

MISSIONS, REPUBLICANISM, AND ANTI-CATHOLICISM:
THE IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS OF THE METHODIST CHURCH'S SUPPORT
FOR THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

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ABSTRACT

The Methodist Church's support of the Mexican-American War arose from its commitment to the missionary endeavor and spreading the gospel. The self-imposed mission of the Methodists to evangelize the nations and their commitment to the United States war with Mexico cannot be understood without taking into account two other developments. Of first importance was the Church's adoption of republicanism. By the 1840s, the Methodist Church accepted republicanism as the best form of human government and inextricably linked it to Protestant Christianity. Protestant (or biblical) Christianity was now not only necessary for salvation but was also a necessary component for political freedom, virtue, and economic prosperity. In effect, Christianity was the key to happiness in both this life and the next. The adoption of republicanism was joined by the second important factor—anti-Catholicism. Methodists portrayed Catholicism as hardly better than paganism and saw it as especially detrimental to human beings. The Catholic Church was portrayed as unbiblical and thus unable to produce the virtue needed to sustain a republican government. In addition, they claimed that Catholicism was inherently tyrannical and that its commitment to the union of church and state made it an especially powerful and dangerous enemy of biblical Christianity and political freedom. The Methodist Church came to see war as the only possible way to extend both the temporal and eternal benefits of Protestantism to the Mexican people.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

From the firing of the first shots at Matamoros in 1846 to the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the United States' war with Mexico held the nation's attention and dominated its political discourse.¹ Like other Americans, Methodists kept abreast of the conflict and followed regular reports and commentary in denominational newspapers. While the war created divisions throughout the country, the Methodist Episcopal Church was distinctive in its overall support of the United States' military conflict with its sister republic. Doctrinal commitments—both longstanding and of recent origin—led a fractured Methodist Church, which had recently split in 1844 over the issue of slavery, to unite in the belief that the Mexican-American War was the will of God. Specifically, the Methodists believed that the war was necessary to overthrow the entrenched Catholic Church and open the way for the true Christianization of the oppressed Mexican people. The Methodist Church argued that the adoption of Protestant Christianity by Mexico would inevitably lead not only to the salvation of individuals, but also to the political freedom and economic prosperity associated with republicanism.²

Republicanism was also central to the Methodist missionary endeavor during the 1840s. Spreading republicanism by spreading Protestantism joined more traditional motivations for missions such as the salvation of individuals. Methodist missionary

¹ Robert Johannsen has analyzed how the Mexican-American War permeated American fiction, poetry, popular arts, historical literature, and histories in his *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

² Throughout this thesis I use “America” and “American” synonymously for the “United States of America” unless otherwise noted.

literature from this period argues forcefully that Protestant Christianity was the underlying cause of much of humanity's social, political, intellectual, and economic progress, in addition to providing the way to salvation. A common theme in this literature was the comparison of nations that had the Bible to those that did not, to show that inevitably those influenced by the Bible enjoyed greater progress and prosperity. Methodists used references to the Bible, biblical religion, and biblical Christianity to not only differentiate Christianity from non-Christian religions, but also to distinguish Roman Catholicism from Protestant Christianity. The Methodist Church argued that Roman Catholicism was not a form of biblical religion for a number of reasons. First, it believed that Catholicism relied as much on tradition as on the Bible. In this they affirmed the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*, or that matters of faith and morals must rest only on the authority of the Bible. In addition Methodists believed that the Catholic hierarchy restricted the access of lay Catholics to the Bible and cited as evidence the Catholic emphasis on Latin, the supposed exorbitant prices of Bibles in Italy, and the few instances of Catholics burning King James English translations of the Bible in America. Methodist periodicals argued that mission work was not only a way to save souls, but that the spread of Protestantism was also connected to the spread of political freedom and economic advancement.

The Methodist Church's adoption of republican ideology also had a profound impact on how it viewed the Roman Catholic Church. While anti-Catholicism had long pervaded Protestant Churches, it did not truly begin to permeate the Methodist Church until the 1830s and 1840s. One of the primary reasons for the blossoming of anti-Catholicism during this period was the increased competition for converts. Until the

1820s, Methodists were primarily competing for domestic converts with other Protestant groups. Two things happened that changed the nature of this competition. One was that immigration introduced Irish Roman Catholics into previously heavily evangelized Protestant areas, and many German Catholics settled in the Midwest. The second area of competition was in foreign missions. As the American Methodist Church invested more energy and talent in foreign missions, it found itself competing with highly organized Roman Catholic missionaries for converts. Republicanism influenced the Methodist response to both of these new developments. The longstanding Protestant sentiment that Catholicism, which was most often referred to as Popery, Romanism, or Jesuitism, as contrary to personal salvation joined with the belief that it was at odds with political freedom and social and economic progress. Methodists saw the spread of Roman Catholicism in America as a potential threat to the nation's republican system and its political freedom. Like many Protestants, Methodists believed that the Catholic Church was not only opposed to democratic political systems, but also unable to produce the virtue necessary for their existence. Combating Catholic foreign mission activity became a rallying cry in numerous Methodist periodicals for many of the same reasons. Roman Catholicism was not only viewed to be contrary to the salvation of the 'heathen' in foreign lands, but it was also believed to hinder their political, moral, and economic improvement. This foreign and domestic competition with Catholicism, when combined with republican sentiments, created a virulent anti-Catholicism during the 1840s. American Methodists supported the Mexican-American War because they believed the Catholic Church, which they saw as inherently tyrannical, needed to be forcibly removed

from power in order for the Mexican people to enjoy the temporal and eternal benefits of Protestant Christianity.

A detailed study of the Methodist Church's reasons for backing the Mexican-American War, which this thesis represents, is beneficial for several reasons, not the least of which is its contribution to a greater understanding of the war itself. For whatever reason—possibly because of its occurrence between the more popular Revolutionary and Civil wars—the importance of the war that expanded America from “sea to shining sea” has not been sufficiently acknowledged or analyzed by historians.³ In addition to the Mexican-American War not receiving the attention it deserves, the relationship between religion and America's wars demands further study. According to historian Harry Stout, “the norm of American national life is war,” and in both colonial America and the United States the ties “between war and religion are symbiotic and the two grew up inextricably intertwined.” In particular, evangelical Protestantism is “martial at the very core of its being.”⁴ An analysis of the Methodist Church's support of the Mexican-American War will contribute to the development of a fuller understanding of the relationship between evangelicals and war, and possibly help lay the groundwork for a compelling explanation of the role religion plays in warfare.

While several historians have taken up Stout's challenge to explore the relationship between war and American religion, the Mexican-American War has yet to

³ Historian Daniel Walker Howe wrote in his recent Pulitzer Prize winning Oxford history of America from 1815-1848 that the “U.S.-Mexican War has not attracted as much attention as so momentous a conflict deserves from either historians or the American public.” Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 876.

⁴ Harry S. Stout, “Religion, War, and the Meaning of America,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 19, no. 2 (Summer, 2009): 275.

receive adequate historical analysis.⁵ This deficit is even more pronounced for the Methodist Church's views on the Mexican-American War than for other denominations. The only historian to explore their stance in any detail was Clayton Sumner Ellsworth, who included the Methodist Church in his article "The American Churches and the Mexican-American War," and even though he mentioned the Methodists he concentrated primarily on Northeastern denominations such as the Congregationalists and Presbyterians.⁶ He argued that of all American denominations the Methodists expressed the strongest support for the Mexican-American War. Ellsworth was correct in his assessment that the Methodist churches were, with some reservations, largely in favor of the Mexican-American War. He does not, however, explain the reasons for their support other than that they believed it was somehow God's providential punishment of Mexico and that the end result would be to Mexico's benefit. The purpose of this thesis is to more fully address why America's largest Protestant denomination championed this war. That the Methodists were the United States largest and most geographically widespread denomination, and that they had "one of the most important religious papers in the country" in the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, requires that their position on the Mexican-American War be given serious attention.⁷

⁵ Recent works on the American Revolution and Civil War include: Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basis Books, 2010); and George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

⁶ Clayton Sumner Ellsworth, "The American Churches and the Mexican War," *The American Historical Review* 45 (January, 1940): 301-326.

⁷ Ellsworth, "The American Churches," 305. Two other historians who analyze the role of religion in American's response to the Mexican war are Ted C. Hinckley and John C. Pinheiro. Ted Hinckley correctly asserts that the Methodist believed the war would be "salutary," but he does not explain why and aside from this brief mention of the Methodist they are alarmingly absent from his study. [Ted C. Hinckley, "American Anti-Catholicism during the Mexican War," *Pacific Historical Review* 31 (May,

Lastly, the ideological origins of anti-Catholicism in the Methodist Church and the role it played in their support of the war provide a needed revision of historiographical accounts of the reemergence of anti-Catholicism in the 1830s and 1840s. The majority of historiography since the publication in 1994 of Jenny Franchot's seminal *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* has adopted the approach of cultural theorists and advocated a discursive interpretation of American anti-Catholicism. Historians using this theoretical framework approach anti-Catholicism in antebellum America primarily as an internal discourse in which American Protestants questioned, contested, and sought to legitimize other internal discourses such as the gender doctrine of separate spheres. This historiographical convention downplays the importance of doctrinal, personal, and institutional conflicts as a source of anti-Catholicism. Franchot herself argued that "anti-Catholicism operated as an imaginative category of discourse" whereby American writers "indirectly voiced the tensions and limitations of mainstream Protestant culture."⁸ Two much more recent works by Elizabeth Fenton and Timothy Verhoeven reveal the continued dominance of the discursive paradigm in the interpretation of American anti-Catholicism. Fenton argued anti-Catholicism, as "a set of imaginative contours and political functions," helped form "U.S. conceptions of religious pluralism and its corresponding 'right of conscience.'"⁹

1962): 124] John C. Pinheiro offers an informative study on the role anti-Catholicism played in the War, but focuses primarily on anti-Catholicism in the rhetoric of the political leaders and parties and ignoring for the most part the responses of denominations and religious groups to the conflict..

⁸ Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xvii.

Verhoeven's 2010 monograph represents another dominant interpretation of anti-Catholicism—the relationship between anti-Catholic discourse and gender and sexuality. In addition to arguing that anti-Catholicism was a transatlantic phenomenon, Verhoeven asserted that in France and the United States the Catholic Church was portrayed negatively “because it was understood to threaten the prevailing ideals of femininity, masculinity, and family life.”¹⁰ Other historians of anti-Catholicism have also sought to situate anti-Catholic discourse in the American perception that the Roman Catholic Church violated prevailing ideals of gender and sexuality in the United States.¹¹ While gender discourses cannot be discounted as impacting American anti-Catholicism, doctrinal commitments were far more important.

An analysis of the origins of the Methodists Church's support of the Mexican-American War and the role played by anti-Catholicism provides a beneficial revision to current understandings of American anti-Catholicism. Methodist anti-Catholicism in the 1840s represented both continuity and change with that prior to it. The Methodist Church opposed Catholicism for many of the doctrinal reasons the original Protestant Reformers did. They especially opposed the idea of the Roman Catholic Church as an intermediary between God and man, and rejected Catholic practices such as confession and the

⁹ Elizabeth Fenton, *Religious Liberties: Anti-Catholicism and Liberal Democracy in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

¹⁰ Timothy Verhoeven, *Transatlantic Anti-Catholicism: France and the United States in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 14.

¹¹ Daniel A Cohen, “The Respectability of Rebecca Reed: Genteel Womanhood and Sectarian Conflict in Antebellum America,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 419-461; C. Walker Gollar, “The Alleged Abduction of Milly McPherson and Catholic Recruitment of Presbyterian Girls,” *Church History* 65, no. 4 (December 1996): 596-608; Marie Anne Pagliearini, “The Pure American Woman and the Wicked Catholic Priest: An Analysis of Anti-Catholic Literature in Antebellum America,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 97-128; Tracy Fessenden, “The Convent, the Brothel, and the Protestant Woman's Sphere,” *Signs* 25, no. 2 (Winter 2000): 451-478.

issuance of indulgences. As Ray Allen Billington argued in *The Protestant Crusade* in 1838 anti-Catholicism within the Methodist Church shared the same roots with American anti-Catholicism more generally—the European Reformation.¹² For American Methodists, Catholicism and Methodism were two distinct and competing doctrinal systems. For this reason, the prevailing cultural interpretations that treat American Catholicism as a set of “imaginative contours and political functions” rather than as a set of beliefs and practices is deeply inadequate.¹³

The prevalence of missions as a source of anti-Catholicism within the Methodist Church reveals the drawbacks of the cultural approach. Methodists committed substantial financial and personnel resources, in addition to space in the vast array of Methodist literature, to convert individuals they perceived as non-Christian to Protestant Christianity. Methodists believed they could identify non-Christians, including Catholics, by identifiable sets of beliefs and practices.

The Methodist Church’s stance on the Mexican-American War cannot be understood without reference to missions or anti-Catholicism. Like many Americans, Methodists believed that the decrepit state of the Mexican Republic and its people stemmed from the dominance of the Catholic Church. The Mexican-American War represented an opportunity for the Methodist Church to spread the saving message of Protestant Christianity in Mexican and formerly Mexican territories, but also to free the

¹² Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 1.

¹³ Fenton, *Religious Liberties*, 4.

Mexican people from the political tyranny that resulted from Catholic dominance. For this reason, the Methodist Episcopal Churches (both North and South) supported the United States in its war with Mexico.

CHAPTER 2: AMERICAN METHODISM

In order to understand why Methodists supported the Mexican-American War, we must account for the Methodist Episcopal Church's (MEC) importance in the development of American society and culture in the antebellum United States. While numerous evangelical sects experienced tremendous growth after the American Revolution during the Second Great Awakening, the expansion of the MEC outpaced all competing sects. Methodist membership grew from four ministers and three hundred lay members in 1771 to more than twelve thousand itinerant and local ministers and one and a half million members in 1850.¹⁴ Methodist congregations increased from sixty-five churches on the eve of the American Revolution in 1776 to more than thirteen thousand congregations in 1850. This growth represented a phenomenal increase in the percentage of Methodists in relation to the total number of religious adherents in the United States. Representing less than three percent of adherents in 1776, by 1850 Methodism accounted for thirty-four percent, nearly fifteen percent more than any other denomination.¹⁵

In addition to being the largest American religious denomination in 1850, the Methodist Church also pervaded other aspects of American society with its influence. It did not take long for both the Methodist message and organizational structure to spread across the American continent. Historians Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger draw

¹⁴ Nathan O. Hatch, "The Puzzle of American Methodism," *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, Edited by Nathan O. Hatch and John Wigger (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 27.

¹⁵ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 56-57.

attention to this fact, noting that “during the first half of the nineteenth century, the Methodists became the largest religious body in the United States and the most extensive national organization other than the federal government.”¹⁶ Important mechanisms in the spread of Methodism’s social and cultural influence included an extensive system of itinerant ministers and one of the world’s largest publishing endeavors. Soon after the *Christian Advocate and Journal* became the official newspaper of the Methodist Church in 1826, it achieved a circulation of 25,000 copies, making it the largest newspaper in circulation and one of the only papers with a nationwide readership. Its impact was further increased due to the tendency of regional Methodist newspapers to reprint articles from the *Christian Advocate and Journal*.¹⁷ According to Hatch, by 1860 the Methodist Church’s publishing house, the Methodist Book Concern, was the largest publishing house in the world.¹⁸ In addition to newspapers, the Methodist Book Concern published journals, Sunday School literature, sermons, a women’s magazine, and other periodicals.

Despite the phenomenal growth and national reach of the Methodist Church by the middle of the nineteenth century, its pre-Civil War history and development has until recently been largely ignored by American historians. The majority of recent Methodist antebellum historiography focuses on the early Methodist period, spanning from the

¹⁶ Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger, “Introduction,” *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, Edited by Nathan O. Hatch and John Wigger (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 11.

¹⁷ The phenomenon of reprinting previously published articles was widespread in Antebellum America and the *Christian Advocate and Journal* itself frequently reprinted articles from English and American religious periodicals and from secular American newspapers.

¹⁸ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 204-5.

American Revolution to the death of Bishop Francis Asbury in 1816.¹⁹ Nathan O. Hatch and John Wigger both address the formidable expansion of American Methodism in the three decades after the American Revolution. Hatch argues that Methodism was an integral part of the ‘Democratization of Christianity’ that occurred after the American Revolution during the Second Great Awakening.²⁰ With the creation of religious disestablishment after the ratification of the Constitution, religious organizations could no longer rely on the federal government to enforce attendance or for financial support. Those movements that were most successful in this environment emphasized the religious aspirations of the common people on whose voluntary commitments they now relied upon for membership and financial support.²¹ This was reflected in the new forms of worship, belief, and social characteristics of preachers. The social backgrounds of Methodist circuit riders were similar to the laity. Economically, most were poor or in the increasingly mobile middling classes and nearly all were self-educated, having had formal education.

Like other religious movements during the Second Great Awakening, the Methodist Church aggressively evangelized. They, however, enjoyed greater growth than

¹⁹ Some important recent works include: Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1998); Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991); Gregory A. Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁰ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); and John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1998).

²¹ Hatch, *Democratization*, 10-11.

other evangelical movements. One reason for this was a widespread emphasis on evangelization and expansion within the Methodist Church. Dee Andrews asserts that the Methodist Church displayed its most essential features as a missionary religion. Methodism was “all-encompassing, ambitious, and ‘catholic,’ seeking a universal and inclusive membership and dispensing with stringent tests of faith common among the more exclusivist” Reformed churches and the Quakers.²² In comparing the Methodists to other expansionist sects, John Wigger notes that no other group “matched the Methodists’ national focus or their overriding commitment to expansion.”²³ Mark Noll also draws attention to Methodism’s commitment to expansion when he writes that “when the Methodists’ all-consuming purpose was to evangelize the nation’s restlessly mobile lower and middle classes, their theology cut across the grain of dominant American ideologies with unexpected force.”²⁴ Despite the central position of the missionary impulse within early Methodism, it cannot completely explain why the growth of the Methodist Church outpaced all other sects.

Since numerous sects shared Methodism’s emphasis on evangelization, the answer to its exceptional growth lies elsewhere. David Hempton has shown that in both the United States and Great Britain, the Methodist Church experienced the most growth among highly mobile populations, both geographically and socially. Methodism provided social cohesion for this group where prior methods of ordering social interaction were ineffective or nonexistent. Methodism in America thrived among two different mobile

²² Andrews, *The Methodists*, 6.

²³ Wigger, *Taking Heaven*, 12.

²⁴ Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 364.

populations: those moving into the growing cities and those moving westward.²⁵ What set the Methodists apart in reaching these migrants was their itinerant circuit system. It was developed by Francis Asbury in order to facilitate the expansion of Methodism in America. The early American Republic was divided into numerous circuits, usually encompassing several hundred square miles. Circuits were not only established in populated areas, but were also created in the rapidly expanding frontier settlements situated in territories lacking federal or state political structures. The emphasis on frontier circuits was part of Asbury's desire to draw Methodist resources, both human and economic, from established circuits on the eastern seaboard to new ones being created on the western frontier.²⁶ Each featured an itinerant circuit rider charged with making regular visits and preaching appointments in his circuit that were usually completed every two to four weeks, depending on size. The average time spent by an itinerant minister in a circuit was one or two years before being moved elsewhere. Within each circuit, ministers gathered Methodist families into classes in which a lay class leader led meetings and watched over class members while the itinerant minister made his rounds elsewhere in the circuit.²⁷ According to historian Dee Andrews, the Methodists' organization and the itinerant system were major advantages in Methodism's evangelization of the United States and in its ability to create a "common religious culture and style of life" in the thirty years after the American Revolution.²⁸

²⁵ David Hempton, *Methodism*, 11-31.

²⁶ Hatch, *Democratization*, 86-89.

²⁷ For a detailed account of both Methodist organization (Methodist Connection) and the itinerant system see: Wigger, *Taking Heaven*, 21-79; and Andrews, *The Methodists*, 39-72.

²⁸ Andrews, *The Methodists*, 239.

While the nature of Methodist evangelization changed after the death of Francis Asbury in 1816, it remained robust. According to Dee Andrews, “the missionizing drive of the movement continued to be one of its most original and dynamic features, and...one of its claims to extraregional American-wide influence.”²⁹ This missionizing drive, however, underwent fundamental changes in the period between Asbury’s death in 1816 and the onset of the Mexican-American War in 1846. Like other aspects of the Methodist Church during this period, Methodist missionary activity after the death of Francis Asbury has not generated much historical scholarship. Fortunately, a few general observations have been made. First, by 1820, local or settled ministers started to displace itinerants and the circuit rider system. John Wigger noted that the decline of the itinerant system was due to demographic changes. As regions became more settled and stable, the circuit system lost its advantage over other denominations such as the Baptists, whose growth challenged that of the Methodists by mid-century.³⁰ Money and energy formerly invested in the circuit system were redirected to other evangelistic endeavors. One new outlet involved reaching the children of the first generation of Methodist converts. Two of the major means of doing this were by family prayer and devotions and through Sunday Schools.³¹ Major new evangelistic developments in the Methodist Church affected both foreign and domestic missions. The Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1820 to oversee domestic and foreign missionary

²⁹ Andrews, *The Methodists*, 238.

³⁰ Wigger, *Taking Heaven*, 13.

³¹ Schneider, *The Way of the Cross*, 196-208.

activity.³² In 1845, the society maintained foreign missions in Liberia, South America, Oregon, and Texas. Domestic missions were focused on converting German immigrants and American Indians.³³

Theology also contributed to the growth of the Methodist Church after the American Revolution. Methodist theology was distinct in several ways. Like other Protestant sects, Methodists placed great emphasis on the Bible. They did not, however, make the Bible the sole rule of faith, but as John Wigger notes they “also held that experience (along with reason and tradition) could be a legitimate source of doctrinal judgment.”³⁴ Religious experiences could include dreams and visions, but were also linked to Wesleyan Arminianism. Arminianism was in many ways the most distinctive Methodist doctrine and set it at odds with variants of American Calvinism such as the Presbyterians and the New England Congregationalists. Unlike the juridical emphasis of Calvinism on justification and the predestination of the elect, Methodists believed that some grace was given to all human beings and that this empowered individuals with some active choice in their salvation or damnation. For the Methodists, “salvation thus [became] a cooperative effort with God” in which individuals strove for continued conversion and greater holiness.³⁵

The Methodist Church competed with American Calvinist sects such as the Presbyterians, New England Congregationalists, and some Baptists because of its

³² Hempton, *Methodism*, 158-159.

³³ The Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Twenty-sixth Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Methodist Episcopal Church, 1845), 16-98.

³⁴ Wigger, *Taking Heaven*, 15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

emphasis on growth and missionizing. While anti-Calvinism was a characteristic of American Methodism, it was especially prominent in New England where Methodists competed more directly with the still established Congregational churches. According to John Wigger, anti-Calvinism in New England often took the form of criticism against the authority and social position of the Congregationalist clergy. The Methodist emphasis on religious experiences was used to undermine the respectability and authority of the highly educated New England ministers.³⁶ Nathan O. Hatch relates that many Methodist circuit riders entered the Church after they struggled with the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Hatch also relates that humor at the expense of Calvinist orthodoxy was prominent in the sects that arose during the Second Great Awakening.³⁷ The poem “There is a Reprobation Plan” by the Methodist-affiliated preacher Lorenzo Dow typifies this genre:

There is a Reprobation plan,
Some how it did arise;
By the Predestination clan
Of horrid cruelties.

The plan is this, they hold a few,
They are ordain'd for heaven
They hold the rest accursed crew,
That cannot be forgiven.

They do hold, God hath decreed
Whatever comes to pass;
Some to be damned, some to be freed,
And this they call free grace...³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., 19.

³⁷ Hatch, *Democratization*, 170-179 & 138-9.

³⁸ Lorenzo Dow, “There is a Reprobation Plan,” *All the Political Works of Lorenzo* (New York, 1814), 27, quoted in Hatch, *Democratization*, 228-229.

Along with humor, Methodist anti-Calvinism also took the form of verbal and written debates with Calvinist ministers.³⁹

The third characteristic that facilitated Methodism's dramatic growth in antebellum America were its views about the relationship between government and religion. According to Mark Noll, before the death of Francis Asbury, American Methodism was primarily a spiritual movement that was "organized as a vast engine of salvation," and Methodists "at first resisted, as a distraction from their mission, the formulation of thought for politics, society, literature, or civilization."⁴⁰ Russell E. Richey argues that the early Methodists lacked the concept of a nation. Francis Asbury summarized his view of political power, saying: "As to temporal power, what have we to do with that in this country? We are not senators, congressmen, or chaplains; neither do we hold any civil offices. We neither have, nor wish to have, anything to do with the government of the States[...] Our kingdom is not of this world."⁴¹ Instead of identifying with American federal or state governments and their political ideology and geographical boundaries, the early Methodists identified with America as a continent. Their ability to develop a national organizational structure before they developed or adopted a national ideology greatly benefited their evangelization efforts.⁴² With the constitutional disestablishment of religion and the guarantee of religious freedom, churches could no longer rely on government support to spread their message, and instead had to rely on

³⁹ Noll, *America's God*, 349-358.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁴¹ *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 3 vols., ed. Elmer T. Clark et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), III, 480, August 5, 1813, quoted in Richey, *Early American*, 33.

⁴² Richey, *Early American*, 36-7.

their own resources. Early Methodism's political aloofness and extensive voluntary organization made it ideally suited to converting those moving to America's expanding western frontier.

In the years spanning from the death of Francis Asbury in 1816 to the onset of the Mexican-American War in 1846, American Methodism underwent fundamental changes. While American Methodism's missionary drive and tendency to compete and come into conflict with other religious denominations remained an important part of Methodism on the eve of the Mexican-American War, its focus had shifted. An emphasis on converting German and Irish Catholic immigrants and on bringing the gospel to those in foreign lands replaced a focus on converting the unchurched and those moving to the western frontier. By 1845, anti-Catholicism had eclipsed anti-Calvinism as a topic in Methodist literature.⁴³ The greatest change occurred in the relationship between the Methodist Church and politics. No longer primarily a spiritual and apolitical organization, by the onset of the Mexican-American War the church wholeheartedly adopted a fusion of the political ideology of republicanism and Protestant Christianity.

One of the most momentous developments in the history of American Methodism happened just before the onset of the Mexican-American War. In 1844, the nationwide Methodist Episcopal Church split along geographical lines into the northern Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The controversy erupted during the 1844 General Conference when northern members of the Conference voted to

⁴³ By the start of the Mexican-American War in 1846 the Methodists adopted a more ecumenical approach to Christianity and advocated that Protestants of all sorts should band together in opposition to Catholicism. This tendency can be seen in the Methodist Church's participation in the Evangelical Alliance, which hoped to present a united Protestant front against the spread of Roman Catholicism. "Evangelical Alliance," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, October 14, 1846, 161.

suspend Bishop James O. Andrew of Georgia for owning slaves. Bishop Andrew, who had come to own the slaves through his recent marriage, at first intended to resign in order to preserve harmony. Southern members of the Conference, however, insisted that Andrew retain his position since resigning would be to “surrender to the false doctrine of the sinfulness of slaveholding in all cases and an admission of the moral inferiority of the South.”⁴⁴ When northern ministers continued to insist on Andrew’s removal, the Conference’s southern members opted for separation and the resulting Plan of Separation was overwhelmingly agreed upon by both northern and southern members of the conference. Southern Methodists formally established the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in May of 1845. The creation of southern counterparts of many prominent periodicals followed the creation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.⁴⁵ *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, the *Southern Christian Advocate*, and the *Southern Lady’s Companion* brought a proslavery message to southern Methodists. Despite the profound disagreement over the issue slavery among American Methodists, they continued to share commitments in other areas. These included energetic support for the missionary endeavor, a virulent anti-Catholicism, and a belief in a contingent relationship between Christianity and republicanism.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (1993; repr., Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 160.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 159-166.

⁴⁶ These shared sentiments form the basis of this thesis and for the most part I do not distinguish between northern and southern Methodists or the northern and southern branches of the Methodist Episcopal Church except when referencing publications. This is to show the universality of certain aspects of American Methodism and to help the reader keep track of periodicals which often had very similar titles.

CHAPTER 3: METHODIST REPUBLICANISM

The adoption and integration of republican ideology into the Church's theology and message fundamentally influenced Methodism's response to the Mexican-American War. By the outbreak of the war the Methodist Church asserted that biblical Christianity was the best religion and that republicanism was the best political system. Methodists had come to equate the fate of political liberty with the advancement of Protestant Christianity. They argued that Protestant (or biblical) Christianity was responsible for both the origins and the continued existence of republicanism in the United States.

The American religious historian Mark Noll in *America's God*, his monograph on American theology from the time of Jonathan Edwards to the Civil War, noted that American republicanism encompassed two main ideas of liberty and virtue. Noll wrote that republicanism was "a flexible term that linked the practice of virtue (however defined) with the presence of freedom and the flourishing of society; republicans invariably held that vice (usually defined as luxury, indolence, and deceit in high places) promoted the corruption of government, led to tyranny, and ruined the social fabric."⁴⁷ After the Constitution disestablished religion, American churches defended their importance to American society by stressing the role of religion as a necessary ingredient in America's new political system.

The Methodist Church was one of the last American denominations to accept republican ideologies. While many denominations began to adopt republicanism during

⁴⁷ Noll, *America's God*, 567.

the Revolutionary War, the Methodists did not embrace it until the 1830s.⁴⁸ Even then it was not until the division of the Methodist Church in 1844 that republican commitments began to have a great influence.⁴⁹ This post-division influence manifested itself in Methodist journals such as the northern and southern quarterly reviews, the northern *Ladies' Repository*, and the *Southern Lady's Companion*. A main theme of Methodism's republican sentiments was that Christianity was necessary for the existence of any functional republican government, including that of the United States. The centrality of Christianity to human freedom was the dominant theme of "Our National Religion," an article in the *Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*.⁵⁰ According to the article, the basis of all human liberty, including that in America, stemmed from Christianity. While the article initially placed Christianity and republicanism on equal terms, when it said that "republicanism is the true government of man" and "Christianity is the true religion of man," it confirmed Christianity as the more important.⁵¹

The *Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* made the argument for Christianity's importance to liberty using American religion and politics as a backdrop. It argued that despite the disestablishment of religion, America had not become "a nation without religion." On the contrary, America was "essentially a CHRISTIAN NATION—a religious people, in our civil and political character."⁵² The

⁴⁸ Noll, 189-91 and 347.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁵⁰ R. A. "Our National Religion," *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* 3 (April, 1849): 301-319.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 304. (Emphasis in original)

author of the article claimed that the “principles of Christianity” were both in the nation’s laws and were demonstrated by the actions “in all the departments of the government.” Americans had “a bible government, producing and sustaining bible privileges and bible laws.”⁵³ The article’s premise that Christianity was a necessary prerequisite for human freedom also pervaded other Methodist publications during the Mexican-American War.

Not just any type of Christianity was conducive to freedom, however; “protestant religion is far more congenial with the spirit of political freedom than [than] the Catholic.”⁵⁴ In addition to periodicals, the relationship between Protestant Christianity and liberty was a topic in many published sermons. Rev. E. E. Griswold preached in 1849 that “the origin of nearly all that is known in England or America of human rights or human freedom” could be traced back to the Puritans.⁵⁵ Stephen M. Vail, a pastor in Pine Plains, New York, expressed similar sentiments. Vail informed his congregation: “I hold that Christianity is democratic—that the Bible is democratic.”⁵⁶ While Stephen Vail did not specifically mention Protestant Christianity, his reference to the Bible would have removed Roman Catholicism from consideration since Methodists believed it was not a form of biblical religion. Reverend Abiathar Osbon provided one of the strongest assertions of the link between Protestantism and freedom in a Thanksgiving day sermon delivered in November 1848. While discussing the duties of American citizens to the

⁵³ Ibid., 305.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 307.

⁵⁵ Rev. E. E. Griswold, *The Providence of God Recognized: A Sermon Preached in the Second Wesleyan Chapel, Mulberry-Street, New-York, on Thanksgiving Day, November 23, 1848, by Rev. E. E. Griswold* (New York: Oliver & Brother, 1849), 7.

⁵⁶ Stephen M. Vail, *The Signs of the Times. A Thanksgiving Sermon, delivered November 26, 1846, to the Methodist E. Church and Congregation, in Pine Plains, N. Y. by Stephen M. Vail, Pastor* (Poughkeepsie, New York: Journal and Eagle Printing Establishment, 1846), 8.

rising tide of European immigrants, Osbon argued that Protestant republican institutions were vastly superior to both monarchy and titled aristocracy.⁵⁷ He left little doubt about the link between republican institutions and Protestant Christianity. In a comparison between Protestantism and ‘Romanism,’ Osbon told his congregation that “Protestantism, as a form of religion, is incomparably better than its historical antagonism, Papacy, I have no doubt; and chiefly better it may be, viewed philosophically, because it is more consonant with the natural and essential liberty of man.”⁵⁸

While the link between Protestant Christianity and human freedom was commonplace in Methodist literature by the onset of the Mexican-American War, the nature of this relationship was most fully explored by two articles in *The Methodist Quarterly Review*. The Methodist Church argued that Protestant Christianity naturally gave rise to freedom. The contingent relationship between Protestantism and freedom was set forth in “The Reformation the Source of American Liberty.”⁵⁹ Published just months before the war began, the author argued that “the Reformation of the sixteenth century is the source of American liberty” because there was “a connection of cause and effect existing between historical events [the Reformation and the American Revolution] as real as that which is found in any other case.”⁶⁰ So important was the Reformation that the American Revolution would have been unsuccessful, or would possibly not even have

⁵⁷ Abiathar M. Osbon, *The Duty of America to Her Immigrant Citizens: A Sermon Preached in the Eighteenth-Street M. E. Church, November 25, 1848*. By Abiathar M. Osbon, of the New-York Annual Conference (New York: Conference Office, 1848), 19.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁹ “The Reformation the Source of American Liberty,” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 6 (January, 1846): 5-24.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8 and 9.

occurred, without it.⁶¹ This connection existed because several facets of the Reformation were conducive to both political and intellectual freedom. The first is that the Reformation was a “revival of the religion of the Bible.”⁶² The reference to the “religion of the Bible” served two purposes. First, it signified a specific type of Christianity that was thought to be a revival of the biblical religion of early Christianity in which emphasis was put on each individual’s acceptance of biblical truths. Second, it was used to differentiate Protestant Christianity from Roman Catholicism.

Another article in *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, titled the “Republican Tendency of the Bible,” further developed the perceived importance of Christianity to political freedom.⁶³ The primary theme of this article was that “the general influence of the Bible was not only favorable, but absolutely indispensable, to the permanent existence of a republic.”⁶⁴ Methodists argued that Christianity was fundamental to the health of a republic for three reasons: it was the foundation of individual rights, it promoted the education of citizens, and most importantly it provided citizens with the virtue that was the necessary for a republican political system.

During 1845-1850, Methodist publications repeatedly claimed that the gospel was the foundation of human rights. The “Republican Tendency of the Bible” defined republicanism using language drawn directly from the Declaration of Independence: “the creed of republicanism is, ‘that all men are born free and equal, and endowed with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’” These

⁶¹ Ibid., 9.

⁶² Ibid., 11.

⁶³ “Republican Tendency of the Bible,” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 6 (April, 1846): 202-226.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 208.

republican principles of liberty and equality were claimed to be derived directly from the Bible. There was no item in the “fundamental doctrines of republicanism” that could not be “drawn directly from the fountain of inspiration.”⁶⁵ Specifically, Methodists claimed that the ideals of freedom and equality originated from the biblical “Golden Rule.”

It was commonplace in Methodist publications to find the origins of the republican principles of liberty and equality in the biblical injunction that “therefor all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”⁶⁶ *The Methodist Quarterly Review* asserted that this verse made one’s own rights and feelings the standard of their treatment of others. The article went on to ask rhetorically: “does not this one pervading and indeed frontal principle of ethics that runs through the entire word of God, sweep away, with cataract force, all usurpation, all oppression, all tyranny, all that prerogative claimed by kings and nobles to ride booted and spurred over the great mass of humanity, trampling them down at their will?”⁶⁷ Because the golden rule was addressed to all humanity and universally binding, its implication that “the rights every man claims from another, are the rights every other may claim from him” formed the “very seed from which grew the Declaration of Independence.”⁶⁸ The claim that human freedom was a byproduct of the biblical injunction to treat one’s neighbor as yourself was disseminated to American Methodists through *The Methodist Quarterly Review* and was

⁶⁵ “Republican Tendency of the Bible,” 213.

⁶⁶ Matthew 7. 12 KJV.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

numerous in other publications.⁶⁹

While *The Methodist Quarterly Review* was targeted primarily at Methodist clergy and well-educated lay members, *The Ladies' Repository* exposed a larger audience of lay Methodists to the link between human freedom and the Golden Rule. An article written by B. S. Taylor, published in 1847, reinforced to female readers its political importance. The golden rule captured “a rule comprising man’s whole duty to his fellow—a rule regulating every act of his, amid the diversified relations of society,” and which “is applicable to every circumstance.”⁷⁰ Like the articles discussed above from *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, Taylor made explicit the connection between the golden rule and the formation of human rights: “it is to the influence of this principle, taught by our Savior, that we owe all our political and social superiority over the inhabitants of the dark ages; because mankind have been taught to regard the rights of others as sacred as their own. This is the only ground of the political freedom of republican government.”⁷¹ The golden rule not only provided the foundation of republican government because of its association with human rights, it also was the basis of virtue.⁷² The importance of virtuous citizens to the survival of republican governments made the golden rule and the

⁶⁹ While abolitionists would later use the Golden Rule to argue against slavery the aim of the Methodist arguments presented here was to argue that understanding of rights inherent in republican political ideology was derived from the Bible rather than a secular source.

⁷⁰ B. S. Taylor, M. D., “The Golden Rule,” *The Ladies' Repository, and Gatherings of the West: A Monthly Periodical Devoted to Literature and Religion*, June 1847, 166.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁷² L. A. Nine, “Idea of Virtue,” *The Ladies' Repository: A Monthly Periodical Devoted to Literature and Religion*, March 1850, 97.

command to “love one another...the only foundation of progress,” both political and social.⁷³ The chief means of producing virtuous citizens was through education.

Besides sowing the seeds of republicanism and human rights, the Methodist Church propagated the idea that Protestant Christianity was the genesis of western knowledge. Along with other Americans, Methodists believed that education and intelligence were “indispensable to the enjoyment of free institutions.”⁷⁴ They also believed, however, that intelligence and education were the creations of Protestant Christianity. Methodists argued that the Bible and Christianity were responsible for “nearly all the learning of the world for fifteen hundred years.”⁷⁵ While for much of this time Christianity kept only the “glimmering sparks” of classical learning alive, “the men who were the advocates” of the revival of learning in the 14th through 16th centuries were almost without exception “men who studied and loved the Bible,” such as Wyckliffe, Huss, Petrarch, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, Knox, and Usher.⁷⁶ The Bible and Christianity were not only responsible for the advance of knowledge in the Renaissance and Reformation, they were also responsible for the “education of the general mass of society.” Methodists argued that Christianity was responsible for the education of the masses because of the link between schools and churches. According to the *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, “wherever the church is found, there is the school; and the

⁷³ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁴ “The Republican Tendency of the Bible,” 208.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 208.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 209.

schoolmaster and preacher go hand in hand.”⁷⁷

The Christian and republican duty to educate the American people was a common theme in the literature published during the Mexican-American War. New York’s Reverend P. P. Sandford, in a Thanksgiving sermon preached in December of 1845, told his congregation of the close ties between republicanism and education. According to Sandford, “our republican and free institutions are only adapted to an intelligent and virtuous community.” He went on to assert that a supposed lack of intelligence was one reason why the “half-enlightened and superstitious inhabitants of the South American States ... are unprepared to exist under free constitutional governments.”⁷⁸ The necessary relation between an educated populace and political freedom is reiterated in a sermon by A. M. Osbon. Towards the end of a Thanksgiving sermon, he preached New York in November of 1846, he informed his congregation that what had accounted for the success of American republican institutions compared with those of Europe was that, “the education of Europe, like its government, is confined to the minority, whilst ours, in the true spirit of republican freedom, is the education of the people—the great public mind and heart.”⁷⁹ The acceptance among the Methodists of the importance of an educated populace resulted in calls for the expenditure of energy to promote education. An editorial in the January *Ladies’ Repository* called for Christians to “endeavor to promote the diffusion of useful knowledge among all ranks of the people,” since “our government

⁷⁷ Ibid., 209.

⁷⁸ Rev. P. P. Sandford, *Public Thanksgiving: Being a Sermon Delivered in the Bedford-Street Methodist Episcopal Church, New-York, on the Day of Public Thanksgiving, December 4, 1845. By Rev. P. P. Sandford* (New York: Conference Office, 1846), 12-13.

⁷⁹ A. M. Osbon, *Public Prosperity, its Evidences and Means. A Sermon: on the Occasion of Public Thanksgiving in the State of New-York, November 25th, 1846, Delivered in the Pacific-St. M. E. Church, Brooklyn, N. Y. By A. M. Osbon, of the New-York Annual Conference* (Brooklyn, N. Y.: 1846), 29.

being founded in the intelligence of the people, can exist no longer than the mass are well informed.”⁸⁰ While the Methodist Church accepted the republican ideal of an educated populace, it stressed that a particular type of education was key.

Methodists believed Christianity was integral to human progress and promoted a type of education imbued with Christian principles. According to the *Southern Methodist Quarterly Review*, Christianity was “not only the true, and only true religion of man, but it is the only religion that heightens and enlightens civilization.”⁸¹ The religious basis of education is made even clearer in an article published in *The Southern Lady’s Companion*. Education must be grounded on the principles of Christianity because the “moral, as well as the intellectual powers, must be developed and improved.”⁸² The emphasis on moral improvement was important because it was through moral improvement that an individual came to possess virtue.

American Methodists saw the distillation of virtue as the primary contribution of Protestant Christianity to political freedom. Like many people, the Methodists accepted the common understanding that virtue was essential to a functional republican government. A. M. Osbon made this connection clear in a Thanksgiving sermon delivered in 1846. He preached that the “origination and perpetuity of liberal and enlightened political policy” depended on the intelligence and virtue of the rising

⁸⁰ Rev. E. Thomson, “Editor’s Table,” *The Ladies’ Repository, and Gatherings of the West: A Monthly Periodical Devoted to Literature and Religion*, January 1845, 30.

⁸¹ “Our National Religion,” 303.

⁸² E. H. Hatcher, “Female Education,” *The Southern Lady’s Companion, Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature and Religion*, May 1847, 44.

generation.⁸³ Osbon reiterated the importance of virtue in another sermon. While addressing the flood of immigrants in the 1840s, he told his congregation to “let them see that true freedom is an uncoerced subjection to order and right; a loved and cheerful pursuit of virtue.”⁸⁴ The minister P. P. Sandford shared a very similar message with his New York congregation in 1845. He entreated his congregation, and all American citizens, to remember “that our republican and free institutions are only adapted to an intelligent and virtuous community.”⁸⁵ The importance of a virtuous populace stemmed from virtue’s ability to protect against political tyranny. Osbon told his congregation that “the intelligence and virtue of a people” was the only antidote to the corruption of free government.⁸⁶ In like manner, the *Southern Christian Advocate* informed its readers that “virtuous principles” must be instilled in the masses “or our politicians will ruin us, and our navy and army will only become instrumental in enslaving us.” The only sure means to instill virtuous principles in the masses was to “build school-houses and churches, or to promote the interest of education and gospel morality.”⁸⁷ The allusion to churches and gospel morality was part of a larger theme in Methodist publications, namely that Christianity was required to create and sustain a virtuous citizenry.

The connection between virtue and republicanism formed the primary link between Christianity and republicanism. The Methodist Church proclaimed to everyone

⁸³ Osbon, *Public Prosperity*, 6.

⁸⁴ Osbon, *The Duty of America to Her Immigrant Citizens*, 20.

⁸⁵ Sandford, *Public Thanksgiving*, 12.

⁸⁶ Osbon, *Public Prosperity*, 20.

⁸⁷ Dr. Kurtz, “The Only Certain Safeguard of our Liberties,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, November 20, 1846, 94.

who would listen their belief that Christianity was the only method of instilling virtue in the mass of citizens. Virtue could not be diffused in the population using secular means such as civil law because it would only “restrain men from open transgression,” but would leave unaltered “the most fiendish passions of fallen human nature.”⁸⁸ Methodists used the French Revolution was an example of the perceived failure of secular means to produce virtue. Despite the existence in France of enlightenment in the human sciences, literature, and the arts, it was the absence of “pure evangelical light and Christian virtue” that prevented revolutionary France from obtaining political freedom.⁸⁹ Other Methodist publications also trumpeted the assertion that Christianity was the foundation of virtue. *The Methodist Quarterly Review* informed its readers that it was the “intrinsic excellence of Christianity” that “prompts its possessor to all those acts of justice, truth, and mercy,” and thus was the foundation of virtue.⁹⁰ Due to the gospel’s ability to convert sinners, “there is no stronghold of vice so impregnable, that it cannot scale and conquer, and even transform it into a temple for the most high God.”⁹¹ Thus, Methodists argued that Protestant Christianity was indispensable to a functioning republican government because it provided the grace and moral regulations needed to produce virtue. Their belief in Christianity’s political benefits combined with an equally strong belief in its importance for individual salvation to spur on both national and global evangelization efforts.

⁸⁸ Osbon, *Public Prosperity*, 23.

⁸⁹ Sandford, *Public Thanksgiving*, 13.

⁹⁰ “Religion in America,” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 27 (October 1845): 499.

⁹¹ “Republican Tendency of the Bible,” 211.

CHAPTER 4: THE MISSIONARY ENDEAVOR

Republicanism and a commitment to evangelization combined within the Methodist Church to create widespread support of the Mexican-American War. As noted by multiple historians, aggressive evangelization was a central characteristic of the Methodist Episcopal Church at its inception. The importance of the missionary impulse continued to be a main feature of the Church during the war. Under the guidance of Francis Asbury, the Church's missionary activity had been primarily spiritual, with the main emphasis on the salvation of individuals. By the Mexican-American War, however, more attention was being paid to the social, economic, and political benefits of spreading the gospel. The initial spiritual motivation for missionary activity was not displaced, but was rather joined to the belief that spreading the Christian gospel also facilitated the social progress and political freedoms associated with republicanism.

While the nature of Methodism's missionary endeavor had changed by the 1840s, Methodists still believed that evangelization was necessary to the Church's identity. In an article published in *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, readers were instructed that "every Christian who has the spirit of his master loves the cause of missions," and has "a deep interest in the prosperity of that glorious work."⁹² Other published articles, books, and missionary society reports reinforced the fundamental importance of missions to the character of the Methodist Church. The

⁹² N., "Review of the Claims of the Missionary Enterprise," *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* 4 (April, 1850): 282.

Reverend W. P. Strickland, in his history of the Church's missionary work published in 1850, claimed that the Methodist Episcopal Church "[was] the only Church claiming to be missionary in its entire character."⁹³ An article in the northern *Methodist Quarterly Review* stressed that American Methodism had not left behind the missionary spirit that had filled the Church during its early years. Reminding their readers that "the denomination retains everywhere a good measure of its missionary character," they claimed that the Methodist organizational system was imbued with "special and providential adaptations," which made the church especially adept at fulfilling its divine mission to spread the gospel throughout America and the rest of the world.⁹⁴ In 1846, the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church reiterated the central position of evangelization to Methodism. The 27th annual report of the society ended with a plea that a strong voice for the world's conversion, calling Methodists to "go out from every pulpit, every society, every Sabbath school, and from every Christian in our widely-extended Zion."⁹⁵ The biblical command to evangelize the world was not only an integral part of the Methodist Church, but also an essential aspect of Christianity.

⁹³ Rev. W. P. Strickland, *History of the Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, From the Organization of the Missionary Society to the Present Time* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt & J. H. Power, 1850), 245. While Strickland published his monograph two years after the end of the Mexican-American War I decided to utilize it as a primary source to illustrate the Methodist Church's commitment to missions. The viewpoints expressed by Strickland were in accord with those of the Methodist Church before and during the war, and the thematic nature of his work made it a very appealing, and ultimately a very valuable, resource to analyze the missionary endeavor within the Methodist Church. Another reason for my use of Strickland's monograph was his inclusion of several talks that were given at previous Missionary Society meetings. (249) While Strickland unfortunately does not give the dates these were presented at the annual meetings of the Missionary Society, it can be justifiably assumed they represent a pre-1850 pro-missionary stance that became a major factor in the Methodist Church's support of the Mexican-American War.

⁹⁴ "Missions and Methodism," *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 29 (April, 1847): 277, 278.

⁹⁵ The Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Twenty-seventh Annual Report of The Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Conference Office, 1846), 115.

Methodists argued that the ‘Great Commission,’ the final words of Christ to his disciples in the New Testament, was the essence of Christianity. The attempt to fulfill the Great Commission, or the command to preach the gospel to all nations, was heralded in numerous Methodist publications as not only the duty of every Christian, but also as one of the most important events of the age. The annual reports of Methodist missionary societies were among the most strident voices proclaiming the necessary connection between “true” Christianity and the missionary endeavor. The 10th annual report of the Female Missionary Society at the Second Wesleyan Chapel in New York proclaimed that an individual’s support of missions was made the measure of her Christian faith. The report advised readers that the “proportion as we imbibe the spirit of living Christianity” was the same as “that degree will we desire, and exert ourselves for, the salvation of others.”⁹⁶ In other words being a good Christian was dependent upon how strongly one supported evangelization and missions. The parent missionary society of the northern Methodist Church echoed these sentiments. The society closed its 27th annual report with the proclamation that the missionary enterprise “was pre-eminently the cause of God,” and that spreading the gospel to all nations was not “a mere appendage to Christianity, but Christianity herself.”⁹⁷ The Methodist Missionary Society provided an example of another dominant theme in Methodist literature when it informed its readers that the

⁹⁶ Female Missionary Society of the Second Wesleyan Chapel, Mulberry-Street, *Tenth Annual Report of the Female Missionary Society of the Second Wesleyan Chapel, Mulberry-Street, Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Methodist E. Church* (New York: Conference Office, 1846), 7. This missionary society associated with a single church in New York contained 80 lifetime subscribers and 95 annual subscribers.

⁹⁷ The Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Twenty-seventh Annual Report*, 114.

“noble” missionary enterprise was not only a “great movement of the Church,” but that it was the “great movement of the age.”⁹⁸

The northern and southern Methodist quarterly reviews both testified to the great importance of the movement to spread the gospel to all nations in modern history. The southern *Quarterly Review* rhetorically asked its readers: “is not the conversion of the world—the grand missionary enterprise, more important, more noble, more benevolent, and more absolutely essential to the well-being of society, than any scheme ever conceived by human ingenuity, or executed by human power?”⁹⁹ Because of the emphasis placed on promoting the missionary enterprise, all Christians had a moral obligation making them “duty bound to promote the spread of the gospel.”¹⁰⁰ Individuals’ duty to promote the spread of the gospel was in fact even more important than their patriotic duty to their country.¹⁰¹ The northern *Methodist Quarterly Review* stressed the importance of the missionary cause to its readers in the north. It speculated that when people in the next century looked for the most important event of the past one-hundred years, they would find it to be “the revival and new development of the missionary enterprise.” The expansion of the missionary enterprise would surpass other events such as the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the English Reform Bill and Catholic emancipation, the abolition of slavery in the West Indies, the extension of the

⁹⁸ Ibid., 10, 11.

⁹⁹ “Review of the Claims of the Missionary Enterprise,” 286.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 297.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 315-16.

British East Indian Empire, and “the introduction of China into the family of nations.”¹⁰²

In addition to believing that evangelization was essential to Christianity and one of the most important events in modern history, the Methodist Church also argued that human effort and agency were necessary to promote the spread of the gospel. The annual reports of missionary societies made clear how important human agency was to the missionary endeavor. In 1847, the 11th annual report of the Second Wesleyan Chapel Female Missionary Society in New York noted that the great work of missions would be achieved “by the patient, earnest, long-continued labor of his [God’s] earthly creatures.” They also called on their fellow Methodists to support the Church’s missionary endeavors because there had never been “a greater need for earnest and determined exertion, on the part of the Church, for man’s salvation.”¹⁰³ The female missionary society for the whole state of New York echoed these sentiments. In their appeal for “continued liberality” toward the Methodist missionary endeavor, they claimed that multitudes had been saved “by the instrumentality of Missionary labours,” and that more would be saved with continued support.¹⁰⁴ The parent missionary society of both female missionary societies likewise stressed the importance of human effort in the spread of the gospel to all nations. Its own report took on an eschatological tone, proclaiming that if “the glory of the millennium [was] to burst upon the world,” the “sanctified agency and benevolent

¹⁰² “Missions and Methodism,” 269.

¹⁰³ Female Missionary Society of the Second Wesleyan Chapel, Mulberry-Street, N. Y., *Eleventh Annual Report of The Female Missionary Society of the Second Wesleyan Chapel, Mulberry-Street, N. Y., Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Methodist E. Church* (New York: Conference Office, 1847), 6, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Female Missionary Society of New-York, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Female Missionary Society of New-York, Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Conference Office, 1849), 4.

activity of Christians [were] essential, in the order of means, to the latter-day glory.”¹⁰⁵

The importance of human agency was also echoed in Methodist periodicals.

One outgrowth of Methodism’s emphasis on missions was the publication of the *Missionary Advocate*, with its first issue appearing in April of 1845. The purpose of the *Missionary Advocate* was to help the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church promote the cause of missions. By the end of its first year, over 12,000 subscribers were helping the periodical fulfill its purpose of spreading God’s dominion “from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.”¹⁰⁶ In every issue the *Missionary Advocate* issued calls for Methodist ministers and laypeople to support the spread of the gospel. The article “The Church the only Channel of giving the Gospel to the Heathen,” like many others, called Methodists to action. It claimed that the agency by which the gospel spread was not by “miraculous or supernatural means,” but rather “the instrumentality of [God’s] people, employed in the circulation of the preached and written word.”¹⁰⁷ The *Missionary Advocate* regularly included songs or poems encouraging reading to support the missionary endeavor. One common category was the praising of contributions of children. A “Child’s Missionary Hymn” is typical of this genre:

Lord! can a simple child like me
Assist to turn the world to thee?
or send the bread of life to hands
Stretch’d out for it in heathen lands?

¹⁰⁵ Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Twenty-seventh Annual Report*, 115.

¹⁰⁶ This quote, “His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth,” introduced each issue in the first three volumes. For example see: “Subtitle,” *Missionary Advocate*, April 1845, 1.

¹⁰⁷ “The Church the Only Channel of Giving the Gospel to the Heathen,” *Missionary Advocate*, July 1846, 30.

Will this poor mite I call my own
 Lead some lost Hindoo to thy throne?
 Or help to cast the idols down
 Which midst the groves of Java frown?

O! yes. Although the gift be small,
 Thou'lt bless it, since it is my all;
 And bid it swell the glorious tide,
 By thousands of thy saints supplied...¹⁰⁸

While the *Missionary Advocate* primarily targeted Methodist ministers and members of missionary societies, the quarterly journals of both the northern and southern branches of the Methodist Church brought the message of the centrality of human agency to the missionary endeavor to the Church's emerging intelligentsia.

Articles published in both sectional variations of the quarterly review emphasized many elements found in the *Missionary Advocate*. They stressed the importance of the church to the spread of the gospel, and the necessity of financial contributions by members. *The Methodist Quarterly Review* of the northern Methodist Church noted how the agency of the church had been instrumental in evangelizing America. It noted that the labors of the church, such as those associated with the Church's official Missionary Society, were "the great depository of saving truth and power," and that the church was "entrusted with a monopoly of the only remedy for sin."¹⁰⁹ As Methodists sought to account for their success in America, they placed as much emphasis on "the special fitness of the itinerant system" as to the supernatural aid of God.¹¹⁰ The southern *Quarterly Review* makes the link between the spread of the gospel and effort by the

¹⁰⁸ "Child's Missionary Hymn," *Missionary Advocate*, July 1846, 30.

¹⁰⁹ "Missions and Methodism," 276.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 277.

Church even clearer. In “Review of the Claims of Missionary Enterprise,” readers were informed that “the universal diffusion of Gospel light” would only be manifested “by human instrumentality; by the agency of the church”; and that the “complete triumph of Christianity” could only be “accomplished through the instrumentality of the Church.”¹¹¹ In order for the Methodist Church to accomplish its divine commission, sacrifices were required from all members. The *Quarterly Review* called for the total consecration of its members to the spread of the gospel throughout the whole world. For Methodists, there was “no limit to the contributions of the Christian in the cause of religion.”¹¹² This included even the expenditure of all of a family’s income after household expenses had been deducted. Closely related to the belief that the agency of the church was necessary to the spread of Christianity was a negative view of those unwilling to promote missions.

Methodists believed that the missionary endeavor was of such importance that they considered a lack of energy or a disinterest in promoting the spread of the gospel to be unchristian. As part of its discussion of the need of total consecration of Methodists to the missionary cause, the southern *Quarterly Review* claimed that the “great mass of the professing world [was] far from being *entirely* devoted to Christ.”¹¹³ The northern *Methodist Quarterly Review* turned this criticism against its own church. The review noted that while the “evangelization of the heathen [was] the proper sphere” of the Methodist Church’s missionary endeavors, the Church was in “virtual denial of its

¹¹¹ “Review of the Claims of Missionary Enterprise,” 283, 294.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 285.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 284.

obligations to extend its labors to the heathen.”¹¹⁴ At this time, the only American Methodist missionaries in foreign lands were a few in Liberia and one missionary in South America. Missionaries in both of these locales ministered solely to English speakers. The absence of viable foreign missionary work despite the Church’s status as the largest and wealthiest American Protestant denomination was considered the Methodist Church’s “greatest reproach.”¹¹⁵ The obligation of Christians to the missionary endeavor was made even clearer by the Second Wesleyan Chapel Female Missionary Society. They proclaimed in their annual report for 1846 that “to refuse aid in spreading the gospel...involve[d] such a disregard for the glory of God...as should lead such a mind seriously to question whether it has ever felt the power of true religion.”¹¹⁶ W. P. Strickland presented the argument about the culpability of Christians in the fate of those dying without the gospel in his history of Methodist missions and a paper by Reverend S. Olin. Strickland argued that Christian inactivity resulted in vast numbers of heathen remaining unconverted. According to Strickland, “it [was] the sin and shame of the Church” that although there were two hundred million Christians in the world, there were only three thousand missionaries. This left only “one missionary for every two hundred thousand of the heathen world.”¹¹⁷ The Reverend S. Olin placed even stronger emphasis on the obligations of Christians to unconverted heathen. In his paper “The Duty of the Church to Evangelize the World,” the reverend Olin asserted that it was a “great truth,

¹¹⁴ “Missions and Methodism,” 289, 299.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 300.

¹¹⁶ Female Missionary Society of the Second Wesleyan Chapel, “Tenth Annual Report,” 7-8.

¹¹⁷ Strickland, *History of Missions*, 241.

that God holds the Church responsible for the evangelization of the world.”¹¹⁸ A consequence of this responsibility before God was that Christians were “accessories” to the guilt and fate of the vast numbers of the unevangelized who “die without a savior,” and were thus condemned to an eternity apart from God.¹¹⁹ For both of the above reasons, an “indifference to missions [was] tantamount to a denial of Christ.”¹²⁰

While Methodist missions underwent fundamental changes after the death of Francis Asbury, one of the primary goals of the missionary endeavor remained the salvation of souls. The aim of saving individuals from eternal damnation was central in published works advocating for the Church’s missionary enterprise. The quarterly reviews in both the northern and southern branches of the Methodist Church reminded readers that according to the “Great Commission” missions were God’s mandated way of bringing Christianity and salvation to the unconverted. The southern *Quarterly Review* conveyed to its readers that the “grand object of the missionary scheme” was to “redeem a captive world from the thralldom of Satan and sin.”¹²¹ The northern *Methodist Quarterly Review* likewise reinforced the redemptive purpose of the Church’s missionary enterprise. An article published in April of 1847 asserted that the missionary enterprise was “God’s chosen and only revealed method of making known to perishing nations the

¹¹⁸ Rev. S. Olin, D. D., “The Duty of the Church to Evangelize the World,” found in: Rev. W. P. Strickland, *History of the Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, From the Organization of the Missionary Society to the Present Time* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt & J. H. Power, 1850), 253.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹²¹ “Review of the Claims of Missionary Enterprise,” 316.

great scheme of redemption through the blood of the cross.”¹²² Without the saving truth and power of the Christian gospel, of which the church was “intrusted with monopoly,” there was no possibility of salvation.¹²³ In the *History of the Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, the Reverend W. P. Strickland further explored the claim that there was no salvation outside of the Christian gospel. In response to Christians who claimed that those who had not heard the gospel could be saved if they “obey[ed] the law which God, by his Spirit, [had] written on their hearts,”¹²⁴ Strickland argued that none could be saved without the gospel and that every year “millions of heathen die without a present salvation.” Like the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, he claimed that the church, and more specifically, Methodist Church, was God’s chosen means of offering salvation and eternal life to the heathen.¹²⁵ The Reverend S. Olin placed even greater stress on the centrality of the Christian gospel for salvation. According to Olin, one reason for the church’s indifference to “the myriads of unevangelized” dying without the hope of salvation was that many Christians did not realize that evangelization by the church was “the only way of saving the world.” They had accepted the great error that the Christian gospel was not “indispensable to the salvation of the heathen,” and they doubted whether God wished the conversion of the world to Christianity.¹²⁶ In another paper, John Harris reiterated the importance of the gospel for salvation. It was only through the divine power that permeated the gospel message that a savage could be raised into a man by becoming

¹²² “Missions and Methodism,” 275.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 276.

¹²⁴ Strickland, *History of the Missions*, 241.

¹²⁵ Strickland, *History of the Missions*, 243, 245.

¹²⁶ Olin, “Duty of the Church,” 250, 251.

“a new creature in Christ Jesus.”¹²⁷ Methodists argued that the power of Christianity to make an individual a “new creature” was also responsible for the “civilizing” power they attributed to the gospel.

Along with salvation, the second motivating factor for Methodist missionary activity was what they saw as the gospel’s ability to “civilize” individuals and societies. The Methodist Church linked to human freedom and progress, and the absence of Christianity was the primary reason for the perceived “backwardness” of heathen societies. The *Missionary Advocate* drew comparisons between those societies that had the Bible and those that did not. It used access to the Bible to create a “moral geography of the world,” in which decay, degradation, and suffering existed everywhere that the Bible had no influence. The *Missionary Advocate* also claimed that the absence of Christianity also affected the physical state of the people and resulted in languishing commerce, agriculture, and arts. Societies with the Bible, on the other hand, were claimed to be characterized by independence, industry, neatness, and education for children.¹²⁸

Like published material related to Christianity and republicanism, articles and sermons promoting missions also linked Christianity to political freedom. According to the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, the “great obstacle in the way of free institutions and of valuable progress” in France and other European countries was “the want of Christian

¹²⁷ John Harris, “The Duty of the Church in Regard to the World,” in Rev. W. P. Strickland, *History of the Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, From the Organization of the Missionary Society to the Present Time* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt & J. H. Power, 1850), 319.

¹²⁸ “Bible and No Bible,” *Missionary Advocate*, (July 1846): 26. The *Missionary Advocate* drew the last quotation of the paragraph from Proverbs 14:34.

principles and morals.”¹²⁹ The state of unchristian heathen societies was portrayed as even worse than that of secular or Catholic European nations. According to the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, “no element of character ha[d] yet been developed” among America’s own “injured race,” the North American Indians.¹³⁰ The southern *Quarterly Review* went even further in its description of heathen societies. It reported that in those nations where the gospel was unknown, the inhabitants were in a miserable state, scarcely superior to “the beasts of the field,” despite their possession of “natures susceptible of the highest improvement and enjoyment.”¹³¹ Methodists argued that women were in an especially miserable position. In Muslim societies, women were considered to be “without souls, made only to be the slaves of man, and the instruments of his pleasure.” The state of women in pagan societies was reputed to be even worse, as they were generally placed “in the same rank with their domestic animals,” and treated accordingly.¹³² Methodist literature attributed much of the ‘miserable’ state of the heathen to the characteristics of their gods. According to W. P. Strickland, “the attributes of their prevailing deities [were] rage, revenge, and lust—a frightful trinity.”¹³³ The nature of these gods caused intellectual degradation in the heathen, and missionaries were warned that among the

¹²⁹ “Missions and Methodism,” 272. Stanford, *Public Thanksgiving...*, 13 also attributes the lack of free government in France to a lack of “pure evangelical light and Christian virtue.”

¹³⁰ “Missions and Methodism,” 282.

¹³¹ “Review of the Claims of Missionary Enterprise,” 290.

¹³² “A Cry From the Heathen,” in Rev. W. P. Strickland, *History of the Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, From the Organization of the Missionary Society to the Present Time* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt & J. H. Power, 1850), 265.

¹³³ Strickland, *History of the Missions*, 242.

“wild children of Paganism” they would have to operate upon a “vacuity of mind.”¹³⁴ Since pagan societies never exposed to Christianity were unchecked by the laws of God and had never benefited from the intellectual progress attributed to Christianity, their members were ruled by their passions and emotions rather than by reason. The Methodist Church insisted the only remedy for the perceived social backwardness and tyranny of heathenism was the social progress that could only be brought about by the gospel.

The Methodist Church’s belief that Christianity facilitated social progress, intellectual enlightenment, and political freedom was another major motivating factor for its emphasis on missionary activity. The groundwork for the perceived connection between Christianity and social progress had already been laid when the Methodist Church linked republicanism with Christianity. This connection meant that missionary activity not only promoted the salvation of individuals from an eternity in hell, it also promoted the cause of civilization.¹³⁵ Methodists believed that because of Christianity’s great civilizing power that it was able to “emancipate the spell-bound nations of the earth from the galling ban of superstition, idolatry and crime.”¹³⁶ The gospel’s civilizing powers were due to its ability to elevate a “barbarian into a man,” bringing about a moral reformation “by making him a new creature in Christ Jesus.”¹³⁷ The powers of the Christian gospel were equally advantageous for women. The missionary cause would appeal “to every female Christian heart, as the great and only instrumentality of the

¹³⁴ “Missionary Schools,” in Rev. W. P. Strickland, *History of the Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, From the Organization of the Missionary Society to the Present Time* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt & J. H. Power, 1850), 291.

¹³⁵ Female Missionary Society of the Second Wesleyan Chapel, *Eleventh Annual Report*, 5.

¹³⁶ “Review of the Claims of the Missionary Enterprise,” 313.

¹³⁷ Harris, “Duty of the Church,” 318 and 319.

intellectual, moral, and physical elevation of her sisters in pagan lands.”¹³⁸ The Methodist Church believed that since virtue was foundational for political freedom, the gospel’s ability to promote morality by making people a “new creature in Christ Jesus” meant that missionaries not only offered salvation, but also the primary constituent of republicanism.

Along with political freedom, Methodists believed the spread of the gospel facilitated widespread social progress. According to the southern *Quarterly Review*, the “vivifying rays of gospel light and truth” were able to develop and refine the “powers of human nature.”¹³⁹ Christians had the duty to support missions because the gospel was “so beneficent in its influence on society,” that the wide dissemination of Christianity was the best means of promoting the happiness of the heathen.¹⁴⁰ In a paper published in 1850, the Reverend B. F. Tefft asserted that “the Christian religion and civil liberty always go together.” Writing about the effect of the Bible on societies, he claimed:

the personal freedom and happiness of the inhabitants of every land are measured by the degree of influence which that inspired volume has exerted. If there is any hope for the future political disinthralment of all enslaved and oppressed nations, it lies in the possibility of bringing their citizens under the daily action of the Bible, by giving ultimate success to the missionary operations now at work, or hereafter to be put in motion, in all countries.¹⁴¹

In addition to political freedom, Methodists contended the gospel also promoted a society’s political economy. The missionary enterprise exhibited “a decided and manifest

¹³⁸ Female Missionary Society of New York, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Female Missionary Society of New-York*, 3.

¹³⁹ “Review of the Claims of Missionary Enterprise,” 290.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 297.

¹⁴¹ “Introduction,” Rev. B. F. Tefft, D. D., in Rev. W. P. Strickland, *History of the Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, From the Organization of the Missionary Society to the Present Time* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt & J. H. Power, 1850), 10.

superiority over all other agencies and plans of reform.”¹⁴² In comparison to changes wrought by political reform, the missionary endeavor had “achieved more and greater temporal benefits, and far greater, than have resulted from all the political changes which have made up the history of the present generation and of that which preceded it.”¹⁴³ According to the Reverend S. Olin, a great truth of political economy was that “godliness [was] profitable in all things.” One of the primary reasons for the profitability of godliness was that in the promotion of “all pious and benevolent enterprises,” such as the building of churches and the endowing of academies, was to be found the “most sure and rapid advancement of wealth and civilization.”¹⁴⁴ Like the “blessings of commerce,” other signs of social progress such as freedom, virtue, education, and the arts of civilization, were “triumphs of the Gospel alone” and were not a byproduct of secular institutions.¹⁴⁵ Ultimately, by the 1840s, Methodists viewed the Christian gospel not only as a means of salvation, but because of the contingent relationship between Christianity and republicanism, they also perceived it as the only sure means to promote human political and social progress.

¹⁴² “Missions and Methodism,” 270.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 271.

¹⁴⁴ Olin “Duty of the Church,” 255.

¹⁴⁵ Harris, “Duty of the Church,” 318.

CHAPTER 5: ANTI-CATHOLICISM

The combination of the strong emphasis on missions and the commitment to the temporal and eternal benefits of Protestant Christianity generated virulent anti-Catholicism that permeated the Methodist Church in the second half of the 1840s. By 1840, the number of Methodists in the United States surpassed those of the New England Congregational Churches and the Episcopal Church. While the Methodist Church still sparred with the rapidly growing Baptist sect, Methodism increasingly competed with Catholics for both domestic and foreign converts. The 1840s saw increasing numbers of German and Irish immigrants who were at least nominally Catholic, and who the Methodists sought to bring into the Protestant Christian—and namely Methodist—fold. The 1840s also saw a major movement within American Methodism to pursue foreign missions activity, which brought Methodists into competition with Catholic missionaries in China and Africa. The adoption of republicanism by the Methodist Church in the 1830s and 1840s was the second major historical development that gave rise to anti-Catholicism within the Church. Methodists argued that republicanism was the highest and most godly expression of political life. Christianity and republicanism were combined so tightly that their fates became intertwined. The Methodist Church believed that the advance of Protestant Christianity coincided with the spread of political freedom and economic prosperity, and that threats to Protestantism undermined human liberty. Methodists saw the spread of Catholicism, which they largely believed to be unchristian, as endangering both political freedom and salvation. Ultimately, the growth of anti-

Catholicism in the Methodist Church in the 1840s was an important factor in the Church's support of the Mexican-American War.

Anti-Catholicism pervades American Methodist literature published in the second half of the 1840s. Both the northern and southern *Christian Advocates* routinely printed articles attacking the Roman Catholic Church. In addition to shorter articles, the *Southern Christian Advocate* offered a long-running series of articles called the "New Testament Church." Every week from July 31, 1846, to August 20, 1847, the "New Testament Church" greeted readers on the front page and covered such topics as divinity, catholicity, apostolic succession, perpetuity, and church. The overriding theme of this year-long series of articles was a presentation of the Reformation era argument that the contemporary Roman Catholic Church was not the New Testament Church of the Bible.¹⁴⁶ The northern counterparts of the *Southern Christian Advocate* were just as vehemently anti-Catholic. Two northern papers, the *Christian Advocate and Journal* and *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, featured articles directly attacking the Catholic Church almost weekly, while many other articles on topics such as missions or morals attacked Catholicism indirectly. Anti-Catholic articles were also featured regularly in the *Missionary Advocate*, a monthly journal published by the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ "New Testament Church: Notes of the Church," *Southern Christian Advocate* 10-11 (July 31, 1846-August 20, 1847), Front page.

¹⁴⁷ Some of these from the *Missionary Advocate* include: "Papal Converts" (Sept. 1845), "First Protestant Missionary Meeting at Rome" (March 1846), "A Chinese Youth and a Popish Priest" (April 1846), "South-Sea Teacher and the Romish Priest" (May 1846), "Vauntings of Romanism" (June 1846), "Dread of the Bible" (Aug. 1846), "Heathenism Romanised" (Sept. 1846), "Romanism in Oregon" (November 1846), "The Pope and Romish Idolatry" (January 1847), and "Romanism and Hinduism Compared" February 1847.

Strident anti-Catholicism was also displayed in both the quarterly journals of the northern and southern Methodist Episcopal Churches. In the North, *The Methodist Quarterly Review* printed numerous anti-Catholic articles such as “Policy of the Romish Church.”¹⁴⁸ This article, along with the southern *Quarterly Review*’s “A Brief Review of the Claim of the Roman Catholic Church, to be Considered as Identical with the Original Church of Jesus Christ,” contains some of Methodism’s most virulent and pointed anti-Catholic rhetoric. Both articles make their anti-Catholic agendas clear in the opening paragraphs. The stated purpose of the northern “Policy of the Romish Church” was to “throw some additional light on the subject of Romanism...and convey some information as to the means most likely to arrest, to counteract its progress, and eventually to put it down.”¹⁴⁹ While the aim of the southern *Quarterly Review*’s “A Brief Review of the Claim of the Roman Catholic Church” was not to put down the Catholic Church, it did endeavor to show that the modern system of Catholicism was not the original church of Christ but instead was a “monumental superstition to deceive the ignorant and unwary; a stupendous moral fraud, conceived and practiced for the basest of purposes.”¹⁵⁰ Both articles, in developing their opposition to Catholicism, focused on themes that permeated other Methodists publications.

One common point of contention was that Roman Catholicism was not a form of Christianity. *The Methodist Quarterly Review* drew connections between Catholicism and

¹⁴⁸ “Policy of the Romish Church” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 27 (January 1845): 63-101. Other anti-Catholic articles published in *The Methodist Quarterly Review* include: “Brownson’s Quarterly Review” (July 1845), “Life and Times of Gregory the Great” (October 1845), “The Reformation the Source of American Liberty” (January 1846), and “Protestantism in Italy” (October 1846).

¹⁴⁹ “Policy of the Romish Church,” 64.

¹⁵⁰ P. “A Brief Review of the Claim of the Roman Catholic Church, to be Considered as Identical with the Original Church of Jesus Christ” *Quarterly Review* 4 (October, 1850): 522.

paganism when it informed its readers that the pagan Roman statue of Jupiter Capitolinus in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome was "the truest emblem of the Christianity of the Popes."¹⁵¹ The southern *Quarterly Review* asserted that "in a doctrinal sense...there is not the slightest similitude between the original Catholic Church, and the Romish Establishment of the present day."¹⁵² A second frequent charge against the Catholic Church was that it facilitated the spread of sin. The author(s) of "A Brief Review of the Roman Catholic Church" wrote that by the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century "the last germ of holiness had been driven from the system in the course of the long session, to make place for carnal appetites and carnal indulgences," and that the Roman hierarchy was "crowned with a combination of every ungodly principle contained in the records of sin."¹⁵³

The primary reason Methodists opposed Roman Catholicism was that they believed it to be unchristian. Numerous Methodist publications claimed that Roman Catholicism, from a doctrinal standpoint, was far from being true Christianity. The southern *Quarterly Review* made this clear in an article promoting the missionary cause. "Review of the Claims of Missionary Enterprise" argued that Catholics were valid targets of missionary activity since "most of the Catholics yet need to be taught 'the first principles of the doctrine of Christ.'"¹⁵⁴ In another article, the *Quarterly Review* claimed

¹⁵¹ "Policy of the Romish Church," 87.

¹⁵² "A Brief Review of the claim of the Roman Catholic Church," 536.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 530, 531.

¹⁵⁴ "Review of the Claims of the Missionary Enterprise," 284.

that faith, truth, and holy living were not to be found in Rome.¹⁵⁵ Instead the entire Roman system was “a monumental superstition to deceive the ignorant and unwary.”¹⁵⁶ Three main arguments were put forward to show the unchristian nature of Roman Catholicism.

The first argument put forward was that the Roman church was not identical or even similar to the first Christian churches founded by the apostles. This historical mode of argument existed in both the north and the south, but was especially popular in southern publications. The *Quarterly Review* states the matter clearly, saying that “the Roman Catholic Church of the present time is an institution of comparatively modern date, and possessing no essential feature of identity with the original Christian Church.”¹⁵⁷ A common feature of Methodist anti-Catholic arguments against the continuity of the modern Roman Catholic Church with the early church was that after the year A.D. 600 Catholicism had strayed from orthodox Christian doctrine. *The Methodist Quarterly Review* informed its readers that by the sixth century “Romanism was corrupted, deeply corrupted ... and it needed but power, to show the world its heart of blackness.”¹⁵⁸ According to the article, the “Church of the first six hundred years was truly the Church of God.” Unfortunately, after this, the doctrinal purity that had produced the Nicene Creed succumbed to the “flood of corrupt novelties which had overwhelmed

¹⁵⁵ “Brief Review of the Claim of the Roman Catholic Church,” 524.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 522.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 524.

¹⁵⁸ C., “The Life and Times of Gregory the Great,” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 27 (October, 1845): 540.

the Church.”¹⁵⁹ In the north, *The Methodist Quarterly Review* chronicled the spiritual decline of the Roman Church in an article treating the 6th century pope Gregory the Great. According to “The Life and Times of Gregory the Great,” by the time of Gregory’s papacy Catholicism was already compromised, as the bishops became “swallowed up in the affairs of this world” and “too often neglected those of the next.”¹⁶⁰ While Gregory received a favorable treatment, he was portrayed as one of the last bulwarks of true Christianity in the Catholic Church as he battled with the “superstitions and misdirected religious sentiments of the age.”¹⁶¹ Despite Gregory’s efforts, he was unable to prevent the Catholic religion from developing into “a proud and wicked system of pseudo-religion,” and becoming “a mere outward show, plenteous in ceremonies,” which differed little from paganism.¹⁶²

The theme of Roman Catholic “paganism” and “idolatry” resounded in Methodist literature in the 1840s and often resulted in Catholicism being placed on an equal footing with pagan belief systems. The author of “The Life and Times of Gregory the Great” wrote that during the papacy of Gregory the Great “there was little difference between the Christianity and the heathenism of that age.”¹⁶³ Methodist publications made it clear that the Catholic Church had made little progress since the time of Pope Gregory. In evaluating the Spanish conquest of Mexico, the southern *Quarterly Review* related that though Cortez stopped human sacrifices he left the Aztecs “more corrupt and degraded

¹⁵⁹ “Brief Review of the Claim of the Roman Catholic Church,” 530.

¹⁶⁰ “The Life and Times of Gregory the Great,” 524, 525.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 527.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 529, 540.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 525.

than he found them;--he left them a religion, but little, if any, in advance of positive heathenism,--a religion, the errors and corruption of which were infinitely more difficult to eradicate than those of Paganism.”¹⁶⁴ The Reverend E. E. Griswold reiterated the spiritually detrimental effects of Spanish colonization. In a Thanksgiving day sermon to his New York congregation, Griswold informed his congregation that Spain’s colonization of Mexico and South America resulted in the “perpetuation of the evils then prevalent in the old world, and the misery of succeeding generations.”¹⁶⁵

Comparisons between Catholicism and paganism also appeared in women’s and missionary journals. *The Ladies’ Repository* stated that in addition to killing more than fifty million Protestants since the Reformation, Papal Rome “has concealed all the abominations of Paganism” under the guise of Christianity.¹⁶⁶ The nature of Roman Catholic “heathenism” was described by multiple articles in the *Missionary Advocate*. It analyzed the doctrine of transubstantiation in what was reportedly a discussion between a priest and a young Chinese convert. The priest asked how many gods there are, to which the boy replied that there are none. Puzzled, the priest asked the boy to explain why he doesn’t believe what the priest taught about there being one God. To this the boy replied that there are now no gods since he ate God yesterday.¹⁶⁷ Another article recounted how a

¹⁶⁴ J. B., “Hints with regard to the Aboriginal History of North America,” *Methodist Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* 1 (April 1847): 247.

¹⁶⁵ E. E. Griswold, *The Providence of God Recognized: A Sermon Preached in the Second Wesleyan Chapel, Mulberry-Street, New-York, on Thanksgiving Day, November 23, 1848, by Rev. E. E. Griswold*, (New York: Oliver and Brother, 1849), 6.

¹⁶⁶ Eusebia, “The Messiah’s Government,” *The Ladies’ Repository, and Gatherings of the West: A Monthly Periodical Devoted to Literature and Religion* 5 (January, 1845): 9.

¹⁶⁷ “A Chinese Youth and a Popish Priest,” *Missionary Advocate* 2 (April, 1846): 1.

Catholic convert in Bangalore worshipped a statue of St. Anthony as his god.¹⁶⁸ In “The Pope and Romish Idolatry,” the belief that Catholics worshipped statues and saints was expressed in greater detail. During a lenten service the Pope reportedly knelt before a statue of St. Peter—which was said to originally have been a statue of Jupiter—for almost five minutes. This was taken as evidence that “many of the ignorant populace of Popish countries are as complete worshippers of wood and stone as the heathen inhabitants of the South-Sea Islands.”¹⁶⁹ Another common Methodist complaint against Catholics was that they worshiped Mary as a god. An article in the southern *Methodist Review* claimed that “*Mary and Money are, de facto, the God of the Romish Church,*” and that the Roman Catholic Church “belongs not to the Church of God, nor yet to any Christian system—but to the Church of the *Virgin Mary.*”¹⁷⁰

In addition to being nearly as heathenish as the South-Islanders and worshipping Mary, Methodists affirmed the long-standing Protestant argument that Catholics were opposed to the Bible. Prohibition of the Bible was especially grievous to the Methodists because they believed that the Bible was responsible for salvation, virtue, and the political freedoms associated with republican government. A recurring theme in Methodist literature was the perceived animosity of Catholics—and especially the Catholic hierarchy—toward the Bible. The New England-based *Zion’s Herald* reported that in Italy the papacy placed great impediments on access to the scriptures. The *Herald* argued that while Bibles were prominently displayed in Italian bookshops, they were

¹⁶⁸ “Heathenism Romanized,” *Missionary Advocate* 2 (September, 1846): 44.

¹⁶⁹ “The Pope and Romish Idolatry,” *Missionary Advocate* 2 (January, 1847): 80.

¹⁷⁰ “Brief Review of the Claim of the Roman Catholic Church,” 539, 540 (emphasis in the original).

reportedly heavily edited and “Romanized”; they could not be purchased by the laity without a permit from the Pope or a bishop, they were too expensive for the majority of the people to buy, and most of the supposedly illiterate Italian people would not be able to read the Bible even if they possessed one.¹⁷¹ In an article comparing Roman Catholics and Muslims, the *Missionary Advocate* stated that the average Muslim was allowed greater access to the Koran than the lay Catholic had to the Bible. According to “Dread of the Bible,” Muslims had never enacted laws disallowing the Koran to be read in the vernacular or by the common people. The Catholic Church meanwhile had forbidden the Bible to be read and “resorts to all other talismans and symbols save the Word of God.”¹⁷² The Methodist Church claimed that the anti-biblicism of the hierarchy had such a strong hold over the laity in the United States that ordinary Catholics refused free Bibles from the American Bible Society and that priests held Bible burnings.¹⁷³

The Methodists argued that one byproduct of Roman Catholicism’s supposedly unbiblical and unchristian character was that it undermined individual morality. According to the southern *Quarterly Review*, the Catholic hierarchy was crowned with a combination of every ungodly principle contained in the records of sin, then stood boldly forth to view.” The Roman Catholic Church was “a dealer in blood,” and a “trafficker in

¹⁷¹ “The Bible in Italy,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, November 4, 1846, 173.

¹⁷² “Dread of the Bible,” *Missionary Advocate* 2 (August, 1846): 39.

¹⁷³ Rev. Calvin Wolcott, “The Bible,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 29, 1846, 151; and M. Springer, “Popery in the Dark Ages and Popery in 1846,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, March 25, 1846, 129.

conscience,” in which sins (including murder) were “redeemable with silver and gold.”¹⁷⁴ Along with historically Protestant grievances against the system of indulgences Methodist publications singled out the Roman Catholic practice of confession for what they believed was its harmful impact on virtue.

The Catholic practice of confessing one’s sins to a priest represented for Methodists two of Catholicism’s most negative characteristics: its perceived tendency to undermine virtue, and the supposed tyranny the Catholic Church held over individuals and societies. The southern *Quarterly Review* labeled the “chair of the Confessional” as the Roman Catholic Church’s “dark throne of power.” It claimed that in the confessional, individual conscience “must be deposited in the sacred keeping of the holy incumbent.”¹⁷⁵ The Methodist Church claimed the power the Catholic Church held over individual conscience through the practice of confession resulted in “the tremendous power of the system for evil” on the priest hearing confession, the penitent, and through the penitent on society.¹⁷⁶ The standard of priestly celibacy, which according to the *Christian Advocate and Journal* even Italian Catholics acknowledged as unnatural and rarely observed by the clergy, made the confessional especially dangerous for women.¹⁷⁷ The depositing of conscience with the priest during confession not only caused virtue to “wither and die,” but also allowed the Catholic Church to commit robbery and influence elections. The practice of assigned penances allowed priests “to wring from the widow

¹⁷⁴ “Brief Review of the Claim of the Roman Catholic Church,” 531. The reference to sin being redeemable in gold was a reference to indulgences. At the bottom of p. 531 is a list of sins and their prices: murder-7.6 shillings, laying hands of a clergyman-10.6, robbing-12.

¹⁷⁵ “Brief Review of the Claim of the Roman Catholic Church,” 528.

¹⁷⁶ “Reformation the Source of American Liberty,” 8.

¹⁷⁷ Raffaele Ciocci, “Of Celibacy in Italy,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, May 26, 1847, 84.

and the house-maid their scanty but hard-earned gains.” In addition to robbing widows, Methodists claimed that through the confessional the Catholic Church gained “the power of the ballot-box,” and the “fettered franchise of the devotee.”¹⁷⁸ This allowed the Catholic Church to advance its political agenda in democratic countries.

Methodists blamed the tyranny they believed the Roman Catholic Church held over the minds of lay Catholics for the intellectual “backwardness” of Europe during the Middle Ages. Medieval Catholicism “sat as an incubus on the human mind,” and Europe was “deeply sunk into an abyss of intellectual stupor and degradation.”¹⁷⁹ Two articles in *The Methodist Quarterly Review* made what the Methodists believed was the inverse relationship between Catholicism and intellectual progress clear. They claimed that throughout its history, “the instinctive hatred of the Roman Church to the intellectual progress of mankind” remained one of Catholicism’s dominant characteristics.¹⁸⁰ Hatred of intellectual progress was even more central to Catholicism than to Islam or Paganism. While the ancient Roman and medieval Islamic empires showed that “Mohammedanism, heathenism, and even infidelity” were not completely inconsistent with national prosperity and happiness, “the constant attendants of Popery are ignorance, poverty, and degradation.”¹⁸¹ *The Methodist Quarterly Review* argued that the Roman Church’s stranglehold over the minds of Europeans was broken by the Reformation. While “Popery” had aligned itself against “the rising spirit of inquiry and thirst for knowledge”

¹⁷⁸ “Brief Review of the Claim of the Roman Catholic Church,” 528.

¹⁷⁹ M. Springer, “Popery in the Dark Ages and Popery in 1846,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, March 25, 1846, 129; and Dr. A. Clarke, “The Reformation,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, February 19, 1847, 145.

¹⁸⁰ “Policy of the Romish Church,” 80.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 82.

in late medieval Europe, the Reformation asserted the rights of free inquiry and speech.¹⁸² The Methodist Church asserted this resulted in the “resurrection of the mind of the world,” and produced “more men of gigantic girth and stature in every province of intellect, more discoveries of importance to the human race...than any period of time since the creation of the world.”¹⁸³ While the Reformation reportedly liberated much of Europe, Methodists believed the Catholic Church of the 1840s, much like its medieval counterpart, continued to exert its power in “staying the progress of intelligence and keeping in basest thralldom the human intellect.”¹⁸⁴ While the Methodist Church abhorred Catholicism’s perceived antagonism toward intellectual inquiry, it reserved some of its strongest language for Rome’s political agenda.

In the 1840s, the Methodist Church associated Roman Catholicism with tyranny and political oppression just as strongly as it associated Protestantism with liberty and the political system of republicanism. The Pope was the recipient of the numerous scathing polemics. In a 1846 Thanksgiving day sermon, the Methodist minister Stephen M. Vail told his congregation that while Christianity and the Bible were democratic, the Pope was “the most ghastly tyrant on the face of the earth.”¹⁸⁵ The *Christian Advocate and Journal* informed its readers that “Papacy is idolatry, and the Pope is Antichrist.”¹⁸⁶ The Roman Catholic Church was so strongly associated with the Bishop of Rome that it was more

¹⁸² “The Reformation the Source of American Liberty,” 16.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁸⁴ M. Springer, “Popery in the Dark Ages and Popery in 1846,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, March 25, 1846, 129.

¹⁸⁵ Vail, *Signs of the Times*, 8.

¹⁸⁶ Hobart Berrian, “The Idolatry of Rome, Testimony of a Great Cloud of Witnesses,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, November 11, 1846, 53.

often referred to as Popery or the Romish Church. “The Reformation the Source of American Liberty,” while utilizing Popery as a synonym for Catholicism throughout the article, stated that Popery was not simply a religious movement, but was “a vast politico-religious system, which claimed supremacy over all human governments.” This alliance between church and state (which was referred to as the two beasts of the book of Revelation) made “Popery the unchangeable foe to genuine liberty.”¹⁸⁷ The Pope was portrayed as commanding an army of priests and Jesuits in the “contest for the supremacy of the church over the state, that is to say, for the pope’s universal monarchy.”¹⁸⁸ The Jesuits were especially dangerous because they were “exclusively adapted to the purpose of building the Church of Rome on the ruins of the Protestant faith.”¹⁸⁹ Methodists believed that what they saw as Catholicism’s inherent animosity toward political freedom made it a threat to America’s republican system of government.

The Methodist press widely circulated their belief that Catholicism undermined America’s free institutions. An article in the New England-based *Zion’s Herald* warned its readers that the formidable forces of the Catholic Church were “deeply engaged in a crusade against the liberties and religion of the country.” In order to reinforce the dangers of Catholicism to its readers, *Zion’s Herald* referenced Marquis de Lafayette, who it reports to have said “American liberty can only be destroyed by the Popish clergy.”¹⁹⁰ Other Methodist periodicals reiterated the belief that Catholicism would undermine

¹⁸⁷ “The Reformation the Source of American Liberty,” 15. The reference to the union of church and state to the two beast in the book of Revelation is from: “Republican Tendency of the Bible,” 220.

¹⁸⁸ “Policy of the Romish Church,” 70.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁹⁰ S. W. Johnson, “Popery in the United States,” *Zion’s Herald*, August 5, 1846, 121.

American Protestantism and thus the nation's republican system of government. Some of the strongest language came from *The Methodist Quarterly Review*. An article on the policy of the Catholic Church asserted that Catholicism's success in America was due to using the confessional and its power over the laity to accomplish the "annihilation of the civil power," and promoting the "obliteration of our nationality" with mass immigration. It concluded that since the Catholic Church was incompatible with America's political compact, "no conscientious professor of, or believer in, Popery, can legally and consistently be, or remain, an American citizen."¹⁹¹ The Reverend Abiathar Osbon also highlighted the incompatibility between Catholicism and America's political system in a 1848 Thanksgiving day sermon. In a sermon discussing immigration, he explained one of the underlying themes of Methodist literature during the 1840s. While discussing the duties of immigrants to the American nation, he informed his congregation that while America had no state religion, "this is a Christian nation; at least, *Christianity is the religion of America*. Nay, Protestantism is the religion of America."¹⁹² Because of the inextricable link between the Bible and republicanism, and because the Reformation was a renewal of Biblical religion, Osbon claimed that "there can be, then, no right to propagate in this country a religion contrary to that under whose auspices the government was founded."¹⁹³ Since Osbon's call that Catholics be prohibited from propagating their religion was ultimately not heeded by the rest of the nation, the Methodist Church was

¹⁹¹ "Policy of the Romish Church," 92.

¹⁹² Abiathar M. Osbon, *The Duty of America to Her Immigrant Citizens*, 25.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 26.

left with the question of how to respond to the increasing number of Catholic immigrants in America.

The centrality of the missionary endeavor within the Methodist Church resulted in evangelization being the answer to safely assimilating Catholic immigrants. Missionary activity was the last major source of anti-Catholicism within the Methodist Church. Methodists clashed with the Catholic Church in both domestic and foreign missions. In the 1840s, the primary area of conflict was in America itself. While it is sometimes assumed that many of the German and Irish immigrants that came to America in the 1830s and 1840s were practicing Roman Catholics, sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark have challenged this view. They argue that religious adherence in Catholic countries was quite low in 19th century Europe and that most “Catholic” immigrants were only nominal Catholics at best. In order to make them Catholics, the American Catholic Church engaged in aggressive evangelization, utilizing many of the same practices that were used by Protestants during the Second Great Awakening.¹⁹⁴ Catholic missionary efforts and missionaries came into conflict with Methodist missionary activity among the same immigrant populations. The Methodist Church placed great importance on converting immigrants to “biblical Christianity,” specifically Methodism. It did this not only because they believed Catholic immigrants were in need of salvation, but because they also believed the spread of “Popery” represented a direct threat to America’s republican system of government and to American Protestantism itself.

¹⁹⁴ Finke and Stark, *Churching of America*, 122-128.

In the sphere of the Methodist Church's domestic missions, the primary targets were German immigrants.¹⁹⁵ During the 1840s, the Methodist periodicals alerted their readers to Catholic missionary activity within the United States and warned them of the harm they believed it would cause. *The Methodist Quarterly Review* declared that Catholic entities such as the Leopold Society and the Jesuits were determined to "undermine and supplant every Protestant mission on the face of the earth."¹⁹⁶ In order to confront the rising tide of German immigrants in the Midwest, the Methodist Church stepped up its efforts to convert them.

The Methodist Church's Missionary Society spearheaded the Church's domestic missions to German immigrants. In 1848, the Society's 29th annual report declared that the Methodists themselves were the "church God has evidently devolved a large amount of the responsibility to furnish" the German immigrants "with the bread of life."¹⁹⁷ While the vast numbers of German immigrants annually pouring into the United States could become a class of the nation's "most useful and reliable citizens,"¹⁹⁸ that many were "bound by a sworn allegiance to a foreign ecclesiastical despot" disqualified them from "becoming safe and trustful citizens of this republic."¹⁹⁹ The German people held the fate of the nation in the balance. This "mass of mind, fettered and trammled by ignorance

¹⁹⁵ While there were also a large number of Irish immigrants during the 1840s it was primarily German immigrants and to a lesser extent Native Americans who were the focus of the domestic missionary efforts of the Methodists.

¹⁹⁶ "The Reformation the Source of American Liberty," 6.

¹⁹⁷ Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of The Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Conference Office, 1848), 51.

¹⁹⁸ Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Thirty-First Annual Report of The Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Conference Office, 1850), 32.

¹⁹⁹ Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report*, 50.

and a superstitious veneration for the authority of a tyrannous ecclesiastical dynasty,” and devoted to “image worship and wafer gods,” could exercise their influence “either for weal or for woe” on the nation’s future.²⁰⁰ The Methodist Church argued that the only remedy to the errors and dangers of Catholicism was “true” Christianity since Protestantism was “the great conservator of rational liberty, and nothing else can be relied upon for its security and preservation.”²⁰¹ At the outbreak of the Mexican-American War, the Methodist Church could justifiably trumpet the success of its German missions. What had begun in 1835 as a single German Society had grown considerably in the eleven years since its establishment. By 1848, Methodist missionary efforts to German immigrants included “between sixty and seventy circuits and stations,” in which more than eighty missionaries proclaimed “the wonderful works of God” to the Germans in their native language.²⁰²

In addition to domestic evangelization, foreign missions represented another source of anti-Catholic sentiment in the Methodist Church. Many regions throughout the world were being evangelized by both Protestants and Catholics and the competition between them was regularly covered in Methodist periodicals. While the primary motivation for the domestic missions to America’s German immigrants was to promote their assimilation to the nation’s republican political system by converting them to “true” Christianity, foreign missions had a twofold purpose. The first was salvation. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Methodist Church believed that Christianity was

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 50.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 50.

²⁰² Ibid., 49.

necessary for individual salvation. The second goal was to spread prosperity and political freedom. Methodists believed that Christianity brought about extensive social benefits and thus in addition to offering individuals heaven in the next life it also offered a form of civic salvation in this life. Catholic missionary activity undermined both of these purposes of Methodism's foreign missions.

Conflict with Catholicism and Catholic missionaries was widely reported in Methodist periodicals and several themes emerged from this literature. One of the most common was a portrayal of Catholicism as hardly different from the paganism it sought to displace. In a history of the North American Indians the southern *Quarterly Review* claimed that Spanish missions in Mexico and South America spread a religion barely in advance of the paganism of the Aztecs and Incas.²⁰³ Methodists also compared Catholics to oriental paganism. The *Missionary Advocate* ran an article featuring a Hindu Brahmin who asserted that India's Hinduism and Catholicism were virtually the same, with Hinduism having counterparts to Mary worship, celibate priests, monks, and nuns, rosary beads, "cheap pardons," and the mass rescue of ancestors from purgatory.²⁰⁴

The Methodist Church used descriptions of the success of Roman Catholic missionary activity and commitment to solicit readers for greater commitment and financial support for its own missionary work. A missionary in South Africa described the Catholics as "invading us in great force," and alerted the readers of the *Missionary Advocate* that Catholic priests were "filling the towns and country with their tracts, and employing every other means that their zeal can dictate to make an impression and gain

²⁰³ "Aboriginal History of North America," 247; and Griswold, *Providence of God Recognized*, 6.

²⁰⁴ "Romanism and Hindooism Compared," *Missionary Advocate*, February 1847, 88.

converts.”²⁰⁵ In 1848, The Missionary Society of the Methodist Church detailed the inroads Catholics were making on the continent. They claimed through the *Missionary Advocate* that Catholicism was proliferating in Oregon, which in 1848 was still considered a foreign mission by the Methodist Church. The Catholic Church, they asserted, had made “6,000 converts among the Indians” and that Caucasians were also “eager to receive instruction in the same religion.” They claimed the Catholic Church had also set up a college, a school, several churches, and was constructing two convents.²⁰⁶

The third anti-Catholic theme was that of Catholic conversion narratives. Catholic converts to Methodism were a valuable prize for Methodist missionaries. The *Christian Advocate and Journal* published the account of a priest in Dijon, France, who left the Roman Catholic Church for Protestantism.²⁰⁷ The conversion of a French peasant was also recounted in the *Missionary Advocate*. He was confronted by a Protestant colporteur while on a pilgrimage and given a Bible.²⁰⁸ Upon its reception, he asked the colporteur to accompany him to his home and convert his daughter.²⁰⁹ While Methodists placed an emphasis on converting individual Roman Catholics, the ultimate hope was to convert Catholic nations, and the foremost of these was Italy.

Since Italy had the misfortune of being the seat of the Roman Catholic Church, it was portrayed as the epicenter of immorality and backwardness and was used as an important trope to push missionary activity. Italian crime rates were a popular addition to

²⁰⁵ “Popery in South Africa,” *Missionary Advocate*, February 1847, 88.

²⁰⁶ “Romanism in Oregon,” *Missionary Advocate*, November 1846, 64.

²⁰⁷ “Conversion of a Romish Priest at Dijon,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, March 25, 1846, 130.

²⁰⁸ A colporteur is a peddler of religious books or tracts.

²⁰⁹ “The Pilgrimage Given Up,” *Missionary Advocate* (May 1845): 8.

Methodist publications in the 1840s. The “Policy of the Romish Church” included an extended section of statistics on the Papal States. It found a correlation between the high number of bishops, priests, and monks residing in Italy and “fewer inhabitants, fewer schools, less commerce, greater public debt, more foundlings, [and] more crime.”²¹⁰ The *Missionary Advocate* also diffused this view of Italy under Roman Catholicism. In an article chronicling the “moral geography of the world,” the inaccessibility of the Bible had caused “decay, degradation, [and] suffering” in Italy along with depressed commerce, and agriculture.²¹¹ According to the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, the only hope for the great mass of the “ignorant, degraded, and vicious” Italian people was the adoption of biblical Protestant Christianity.²¹² The Methodist Church believed it knew the answer to Italy’s problems and was eager to “bless” the country with the gospel and use the Waldenses sect to evangelize and spread Bibles throughout the rest of the country.²¹³

Before the Methodist Church was able to concentrate its energy on the conversion of Italy, however, an opportunity opened for it to evangelize a Catholic nation much closer to home. Ultimately, the missionary endeavor, with its corresponding aim to spread salvation and social, economic, and political benefits that Methodists associated with Protestant Christianity, became the primary factor in the Methodist Church’s support of the Mexican-American War.

²¹⁰ “Policy of the Romish Church,” 85.

²¹¹ “Bible and No Bible,” *Missionary Advocate* 2 (July 1846): 26.

²¹² “Our Right to Bless Italy,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, May 6, 1846, 156.

²¹³ The Methodist Church’s esteem of the Waldenses is important to understand how it viewed Christian history. The Waldenses and other groups who were labeled as heretics by the Catholic Church during the middle ages provided the Methodist with two things. First and most important, they allowed the Methodists to say that while the Catholic Church ceased to be the true church after the 5th or 6th centuries, true Christianity continued to exist outside Catholicism. Second, it allowed the Methodist Church to charge the Roman Catholic Church with persecuting the true church of Christ.

CHAPTER 6: SUPPORTING THE WAR

When the Mexican-American War began in April of 1846, it quickly became a mainstay in Methodist publications. By July of 1846, the weekly newspapers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South—the *Christian Advocate and Journal* and the *Southern Christian Advocate*—began to devote extensive space in their papers to the Mexican-American War. Both papers regularly featured news of the war under the heading “General Intelligence” or “Intelligence from Mexico.”²¹⁴ In addition to reporting war news, Methodist papers also printed pieces related to the Mexican-American War such as letters from generals or Presidential addresses.²¹⁵ In addition to printing war-related “intelligence”—which was usually reprinted from other newspapers—Methodist newspapers and other publications also printed original pieces. These articles can be used to reconstruct the Methodist Church’s views on the Mexican-American War.

While Methodist views of the Mexican-American War did vary, they were mostly favorable and followed a line of reasoning set forth in the *Christian Advocate and Journal*. An article published in November 11, 1846, begins by affirming the war’s importance to the nation. In an editorial representing the views of the editors—and thus the Methodist hierarchy—the Mexican-American War was called “the principle political

²¹⁴ For examples see: “General Intelligence,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 31, 1846, 31; “General Intelligence,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, July 1, 1846, 187.

²¹⁵ See “President’s Message,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, December 18, 1846, 111, for Polk’s Presidential address.

event with considerate men of all parties.” The article presents war “in the category of national calamities,” and, in reference to the New Testament letter of St. James, claims that wars “come of man’s lust; his inordinate desire of power, distinction, and wealth.” While war was a national calamity and its cessation should be anxiously prayed for, God could make the “wrath of man to praise him” by making wars “subservient to his great and ultimate purposes of mercy to the family of man.” The article references the Opium War, fought between China and England from 1839-1842, as an example of this aspect of God’s providence. God used this “unjust war” to provide the gospel a doorway into the Chinese Empire to free the three hundred million souls who were “heretofore shut up in heathen darkness, and the grossest and most demoralizing superstition.”²¹⁶

Just as the missionary endeavor and the primal importance of sharing the gospel provided justification for the Opium War, which was fought in order to force China to allow an intoxicative drug that “was a thousand times more baneful in its effects than ardent spirits,” the Methodist Church argued that spreading the gospel formed the primary justification for the Mexican-American War.²¹⁷ While the Mexican-American War might be as “equally unjust and unjustifiable” as the Opium War, Methodists hoped that in allowing Mexico to be invaded “God [had] designs of mercy toward the people of Mexico and its dependencies.” God’s providence meant that the “ultimate result” of the war must be favorable from both “a religious, as well as civil point of view.” This was because the Mexican people were enthralled by a superstition that was only a “little less

²¹⁶ “General Intelligence: Domestic,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, November 11, 1846, 55.

²¹⁷ It should be remembered that the Methodist church in the 1840s was at the forefront of the temperance movement and so saying that opium was “a thousand times more baneful” than alcohol expressed extreme condemnation.

base, and besotting than the heathenism of China,” and were just as helpless as the Chinese to deliver themselves from it.

Methodists believed that Catholicism was the source of Mexico’s hopelessness. Despite gaining its independence from Spain in 1821 and establishing a republican constitution in 1824, Catholicism remained constant and the “Romish priesthood” continued to “sustain its supremacy.” Because the Catholic Church’s policy was to “exclude all light, all means of intelligence from the people,” and possessed the consciences of all South America “in its hands” for three hundred years, the Mexican people were “degraded in respect to knowledge and civilization”—even very far below “the savages conquered by the Spaniards.” Because of this extreme degradation of the Mexican people, Methodists hoped that through the Mexican-American War the “blessings of civil and religious liberty may be diffused over the provinces conquered by our armies.”²¹⁸ Subsequent articles in the *Christian Advocate and Journal* continued to express support for the war. In January of 1847, an article detailing prospects for the New Year devoted a sizable portion to America’s conflict with Mexico. It represented a change in which a quick peace was no longer considered a possibility. Victory was now even more important for the “political and religious amelioration” of the depredation caused “during their long subjection of three hundred years to the Papacy.” In this way, God might use war to bring about moral, religious, and political regenerations, which are impossible through other means.²¹⁹ A third article published in February made even fewer qualifications regarding the benefits of the Mexican-American War. It stated:

²¹⁸ “General Intelligence: Domestic,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, November 11, 1846, 55.

²¹⁹ “The New Year,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, January 6, 1847, 2.

Great good will come of this war to Mexico. I say nothing of the causes which led to it; but I do say, that end as it may, the consequences to Mexico must be most beneficial. Her institutions may be subverted and changed—for worse they cannot be. Her religion may be uprooted. So much the better. It is but an idolatrous superstition. In fact, let come what may come, be the war long or short, bloody or bloodless, a spirit of Yankeeisia will be infused into Mexico, that will make her valleys to bloom and blossom as the rose.²²⁰

This view of the Mexican-American War—that it was probably unjust, certainly unfortunate, but that God would ensure that the end result would be beneficial because it would overthrow the Catholic establishment to allow true Christianity and republicanism to blossom—proliferated within the Methodist Church.

While Methodists in New England voiced the most opposition to the Mexican-American War, they could not completely condemn it, and the language of *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal* echoed that of the *Christian Advocate and Journal*.²²¹ An article published in May of 1846 asserted that God “would overrule the crisis for his own glory and the good of the continent,” and that God would make the “wrath of man” praise him.²²² New England Methodists also found it hard to balance their commitment to peace with their equally strong commitments to missions and to anti-Catholicism. An article published in June of 1847 proclaimed that the church was the “world’s only hope.”²²³

²²⁰ W. R. “Palo Alto and Resaca,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 17, 1847, 25. While the author believes that the war will ultimately be beneficial he also cautions young Methodists against fighting in the war.

²²¹ For example of opposition in *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal* see: May 20, 1846; July 8, 1846; August 19, 1846; December 23, 1846; January 13, 1847; June 2, 1847

²²² “War with Mexico,” *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, May 20, 1846, 78.

²²³ “The Church the World’s Only Hope,” *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, June 2, 1847, 87. The “church” reference is to the Protestant church.

Other articles denounced the spread of Popery and referred to the relation between Catholicism and Protestantism as the “great conflict.”²²⁴

Like other publications, the *Herald* was not above comparing Catholic and Protestant regions—such as Mexico and Massachusetts. Mexico was settled one hundred years before Massachusetts by the “noblest spirits of Spain” and also possessed a rich soil and “every metal used by man” while Massachusetts had poor pilgrims, sterile soil, and “no single article for exportation but ice and rock.” Despite this, God had blessed Massachusetts with “productive industry, wide-spread diffusion of knowledge, public institutions of every kind, general happiness, and continually increasing prosperity” so that “in everything which makes a people great, there is not in the world, and there never was in the world, such a commonwealth as Massachusetts.”²²⁵ This article repeated the common theme that Protestant Christianity imbued societies with temporal as well as spiritual blessings.

In addition to being potentially the most anti-Catholic Methodist weekly paper, the editors of *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal* were also expressed commitment to evangelization, including that of Mexico. In March of 1847, the *Herald* described the diffusion of tracts among the soldiers and noted the gratitude with which tracts in Spanish were received by the Mexican people.²²⁶ As the Mexican-American War treaty was being discussed in Congress, New England Methodists championed sending missionaries to Mexico. The author of a March 1848 article wrote, “nothing would suit me better than to

²²⁴ “Spread of Popery,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, June 2, 1847, 87; and J. W. True, “The Great Conflict,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, June 23, 1847, Front page.

²²⁵ “Massachusetts and Mexico,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, December 23, 1846, 201.

²²⁶ “Tracks and Volumes in Mexico,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, March 10, 1847, 38.

invade Mexico, with my pockets full of tracts, my arms full of Bibles, and my heart full of love.”²²⁷ Methodists in other regions of the United States shared the belief that the war would aid evangelization efforts.

In New York, the pastor Stephen Vail analyzed the significance of the Mexican-American war in n 1846 Thanksgiving day sermon. He follows the official stance of the Methodist Church as expressed in the *Christian Advocate and Journal*. Vail referred to the war as deplorable, but claimed it was being prosecuted with the “enlightened, humane and liberal policy of our government.” Like the *Advocate*, he saw the overthrow of the Catholic Church in Mexico as the primary benefit of the war. The war would break the power of the “wicked priesthood” who were more concerned about getting the “property of the nation into their hands” than they were about saving the souls of the Mexican people. Another benefit would result from the acquisition of Mexican territory by the United States. Vail claimed that the probable addition of California and Northern Mexico would “bring the great body of the Mexican People under the influence and training of American Institutions,” and our superiority in the sciences, arts, education, religion, morality, and general prosperity.²²⁸ In addition to Methodists in New England and New York, southern Methodists also believed the ultimate outcome of the Mexican-American War would be positive.

While Southern Methodists did acknowledge the negative consequences of war, they saw it (and war in general) in a much more favorable light than their northern counterparts. In a series of articles called “The Relations of Christianity to War,” the

²²⁷ A Friend of Peace, “War on Christian Principles,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, March 22, 1848, Front Page.

²²⁸ Vail, *Signs of the Times*, 9.

Southern Christian Advocate argued that God often used war for “the advancement of Society and the ultimate benefit of the world.” In addition to arguing that God often used war to advance his will, the article claimed that Christianity increases the benefits of war and that it is the duty of Christian men to fight if the cause of their country is just.²²⁹

Southern Methodists addressed the Mexican-American War more directly in a *Quarterly Review* article published in July of 1848. The article encompassed an exposition of the twelfth chapter of the Book of Revelation. Revelation 12 describes a vision of a pregnant woman being pursued by a dragon with seven horns. After the woman gives birth, she is carried by an eagle into the wilderness, a safe place prepared for her by God. Despite disowning “all claim to prophetic spirit,” the *Quarterly Review* advanced a bold interpretation of this passage. According to the article “Some Remarks on the Twelfth Chapter of Revelation,” the woman in the passage was Protestant Christianity, the seven horned dragon was the Roman Catholic Church, the wilderness the American continent, and the “symbolical eagle seems plainly to refer to the United States.”²³⁰ The meaning of the eagle, however, was a point of contention in the article since two nations on the American continent used the eagle as a national symbol—Mexico and the United States. The *Quarterly Review* resolved this issue by claiming that the eagle referred to the contemporary United States and to Mexico in the future. At the date of publication, the eagle referred solely to the United States since the “woman,” or Protestant Christianity, was not at that time found in Mexico where “Romanism [was] the

²²⁹ Rev. Thomas Smith, “The Relations of Christianity to War,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, January 8, 1847, 121.

²³⁰ “Some Remarks on the Twelfth Chapter of Revelation,” *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* 2, (July 1848): 472-3.

prevalent system of idolatry.” The southern Methodist Church argued that the Mexican-American War was in the process of changing this. It believed that “the present war of the two republics will end in a toleration of protestantism throughout the land of the Aztecs.” The southern Methodist Church speculated that the spread of Protestant Christianity into what was then Mexico would take place in two stages. The first was that “one third of the Mexican domain will probably be transferred by treaty to the government of the American union, and receive the benefit of our laws and religion.” According to the *Quarterly Review*, the second stage would result from the spread of Protestantism in whatever remained of Mexico after the war. The southern Methodist Church reported that “already evangelical colporteurs have scattered the good seed of eternal life in the prolific soil of Mexico,” and hoped the bright day might soon dawn “upon Mexico’s benighted plains, when a nation shall throw off the shackles of ecclesiastical bondage” and be “ushered into a new and spiritual existence.”²³¹ Like their northern counterparts, southern Methodists ultimately supported the Mexican-American War in order to spread Protestant Christianity.

²³¹ “Some Remarks on the Twelfth Chapter of Revelation,” 474-5.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the Methodist Church's support of the Mexican-American War arose from its commitment to the missionary endeavor and spreading the gospel. By the 1840s, however, Methodism's self-imposed mission to evangelize the nations had changed in such a way that Methodist support of America's war with Mexico cannot be understood without taking into account two other developments within the Methodist Church. Of first importance was the adoption of republicanism by the Methodist Church. By the 1840s, the Methodist church had in effect "baptized" republicanism as the best form of human government and had inextricably linked it to Protestant Christianity. Protestant (or biblical) Christianity was now not only necessary for salvation but was also a necessary component for political freedom, virtue, and economic prosperity. In effect, Christianity was the key to happiness in both this life and the next. The adoption of republicanism was joined by the second important factor—anti-Catholicism. Methodists portrayed Catholicism as hardly better than paganism and saw it as especially detrimental to human beings. The Catholic Church was portrayed as unbiblical and thus unable to produce the virtue needed to sustain republican governments. In addition, they claimed that Catholicism was inherently tyrannical and that its commitment to the union of church and state made it an especially powerful and dangerous enemy of biblical Christianity and political freedom. The Methodist Church came to see war as the only possible way to extend both the temporal and eternal benefits of Protestantism to the Mexican people.

The ideological origins of the Methodist Church's support of the Mexican-American War point the way toward several exciting avenues of study. One is a reinterpretation of Anti-Catholicism in America during the three decades prior to the Civil War. Unlike the assertions of some recent historical works, Anti-Catholicism within the Methodist Church cannot be reduced to an "imaginative category of discourse" through which Methodists expressed "the tensions and limitations of mainstream Protestant culture."²³² Rather than being a product of the perceived limitations of Protestantism, Methodist anti-Catholicism resulted from what they considered a contingent or causal relationships between belief systems, political arrangements, and salvation. Methodists argued that Protestant Christianity gave rise to both republicanism and individual salvation while Catholicism facilitated neither. The perceived positive effects of Protestant Christianity spurred on Methodist's missionary activity. The relationship between Protestant missions and both American and transatlantic anti-Catholicism have not been adequately studied.

The relationship between missions and war represents another fruitful area of further research. Ultimately, the American Methodist Church supported the United States' offensive with Mexico because of its commitment to spreading Protestant Christianity and its associated political, economic, and eschatological benefits. Believing that Catholicism inevitably resulted in tyranny and political oppression, and that it would undermine attempts to evangelize Mexico peacefully, the Methodist Church concluded that an offensive war was the only means of opening up the Mexican nation to Protestant Christianity. The Mexican-American War is far from the only example of religious or

²³² Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, xvii.

other ideological commitments forming the basis of the aggressive use of force.²³³ A recent example was Libya's revolutionary movement, which recently toppled Gadhafi's secular regime. According to the Associated Press, Libya's transitional leader, Mustafa Abdul-Jalil, has pledged to institute Islamic Sharia law as the basic source of future legislation. There are few more important areas of study than the role a commitment to spreading an ideological belief system plays in warfare.

A last area for further study encompasses the role shared cultural beliefs plays in successful communities. Whether right or wrong, American Methodists believed that the continued existence and success of their nation's republican political system depended on Protestant Christianity. The adoption of republicanism and the American tradition of religious disestablishment, while representing a major change in Christian history, also embodied important continuities. Prior to the American Revolution, the relationship between Christianity and government was that of an established group religion. This relationship can be traced in the history of Christian Europe and most often involved a group adopting the religion of its political leadership. This process began with the conversion of Constantine to Christianity and the subsequent Christianization of the Roman Empire.²³⁴ After the fall of Rome, missionaries in Western Europe continued to pursue the Christianization of Europe by targeting kings and tribal leaders for conversion with the expectation that they would be followed into the church by other group members. The targeting of group leadership for conversion continued throughout the

²³³ Mary Beth Sheridan, "Libya declares liberation with an Islamic tone," *WashingtonPost.com*, October 23, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/libya-declares-liberation-with-an-islamic-tone/2011/10/23/gIQA4VsbAM_story.html (accessed October 23, 2011).

²³⁴ W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 473-543.

medieval and early modern periods.²³⁵ The Reformation made the link between the religion of leaders and group members more explicit in treaties such as the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which guaranteed princes the right to determine the religion within their domains.

The significance of the American Revolution was that it severed the connection between political leadership and group belief. What was not severed, however, was the perceived connection between religion and government/social order. Thus, the constitutional disestablishment of religion in conjunction with the freedom of religious expression necessitated a reevaluation of the importance of religion in the new United States of America. Whereas after the Reformation there were multiple forms of Christianity but primarily one form of government (monarchy), now the relationship between multiple Christianities had to be reconstructed in reference to differing political systems. American Protestants, including the Methodists, accomplished this by arguing for a contingent relationship between Protestant Christianity and republicanism.

By the time of the Mexican-American War, both the northern and southern Methodist Episcopal Churches joined other Protestants in affirming the main tenets of American republican ideology. These included both a commitment to liberty and to the importance of virtue. Methodists adopted the principle of liberty by their affirmation of democracy and religious freedom. Adopting the separation of church and state did not entail the acceptance of the belief that religion played no role in American government; instead the place of religion in republican political systems was tied to virtue. A virtuous populous was deemed

²³⁵ The importance of kings and tribal leaders in the conversion of Europe is detailed in: Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 21-30; Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

necessary for the existence of republican government. Like other American Protestants, the Methodists insisted that it was only religion—and specifically Protestant Christianity—that could create virtue, and thus Christianity was necessary if the American Republic was to survive. The Methodists went even further and asserted that it was Protestantism that had ultimately created political liberty by arguing that the American Revolution was the result of the Protestant Reformation.²³⁶ Ultimately, they came to believe that Protestant Christianity would be the source of political freedom in Mexico also, and this led the Methodist Church to support the Mexican-American War.

Ultimately, the Methodist Church's commitment to spread Protestant Christianity, even if it entailed supporting what many felt was an unjust war, calls for a reassessment of the role that ideological commitments play in human behavior. Within the history profession, the result of an increased understanding of the relationship between ideas and human behavior must inevitably lead to reevaluation of the prominence given to race, class, and gender. While all three of these are important, they provide a profoundly inadequate basis for the majority of human actions. Historians must create room for ideas such as equality, liberty, and religious concepts like evangelization and the Bible as the standard of truth to account for the formation of a vast array of legal systems and social institutions.

The Methodist Church's decision to support the Mexican-American War is a good example of the power that Christian doctrine has exercised in motivating human behavior. While the American Methodists had just separated in 1844 over the issue of slavery, outside of New England neither abolitionism nor the extension of slavery played a perceptible role in whether or not Methodists supported the war. Instead the primary factor was evangelization. Evangelization was also the reason why the Methodists looked favorably on the opening of

²³⁶ "The Reformation the Source of American Liberty," *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 6 (January, 1846).

China to foreign trade. Even though they remained steadfastly in favor of temperance and saw opium use as a great evil, they believed that spreading Christianity took precedence over eliminating opium use. For Methodists during the Mexican-American War, evangelization trumped slavery.

The relationship between Christianity and republicanism (or any other ideology) is also important to understand.²³⁷ Once Methodists accepted republicanism as being in accordance with Christianity, they now not only saw themselves as commanded to promote the gospel as the means of eternal life, but also believed that they were spreading the world's most perfect political system as well. Like the relationship between the Bible and slavery in antebellum America, it must be remembered that Christianity took precedence over republicanism, just as the Bible as the standard of truth determined how both pro-slavery southerners and northern abolitionists defended their positions.²³⁸ It is possible that the connection of the Christian missionary endeavor to slavery and abolition contributed as much to the Civil War as it did to the Mexican-American War as both abolitionists and pro-slavery southerners combined their positions on slavery with Christianity's commitment to evangelization.

²³⁷ The relationship between Christianity and other ideologies is becoming increasingly important as Christianity expands globally.

²³⁸ Methodists saw Protestant Christianity as the source of republicanism or political freedom, and Christians in both the north and the south went to great lengths to demonstrate how their position on slavery was consistent with either literal or spiritual interpretations of the Bible. A helpful discussion of the role of the Bible in the debates over slavery and abolition is in: Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

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