

THAT HER RELIGION MAY BE UPROOTED: THE METHODISTS AND THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

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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 their denominational newspapers. While the war created divisions throughout the country, the Methodist Episcopal Church was distinctive in its overall support of America's military conflict with its sister republic.² 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, Methodists believed that the war was necessary to overthrow the entrenched Catholic Church in Mexico and open the way for the true Christianization of the oppressed Mexican people. Both the northern and southern Methodist Episcopal Churches argued that the adoption of Protestant Christianity by Mexico would lead not only to the salvation of individuals, but also to the political freedom and economic prosperity associated with republicanism.

The Methodist Church's numerical and cultural importance in antebellum America made its perspective on the Mexican-American War matter. While numerous evangelical sects experienced tremendous growth after the American Revolution during the Second Great Awakening, the expansion of the Methodist Episcopal Church outpaced all competing sects. The Methodist Church 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 1850.³ 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

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

² Clayton Sumner Ellsworth, "The American Churches and the Mexican War," *The American Historical Review* 45 (January, 1940): 304.

³ 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.

than three percent of adherents in 1776, by 1850 the northern and southern Methodist Churches combined accounted for thirty-four percent, or nearly fifteen percent more than any other denomination.⁴

In addition to being the largest American religious denomination in 1850, American Methodism influenced many aspects of American society and culture. 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 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.”⁵ 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 American newspaper and one of the only papers with a nationwide readership. Its influence further increased due to the tendency of regional Methodist newspapers to reprint articles from the *Christian Advocate and Journal*.⁶ According to Hatch, by 1860, the Methodist Episcopal Church’s publishing house, the Methodist Book Concern, was the largest publishing house in the world.⁷ In addition to newspapers, the Methodist Book Concern published journals, Sunday School literature, sermons, a women’s magazine, and other periodicals. Methodism’s size and cultural influence in the 1840s make it important to understand why the denomination supported the Mexican-American War.

Despite American Methodism’s numerical size and cultural importance, the Church’s position on the Mexican-American War has received little scholarly attention. One reason for this is that the Mexican-American War itself has largely been overlooked by historians. According to Daniel Walker Howe, the “U.S.-Mexican War has not attracted as much attention as so momentous a conflict deserves from either historians or the American public.”⁸ In addition to inadequate analysis of the Mexican-American War, the relationship between American religion and war demands further study. Historian Harry Stout recently drew attention to the need to understand more adequately this relationship. According to Stout, “the norm of American national life is war.” In both colonial America and post-colonial America the

⁴ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2005), 56-57.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), 203-204.

⁸ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 876.

ties “between war and religion are symbiotic and the two grew up inextricably intertwined.” In particular, he asserted that evangelical Protestantism was “martial at the very core of its being.”⁹

While several historians have taken up Stout’s challenge to explore the relationship between American religion and war, the Mexican-American War has yet to receive adequate historical analysis.¹⁰ Two historians who have analyzed the role of religion in Americans’ response to the Mexican-American War are Ted C. Hinckley and John C. Pinheiro. Hinckley provided an overview of the role that anti-Catholicism played in the conflict. Although Hinckley asserted that the Methodists believed the ultimate effects of the war to be salutary, he primarily focused on the views of the New England-based Congregationalists and Presbyterians.¹¹ John C. Pinheiro offered a more recent article on the role of anti-Catholicism in the War, but it was mainly devoted to anti-Catholicism in the rhetoric of political leaders and parties rather than on the responses of denominations and religious groups to the conflict.¹²

The only historian to explore the Methodist Church’s stance on the war in any detail has been Clayton Sumner Ellsworth, who included the Methodists in his article “The American Churches and the Mexican-American War.” While he mentioned the Methodists, Ellsworth concentrated primarily on Northeastern denominations such as the Congregationalists and Presbyterians. He argued that of all American denominations, the Methodists expressed the strongest support for the Mexican-American War.¹³ Ellsworth was correct in his assessment that the Methodist churches were, with some reservations, largely in favor of the Mexican-American War. He did not, however, explain the reasons for their support other than writing that they believed it was somehow God’s providential punishment of Mexico and that the end result would be to Mexico’s benefit. While both of these reasons are true, both responses relied on deeper ideological commitments.

The Methodists’ support for the Mexican-American War cannot be adequately understood without comprehending the denomination’s profound commitment to spreading the Christian gospel. What Methodists referred to as the missionary endeavor or the missionary enterprise comprised a central characteristic of American Methodism in the 1840s. Statements from periodicals such as the *Missionary Advocate* demonstrated this evangelical fervor. The *Missionary Advocate*, which published its first issue in April of 1845, disseminated typical Methodist missionary rhetoric. As an organ of

⁹ Harry S. Stout, “Religion, War, and the Meaning of America,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 19.2 (Summer, 2009): 275.

¹⁰ 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: U North Carolina P, 2010).

¹¹ Ted C. Hinckley, “American Anti-Catholicism during the Mexican War,” *Pacific Historical Review* 31 (May, 1962): 124.

¹² John Christopher Pinheiro, “‘Religion without Restriction’: Anti-Catholicism, All Mexico, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 23.1 (2003): 69-96.

¹³ Ellsworth, “American Churches,” 305.

The Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, it was committed to promoting the missionary endeavor to lay members. Opening each issue with “His Dominion Shall be from Sea even to Sea, and from the River even to the ends of the Earth” (Psalm 72:8), the *Missionary Advocate* brought before its readers the call to evangelize the world.¹⁴

The annual reports of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church further illustrate the priority of missions. The Missionary Society’s 27th annual report made the connection between Christianity and evangelization nonnegotiable for its readers. The Society asserted that the missionary endeavor was “pre-eminently the cause of God,” and “was identified with all the great and glorious designs of human redemption.” Due to its association with redemption, the missionary endeavor was not a “mere appendage to Christianity, but Christianity herself.”¹⁵ Subsequent annual reports reasserted the importance of missions. The 29th annual report, published in 1848, informed readers that if Methodists had lost their “interest in the world’s regeneration,” then the “M. E. Church ha[d] lost its vitality.”¹⁶ The 30th annual report specified the role that the Methodist Church envisioned itself playing in the spreading of the gospel. The divine ordination of “preaching the word” obligated the church to “send faithful and efficient missionaries to every accessible point of this sin-stricken earth.” For this reason, the Missionary Society proclaimed that “no class of agents employed by the Church has produced such extensive and permanent good as the preachers of the word.”¹⁷

Connected to rhetoric encouraging support of missions was the charge that the refusal to take the gospel to the “heathen” or “pagan” peoples of the world entailed a grievous sin. The Female Missionary Society at the Second Wesleyan Chapel in New York advised its readers that to “refuse aid in spreading the gospel” involved a disregard for the glory of God, and that apathy toward missions should cause people to reexamine whether they were truly Christians.¹⁸ The *Missionary Advocate* article, “Twenty Reasons for Missionary Effort,” questioned the Christianity of anyone not committed to the missionary cause. It stated that since true Christian piety “prompts its own diffusion,” a Christian could not be indifferent to the missionary cause without “being false to his principles and recreant to his most sacred trusts.” In addition, the article warned that apathy toward the “degraded, helpless, and perilous condition of six hundred millions of our species” was a “*deep*

¹⁴ *Missionary Advocate*, April 1845, 1.

¹⁵ *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Conference Office, 1846), 114.

¹⁶ *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Conference Office, 1848), 112.

¹⁷ *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Conference Office, 1849), 106-107.

¹⁸ *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.

criminality.”¹⁹ The Rev. W. P. Strickland presented the basic argument for why apathy toward missions was unchristian in his *History of the Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. Strickland argued that “no heathen has been, or can be saved without the Gospel.”²⁰ Methodists wholeheartedly believed that missionary preaching was the most effective way of bringing people the gospel and offering them the prospect of eternal life.

By the outbreak of the Mexican-American War, American Methodists had affirmed the political ideology of republicanism and made spreading republicanism part of their larger missionary enterprise. According to historian Mark Noll, the Methodist Church was one of the last American denominations to accept republican ideologies. While many denominations began to adopt republicanism during the Revolutionary War, the Methodists did not embrace it until the 1830s.²¹ American republicanism combined the ideas of liberty and virtue. According to Noll, 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.”²² 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. Like other denominations, by the 1840s, Methodists embraced their role as part of the foundation of American liberty.

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*.²³ 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.²⁴

The southern *Quarterly Review* 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

¹⁹ “Twenty Reason for Missionary Effort,” *Missionary Advocate*, July, 1847, 28 (Emphasis in original).

²⁰ 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.

²¹ Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 189-191, 347.

²² Noll, *America’s God*, 567.

²³ R. A. “Our National Religion,” *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* 3 (April, 1849): 301-319.

²⁴ R. A. “National Religion,” 303.

people, in our civil and political character.” Basic elements of Christianity—belief in God, reverence for the Sabbath, and belief in heaven and hell—were the “principles of our government, as much as republicanism” and just as essential to citizenship.²⁵ 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.”²⁶ The article’s premise that Christianity was a necessary prerequisite for human freedom also pervaded other Methodist publications during the Mexican-American War.

Another article in *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, titled the “Republican Tendency of the Bible,” further developed the perceived importance of Christianity to political freedom.²⁷ The primary theme of this article was that “the general influence of the Bible is not only favorable, but absolutely indispensable, to the permanent existence of a republic.”²⁸ There was no item in the “fundamental doctrines of republicanism” that could not be “drawn directly from the fountain of inspiration.”²⁹ Specifically, Methodists claimed that the ideals of freedom and equality originated from the biblical “Golden Rule.” 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 political freedom and the Christianity. 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.”³⁰ Like *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, Taylor made explicit the connection between the Christianity and republican government: “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.”³¹

At the outbreak of the Mexican-American War, spreading republicanism by spreading Protestantism had joined more traditional motivations for missions such as the salvation of individuals. Methodist missionary literature from this period argued forcefully that Protestant Christianity, in addition to providing the way to salvation, was the underlying cause of much of hu-

²⁵ R. A. “National Religion,” 304. (Emphasis in original)

²⁶ R. A. “National Religion,” 305.

²⁷ “Republican Tendency of the Bible,” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 6 (April, 1846): 202-226.

²⁸ “Republican Tendency of the Bible,” 208.

²⁹ “Republican Tendency of the Bible,” 213.

³⁰ 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.

³¹ Taylor, “Golden Rule,” 167.

manity's social, political, intellectual, and economic progress.³² A common theme in this literature was the comparison of nations which had the Bible to those which did not, to show that inevitably those influenced by the Bible enjoyed greater progress and prosperity.³³ Methodists used references to the Bible, biblical religion, and biblical Christianity not only to differentiate Christianity from non-Christian religions, but also to distinguish Roman Catholicism from Protestant Christianity.

While Ray Allen Billington asserted that Methodists forgot "the menace of Catholicism in America" after their 1844 schism, both Northern and Southern Methodists remained staunchly anti-Catholic.³⁴ Anti-Catholicism pervaded 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 that the contemporary Roman Catholic Church was not the New Testament Church of the Bible.³⁵ 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.³⁶

Numerous Methodist publications claimed that Roman Catholicism, from a doctrinal standpoint, was not 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

³² "Bible and No Bible," *Missionary Advocate*, July, 1846, 26.

³³ "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.

³⁴ Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938), 177.

³⁵ "New Testament Church: Notes of the Church," *Southern Christian Advocate* (July 31, 1846-August 20, 1847), Front page.

³⁶ 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 Romanized" (Sept., 1846), "Romanism in Oregon" (November, 1846), "The Pope and Romish Idolatry" (January, 1847), and "Romanism and Hinduism Compared" (February, 1847).

be taught ‘the first principles of the doctrine of Christ.’”³⁷ In another article, the *Quarterly Review* claimed that faith, truth, and holy living were not to be found in Rome.³⁸ Instead, the entire Roman system was “a monumental superstition to deceive the ignorant and unwary.”³⁹ The Methodist Episcopal Church situated Roman Catholicism outside of biblical religion for a number of reasons. First, it argued that Catholicism relied as much on tradition as on the Bible. In this, Methodists affirmed the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*, or the belief that matters of faith and morals must rest only on the authority of the Bible. In addition, Methodists believed that the Roman 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.⁴⁰

Joining longstanding doctrinal differences stemming from the European Reformation, the Methodist Church’s adoption of republican ideology also affected Methodists’ anti-Catholicism. The Protestant sentiment that Catholicism (which was most often referred to as Popery, Romanism, or Jesuitism) hindered individual salvation joined with the belief that it opposed political freedom and social and economic progress.⁴¹ Like many Protestants, Methodists believed that the Catholic Church was not only directly opposed to democratic political systems, but also that it was unable to produce the virtue necessary for their existence. 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 practice of confessing sins to a priest made the Church a “dealer in blood,” and a “trafficker in conscience,” in which sins (including murder) were “redeemable with silver and gold.”⁴² Methodists viewed Roman Catholicism not only as contrary to the salvation of the “heathen” in foreign lands, but also as a hindrance to their political, moral, and economic improvement. Ultimately the combination of the strong emphasis on missions, the commitment to the temporal and eternal benefits of Protestant Christianity, and the virulent anti-Catholicism that permeated both northern and southern Methodism in the second half of the

³⁷ N., “Review of the Claims of the Missionary Enterprise,” *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* 4 (April, 1850): 284.

³⁸ P., “A Brief Review of the Claim of the Roman Catholic Church, to be Considered as Identical with the Original Church of Jesus Christ,” *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* 4 (October, 1850): 524.

³⁹ P., “A Brief Review of the Claim of the Roman Catholic Church,” 522.

⁴⁰ “The Bible in Italy,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, November 4, 1846; “The Bible,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 29, 1846; and “Popery in the Dark Ages and Popery in 1846,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, March 25, 1846.

⁴¹ “The Reformation the Source of American Liberty,” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 6 (January, 1846): 15; “Policy of the Romish Church,” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 27 (January, 1845): 70.

⁴² P., “Brief Review of the Claim of the Roman Catholic Church,” 531. The reference to sin being redeemable in gold was a reference to indulgences.

1840s all contributed to the Methodist Church's support of the Mexican-American War.

When the Mexican-American War began in April of 1846, it quickly became a mainstay in Methodist publications. By July, 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*, respectively—began devoting extensive space to the war. Both papers regularly featured news of the war under the headings “General Intelligence” or “Intelligence from Mexico.”⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ Methodist newspapers and other publications also printed original pieces, as well as war-related “intelligence,” which they usually reprinted from other newspapers. 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 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 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 Methodists maintained that war was a national calamity and its cessation should be anxiously prayed for, they also believed that 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 Wars, 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.”⁴⁵

Methodists viewed the missionary endeavor and the primal importance of sharing the gospel as justifications for the Opium Wars, which the *Christian Advocate and Journal* argued were fought to force China to allow an intoxicating drug that “was a thousand times more baneful in its effects than ardent spirits.” Similarly, the Methodist Church argued that spreading the gospel formed the primary justification for the Mexican-American War. While the Mexican-American War might be as “equally unjust and unjustifiable” as the

⁴³ For examples see: “General Intelligence,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 31, 1846; and “General Intelligence,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, July 1, 1846.

⁴⁴ See “General Intelligence,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, December 18, 1846, for Polk's Presidential address.

⁴⁵ “General Intelligence: Domestic,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, November 11, 1846.

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 base, and besotting than the heathenism of China,” and were just as helpless as the Chinese to deliver themselves from it.⁴⁶

Methodists believed that Catholicism was the source of Mexico’s hopelessness. Despite Mexico gaining its independence from Spain in 1821, and establishing a republican constitution in 1824, Catholicism remained and according to the *Christian Advocate* the “Romish priesthood” continued to “sustain its supremacy” in the Mexican nation. Because the Catholic Church’s policy was to “exclude all light, all means of intelligence from the people,” and possessed the consciences of all of 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.”⁴⁷

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. The Methodist Church argued that victory was now even more important to ameliorate the depredation suffered by the Mexican people “during their long subjection of three hundred years to the Papacy.” In this way, Methodists hoped that God might use war to bring about moral, religious, and political regenerations that were impossible through other means.⁴⁸ A third article published in February made even fewer qualifications regarding the benefits of the Mexican-American War. It stated:

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. If good is to come of it, then war is justifiable.⁴⁹

While the article reflected a belief in the ultimate positive outcome of the war, it also advised young Methodists to fold their arms and “let others fight in their defense.” This view of the Mexican-American War—that it was probably unjust, certainly unfortunate, but that God would ensure that the

⁴⁶ “General Intelligence: Domestic,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, November 11, 1846.

⁴⁷ “General Intelligence: Domestic,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, November 11, 1846.

⁴⁸ “The New Year,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, January 6, 1847.

⁴⁹ “Palo Alto and Resaca,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 17, 1847.

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.

Methodists in New England voiced the most opposition to the Mexican-American War. The *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal* argued that one of the terrible evils associated with military conflicts included the diversion of the “public mind” from religious matters and a resulting increase in immorality.⁵⁰ The *Zion's Herald* also expressed the sentiment that peace was necessary to the conversion of the world and that war hindered the foreign missionary efforts.⁵¹ Despite its anti-war stance, however, the language of the New England *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal* echoed that of the *Christian Advocate and Journal* in its zeal for missions, and its anti-Catholicism. An article published in May, 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.⁵² 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.”⁵³ Other articles denounced the spread of Popery and referred to the relation between Catholicism and Protestantism as the “great conflict.”⁵⁴

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.”⁵⁵ This article repeated the common theme that Protestant Christianity imbued societies with temporal as well as spiritual blessings.

In addition to being vehemently anti-Catholic, *Zion's Herald* was also committed to evangelization, including that of Mexico. In June of 1847, the *Herald* noted the gratitude with which the Mexican people received tracts in Spanish, which American soldiers distributed.⁵⁶ As Congress discussed

⁵⁰ “War with Mexico,” *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, May 20, 1846.

⁵¹ “The Prevalence of Peace Principles Essential to the Conversion of the World,” *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, July 8, 1846.

⁵² “War with Mexico,” *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, May 20, 1846.

⁵³ “The Church the World’s Only Hope,” *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, June 2, 1847. The “church” reference is to the Protestant church.

⁵⁴ “Spread of Popery,” *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, June 2, 1847; “The Great Conflict,” *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, June 23, 1847.

⁵⁵ “Massachusetts and Mexico,” *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, December 23, 1846.

⁵⁶ “Tracts and Volumes in Mexico,” *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, March 10, 1847.

the potential for a Mexican-American War treaty, New England Methodists championed sending missionaries to Mexico. The author of a March, 1848, article wrote, "nothing would suit me better than to invade Mexico, with my pockets full of tracts, my arms full of Bibles, and my heart full of love."⁵⁷ 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 an 1846 thanksgiving sermon. He followed the official stance of the Methodist Church as expressed in the *Christian Advocate and Journal*. Vail referred to the war as deplorable, but claimed that 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 America's superiority in the sciences, arts, education, religion, morality, and general prosperity.⁵⁸

In addition to Methodists in New England and New York, southern Methodists also believed that the ultimate outcome of the Mexican-American War would be positive. While southern Methodists did acknowledge the negative consequences of the 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 *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 increased the benefits of war and that it was the duty of Christian men to fight if the cause of their country was just.⁵⁹

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 represent-

⁵⁷ "War on Christian Principles," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, March 22, 1848.

⁵⁸ Stephen M. Vail, *The Signs of the Times. A Thanksgiving Sermon, Delivered November 26, 1846, In Pine Plains, N. Y.* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Journal and Eagle Printing Establishment, 1846), 9.

⁵⁹ "The Relations of Christianity to War," *Southern Christian Advocate*, January 8, 1847.

ed Protestant Christianity, the seven-horned dragon the Roman Catholic Church, the wilderness the American continent, and the “symbolical eagle seem[ed] plainly to refer to the United States.”⁶⁰ 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 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.”⁶¹

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.” They hoped that 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.”⁶² Like their northern counterparts, southern Methodists supported the Mexican-American War in order to spread Protestant Christianity.

Ultimately, the Methodist Church’s support of the Mexican-American War arose from its commitment to evangelization. By the 1840s, however, Methodism’s self-imposed mission to evangelize the nations had changed in such a way that its 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 republican political ideology 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. American Methodists now believed that Protestant Christianity was not only necessary for salvation but was also a necessary component for political freedom, virtue, and economic prosperity. In effect, Methodists believed that Christianity was the key to happiness in both this life and the next. The adoption of republicanism was joined by the second important factor, which

⁶⁰ “Some Remarks on the Twelfth Chapter of Revelation,” *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* 2, (July, 1848): 472-473.

⁶¹ “Some Remarks,” *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* 2, 474.

⁶² “Some Remarks,” *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 474-475.

was anti-Catholicism. Methodists portrayed Catholicism as hardly better than paganism and saw it 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 advancing Harry Stout's call for a greater understanding of American Christianity's relationship with war. Ultimately, the American Methodist Church supported the United States' offensive with Mexico because of its commitment to spreading Protestant Christianity and its perceived 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. While the American Methodists had just separated in 1844 over the issue of slavery, neither abolitionism nor the extension of slavery played a perceptible role in whether or not Methodists supported the war. Instead, the primary factor for both northern and southern Methodists was evangelization.