbough's early days as a scribe ended in disappointment as he transcribed revelations that undermined his ideas about the origins of the Bible. "I well remember how wofully [sic] sad was that expression which pervaded the scribe's usually placid countenance," Davis recalled around a decade later in his first autobiography, adding that Fishbough "[f]or two whole weeks... was mourning."[144] Fishbough's initial expectations, however, suggest another way that spiritual knowledge could be put to use – in order to confirm traditional biblical criticism, rather than undermine it. In fact, the later life of Fishbough himself shows that this use of spiritual knowledge was not just a theoretical possibility. Although standing fast by Davis during the dissolution of the *Univercoelum* and his scandalous acquaintance with the woman who would become his first wife, Fishbough remained in "Williamsburgh," New York, while Davis began to travel again, eventually marrying and moving to Hartford, Connecticut. In 1854, Davis received what he later termed "a sort of valedictory epistle from the conscientious scribe," a lengthy letter in which Fishbough presaged a "death struggle between religionism and anti-religionism, Christianism and anti-Christianism, Bibleism and anti-Bibleism, as connected with the modern spiritual unfolding."[145] Stating in the language of the Evidences that the Bible should be "subject[ed] to the scrutiny of our own developed reason," Fishbough now affirmed that he found the Bible "indispensable" and that he believed "the doctrine of the divine incarnation... taught in John's gospel... and many other places."[146] In other words, Fishbough had given allegiance to the Christian wing of spiritualism.

[144] Davis, *Magic Staff*, 337-338.
[145] Davis, *Magic Staff*, 483, quoting a version of a 16 March 1854 letter of William Fishbough to A[ndrew] J[ackson] Davis, reprinted in Davis, *Magic Staff*, 483-488.
[146] Ibid., 486.

Spiritualists themselves recognized the existence of two rough wings of their movement: a "Harmonial" wing associated first and foremost with Davis, but also with other luminaries like Warren Chase; and a Christian wing associated with sundry figures from Wisconsin governor Nathaniel P. Tallmadge to the prominent medium and historian Emma Hardinge. As disaffected Davis disciple Thomas Lake Harris would put it in 1854, Davis's wing was marked by "the effort of Spirits, through scores and even hundreds of media, to organize 'Harmonial circles' to disseminate their peculiar sentiments, and to subvert some of [the] most cherished religious views," while "Christians among Spiritualists" followed the lead of "a vast organization of Spirits... who believe that CHRIST IS LORD OF ALL."[147] The size of each wing is difficult to estimate. From the standpoint of old age, Chase remembered that the Christian wing was especially dominant in the very early years of the movement. As he recalled, "[p]revious to the rappings, nearly all of the advocates who had learned the facts of spirit intercourse even through Mr. Davis... were quasi-Christians, and held to the Bible and Christ."[148] Even more than that, "[u]p to 1850," Chase himself claimed that he could not "express... convictions of the truth of spirit life and intercourse, without pandering to Christianity or its Bible."[149] Whether or not Chase's numeric impressions are strictly accurate, both he and Harris were attuned to a very real fault line within the larger spiritualist movement. Just like among proponents of anti-slavery measures and woman's rights, spiritualists also were divided by acceptance of traditional biblical criticism within the framework of the Evidences.

This fault line became most manifest during the mid-1850s with the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge (SDSK), an organization of national reach based in New York

[147] T[homas] L[ake] Harris, "Organizations Among Spiritualists, Letter from T. L. Harris," *Christian Spiritualist*, June 17, 1854, 2 (capitals in original).
[148] Chase, *Forty Years*, 28.
[149] Ibid., 35.

City. Propped up from 1854 to 1857 by the wealth of manufacturer Horace Day, the SDSK published the *Christian Spiritualist* newspaper from offices on Broadway, at which it also offered a lending library, Sunday lectures, and free consultations with two mediums, Emma Hardinge and Kate Fox of the famous Fox sisters.[150] Occasionally sounding a note of tolerance for free inquiry among spiritualists and sometimes even admitting other viewpoints into its pages, the *Christian Spiritualist* was still an unabashed advocate for the wing of spiritualists signaled by its title, since the tolerance typical of oppositional subcultures did not undermine its primary emphasis.[151] Although short-lived, like most other early attempts at organizing spiritualists, the SDSK was nonetheless a revealing rallying point during the three years of its existence.

Overall, the Christian spiritualists whose lives intersected with the SDSK viewed spiritualism as compatible with Christianity and the Bible as understood through the Evidences. For these spiritualists, spirit contact was part of the single divine plan discernible within the New Testament, and teachings from trustworthy spirits could reaffirm or expand upon but never contradict the teachings found there. Moreover, the spiritual knowledge gained through judicious spirit contact complemented the Evidences, affirming the older time-worn arguments and itself becoming a compelling new reason for being the spiritualists' type of Christian.

The ordeal of Melinda Ball, a minor *cause célèbre* among spiritualists, captures how Christian spiritualists interpreted the Bible.[152] A schoolteacher in Troy, New York, Ball was

---

[150] Isaacs, *History*, 227-234. See also Hardinge, *American Spiritualism*, 133-141.
[151] Although "The Ends and Aims of 'The Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge,'" *Christian Spiritualist*, May 13, 1854, 2, praises the establishment of "circles upon the principles of Christianity" and forcefully distinguishes "[f]alse and frivolous manifestations... from true Spiritual guidance," Committee on Correspondence, "Circular," *Christian Spiritualist*, June 24, 1854, 2, rebukes intolerance, recommends dealing "ever gently with the erring," and insists on "no test of faith or doctrine."
[152] Melinda A. Ball, "Bigotry vs. Spiritualism," *Christian Spiritualist*, June 10, 1854, 4, in an article reprinted from the Troy *Daily Whig*.

dismissed from her position in 1854 by the local Board of Education because parents complained of her private religious views. In conversation with one Board member, Ball relates that she was confronted with a simple question: since "Spiritualists, as he conceived, had each a guardian Spirit... should they teach anything in opposition to the Scriptures, he wished to know which would be my authority." When she replied that her "guide in matters of truth and error" was reason, the same board member pressed her further "whether you may or may not look upon anything as superior to the Bible." When another board member interjected that "[p]arents, lovers of the Bible, [were] fearing the effect on the minds of their children should they send them to a teacher who would look upon anything as authority in preference to the Bible," Ball rebutted "that my standard of life was found in the Bible, and there could be nothing superior, as that was perfection."

As this exchange makes clear, all sides in the dispute agreed upon a Bible with a single normative message in accord with reason; all referred to the ultimately monovocal entity of "the Bible," and Ball's claim that her guide to truth was reason could have been uttered by all Christians operating within the framework of the Evidences, since they all thought that reason proved Christianity. For Ball, however, "the Bible" also included contemporary spirit contact, which aligned with "the Spiritual manifestations of former times, as recorded in the Scriptures." Taken all together, Ball's biblical blueprint included both spirits and a set of teachings against which reason could discern true spirits, whose message of course could then never undercut the "the Bible" or its teachings. Notably, Ball was informed that spiritualism was "a subject of ridicule," but that other doctrines of her Christianity – for example, that "love was the fulfilling of the law" – were "not very objectionable." For the citizens of Troy, Ball's form of Christianity was mostly uncontroversial. The biggest sticking point was the spirits.

The *Christian Spiritualist* overflowed with similar statements that true spirits affirm the teachings of "the Bible," much in the manner of Protestant reformers restoring the one true church. One spirit communication declared that spirit contact occurred because "[t]he old dispensations were growing dim – revelations were lost sight of."[153] A "Dr. Young" who spoke at a New York spiritualist meeting echoed that remark, stating that "[i]t is because the church has not lived up to the teachings of Christ that we have these manifestations now," while another speaker at the same meeting asserted that spiritualism "is that same faith which Jesus planted, and which the Apostles found after his ascension."[154] A summary of a lecture given by a General Ballard relates that not only were "the angels, or the Spirits of our departed friends... calling us back to the simple truths taught by Jesus," but also that "they do not come to discard the bible, but conceded [sic] the truth of all the great principles taught therein, and... came to elucidate them so as to make religion a matter of every day [sic] life."[155] Similarly, a correspondent from New Orleans complained that "[t]he true Christian religion is not taught any more[sic]," but maintained that "God's truest, highest angels are rejoicing in the knowledge that they can influence the minds of men to better things" and teach "as did the Apostles of old."[156] "For our part, we will not give up the Bible," one approvingly reprinted article declared, going on to say that "[w]e see in it the work of Spiritual intercourse like that which we are now experiencing... and from both alike we are to obtain the rule and guide of our faith."[157] In his introduction to writing medium Charles Linton's *The Healing of the Nations*, the SDSK's most

[153] "The Cause in Washington," *Christian Spiritualist*, May 20, 1854, 2.
[154] "New-York Conference of Spiritualists," *Christian Spiritualist*, May 20, 1854, 3.
[155] "Gen. Bullard at Home," *Christian Spiritualist*, July 15, 1854, 3, reprinted from the Waterford Sentinel.
[156] "Correspondence," *Christian Spiritualist*, May 13, 1854, 3.
[157] *Christian Spiritualist*, May 13, 1854, 3, reprinting an untitled and undated article from the *Sacred Circle*. That said, however, the article termed spirit contact "further revelation," albeit a clarifying revelation to resolve "discord in the Christian world" by showing that "Jesus of Nazareth is our Savior and Redeemer... by living, not by dying," as well as "by his teachings."

famous book production, Tallmadge noted that "[t]he believers in 'Spiritual Manifestations' have been denounced as denying the truth of the Bible," but instead asserted that "the manifestations prove the Bible, and the Bible proves the manifestations."[158] As he further clarified, the manifestations were identical to those in the Bible, and could help to clarify varying scriptural interpretations, hastening the day when "we shall stand on one broad platform, founded on the doctrines of Christ."[159] In other words, as he stated in summary, "[T]hese manifestations are in accordance with, and designed to elucidate the truths of, the Bible as the word of God... sustain[ing] the pure doctrine which Christ preached and practiced."[160]

Furthermore, as with all proponents of the Evidences, people who supported "the Bible" presumed traditional biblical criticism in the form of longstanding authorship and harmonization traditions.

The various print productions of the SDSK show that spiritual knowledge gained by some spiritualists affirmed the traditional authorship claims of the Evidences. One spirit communication in the *Christian Spiritualist* reviewed the inhabitants of heaven, which abounded in biblical personages from "the Phillipian [sic] jailor" to Solomon and Moses.[161] Among this august crowd was the evangelist John, in his traditional identification with the beloved disciple; "John's *love-curtained* eyes," the spirit related, "create for himself a brighter Heaven blended and overborne by the prevailing likeness to the elder brother [Christ]." In his introduction to the *Healing of the Nations*, Tallmadge not only quotes the gospel of "St. John", but also a spirit communication from that same "John the Beloved," a rather unremarkable message about the

[158] Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, "Introduction," 12, in Charles Linton, *The Healing of the Nations* (New York: Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge, 1855), [3]-71.
[159] Ibid., 13-14 and 16.
[160] Ibid., 70-71.
[161] "The Cause in Washington," *Christian Spiritualist*, May 20, 1854, 2.

discernment of spirits and good deeds that Tallmadge himself transcribed, "the wife of a Methodist clergyman" serving as medium.[162] Both of these communications were part of a larger phenomenon of claimed spirit contact with biblical personages. In response to a letter complaining of mediums who "profess to converse with the Spirits of Apostles," one reprinted article in the *Christian Spiritualist* expressed doubt "that these manifestations proceed from the Spirits of departed Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles and Christians" since "[t]hey have other and more interesting employment."[163] Although it is unclear whether these apostles included the evangelists, the decision of the *Christian Spiritualist*'s editors to magnanimously reprint this adversarial letter showed that claimed contact with biblical personages – including, on occasion, the authors of biblical books – helped define Christian spiritualists as a group.

Above all else, the harmonization traditions that were part of the Evidences were presumed by Christian spiritualists in their frequent references to "the Bible"; then as now, harmonization and minimization of discrepancies is necessary in order for interpreters to ultimately hear a single voice in "the Bible." That said, at least some Christian spiritualists not only acknowledged the necessity of biblical harmonization, but even extended that practice to communications from spirits. In a reprinted apologetic letter to a non-spiritualist clergyman, one man took on the charge of "acknowledged discrepancies and absurdities" in this "new instruction":

> [T]hose revelations [of the Bible] also have involved the task of reconciling discrepancies... Hundreds of years have rolled on and the task is not yet performed. Must the parallel be complete? And must ages elapse again before the work of reconciling contradictions can be performed? I hope not; but the result is in His hands. Our duty, at least, is plain before us... [I]t would be as wise to deny the revelations through Christ, on this account, as to stumble over the incongruities of the present day.[164]

---

[162] Tallmadge, "Introduction," 18 and 28.
[163] "Spiritualism in Churches," *Christian Spiritualist*, June 3, 1854, 4.
[164] J.W. Edmonds, "Letter to a Clergyman," *Christian Spiritualist*, June 3, 1854, 1-2, reprinting from the *Sacred Circle* a letter of 23 December 1853.

As with the Bible, discrepancies in spirit communications must be harmonized – or at least presumed harmonizable, even if no solution is immediately forthcoming. In a similar vein, Tallmadge referenced "the alleged discrepancies of the 'Spiritual Manifestations,'" and noted how in "once delivering a lecture on 'Spiritualism' to a very large audience, and whilst commenting on the truths of the Bible," he brought forward "specimens of the numerous discrepancies in the interpretation of the Scriptures" as a plea "to show how extremely cautious reverend gentlemen should be in denouncing others."[165] When it came to "alleged discrepancies," Tallmadge desired for spirit communications the same charitable attitude that existed for the Bible.

Given the traditional claims that the evangelists were apostles or their followers and that any discrepancies between the gospels could be harmonized, Christian spiritualists were able to unproblematically relate sections of narrative from the gospel as reliable accounts of actual occurrences. To give just two examples, one speaker at a New York spiritualist conference discussed a section from the fifteenth chapter of the gospel of Matthew as if correct in all details, while another speaker at that same conference referred to "the gospel record of the doings of Jesus Christ."[166] Because of their adoption of long-standing interpretative traditions as part of the Evidences, these and other spiritualists were able to read the gospels much the same as many other Christians of their time.

Above and beyond how spirit communications served to shore up traditional biblical criticism as part of the Evidences, the very phenomenon of spirit communications could also be presented as a contemporary miracle and thus corroboratory proof for the truth of Christianity.

[165] Tallmadge, "Introduction," 19-20.
[166] "New-York Conference of Spiritualists," *Christian Spiritualist*, May 20, 1854, 3.

Within the Evidences, miracles accompanied Jesus and were passed down in a chain of reliable testimony. These spiritualist miracles, however, were a bit better, since they were much more immediate. One spirit communication reflected on the Evidences and related how "a congress of the Angels and Ministers of God... decided that some new Evidences, appealing directly to man's senses, were necessary to check the growing infidelity."[167] Similarly, the correspondent from New Orleans twice termed spirit contact "visible, tangible evidence," adding that "[n]o one who thoroughly examines these phenomena can with any reason doubt."[168] In the *Healing of the Nations*, Tallmadge likewise referenced the Evidences when he briefly recounted his decision to investigate spiritualism; after hearing the testimony of his colleague Judge Edmonds, he remembered that "I felt that something was due to human testimony – that testimony on which our belief in all things is founded – that testimony on which the Sacred Scriptures themselves have been handed down to us... and without which we should have no authentic evidence of their existence."[169] As was not possible for the testimony about the Bible, however, Tallmadge proceeded to search out and personally encounter the present-day miracles of spirit communication.

Additionally, some Christian spiritualists viewed spirit contact as fulfilled prophecy, yet another form of proof within the Evidences. Some of these spiritualists saw renewed spirit contact as another one of the fulfilled "prophecies of our blessed Lord," who "said he would separate the sheep from the goats... by means of the angels that would come forth," though in good prophetic obscurity "[t]he coming forth of these angels, or good Spirits, never could be understood until the time arrived for them to come forth and do the work they were to be sent to

[167] "The Cause in Washington," *Christian Spiritualist*, May 20, 1854, 2.
[168] "Correspondence," *Christian Spiritualist*, May 13, 1854, 3.
[169] Tallmadge, "Introduction," 8-9.

do."[170] A speaker at a New York spiritualist conference, however, suspected differently, that spirit contact was "a literal fulfilment [sic] of the prophecy that the wisdom of the wise is to be put to nought [sic], and the prudence of the prudent is to be stultified."[171] Tallmadge referenced other prophecies, by Joel and even Jesus.[172] Although the prophecies that some Christian spiritualists identified varied, all were incorporated the thinking typical of the Evidences, in which fulfilled prophecy proved Christianity.

Besides these types of Christian spiritualists, however, the *Christian Spiritualist* also gave voice to other spiritualists – and that included a small number of self-identified Christians who, like William Lloyd Garrison, abandoned the Evidences and traditional biblical criticism. Much less prominent than the Christian spiritualists who accepted the Evidences and traditional biblical criticism, these Christians were nonetheless strikingly visible in their denial of long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions. A certain Charles H. Cragin wrote in to the *Christian Spiritualist* and wholeheartedly agreed that he wanted "to see Spiritualism thoroughly Christianized."[173] That said, he was a Christian who accepted the fundamental outlines of a historical Jesus problem; after railing against how of Jesus's "doctrines, or what his biographers report his doctrines... many [are] very unjust and contradictory," Cragin bluntly stated that "[f]or myself, I am inclined to think that he was misunderstood, misreported, his teachings more or less distorted, by his unknown biographers." Likewise, a certain Henry Stagg claimed that

---

[170] "A Synopsis of the Spiritual Experience of a Medium (Continued)," *Christian Spiritualist*, June 3, 1854, 4, referencing Matthew 25: 31-33.
[171] "New-York Conference of Spiritualists," *Christian Spiritualist*, May 20, 1854, 3, referencing Isaiah 29:14 and perhaps 1 Corinthians 1:19.
[172] Tallmadge, "Introduction," 18 and 20-21. Tallmadge categorizes the manifestations as "more light" that "from time to time, would be shed upon" biblical obscurities, in accordance with Jesus's words in John 16:12, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but can not [sic] *bear* then now" (18; italics in original). He also identifies contemporary manifestations with those mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, and claims that they are "foreshadowed by the Prophet Joel in the Old Testament, and by the same prophet as cited in the New Testament (Acts ii. 17, 18)" (20-21).
[173] Untitled letter of Cha[rle]s H. Cragin, *Christian Spiritualist*, July 1, 1854, 3.

"Spiritualism embraces the same pure doctrines which Jesus taught eighteen hundred years ago," but also carefully differentiated that position on "the Bible and Christ" from the one "generally claimed by our orthodox friends."[174] As with the interpretation of Cragin, one major difference was the mixed composition of the Bible, "that the Bible contains many great moral and sublime truths, as well as many contradictory and absurd things." Here and there among the other Christians whose paths crossed that of the SDSK was a new sort of Christian, one who accepted not just spirit contact, but also jettisoned the Evidences and traditional biblical criticism. As with some social reform movements and Transcendentalism, spiritualism was an incubator for liberal Christians who maintained the identification of "Christian" but abandoned the dominant mode of biblical interpretation. Although Fishbough characterized spiritualism as beset by a clearcut battle between "religionism and anti-religionism, Christianism and anti-Christianism, Bibleism and anti-Bibleism," some Christian spiritualists of which he took no notice queered his categories – namely those religious Christians who, to use Fishbough's terms, were part of "anti-Bibleism."

The *Banner of Light*, founded in Boston in 1857, became one of spiritualism's most popular newspapers, lasting through the Civil War and into the twentieth century. In addition to this laudable circulation and longevity, its successes included its openness to spiritualist adherents of both traditional and anti-traditional biblical criticism.[175] Although the SDSK failed, its main constituency – and thus the two wings of spiritualism – remained.

In its very first issue, the *Banner of Light* promised exclusive communications from "the mediumship of Mrs. J.H. Conant" in a regular feature called "The Messenger" and began to

[174] Henry Stagg, "What is Spiritualism?", *Christian Spiritualist*, June 3, 1854, 4.
[175] Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 13.

"solicit questions on Theological subjects... to remove the prejudice existing among religionists against Spiritualism, and show that it is sent from Heaven, not to demolish the Bible, but to prove its truth."[176] Despite at least one further call for "inquiries, relating to Biblical matters," Mrs. Conant's communications on such topics were few.[177] For example, set amidst many lengthy messages from the dead, her answer to a Vermont correspondent's question on "the Revelations of St. John" consisted of a single line attesting how "[t]he Revelations of St. John... ALL hav[e] reference to the present time, and time in the future."[178] Nevertheless, other items presumed and propounded the traditional biblical criticism implicit in Mrs. Conant's response. A certain Mrs. Henderson regularly lectured in the Boston area and discussed spiritualism as a fulfillment of Scripture, since "[t]he authority is alike" because "God is unchangeable."[179] Within this declaration of authority and in response to "questions offered by the clergy or others relating to the interpretation of the Scriptures or of modern spiritualism," she presumed the ability to harmonize the Gospel narratives and thus the accordant straightforwardness of any piece of narrative, thus affirming that Jesus walked on water and changed water to wine, and that both Jesus and Lazarus raised from the dead, albeit with the added detail that Lazarus revived under the power of "[h]is magnetic will." Although new, these occasional channeled details did not contradict narratives from the gospels, but rather supplemented them, as did her statement from a later appearance that Christ multiplied loaves "as articles are now removed from place to place by spirit power."[180] Despite the *Christian Spiritualist*'s lack of success, Christian

[176] "The Messenger," *Banner of Light*, April 11, 1857, 7.
[177] "Answers to Theological Questions," *Banner of Light*, April 25, 1857, 6.
[178] "Answers to Correspondents," *Banner of Light*, June 11, 1857, 7 (capitals in original).
[179] W.H. Porter, "Spiritualism at the Melodeon," *Banner of Light*, May 21, 1857, 4.
[180] W.H. Porter, "Conference and Spirit-Discourse at the Melodeon," *Banner of Light*, June 25, 1857, 6.

spiritualism was alive and well in Mrs. Henderson. Through mediums like her, spirits spoke, and they confirmed what the audience expected of the Bible thanks to the Evidences.

Other items, however, did in fact provide alternative narratives to those in the gospels, and formed a discordant voice piping up in this tolerant forum of this oppositional subculture. Through an unspecified medium, for example, the same Vermont correspondent who had written to Mrs. Conant demanded to know, "Was Christ the Son of Joseph the carpenter?"[181] To this, a blunt answer was provided, "No... He was the legitimate son of the high priest, who was privately married to Mary, in the hilly country," though because of the necessity of "secrecy... no record was made of the facts we now give you." Unsurprisingly, the *Banner of Light* also regularly featured ads for *The Magic Staff*, the "just published" autobiography of Andrew Jackson Davis, the prototypical purveyor of alternative and otherwise uncorroborated biblical histories.[182] In the very same newspaper, these voices created a striking contrast with those of Mrs. Conant and Mrs. Henderson.

Overall, whether ultimately endorsing or undermining the Evidences, spiritualism was appealing to a new authority and forcing re-examination of long-held beliefs. "Spiritualism is undermining the authority of the Bible faster than all causes put together," Unitarian social reformer and author Lydia Maria Child wrote in an 1862 letter. From the perspective of spiritualists, however, the developing situation was perhaps best summarized by another voice from the pages of the *Banner of Light*, that of Child's fellow Unitarian and social reformer Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Although "one wing among the believers is stiffening into a

[181] "Inquiries of T.P. – Middlebury, Vt.", *Banner of Light*, May 14, 1857, 6.
[182] For example, "Life of a Seer," *Banner of Light*, May 28, 1857, 8, and in many issues following.

mere bigoted Swedenborgianism, and another into a wilder Second-Adventism... the new movement is shaking all the churches, and confounding all the colleges. So far, so good."[183]

In terms of change within biblical interpretation, however, not all spiritualism was equally important. For the history of biblical interpretation within the United States, someone like Andrew Jackson Davis is more noteworthy than most people associated with the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge. Unlike most SDSK associates, Davis's grounding in spiritual knowledge was associated with the questioning of long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels and the positing of a historical Jesus, a major fault line of the time. Interestingly, although Jackson did not identify as a Christian and even could have his beliefs written off as "a mere bigoted Swedenborgianism," scattered glimpses from publications show that a few SDSK associates interpreted the gospels similarly to Davis and as self-identified Christians as well, a move that makes them doubly interesting – as part of a change in biblical interpretation on the one hand, and on the other as part of an accompanying change in Christian theology accommodating this change in biblical interpretation after it had become firmly established among non-Christians. In any case, as all of these communicants with spirit knowledge show, reliance on this innovative form of authority could but did not require the abandonment of long-standing authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels, an intellectual position that was the hallmark of this important shift in biblical interpretation.

[183] Lydia Maria Child to Lucy Osgood, May 18, 1862, as quoted in Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 28. T[homas] W[entworth] Higginson, "A Word from T.W. Higginson," *Banner of Light*, June 25, 1857, 4.

EPILOGUE

"The idea of a single break suddenly, at a given moment, dividing all discursive formations, interrupting them in a single moment and reconstituting them in accordance with the same rules – such an idea cannot be sustained."

– A 1969 methodological reflection of historian Michel Foucault.

Analysis of representative figures and their widely-circulating texts has shown that the displacement of authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels and the accompanying positing of a historical Jesus first predominantly occurred within the United States' milieu of oppositional subcultures. In each case, this historic change in biblical interpretation involved advocacy of radical normative projects drawing on innovative forms of authority. With both the biblical interpretation and the normative projects, the consistent opponent was the mainstream Christian theological framework of the Evidences, the site of increasing contestation due to how these various, variously-connected subcultures were nurtured by the expanding freedoms and cultural possibilities of the Early Republic.

Although enough evidence has been provided to reorient research on this topic towards examination of antebellum oppositional subcultures, the details of this overall shift in interpretation are many and complex, and ultimately irreducible to a single pat narrative where one manner of biblical interpretation and one accompanying normative project definitively prevailed everywhere.[1] Instead, future research should focus on the types of accompanying normative projects and the differing levels of their cultural penetration, as the paradigm of the historical Jesus became established within mainstream denominational and academic circles.

[1] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), 175.

First, there still remains the fuller examination of the normative projects compatible with the historical Jesus, both synchronically and diachronically. On the one hand, this analysis has likely not identified all of the antebellum movements who contemplated a historical Jesus. Thus, to hazard a sociological prediction, other groups with innovative forms of authority and found within the milieu of oppositional subcultures should be scrutinized for advocacy of a historical Jesus; obvious candidates include the fringe Quakers already identified as abolitionists and instrumental in the birth of spiritualism, for example.[2] On the other hand, this analysis has not looked in any great degree beyond the Civil War to see how the known movements changed, let alone what new movements sprang up and joined them. Thus, even apart from examining the effects of the upheaval of the Civil War on biblical interpretation writ large, the American religious landscape of later decades must be thoroughly sifted for signs of the interpretative paradigm of the historical Jesus.[3] With the known movements of this analysis, examination would include productions of legendary skeptics like freethinker Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899); the lives of Jesus written by Gilded Age labor agitators; the legendary 1895 *Woman's Bible* compendium headed up by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902); the twists and turns of denominational respectability as Theodore Parker's once explosive theology became standard working Unitarian knowledge by the 1890s; and even the works of clear successor movements like Theosophy, the home of many former spiritualists after the debunkings and general decline of the 1870s.[4] As the fate of Parker's work indicates, at least one portion of this narrative

[2] Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 10-15.
[3] Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 134-138. Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight Against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[4] Susan Jacoby, *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014). David Burns, *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), though see David Mihalyfy, review of *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus*, by David Burns, *Journal of Religion* 94, no. 3 (July 2014): 417-419. Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., eds., *The Woman's Bible,*

includes movement of ideas out of the milieu of oppositional subcultures due to an increase in intellectual respectability, as the paradigm of the historical Jesus and at least one attendant ideology became more mainstream. As a lesser point, the various connections among oppositional subcultures of these eras could be more carefully teased apart, as already has begun occurring for movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.[5]

Second, this shift in biblical interpretation is ultimately not a story of the dwindling away of authorship and harmonization traditions and the accompanying Evidences, but rather of their eventual marginalization within the academic study of the gospels despite their continued presence in different forms of Christianity found within the United States. Recent scholarship has appropriately marked out as one major narrative of Christian theological change liberals' continuing reconciliation of inherited claims with the evolving standards of modern secular disciplines.[6] That authorship and harmonization traditions are indeed no longer the starting point of academic interpretation of the gospels is very clear from the paratextual material of contemporary works like the 2006 edition of the *HarperCollins Study Bible*, a product of the Society for Biblical Literature; its committee-determined positions signal what is more or less standard within academic study, and that standard knowledge consists of the unknown evangelist

---

Part I (1895; Salem, NH: Ayer Company, 1988). For the evolution of Unitarianism, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (1966; Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1976); and William R. Hutchison, *The Transcendentalist Ministers: Church Reform in the New England Renaissance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959). Braude, *Radical Spirits*, [162]-191; Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 177-179; R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 102-104.

[5] Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, "Introduction," in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), ed. Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, 1-11. Bron Taylor, "Diggers, Wolves, Ents, Elves and Expanding Universes: Bricolage, Religion and Violence from Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front to the Antiglobalization Resistance," in *Cultic Milieu*, ed. Kaplan and Lööw, 26-74,

[6] David A. Hollinger, "The Accommodation of Protestant Christianity with the Enlightenment: An Old Drama Still Being Enacted," esp. 6-8, in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), [1]-17.

identities and textual dependence theories dovetailing with the paradigm of the historical Jesus.[7] Sources from contemporary evangelicalism such as Josh McDowell's 1999 apologetic touchstone *Evidences that Demand a Verdict*, however, show that the previously dominant paradigm of the harmonized Jesus still circulates within some Christian communities.[8] Thus, still left to be determined are the fuller identification of Christian traditions for whom the harmonized Jesus has been important, as well as the related story of how the paradigm of the historical Jesus percolated out of oppositional subcultures and became dominant within the academy. Here, previous research on heresy trials as well as biblical scholars' reflections on dogmatic use of texts can provide important starting points for answering these questions.[9]

In sum, this analysis only provisionally maps roughly the first half century of an emerging paradigm of biblical interpretation, and untold is the story beyond these decades, in which the paradigm of the historical Jesus became ascendant in some Christian denominations and the academy. Further study will undoubtedly create a more complicated story of waxing and waning across eras, as the academy absorbed this paradigm amidst the back-and-forth of ideological struggle. Ironically, what was once the property of oddballs and outcasts came to be common currency among the socially and intellectually respectable, while what was once mainstream was pushed aside. In the words attributed to Jesus in a text once largely attributed to the apostle Matthew, "Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (19:30).[10]

---

[7] For example, see the introduction of C. Clifton Black, "The Gospel According to Mark," rev. Adela Yarbro Collins, in *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, rev. ed., gen. ed. Harold W. Attridge (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), 1722-1724.

[8] E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 505-511, only traces continuities of the Evidences through the first several decades of the twentieth century, but their survival in present-day evangelicalism can be seen in texts like Josh McDowell's *Evidences that Demand a Verdict* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999).

[9] For example, George H. Shriver, ed., *American Religious Heretics: Formal and Informal Trials* (Nashville , TN: Abingdon Press, 1966); and James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1981).

[10] Dennis C. Duling, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in *HarperCollins Study Bible*, 1665-1667. "Composition by Jesus' Galilean tax-collecting disciple [is] extremely unlikely" (1666).

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Given that this analysis works with an array of existing insights in its call for a reorientation of assumptions about the spread of anti-traditional biblical criticism in the United States, it can appear either underwhelming or overambitious, depending on whether its precedents or its implications are emphasized. Thus, explicit methodological reflections on the analysis's evolution and current shape seem necessary, in order to provide clarity about how its findings fit into and develop existing conversations.

Methodological Reflections

Essentially, although this analysis first developed as an examination into the lacuna of popular groups, its implications eventually extended well them. In its arguments' final formulation, this analysis has in fact made a standard "history of knowledge" proposal for reorienting how we think about changes between intellectual paradigms. Previously, the paradigm of the historical Jesus was seen as naturally emerging as part of a succession of technical developments and intellectual achievements culminating in the present-day academic domain of biblical studies. Instead, the paradigm of the historical Jesus is better thought of as resulting from shifts in larger social configurations that allowed this discontinuous mode of thinking to circulate and take root among oppositional subcultures, at least for the antebellum period of American history.

Taking as its topic the displacement of authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels and the attendant positing of a historical Jesus, research initially organized itself around a rough distinction that eventually became "learned" and "popular" texts. Because

previous historiography had scrutinized the porous milieu of the ministry and schools, attention was turned to the appearance of a historical Jesus in popular texts like Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* (1794 and 1795, in two parts). Due to definitional muddiness around "biblical criticism" and relative lack of attention to such popular texts, both their disputation of authorship and harmonization traditions and their mass circulation seemed noteworthy. Accordingly, the task became to identify a number of such texts and trace their origin, reception, and positioning within their associated movements. Unfortunately, the definitional uncertainty of previous historiography presented a troubling gap, since it has not yet identified the first American-authored learned presentation of the historical Jesus; the earliest known English-language exemplar is British professor Herbert Marsh's translation and augmentation to "John David" Michaelis' *Introduction to the New Testament* (1802, in three volumes), and American minister Theodore Parker was fully capable of writing such a learned text, but no plausible proposal on this front seems to have yet been made.[1] Thus, bracketing this question with its yet unknown implications, research honed in on and began contextualizing a number of early popular texts that made a great impression upon their debut in the United States.

Ultimately, late-stage engagement with Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* led to this analysis's current conceptualization of its findings in relation to prior historiography.[2] Effectively, major works of prior historiography prioritize a teleological narrative of rationality

[1] Pointing to the influence of Marsh are Michael J. Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty: Battles over Authority and Interpretation in America* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 230n48; Stephen Neill and Tom Wright. *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5-7; and James Turner, "'Grammatical and Exegetical Tact': Biblical Philology and its Others, 1800-1860," 216, in *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 210-229.

[2] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), especially 1-17, 135-148, 166-177, and 199-211. Also of methodological resonance are its descriptions of a possible shift away from author intentionality (e.g. 27-28), and a focus on the emergence of a pre-conceptual field of which particular texts are manifestations (e.g. 62-63).

culminating in the university settings inhabited by their authors: they focus on the efforts of men whose work was gestated within the predecessors of today's academic milieus (with the tacit assumption that perceived scholarly forefathers drive history); and they cursorily gesture toward a numerous array of technical developments and intellectual achievements (since all developments and achievements are presumed to emerge and coalesce in due time and thus need no sharp differentiation). Within this historiography, the paradigm of the historical Jesus is but one more element that arises and "slots in" to a dominant triumphal narrative resulting in us, who look back at the past and with ourselves as a measure seek to determine how much past persons thought like us and had tools resembling ours. Instead, consideration of the popular texts covered by this analysis produced a different proposal conceptually dovetailing with an alternate model for writing the history of knowledge, that of attention to changes in social relations that allow a discontinuous discourse to spring up and take root – namely, the abandonment of authorship and harmonization traditions around the gospels, a phenomenon that occurred crosswise to other developments such as the accumulation of better stocked libraries and more precise base texts and that posits a competing harmonizing rationality in some ways foreign and incommensurable with our own. Here, the key enabling context was the expansion of the milieu of oppositional subcultures during the Early Republic, as articulated through the standard "cultic milieu" concept from the sociology of religion and linked to the mainstream Christian theology of the Evidences: as cultural options increased and circulated more broadly due to changes in religious freedom, better transportation, and the like, the paradigm of the historical Jesus became one more element being passed around among these relatively heterodox groups that formed the American underside prior to the Civil War, and thus this paradigm appeared alongside notable

departures from and contestations of the dominant theological framework of the Evidences.[3] Among these groups, oftentimes distinct but with many formal and informal connections, the historical Jesus not only received mention by the likes of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and various spiritualist newspapers, but also found lasting advocacy among the deist-freethinker constituencies and at least one Christian congregation outside of hierarchical control, the rogue Congregationalist church of Theodore Parker. Tellingly, Parker's work indicates the necessity of moving beyond the original divide between "learned" and "popular' texts and instead thinking first and foremost about oppositional subcultures; although Parker could have written a learned text featuring the historical Jesus, he did not, instead suffering exclusion by many learned men of the ministry and the schools, and as a consequence he concentrated his efforts within his self-standing congregation and the larger publics radiating outward from there. As can be seen here, then, although this analysis's text selection fills a lacuna on popular biblical criticism, its consequences are a reorientation away from the divide that inspired the initial research. Instead, this analysis proposes that the paradigm of the historical Jesus did not emerge along a learned-popular split, but rather among various oppositional subcultures, as it bore a function of destroying theological opponents and forging other visions. In other words, when searching for proponents of the historical Jesus in antebellum America, the question is not who had access to learning, but rather who was bucking the system, since it is among culturally creative upstarts that this paradigm took root.

[3] Contemporary applications of Colin Campbell's still largely standard cultic milieu theory are covered in Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, "Introduction," in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), ed. Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, 1-11. A reprint of the classic essay is Campbell, "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization," in ibid., 12-25. The current starting point for all examination of the Evidences is E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

Notably, too, the ideological visions propounded alongside the historical Jesus are various and apparently irreducible to any single thread such as the emergence of a naturalistic liberal Protestantism. At least in this case, one teleological narrative of an accompanying, conquering theology does not seem capable of being displaced by another; although some prominent ideas such as revelation in nature and progressive revelation appear in multiple ideologies, the full range of ideologies identified here seem incapable of being shoehorned into some such single option. Instead, this analysis points to a need for future research to examine the full range of accompanying ideologies, and of course the social forces that may have led some to gain more traction through the present day, while others faded away.

One Major Historiographic Body: "Bible in America" Literature

Overall, bringing the findings of this dissertation into conversation with "Bible in America" literature is possible within a narrow and a broader purview. Within a narrow purview, this dissertation fills a lacuna within the handful of "Bible in America" studies devoted to biblical criticism in the United States, through paying attention to and newly contextualizing conversations and controversies taking place outside of the learned circles that were associated with seminaries and colleges and that had access to German learning. Within a broader purview including studies on other related subjects and extending beyond a chronological focus on the Early Republic, this dissertation resonates with a handful of scattered insights on long-term change, although such insights are infrequent due to common analytic issues, even above and beyond these same issues' particularly acute appearance in the literature on biblical criticism.

A Lacuna on Biblical Criticism

A handful of classic studies on biblical criticism in the United States form a backdrop against which the present study fills a gap and proposes a reorientation of questioning. In conversation with these studies, crucial to this reorientation have been Michel Foucault's insights on ways to write the history of knowledge, as well as two underappreciated contexts for the history of biblical interpretation in antebellum America.

Taken all together, despite different relationships with the narrative of academic progress, the classic studies on biblical criticism in the United States tell a relatively uniform narrative of innovation in biblical interpretation occurring within antebellum seminary- and university-associated circles having access to German learning. In general, the common narrative is rooted in Jerry Wayne Brown's 1969 study *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars*, and it highlights the early nineteenth century importation of German-language books and German academic priorities to a few schools, Harvard foremost among them thanks to its pioneering 1810 establishment of a position devoted to biblical criticism.[4] On the basis of this common narrative, the classic studies typically gesture towards or treat the fuller expansion of these developments at a greater number of schools after the Civil War.[5] Although

[4] This common narrative is most influentially rooted in Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), which informs Grant Wacker, "The Demise of Biblical Civilization," 122 (see 134n5), in Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, eds., *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 121-138; and Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1991), 14 (see 228n6). Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 10-26, treats the establishment of the Harvard lectureship and the career of its first occupant.

[5] Brown, 8-9 and 180-182. After recognizing Brown, Wacker, "Demise," 122, asserts that "the real change seems to have begun, almost imperceptibly, in the late 1870s and 1880s." Similarly, after also recognizing Brown, Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 11, flags 1880 as the starting date of his treatment. Conversely, although prioritizing discussion of theology over treatment of biblical criticism *per se*, Lee, *Erosion of Biblical Certainty*, 4, explicitly leverages certain limited eighteenth century developments against this common narrative. Overall, some degree of the discrepancy on dates and actors is likely attributable to the lack of definitional clarity typical of the larger "Bible in America" literature, as well as this type of historiography's impulse to always push back to earlier precedents rather than focus on and trace discontinuities of discourse. Note Foucault, *Archaeology*, 4, on the difference

sometimes acknowledging the presence of persons like deists who created conversations outside of these circles but somehow bore similar ideas, these studies not only discern no connection between them, but also minimize their importance and attribute any developing tensions around paradigms in biblical interpretation to a posited "trickle down" effect from learned circles, seen somewhat with Theodore Parker, but occurring mostly after the Civil War.[6] In tandem with this relatively standard narrative of progress are slightly different valuations of it; Brown's work laments the abortion of their project due to the dislocation of the Civil War, whereas studies by later historians affected by and active within the evangelical tradition perceive a modernity gone awry but perhaps still somehow reconcilable with that faith.[7] Interestingly, although the later studies postdate the germane methodological discussions of Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, its recommended insights and emphases have gone unnoticed. Thus, against this backdrop, this dissertation draws upon newer ways of writing the history of ideas and forms a contribution by examining understudied sets of conversations within two crucial contexts, that of

between "the never-ending tracing-back to the original precursors" and "the search for a new type of rationality and its various effects."

[6] For acknowledgment of other conversations, see Brown, *New England Scholars*, 6 and 181, which excludes "American deism" because "the deists stood outside the realm of church life… and brought no significant critical and methodical techniques to bear on the Bible" (6). See also Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 11 and 13, which notes that "[d]uring and immediately after the War for American Independence, views of free-thinking *philosophes* found a hearing in America [but] were mostly limited to New England and to the religious bodies furthest removed from the kind of evangelicalism that dominated American religious life" (13). Treatment of Parker tends to emphasize his learning, to the neglect of his accessible efforts produced in his capacity as minister. Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 153-170, mixes Parker's accessible and learned efforts and gives little explicit analysis to response to his accessible efforts. Wacker, "Demise of Biblical Civilization," 122, notes that "[a] sprinkling of scholars" like Parker began an "erosion of confidence" before the Civil War, but does not go into detail. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, also does not go into detail with Parker, whom he terms a "transcendentalist" and whom he declares "accepted many of the then radical conclusions about the human origin of Scripture, and… popularized German views about the mythological character of biblical stories" (13-14).

[7] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 182, sees a tragic break with antebellum scholarship, since "American religious life suffered a great lost with the collapse of this early movement." Wacker, "Demise," 121, hopes for "the beginnings of a new spring" against the titular "Demise of Biblical Civilization," though he notes that any theology would have to "patch together… the historical processes revealed by the modern world." Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 209, wants "a brighter intellectual and spiritual day arising from an alliance of deep Christian conviction, self-critical but loyal attachment to evangelical traditions, and discriminating use of contemporary scholarly resources."

the milieu of oppositional subcultures and the mainstream theological repertoire of the Christian Evidences.

Although not currently appearing in any known scholarship on the "Bible in America," the classic "cultic milieu" concept of Colin Campbell provides crucial context for these understudied sets of conversations.[8] First appearing in the sociology of religion and now most prevalent in the Religious Studies subfield of New Religious Movements, this concept has lastingly proposed a multiform, linked underbelly to all societies in which "[i]deas unacceptable to the social, cultural and political mainstream flourish" amidst varied "seeker"-like actors who give them a hearing and typically foster habits and spaces of tolerance.[9] Above and beyond the many keen insights provided by this concept, it particularly serves to explain the many striking links between the movements, since so many of the works percolated into other movements and their authors met and spoke beside each other, despite later categorizations typically slotting them neatly into a capital letter "-ism" like "Deism," "Transcendentalism," or "Spiritualism." Rather than being peculiar historical factoids, such links are in fact the norm and to be expected in the study of oppositional subcultures.

Although not constituting part of the classic studies due to its overall focus on the development of antebellum American theology, perhaps the single most helpful treatment of biblical criticism is nevertheless found within E. Brooks Holifield's magisterial 2003 study *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War*. Covering the same time period as the classic studies, this work not only highlights authorship

[8] Campbell, "Cult," especially 14-24, which present useful ideas extricable from the now-defunct categorization of groups into churches, sects, and cults. For a history of the abandonment of "cult" terminology, see J. Gordon Melton, "An Introduction to New Religions," 17-24, in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, ed. James R. Lewis (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16-35.
[9] Kaplan and Lööw, "Introduction," 4.

and harmonization traditions of the gospels as fault lines within biblical criticism, but also thoroughly treats the theological framework of the Evidences in which these traditions were most commonly embedded.[10] This emphasis on authorship and harmonization traditions as well as the larger, commonplace arguments with which they were typically associated is an important insight into the period's regnant mode of biblical interpretation, since this perceptive emphasis allows for the identification and informed discussion of the oppositional subcultures who resisted variations of that theology and propounded what is here termed "anti-traditional biblical criticism." Thus, for the acuity of its insights, certain sections of Holifield deserve to be read alongside and put into direct conversation with the "cultic milieu" concept of Campbell and the classic studies on biblical criticism.

Scattered Insights on Long-term Change

The "Bible in America" literature extends well beyond this handful of studies, however, and encompasses a number of lines of interpretation directly resonant with this dissertation. That said, because studies focusing on or significantly involving biblical interpretation in the United States are exceptionally diffusive, because only a minority of studies successfully grapple with long-term change, and because the studies display a high level of definitional uncertainty (a broader challenge even more acutely manifest in the literature on biblical criticism), bringing the findings of this dissertation into deep conversation with the larger body of "Bible in America" scholarship is difficult. Nevertheless, discernible throughout many studies are useful lines of interpretation supporting the more incisive and accurate narrative of the spread of anti-traditional biblical criticism in the United States: namely, that authorship and harmonization traditions most

[10] Holifield, *Theology in America*, especially 186-196.

recently incorporated into the widespread theological framework of the Evidences were the increasing focus of discussion and challenge, often in conjunction with theological projects drawing on innovative forms of authority and as part of popular discourse in culturally creative oppositional subcultures. Importantly, these insights are found in a range of studies extending beyond a chronological focus on the Early Republic, including in some books surfacing as references in but not forming part of "Bible in America" literature *per se* (for example, typologies of contemporary biblical interpretation, which are sometimes referenced with an eye to the suspected historical developments resulting in the present-day landscape).[11]

On this note, since they form deep conversations relatively rarely, the literature focusing on or significantly involving biblical interpretation in the United States is perhaps most manageably grasped according to the studies' primary focuses of inquiry.[12] These focuses include biblical texts' cultural reception (whether internationally; within America as a whole as regards shifting conceptions of national identity or of Jesus; within different American institutions and subcultures such as those based on religion and race; or in various art forms);[13]

---

[11] For example, Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6ff.

[12] Another recent, largely complementary attempt at such categorization can be found in David W. Kling, "A Contested Legacy: Interpreting, Debating, and Translating the Bible in America," 215nn6-17, in Catherine A. Brekus and W. Clark Gilpin, eds., *American Christianities: A History of Dominance and Diversity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 214-241.

[13] Raymond-Jean Frontain, "'Passing the Love of Women': Sexual Codes and the KJV," in Angelica Duran, ed., *The King James Bible Across Borders and Centuries* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2014), 215-238. Mark A. Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Mark A. Noll, "The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation, 1776-1865," in Hatch and Noll, eds. *Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, 39-58. Sacvan Bercovitch, "The Biblical Basis of the American Myth," in Giles Gunn, ed., *The Bible and American Arts and Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), [219]-229. Jon Pahl, "America's King of Kings: The King James Bible and American Civil Religion," in David G. Burke, John F. Kustko, and Philip H. Towner, eds., *The King James Version at 400: Assessing its Genius as Bible Translation and its Literary Influence* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 413-444. Prothero, *American Jesus*. Fox, *Jesus in America*. David Burns, *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). David L. Barr and Nicholas Piediscalzi, eds., *The Bible in American Education: From Source Book to Textbook* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982). James Turner Johnson, ed., *The Bible in American Law, Politics, and Political Rhetoric* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985). Clark, *Founding the Fathers*. Harry S. Stout, "Word and Order in Colonial New England," in Hatch and Noll, eds., *Bible in America*, 19-38. Timothy P. Weber, "The Two-Edged

history-of-the-book topics such as print editions, paratextual material, and translations;[14] the development of theology (whether in some degree of overview; on the interplay of deist criticisms and the Evidences; on shifting understanding of sources of authority vis-à-vis the canon; in relation to political debates such as that over slavery; and on liberalism in the late nineteenth century and beyond);[15] hypothesized previous long-term changes in consciousness

---

Sword: The Fundamentalist Use of the Bible," in Hatch and Noll, eds., *Bible in America*, 101-120. Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Trevor Cook, "The KJV Plagiarized: Joseph Smith's Mormon Scriptures," in Duran, ed., *The King James Bible Across Borders and Centuries*, 239-258. Simon Crisp, "The KJV in Orthodox Perspective," in Burke, Kustko, and Towner, eds., *The King James Version at 400*, 445-453. Theophus H. Smith, *Conjuring Cultures: Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., with the assistance of Rosamond C. Rodman, *African Americans and the Bible* (New York: Continuum, 2000). Rodney Sadler Jr., "African Americans and the King James Version of the Bible," in Burke, Kustko, and Towner, eds., *The King James Version at 400*, 455-474. Shaindy Rudoff, *Scripturally Enslaved: Bible Politics, Slavery, and the American Renaissance* (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009). Katherine Clay Bassard, *Transforming Scriptures: African American Women Writers and the Bible* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010); "The King James Bible and African American Literature," in Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones, eds., *The King James Bible after 400 Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 294-317; and "Reading between the Lines: Neo-Slave Narratives and the KJV," in Duran, ed., *The King James Bible Across Borders and Centuries*, 195-213. Gunn, ed., *The Bible and American Arts and Letters*. Allene Stuart Phy, *The Bible and Popular Culture in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985). Robert Alter, *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). Norman W. Jones, "The King James Bible as ghost in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Beloved*," in Hamlin and Jones, eds., *The King James Bible after 400 Years*, 269-293. Patricia Demers, "'For the Bible Tells Me So': The KJV in Children's Literature," in Duran, ed., *The King James Bible Across Borders and Centuries*, 259-280.

[14] Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). Lori Anne Ferrell, *The Bible and the People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008). Beth Quitslund, "Old Wine in New Boxes: Niche Bibles and the KJV," in Duran, ed., *The King James Bible Across Borders and Centuries*, 81-103. Isabel Rivers, "Philip Doddridge's New Testament: *The Family Expositor* (1739-56)," in Hamlin and Jones, eds., *The King James Bible after 400 Years*, 124-145. Gerald P. Fogarty, "The Quest for a Catholic Vernacular Bible in America," in Hatch and Noll, eds., *Bible in America*, 163-180. Thuesen, *In Discordance*. Mark Noll, "The King James Version at 300 in America: 'The Most Democratic Book in the World,'" in David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *The King James Bible and the World It Made* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 71-97. Paul C. Gutjahr, "From Monarchy to Democracy: The Dethroning of the King James Bible in the United States," in Hamlin and Jones, eds., *The King James Bible after 400 Years*, 164-178.

[15] Holifield, *Theology in America*. Noll, *America's God*. Nathan O. Hatch, "Sola Scriptura and Novus Ordo Seclorum," in Hatch and Noll, eds., *Bible in America*, 59-78. George M. Marsden, "Everyone One's Own Interpreter? The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth Century America," in Hatch and Noll, eds., *Bible in America*, 79-100. Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). Lee, *Erosion of Biblical Certainty*. David F. Holland, *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Ernest R. Sandeen, ed., *The Bible and Social Reform* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982). Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight Against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). George H. Shriver, ed., *American Religious Heretics: Formal and Informal Trials* (Nashville , TN: Abingdon Press, 1966). William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992). Mark S. Massa, *Charles Augustus Briggs and the*

usually associated with German intellectual elites and universities;[16] the Protestant restorationist hermeneutic in both primitivist and millennial applications;[17] biblical criticism;[18] interpretative practices of current day Protestant fundamentalists;[19] and typologies of contemporary biblical interpretation by academics in a range of disciplines.[20] Since none of these focuses is wholly discrete, the literature as a whole is somewhat overwhelming, even though relatively few are the studies identifying and analyzing long-term change and thus demanding most command of the material.

Among studies identifying and analyzing long-term change, Paul C. Gutjahr's article "From monarchy to democracy: The dethroning of the King James Bible in the United States" displays to a high degree the virtues and possibilities of carefully crafted scholarship on biblical interpretation in America: through precisely framed analysis, this work draws on other developments as needed in order to craft a compelling, significant argument about long-term

---

Crisis of Historical Criticism (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990). David A. Hollinger, "The Accommodation of Protestant Christianity with the Enlightenment: An Old Drama Still Being Enacted," in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), [1]-17.

[16] Klaus Scholder, *The Birth of Modern Critical Theology: Origins and Problems of Biblical Criticism in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. John Bowden (1966; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990). Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974). Peter Hanns Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[17] Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Richard T. Hughes, ed., *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988). Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, eds., *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

[18] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*. Wacker, "Demise." Turner, *Without God*. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*. Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact."

[19] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press). Vincent Crapanzano, *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench* (New York: New Press, 2000).

[20] Richard J. Mouw, "The Bible in Twentieth-Century Protestantism: A Preliminary Taxonomy," in Hatch and Noll, eds., *Bible in America*, 139-162. James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1981). John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

change in American biblical interpretation – namely, that among American Protestants, the late twentieth century supersession of the King James Version (KJV) by dynamic equivalent translations likely signals a market-based dampening of religious creativity, especially because of the premium on interpretative clarity among rapidly proliferating niche bibles. First, the study's parameters are carefully defined and mark off a substantial topic, "the bestselling Bible version among American Protestants."[21] Second, even as these parameters remain constant, points of contrast and change in the overall narrative are carefully described and introduced. For example, other translations from the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century are presented as relatively unsuccessful alternatives to the KJV, while Today's English Version and The Living Bible of the mid-1960s are highlighted as the beginning of a widespread change in translation philosophy that would ultimately unseat the regnant KJV.[22] Similarly, computerization developments of the 1980s are discussed, but only insofar as is necessary to support the larger claim that "[t]he intersection of functional equivalence with the revolutionary changes in publishing has made the last forty years an era dominated by highly interpretative, niche Bibles."[23] Third, the study moves beyond the already significant subject of the most prevalent Protestant biblical translation to elicit an even greater significance from the identified historical developments, that "[n]ot only is the popularity of the KJV dying in America, but with it is American biblical culture's ability to benefit from the many-layered riches found in the Bible" – that is, in other and perhaps more apt words, this recent trend in translation and publishing likely restricts the range of interpretations produced by readers at large.[24] Fourth and lastly, theological claims present in the material have been carefully separated from the study's

[21] Gutjahr, "From Monarchy to Democracy," 164.
[22] Ibid., 164-170.
[23] Ibid., 173.
[24] Ibid., 176 (acronym adjusted to "KJV" from Gutjahr's less typical "KJB" ['King James Bible']).

major analytical categories, so that the major arguments do not contain an inextricable sectarian perspective. The only real exception is the climactic statement about growing restrictions on interpretation due to "the many layered-riches found in the Bible," the current phrasing of which implies that the Bible constitutes a timeless text with a natural, beneficial richness. Nevertheless, this climactic sentence of the article could easily be rephrased to state that the decline of the KJV is paralleled by something like "American biblical culture's declining ability to dialogue and develop in tandem with many layers of meaning such as those found by interpreters of previous translations." Overall, then, in roughly twelve pages of text and another two of footnotes, Gutjahr's study of the popularity of biblical translations among Protestants demonstrates the huge potential of even the smallest investigation, when well-designed.

In comparison, Robert Alter's book-length compilation of lectures *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible* skillfully presents fascinating case studies of how KJV prose style concretely, variously affected the work of a number of canonical literary authors from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but these case studies are embedded within a narrative of long-term change that is less satisfactory and more typical of scholarship as a whole. In its close readings of prose style in fiction by figures like Herman Melville, William Faulkner, Saul Bellow, and Ernest Hemingway, Alter's study is incredibly insightful and rewards multiple readings, but does not give its background narratives of long-term change the careful consideration manifested in a study such as Gutjahr's. First, the framing sections discussing long-term change are not consistently cognizant of the chosen subject and display an analytical drift towards alignment with and incorporation of separate subjects that end up overextending the argument. For example, although specifying the stylistic influence of the King James Bible as its subject, the introduction moves onto the topic of "the Bible as a foundational text of Western

literature" and quickly collapses this topic into the KJV in order to characterize the KJV as "the vehicle of a particular vision of reality."[25] Since such a characterization elides the influence of biblical texts in American culture apart from a particular translation or other texts beyond bibles, not to mention minimizes the presence of interpreters and interpretative conflict, this study does not so much deftly delineate one very important aspect of KJV reception as present an undernuanced presumption of a relatively monolithic stylistic and conceptual ubiquity in which a particular biblical translation represents separate subjects not wholly identifiable with it. Second, the study highlights but does not satisfactorily grapple with points of contrast and change in the overall narrative. Immediately emphasizing in its opening sentence "[t]he pervasiveness of the Bible in American culture from the colonial period onward," the introduction shies away from examining the scale of this pervasiveness or even directly recognizing gaps in knowledge, as especially seen in the too guarded observation that "[t]he Bible is surely not ubiquitous in American culture as it once was."[26] Furthermore, the points of contrast provided seem inaccurate or not productively chosen. Mentioned in comparison to the climate of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the earlier "fervid faith in Scripture as revelation" is romanticized, while the authorial decision to omit Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* because "a renewed inspection of its prose revealed only oblique and episodic links with biblical style" again indicates underengagement with the nature of the posited shift in influence.[27] Third, and closely related to the second, the study places unfortunate limitations on its significance through its underexamination of long-term change. Ultimately disclaiming the introduced larger narratives in favor of a more restricted examination of "how the canonical English translation of the

[25] Alter, *Pen of Iron*, 4.
[26] Ibid., [1], 6.
[27] Ibid., 3, 5.

Bible… made a difference in style for certain major American novelists," the study thus becomes multiple illustrations of a fascinating subject, but stops short of becoming even a preliminary sketch of long-term change thanks to its omission of partially contrasting examples like Ellison's *Invisible Man*.[28] Fourth, and as may already be apparent, the study repristinates sectarian theological perspectives. Examples include the alignment of "the Bible" with an American essence such as "the foundational language and symbolic imagery of a whole culture"; the related romanticization of a naïve original piety of the Puritans, against which "fervid faith" or "absolute faith… in Scripture as divine revelation" later America is implicitly accused of declension; and the prominent suggestion of an authoritative Bible with an interpreter-independent message, that is, "what the sundry biblical texts were saying about the world," or, in other phrasing, "its conception of things."[29] Within such a framework, the study's interesting examinations of particular pieces of fiction then become arguments for the respectability of certain theology, since culturally respected figures and American culture as a whole are still demonstrated to be under the influence of a laudable originatory text that seems to exude a message even apart from any interpreters. In conclusion, then, though each of the compelling case studies about prose still stand, they consist of discrete analyses around which no dependable long-term narrative can be discerned, due to either lack of attention to discerning this change or to too easy use of commonplace theological categories.

Similarly, Grant Wacker's still influential essay "The Demise of Biblical Civilization" from the seminal 1982 essay collection *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*

[28] Ibid., 6.
[29] Ibid., [1]; 3 and 6; and 4 and 5.

displays some of the same challenges in analyzing long-term change.[30] As is typical of scholarship on biblical criticism, however, it also suffers more acutely in the realm of analytical clarity, a phenomenon likely attributable to its dominant narrative of teleological rationality and the attendant necessity of continuous gestures to technical developments and intellectual achievements. First, in his narrative of the causes of a late nineteenth century collapse of "[a] broadly evangelical Protestant consensus powerfully gripp[ing] mainstream culture," the term "biblical criticism" is inadequately parsed and includes seven overlapping but unresolved definitions from the at least fourteen different phenomena that can be found associated with the term in scholarship:[31]

> 1) Questioning rather than passively receiving customary interpretations.[32]
> 2) Study of the Bible by scholars.[33]
> 3) The term "criticism" itself, as appearing in titles of books, named professorial chairs, and the speech of historical actors.[34]
> 4) Use of biblical texts in their languages of composition.[35]
> 5) Textual criticism.[36]
> 6) Historical contextualization.[37]
> 7) Increased recognition of historical change.[38]
> 8) Issues of attribution of authorship of biblical books.[39]
> 9) Disputing the unity of a single text or the harmonization of multiple narratives.[40]

---

[30] For example, Wacker's essay surfaces in prominent studies with different focuses of inquiry that include Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 13 (228n5); Thuesen, *In Discordance*, 10 (160n22); and Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin*, 100-101 (166-167n1).
[31] Wacker, "Demise," 122.
[32] Frei, *Eclipse*, 17. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 199-200. Turner, *Without God,* 150. Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 211. Wacker, "Demise", 133.
[33] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 6-7. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, title and [1]. Frei, *Eclipse*, 17. Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 210. Wacker, "Demise," 123.
[34] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 6, 8, 26, 29. Wacker, "Demise," 121.
[35] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 6. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 12. Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 210.
[36] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 6, 23. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 12. Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 211.
[37] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism* 7. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 12. Frei, *Eclipse*, 7. Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 211.
[38] Turner, *Without God*, 150. Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 210.
[39] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 6. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 17, 22, 25. Turner, *Without God*, 146-147. Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 211. Wacker, "Demise," 132.
[40] Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 6. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 17. Turner, *Without God*, 147. Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 211. Wacker, "Demise," 132.

10) Questioning whether sections of narrative corresponded to actual occurrences.[41]
11) Methodological naturalism such as denial of the miraculous and prophetic or restriction of the divine to non-supernatural processes.[42]
12) Adoption of evolutionary philosophical presuppositions like those of Hegelianism.[43]
13) Denial of definitions and avowals of biblical inspiration (e.g. Bible no longer Word of God, Scripture, revelation, divine, taken as a whole).[44]
14) Denial of the validity of symbolic interpretation as a reading practice.[45]

In particular, Wacker identifies the cause of long-term change as methodological naturalism – pointedly, "the assumption that knowledge of divine things… must be found squarely within the historical process or not at all" – but throughout the essay to a greater or lesser degree he references nineteenth and twentieth century professors, what they termed "criticism," their disputations of received authorship and textual unity, and their loss of a view of textual divinity alongside abandonment of old certitudes.[46] Although all sets of ideas seem historically relevant to some degree, the connections among the phenomena remain underscrutinized; for example, disputation of received authorship and textual unity does not necessarily involve methodological naturalism, the key agent of change invoked. To a large extent, many of the identified figures and ideas represent what later scholarship has identified as challenges to the regnant theological framework of the Evidences (abandonment of certain received ideas about the Bible) and the adoption of one alternate framework in its place (methodological naturalism), but due to issues with analytical clarity, this context must be read into the study rather than gained from it.[47] Beyond this exceptional issue of definitional clarity, the other issues found in other scholarship appear to a similar degree. Again, the study highlights but does not satisfactorily grapple with

[41] Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, [11]. Frei, *Eclipse*, 1-2. Turner, *Without God*, 146. Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 211.
[42] Frei, *Eclipse*, 6. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 13. Turner, *Without God*, 148-149. Wacker, "Demise," 127.
[43] Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 147.
[44] Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 6-7. Wacker, "Demise," 124.
[45] Frei, *Eclipse*, 6-7, though note the opposite interpretation of Turner, *Without God*, 149-150.
[46] Wacker, "Demise," 127.
[47] See especially Holifield, *Theology in America*, as well as Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, and Lee, *Erosion of Biblical Certainty*.

points of contrast and change in the overall narrative. For example, the study does not question at length the dominance of methodological naturalism among scholars, a move that might have turned up multiple alternatives to the Evidences rather than just one. Again, the study limits its significance, here by not identifying and thoroughly examining the specified set of changes. Again, the study incorporates sectarian perspectives, whether its characterization of a shift in biblical interpretation as the titular "Demise of Biblical Civilization," or its questionable adduction of theological formulas as descriptions of historical theology (for example, the declaration that "the Bible came to be seen as a human as well as a divine document," which implausibly asserts that no previous humanness was seen in the Bible).[48] In total, then, although many interesting texts and topics have been identified, the analysis as a whole provides no solid long-term narrative due its oversights and absorption of commonplace theological categories.

Despite these relatively common analytical issues, however, six lines of interpretation highly applicable to a more dependable narrative of biblical criticism can be identified among the various studies with all of their various focuses of inquiry.

First, some studies contain the more or less explicit recognition that authorship and harmonization traditions are highly important phenomena among all those identified with biblical criticism, while still others note their presence, even if not granting them special prominence.[49]

---

[48] Wacker, "Demise," 124.

[49] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 187 and 190; Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 69 and 86; Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 166. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 25; Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 210-211; Crapanzano, *Serving the Word*, 63 and 78. Clark, *Founding the Fathers*, highlights both in relation to the gospels, but states that in her subjects' understanding "the Gospels… provide *eyewitness* accounts of the Savior" rather than accounts of eyewitnesses and their followers (4; italics added). For additional recognition of harmonization in New Testament literature reviews, see also F.C. Conybeare, *History of New Testament Criticism* (London: Watts & Co., 1910), 15-29; Neill and Wright, *Interpretation of the New Testament*, 6; and Dennis Nineham, "Foreword to the Complete Edition," xiv, in Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, First Complete Edition, edited by John Bowden and with a foreword by Dennis Nineham (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), xiii-xxxii.

(In comparison, studies noting or assuming the discovery of discrepancies among the gospels usually mention this occurrence tangentially and pay insufficient attention to the active harmonization otherwise occurring.[50] In comparison in yet another way, at least three other competing definitions prioritizing other phenomena are unconvincing. The tendency to tightly focus on learned practices seems somewhat arbitrary since narratives about biblical criticism presume the eventual ability of others to somehow imbibe new interpretative paradigms.[51] The focus on naturalism seems overly restrictive since those producing learned works within the interpretative paradigm of the historical Jesus can believe in the miraculous, as is explicitly pointed out in some scholarship.[52] Additionally, an increase in historical contextualization does not always track with innovations in biblical criticism, since contextualization can not only occur within the paradigm of the harmonized Jesus, but even as a means of solidifying it through provision of historical details to enliven the past as understood within a particular theological framework.[53])

Second, much scholarship explicitly or implicitly emphasizes how the larger Christian theological tradition of the Evidences shaped biblical interpretation, including through repetition of the authorship and harmonization traditions that anti-traditional biblical criticism would challenge.[54]

---

[50] For example, Prothero, *American Jesus*, 82; Fox, *Jesus in America*, 163; and Burns, *Life and Death*, 4-5. Regarding this feature of Burns, see David Mihalyfy, review of *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus*, by David Burns, *Journal of Religion* 94, no. 3 (July 2014): 417-419.

[51] Examples of a narrative in which scholars innovate and spread a paradigm include Wacker, "Demise," 123; and Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 10.

[52] See especially Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 235ff., which directly confronts arguments similar to those surfacing in Wacker, "Demise," 127; Ammerman *Bible Believers*, 18-19; and Fox, *Jesus in America*, 233-234.

[53] See especially Holland, *Sacred Borders*, 106 and Crapanzano, *Serving the Word*, 69, both of which implicitly rebut definitions like that of Hollinger, "Accommodation," "the archaeological and linguistic study of how the Bible came to be written" (1).

[54] See especially Holifield, *Theology in America*; Brown, *Jonathan Edwards*; and Lee, *Erosion of Biblical Certainty*. This theological framework is also mentioned by Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 278, with incidental references at 37, 165, and 315. Although not discussed within the framework of the Evidences, harmonization traditions are discussed in Barton, *Nature of Biblical Criticism*, 9-30, and Rivers, "Philip Doddridge's New Testament", passim.

(In light of such research, treatments heavily incorporating an assumption of an apparently unconditioned reading of narratives as fact are unconvincing.[55])

Third, in an emerging but seemingly sound set of observations that helps conceptualize the nature of learned works and the implicit academic agenda of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a focus on controversy-fomenting historical matters such as authorship is understood as the ironic long-term result of state pressure on German universities to move away from the confessional debates of later eras of Christian history and toward the seemingly safer common ground of the Bible and its origins.[56]

(As has been perceptively noted, the exact nature of the hypothesized long-term changes in consciousness usually associated with German intellectual elites and universities has been underdebated, and multiple unreconciled positions exist in the scholarly literature.[57])

Fourth, some scholarship explicitly or implicitly highlights the recurring issue of competing conceptualizations of authority around the Bible: on the one hand, the restorationist idea of a Bible-contained pattern after which life must be modelled, and on the other hand, multiple alternate ways of relating to the Bible in innovative, non-restorationist theologies.[58]

---

[55] Frei [1]-2, 5, 10, and passim. To some extent, see also Noll, *In the Beginning*, which acknowledges other sources of authority and many cultural influences that affect biblical interpretation (8-11), but does not provide the same thorough attention to biblical interpretation in sections dealing with biblical criticism; as a *status quo*, it notes "the implicit trust in Scripture that had once been common in the early modern world" (144), which is opposed to "the deliberate setting aside of Scripture as outmoded, deceptive, or merely human" (261).

[56] For the fullest statement of this perspective, see Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, [3]-10 and 165-169.

[57] Lee, *Erosion of Biblical Certainty*, 143.

[58] For the fullest treatment of this perspective, see Holland, *Sacred Borders*, 9, 12, 211, and 215-216, which clearly relates to the restorationist ideas focused on by Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*; Hughes, *American Quest*; Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence*; and Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*; forms of authority mentioned in studies such as Ammerman, *Bible Believers*, 52, 55, and 57; and theological alternatives such as those covered by Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, and Massa, *Charles Augustus Briggs*. More recently, Noll, *In the Beginning*, 8-11, acknowledges work on "primitivism" such as that of Bozeman and Hughes, but prefers to adopt the term "Biblicism."

Fifth, just as with the narrow literature on biblical criticism, some of this broader body of scholarship also contains scattered recognitions of the importance of popular discourse to the spread of biblical criticism by gesturing to groups such as the deists.[59]

Sixth and lastly, some scholarship recognizes theological pressure against heterodoxy in American learned milieus, while other scholarship explicitly turns attention to milieus of oppositional subcultures as areas of vitality for shifts in biblical interpretation.[60]

Thus, although not comprehensively assembled, these collective insights already support a larger narrative in which authorship and harmonization traditions most recently incorporated into the widespread theological framework of the Evidences were the increasing focus of discussion and challenge, often along with theological projects drawing on innovative sources of authority and as part of popular discourse in culturally creative oppositional subcultures.

Another Major Historiographic Body: Diversity and Debate in the Early Republic

In comparison to "Bible in America" literature, scholarship is more easily engaged for a second set of conversations. Specifically – and in ways compatible with the wholly neglected cultic milieu concept of Colin Campbell – well-established historiography on the Early Republic readily explains the social location and often polemical character of the anti-traditional biblical criticism found among deists, social reformers, Transcendentalists, and spiritualists from 1794 through the 1850s: forming part of an exploding panorama of religious diversity, these groups

[59] In addition to Brown, *New England Scholars*, 6, and Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 11, see Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 165, and Noll, *In the Beginning*, 144 and 261.

[60] Turner, "Grammatical and Exegetical Tact," 214. For additional recognition of such pressure in period New Testament literature reviews, see Benjamin Wisner Bacon, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (London: MacMillan, 1900), 22-24; and Henry S. Nash, *History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament* (London: MacMillan, 1900), 159-160. Burns, *Life and Death*. Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin*.

frequently deployed anti-traditional biblical criticism as they entered into debate in print and speech.[61]

Ideologies and infrastructure encouraging popular debate over a cacophonous diversity of political and religious opinions particularly marked the era of these groups, in what might be conceived of as the expansion of the size of the American cultic milieu of oppositional subcultures.[62] Beginning in the 1790s, a republican ideal of an informed, sovereign citizenry increased alongside the number and partisanship of newspapers. Meanwhile, in the religious realm, this anti-traditionalism merged with disestablishment to create the United States' characteristic denominationalism and the coeval success of rabble-rousers like Methodists and Baptists as the country expanded westward and the number of religious groups noticeably grew.

---

[61] In its sophistication and deep interaction with previous historiography in this vein, the well-known study of Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), pointedly demonstrates the absence of sociological conceptualization via Campbell's cultic milieu framework. Although fascinating within inherited conversations from scholarship on the history of religion in America, Braude's concrete findings on seekership, heterodoxy, and movement overlap are expected within the cultic milieu framework. Thus, rather than highlight the existence of what she terms "the elusive connection" between movements, her treatment of the "nature and extent of the overlap between the woman's rights movement and Spiritualism in nineteenth-century America" would ideally have focused in greater detail on bridges between and barriers among different corners of the cultic milieu (3-4). For example, Bron Taylor, "Diggers, Wolves, Ents, Elves and Expanding Universes: Bricolage, Religion and Violence from Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front to the Antiglobalization Resistance," in *Cultic Milieu*, ed. Kaplan and Lööw, 26-74, concludes that racist environmental subcultures cannot cross-fertilize with radical environmental subcultures due to the latter's egalitarianism and extremely strong boundary-setting.

[62] Note Campbell, "Cult," 20, "[T]he nature and extent of such a milieu and the precise form of its relationship with the dominant orthodoxy are… subject to much variation." These historical developments are fairly standard across historiography on print culture, Christianity, and religion more broadly defined. Particularly helpful are interpretations of Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); and Jan Stievermann, Daniel Silliman, and Philip Goff, "General Introduction," and E. Brooks Holifield, "Why Are Americans So Religious? The Limitations of Market Explanations," in Jan Stievermann, Philip Goff, and Detlef Junker, eds., with Anthony Santoro and Daniel Silliman, *Religion and the Marketplace in the United States*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1-29 and 33-59. See also Catherine L. Albanese, "Understanding Christian Diversity in America," in Brekus and Gilpin, eds., *American Christianities*, 1-24; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); E. Brooks Holifield, "Theology as Entertainment: Oral Debate in American Religion," *Church History* 67, no. 3 (Sept. 1998): 499-520; Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); and William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench, eds., *Printing and Society in Early America* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983).

Although cooperation in realms like reform-minded voluntary societies served as partial counterweight, contentious pluralism trumped the country's previous stable parochialism and only became amplified from the 1820s onward; canals and railroads further increased social mobility, while improvements in technology gave more Americans more leisure at the same time that printing became cheaper and more widespread and popular oratory and debate blossomed. Although precursors of many developments are found in earlier eras, the confluence of trends encouraging diversity and debate in the Early Republic is remarkable and forms incredibly pertinent background for any group of this time, particularly those so readily brandishing transgressive ideas.

In terms of the social location, anti-traditional biblical criticism frequently found a home among a motley array of upstarts who propounded a range of unconventional forms of authority in the era's accessible fora of print and oratory, and who are already known to have often overlapped in movements such as spiritualism and Woman's Rights.[63] At the beginning of the era and ahead of his time, deist Thomas Paine used his bestselling *Age of Reason* to unexpectedly leverage the widespread cultural authority of reason against accustomed forms of Christianity. Beginning in the mid-1820s and in full force through following decades, humanitarians of the Freethought-aligned early labor movement and then amongst the broader based anti-slavery and woman's rights movements militated against biblically justified retrogressive positions through newspapers, speeches at reform and political gatherings, and even staged debates like the 1854 Hartford Bible Convention. Amidst faith in the fruits of introspection like Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's *Records of a School* (1835) and *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* (1836), other Transcendentalists like minister Theodore Parker

[63] In specialized literature, especially see Braude, *Radical Spirits*.

could not only find anti-traditional biblical criticism palatable, but even advocate such a stance in accessible lectures and corresponding books of the 1840s. Lastly, from the late 1840s on, some people who claimed contact with spirits would offer anti-traditional biblical criticism alongside their channelings, whether Andrew Jackson Davis in his voluminous 1847 *Nature's Divine Revelations*, or multiple other mediums whose proclamations would circulate through articles in the spiritualist press. Although Transcendentalists enjoyed a certain elite cache and spiritualists much success, these groups enjoyed an outsize presence but never constituted a numeric or cultural mainstream, even without taking into account how different opinions about anti-traditional biblical criticism split the various social reformers, Transcendentalists, and spiritualists. Yet, taken all together, they formed part of the era's characteristic variety, made use of its characteristic forums, and in retrospect sporadically advocated positions about the interpretation of the gospels that would become increasingly influential.

Importantly, within this diversity, the context of debate explains many characteristics of anti-traditional biblical criticism as it surfaced among these groups. First, since the dominant theological framework of the Evidences emphasized older traditions about the Bible as a necessary precondition to deriving any meaning from it, these groups most frequently employed anti-traditional biblical criticism to destabilize dominant forms of Christianity as they sought to create converts to their various beliefs and causes or to undercut opposing political positions identified with such views of the Bible. Second, although constituting recognizable claims about a historical Jesus against the older harmonizing of the gospels, such anti-traditional biblical criticism formed attempts at not so much historical understanding, but rather scoring points during debate. Thus, this anti-traditional biblical criticism often displayed little engagement with sources, a certain exaggerated crudeness sometimes manifested in blunt polemical repossession

of Jesus as a holder of the debater's values but not the opponent's, and even careless inconsistency within the same text. Lastly, such anti-traditional biblical criticism frequently surfaced alongside other arguments aimed at the same goals: most often, other arguments targeting the Evidences, but also contradictory Christian arguments supporting the same political goals such as in the case of allied social reformers of disparate backgrounds and beliefs.

Granted, Transcendentalists form a partial exception to this pattern, to a certain extent, and thus preclude an otherwise tight identification of a popular historical Jesus with polemical function. People like Peabody and Parker did not argue with each other over their different views on the Bible, but rather formed common cause as advocates of intuition against the hidebound traditionalists who more often concerned them. Although Parker in particular was sometimes critical in tone when discussing this preferred theology with broader publics, he did not use anti-traditional biblical criticism as a weapon. Instead, both Parker and Peabody preferred to strike a positive approach as they typically advocated for another form of authority in light of which interpretation of the Bible became very much less important, and in Parker's case was caused by and could even stretch to include anti-traditional biblical criticism. That said, anti-traditional biblical criticism surfaces alongside Transcendentalist advocacy of new forms of authority in the Early Republic, although not always as stridently as elsewhere.

Finally, on this note, it is important to recognize within this era's ferment the underappreciated beginnings of one important strand of the modern liberal Christian project, its eventual reconciliation with the findings of biblical criticism as a secular academic discipline.[64] Presently institutionalized within the mainstream academy, the historical Jesus enjoyed its greatest early success among deists like Paine and the related Freethought movement of the

[64] Hollinger, "Accommodation," especially 6-8.

1820s, but soon appeared in theologies of self-identified Christians like Theodore Parker, William Lloyd Garrison, and even some spiritualists. Of these figures, only Parker is usually understood as an innovative figure on this front, although Christian theological incorporation of the historical Jesus is not unique to him. Although not prioritized within this dissertation as a sustained focus of attention, these theologies of less learned and "fringier" figures are noteworthy and justify recent calls to reconceive liberal Protestantism through examination of less respectable and much weirder figures and groups – a move that again highlights the surprising diversity of the Early Republic.[65]

[65] Leigh E. Schmidt, "Introduction: The Parameters and Problematics of American Religious Liberalism," in *American Religious Liberalism*, ed. Leigh E. Schmidt and Sally M. Promey (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 1-14.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abzug, Robert H. *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Ahlstrom, Sydney E. *A Religious History of the American People*. 2nd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.

Albanese, Catherine L. "Understanding Christian Diversity in America." In *American Christianities*, edited by Catherine A. Brekus and W. Clark Gilpin, 1-24. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011

Alcott, A. Bronson, conductor and ed. *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*. 2 vols. Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1836-1837.

Alter, Robert. *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Augustine. *De Consensu Evangelistarum*. Edited by Franciscus Weirich. Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 43. Vienna: F. Tempsky; Leipzig: G. Freytag, 1904.

Bacon, Benjamin Wisner. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. London: MacMillan, 1900.

Baird, William. *History of New Testament Research – Volume One: From Deism to Tübingen*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992.

----------. *History of New Testament Research – Volume Two: From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003.

Ballou, Hosea. *A Series of Letters in Defence* [sic] *of Divine Revelation; In Reply to Rev. Abner Kneeland's Serious Inquiry into the Authenticity of the Same….* Boston: Henry Bowen, 1820.

Barlow, Philip L. *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Barr, David L., and Nicholas Piediscalzi, eds. *The Bible in American Education: From Source Book to Textbook.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982.

Barr, James. *Fundamentalism*. 2nd ed. London: SCM Press, 1981.

Barton, John. *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

Bassard, Katherine Clay. "The King James Bible and African American Literature." In *The King James Bible after 400 Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences*, edited by Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones, 294-317. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

---------. "Reading between the Lines: Neo-Slave Narratives and the KJV." In *The King James Bible Across Borders and Centuries*, edited by Angelica Duran, 195-213. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2014.

---------. *Transforming Scriptures: African American Women Writers and the Bible*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010.

Bercovitch, Sacvan. "The Biblical Basis of the American Myth." In *The Bible and American Arts and Letters*, edited by Giles Gunn, [219]-229. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983.

Black, C. Clifton, with revision by Adela Yarbro Collins. "The Gospel According to Mark." In *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, rev. ed., generally edited by Harold W. Attridge 1722-1724. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006.

Boyer, Paul. *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992.

Bozeman, Theodore Dwight. *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Braude, Ann. *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Brekus, Catherine A. *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Brekus, Catherine A., and W. Clark Gilpin, eds. *American Christianities: A History of Dominance and Diversity*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Bressler, Ann Lee. *The Universalist Movement in America, 1770-1880*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Britten, Emma Hardinge. *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten*. Edited and revised by Margaret Wilkinson. London: John Heywood, 1900.

Brown, Jerry Wayne. *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969.

Brown, John, annotator. *The Self-Interpreting Bible*.... Vol. 1. London: T. Bensley, 1791.

---------. *The Self-Interpreting Bible*.... New York: Hodge and Campbell, 1792.

Brown, Richard D. *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Brown, Robert E. *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

Brown, Slater. *The Heyday of Spiritualism*. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1970.

Brownson, O[restes] A[ugustus]. *The Spirit-Rapper: An Autobiography*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1854.

Burke, David G., John F. Kustko, and Philip H. Towner, eds. *The King James Version at 400: Assessing its Genius as Bible Translation and its Literary Influence*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013.

Burns, David. *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Burr, William Henry. *Self-Contradictions of the Bible*. New York: A.J. Davis, 1860. Reprinted with an introduction by R. Joseph Hoffmann. Classics of Biblical Criticism. N.p.: Prometheus Books, 1987.

Butler, Jon. *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Cain, William E. "Introduction: William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery." In *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery: Selections from the Liberator*, edited by William E. Cain, 1-57. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Campbell, Colin. "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization." In *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*, edited by Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, 12-25. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002. First published in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5 (1972): 119-136.

Carlson, Eric T. "Charles Poyen Brings Mesmerism to America." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 15 (April 1960): 121-132.

Carroll, Bret E. *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

Cazden, Elizabeth. *Antoinette Blackwell Brown: A Biography*. Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press, 1983.

Channing, William Ellery. *Memoir of William Ellery Channing, with Extracts from his Correspondence and Manuscripts*. Vol. 1. Boston: W.M. Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1850.

[Chase, Warren]. *The Life-Line of the Lone One; or, Autobiography of the World's Child*. 3rd ed. Boston: Bela Marsh; New York: S.T. Munson, 1861.

---------. *Forty Years on the Spiritual Rostrum*. Boston: Colby & Rich, 1888.

Cherok, Richard J. *Debating for God: Alexander Campbell's Challenge to Skepticism in Antebellum America*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2008.

Chielens, Edward E., ed. *American Literary Magazines: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.

Church, E. Forrester. "The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson." In Thomas Jefferson, *The Jefferson Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, with an introduction by E. Forrester Church and an afterword by Jaroslav Pelikan, 1-31. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Clark, Elizabeth A. *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

Collyer, Rob[er]t H. *Psychography, or, the Embodiment of Thought; with an Analysis of Phreno-Magnetism, "Neurology," and Mental Hallucination, including Rules to Govern and Produce the Magnetic State*. Philadelphia: Zieber & Co.; New York: Sun Office; Boston: Redding & Co., 1843.

Conybeare, F.C. *History of New Testament Criticism*. London: Watts & Co., 1910.

Cook, Trevor. "The KJV Plagiarized: Joseph Smith's Mormon Scriptures." In *The King James Bible Across Borders and Centuries*, edited by Angelica Duran, 239-258. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2014.

Crabtree, Adam. *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.

Crapanzano, Vincent. *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench*. New York: New Press, 2000.

Cremin, Lawerence A. *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876*. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.

Crisp, Simon. "The KJV in Orthodox Perspective." In *The King James Version at 400*, edited by David G. Burke, John F. Kustko, and Philip H. Towner, 445-453. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013.

A Curious Hieroglyphick Bible…. 2nd ed. London: T. Hodgson, [1784?].

A Curious Hieroglyphick Bible…. Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1788.

A Curious Hieroglyphick Bible…. 13th ed. London: Robert Bassam, [1796?].

Dahlstrand, Frederick C. *Amos Bronson Alcott: An Intellectual Biography*. London: Associated University Presses, 1982.

Dalton, Kathleen. *Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.

Davidson, Edward H., and William J. Scheick. *Paine, Scripture, and Authority: The Age of Reason as Religious and Political Idea*. Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1994.

Davis, Andrew Jackson. "Author's Preface." In Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Great Harmonia*…., Vol. I, [5]-6. Boston: Benjamin B. Mussey, 1850.

---------. *The Great Harmonia*…. Vol. III. New York: J.S. Redfield; Fowlers & Wells, 1852.

---------. *The Magic Staff, An Autobiography of Andrew Jackson Davis*. New York: J.S. Brown & Co.; Boston: Bela Marsh, 1857.

---------. *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind*. With an introduction by William Fishbough. New York: S. Lyon, and Wm. Fishbough, 1847.

Deese, Helen R. "Introduction." In Jones Very, *Jones Very: The Complete Poems*, xi-lviii. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993.

Delp, Robert W. "Andrew Jackson Davis: Prophet of American Spiritualism." *Journal of American History* 54, no. 1 (June 1967): 43-56.

Duran, Angelica, ed. *The King James Bible Across Borders and Centuries*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2014.

Demers, Patricia. "'For the Bible Tells Me So': The KJV in Children's Literature." In *The King James Bible Across Borders and Centuries*, edited by Angelica Duran, 259-280. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2014.

Doress-Walters, Paula. "Introduction: Ernestine L. Rose, Early Women's Rights Advocate." In Ernestine Rose, *Mistress of Herself: Speeches and Letters of Ernestine L. Rose, Early Women's Rights Leader*, with a preface and introduction by Paula Doress-Worters and a

foreword by Ellen Carol DuBois, 1-55. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2008.

Duling, Dennis. C. "The Gospel According to Matthew." In *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, rev. ed., generally edited by Harold W. Attridge 1665-1667. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006.

Ecce Homo! or, A Critical Inquiry into the History of Jesus of Nazareth…. New-York: New-York Free Press Association, 1827.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Vol. 7. Edited by Eleanor M. Tilton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

Engleman, Peter C. *A History of the Birth Control Movement in America*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011.

Evans, Curtis J. *The Burden of Black Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Ferrell, Lori Anne. *The Bible and the People*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008.

Fishbough, William. "Scribe's Introduction: Biographical Sketch of the Author, and History of the Production of This Volume." In Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind*, [iii]-xxii. New York: S. Lyon, and Wm. Fishbough, 1847.

Flexner, Eleanor. *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Right Movement in the United States*. Rev. ed. Cambridge, MA The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975.

Fogarty, Gerald P. "The Quest for a Catholic Vernacular Bible in America." In *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, edited by Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, 163-180. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Fosdick, David, Jr. "Preface." In H[ermann] Olshausen, *Proof of the Genuineness of the Writings of the New Testament*…., translated and with a preface by David Fosdick, Jr., [iii]-vi. Andover, MA: Gould & Newman; New York: Corner of Fulton and Nassau Streets, 1838.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972.

Fox, Richard Wrightman. *Jesus in America: Personal Savior, Cultural Hero, National Obsession*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004.

Frei, Hans W. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974.

French, Roderick Stuart. "Liberation from Man and God in Boston: Abner Kneeland's Free-Thought Campaign, 1830-1839." *American Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 202-221

---------. "The Published Writings of Abner Kneeland." *Bulletin of Bibliography* 31, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1974), 170-172.

---------. *The Trials of Abner Kneeland: A Study in the Rejection of Democratic Secular Humanism* (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1971).

Frontain, Raymond-Jean. "'Passing the Love of Women': Sexual Codes and the KJV." In *The King James Bible Across Borders and Centuries*, edited by Angelica Duran, 215-238. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2014.

Frothingham, Octavius Brooks. *Theodore Parker: A Biography*. Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874.

Fuller, Robert C. *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.

Garrett, Clarke. *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion from the Camisards to the Shakers*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

[Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Francis Jackson Garrison]. *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life, Told By His Children*. Vol. II (1835-1840) and vol. III (1841-1860). New York: The Century Co., 1889.

Garrison, William Lloyd. *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery: Selections from the Liberator*. Edited and with an introduction by William E. Cain. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Gilpin, W. Clark. *A Preface to Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Gimbel, Richard. "The First Appearance of Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*." *The Yale University Library Gazette* 31 (1957): 87-89.

Grasso, Christopher. "Skepticism and American Faith: Infidels, Converts, and Religious Doubt in the Early Nineteenth Century." *Journal of the Early Republic* 22 (Fall 2002): 465-508.

Grodzins, Dean. *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Gunn, Giles, ed., *The Bible and American Arts and Letters*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983.

Gutjahr, Paul C. *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999.

---------. "From Monarchy to Democracy: The Dethroning of the King James Bible in the United States." In *The King James Bible after 400 Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences*, edited by Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones, 164-178. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Hamlin, Hannibal, and Norman W. Jones, eds. *The King James Bible after 400 Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Hardinge, Emma. *Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years' Record of the Communion Between Earth and the World of Spirits*. New York: Published by the Author, 1870.

---------. *See also* Britten, Emma Hardinge.

The HarperCollins Study Bible. Rev. ed. Revised in general by Harold W. Attrridge. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006.

Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.

---------. "Sola Scriptura and Novus Ordo Seclorum." In *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, edited by Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, 59-78. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Hatch, Nathan O., and Mark A. Noll, eds. *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Hawke, David Freeman. *Paine*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The American Notebook*. Edited by Randall Stewart. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1932.

Hedrick, Joan D. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Hempton, David. *Evangelical Disenchantment: Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008.

Hennel, Charles C. *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity*. London: Smallfield and Son, 1838.

The Hieroglyhick [sic] *Bible*…. Boston: Isaiah Thomas, 1814.

Hills, Margaret H. "The English Bible in America." In Margaret H. Hills, ed., *The English Bible in America: A Bibliography of Editions of the Bible & the New Testament Published in*

America 1777-1957, xv-xxvi. New York: American Bible Society and the New York Public Library, 1961.

Hills, Margaret H., ed. *The English Bible in America: A Bibliography of Editions of the Bible & the New Testament Published in America 1777-1957*. New York: American Bible Society and the New York Public Library, 1961.

The History of the Holy Jesus. 3rd ed. Boston: B. Gray, 1746.

The History of the Holy Jesus. 2nd ed. Leominster, MA: Salmon Wilder, 1813.

Holifield, E. Brooks. "Theology as Entertainment: Oral Debate in American Religion." *Church History* 67, no. 3 (Sept. 1998): 499-520.

---------. *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Puritans to the Civil War*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

---------. "Why Are Americans So Religious? The Limitations of Market Explanations." In *Religion and the Marketplace in the United States*, edited by Jan Stievermann, Philip Goff, and Detlef Junker, with Anthony Santoro and Daniel Silliman, 33-59. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Holland, David F. *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Hollinger, David A. "The Accommodation of Protestant Christianity with the Enlightenment: An Old Drama Still Being Enacted." In *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History*, [1]-17. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments…. Trenton, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1791.

The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments…. Brattleborough, VT: 1816.

Howard, Thomas Albert. *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Hughes, Richard T., ed. *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Hughes, Richard T., and C. Leonard Allen, eds. *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Hutchison, William R. *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992.

---------. *The Transcendentalist Ministers: Church Reform in the New England Renaissance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959.

Isaacs, Ernest Joseph. "A History of Nineteenth Century American Spiritualism as a Religious and Social Movement." Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1975.

Jacoby, Susan. *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014.

Jefferson, Thomas. *The Jefferson Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*. With an introduction by E. Forrester Church and an afterword by Jaroslav Pelikan. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Jeffrey, David Lyle, ed. *The King James Bible and the World It Made*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011.

Johnson, James Turner, ed. *The Bible in American Law, Politics, and Political Rhetoric*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985.

Jones, Norman W. "The King James Bible as ghost in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Beloved*." In *The King James Bible after 400 Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences*, edited by Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones, 269-293. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Joyce, William L., David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench, eds. *Printing and Society in Early America*. Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983.

Judah, J. Stillson. *The History and Philosophy of the Metaphysical Movements in America*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967.

Kammen, Michael. *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978.

Kaplan, Jeffrey, and Heléne Lööw, eds. *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002.

Kaplan, Jeffrey, and Heléne Lööw. "Introduction," in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*, edited by Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, 1-11. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002.

Keane, John. *Tom Paine: A Political Life*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1995.

Kidd, Colin. *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Kling, David W. "A Contested Legacy: Interpreting, Debating, and Translating the Bible in America." In *American Christianities*, edited by Catherine A. Brekus and W. Clark Gilpin, 214-241. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Kneeland, Abner. *Ancient Universalism, as Taught by Christ and His Apostles*…. New-York: Office of the Gospel Herald, 1825.

---------. *An Appeal to Universalists, on the Subject of Excommunication, or the Withdrawing of Fellowship, on Account of Diversity of Opinion*. New-York: George H. Evans, 1829.

---------. *A Review of the Evidences of Christianity*…. 6th ed. Boston: Office of the Investigator, [1829?].

---------. *Three Sermons; Delivered in the First Universalist Church, in the City of New-York, on Easter Sunday, March 26, 1826*…. New-York: J. Finch, 1826.

---------, comp. *The Columbian Miscellany; Containing a Variety of Important, Instructive, and Entertaining Matter*…. Keene, NH: John Prentiss, 1804.

Koch, G. Adolf. *Republican Religion: The American Revolution and the Cult of Reason*. New York: Henry Holt, 1933.

Kolmerten, Carol A. *The American Life of Ernestine L. Rose*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999.

Lardner, Nathaniel. *Credibility of the Gospel History*…. 17 vols. London. 1727-1757.

Lee, Michael J. *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty: Battles over Authority and Interpretation in America*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

Legaspi, Michael C. *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Lewis, James R., ed. *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Linton, Charles. *The Healing of the Nations*. New York: Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge, 1855.

Lucas, Christopher J. *American Higher Education: A History*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Marsden, George M. "Everyone One's Own Interpreter? The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth Century America." In *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, edited by Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, 79-100. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Martineau, Harriet. *Society in America*. Vol. 3. London: Saunders and Otley, 1837.

Marty, Martin E. *The Infidel: Freethought and American Religion*. Cleveland, OH: Meridian Books, 1961.

Massa, Mark S. *Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990.

May, Henry. *The Enlightenment in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Mayer, Henry. *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

McDowell, Josh. *Evidences that Demand a Verdict*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999.

McKanan, Dan. *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2011.

Mead, Sidney E. *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

Melton, J. Gordon. "An Introduction to New Religions." In *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, edited by James R. Lewis, 16-35. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

"Memoir of the Life of President Dwight." In Timothy Dwight, *Theology; Explained and Defended, in a Series of Sermons*, vol.1, [iii]-lxxviii. Middletown, CT: Clark and Lyman, for Timothy Dwight, 1818.

Merrill, Walter M. *Against Wind and Tide: A Biography of Wm. Lloyd Garrison*. Cambridge, A: Harvard University Press, 1963.

Mesmer, F[[ranz] A[nton]. *Mémoire de F.A. Mesmer, docteur en médicine sur ses découvertes*. Fuchs: Paris, 1799.

Mihalyfy, David. Review of *The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus*, by David Burns. *Journal of Religion* 94, no. 3 (July 2014): 417-419.

Mills, Bruce. *Poe, Fuller, and the Mesmeric Arts: Transition States in the American Renaissance*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006.

Modern, John Lardas. *Secularism in Antebellum America*…. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Monroe, John Warne. *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008.

Moore, R. Laurence. *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Morais, Herbert M. *Deism in Eighteenth Century America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1934.

Morgan, Thomas. *The Moral Philosopher*. 2nd ed. London: Printed for the Author, 1738. Facsimile of the second edition with an introduction by John Valdimir Price. London: Routledge, 1995.

Mott, Frank Luther. *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1947.

Mouw, Richard J. "The Bible in Twentieth-Century Protestantism: A Preliminary Taxonomy." In *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, edited by Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, 139-162. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Nash, Henry S. *History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament*. London: MacMillan, 1900.

Neill, Stephen, and Tom Wright. *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

A New Hieroglyphical Bible…. Boston: W. Norman, [1794?].

A New Hieroglyphical Bible…. New-York: Samuel Wood & Sons, 1818.

A New Hieroglyphical Bible…. 11th ed. Chiswick, [England]: C. Whittingham for William Jackson, 1836.

Newman, Richard S. *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

[Nicholson, William]. *The Doubts of Infidels: Or, Queries Relative to Scriptural Inconsistencies and Contradictions*…. London: Printed for the Author, 1781.

Nineham, Dennis. "Foreword to the Complete Edition." In Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, First Complete Edition, edited by John Bowden and with a foreword by Dennis Nineham, xiii-xxxii. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.

Noll, Mark. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

---------. *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*. 2nd ed. Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1991.

---------. *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

---------. "The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation, 1776-1865." In *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, edited by Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, 39-58. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

---------. *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

---------. "The King James Version at 300 in America: 'The Most Democratic Book in the World.'" In *The King James Bible and the World It Made* edited by David Lyle Jeffrey, 71-97. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011.

Norton, Andrews. *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians, Respecting the Nature of God and the Person of Christ*… Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1819.

---------. *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*. Vol. I Boston: John B. Russell, 1837. Vols. II and III. Boston: John Owen, 1844.

---------. *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*. Abridged edition. Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1871.

Oegger, G[uillaume]. *The True Messiah; or Old and New Testaments, Examined According to the Principles of the Language of Nature* Translated by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody. Boston, MA: E[lizabeth] P[almer] Peabody, 1842.

Olshausen, H[ermann]. *Proof of the Genuineness of the Writings of the New Testament*…. Translated and with a preface by David Fosdick, Jr. Andover, MA: Gould & Newman; New York: Corner of Fulton and Nassau Streets, 1838.

Oshatz, Molly. *Slavery and Sin: The Fight Against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Owen, Robert Dale. *Moral Physiology*. 2nd ed. New-York: Wright & Owen, 1831.

Pahl, Jon. "America's King of Kings: The King James Bible and American Civil Religion." In *The King James Version at 400*, edited by David G. Burke, John F. Kustko, and Philip H. Towner, 413-444. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013.

Paine, Thomas. *Age of Reason, Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology*. New York: T. and J. Swords, for J. Fellows, 1794.

---------. *Age of Reason, Part the Second, Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology*. [Paris?]: Printed for the Author, 1795.

---------. *The Age of Reason… Part the Second*. London: Mott & Lyon, for Fellows & Adam, 1796.

---------. *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*. 2 vols. Edited by Philip S. Foner. New York: Citadel Press, 1945.

---------. "Extracts from a Reply to the Bishop of Llandaff." [1809?]. In *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 2, edited by Philip S. Foner, 764-788. New York: Citadel Press, 1945.

---------. "Prosecution of *The Age of Reason*." 1797. In *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 2, edited by Philip S. Foner, 727-748. New York: Citadel Press, 1945.

---------. *The Works of Thomas Paine*. Philadelphia: H. and P. Rice, James Rice, and Co., 1796.

Paley, William. *Natural Theology: Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature*. London: R. Faulder for Wilks and Taylor, 1802.

---------. *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. London: R. Faulder, 1794.

---------. A *View of the Evidences of Christianity*. New York: Thomas Bakewell, 1814.

Parker, Theodore. *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion*. Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1842.

---------. *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker*. Vol. 1. Edited by John Weiss. New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1864.

[Parker, Theodore, and George E. Ellis]. *Scriptural Interpreter*. Vol. 5. Boston: Leonard C. Bowles, 1835. Vol. 6. Boston: Otis, Broaders, and Company: 1836.

Pattison, Mark. "Tendencies of Religious Thought in England, 1688-1750." In *Essays and Reviews*, 254-329. London: W. Parker and Son, 1860.

Peabody, Elizabeth Peabody. "Language." In *Aesthetic Papers*, 214-224. Boston: The Editor; New York: G.P. Putnam, 1849.

---------. *Letters of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: American Renaissance Woman*. Edited by Bruce A. Ronda. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984.

---------. "Preface to the Third Edition." In *Record of Mr. Alcott's School, Exemplifying the Principles and Methods of Moral Culture*, 3rd ed., [3]-5. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1874.

---------. *Record of a School: Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture*. Boston: James Munroe and Company; New York: Leavitt, Lord, and Co.; Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1835.

---------. *Record of Mr. Alcott's School, Exemplifying the Principles and Methods of Moral Culture*. 3rd ed. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1874.

---------. "Recorder's Preface." In *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, conducted and edited by A. Bronson Alcott, vol. I, [iii]-x. Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1836.

---------, trans. *The True Messiah; or Old and New Testaments, Examined According to the Principles of the Language of Nature* By G[uillaume] Oegger. Boston, MA: E[lizabeth] P[almer] Peabody, 1842.

Perry, Lewis. *Childhood, Marriage, and Reform: Henry Clarke Wright, 1797-1870*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Phy, Allen Stuart. *The Bible and Popular Culture in America*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985.

Post, Albert. *Popular Freethought in America, 1825-1850*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1943.

Prothero, Stephen. *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

Quitslund, Beth. "Old Wine in New Boxes: Niche Bibles and the KJV." In *The King James Bible Across Borders and Centuries*, edited by Angelica Duran, 81-103. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2014.

Proceedings of the Hartford Bible Convention. Phonographically reported by Andrew J. Graham. New-York: Published by the Committee, 1854.

The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Syracuse, September 8th, 9th & 10th, 1852. Syracuse, NY: J.E. Masters, 1852.

Reill, Peter Hanns. *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

Rivers, Isabel. "Philip Doddridge's New Testament: *The Family Expositor* (1739-56)." In *The King James Bible after 400 Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences*, edited by Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones, 124-145. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Robinson, David. "Jones Very, the Transcendentalists, and the Unitarian Tradition." *Harvard Theological Review* 68, no. 2 (April 1975): 103-124.

Ronda, Bruce A. *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: A Reformer on Her Own Terms*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

---------, ed. *Letters of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: American Renaissance Woman*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984.

Roosevelt, Theodore. *Gouverneur Morris*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1888.

Rose, Anne C. *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981.

Rose, Ernestine. *Mistress of Herself: Speeches and Letters of Ernestine L. Rose, Early Women's Rights Leader*. With a preface and introduction by Paula Doress-Worters and a foreword by Ellen Carol DuBois. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2008.

Rudoff, Shaindy. *Scripturally Enslaved: Bible Politics, Slavery, and the American Renaissance*. Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009.

Rudolph, Frederick. *The American College and University: A History*. New York: Vintage Books, 1962.

Sadler, Rodney, Jr. "African Americans and the King James Version of the Bible." In *The King James Version at 400*, edited by David G. Burke, John F. Kustko, and Philip H. Towner, 455-474. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013.

Sandeen, Ernest R., ed. *The Bible and Social Reform*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982.

Schlereth, Eric R. *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

Schmidt, Leigh E. "Introduction: The Parameters and Problematics of American Religious Liberalism." In *American Religious Liberalism*, edited by Leigh E. Schmidt and Sally M. Promey, 1-14. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.

Scholder, Klaus. *The Birth of Modern Critical Theology: Origins and Problems of Biblical Criticism in the Seventeenth Century*. Translated by John Bowden. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990.

Schweitzer, Albert. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. First Complete Edition. Edited by John Bowden and with a Foreword by Dennis Nineham. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.

Sherman, Harry M. *Abner Kneeland: Religious Pioneer*. B.D. thesis, Tufts College, 1953.

Shriver, George H., ed. *American Religious Heretics: Formal and Informal Trials*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1966).

Sklar, Kathryn Kish. *Women's Rights Emerges within the Antislavery Movement, 1830-1870: A Brief History with Documents*. The Bedford Series in History and Culture. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.

Smith, Gibson. *Lectures on Clairmativeness: or Human Magnetism*. New-York: Searing & Prall, 1845.

Smith, J.E.A. *The History of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, from the Year 1800 to the Year 1876*. Springfield, MA: C.W. Bryan, 1876.

Smith, Theophus. *Conjuring Cultures: Biblical Formations of Black America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Snay, Mitchell. *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds. *History of Woman Suffrage*. 2nd ed. Vol. 1, 1848-1861. Rochester, NY: Charles Mann, 1889.

Stewart, James Brewer. "Abolitionists, the Bible, and the Challenge of Slavery." In *The Bible and Social* Reform, edited by Ernest R. Sandeen, 31-57. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Scholars Press, 1982.

---------. *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*. Rev. ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1996.

---------. *William Lloyd Garrison and the Challenge of Emancipation*. Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1992.

Stievermann, Jan, Daniel Silliman, and Philip Goff. "General Introduction." In *Religion and the Marketplace in the United States*, edited by Jan Stievermann, Philip Goff, and Detlef Junker, with Anthony Santoro and Daniel Silliman, 1-29. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Stievermann, Jan, Philip Goff, and Detlef Junker, eds., with Anthony Santoro and Daniel Silliman. *Religion and the Marketplace in the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Stout, Harry S. "Word and Order in Colonial New England." In *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, edited by Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, 19-38. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Edited, introducd, and annotated by Jean Fagan Yellin. Oxford World Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Stuart, M[oses]. *Miscellanies*. Vol. I. New York: Van Nostrand & Terrett, 1851.

Suhl, Yuri. *Ernestine L. Rose and the Battle for Human Rights*. New York: Reynal & Company, 1959.

Tallmadge, Nathaniel P. "Introduction." In Charles Linton, *The Healing of the Nations*, 8-9. New York: Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge, 1855.

Taylor, Bron. "Diggers, Wolves, Ents, Elves and Expanding Universes: Bricolage, Religion and Violence from Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front to the Antiglobalization Resistance," in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*, edited by Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, 26-74. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002.

Taylor, Robert. *The Diegesis; Being a Discovery of the Origin, Evidences, and Early History of Christianity*…. Boston: Abner Kneeland, 1834.

Thomas, John L. *The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison – A Biography*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962.

Thuesen, Peter J. *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Tilton, Eleanor M., ed. *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Vol. 7. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

Townshend, Chauncy Hare. *Facts in Mesmerism, with Reasons for a Dispassionate Inquiry Into It*. London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1840.

---------. *Facts in Mesmerism, with Reasons for A Dispassionate Inquiry Into It*. 2nd ed. London: Hippolyte Bailleire; Paris: J.B. Bailliere; Leipzig: T.O. Weigel, 1844.

Turner, James. "'Grammatical and Exegetical Tact': Biblical Philology and its Others, 1800-1860. In *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities*, 210-229. Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014.

---------. *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities*, 210-229. Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014.

---------. *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985.

Very, Jones. *Essays and Poems*. Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1839.

---------. *Jones Very: The Complete Poems*. With an introduction by Helen R. Deese. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993.

Wacker, Grant. "The Demise of Biblical Civilization." In *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, edited by Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, 121-138. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Wakefield, Gilbert. *An Examination of the Age of Reason, or an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology, by Thomas Paine*. London: Kearsley, 1794.

Walters, Ronald G. *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Watson, Richard. *Anecdotes of the Life of Richard Watson, Bishop of Landaff* [sic]*; Written by Himself at Different Intervals, and Revised in 1814*. London: J. M'Creery, for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1817.

---------. *Apologie der Bibel gegen Thomas Paine*…. Hannover: Hahn, 1798.

---------. *Apologie ou défense de la Bible*…. London : C.J.G. and F. Rivington, 1829.

---------. *An Apology for the Bible, in a Series of Letters, Addressed to Thomas Paine*…. New York: John Bull, 1796.

---------. *An Apology for the Bible – In a Series of Letter, Addressed to Thomas Paine, Author of the Age of Reason*. New York: J. Collord, for T. Mason and G. Lane, 1837.

Weber, Timothy P. "The Two-Edged Sword: The Fundamentalist Use of the Bible." In *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, edited by Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, 101-120. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Weiss, John, ed. *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker*. Vol. 1. New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1864.

Weld, Theodore Dwight. *The Bible Against Slavery*…. New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838.

Whitcomb, Mary R. "Abner Kneeland: His Relations to Early Iowa History." *Annals of Iowa*, 3rd ser., 7, no. 5 (April 1904): 340-363.

Wilkinson, Margaret, ed. and rev. *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten*. London: John Heywood, 1900.

Wimbush, Vincent L., ed., with the assistance of Rosamond C. Rodman. *African Americans and the Bible*. New York: Continuum, 2000.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, et al., eds. *The Woman's Bible, Part I*. 1895. Reprint, Salem, NH: Ayer Company, 1988.

Wright, Conrad Edick. *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America*. 1966. Reprint, Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1976.

---------. *The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarian History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.

---------. *The Unitarian Controversy: Essays on American Unitarian History*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1994.

---------, ed. *American Unitarianism, 1805-1865*. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society and Northeastern University Press, 1989.