The historic antipathy between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism which had emerged so decisively in the 16th century remained a lively force in 19th century America. While Roman Catholics held that theirs was the authentic faith and the true church, Protestants claimed that Roman Catholicism had forsaken Christ and His way for doctrines and practices which were dangerously unscriptural and misleading.

Nineteenth century American Methodists entered into the Protestant quarrel with Roman Catholicism. In sermons, addresses, books, pamphlets and periodicals they expressed their arguments against Catholicism and voiced their fears about its growth in America.

Likewise, Roman Catholic voices registered their impressions and opinions about Methodism, often in acrimonious fashion. Following the Civil War one Roman Catholic periodical, the Tablet noted:

The real enemies to us among Protestant sects in this country are the Methodists, admirably organized for aggression, and who in their appeals to the animal nature and sensible devotion, acquire no little power over sensitive, the ignorant, and the superstitious. They, however, are laying the foundation of their own ruin. They are becoming wealthy, are building fine churches, founding colleges and theological seminaries, and they are taking their place among the respectable sects of the country. A strong party among them, almost a majority, are struggling to introduce lay representation in their Conferences, and they are not unlikely to succeed. These things will gradually work their ruin. They are ruined the moment they lose sight of the poor, the ignorant, and the neglected, and pride themselves on having large, wealthy, and fashionable congregations. The poor are worth more than the rich.¹

The following represents a limited survey of some of the views which American Methodists and Roman Catholics entertained regarding each other in the 19th century. It has been drawn from the periodical and pamphlet literature.

Methodist Statements About Roman Catholicism

Methodist assessments of Roman Catholicism may be divided into three main categories. First, there were attempts by Methodists to respond to Roman Catholic criticisms of Protestantism. Second, Methodists felt that they must expose and refute the erroneous doctrines and practices

¹"The Tablet," quoted in The Christian Advocate, XLIV (March 11, 1869), 76.
of the Roman Catholic Church. Third, since Catholicism was perceived to be a threat to America and "the American way," various authors issued a warning to their Methodist brothers and sisters that their religious and civil freedom was in jeopardy. Each of these categories will be briefly examined.

When Roman Catholic leaders and writers issued statements which were critical of Protestantism and its institutions Methodists were among those who felt compelled to respond. The duty to reply became especially urgent as the Catholic population of America grew and its church's voice became more influential. Robert T. Handy has observed,

Protestants had been able to look with benevolent condescension on the Roman Catholics when the latter were in a small minority which in time might be 'liberated.' But when the number of Catholics began to grow so swiftly, chiefly because of the hordes of illiterate foreigners who crowded noisily into the cities—the reactions were sharp and in some cases violent. Protestants who wrangled among themselves over denominational differences could readily make common cause against the old threat of 'popery.'

One illustration of Methodist apologetic occurred early in 1825 when the *Methodist Magazine* devoted space in its issue to a letter issued by Pope Leo XII in which he complained about the Protestant Bible society which was "audaciously dispersing itself through the whole world." He was particularly wary of the society's intention to translate the scriptures into the vernacular language. In the course of his argument the Pope even associated the Bible society with those views which "make an open profession of pure deism, nay, of mere naturalism." His plea with regard to these societies was that the leaders of the church make every effort to remove their "flocks" from the "deadly and destructive pastures" of these organizations.

The Methodist respondent expressed regret that the Pope desired to impede the spread "of divine truth by means of Bible and Missionary Societies" and deplored the,

display of that ecclesiastical finesse which is the offspring of the cunningness of the serpent, by associating the promoters of Bible societies . . . with deists and naturalists, with a view, no doubt, to render them the more odious in the estimation of all good Catholic Christians. This guise, however, is too thin not to be seen through, and must excite a smile even in the breasts of those Catholic bishops and priests, who know the true state of the case.

---

A sermon published in 1884 by J. Richards Boyle provides a second illustration of Methodist apologetic. It was a rejoinder to an address given to a large audience in Philadelphia by "a widely known Roman Catholic priest, of high rank." A synopsis of the priest's sermon had been printed in The Philadelphia Press, a local newspaper. According to the newspaper account the priest vehemently criticized the disunity evident among the Protestant "sects." He claimed that,

these churches have no charity, the one for the other, and in them the teaching of how to gain the one great end, salvation, is given in as many different ways as there are buildings. The extreme hatred manifested for each other by these churches is the bitterest that is known in history. How deplorable it is that there should be these divisions.  

The varying ways of faith taught by the churches, the priest contended, cannot be Christ's Gospel which affirms one faith, one hope, one salvation, and, of course, one church. The unity intended by God had been destroyed. "Uneducated, illiterate men expound the Scriptures, each on his own theory. Separate religious bodies are formed. They have their government and their management and each regards itself as the true Christian Church." Finally, the priest suggested three steps to overcome the confusion and harm created by this Protestant discord: prayer to God, fidelity to the dictates of one's conscience, and "the study of those truths of history which prove the authority of the Church, in the expressed outward form of the Pope as the vicegerent of God."

Boyle, a Methodist Episcopal preacher, was driven to answer the allegations which he had read in the newspaper account. He denied that hatred and bitterness were typical among the Protestant churches. Rather, the churches demonstrated partnership in the American Bible Society, the YMCA, the Evangelical Alliance, the Week of Prayer, and the common plan for Sunday school lessons. They held a common doctrinal ground and sang the same hymns. Perhaps he overstated the case when he said that these features,

demonstrate the existence of undisturbed peace throughout Protestantism. They proclaim not a 'bitterness' unparalleled in history, but an unexampled fellowship and unity. They are the very realization of the idea of Christian brotherhood. They exhibit the Protestant commonwealth as a well atuned harp, whose tense and separate strings of denominational life, chord in perfect harmony, and swept by the hand of God, give forth richest strains of peace and love! There is no discordant element in the life of Protestantism. Ecclesiastical quietude and fellowship are universal within its borders. 

8 Boyle, 3.
9 Boyle, 4.
10 Boyle, 4.
11 Boyle, 8-9.
Boyle then set forth a brisk counterattack against the views expressed in the priest’s reported address. He stated that Roman Catholic doctrine could not be supported by scripture. Its polity was derived not from Christ and the apostles, but from the legal system of the Roman empire. Catholicism had created a “wholly secularized ecclesiasticism” dominated by superstition, guilty of unjust persecution, and scornful of biblical truth.  

On the other hand, the Methodist cleric cited the achievements of Protestantism. It had dethroned the “hierarchical despotism” of Rome. It had reasserted the importance and authority of the scriptures and had created a lively biblical scholarship. Protestantism had,

transformed the Christian ministry from an illiterate and immoral priesthood into a pure and able exponent of righteousness. . . . Protestantism has produced the noblest manhood, and purest womanhood, the happiest homes, and the most virtuous communities in history, and is to-day the patron of the world’s best life. . . . The modern Christian world is its trophy, and gladly recognizes it as the conservator of its blessings, and heathen nations are calling from all lands for its kindly offices. It is the necessary and appointed agency for the world’s evangelism, and cannot be spared at the solicitation of an effete medievalism.  

Furthermore, Protestantism had produced an outstanding system of benevolent organizations, institutions of higher education, and a missionary movement which had “revolutionized the religious life of mankind.”  

Boyle concluded by saying,

. . . Protestantism is the embodiment of the spirit of cattolicity. . . . Catholicity is the communion of human heart in the love of Jesus Christ! Catholicity is the fellowship of salvation! Catholicity is the keeping of the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace! Catholicity is the bond of divine life binding soul to soul in the love of God and in the work of Christ! Catholicity is Christian liberty and enfranchisement for redeemed men in the kingdom of God. And Protestantism is Catholicity! With absolute freedom of conscience and method, it is the guarantee of peace and good-will to all men, and the realization of the New Testament idea of the Christian commonwealth!  

What can the dying Roman church offer to Protestantism? What has she to give us? Can she strengthen our brotherhood or enlarge our privileges? Can she contribute to Christian fraternity, or to the cause of humanity? Do we want to exchange the leadership of the Holy Ghost for the vicegerency of the Roman pope? No, forever, no. Roman has no gift that the living church of God wants, or would accept. She is bankrupt, and outlived in influence. Her hands are empty and her heart is cold. Protestantism is far beyond and above her. She is medieval and not modern, and must be content to remain broken sceptre beside her, and the epitaph of her condemnation above her, in the sepulchre in which four centuries ago she was laid away forever.  

12 Boyle, 11-14.  
13 Boyle, 18.  
14 Boyle, 18-19.  
15 Boyle, 20.
A third example of Methodist replies to Roman Catholic criticism is found in a pamphlet by John Lee, a Methodist Episcopal cleric, published in 1885. It was a response to a sermon preached by Bishop John Ireland before the Third Plenary Council of American Roman Catholic leaders which met in Baltimore in 1884. Ireland's sermon was titled, "The Catholic Church Equally Opposed to Anarchy and to Despotism, the Guardian of Society, the Defender of True Liberty." In it Ireland considered the relationship between Protestantism and liberty. He said,

Did Protestantism advance liberty? It did nothing for liberty. It introduced into the world no one new principle that favored liberty. Its claim to private judgment in religion was religious anarchy; if it was anything in civil and political matters, it was political anarchy, the reaction from which always leads to despotism. 16

It was Lee's contention that Protestantism had not deprived the human race of true liberty, but rather had restored the liberty which the Catholic Church had abridged. The Reformation had restored the freedom for people to read the scriptures. It encouraged a priesthood of all believers. Protestantism advocated the right of all to form and propagate their own religious views. It placed no bar upon freedom of the press; it had no Index. Protestantism was the friend of intellectual liberty. Lee claimed that if Galileo had lived in a Protestant nation he would never have been imprisoned for teaching his views about the working of the universe. 17

Lee's conclusion was unqualified praise for the accomplishments of Protestantism as the true champion of human liberty. He asserted,

Protestantism has changed the entire current of human history; rolled back the night of moral gloom that enveloped Europe in its awful shadows; gave to Protestant and Romanist alike the blessings of civil freedom; lifted up nations that welcomed its reforming work, and left in abjectness and wretchedness those that refused it; generated a hatred of ignorance and a love for knowledge; bequeathed to men an unfettered Bible and freedom of conscience; bestowed to Anglo-Saxon and Teuton an energy and aggressiveness never possessed before; created that type of character that became weary and chafed beneath the restraints of absolute monarchy and Popish "despotism"; and last, yet not least, made our glorious republic a blessed reality. 18

In addition to Methodist replies to Roman Catholic criticisms of Protestantism there were unprovoked attempts to expose and refute those doctrines and practices of Catholicism which were considered erroneous. These effects generally included ideas and took forms characteristic of 19th-century Protestant assaults on Catholicism.

Typical was the essay by William Fisk, the prominent Methodist Episcopal leader, written on a visit to Rome in 1836 and published in 1837

17 Lee, 9-25.
18 Lee, 28-29.
in which he levelled four charges against the Catholic religion. First, he alleged, "Romanism has a strong and direct tendency to idolatry." While he was reluctant to claim that all Roman Catholics were necessarily guilty of idolatry, it was difficult for them to avoid it. The veneration of relics, prayers to saints and angels, the worship of Mary, reverence offered to images and pictures, the homage paid to the Pope as though he were a god—all of these were evidences of the "glaring idolatry" which prevailed throughout their church. Worst of all was their acceptance of the infallibility of the church which sanctioned these pagan practices.

Second, Fisk stated that "Romanism is incompatible with civil and religious freedom." Although Catholics were advocates of religious toleration in nations like the United States where they were a minority, they were at base proponents of a church which sought to undermine human and social freedom. Their ecclesiastical hierarchy with the papacy at its head was proof that "Romanism" was not concerned for the liberty of the individual or society. Withholding the Bible from the common people was another sign that the church did not want them "to judge for themselves in matters of faith and practice." And the power to enforce the church's will over personal freedom was largely exercised through the system of auricular confession in which individuals were manipulated by the church's power to condemn or to forgive. Furthermore, the press was shackled by the censorship of the church. The Index Expurgatorius was evidence of that.

Third, Fisk said, "The tendency of popery is rather to encourage than to restrain vice." The history of Catholicism revealed a moral corruption rooted in the "very constituent principles of Popery." The rule of celibacy for the clergy encouraged a direct tendency to their licentiousness. "The doctrines of penance, and of purgatory, and of masses for the dead, and of transubstantiation, not only leave the passions of the heart unsubdued, but do, in fact, substitute something else for personal holiness." As long as people believed that they could procure absolution for their misdeeds, and that they could do so for money, they were not moved to moral living.

Finally, according to Fisk, "The Roman Catholic religion has a direct tendency to impoverish a nation, and is diametrically opposed to the

20Fisk, 104-106.
21Fisk, 107.
22Fisk, 108.
23Fisk, 110-111.
24Fisk, 112.
25Fisk, 112.
26Fisk, 112.
soundest principles of political economy." The poverty in Roman Catholic countries such as France, Ireland, and Italy is proof that the economic influence of Catholicism is negative. Why? Fisk offered two reasons. First, Catholic religion shrouds people's minds in superstition and induces intellectual apathy. It does not lead people to use their gifts in an enterprising way. Second, the church absorbs the income of the people 'in a barren consumption.' The multiplicity of churches in Italy, lavish buildings, the vast number of priests, monks and nuns, and expensive processions, feasts and pilgrimages involve enormous expenses for which the common people must pay with their charitable offerings. These contributions create much of the poverty apparent in countries dominated by Romanism.

Fisk ended his diatribe by saying,

These are some of the objections that have occurred to me as operating decidedly and fatally against the character and claims of the Roman Catholic Church. And, however little they may avail with such as are Catholics, they ought to have their own weight with Protestants, as well to guard their own minds against the plausible insinuations of the system, as also to keep up the influence of an enlightened public sentiment of this subject. Let Roman Catholics have full liberty to exercise and propagate their religion, but let Protestants ever bear in mind what have been and what are now the essential features of a church which must always maintain the same character in all its parts, or cease to be what she claims to be—the infallible and only Church of Christ.

Almost fifty years after Fisk's criticisms of Catholicism another Methodist, Henry King Carroll, published an article in the Methodist Quarterly Review which incorporated opinions about the Catholic Church typical of the Protestant and Methodist mentality of the time. Although he admitted that some of the popular Protestant judgments about Romanism were unjust and that Roman Catholics shared some common doctrinal ground with Protestants on such concepts as the nature and attributes of God, the Trinity and the fall of the human race, nevertheless, there were serious differences between the two, "a chasm . . . which refuses to be bridged."

Carroll's thesis was that the "dogma of the supreme authority of the church is the key to the Catholic system and the cause of its wide variance from the faith and spirit of the Gospel." Concerning the Catholic doctrine of the church's authority Carroll wrote:

27 Fisk, 113.
28 Fisk, 115.
29 Fisk, 116-117.
30 Fisk, 117.
31 Henry King Carroll, "The Catholic Dogma of Church Authority," Methodist Quarterly Review, (October, 1884), 719.
32 Carroll, 721.
It is a vast and awful absolutism, not only proposing to strip all mankind of liberty of conscience, intellect, and worship, but even presuming to rob God in heaven of his prerogatives in the salvation of men. Its claim of infallibility and authority is only a blasphemous invention; its pretended power to confer the grace of regeneration and to forgive sin is a wicked usurpation of divine authority, its worship of bread and wine and its prayers to the Virgin Mary and the saints are idolatry; and its pretense that the ecclesia docens cannot teach error in faith or morals involves the awful assumption that sinful men are equal to God in some of his attributes. 33

According to Carroll there were three chief results in the development of the Roman Catholic teaching about the church's authority. First, it had led the church to control "the text, the interpretation, and the use of the Bible." 34 In effect, this completely subordinated the scriptures to ecclesiastical authority. By denying common people access to the Bible and by claiming that the Roman church alone could rightly interpret scripture, Catholicism was guilty of robbing it of its simplicity and was free to read into its text ideas which God did not inspire. 35 Second, the Roman church assumed that it could lay down the conditions for human salvation. This it did chiefly through its views regarding the sacraments, especially baptism, confirmation, penance and the eucharist. The Catholic Church declared that God had committed these means of grace to its care and did not "regenerate, sanctify, and save, except through its ministry." 36 Furthermore, the practices of prayer and devotion which it enjoined, e.g., the rosary and other "machine performances," were essentially worthless and vain repetitions. 37 Third, Catholicism had subverted the judgment and conscience of the individual. The church assumed for each submissive person the "responsibility of ascertaining all religious and moral truth necessary for him to know. His conscience is only bound to unquestioning acceptance and implicit obedience." 38 A good Catholic could never be an "independent investigator of religious truth." 39

The Roman Catholic doctrine of the church's supreme authority, therefore, obstructed God's revelation and blocked human progress. For this reason, Carroll warned, the Catholic church and its practices were dangerous to the Gospel.

A third category of Methodist statements about Roman Catholicism was comprised of those authors who understood Catholicism as a threat to the nation and its way of life. Some of the authors already mentioned had brief comments about the menace which held the Catholic Church posed to religious and civil liberty. However, there were a few Methodist

33 Carroll, 726.
34 Carroll, 727.
35 Carroll, 729-730.
36 Carroll, 730.
37 Carroll, 734.
38 Carroll, 736.
39 Carroll, 736.
writers for whom concern about this issue became the predominant theme of their work. Hiram Mattison's articles in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* illustrate this point of view.

In his first article, published in 1868, Mattison described the declining power and influence of Roman Catholicism in Europe, Ireland, and England. He was convinced that developments in those areas of the world marked the destruction of the papacy and its detrimental influence. This destruction had been foretold in scripture. The Catholic Church was Paul's "man of sin" and "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" in the Apocalypse. Romanism was being overthrown so that Christianity could triumph. Mattison claimed that the facts were clear that the Catholic Church was in crisis. "Let us look abroad," he stated, "upon the moral heavens, and endeavor to read and understand the tokens of decay and the approaching doom of 'the mother of harlots.'"

France was an illustration of the deterioration of the Catholic Church. While France was still a strong Catholic nation there were signs that French Protestantism was growing stronger each year. Its benevolent societies were active and the number of its periodicals had increased. The leading minds in the nation were not Catholic, but Protestant or skeptic. Mattison rejoiced that the "system of popery is already well disintegrated by Bible truth and a pure religion, and is actually declining, and has been declining for more than a century." The same could be said about Austria where he stated, "... Protestant principles are asserting themselves ... with wonderful success; the darkness of ages is passing away, and the day of religious freedom seems nigh at hand."

Mattison dismissed the Catholic strongholds of Spain and Portugal as of little consequence because they no longer wielded power and influence over other nations. In those two small and feeble empires Romanism still held sway as it did in medieval times. That was probably the reason why they could not become modern states.

Romanism was also declining in Germany and Italy. In the former the Protestant population was increasing at a rapid rate as the number of Catholics fell. In the latter, which did not include the Papal States, monasteries and nunneries had been confiscated, civil marriage was as legal as that performed by the priest, a large number of priests and nuns had married, and there was a decided drift toward infidelity, "the legitimate outcome of all spurious Christianity." Furthermore, many Italians were

---

41 Mattison, 426.
42 Mattison, 431.
43 Mattison, 435.
44 Mattison, 435.
45 Mattison, 441.
being attracted to Protestant churches. "... it is doubtful if there is to­
day," Mattison added, "a more inviting or promising field for evangelical
labor on all the earth than is to be found in Italy, the ancient and once
impregnable citadel of the Papacy." 46

Ireland and England were the last two illustrations Mattison chose
to highlight the decay of the Roman church. In Ireland the false and cor­
rupt Catholic religion was gradually giving way to an energetic Protestan­
tism. 47 And while Catholicism had been experiencing some modest increase
in England, the rise was mainly due to immigration from Ireland and,
therefore, not a sign of Protestant declension or authentic Catholic
growth. 48

Mattison's second article examined the status of Roman Catholicism
in the United States. In this country the story was quite different.
Catholicism in America appeared to be growing vigorously. Evidences of
its strength and progress were abundant. Mattison stated,

The numerous and costly churches and colleges, seminaries, monasteries, and con­
vents, that are crowning the best localities; the hundreds of parochial and other schools;
the increase of priests and nuns and "sisters" seen in our streets; the numbers that
attend the churches; the frequent and immense过程ions; and the influence the
Romanists exert upon Common Councils and State Legislatures, in obtaining almost
any thing they desire, are all indicative of numbers and strength, and of either in­
tense devotion to the system on the part of the people, or oppression and extortion
on the part of the priesthood. 49

Roman Catholic growth in America was a source of the greatest con­
cern to Mattison. It could not be ignored. Catholics were a numerous and
formidable body who could grow large enough to control the political life
of the nation and administer the government in the interests of their
church. 50

Using the best statistical information at hand Mattison sketched out
the numerical strengths of American Catholicism comparing it to Pro­
estantism, and occasionally to Methodism wherever possible, in such areas
as geographical distribution, number of clergy and churches, value of
church property, number of colleges, schools, monasteries and convents,
publishing interests, and church membership.

Mattison drew six main conclusions from his study as follows. First,
the Catholic Church in America was well organized and directed by capable
leaders. Second, there were sufficient priests to serve all the existing parishes

46Mattison, 442-443. Cf. Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal
Church, Thirteenth Annual Report, 1883, 42.
47Mattison, 447.
48Mattison, 448-449.
49Hiram Mattison, "Romanism in the United States," Methodist Quarterly Review, 50
(October, 1868), 508.
50Mattison, 510. See also, "State of the Country," Official Minutes, Kansas Annual Con­
ference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1894, 28-29.
and their number was rising. Furthermore, many of these priests were born in America and a few of them were from Protestant ancestry including Isaac Hecker who came from Methodist stock. “And what is more, these renegade Protestants are the most zealous, efficient, and intolerant of all the Papal priesthood in this country,” Mattison added. Third, Roman Catholicism was surpassing every Protestant denomination in the construction of costly churches and was accumulating vast amounts of real estate. It was also undermining the public school system with its own organization of parochial schools. Fourth, Roman Catholics were more numerous than any other church in the nation. Fifth, Catholicism was growing rapidly in the United States and showed no signs of slowing. Sixth, the literature and periodicals of the Catholic Church were formidable means of spreading its doctrines and attacking Protestantism.

Finally, Mattison argued, Roman Catholicism was a danger to America. The only hope of Catholicism, in all the earth is these United States, and they will contest the ground with the energy of desperation. And though they must ultimately fail, and Babylon must fall, yet unless the Protestant pulpit and press awake, and do more to arouse the nation to our danger, to confront Romanism in all its designs, and to warn Protestants and others of its purposes and encroachments, we shall awake one of these years to find Papists in all the high places of the nation, with the control of cities and states, our Sabbaths abolished, our educational system in ruins, Romanism established and sustained by law, (as it already is partially in some places,) our religious freedom gone, and all to be recovered only as they have been regained elsewhere, through revolution and bloodshed. And the American people cannot awake one day too soon if by timely and well-directed efforts they would avert such a calamity. Resistance now, or a religious war within twenty years, is the alternative before us.52

An American Roman Catholic View of Methodism

Roman Catholic opinions about Protestantism were often as offensive as those we have just examined. The comment about Methodism in the Tablet quoted earlier is an example of the type of remark which undoubtedly satisfied many Roman Catholics that they could hurl their invective at Protestants as well as receiving the same kind of literary abuse.53

One example of the Roman Catholic argument with Protestantism in its Methodist form was a lengthy article by John Gilmary Shea, the respected 19th century American Catholic historian and founder of the Catholic Historical Society. Shea’s article published in The American Catholic Quarterly Review in 1882,54 was ostensibly written as a review

51 Mattison, 529.
53 Mattison, 508-509.
of two separate histories of Methodism published by P. Douglas Gorrie\textsuperscript{55} and James Porter.\textsuperscript{56}

Shea's opening paragraph sounded a keynote for the balance of his assessment of American Methodism:

The Methodist Church in this country, and its general relation to our institutions have not been sufficiently studied. Strange in its origin, its organization, its methods, it began its labors among the poorest and least enlightened portion of the community, but now in the tide of its prosperity claims nearly two millions of members, and shows an ambition for power through the general and local governments that is unexampled in our national history, and in itself a matter of serious concern.\textsuperscript{57}

Shea found in John Wesley, "the strange spectacle of a man professing one religion and establishing another."\textsuperscript{58} Although he was impressed by Wesley's love of some Catholic authors and his respect for Catholic mission work, Shea wondered why Wesley had not been led by God back into the true church. Perhaps "the prejudices in which he was reared formed an impenetrable veil over his heart."\textsuperscript{59} Instead, Shea observed Wesley,


neither became a Catholic to labor in the cause of truth, nor grew to be a bulwark and stay of the Church of England, but simply added one more to the list of rash and daring men who have assumed an office that only a direct commission from God can authorize, that of founders of religious denominations.\textsuperscript{60}

The lives of John and Charles Wesley received brief notice in Shea's review. He did point out that Charles' role as both a cleric and civil officer under Oglethorpe in Georgia unwittingly provided, "a precedent to the Methodist clergy of our time to combine ministerial duties and office-holding, yet after all a precedent more to be honored in the breach than the observance."\textsuperscript{61} Shea used his sketch of John Wesley's spiritual struggle in 1738 to tell the reader that it was regrettable that Wesley had not had access to the sacrament of penance, but had to rely on "self-absolution from sin, . . . the corner-stone of Wesley's system."\textsuperscript{62}

Next, Shea offered a synopsis of the development of the Methodist movement in England and its eventual arrival in America. This period of Methodist history provided Shea an opportunity to continue his sniping at Methodism. He pointed out that Wesley denounced the cause of the American Revolution and claimed that, "The Methodist body cannot lay claim to a single member of the Continental Congress, or a single man

\textsuperscript{55}The Lives of Eminent Methodist Ministers (New York: R. Worthington, 1881).
\textsuperscript{56}Comprehensive History of Methodism (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1876).
\textsuperscript{57}Shea, 1.
\textsuperscript{58}Shea, 1.
\textsuperscript{59}Shea, 3.
\textsuperscript{60}Shea, 3.
\textsuperscript{61}Shea, 4.
\textsuperscript{62}Shea, 5.
prominent in the defence of American freedom. "63 Following the Revolution it became evident to Wesley that his disciples in America should organize more formally. At the time American Methodism, "was a religion without a creed and without a ministry of its own, without a form of worship. John Wesley resolved to manufacture them for the American market."64

Shea noted that the liturgy Wesley sent to America had largely vanished. He also called attention to the Articles of Religion employed by the Methodists, observing that Wesley himself had excised fifteen of the original Thirty-nine Articles to "which he had frequently subscribed."65

The organization of the Methodists was fascinating to Shea. But he found the connectional polity overbearing:

Such a complete system of supervision and control of the laity was never devised or exercised in any body from the earliest heresies to our times. The members are under constant supervision and control, constant excitement to fervor and perseverance, their daily life and family controlled, and yet the power of the Methodist body is in the hands of the conferences, from which all lay delegation and representation have till recently been excluded.66

Protestantism and Methodism had changed in recent years, Shea claimed. Neither one had the power it once enjoyed in America, especially among the clergy:

The decline in the influence of the Protestant clergy in this country since the year 1860 has been very marked. Several causes seem to have combined to produce this result. The dignified old ministers of other days, schooled and grounded in their creeds and systems, had been succeeded by more worldly and superficial men, who could exert less real influence but were always straining for a short-lived popularity with the masses. In the Methodist body the earnest but often unlettered preachers of the old time, with their homely eloquence, had been replaced by men who aspired to a higher social position, who gave more time to literature, and who thus lost the hold which early Methodism possessed over the lower classes.

With the war came the temptation to the clergy to seek their own advancement; the active part taken by them individually and in bodies in the political affairs, the aspirations of many to office, and the bait of lucrative appointments destroyed the morale of their whole clerical body, and within the last twenty years the newspapers teem with charges against Protestant ministers, ecclesiastical trials, depositions, and expulsions.67

While Methodism was still a strong religious force in America, Shea claimed that it was suffering from wealth and prosperity. Gothic buildings had replaced the plain meeting house. The appealing simple sermon had disappeared. Camp meetings had been modernized into resorts. Even the

---

63 Shea, 6.
64 Shea, 7.
65 Shea, 8.
66 Shea, 10.
67 Shea, 11.
Methodists and Roman Catholics in 19th Century America

scriptures had a lesser role in Methodist worship. Shea added, "To one accustomed to a service, like the Mass or Vespers, made up of Scripture or redolent of it, the almost utter absence of biblical extracts in the religious service of those who are constantly talking about the Bible seems inexplicable." 68

Shea saved some of his most critical remarks about American Methodism for the end of his article. He expressed his great unhappiness with the way in which the Methodists, largely supportive of the Republican Party and U.S. Grant, had been unduly favored by that administration, especially in religious work under the "Indian Department." Furthermore, Shea complained, "Whenever and wherever any national celebration or function admitted the services of a clergyman, a Methodist bishop or preacher appeared; of this the opening of the Centennial Exhibition may serve as an example." 69 While the Methodist influence continued in the administration of Rutherford B. Hayes, Shea was pleased to observe that the election of Garfield temporarily broke the Methodist hold on the office. However, Garfield's assassination had permitted the Methodists, a powerful force in Republican parties, to exercise their direction over national affairs through Chester A. Arthur. Shea concluded,

...everything seems to indicate that the Methodist influence over the national government and the foothold it has acquired will continue for the next term, and in all probability until a general indignation is aroused at the unwise course which this religious denomination has seen fit to adopt, and which must ultimately be as destructive to its influence in the sphere of religion as it will certainly be in the sphere of politics. 70

Ironically, what the Methodists feared most, i.e., the advent of Roman Catholic political power which would adversely influence national and religious life in America, was conversely the major complaint of Father Shea, i.e., undue Methodist influence on the course of American political life.

Conclusion

There were severe tensions between Methodists and Roman Catholics in 19th century America. They were typical of the antagonism which existed between the larger body of American Protestants and Catholics during that period. The literature in which each side stated its position against the other was generally inflammatory. It was not expected that any sort of dialogue between the two would ensue, or even that any fruitful dialogue was possible.

Methodist writers ordinarily addressed the differences between themselves and Catholicism as Protestants rather than as Methodists. There

68 Shea, 13.
69 Shea, 15.
70 Shea, 16.
were few references to specific Methodist doctrines and principles in their writings and even fewer references to the Wesleys. This supports Handy's statement cited earlier in this paper that Methodists considered themselves members of a larger community of faith in a struggle against "Popery.”

Finally, the literature does indicate that an important concern of both Methodists and Roman Catholics was the influence each body could exert upon the nation and its political and religious life. Methodist writers voiced their fear that the nation might become the preserve of the Pope. Roman Catholics were disturbed by the influence that Methodists already enjoyed and which they used to their religious and political advantage.