

Heaven on Earth: George Rapp on the Destiny of Man¹

Adam Darlage

When Rapp the Harmonist embargoed marriage
In his harmonious settlement – (which flourishes
Strangely enough as yet without miscarriage
Because it breeds no more mouths than it nourishes,
Without those sad expenses which disparage
What Nature naturally most encourages) –
Why call'd he “Harmony” a state sans wedlock?
Now here I have got the preacher at a dead lock.

Because he either meant to sneer at harmony
Or Marriage, by divorcing them thus oddly,
But whether reverend Rapp learn'd this in Germany
Or no, 'tis said his sect is rich and godly,
Pious and pure, beyond what I can term any
Of ours, although they propagate more broadly,
My objection's to his title, not his ritual,
Although I wonder how it grew habitual. (Byron 310-11)

*L*ord Byron's unfinished masterpiece *Don Juan* is an unlikely source of information about George Rapp (1757-1847) and the Harmony Society of early nineteenth-century America. Led by Rapp and his adopted son Frederick (Reichert) Rapp (1775-1834), the Harmonists were a communitarian Christian group from Württemberg, Germany that erected settlements in the United States beginning in 1804 with the

town of Harmony in Butler County, Pennsylvania. Here in Canto 15 of *Don Juan*, Byron satirizes the irony between the name Harmony and the Harmonist commitment to celibacy. At that time, celibacy was commonly associated with the Shakers of Mother Ann Lee, but the Harmonists too were infamous for the practice.² Byron notes that they were a “pious and pure” people from Germany and that their communities in America were generally successful as economic ventures, being both “rich and godly.”

Most studies of George Rapp and the Harmony Society have focused on the same social and economic issues that intrigued Lord Byron, that is, the Harmonist commitment to celibacy and their success as a Christian commune. For decades the Harmony Society has been a staple of collections dealing with utopian or communitarian Christian sects in America.³ Since most scholars have approached the group as a utopian social experiment, far less work has been done on the theology and religious practices of Rapp and the Harmonists. From the 1940s until his death in 1991, Karl J.R. Arndt, the chief historian of the Harmony Society, focused heavily on the economic success and social dynamics of the Harmony Society, largely viewing theological and philosophical matters as secondary to the fact that the Harmonists were a financially stable and influential immigrant Christian movement.⁴ His documentary histories of the Harmonists, while invaluable, omit important Harmonist philosophical and theological texts.⁵ Alice T. Ott notes that Arndt’s approach to Harmonist spirituality and theology is unsophisticated and sometimes negative.⁶ When Arndt does deal with theological concerns, he generally follows Emmanuel Hirsch’s *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie im Zusammenhang mit den allgemeinen Bewegungen des europäischen Denkens* in locating the primary source for George Rapp’s theology in the work of the mystic and theosophist Jakob Boehme (1575-1624).⁷

Ott herself argues that Rapp’s movement was “a unique and eclectic mixture of orthodox Lutheran and churchly and radical Pietist emphases found in Württemberg” (18). She traces two “trajectories” of thought in Rapp: 1) a biblical-eschatological commitment to Reformation doctrine,

with Pietist emphases on personal experience, millennialism, and an Anabaptist ecclesiology; and 2), a mystical-spiritual turn to mysticism, Quietism, Sophiaology, theosophism, and cabbalistic ideas (18). Ott argues convincingly that several figures have been overlooked as influences on Rapp's vision of communal Christianity as it was worked out in his North American Harmonist communities at Harmony, Pennsylvania (1805-1815); New Harmony, Indiana (1814-1825); and Economy, Pennsylvania (1824-1905).⁸ She highlights the influence of a number of thinkers associated with Pietism, including Philip Jakob Spener, Johann Albrecht Bengel, Gottfried Arnold, Gerhard Tersteegen, and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger. Jakob Boehme figures as one of several influences on the thought of Rapp. Ott draws on many different kinds of archival and printed material to make her case for Rapp's theological hybridity, her chief sources being Rapp's sermons and pastoral letters as well as Harmonist hymns.⁹ Examined together, Harmonists records, receipts, letters, hymns, sermons, and bills of exchange paint a vivid picture of life among the Harmonists between 1805 and 1905 when the last Harmonist community at Economy, Pennsylvania was formally dissolved.

Ott, however, makes little use of George Rapp's self-published treatise, *Gedanken über die Bestimmung des Menschen: besonders in Hinsicht der gegenwärtigen Zeit*, which was printed at New Harmony in 1824. This treatise, the first book of philosophy written in Indiana, is George Rapp's only prose writing intended for outsiders. In it he outlines his vision of an age characterized by harmonious Christian communalism, a new world order initiated by his Harmony Society. Rapp's *Gedanken über die Bestimmung des Menschen* represents an interesting study for both scholars of his philosophical, theological, and theosophical thought, and for scholars of nineteenth-century religious prose. This is especially the case for its English translation within the North American context. This translation, executed by Frederick Rapp, is titled *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man: particularly With Reference to the Present Times*. Both the original and the translation are rare,¹⁰ for Rapp

took them both out of circulation because he believed the work needed revision in both form and content.¹¹

Rapp was quite right to note flaws, especially in the English translation. *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man* may best be described as tedious. Some of Frederick Rapp's English translations are awkward.¹² Many of the English sentences are convoluted, because Frederick often uses commas in place of the stronger punctuation marks in his father's German original.¹³ Complicating matters further, Frederick Rapp added seven pages of concluding summary to the English translation, which totals 96 pages; the German original, however, ends on page 85. Finally, the work has numerous typographical errors.¹⁴

Most scholars of the Harmony Society have dealt only with *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man* in a cursory manner.¹⁵ This has less to do with Rapp's appraisal of the work's value, however, and more to do with Karl Arndt's analysis of the text in a short yet influential article from 1941 titled "Herder and the Harmony Society."¹⁶ Arndt argues that in *Thoughts* Rapp was the "practical executor" of Johann Gottfried Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Arndt, "Herder and the Harmony Society" 111). He contends that Rapp's account of Harmony is a religious reworking of Herder's attempt at the realization of a Humanitätsideal, that is, the realization of full humanity in and through history. Arndt points out that "the work shows that it was not written by a man trained to develop a subject from its germ and carry it through to a clear conclusion. It resembles the first draft of a book consisting chiefly of notes, frequent repetitions, and certain more carefully worked out passages which were probably in their final form" (Arndt, *George Rapp's Harmony Society* 255). Overall, Arndt treats *Thoughts* as a largely unoriginal and sloppy document that is best left on the margins of any serious study of the Harmony Society.

Recent scholars of the Harmony Society have been more willing to look at *Thoughts* with an eye to its historical, theological, and philosophical value. Donald Pitzer, who is currently working with Silvia Rode on a new English translation of *Gedanken über die Bestimmung des*

Menschen, has noted the repetition of ideas and passages in the work.¹⁷ Unlike Arndt, however, Pitzer and Rode take the text seriously as a piece of Harmonist philosophy despite its orthographic problems, repetitions, and reliance on the philosophical reflections of Herder and others. Like myself, Pitzer is interested in Rapp's optimism about the future of humanity, and how *Thoughts* complicates the general scholarly conclusion that Rapp was a premillennialist.¹⁸

The scholarly neglect of Rapp's *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man* from a literary perspective is also surprising, especially given the amount of attention that the Harmonists and other Christian communitarian societies in America have received from historians and sociologists. While Rapp repeats passages and ideas quite frequently in *Thoughts*, this is no reason to ignore its value as religious prose. On the contrary, repetition can be just as interesting as novelty, especially with respect to its pedagogical value for readers. Therefore, while George Rapp was not a skilled writer and his text was not distributed, the original English *Thoughts* warrants closer examination as a nineteenth-century philosophical and religious text. Yet I do not argue that it is "the most definitive statement of Rappist belief," as Gladys Inez Seagle does in her 1963 dissertation, as this is simply not the case (Seagle 2). I also do not follow Robert P. Sutton in his conclusion that *Thoughts* constitutes Rapp's "ideas on education" (Sutton 40). Although the work does call for the proper education of believers in the Harmony Society, that is but one element of Rapp's universal Christian vision for humanity.

Furthermore, I will not overly concern myself with establishing "influences" behind Rapp's thought, as this betrays a reading practice of *Thoughts* not as religious literature that makes its own claim upon the reader, but as historical evidence of the thoughts of others synthesized by Rapp. This approach has been the norm in studies of George Rapp, most notably in Arndt's comparison of Rapp and Herder and Ott's analysis of Rapp within the context of radical Pietism. My goal in this essay is to offer a close reading of Rapp's *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man* as a work of religious prose, and to present a clear account of Rapp's

philosophical and theological claims within the text. I begin by narrating a brief history of Rapp and the Harmonists from 1785 to 1824, as this offers the reader a starting point from which to approach the text. Then, I turn to the text of *Thoughts* by summarizing Rapp's main argument. Afterward, I take a closer look at Rapp's use of language, as he builds his account of the "brotherly union" or "united whole" of humanity on mechanical, horticultural, and alchemical¹⁹ metaphors and images. Rapp envisions the true destiny of man as a machine or system, a plant or tree, and especially a reconciliation of opposites. These images reinforce his fundamental communal point that the individual must "deny thyself" in order that all may live "one for all, and all for one."

I argue that Rapp's *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man* was not merely an apology for the Harmony Society directed at hostile outsiders and the Enlightenment threat of Deism, but also an optimistic advertisement for what Rapp believed could happen if humanity could come together in Christ and establish a "golden age" of a "Brotherly Union of good men" (91). For Rapp, the Harmony Society had established something that the rest of the world would eventually participate in, a spiritual and practical Christianity for all people, a realized social and economic venture that could even be described as a utopia.²⁰ With Donald Pitzer's recent research in mind, I end by pointing to how the optimism of *Thoughts* raises questions about defining Rapp as a premillennialist thinker, as has commonly been the case on the basis of his other writings and activities. The text promotes universal salvation for all those joined to his endeavor and the power of humanity to establish a golden age on earth, an age that would presumably precede the Second Coming of Christ in postmillennial fashion.²¹

Historical Context (1785-1824)

George Rapp was born in the Lutheran village of Iptingen in the southwest German duchy of Württemberg on 1 November 1757. Educated in traditional Lutheranism with his brother and three sisters, Rapp later learned the craft of weaving. He married Christine Benzinger in 1783, with whom he had two children. Rapp soon became influenced

by strains of Christian thought deemed potentially dangerous by the Lutheran government of Württemberg, including mysticism, theosophy, and above all, pietism. Pietism was an approach to Christian life and practice that emphasized the importance of experience and a religion "of the heart," over against the traditional religious forms, such as rote prayers and strict liturgies. Although Pietism began as a reform movement within the Church through men such as Philip Jakob Spener (1635-1705) and August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), German Pietist movements had grown more radical by the late eighteenth century, especially in the duchy of Württemberg. Many radical Pietists wanted to separate from the established church, believing that they had the authority to interpret the Bible for themselves.

Within this crucible of Pietist fervor, Rapp emerged as the charismatic leader of a small group of followers who separated from the established Lutheran church in 1785. Rapp's group risked political, economic, and social repercussions, for it was commonly believed that separatism bred social and political anarchy. Indeed, Rapp was briefly imprisoned in 1791 for his religious activities. Rapp and his followers composed an Article of Faith, and in their Lomersheimer Declaration decried the "empty" ceremonies of the established Lutheran Church and contended that they would not serve in the military or send their children to Lutheran schools.

Continually harassed by the Württemberg government, Rapp and his followers decided to emigrate, seeking fertile land in the United States. Rapp and key leaders of the movement eventually procured 3,000 acres in western Pennsylvania, and 140 families settled there. Rapp called this first community, "Harmonie," and it soon became a profitable economic endeavor. By 1815 the Harmonists had built a tannery, a brewery, and were dealing successfully in a number of trades. The Harmony Society was formally established on 15 February 1805 with about 500 members. They all contracted to hold their goods in common and submitted to Rapp's authority as their leader. Rapp's adopted son Frederick Rapp was particularly important for the group; he not only organized the move to

America, but he also became the business manager and public spokesperson for the Harmony Society in America.

Rapp introduced celibacy two years later in order to purify the gathered community for the millennium; he believed that the rise of Napoleon was a sign of the end of days. The Harmonists recorded no marriages between 1807 and 1817, and by 1809 the members of the Harmony Society had begun to call Rapp “Father,” and his presence was felt in nearly every aspect of his followers’ lives. As their spiritual leader, he heard confessions, preached sermons, visited the sick, and led prayers. He also involved himself in the economic interests of the commune.²²

The Harmony Society sold Harmonie to a group of Mennonites in 1814 for ten times its original value and left for more fertile land in southwest Indiana, seeking a warmer climate more amenable to their interests in viniculture. They settled on 7,000 acres of swampy land near the Wabash River in southwest Indiana and called it Harmonie as well. This Harmonie later became known as New Harmony after the Welsh socialist reformer Robert Owen bought the town and the surrounding land (about 30,000 acres) from the Harmonists in 1824. The Harmonists earned their international reputation for strict celibacy and their regimented communitarian life during this period. They also became quite successful as an economic venture: the Harmonists built houses, a granary, mills, and in 1822, a brick church. In 1818, the Harmonists burned their Book of Debts on the anniversary of their founding. This book detailed familial or individual contributions to the gathered community of faith. While perhaps evidence of Harmonist zeal for their communitarian way of life, it is more likely that this was Father Rapp’s strategy for ensuring the financial security of the Society by making it difficult for disgruntled former members to regain their original contributions.

By the early 1820s, Harmony had become a self-sufficient manufacturing and farming community of about 800 members with a school, a brass band, and a communal morning wake-up call with French horns. Rapp procured a printing press for their physician, music director, and schoolmaster Johann Christoph Müller in 1823 and had it installed in

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the schoolhouse. *Gedanken über die Bestimmung des Menschen* and its English translation were printed here in 1824. By this date, the Harmonists had weathered several external and internal storms. From outside, they had to continually deal with jealous, suspicious, or disagreeable neighbors (they were Abolitionists living fifteen miles from the slave state Kentucky), tax disputes, and they were far from their primary markets of trade on the east coast. From inside, Father Rapp had become more authoritarian and uncompromising. He was behind the institution of individual agreements for incoming members in 1821, which contained no provision for receiving goods back upon leaving the Harmony Society. In the midst of increasing tensions both within the group and with the wider community, Rapp gave religious reasons to justify the move from southern Indiana. He claimed that his group was like the Sunwoman from Revelation 12 who had to flee again to the wilderness.²³ In January of 1825, the Harmonists sold the land to Robert Owen, and the Harmonists moved back to Pennsylvania to their new community Economy.²⁴

Restoring the Lost Dignity of Man Through Self-denial

Father Rapp's *Gedanken* and its English translation were printed at Harmony in 1824, the last year of the Harmony Society's residence in Indiana. The timing is curious, for one may only speculate as to exactly why and for whom Rapp composed the piece and why it was never circulated widely. His choice to suppress the piece so quickly suggests that Rapp may have decided to republish a "cleaner" version in Economy, or even that differences of opinion prevailed among Rapp and his fellow Harmonists about the wisdom of publishing *Thoughts* in an increasingly hostile environment. Yet this much is clear: the English translation of *Thoughts* is not a text for the Harmonists, as the Harmonists usually spoke German among themselves. Moreover, Rapp's sermons for his followers contain far more direct references to scripture and far less concern for justifying the communal way of life. Finally, Rapp alludes several times in *Thoughts* to the Harmony Society as the

model for what the world at large should embrace, i.e., a practical Christianity devoted to both spiritual and material concerns. This suggests he had an outside audience in mind.

Thoughts on the Destiny of Man is an ambitious piece of religious prose that rewards a close and careful reading of its central precepts. Rapp outlines nothing less than how the lost dignity of man is to be restored through a communal practical Christianity, the end of which is both spiritual and temporal happiness for men and women throughout the world. This happiness is their destiny. Here, I outline Rapp's main argument as briefly and clearly as possible before turning to Rapp's reliance on certain metaphors and images.

Rapp's vision of harmony begins with his recognition that men were created to use their natural faculties to serve others. Yet this natural end of human existence is countered by the "carnal propensities of the flesh," which humanity must combat through belief in Jesus Christ and God the Father (1). Rapp writes, "all who believe his word will become men of God, whose aim and design will be, to unite the general welfare of their fellow beings with their own, and thereby assist, in restoring the lost dignity of man" (2). Through true Christianity, which is exemplified by the Harmony Society and destined to be restored throughout the earth over the course of time, humanity will learn how to work together as one and establish a "golden age" of lived Christian communalism that is neither overly spiritual or based in "empty" material forms of worship. Rapp believes that Deists are given to reckless carnal proclivities and that traditional "high church" forms of Christianity, most notably the Lutheranism of his native Württemberg, are too material and superstitious.

Rapp contends that the lost dignity of man will be restored primarily through self-denial, as people will come to recognize the saving power of communal and harmonious living:

All deeds done for the sole welfare of mankind are of immortal nature, and bear immense interest. In order to obtain this object, it is necessary to follow that very excellent doctrine of Jesus: deny thyself.

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No one can enjoy a more quiet condition, than he who practises this selfdenial,²⁵ for whoever has experienced the more exalted influence of light, is thereby transmuted into a truly comfortable state of assiduity. (36)

The dignity of man can only be restored by denying oneself for the sake of the community. He looks for a world where people are "all of *one* constitution belief and religion, living in peace and union and moving in fraternal communities and harmonies, one for all, and all for one. (14)

Although Frederick Rapp added the last seven pages of *Thoughts* to his father's German original, this passage drawn from those pages perhaps best summarizes how humanity, through proper moral education within the context of a lived communal Christianity, can establish the "golden age" of true Christianity:

Every exertion and difficulty, which are properly applied, are precious treasures, for the welfare of the human race. The earlier these correct principles can be impressed upon the human mind, and the sooner regular and virtuous habits can be formed, the more certain and the more permanent, will necessarily be their happy consequences....

It is ardently hoped and believed that this sublime, predestinated system of *Brotherly Union & Social Harmony*, will ere long be universally established, for the restoration of the golden age, the dignity of the human character, and the happiness of man. (95-96)

The end of humanity is predestined for this end, with the Harmony Society as the example to follow. This optimism about the destiny of humanity pervades *Thoughts*, especially in Rapp's mechanical, horticultural, and alchemical metaphors. These metaphors present Rapp's "*Brotherly Union & Social Harmony*" or "*Indivisible Whole*" (57) of

humankind in vivid detail, prompting the reader to imagine that this harmonious material and spiritual union runs in practice like a “great machine,” has grown like an “excellent” plant in and through history, and stabilizes material and spiritual interests into a “powerful and durable” alchemical compound.

“A machine of mere living wheels”: Rapp’s Mechanical Metaphors

George Rapp, like the leaders and writers of other Christian communitarian movements, often deploys mechanical metaphors to describe how a true Christian community works:

The time has come when all good and rational men surmount every difficulty, and bring the spirited activity into a steady course and more perfect system of intimate connexion, so that excessive abuse with its crumbled ruins remain behind, and are succeeded by a well regulated motion of duties toward men in general, to unite the spiritual with the temporal and let it grow up in pure brotherly sentiment and spirit to a perfect harmony & godly kingdom, which can only be effected by men, in a well regulated activity and motion. (5)

Rapp’s musings sound very much like the communitarian Hutterite Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, who depicted life on their communes as akin to the “ingenious work of a clock, where one piece helps another to make it go, so that it serves its purpose” (Hutterian Brethren 406). In both cases, the “well-regulated” motion of the machine produces a harmony of human activity.

Mechanical harmony, as a metaphor for group striving as a single unit, is critical for Rapp, who believes that only communal efforts can redeem the earth from its misguided cultivation of individuals over the community of the faithful. He exclaims, “a machine of mere living wheels, what can it not accomplish! What power to awake and display! What great achievement when corrupt constitutions, discord & despotism

are done away & innocence [sic] is rescued from the grasp of Tyrants!" (9). Rapp's attack on despotism and tyranny is his rejection of self-interest, for as he remarks, "the Spirit of our age abhors the useless works of vanity and self-interest" (68). These "living wheels" not only work well together, they deny their own individual desires for the sake of the whole.

Rapp's mechanical metaphors oscillate between valences of social utopianism and those of nostalgic Christian primitivism. Read by itself, the following passage lays out a blueprint for a social utopia:

Each Department of the household, from the most extensive manufacturer, down to the business of a seamstress, has its superintendent, chosen within itself, & approved of by the community, so that any person having business to transact, always knows to whom to apply: and all the manufacturing, mechanical, agricultural, & commercial branches of the establishment, are carefully kept in operation and order, and their incomes and orders properly accounted for.

The various branches of this economic commonwealth, thus regularly conducted & united together, form one great machine, the principle wheel of which, when in motion, puts all the rest in operation, for the common interest of the whole. In their mutual enjoyments, all the members are contented, and happy: none are rich or poor; the causes of distress & clamor in the world, are not experienced, nor even known here. (70-71)

With an organizational strategy rivaling that of Thomas More's *Utopia*, Rapp calls for superintendents of various departments in this "economic commonwealth" or "great machine," and requires a detailed accounting of finances in every department.²⁶ Rapp privileges "nature" as the example behind this undertaking, the example for a "contented and happy" world where everyone has enough to eat and drink and clothing

to wear. Rapp's vision of nature could hardly be more utopic, and indeed mechanical, for later he writes that "nature itself has its established rules and fixed principles in which rest a thousand different faculties and powers, which operate and perfectionate, themselves distributively through mankind, endeavouring by perseverance to return again to their equilibrium of harmonious power" (51). Nature itself is a machine that operates through humanity.

Only a few lines after the passage cited above, however, Rapp adds that "where so many useful, active powers, are harmoniously united, there must be, and evidently is, a true Kingdom of God" (71). For Rapp, the Kingdom of God is a happy, well-organized, and efficient communal natural utopia, which has only recently become possible again in human history. This happiness is therefore not just utopic, but profoundly Christian, for as Rapp elsewhere notes, "the Creator of the Universe has always in view, the happiness of all the human race" (68).

One wonders, however, about the identity of the "principal wheel" that puts everything in motion in this great machine. Rapp's contention elsewhere in *Thoughts* that this "work has at length been successfully commenced," clearly suggests that he has the Harmony Society in mind, with himself at its head (69). Previous scholarship on the Harmony Society has demonstrated that Rapp controlled nearly every theological, social, and economic aspect of the Harmonists' lives, and that he believed he had a divine calling to his prophetic mission. Moreover, given Rapp's disdain for a purely spiritual Christianity, it is hard to imagine he has the risen Christ in mind. Rapp's mechanical metaphors reinforce his primary contention in *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man* that one must deny oneself and work for the good of the whole. Yet this project was not without a first mechanical cause, and Rapp make thinly veiled claims about the identity of the first mover, or "principle [*sic*] wheel" within the "great machine." Rapp believed that the Harmony Society was the example to follow, and that once the world was fully prepared to leave their self-interest behind, they too could become "living wheels" within this machine.

"Excellent Human Plant!": Rapp's Horticultural Metaphors

George Rapp uses numerous horticultural images of seeds, plants, trees, fruits, and roots to describe the coming new age of "*one Whole for the welfare of all ... that is HARMONY*" (44). These images, intimately connected to gardening as well as the annual cycle of sowing and reaping, could surely resonate with Rapp's nineteenth-century readers in the agricultural world of antebellum America. Moreover, horticulture was a popular pastime for the Harmonists and other Perfectionist communities in the early Republic, most notably the Oneida community.²⁷ Unlike Rapp's mechanical metaphors, however, these horticultural metaphors are not concerned with the paramount importance of communal endeavor in practice. Instead, Rapp relies more on the traditional Christian trope of the human spirit or will as the soil or ground from which virtues or vices flourish. More specifically within the context of *Thoughts*, horticultural metaphors point to the growth of collective humanity into an "excellent human plant" that is virtuous and therefore naturally inclined to seek communal harmony.

At the beginning of *Thoughts*, Rapp notes that the "religious and natural union" that is practical Christianity has appeared in the nineteenth century in order "to reestablish the forfeited rights of man" (2). He relies on a horticultural metaphor to make his point:

Since then such evidences of union have appeared in our 19th Century in which all this was to and has come to pass, and since the spirit has in part emerged from its enclosure and gradually progressed towards perfection, timid to be sure and under scorn and contempt, sowing however unnoticed its precious seed, how can it fail, that now and then a grain should find congenial soil and grow and flourish? Will not the man of sensibility & reflection discover, by the fragrance that a root of the noblest human plant is lying therein, which bears, and unites in itself, every thing whatever necessity requires.... (2-3)

The “congenial soil” is North America, and the “precious seed” is the natural Christian principle of harmony within the human spirit, treated with scorn and contempt by the misguided human spirit, which has heretofore yielded to the selfish temptations of the flesh. That “root of the noblest human plant” may be the Harmony Society, whose “fragrance” evidences the truth about practical Christianity to reasoning human beings. Yet what is this “spirit” that Rapp speaks of here that has guided this process? As Rapp later explains, it is “the wandering Spirit of time,” which has “searched among the nations for a home, and in despair had almost abandoned the pursuit, when by the propitious smiles of heaven a people were discovered, with strength and faculties enough, remaining for the human bond, although rude and rough, in their external appearance” (8). Obviously, Rapp has his Harmony Society in mind.

Rapp uses the term “root” another time in *Thoughts* to make the same point within the context of human history:

By notorious frauds, monuments of useful arts and institutions were often ruined, men destroyed, & whole nations drawn into the vortex of revolutions. But when ever that zeal turned to the right side, it effected also a great deal of good, for many centuries, so, that out of the most injurious abuses, the cause of truth has taken root, revived & propagated christianity in many parts of the world. An essential truth can never be lost, it will work itself through a thousand revolutions, and at last come out triumphant. (20)

It was never an issue that the “cause of truth,” i.e., a proper understanding of Christianity, would “take root” and restore the lost dignity of man in history. Within this passage, we may conclude that the “wandering spirit of time” drives the revival of true Christianity. Nevertheless, Rapp does not discount the evil that drives some to commit “notorious frauds,” for as he adds later in *Thoughts*, “by the agency of bad men, the good seeds are sometimes lost or destroyed” (75).

These metaphors of seed and root are imbedded within and illustrative of Rapp's grand narrative of a humanity that has returned to the truth of communal harmony lived by the earliest Christians. Rapp expands this specific horticultural metaphor about the connection between time and the fulfillment of the human spirit in the following passage:

Here things even the most opposite in their nature, are found to unite, and grow into each other, loosing [*sic*] themselves, *in one great Whole*, thoroughly connected, and this creates and produces means toward perfect ends. What are they? The establishment of true and unexampled politics and rights of nations; a brotherhood; a stupendous aggregate of parts thriving and entwining into each other, a compound of all ages, without Emperor or King. Excellent human plant! Full of philanthropy and brotherly happiness! Time has reached and brought thee forth. All political institutions of the present world, are subject to decay like the politicians who form them, but the human spirit of nations remains. The constitution of every empire and nation, sooner or latter comes to his end. (7-8)

Rapp supplies additional details about how this "*one great Whole*" matures from seed to plant through time, which has brought the seed forth. Mixing his agricultural with his mechanical metaphors, Rapp writes of a "stupendous aggregate of parts thriving and entwining into each other" that form the "excellent human plant."

As for what this human plant looks like as revealed through time, Rapp offers the image of the tree and its fruit: "and what remains yet to be unrevealed by the spirit of time! The sprout has grown up politically and religiously to a new tree, whose branches bear delicious fruits" (16). These fruits have to do with the orientation of the human spirit to virtue instead of vice: "what a pleasant time is now before us! What a fine new world! How happy to enjoy the fruits of our labour. How praise worthy,

when good men, considering mere sensual enjoyment beneath the dignity of their nature, attain the noble charms of virtue, & give evident proof of the possibility to abstain from all superfluities of earthly pleasures” (16). This progress toward virtuous living and the perfection of individual self-denial is predestined. Rapp writes that “every eye must brighten with ecstasy and be amazed, which discovers the growing sprout transformed into a tree, and sees with what life and vigor, its Branches [*sic*] are waving, and forcing themselves forward, to arrive at their predestinated end” (26-27). While Rapp’s mechanical metaphors point to how the people live and work together in harmony, these horticultural metaphors emphasize growth. The branches cited above are “waving, and forcing themselves forward” to their destiny.

Horticultural metaphors play an important role in *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man*. Unlike images and figures taken from the realm of mechanics, which focus on the ability of different moving parts to work together, the images of seeds, roots, branches, and fruit allow Rapp to focus on growth over time. For Rapp, this growth was a spiritual and moral growth away from selfishness and toward practices of self-denial for the task of establishing the “united Whole” of practical Christianity on earth according to the model of the Harmony Society. Because these horticultural metaphors denote growth over time, they reveal much about Rapp’s positive view of history.²⁸

“All contraries [...] reconciled”: Rapp’s Alchemical Metaphors

Metaphors based on the alchemical²⁹ principle of the “reconciliation of opposites”³⁰ dominate Rapp’s presentation of *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man*, as they get to the core of Rapp’s vision of a reconciliation of humanity into one “*compound Whole*” of spiritual and temporal life (55). Scholars of the Harmony Society are well aware of Rapp’s interest in alchemy, as his library contained several volumes on the subject.³¹ Yet these scholars have also hesitated to read Rapp’s language in *Thoughts* through the lens of alchemy. For example, Arthur Versluis argues for the importance of esoteric and alchemical influences on Rapp and the

Harmony, yet also curiously denies their "traces" in *Thoughts*.³² Ott notes the interest in alchemy shared by many radical Pietists from this era, and also examines Rapp's alchemical language in his sermons.³³ However, she does not extend her analysis of terms such as "separation," "distill," "tincture," "annihilation," or "purification" to *Thoughts* itself. Ott demonstrates that Rapp used this language most frequently in his sermons to describe how a Christian becomes more pure, i.e., grows in sanctification.³⁴ A close reading of *Thoughts* reveals that Rapp uses a variety of alchemical code words ("compound," "ferment," "separation," "reconciliation," "contraries," and "opposites") in a similar fashion.³⁵ The reconciliation between the warring human interests of self-denial and selfishness found its most complete expression in these alchemical terms.

To begin, Rapp sets up the historical opposites that must be reconciled in order for true harmony to prevail by relying on the alchemical term "fermentation." Within spiritual alchemy, this is the transformative activity that begins with the inspiration of some spiritual power that awakens the human spirit and energizes it for action in the world.³⁶ In most variants of spiritual alchemy, a golden yellow ferment arises from a state of decay or from the blackness of the soul, and these opposites are reconciled in the spiritual growth of the ferment.³⁷ In *Thoughts*, these alchemical opposites represent the spiritual orientations of humans in history: "the time has at length arrived, when the improvement of mind and the diffusion of Knowledge, have produced a fermentation among the human Race, tending to a total separation. One part is falling into licentiousness and barbarism, corrupting its morals and allowing itself many improprieties to the injury of mankind, the other part adhering to the dictates of reason and equity, is ashamed of extravagance and irrationality" (4). There are virtuous people and vicious people in the world, and a ferment must arise between them.

While these parts tend to a "total separation," Rapp proposes that a ferment is fostered by education in the "arts, sciences, and every kind of learning," which assists in reconciling the contraries of selfishness and

self-denial (4-5). Rapp does not suppose that this reconciliation will be easy, for as he writes near the end of *Thoughts*: “great industry must be used, many and severe trials must be endured, before man can arrive at truth, for in every step of his progress, he is strongly opposed by violent sensual propensities, which constantly strive to rule him” (89). Elsewhere Rapp contends that humanity must “overcome their own wicked passions, in order to be more fit for enduring the many & difficult trials of virtue and for becoming good and useful members of society” (21). The alchemical metaphor of fermentation thus denotes the healing or transformative process of education whereby humanity becomes more virtuous.

Rapp uses the term “fermentation” in precisely the same fashion to describe the central role of Christianity in drawing humanity out of the depths of moral chaos:

How extraordinary and astonishing that the Lily should make its appearance, just at the time when the moral faculties of the whole human mass were almost exhausted & decayed, and when the mind of degenerate man, was wholly transported with the pomp and arrogance of war and with the wild indulgence of unrestrained Liberty (which rather approaches to licentiousness than real freedom) with luxury and every kind of vice.

From what a confused chaos and pressure has the human spirit to work itself out! Will not this arouse the dormant faculties and excite motion in the wearied body? That this fermentation will finally produce tranquility, obedience, sound and proper judgement, for the good of mankind, cannot be denied.

How many projects and systems have appeared before this true and simple one could come to light? A universal ferment was indispensably necessary, the scripture calls it leaven, which is the same in principle, & this is the christian religion (9-10).³⁸

This spiritual power clearly manifested itself first in the Harmony Society, which is the true Christian religion. Within the metaphor, the Harmony society is the leaven that has begun the healing and transformative process of fermentation at this particular point in time. Rapp makes this clear one page later: "plain truth will be self-evident, a little leaven will ferment the whole dough; this is done by the fundamental rules of Harmony."³⁹ According to the logic of spiritual alchemy and Rapp's own horticultural metaphors noted above, the Harmonists were the first seeds to have grown up and born fruits through the "wandering spirit of time." They would inspire the world to follow their example.

Rapp harshly condemns the historical corruption of Christianity over time in the passage above, and he does this several more times to contrast the opposites that must be reconciled in order for harmony to be established: "this leaven has penetrated far and deep, and produced a great fermentation, until it can be usefully applied without pollution from monkish sophistry" (12). For Rapp, "monkish sophistry" refers to both Catholic Church and Protestant expressions of Christianity tied up in dead rituals or needless intellectual wrangling.⁴⁰ His practical Christianity teaches "divine truth and duty towards man ... without pomp or constraint, without dissimulation or superstition" (11). This misguided "high church" Christianity must be fermented into true Christianity.

The reconciliation of opposites therefore also addresses concerns about previous systems that have made Christianity too spiritual or too material. Rapp is especially critical of Deism, or at least his caricature of Enlightenment Deism as the ultimate perversion of Christianity, because it prompts no virtuous action in the world. According to Rapp, Deism promotes selfishness above all other variants of the Christian religion:

The religion of Deism is strictly the contrary of the true christian religion, and deals directly to the dissolution of all morality and virtue, because its only aim is to enjoy sensual pleasures, and these have forever no end nor bottom, and all those who do devote themselves to them,

cause ruin to their souls and bodies sooner or later: their sensual enjoyments are encreased & come to be more and more habitual, and the moral faculties are thereby weakened and debilitated. Of what use is it then to preach up morality, & to talk of performing duties, where the faculties for performance are wanting; and besides this, the moral laws are not sufficient to keep the stimulated passions for luxury and sensuality under command: the religion of Jesus Christ only has the power to do it which teaches the perfect and decisive point: namely: Deny yourself. (40)

When read within Rapp's alchemical worldview, through which a ferment has arisen in history to restore harmony and human felicity, Deism exemplifies the moral and material chaos from which the human spirit has started to free itself through self-denial.⁴¹

Rapp's vision of harmony is the exact opposite of chaos, and alchemical metaphors are ideally suited to convey a reordering of spiritual and material realities into their proper balance.⁴² Rapp's mechanical metaphors alone cannot make this point, as these images are about how harmony works, not about what harmony truly is, a perfect union of the spiritual and temporal. Rapp expresses the alchemical themes of order, symmetry, and reconciliation as the tenets of true Harmony most powerfully in the following passage:

These principles demonstrate plainly, that every beauty and perfection, rest upon the compound elements, which are produced by contrary and opposite restrictions. So that by applying the faculties, for obtaining a great object, an harmonious proportion has to be formed, which will bring and keep all diversities and similarities, simplicities and multiplicities in order for active use, as far as means and strength will reach, by well observed rules and forms for attaining this object, which has already been in motion & acquired inner and outer

consistency and durability, as *a compound Whole*. As soon as the human spirit has reached maturity, then the chief aim of this sphere of action is, to find out what means to put the power of our natural faculties in activity in motion, not in the narrow compass of self-interest; but for the melioration of our brotherkind, to propagate the improvement of mind &c and to lay the more solid foundation of truth.

What a powerful and durable compound will that produce! What a happy *brother union*! When every discovery and invention by the manifold arts and sciences are put together, and become a thoroughly *combined Whole*, where the mental capacities of all nations, and all the useful inventions of man, meet and flow together in our time. (55)

The most telling aspect of this passage is that Rapp believes a stable compound that is "powerful and durable" will be produced. It will be beautiful and perfect when the human spirit reaches its maturity, that is, when humans no longer serve their self-interests at the expense of others. Humanity will realize the truth about how happiness is attained through communal endeavor that is a perfect and symmetrical balance between spiritual and temporal concerns within the community of faith. The "useful inventions of man" are the physical and material extensions of humanity's spiritual and mental energies.

These alchemical metaphors and images within *Thoughts* share one critical aspect: they do not privilege the spiritual over the material, or vice versa, with respect to the reconciliation of the opposites of vice and virtue. The leaven is the Harmony Society itself, the yeast that Rapp envisions as actively fermenting human society. Rapp therefore discards the traditional Christian privileging of the spirit or soul over the body and the usual other-worldly rhetoric that goes with it. Instead, he turns to the tradition of spiritual alchemy within eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Pietist Christianity to envision what Christianity looks like that is

both spiritual and material. As Rapp puts it so bluntly in *Thoughts*, “it is now proved, that the idea of looking up to the sky for a heaven is of no avail.” The Kingdom of God was right here on earth, and the Harmony Society was the model for all true Christians to follow.

“The golden age, in its near approach”: Rapp’s Postmillennial Optimism

These mechanical, horticultural, and alchemical metaphors demonstrate Rapp’s optimism about the future of humanity understood as a “great machine,” an “excellent Human plant,” and a “powerful and durable” alchemical compound. His mechanical image of “living wheels” that work together, moved first by the “principle wheel” of himself and his Harmony Society, emphasize the communal, and indeed utopic, yearnings of a practical Christianity. Rapp’s horticultural metaphors, on the other hand, emphasize organic growth over time, that is, the human progress toward virtue and away from vice within and through history. Rapp notes, “under this serene sky and friendly clime,” that is, the virtuous living of people in true community, “the fruits of noble achievements and wholesome constitutions, come to greater maturity” (8). Rapp uses alchemical metaphors to articulate the fundamental nature of this “brother Union” or “compound Whole” of Christianity. Harmony is neither a spiritual nor a material vision; it is a perfect combination of both in human efforts at communal living.

Given the optimism of Rapp’s guiding metaphors in *Thoughts*, it is not surprising that he describes the future of humanity as a “golden age,” which he does five times throughout the text.⁴³ The phrase is embedded within an alchemical metaphor in the following passage:

Wise and enlightened men even know already, how to unite and bring in order the same contraries; because the Knowledge of nature and religion appears open and clear to their eyes, and they perceive plainly the golden age, in its near approach. For so soon as true and sincere fraternities of harmonious minds are formed and come to

appearance, and who know, how to unite the spiritual matters with the physical, in an indissoluble preservation, for the promotion both of an inward and outward happiness, there immediately the mountains do proclaim peace, and the hills righteousness, and darkness flies before the light of day.... (43)

Rapp imagines a quickly approaching world where "enlightened" men know how to bring nature and religion together, that is, how to unite spiritual and physical realities. Quoting Psalm 72, he believes that "when this happens, the mountains will proclaim peace, and the hills righteousness." He then asks a leading question in another passage that makes the same point even more powerfully: "would not such a community be a resemblance of heaven?" (65).

Moreover, this "golden age" is an age during which all will eventually become full members of the true Christian community: "enlarged and enlightened Ideas of human happiness must, sooner or later, unite in brotherly love, all wise and virtuous men, whose benign influence will be extended over every part of the world, until the human race will every where live in true and perfect sociability, without constraint, and undisturbed by selfish views" (67). I argue that this is Rapp's utopic variant of universal salvation, his ideal that all will live in harmony and achieve salvation through Christian communalism. For Rapp, "one heart beats in all," and all who had joined in this community would be saved because they were all true Christians (66). This conclusion is not that shocking, however, given that Rapp and his followers sang hymns with the theme of universal salvation by the radical Pietists Gerhard Tersteegen and Gottfried Arnold.⁴⁴ Rapp believed that the physical community, held together by bonds of faith and reason, could achieve salvation for the entire group. Rapp's vision of salvation is focused on this world, and his Harmony Society was the example to follow.

Rapp knows the salvation of all will not be easy, given the limitations of human nature:

Man is not brought to what he ought to be, so soon as is frequently imagined. It requires time, attention and patience. Nevertheless, where a thousand persons are united in a society, nine hundred of whom possess the common spirit, acting for the Whole, this large majority will always know how to keep the others in order, until they learn to conceive and acknowledge, that which alone is true and good. (71)

It is not a question of if people will join in the communal endeavor of “acting for the Whole,” but when. Rapp appears willing to be patient with humanity, and he admits that “the more obstinate and stubborn a man or a nation is disposed, the more severe and the longer will they have to bear their judgement and suffer their loss; & will consequently arrive later at their point of destination” (23). Rapp does not say that these men or nations will never arrive at their “destination,” only that they will arrive later.

Rapp makes the same point about how all of humanity will be saved elsewhere in *Thoughts*. Yet nowhere does he do so more clearly, and perhaps controversially, than in the following statement about how true Christianity will unfold in the future:

No one can be useful by himself alone: each individual belongs to all men. Beautiful is therefore the desire & way of God with mankind. They who do not want to be children, will be brought up as Slaves, yet through slow and lothful exertions, there will be transformed gradually out of the vile faculties of most classes of men, different and sublimer forms of life, & the low behaviour, will be exalted to a dignified deportment. Sprightly and vigorous are the transitions of active faculties in our period, to restore the debilitated powers. (62-63)

This is Rapp at his most collectivist, for “each man belongs to all men.” Rapp contends that those who are not morally prepared to undertake the great task of Harmony will be treated like slaves until they are brought to

a higher form of life. While shocking, the point is the same: all humanity will be saved sooner or later.

Finally, Rapp's utopic language about a "golden age" in *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man* points to how difficult it is to divide his prose into contemporary theological categories. To date, most scholars of Rapp have argued that he is a premillennialist, but Rapp's vision of humanity in *Thoughts* appears postmillennial, especially given the lack of specific scriptural references to cue the reader to Rapp's interpretive stance.⁴⁵ Generally speaking, premillennialism is the contention that Jesus Christ will return to earth in physical form (his "Second Coming") and establish his thousand-year reign after a period of great trials and tribulations in the Church, including the persecution of Christians by the Antichrist. In this church historical model, based on a literal reading of Revelation 20-22, things get much worse before they get any better, and Christ is the prime mover. Postmillennialism, on the other hand, posits humanity as the prime mover in history, at least until the return of Christ. According to this model, humans will enjoy a thousand year period of peace and prosperity, and Christ will finally return to establish a new heaven and a new earth. Rapp's vision of a "golden age" seems much more akin to this postmillennial point of view. He could not be more positive about the future of the human race within history.

Conclusion

George Rapp's *Gedanken über die Bestimmung des Menschen: besonders in Hinsicht der gegenwärtigen Zeit* / *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man: Particularly With Reference to the Present Times* has heretofore been neglected as a vitally important example of religious prose from the nineteenth century. Yet it bears on theological, philosophical, and indeed theosophical and alchemical concerns shared by radical Pietists, Christian communalists, and utopian thinkers in antebellum America who sought to establish their communities on American soil. Written and published in 1824 by the leader of perhaps the most successful communal Christian group in North America, *Thoughts* warrants

attention as both religious literature in itself and as an historical document to be examined in its theological and philosophical context.

Thoughts is not a polished piece, and it does lend itself to the kind of examination done most notably by Karl Arndt, the dean of Harmonist Studies. Arndt went to Rapp's text looking for influences, and he found evidence for Rapp's heavy reliance on the thought of Johann Gottfried Herder. Following Arndt's lead, most scholars have since dismissed *Thoughts* as tangential to the Harmonist theological and historical narrative. Nevertheless, although both the German and the English versions were never widely distributed, this by no means lessens their value as religious prose. *Thoughts* may not have gone on to sit on nineteenth-century bookshelves or influence many other Christian thinkers from that era, but it does offer a window into the thought of George Rapp, and therefore also into the world of radical Pietism, communalism, theosophy, and spiritual alchemy.⁴⁶

Thoughts on the Destiny of Man may be one of the most optimistic works of religious prose written during the nineteenth century. On the basis of the belief that one must deny oneself in the name of the community, Rapp envisions and constructs a utopic Christian commune by using mechanical metaphors to describe people as "living wheels" within a "great machine." He articulates the historical and current growth of this community with horticultural metaphors of seed, root, and plant. Rapp makes it clear that this "happy brother union" is both material and spiritual, and that people must be inspired and educated, that is, "fermented," from the depths of selfish individual vice to the heights of selfless communal virtue. He does this by drawing from the language of alchemy, which was ideally suited to express his vision of a literal material and spiritual "golden age" on earth. Practical Christianity, which existed in the union of human nature and religion in history, was true Christianity. Rapp's question, "would not such a community be a resemblance of heaven?" is not mere rhetoric, but his sincere belief that the Harmony Society could establish heaven on earth and eventually save all of humankind.

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Notes

¹ I would like to thank Donald E. Pitzer, Professor Emeritus at the University of Southern Indiana, and founder and Director Emeritus of the Communal Studies Association, for his helpful comments and suggestions at various points in the drafting of this article.

² Following the famous Lutheran mystic and theosopher Jakob Böhme, George Rapp believed that God was perfect, being neither male nor female, and that the first man, Adam, was likewise androgynous because he was made in God's image. The Fall was the separation of the female element from the male, thus alienating humanity from God. The Harmonists desired a return to this harmonious prelapsarian state and practiced celibacy for this end, that they would be purified for the Second Coming of Christ.

³ One of the earliest compilations is William Alfred Hinds, *American Communities: Brief Sketches of Economy, Zoar, Bethel, Aurora, Amana, Icaria, the Shakers, Oneida, Wallingford and the Brotherhood of the New Life* (Oneida, NY: Office of the American Socialist, 1878). More recent works include Brian J.L. Berry, *America's Utopian Experiments: Communal Havens from Long-Wave Crises* (Dartmouth College: UP of New England, 1992); Robert Paul Sutton, *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Religious Communities 1732-2000* (London: Praeger Press, 2003); Donald E. Pitzer, *America's Communal Utopias* (U of North Carolina P, 1997).

⁴ Arndt published copiously on Rapp and the Harmonists for nearly fifty years, both as an archivist and as an historian. See the following works: Karl J.R. Arndt, *George Rapp's Harmony Society 1785-1847* (U of Pennsylvania P, 1965); *George Rapp's Successors and Material Heirs (1847-1916)*, (Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1972); Arndt, ed., *A Documentary History of the Indiana Decade of the Harmony Society* (Worcester: Harmony Society Press, 1978); *George Rapp's Years of Glory: Economy on the Ohio 1834-1847* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1987); *Harmony on the Connoquenessing 1803-1815: George Rapp's First American Harmony* (Worcester: Harmony Society Press, 1980); *The*

Indiana Decade of George Rapp's Harmony Society: 1814-1824 (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1971); *Harmony on the Wabash in Transition: From George Rapp to Robert Owen 1824-1826* (Worcester: Harmony Society Press, 1982).

⁵ Ott points out that "Arndt chose, however, to omit certain key theological documents. Only nineteen of the thirty-eight pastoral letters written between 1791 and 1802 by Rapp to members of the Separatist group in Württemberg are included," "The Sunwoman in the Wilderness: The Religious Beliefs and Practices of George Rapp's Harmony Society In Their Historical Context" (Unpublished Dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2007), 9-10.

⁶ Ott writes, "although Arndt claims to aim for neutrality in his account, to let the documents speak for themselves, his documentary histories are laced with negative commentary," 8. She cites Arndt's *Documentary History, 1803-1815*, xiii, 173, and 303.

⁷ Arndt acknowledges the influence of the eight-volume *Berleburg Bible* (1726-1742), Johann Valentin Andreae's *Christianopolis* (1619), the work of the medieval German mystic Johann Tauler, the Spiritualist Emanuel Swedenborg, and Christoph Schütz. Cf. Ott, 11.

⁸ The Harmony Society was formally dissolved in 1905, but the legal wranglings over Harmonist properties continued until 1916 when John S. Duss reached an agreement with the Pennsylvania Historical Commission over six acres of Harmonist land and seventeen Harmonist buildings.

⁹ The archives at Old Economy Village in Pennsylvania are the most extensive, while most of Karl Arndt's research is at the David L. Rice Library at the University of Southern Indiana.

¹⁰ A recent facsimile edition of *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man* (hereafter, *Thoughts*) was published by Nabu Public Domain Reprints, Breinigsville, PA, 6 January 2011.

¹¹ Donald E. Pitzer and Josephine M. Elliott, "New Harmony's First Utopians, 1814-1824," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 75:3 (1979), 243-44. On 15 November 1824 he chided his adopted son for the errors of the

work: "Of the printed books no one has yet distributed any, much of it must be printed again because I found many mistakes in the style of writing which must be improved, which you should have done, especially Christoph," Arndt, *Harmony on the Wabash in Transition: From George Rapp to Robert Owen 1824-1826*, 282. This was also the judgment of Isaac Blackford, who assisted Frederick Rapp and Christoph Müller with the English translation. He wrote to Frederick Rapp as follows on 16 March 1825: "I have examined that part of your father's composition which has been printed – There are a great many errors, and the style is very imperfect. My advice is that it be carefully corrected, and printed over again," *ibid.*, 473. Cf. Arndt, *George Rapp's Harmony Society*, 255-57; *Documentary History*, II, 812. Pitzer adds in *New Harmony Then and Now*, photos by Darryl D. Jones and foreword by Jane Blaffer Owen and Connie Weinzapfel (Indiana UP, 2012), that "neither the German version, which Rapp was still revising as late as 1831, or the English translation, which he disliked, was ever circulated," 30. Cf. Arndt, *George Rapp's Harmony Society 1785-1847*, 459.

¹² Compare the German text, "da diesen Stand nichts mehr zerstören kann, wo alle redliche und liebende Geister um Einen Mittelpunkt nach allen Thielen vereinigt und gleichartig in Harmonie und Ornnung treten," *Gedanken über die Bestimmung des Menschen: besonders in Hinsicht der gegenwärtigen Zeit* (hereafter, *Gedanken*) (Indiana: Harmonie Gesellschaft, 1824), 28, to the English translation: "nothing can now destroy this happy state, where all sincere and upright loving minds enter and accede to one centre, united and homogenial in order and harmony in all respects" (*Thoughts*, 30).

¹³ The German original separates the following thought with an exclamation mark and a semicolon: "der wandernde Zeit Geist suchte bey allen Nationen heimatlich zu seyn! Also wanderte er umher, biß er ein Volck fand, welches noch Kraft und Trieb im Menschlichen Bande hatte ; ob es gleich rohe und rau in seiner Lage war," *Gedanken*, 8. The (poor) English translation uses commas alone: "the wandering Spirit of time searched among the nations for a home, and in despair had almost

abandoned the pursuit, when by the propitious smiles of heaven a people were discovered, with strength and faculties enough, remaining for the human bond, although rude and rough, in their external appearance,” *Thoughts*, 8.

¹⁴ Many pages have typographical errors, even within the more fluid grammatical context of early nineteenth-century English conventions. See the following examples: “forseen” (9), “degrated” (10), “mokers” (14), “agreable” (15) “anp” (22), “ecstasy” (26), “impliment,” (29), “forwhich” (61), and “encreases” (89). See also the awkward terms “unawarely” (23) and “perturbator” (58).

¹⁵ Cf. William E. Wilson, *The Angel and the Serpent: The Story of New Harmony* (Indiana UP, 1964), 8, 113.

¹⁶ Ott observes, “most scholars have relied on Arndt’s documentary histories for their primary sources of the Harmony Society. Therefore it is understandable that his emphases have been perpetuated,” 10. It is not difficult to find examples of this with respect to Arndt’s comparison of Herder and Rapp. Cf. Pitzer, *New Harmony Then and Now*, 30.

¹⁷ Pitzer and Rode’s new translation and analysis of George Rapp’s *Gedanken* is scheduled for publication in 2012 or 2013.

¹⁸ Pitzer has recently argued that Rapp’s thought in *Thoughts* is postmillennial. He contends that Rapp wrote *Thoughts* “to summarize how historical trends demonstrated the progression which he thought must precede and prepare the way for Christ’s coming kingdom.... Later theologians labeled this interpretation ‘post-millennialism,’ as opposed to ‘pre-millennialism,’ which more pessimistically holds that world conditions will get worse and worse until Christ comes to effect reform,” *New Harmony Then and Now*, 30. Arndt, Ott, and others have concluded that Rapp was a premillennialist on the basis of other writings. Overall, his thought bears elements of both pre- and postmillennialism as we understand them today.

¹⁹ Interest in both scientific and spiritual alchemy was widespread within German Pietist and Spiritualist circles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ott is critical of Arndt’s sole focus on Paracelsus as

a possible influence on Rapp. She notes that "an interest in scientific experiments (alchemy), which Rapp pursued for several years, was not uncommon among German churchly and radical Pietists," 17.

²⁰ As noted above, scholars have often included the Harmony Society in studies of communal utopias. Rapp's blueprint for a Christian "golden age" in *Thoughts* looks very much like a communal utopia, that is, a society that provides the fundamental bases of human happiness through communal political, economic, or social policies. On the definition of utopia, see Lyman Tower Sargent, "Utopia – The Problem of Definition," *Extrapolation* 16 (1975): 137-48.

²¹ *Thoughts* is hardly Rapp's final word on the matter, for as Ott argues on the basis of her work with a wide range of sources, Rapp manages to combine "an optimistic view of the period preceding Christ's return with a premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20," 447.

²² Cf. *Expanded Harmonie Society Document*, U of Southern Indiana, 11 December 2011, <<http://www.usi.edu/hnh/harmonist.php>>.

²³ The image of the Sunwoman from Revelation 12 was particularly compelling for Rapp. On Rapp's views, as well as those of other radical Pietists, see Ott, 163-77.

²⁴ On the history of Harmonists during their Economy period, see esp. Arndt, *George Rapp's Years of Glory: Economy on the Ohio 1834-1847*.

²⁵ "Practises" and "selfdenial" are the first of many typographical errors in the original that I have chosen to reproduce as they are printed. I have also reproduced Rapp's italicizations and capitalizations as they are in the text.

²⁶ The communal structure of the Harmonists certainly reflected Rapp's *Thoughts*. At Harmony in Indiana, each Harmonist household consisted of four to six people, usually a family, led by a male "head" of the household. After their commitment to celibacy, the family as household unit declined in practice. Singles lived in dormitories. Each male member had a specific craft that he was assigned, while women worked as housekeepers, in textiles, or in agriculture. Managers

supervised the work. The daily life of the Harmonists was likewise well regimented, with a communal wake-up call at 6:00 AM with French horns and a general curfew at 9:00 PM. Cf. *Expanded Harmonie Society Document*, University of Southern Indiana, 11 December 2011, <<http://www.usi.edu/hnh/harmonist.php>>.

²⁷ Besides the Harmonists' own interests in gardening and labyrinth-building, the most notable example is the Oneida community, who initially planned to live off fruits and vegetables in their own Garden of Eden in upstate New York.

²⁸ Rapp writes that "the exertions of good men, will give rise to better times, the buds of which are already swelling on the tree of the universal commonwealth, & their blossoms & fruits according to firmly established rules, are ripening and coming to perfection," *Thoughts*, 31.

²⁹ As Ott notes, scholars distinguish between three kinds of alchemy: "transmutation alchemy, which aimed to produce gold from base metals; medicinal alchemy, which sought to explain pathological processes and develop therapeutic remedies; and spiritual alchemy, which employed alchemistic terminology to describe spiritual transformation from a base to a nobler plane." She adds that "spiritual alchemy ... was much more persistent in the Harmony Society" than the first two forms of alchemy (399-400, 410). On alchemy within Pietist circles, see Christa Habrich, "Alchemie und Chemie in der pietistischen Tradition," *Goethe und der Pietismus*, ed. Hans-Georg Kemper and Hans Schneider (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 45-77.

³⁰ The notion of the reconciliation, or coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*) is a familiar concept within the tradition of Western mysticism. Rapp was influenced by the quietistic mystical thought of Gerhard Tersteegen, most notably the annihilation of self-will. Nevertheless, the specific alchemical language of the "ferment" in *Thoughts* is what interests me here.

³¹ Ott finds evidence of attempts at transmutation alchemy among the Harmonists at Economy from 1825-1832, but no evidence of such activities at Harmony or New Harmony between 1804 and 1824 (399-410). On

Rapp's interest in alchemy and his alchemical holdings, see also Arthur Versluis, "Western Esotericism and the Harmony Society," 11 December 2011 <<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/Versluis.html>>, esp. 35-39.

³² Versluis writes that "there is relatively little trace" of Rapp's esotericism in the conclusion of *Thoughts*, and adds that "we should not be surprised that Rapp would not make public his esoteric knowledge in this book or elsewhere, if we recall how harshly such interests had been treated in Germany ("Western Esotericism and the Harmony Society," 29).

³³ Ott, 17.

³⁴ Ott, 410-12.

³⁵ Rapp uses this alchemical language primarily at the beginning of *Thoughts*. For example, he uses some form of the word "ferment" nine times between pages 4-15.

³⁶ On the numerous stages in the alchemical process, see Joachim Telle, "Alchemie II," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 2, ed. Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1978), 202.

³⁷ Colors had special meanings in alchemy, with yellow as proof of fermentation, and red-gold as proof of the successful tincturing, or dyeing, of base metals into gold. For Rapp, "being tinctured to red-gold was a metaphor for spiritual perfection" (Ott, 413).

³⁸ Rapp makes the same point here: "hence a ferment, like the christian [*sic*] religion proved to be, was very necessary and indeed indispensable to those degraded nations. At [*sic*] their time: it brought them to life and activity, with a perfect moving power of spirit, for the formation and preservation of *a whole*" (10).

³⁹ *Thoughts*, 11.

⁴⁰ In his letters and pastoral hymns, Rapp often called this kind of false Christianity, "Babel." Ott notes that "Going out of Babel" referred to Rapp and his followers leaving the oppressive traditional Lutheranism of their Württemberg home for a new life in America (165-70).

⁴¹ Rapp also describes Deism as follows: "others, lost and confused in the labyrinth of false, speculative reasoning, retire into the solitary desert in search of their Saviour, and withdraw themselves altogether

from the useful employments of active life" (*Thoughts*, 81).

⁴² Rapp is well aware that this balance between the spiritual and the material is difficult to achieve, because many people "create for themselves a heaven, either too sensual or too spiritual, according to their notions, which however exists no where except in their ideas" (*Thoughts*, 47).

⁴³ *Thoughts*, 34, 43, 53, 95, 96.

⁴⁴ Before they printed their own hymn collections in 1820 and 1827, the Harmonists used, among others, Tersteegen's *Geistliches Blumen-Gartlein*. In their list of books owned from 1829, the Harmonists note that they have thirteen copies of five works by Tersteegen (Ott, 118).

⁴⁵ In her reading of Rapp's *Thoughts*, Ott argues that Rapp is a particularly optimistic premillennialist. She demonstrates that Rapp combined this optimism with a literal interpretation of Revelation 20-22, as did some other radical Pietists (445-47).

⁴⁶ Karl Arndt, of course, found Harmonist influence in other nineteenth-century movements, including the Mormons of Joseph Smith. He writes, "there is good reason to advance the theory that the living model of the Mormon Church was the Harmony Society of George Rapp." "The Harmonists and the Mormons," *The American-German Review* 10 (June 1944): 6-9, 6.

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