WILLIAM TAYLOR IN CHILE:
A METHODIST MISSIONARY CASE STUDY (1877-1903)

PETER FEINMAN

William Taylor (1821-1902) is not a name well-known today but in his prime he ranked with Henry Stanley and just below David Livingstone as a swashbuckling heroic missionary traveling to the four corners of the world. His missionary stints and evangelical campaigns took him to Africa, Australia, California, Ceylon, England, India, South Africa, and South America (1875-1884). He has been called “American Methodism’s most traveled overseas missionary in the second half of the nineteenth century,” one who more than any other individual expanded the geographical frontiers of Methodism during this time, and who is “believed to have travelled the most miles and accomplished more in his time than anyone else in the nineteenth century.” As Asbury once had roamed the continental wilderness expanding the Methodist frontier, now Taylor pushed the geographical limits of American Methodism into areas far from America’s shores. Just as America was expanding economically, militarily, and diplomatically into the global arena, so too was Methodism led by its own warrior of light who proceeded outside the box.

Methodist Perception of South America

At first glance, South America offered many opportunities for missionary activity both by the Methodists and other Protestant denominations. An excerpt from “The Church at Home and Abroad” in the Methodist Review of Missions described the situation as follows: “South America has been called, from a missionary point of view, the ‘neglected continent.’” Yet despite its size, population, proximity, and potential, South America did not receive the attention that “lands afar off” have received. In an area of 7,000,000 square miles and with a population of 34,000,000, the total number of Protestant missionaries on the continent was a paltry 325 with communicants numbering a scarce 15,000: “In no other country where Protestant missions have been

established is there such a dearth of missionary effort as in South America, in proportion to the population.” A review of the National Geographic-style missionary reports in the Gospel in All the Lands clearly demonstrates that other areas had far more popular appeal. South America paled in significance to the activities in Africa, India, and the Far East.\(^3\)

In South America, there were certain obstacles to be overcome in any endeavor to convert the masses to evangelical Protestantism. Foremost among them was the Roman Catholic Church. Thomas Wood, a missionary in Peru who became the Presiding Elder of both the Peru and Chili districts, asked and answered the question “Why Do We Send Missionaries of Latin America?” The cause of evangelization was a sacred calling to an individual confronted by the ills and evils which enveloped the land in darkness. How could an American resist the call to free the people from tyranny? “The worst feature of the condition of Latin America is the prevalence of a corrupt priestcraft that holds the masses in bondage, ferments corruption and moral weakness to make its domination more secure.” And what about the “growing power and arrogance and mischief-making and unscrupulousness of Romanism in the United States”?\(^4\)

When Wood addressed the Congress of Missions in Chicago in 1893 (three times), he expressed great optimism about South America as a mission field. He focused on the European immigrants who were changing the demographics and society and on various states desire to imitate America including the copying of the Constitution. He anticipated that Catholic immigrants would be easier to evangelize than they would have been had they remained home in Europe. This was a second chance for the Latin race that previously had rejected the Gospel and for the “regenerated Latin race” and the Anglo-Saxon to be united in the making of future history. Once again the hand of God in the history of humanity could be seen: “It seems like a divine inspiration preparing those peoples to receive from us the one thing needful, and then through it enter into our inheritance of moral blessings.” Wood concluded by hailing this enterprise of uplifting all humankind as “the ultimate form of the Americo-European missionary movement, and the crowning mission of Americo-European humanity.”\(^5\)

Of course, there were great obstacles to overcome in attaining such a goal. Jesuitism and a “priesthood as a class [that] is like the old Jewish priesthood” were leading examples. In the present context, “South America stands to-day at the bottom of the moral scale of nominal Christendom” while “Protestant North America is at top.” So it was in South America where the great showdown between Romanism and the Gospel would occur. Wood sought the

---


manifest destiny which would accrue to the two Americas working together, a
destiny greater than either one could achieve alone. And it was the Methodist
Church which was leading the way in the fulfillment of this vision. Its efforts
surpassed those of the Presbyterians or Baptists. Wood concluded his three
addresses with: “As I stand in this first World’s Congress of Missions held in
Brightest America, I foresee a grander World’s Congress of Missions that will
be held in Darkest America, to celebrate the glorious turning of all America
from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” Truly to be
a Methodist missionary in South America was to be a warrior of light leading
South America to join with the North in achieving a manifest destiny!

These thoughts were reiterated in other Methodist publications in the
coming years. The only good that derived from this sorry condition was
the proof of the superiority of the Protestant North American way of life. In
1895, Methodist Review carried an excerpt from the Missionary Herald with
a similar denunciation of the 400 year history of Roman Catholicism in South
America in contrast to Protestant experience in North America.

Perceptions about the people to be saved for Christ was another obsta-
cle hindering missionary success. In a 1907 publication entitled Religious
Liberty in South America, John Heyl Vincent, a pivotal figure in Methodist,
Protestant, and Middle American education in the second half of the 19th cen-
tury and a Methodist bishop who visited South America in 1896, clearly delin-
eated the distinctions to be made between a Roman Catholic and an American
Protestant.

It is not an easy matter for a genuine America, one who believes in individual freedom
and responsibility and in the possibility of the immediate approach of the individual to
God through Jesus Christ—to believe at the same time in the Roman Catholic system,
which seems to us to place barriers and custom-houses and toll gates between the soul
and the Savior he is in quest of.

He went on to claim that “[b]etween Romanism and Protestantism there can
be no compromise.” Vincent expressed grave concern over the possibility of
Roman Catholic rule. Thus one must always remember the cultural percep-
tions of the missionaries in their close encounters with an alien people.

William Taylor’s Experience in Chile

Missionaries recruited and sent to Chile by William Taylor represented
the first major Methodist effort to make a difference in that country. Unfortunately, that effort became entangled within the Methodist hierarchy
presenting a challenge to the evangelistic efforts. The story of Taylor’s con-
cern for South America began in 1849 when he stopped in Valparaiso, Chile,

---

6 Wood, “America as a Mission Field,” 53, 54, 55; Wood, “Beginnings of the Light in Darkest
America,” The Gospel in all Lands 20 (1894): 245.
7 “South America,” 547; “The Methodist Review of Missions: South America,” Methodist Review
77, Fifth Series 11 (1895): 96.
8 John Heyl Vincent, “Introduction,” in Religious Liberty in South America: with special reference
to recent legislation in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia, Jiong Lü, (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham,
1907), 4, 6, 8.
on his way to his appointment to the California mission. It wasn’t until 1877, after having served in India, that Taylor went to Callao, Peru, and began establishing self-supporting missions in Chile. Taylor approached the Methodist mission board about establishing such missions along the west coast of South America where Methodists were not operating at present. An impasse was reached since the mission board sought more control over the self-supporting missions than Taylor was willing to relinquish and the board would not ordain missionaries it could not control. As a result, Taylor felt himself free to try on his own.9

Taylor refrained from writing a “history in detail” about his South American missions claiming the volume would be too large. Instead he restricted himself to some brief notices about various missions. On October 17, 1877, Taylor and his brother had set sail from New York. In his own words, as he gazed upon the “our ancient Inca cousins,” he saw the “properties, proportions, and features of the Adamic family.” These people “had but partially recovered from a depth of barbarous idolatry that the Incas had never received” but which they had now after having been conquered by a nation of “mixed or partial Christianity.” With the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons there was a chance to make things right. As Taylor sailed along the coast of Peru and Chile, he hit upon the goal of establishing “a good English school” in every English-speaking community. Taylor regarded this goal as his calling, he was sent by God to establish such schools in this land. Part of the reason why he hit upon this calling was the repeated request for schools and not churches by the “better class” of people in the land plus the English and German immigrants already present in the land.10

Taylor perceived Latin America not as simply a Catholic monolith, but a land which included immigrants from Protestant countries who might be willing to hear the word of the Lord. When he returned to America in 1878, he spread the good news and his plan “fired the imagination of many younger people” leading to missionaries going to South America that same year. In a recruitment letter to one individual he had met at a camp meeting, Taylor wrote: “The Lord wants you to go to South America in my self-supporting missions, and preach on faith to the Germans in the south of Chili, your own country people.” Von Barchwitz-Krauser, the recipient of the letter, heeded the call, writing: “and I believe that God had been preparing me for the Taylors’ self-supporting mission all the time, and I knew God wanted me to go.” Unlike official Methodist missionaries, these Taylor missionaries were not assigned to

9 Jean Baptiste August Kessler, Jr., A Study of the Older Protestant Missions and Churches in Peru and Chile: With Special reference to the Problems of Division, Nationalism and Native Ministry (Goes, NV: Oosterbaan and Le Contre, 1967), 96.
a conference in America; officially they were outside the pale of the church.\footnote{Kessler, 98; O. Von Barchwitz-Krauser, \textit{Six Years with Bishop Taylor in South America} (Boston: McDonald and Gill, 1885), 82, 83; Goodsil F. Arms, \textit{History of the William Taylor Self-Supporting Missions in South America} (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1921), 188. Arms had responded to a plea for help at the 1888 Vermont Conference and arrived in 1889. His book is based on his own experiences there.}

Taylor undertook this effort with better connections to secular authorities than with religious ones. President Rutherford B. Hayes knew and admired Taylor. He provided Taylor with a personal letter of recommendation to be used with the American minister in Chile. That meeting led to a subsequent meeting with the President and minister of education. Their support helped launch the Self Supporting Missions in that country. Taylor founded his mission in Chile in 1878 at Valparaiso and Coquimbo. The Pacific War in 1879 proved a challenge that Taylor had neither anticipated nor provided for. The South American boundaries now changed. He had visited Iquique in Peru and Antofagasta in Bolivia both of which later would become Chilean stations. For now, Antofagasta was abandoned and it was up to Ira H. La Fetra, one of the pioneer missionaries to hold the effort together. In 1880, he became president at the first conference of the missionaries and he remained in that post until 1906, when he retired. His voice is a key one in tracing the history of the Methodist missionary movement in Chile.\footnote{In 1879, Taylor published \textit{Pauline Methods of Missionary Work} (Philadelphia: National Publishing Association for the Promotion of Holiness, 1879), which established the theological basis for his self-supporting missionaries: it was what Paul had done. Paul, 225-226; Taylor, \textit{Pauline Methods of Missionary Work}, 51, 87-92, 127-135; Kessler, 98-99.}

In 1882, Taylor was asked to relinquish control over his South America missions which were deemed out of order. In response, Taylor “decided” to locate to South India, an administrative more than a physical change. Location refers to being stationed a single spot in contrast to being an itinerant. Taylor’s change in status was favorably received. In January, 1884, the \textit{Christian Advocate} praised Taylor’s election as a delegate from South India to the upcoming May General Conference even though he was in Chile. The publication was practically in awe of his missionary efforts that spanned the globe.\footnote{“The Most Remarkable Election in Methodism,” \textit{Christian Advocate} 59.2 (January 10, 1884): 17; Bundy, \textit{Part II}, 9; Taylor, \textit{Story of My Life}, 684, 687.}

Taylor’s own views of his location were less complementary. In recounting the events leading up to the 1884 General Conference, Taylor wrote: “I would not have my dear fellows in South America forced to a humiliation that I would not voluntarily submit to on their account.” The humiliation was location. Following his decision to be located, he recounted in his autobiography, “I was off again for Peru and Chili by the first steamer, to share the humiliation of a location with my itinerant brethren in those countries.” Prior to the General Conference, Taylor “spent about ten months as preacher in charge of Coquimbo Circuit.” He built a two-story school when the missionary family there returned to America due to illness. Taylor returned to America “so when the General Conference roll was called, in May, 1884, I answered, ‘Here.’” His personal sojourn in South America was over but the legacy of what he had
wrought in Chile lived on with the missionaries who remained there.  

**The William Taylor Missionary Experience in Chile**

The attitudes of missionaries in Chile often mirrored those expressed towards the continent as a whole. In 1883, a missionary wrote from Chile:

> The lazy, licentious clergy, by their costly establishments, extortionate fees for marriages, burials, baptism, masses, indulgences, et., consume the substance of the people, and what is worse, impose such a system of ignorance and superstition, that their civil and social advancement is almost an impossibility. It is hardly possible to describe the ignorance into which this large lower class has fallen . . . .

For a Protestant, it was like stepping back in time to the world Martin Luther had denounced. Two years later in 1885, one of the Taylor missionaries who already had been in Chile for several years wrote:

> The people of Chili, religiously, are in a sad condition. Three hundred years ago the Spaniards brought with them the Roman priests—the worst calamity that can befall [sic] any nation. The people have been priest-ridden ever since . . . . These facts make the work a hard one—more difficult than the work among the heathen of other lands.

> And yet, Chili is one of the most liberal countries in South America . . . .

This Taylor missionary despaired for the future of the country while he highlighted the need for people such as himself: “Next to nothing has been done by missionary societies to avoid this tide of infidelity which bade fair to sweep a nation out of existence into hell.” Saving a nation from hell surely was a worthy goal for a heroic warrior of light and this missionary praised Taylor for sending 45 additional troops to the battlefront on the coast of South America.  

Technically, the Methodist churches and missionaries in the Taylor Missions still remained outside the formal Methodist Church structure. This division caused tension within the Methodist community. The disagreement reached confrontational status at the General Conference in 1892. At that time, the General Conference did authorize the establishment of a South America Conference which embraced all the missionary activity of the Church in the region. The Chile district which had been admitted into the Cincinnati Conference in 1890 subsequently was transferred on July 1, 1893, to the new South America Conference. The General Missionary Committee in November, 1893, adopted a resolution whereby the Transit and Building Fund Society of Self-Supporting Missions in Chili would be transferred to the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church free from debt and “that Chili be set apart exclusively for self-supporting mission work, and that the mission work in Chili be carried on and conducted on the plan to self-support as heretofore” accompanied by urgent appeals for funds. 

---

The 1893 Missionary Report celebrated the July creation of the South American Annual Conference: “By this organization Methodism declares anew her consciousness of a providential call and mission coextensive with this Western Hemisphere, as with the worldwide parish.” The unity of the Taylor Building and Transit Fund and the Methodist Episcopal Church was hailed and the new members from the Cincinnati Conference were welcomed into the conference. The list of the over 200 foreign missionaries of the Methodist Episcopal Church now included the Chilean missionaries, a listing previous denied those who served under Taylor. At last it seemed on paper at least as if the two entities were able to work as one in the common goal of saving the infidels from darkness.\footnote{I. H. La Fetra, “Chili District,” Missionary Society Annual Reports (1894): 258-261, quotation from 258; “The General Missionary Committee,” The Gospel in all Lands 18 (1893): 57.}

The union was not an easy one. it was not until 1896 that the transfer of the Society from the control of Taylor to the Church was completed. Apparently this transfer involved a full-scale institutional war: “Secretaries, ministerial representatives, and laymen participated in this battle royal . . . . Lances were shivered, swords gleamed, broad-axes crashed, and armor rang again.” The field of combat thus romantically described by a writer for The Christian Advocate was on the floor of the General Missionary Committee at Central Church, Detroit, on the afternoon of November 16, 1896. The unromantic, even technical, cause of the conflict was the unsettled status of the Chile mission as a missionary arm of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The issues joined were such that victory by one of these jousting parties could have resulted in severing the Mission from the missionary enterprise of the denomination. The more formal records of the Missionary Committee reported that the “debate was carried on vigorously” for extended time before the motion to accept the Transit and Building Fund Society offer was approved by 26 to 14. These vivid accounts are not the language or situation one would expect in the noble endeavor of saving souls. The vocabulary here is the language of a brutal though non-bloody conflict that would seem perfectly reasonable in the halls of Congress or in a boardroom battle for succession. Instead it was occurring among missionaries.\footnote{J. Tremoyne Copplestone, History of Methodist Missions, Vol. IV: Twentieth-Century Perspectives (The Methodist Episcopal Church, 1896-1939) (New York: The Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church), 589. “The General Missionary Committee,” The Gospel in all Lands 22 (1896): 572.}

**“Warriors of Light”:**\footnote{Peter Feinman, “Itinerant Circuit-riding Minister: Warrior of Light in a Wilderness of Chaos,” Methodist History 45:1. Horace Bushnell said “a kind of light artillery that God had organized, to pursue and overtake fugitives that flee into the wilderness from his presence” (45).} The Chile Experience

It was within this context that individual missionaries struggled to succeed. A brief review of the experiences of three individuals, Juan Bautista Canut, a Catholic convert to Methodism, Wilbur Finley Albright, an Iowan minister on the frontlines in Chile, and Ira H. La Fetra, the previously mentioned ad-
ministrator of the Methodist effort in Chile reveal the challenges which the
Methodists faced and ultimately were unable to overcome. There is an addi-
tional connection among these individuals. Canut and Albright were stationed
together in 1893 in Coquimbo with the latter focusing on the English-speakers
and the former on the Spanish; Albright would be stationed in Serena (see be-
low) where Canut had been as well. Albright’s wife, Zephine (Foxwell) Viola
Albright nursed Canut’s child when he and her husband were stationed to-
gether. This means that the experiences of the Canut family prior to the arrival
of the Albrights became part of the Albright experience in Chile as well.20

Juan Bautista Canut was a Spanish-born Jesuit who arrived in Chile in
1870. The following year he withdrew from the Jesuit order and applied to
work with the Presbyterians claiming he was disgusted with Jesuit intrigues
and was not convinced of the validity of its teachings. Canut later claimed to
have been converted due to the preaching of Taylor but since Taylor hadn’t
arrived until February, 1878, and Canut became a Presbyterian in 1877, that
seems unlikely. Taylor did refer to him as “the Martin Luther of Chili.” As
might be expected, Presbyterian Canut’s preaching was bitter towards the
Roman Catholic Church. When he failed as a Presbyterian missionary he was
suspended in 1881 and reverted to Catholicism in 1884. After becoming disil-
usioned again, he came in contact with Methodists who were converted by
Taylor and missionaries associated with Taylor. In February, 1890, Canut was
assigned to Coquimbo and Serena as a Methodist preacher.21

Only a few months later, the situation became life threatening. The April
29, 1890, El Coquimbo, the newspaper in Serena, reported the following:

On last Friday night the disturbances (of the Protestant service) took alarming propor-
tions, unworthy of a respectable people and disgraceful to our city. After the services,
Dr. Canut, accompanied by his wife and little daughter of tender years, started quietly
to return to their home, situated a few squares distant. As they crossed the open square,
a mob of not less than a hundred people assaulted him, crying out in the most indecent
words and grossest insults and throwing stones which endangered the life of his wife
and child. Dr. Canut was under the necessity of taking refuge in the house of a friend
who lives in that place, in order to escape the fury of the mob. But the popular tumult
increased like a boisterous wave, and the cries of “death” together with the grossest
insults still greeted the ears of the evangelical pastor. He decided to face the mob,
and went again into the street to prevent trouble to the owner of the house. The police
then came to his assistance and escorted him home, but not without showers of stones
falling on them.

Taylor mentioned the incident as well in his own autobiography.22

Despite this event, Canut proved effective as a Methodist missionary espe-
cially in the rural areas. He was successful in converting others and even trans-
forming some of them into preachers and pastors in their own right. As this
Spanish Methodist spoke directly to the people he was perceived to be more

20 Charles W. Drees, “Methodist Episcopal South America Conference,” in The Gospel in all
Lands 19 (1893): 503; Leona Running, draft copy in author’s possession, 1073.
22 Quoted in Arms, 142-143; Taylor, Story of My Life, 680-681; see also The Chile Mission of the
Methodist Episcopal Church (1893): 43.
of a threat and hence more subject to hostility as the open attack on him in 1890 clearly revealed. He bore the brunt of the propaganda war waged against Protestants by the priests of the religion he had forsaken twice before returning to preach to their very parishioners. Canut died in 1896. Part of his legacy was the derogatory term “canuto” used to demean the gringo missionaries.\(^{23}\)

Wilbur Finley Albright, perhaps named after the great Methodist missionary James Finley, grew up in a Methodist environment. He was born in Iowa to a Methodist family with a father who became a lay preacher, Sunday School teacher, and donator of land for a church. He attended Methodist Upper Iowa University, married a Methodist woman from a nearby farm, and became a William Taylor missionary in 1890. He probably became aware of William Taylor either at an annual conference of the Upper Iowa Conference when Taylor spoke there in 1888 or earlier at Methodist Garrett Bible Institute.\(^{24}\)

In Chile, this Spanish-speaking minister became pastor of a Spanish-speaking church in the interior earthquake-prone city of Serena where Canut had been stationed. The Serena district would be divided into three sections: Iquique, Concepcion, and Santiago. The Iquique District covered the hot desert in the north of Chile and revolved around two main cities: Inquique and Antofagasta. Iquique, with an English-speaking colony still had been part of Peru in 1878, became part of Chile after the war, and was a town of considerable importance. It provided an opportunity for Taylor to develop his vision of how the Taylor Missionaries would work. Antofagasta had to be abandoned after the 1879 war by Peru and Bolivia against Chile. It was a center of nitrate production which coincidentally had attracted Cornish miners. As a result, the target audience of the missionaries included many English-speakers and the Albright’s oldest-born son temporarily attended an English school.\(^{25}\)

Albright gained recognition for proficiency within the mission. Serena was the site of bitter persecution, perhaps more so than of any other town in the Chilean mission. Catholic churches, nuns, and frailes were more common there than in any other city in Chile. The school which had opened in 1890 failed by 1894 and the “persecution which fell upon those in Serena who received the gospel of Christ was extended to their children who attended the

---


schools.” The Chile Mission report from 1895 in Santiago provided this description of the situation: “In this fanatical city, the work which has been under the pastorate of Rev. W. F. Albright, has continued to grow.” La Fetra’s report in the Missionary Society Annual Report also included this assessment.  

Albright sought to establish a home for Methodism amidst these trying circumstances. Renting property for a church and parsonage proved difficult, so Albright attempted to purchase a lot 65 by 107 feet. There in Serena, he built a substantial church intended to withstand the earthquakes. In his November, 1895, plea for funds addressed and sent “To the Protestants and Foreigners in Chile,” he wrote: “You believe in Protestant teaching. They have made you—they have made England, Germany, and the United States what they are. What the Bible and Protestantism have done for thee they will do for Chile.”

The Reformation had succeeded before; it can succeed again with your help.

Perhaps nowhere more so in the Sabbath observance were the contrasts between the Protestant religion and the Roman Catholic ways of the Church in Chile more stark. A 1898 article “The Sabbath in Chili” depicted a Sabbath that was anathema to Methodists. It was a day of recreation and diversions including theater, circuses, horse races, football, cricket, and balls (dancing) with a thriving business in liquor sales. The Methodists naturally expected Germans, French, and Italians to embrace such festivities since it was the way Sabbath was celebrated in their Roman homelands. The shock to them was to see the English “fall into the same godless practice” and then even introduce bicycle tournaments into the celebration of the day. As Albright observed the Catholic processions of Chile, he preached in his November, 1895, sermon: “Is this Christian America, or pagan Africa? Is this image a Hindu Juggernaut, an African devil, or Chines god? Alas! no. Painful enough would be such scenes there, but this image is called in Spanish El Nino Dios (the God-child) . . . . Such is Roman Catholicism all over South and Central America and Mexico. Such it is under the sanction of the hierarchy.”

The tensions were remembered by Albright’s son, William Foxwell Albright (1891-1971), the famed biblical archaeologist. The Chilean textbook described the Protestant invasion of the land as follows:

The word Protestantism signifies the rebellion of haughty men against Jesus Christ, the founder of the Holy Catholic Church. It is nothing more than a human religion, earthly and carnal, and can be extended only by carnal, earthly, and human means. It is but a means of introducing into Spanish America irreligion, libertinism, incredulity, communism and socialism. If it should prevail, the continent would become a theatre of bloody, cruel discord, and the blood of her sons would redden town and field. All the institutions of charity and benevolence would disappear. The beautiful buildings which are the pride of our country would be reduced to a heap of rubbish. The most horrible misfortunes would befall our happy soil. In short, it would cause the complete ruin of our nation and the loss of her nationality.

---

26 Arms, 122, 148; Running, draft copy, 17; I. H. La Fetra, Missionary Society Annual Report (1895) 37.
27 Arms, 179; Running, draft copy, 17-18.
Society can expect nothing of there [sic] evangelicals but anarchy, dissolution and despotism. They have employed such tortures against the Catholics that they have surpassed the persecutions of the pagan emperors. The fire and sword, the dungeon, the rack and the gallows have been their weapons, and they have spared neither age nor sex.

The school textbook went on to condemn Protestants in increasingly vitriolic rhetoric denouncing everything about them from their falsified Bibles to the renegade converts who are vicious, detestable, and vile. The religious wars had not abated in Chile. Young Albright’s vivid recollections about the terrors in the streets during his childhood in Chile, about the constant threat of rocks being thrown at him, of being called a “canuto” were part of a much larger war of words which was being waged.²⁹

Overseeing this Methodist effort was Ira. H. La Fetra. Despite the travails previously noted, the missionaries he led could be optimistic about their work. As one Taylor missionary recalled with pride in 1885:

But, thanks be to God! we have a remnant left of those who were among the first sent out by William Taylor, who have passed through deep waters; ... and tried in the fiery furnace of affliction, and polished by the spirit of burning and faith, they stand ready, on the banks of the great Pacific, to work and to die for the land that God has given them to go up and possess.

Yet despite this seeming need, one could state in 1888 that the Taylor missionaries had accomplished little. Presbyterian missionary Robert Trumbull noted: “the Taylor mission as a Gospel agency in Chile is not worth a rap. It has rather brought missions in discredit. It does nothing for the preaching the Gospel in Spanish and in English has only one congregation (Coquimbo) that shows life and permanence.” So aside from some English services at Coquimbo, the Taylor missionaries had little to show for their efforts so far and those Spanish-language services would end in 1892.³⁰

A review of the missionary reports reveals a stark picture of incremental progress at best. In some years, Chile wasn’t even included in the overall reports on South America (1889, 1891, 1892, and 1896). The situation was bleak. The experience was depicted as a waste of men and time which destroyed the health of many. A Chilean Civil War in 1891, which also involved anti-American riots, further complicated the missionary effort. The clash between the clericals and the liberals within Chile inevitably encompassed the Methodists who naturally favored the liberals and sometimes educated their young. The situation had become so dire that the continuity of the mission was in doubt; it survived thanks to the divine hand. “The [Roman] Church which has hung its mill-stones about the neck of this struggling people entered most zealously into the opposition, and hoped by the overthrow of the established government to raise itself to power on the ruins. But under divine chastise-

²⁹ “Progress,” 45-46; Albright, 158; Running and Freedman, 1.
³⁰ Von Barchwitz-Krauser, 300-301; quoted in Kessler, 100; see also Report Bishop Taylor’s Self-Supporting Missions, 8.
William Taylor in Chile

ment it wrought more effectually its own ruin.”

This divinely guided moment provided an opportunity. In an aptly titled article “Providential Opening for Missions in Chili,” La Fetra stated:

This is the most highly civilized and progressive people of Spanish origin on the globe, and is destined to exert a powerful and almost controlling influence on the destiny of other nations of like race.

For more than three hundred years Chili has been under the blighting influence and dominion of the Romish Church, which, unchecked by Protestant piety, has degenerated into paganism and Mariolatry scarcely conceivable of a Church bearing the sacred name of Jesus Christ.

In his mission notes for 1892, La Fetra reported on the peace, prosperity, and growth since the previous year. Dr. Canut was singled out for praise for having undertaken a four month tour “full of thrilling incidents.” La Fetra promised to document these events in a subsequent letter but if he did, it was not published in *The Gospel in All Lands.*

Like many of his missionaries, La Fetra remained optimistic, a worthy character trait for one engaged in the business of saving souls. Yes, there were “[p]olitical disturbances and financial depression . . . upon the land,” but that only meant that “[h]ungry souls, sick with the husks of superstition and error offered them by the old Church, are crying out for the true bread of life.”

La Fetra observed an “awakening throughout the length of the nation” which he deemed “marvelous.” He opined that the excitement from the political contest had spilled over into the religious arena. Bible purchases and attendance at Methodist services were up. For La Fetra, it was still a rising sun of the spread of the good news to those who had been in the shadows for lo these many centuries.

Besides the problems La Fetra faced in Chile, he also had to worry about inadequate resources and support from home. The Chile missionaries noted that the annual appropriations were six times greater to missionary work in Argentina than in Chile. Immediately following the formal transfer of the Building and Transit Fund Committee to the Missionary Society, a call was sent for both missionaries and money. The response was meager leading to a second call:

[T]his is not a false alarm, but a genuine and earnest call for help on behalf of a most important work. The question now is, Does the Church desire that the Missionary Society shall undertake the management of self-supporting missions? The Chili Mission is a test case . . . . We urge you in Christ’s name to send what you can, and send NOW.

---


\subsection*{End of an Era: Methodists in Chile}

The 1896 Methodist Missionary report included no narrative on the situation in Chile. That year, the Chile mission under the direction of La Fetra launched an aggressive evangelical thrust into the Roman Catholic country. These actions were launched from ten centers scattered along the upper half of the country. As it turns out, compared to the Presbyterians the Methodists actually were doing fairly well. Canut, now a Methodist, was assigned to Iquique in 1895, and proved more effective out reaching out to the natives. The Presbyterians “made a cold impression on the Chileans” which provided the Methodists with an opportunity they took advantage of.\footnote{Copplestone, 589; Kessler, 54-58, 63.}

The 1897 Methodist Missionary Report for the new Western South America Conference, John Heyl Vincent presiding, noted the existence of a strong, vibrant community in Antofagasta which built a church practically unaided. The church was known for having “a vitality that, even in its earlier years, projected its evangelical influence far beyond the port city itself.” The primary challenge to these Methodist missionaries was the political and religious opposition of the Roman Catholic Church which vigorously defended its turf as would be expected.\footnote{“Western South America,” \textit{Missionary Report of the Methodist Episcopal Church} (1897): 272; Copplestone, 595, 600.}

Also in 1897, missionary Willis C. Hoover of Iquique wrote about a critical issue that challenged the Methodist ability to succeed in a Roman Catholic land. The issue was marriage, specifically the lack of legality of Protestant marriages and the quest for religious liberty to permit civil marriages. That struggle occurred not just in Chile but in Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador, and would involve Presidents Cleveland, McKinley, and Roosevelt. Hoover’s letter included a translation of a circular posted on the doors of the church which stated that married people not married by the Church “shall be erased from every society and religious association,” shall have their children “counted as illegitimate,” and shall be deemed “public sinners” among other penalties, actions which had serious repercussions in that world.\footnote{Lü, 32, 143-152, 194-195, 197-198, 204-205. Apparently the Protestant push for civil marriages in Roman Catholic lands begin in 1894 with the Chicago Methodist Ministers’ Meeting (Lü, 212-213). The topic was a major point of friction as evidenced by the lengthy article by Thomas Wood including various government documents relating to the efforts of his daughter to be married there [“The Marriages of Protestants in Peru, \textit{The Gospel in all Lands} 22 (1896): 327-335].}

The Methodist Missionary Report of 1898 noted some unusual events in Serena with Pastor W. F. Albright. An ex-priest who supposedly had converted and was studying with Albright turned out to be a troublemaker who soon returned to his old church thus forcing the pastor to remedy the disruption. On
the bright side, the new church was dedicated before a crowd of 800 including 150 by special train from Coquimbo. The event was deemed particularly important because “Serena is a very fanatical city.” The Spanish report of the first Conferencia Misioneral Occidental de Sud-America added that that the Catholic bishops had opposed the construction of the Methodist Church but that the Chilean minister of religion had approved it anyway.39

The overall situation as portrayed by Methodist commentators was comparable to an apocalyptic showdown with the forces of darkness. In an article on “The Religious Conditions of Chili,” by Robert Olave, of Concepcion, one reads about the “vicious and foreign to Christian[-]love” teachings of the political party of the Church of Rome whose “ministers actually commit the greatest crimes in order to accomplish their ends.” They were “pupils in the school of Machiavellian cunning,” yet there was still hope. “To oppose all these evils the Methodist Episcopal Church rises to-day in Chili . . . engaged in a struggle whose grand outcome will raise the republic from the murky pit in which Romanism holds it to-day.” These words illustrate the attitude and feelings of this warrior of light.40

La Fetra realized that the battle was being fought on two levels. There were those who actually converted to the Methodist religion, which numbered only about 1000, a small percentage of the total population of the country. But he recognized that the true path to victory “must be to gain the dominating moral and religious influence in the nation.” The agencies for success would be education, literature, and evangelization. So while the battle in the trenches proceeded soul by soul, the higher level confrontation was to liberate the education system from the control of the backward elements in society and entrust it to the more liberal and open-minded elite. Thus the schools in the various communities were a key tool in reaching out to this target audience.41

One’s understanding of the situation on the ground was affected by the reports one read. In 1899, the Methodist Missionary Report, Bishop W. X. Ninde, presiding, had no report for Chile. By contrast, in the local South America mission report (written in Spanish) by Willis C. Hoover on the Iquique district, Albright’s problems in Serena were noted again with reference to the “fanaticism” of the city, a seemingly standard epithet for it. In the report to the Conference of Foreign Mission Boards, the note on Chile expressed the difficulty in collecting from the government for the damages to property destroyed by mobs or revolutions.42

The 1900 Methodist Missionary Report did have a report from Chile. Over the years, various people, especially La Fetra, had had articles in *The Gospel in All Lands* about the situation in Chile as a whole or a particular district. In Bishop Ninde’s report on “Our Missions in South America” in 1900, the bulk of his section on Chile reported dissatisfaction with the present arrangement between the former Building and Transit Society and the Missionary Society. The complaint registered with him was that evangelistic work had become secondary to education and that “such a relation is demeaning to the Christian manhood of those who are conducting it.” Ninde called for a change in these arrangements which would “remove occasions of confusion and friction and give to our evangelistic work a large increase of virility and self-respect”, worthy goals for any “warrior of light.”

Overall, Ninde expressed optimism for the prospects of Methodism. Yes, the “Romanism represented in the official Church is of the most degraded type.” Yes, the “ecclesiastics of all orders . . . practice vices which destroy or distend their influence as teachers and guides.” Yes, “public and private morals are lamentably low.” Still productive change was possible. The change agents were the Methodist missionaries. They were introducing a “new conception of Christianity” which was more important than the enrollments in the church. They “are undermining the faith of multitudes in the pretensions of a mercenary priesthood whose object is to fleece the flocks—not to feed them.” His comments were suggestive of the dialogue which may have occurred in the Bishop’s meeting with the missionaries about the situation on the ground.

The 1901 Missionary Report had no report from Chile. In a letter to her mother, Zephine Foxwell Albright, wife of Wilbur Albright, recounted the political killings which had taken place including of one member of the congregation. During the funeral procession, the police “Fortunately or Providentially” caught a thief. She was looking forward to going home and never being separated again from her mother in Iowa.

The 1902 Methodist Missionary report contained a “State of the Union” farewell address by the Bishop McCabe, supervising bishop of the Western South America Conference which expressed the battlefield vision of these warriors of light at work for the “kingdom of heaven.” Schools were heralded for the teaching of science and literature, for the lifting of Chile “to a loftier place of Christian civilization than it ever occupied before . . . the light is spreading. Science and Romanism are in deadly hostility” which is why the priests opposed the teaching of the masses. The Roman Catholic religion in South America had not been one based on the Bible itself as one expected given the long-standing contrast between the Protestant and Catholic religions in Europe. It wasn’t read and there were no schools for its study. Speer claimed that, “It has been the priests in South America who burned the Bibles, the priest who instigated the mobs, the priests who have taught that Protestants

---

44 Ninde, 18.
45 Running, personal archive.
are teachers of unholy doctrines and exiles from the Kingdom of Heaven.” So in setting up schools and teaching people to read the Bible which they distributed, Protestant missionaries were reliving the fight which had consumed Europe and England during the Reformation.\(^\text{46}\)

In the Iquique District report this year for Antofagasta, Albright stated: “What a noble band of workers we have in the Antofagasta church! They collected more than three thousand one hundred pesos for all purposes, including the pastor’s salary.”\(^\text{47}\) The church, the Sunday Schools, the class meetings were all praised. As the letter from his wife in 1901 to her mother suggests, there was a darker side to the situation than these noble words from the annual reports suggest. In this regard, the experience of the Albrights serves as a microcosm for the experience of the Taylor missionaries in Chile. The missionary work took a toll on the health of Albright and the children needed better educational opportunities than were available in Chile. There was a concern for his aged parents back home and the combination of typhoid and pneumonia also seem to have contributed to the urgency to leave. Therefore, Wilbur submitted a transfer request back to America. The Conferencia Misionera report of 1903 includes the granting of permission for the Albrights to return home. The Methodist Missionary Report of the same year shows the Albrights in America. The battle had not ended but their participation on the front lines in Chile had. The twelve year journey of the Albright family to Chile was over in 1903. As it turns out, for all practical effect, so was the Methodist missionary venture.\(^\text{48}\)

**Conclusion: Setting Sun on Missed Opportunities**

From the Methodist perspective, the situation in South America had not changed much since the 1894 diatribe against Romanism even though the Church had doubled in size once again between 1897 and 1903. The 1908 General Conference employed similar language referring to South America as “a continent of incalculable possibilities” attesting both the lack of progress and the enticing vision from which hope sprung eternal. At no point were the Methodists blind to the obstacles to be overcome in this Romanist land of “great illiteracy, superstition, immorality, and paganism.” Methodists even questioned whether or not South America truly was a Christian land. The Romanism of the European Middle Ages which Protestants already despised had degenerated even further in centuries of isolation in South America. “Romanism has had its opportunity in South America and has failed.” The already idolatrous had become image-worshippers. These comments reflected


\(^{48}\) United Methodist Church Archives, “Wilbur F. Albright,” Mission Biographical Reference Files; Running and Freedman, 11.
the continuation of the decade old perceptions about Chile.\footnote{Kessler, 105-107; Thomas B. Neely, “South America,” Journal of the General Conference (1908): 819.}

The 1908 General Conference hailed South America as an American area of influence dating back to the Monroe Doctrine and spoke of a religious counterpart, the “special religious duty of the Christian people of the United States of America to the great continent to the south of us . . . . The evangelization of South America [by] the evangelical Christians of the United States; and, of all the churches in the United States, it is the special duty of the Methodist Episcopal Church . . . . The battle between Romanism and Protestantism has not ended.” These words rang true from the Methodist perspective, but by this time the battle had been lost.\footnote{Neely, 820.}

Methodism in Chile, which had made little headway, was soon to be eclipsed by Pentecostalism as the former became more rational and ordered while the latter provided the emotional vibrancy and spiritual release that once had defined the Methodist religion. One could even make the case that the same scenario was playing out at the same time back in the States. The once-frontier religion had become a staid middle class Middle America religion of dignity and decorum far removed from the wilderness camp meetings that once had defined it. The golden age of heroic itinerants James Finley and Peter Cartwright was over. Missionary work was about building churches now. The religion had changed and even though Taylor achieved positions of stature within the organization, he was unrestrained in expressing himself and functioned on the fringes of the denomination’s authority centers. Taylor’s struggle to operate independently of the mainstream church was reflection of the fact there was no room for the free spirits who once defined the religion in America.\footnote{Hempton; Walter J. Hollenweger, “Methodism’s Past in Pentecostalism’s Present: A Case Study of a Cultural Clash in Chile,” Methodist History 20 (1982):169-182.}

When Pope Benedict XVI visited South America in the beginning of the twenty-first century, Pentecostalism—not Methodism—was the Protestant denomination on his radar. As Agenor Brighenti, a Brazilian theologian said: “Perhaps he wants to reassert a Catholic identity through the devotion to Mary that is typically Catholic, this is a way of responding to the advance of Pentecostalism.” The battlefield remained the same a century later but the Methodists no longer competed in that arena. Whatever opportunity the Methodist Episcopal Church once had had been squandered in internecine institutional combat in a Church better skilled in converting unchurched Protestants than it was in reaching out to Catholics in the cities of America in either continent.\footnote{Quoted in Larry Rohter, “Pope and Bishops Set Thorny Agenda for Talks in Brazil,” New York Times (May 13, 2007): 4.}