



# *The* Wonder Springs Chronicle

10 March 2010; Volume 12, Number 10

## The Wonder Springs Chronicle

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## Why Me? Outside the Box

The United States and the world today are facing “Outside the Box” stresses. It has been a long time since the stupendous changes of economics and politics have not only forced people to look outside their comforts and securities for solutions, but also to examine the basic paradigms on which their perceived security is based.

In previous articles we have stated that in western culture about every five hundred years a major reboot of the way we do things occurs. This turmoil creates the fertile soil for new developments that redefine our individuality and communities in ways that were unknown before the plowing or tilling began.

Beginning with the absolute understanding that humanity is a creation of God, and was indeed a creation in the image of God, it logically follows that this five hundred year upheaval, forces us again to look beyond the temporal world and

refocus upon the transcendent nature of common life. That understanding then brings about the incorporation of that transcendence into the religions of mankind.

While all religions including evolutionary materialism are exclusive in their worldviews, stresses develop that quickly become fault lines between the reformers and the establishments they are attempting to reform. Within Christianity the last time this occurred was in the Protestant Reformation.

That Reformation led to an era known as the Enlightenment where those new religious views received a more common application. At the time when the human development and religious fervor were properly understood within the broader culture, time was right for the miracle that became the American Revolution and the founding of the United States of America as a constitutional republic.



Notice all the “re” words that accompanied the changes from subjugation by divine right of kings into a worldview that valued individual liberty above all else. It then attempted to formulate a minimal governmental structure in which all humans would have the opportunity to pursue happiness, without class distinction.

We pick up that American religious story in the eighteenth century before the revolution the adoption of the US Constitution. The period we are referring to is known as the First Great Awakening. As we continue through the rest of this “Why Me?” series what we must understand is that totality of God’s grace, both common as revealed in creation and specific as revealed in the Scriptures and in the church is always perceived in ways limited by human understanding. To clarify, the true saints always tend to agree with us and against you.

According to time chronology the First Great Awakening included the period from 1730 1740. Jonathan Edwards famous 1741 sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” is thought of as the epitome of preaching during the revival. Even though Edwards was a church pastor, this first awakening was really the birth of what we today know as the revival service in which itinerant preachers travel from place to place preaching outside established churches, many times because the appeal to the local populace was so great that no church building could hold the crowd.

This awakening began in Britain and came to this country through the preaching of George Whitfield and John Wesley. Whitfield was a Calvinist. Wesley as we have stated earlier was an Arminian. Both however began their preaching associated with English Methodism, in which systematic “methods” were use to study and expound the Bible. Over time Wesley moved towards personal piety and holiness and took the Methodist moniker with him.

The religious fever swept throughout the colonies, but from our perspective it is important to notice that revivalism had a tendency to bring in experts and excitements from out of town to enhance the Christian gospel message and

provided an emphasis on making conversions to Christ, rather than more traditional catechesis and discipleship.

So what we see in the miracle time of the foundational formation of the United States is a tension between the specific revelations of God through the scriptures and a general revelation of God through creation or the wildness that accompanied living on a continent where the established norms of boxes of Europe and especially England, not only did not apply, but were counter productive to personal and community economic survival and growth.

According to our American time chronology the Second Great Awakening began in 1790 and continued through 1840. This is the era in which revivals, camp meetings, and similar events became the prime force for extension of Christianity across the country. At the same time the local church either adopted or perished simply because revivals and such were really the only method and means of community development, and lest we forget entertainment. For better or worse and as it continues to the present, sound doctrine receded and emotionalism, either inward or external became the prime method of Christian religious expression.

There were many people who were part of this movement and America saw a great diversity of Christian based religious views expressed, as well as the formation of numerous denominations, sects, and cults. What we would like to focus upon however is the interesting New England birth of a number of religious leaders and philosophers with influences still with us today.

It could be said that New England was the center of early Christian thought in the colonies. We all are familiar that Plymouth was the landing place of the Pilgrims. They were followed by the group we call the Puritans, essentially turning the religious landscape of the Northeast to a home of TULIP Calvinists. This was so true that a Baptist Roger Williams was exiled from Massachusetts and formed the Rhode Island colony.

We have chosen six people, born within 150 present road miles of Boston, from 1782 1821, who brought out of box change not only to New England but also to the whole United States. To these six people we will add another born in Scotland and

had a very strict Calvinist father. He was greatly influenced by two of our New England group so that by the time America reached the twentieth century the complex diversity of the closed frontier provided a basis for America's greatness.

These seven figures are listed by date of birth, place of birth, distance to Boston, and prime Calvinist antithesis:

William Miller: Born February 15, 1782, Pittfield, MA; 136 miles to Boston; was the essential founder of Adventism, that focused on Saturday as the true Sabbath and Biblical end times prophesy.

Charles Grandison Finney: Born August 29, 1792, Warren, CT; 146 miles to Boston; still is the patron saint of American revivalism, which used ordinary natural means to bring about emotional conversions to Christianity, generally described as a Presbyterian.

Ralph Waldo Emerson: Born May 25, 1803, Boston, MA; was a founder of the deistic philosophy of natural Transcendentalism.

Joseph Smith: Born December 23, 1805, Sharon, VT; 141 miles to Boston; was the first prophet and founder of Mormonism, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

The year 1816 was known as the year without summer in which the volcanic eruption of Mt. Tambora in Indonesia made many believe that the end of the world was near.

Henry David Thoreau: Born July 12, 1817, Cambridge, MA; just up the street from Boston; if Emerson was the philosopher of Transcendentalism, Thoreau was and still remains its chief disciple and prophet.

Mary Baker Eddy: Born July 16, 1821, Bow, NH; 70 miles to Boston, is the founder of Christian Science.

John Muir: Born April 21, 1838, in Scotland, to a strict Calvinist father who was a itinerate preacher. Muir, following in the path of Emerson and Thoreau found the reality of God in nature and not in the church of their fathers. Muir is the patron saint and godfather of America's National Parks and environmental movement.

The salient point of all of these people is that they all probably knew the Bible as good or better than most modern seminary graduates, but they saw something missing in the churches of their day, and amazingly tried to do something about it. None of these people were in it for the money, there was no robber barons, but profoundly believed in what they did would and did affect the spiritual as well as the natural unity of humanity.

For all of them the transcendence of God greatly surpassed the human condition but at the same time they saw redemption for lack of a better term through the understanding or works of man. In other words the grace of God that they should have understood from the Calvinist culture of their birth, failed to bring satisfaction for their life's pilgrimage.

They all worked from what they believed to be a Christian worldview, but except for Finney none of these people were welcomed as a true Christian. Furthermore even of cursory reading of Finney finds his theology quite distant from historic orthodox Christian beliefs, but his methods of "New Measures" of revivalism still are the philosophical methods to achieve Christian conversions.

While I am only familiar with missionary work within the Native American populations of the Northwest, Christian missionaries came in one of two variations, they were either Roman Catholic or those utilizing revival techniques of Finney and Oberlin College, where Finney was college president. Furthermore there was not a free market for Christian missionary work, but rather a political balance was maintained so that some tribes were evangelized by the Roman Catholic Black Robes, while other tribes were essentially given to the Protestants.

The famous Whitman massacre at the Whitman Mission near Walla Walla, Washington was somewhat brought about by Cayuse Indians not being willing to fit into proper molds of devout Christians of the Finney genre. Similarly the famous Trail of Tears, of Chief Joseph resulted from friction between Reverend Spaulding of the Nez Perce Mission at Lapwai, Idaho and the more spiritual or pentecostal Christianity practiced by the Joseph Band from the Wallowa Valley in Oregon. Likewise the Roman Catholic Spokanes were sent to the Coeur d' Alene Reservation while the Protestants

were sent to the Spokane Reservation centered at Wellpinit.

There are many problems interpreting all of this today because to most historians all Christians are essentially the same and even if there is a recognized difference between Roman Catholics and Protestants, they surely are unable to differentiate between say a historic Presbyterian and a Finney Presbyterian. It surely is a testament of God that there still are many Indian people who still are Christian, considering all the troubles they have obtained from the Great White Father that rules from the land where the sun rises.

In our brief religious excursion this week we see seven people, six born within a hundred mile radius of some point in central Massachusetts that have a significant impact on the common and specific religious culture of the United States and the world today. All of them sought to improve upon the religious culture into which they were born. Lest we forget none of them were very successful in replacing the religious culture they sought to reform. These reformers were forced out of the box of their upbringing, some with great personal cost to themselves.

We today have entered an out of the box time. For the most part the solutions offered today are really totally secular in nature. Rather than attempting to reform or reboot our way of life, they are trying to fix the broken box. The still alive healthcare debate is definitely a fix looking for reason to exist, but it does lie outside the paradigm that the Founders of the American Republic envisioned. This brings into question if healthcare reform, as now being codified, has either the intellectual or the energetic diversity to actually accomplish its goals .

Leadership today, at all levels, are basically beholden to the past and trying to bring change by playing with details that somewhat worked in recent memory, because in the good old days the box brought security and the only change was the change we felt comfortable believing in.

In Ezekiel Chapter 37, God takes Ezekiel to a valley filled with dry bones and asks the prophet if the bones can come alive? The prophet answers essentially, "God, that solution is up to you." Then the bones came together and eventually lived.

If you look at the Founding of the United States as a secular miracle from God to humanity, we find a similar situation. To keep somewhat with the analogy of the week, we are a box of dry bones, and God is saying come out of the box and I will make you alive again.

For those who accept that message, it will be a miraculous time to come alive, for those who would rather stay in the box, there they shall remain. In our world change is the only constant, either you adapt or you don't. In history we find the keys to the future, of life or death. Evolving enlightened material secularism is that death box, get out and walk into a new living valley.