ABSTRACT

Reforming Manners, Redeeming Souls: Sunday Schools, Childhood,
and the Formation of Early Nineteenth-Century American Religious Culture

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Merging religious history with childhood studies, this dissertation analyzes Sunday schools from 1790-1860 to show how concepts of childhood, and young people themselves, helped shape American religious culture. Recent scholarship by historians such as Steven Mintz and Amanda Porterfield has pushed interpretations of reform past the traditional binary focus on social control versus social uplift, resurrecting questions of why and how evangelicals created the Benevolent Empire. This study addresses these questions by contending that ideals and anxieties about childhood helped create volunteerism, which in turn reshaped the structure of American Protestantism. Religious disestablishment, republican concerns about virtue, and romanticized reconstructions of childhood prompted reformers to found child-centric religious institutions on mass scale in the early national period. The resulting dissemination of Sunday schools established physical and imagined communities of faith exclusively for young people, impacting the wider evangelical community in several significant ways. First, Sunday schools promoted an alternative religious agency for children that empowered young people to actively participate in their own conversion processes. Adolescents also served as Sunday school teachers, enabling

youth to assume unprecedented levels of religious leadership. Second, because Sunday schools were distinct from both the home and the church, they functioned as a space in which unmarried or childless individuals could work to convert children in ways that were traditionally reserved for parents and pastors, leading evangelicals to rethink accepted sources of spiritual authority.

Taken together, my project reveals that concern over raising moral Christian citizens for a new republic in which the place of the church remained uncertain led to a new focus on children within the era's Protestant reform movements. This focus in turn redistributed spiritual authority to more marginalized groups, including young people themselves, and challenged inherited patterns of social and cultural authority. In this way, Sunday schools permanently altered the American religious landscape while simultaneously contributing to the formation of a broader child-centric culture that persists in the modern day. Thus, the priorities, power structures, and growth strategies undergirding nineteenth-century religion and culture cannot be understood apart from childhood.

Reforming Manners, Redeeming Souls: Sunday Schools, Childhood,
and the Formation of Early Nineteenth-Century American Religious Culture

by

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DEDICATION

To my family, whose support and love sustains me

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In 1831, speaking at a Boston celebration honoring the Sunday school movement's fiftieth anniversary, Unitarian minister Ezra S. Gannett gave an impassioned sermon on "the age of benevolent enterprise." Gannett claimed that Sunday schools were one of the most effective benevolent innovations of the day, primarily because the institution focused on children. Evangelizing this specific portion of the population, Gannett argued, was crucial to the Protestant goal of sanctifying the world because "children will be the future men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers of the country, who will carry into domestic and public life the characters which they receive in these nurseries of the mind, and determine the social influences of the next generation." Gannett further emphasized that Sunday schools could produce lasting spiritual benefits because they captured children's hearts "in the most plastic state, when impressions are most easily made and sink most deeply." In Gannett's view, therefore, "the great power [the Sunday school] exerts, and the still greater power which it seems destined to exert," made these institutions one of the most significant reform efforts of the nineteenth century.[1]

As Gannett's sermon describes, Sunday schools emerged as a vibrant means of religious formation and cultural transmission within the United States in the nineteenth century. Founded in the late eighteenth century, the Sunday school movement became a

[1] Ezra S. Gannett, *An Address Delivered Before the Boston Sunday School Society, on the Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Sunday School Institution, at the Federal Street Church, September 14, 1831* (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1831), 3-5, 15.

standard part of the American church experience by the antebellum period. The movement's leading organization, the American Sunday School Union (ASSU), was one of the largest national reform societies in the early republic. Reflecting the broader evangelical concern with fostering child conversions, the ASSU was responsible for founding thousands of Sunday schools throughout the nation and distributing millions of copies of juvenile religious literature. Through these efforts, along with those of regional organizations, Sunday schools became the leading religious educational institution for children. Historian Anne Boylan states that the institution became such a foundational part of American religious culture that by the 1850s "a church without a Sunday school was increasingly seen as an anomaly."[2] Boylan further asserts that the Sunday school was a highly significant "agency of cultural transmission" that almost rivaled the nineteenth-century public school system in its impact on children's intellectual and moral development.[3]

Sunday schools continue to serve as a prominent source of religious nurture and values transmission in the twenty-first century. A Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life Religious Life Conversion Recontact Survey from 2007 reported that at least 60% of American parents sent their children to Sunday school or another religious education program.[4] But Sunday schools are now just one of many types of child- and youth-oriented religious programming. Other institutions designed specifically for childhood spiritual formation, such as Vacation Bible Schools, are also staples of modern Protestant

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[2] Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 1,162.

[3] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 33.

[4] Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life US Religious Landscape Survey, May, 2007, Question 55B, accessed www.pewforum.org/question-search/?keyword=sunday+school&x=14&y=4

life. While churches are often divided along denominational, theological, or methodological lines, these age-specific evangelistic tools are widely embraced, demonstrating that childhood plays a significant role in defining American religious experiences.

The importance of childhood and age in structuring American Christianity also reflects the larger dominance of childhood within United States' society and culture. The twentieth century has been dubbed "the century of the child."[5] Within the past one hundred years, children's political rights, child-centered pedagogical practices, children's consumer culture, and youth-centric advancements in the medical and psychological fields, along with a host of other changes centered around childhood, have remade American life. As premier historian of childhood Steven Mintz describes, "we live at the tail end of a protracted process in which childhood was redefined as a special and vulnerable period of life that required affection, freedom from work, and separation from the adult world." Consequently, Mintz asserts, "childhood was prolonged and sentimentalized, and new institutions were created to ensure that children's upbringing took place in carefully calibrated steps that corresponded with their developing capacities." The Sunday school is one of many child-centric institutions created for this purpose. As Mintz notes, however, such developments also pose a troubling paradox, as "children became more tightly integrated into the consumer society and more knowledgeable about adult realities at an earlier age. The result is a deepening contradiction between the child as dependent juvenile and the child as incipient adult."[6]

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[5] Ellen Karolina Sofia Key, *The Century of the Child* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1909).

[6] Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 383.

Modern American culture is a child-centric culture, but this poses as many challenges as it does opportunities.

Attempting to understand and interpret the paradox of childhood, historians have become increasingly interested in the subject of children and youth. Scholars of childhood, such as Steven Mintz and Anna Mae Duane, have pioneered the use of age as a category of analysis that links experiences of overlooked social groups, primarily children, to overarching historical narratives.[7] These historians argue that age and childhood cut across and encompass other categories like race or gender, making them useful tools for rethinking questions of identity, constructions of power, and cultural formation. Moreover, exploring the varied meanings of age helps historians understand how individual interactions with social, religious, and political structures can change across the lifespan, as well as how these interactions reflect broader ideological and cultural shifts. As both a construction and an experience, childhood encompasses diverse activities and expectations that can serve as fruitful points of entry for examining larger patterns of human development across time and space. At the same time, given that the way a society conceives of childhood reflects adult values and norms, childhood can also be an exceptionally helpful frame for exploring cultures in particular historical moments.

However, despite the growing prominence of childhood within the historical profession and the dominance of child-specific programming within the modern American church, historians of religion often minimize childhood within their work.

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[7] Steven Mintz, "Reflection on Age as a Category of Historical Analysis," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 91-94, and Anna Mae Duane, *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 1-15. See also Rachel Leow, "Age as a Category of Gendered Analysis: Servant Girls, Modern Girls, and Gender in Southeast Asia," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 4 (2012): 976; Mary Jo Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 114-124.

Issues of age and lifespan are usually overlooked as factors that helped shape the American religious landscape, while analysis of programs such as Sunday schools are often relegated to denominationally-focused studies that are disconnected from broader scholarly narratives.[8] Yet, given the Sunday school's massive religious and cultural influence in the nineteenth century, and the longevity it continues to exhibit into the twenty-first century, the movement provides an ideal entry point for integrating childhood into broader narratives of American religious practice. It also provides a useful lens for understanding how shifting understandings of age and the lifespan impacted the formation of American religious culture more broadly. As the following literature review demonstrates, integrating the historiographies of evangelical social reform, women's religious reform, and childhood provides an especially rich framework for exploring this topic. Bringing these separate threads of scholarly inquiry together reveals that shifting constructions of childhood and the rise of volunteerism reinforced and enriched each other, helping propel the growth of American Protestantism. Moreover, the creation of child-centric religious communities such as Sunday schools helped pave the way for the age-consciousness that dominates American society today. Young people were at the heart of cultural transformation in the early republic, and the story of their involvement in American religious life is waiting to be told.

[8] For examples, see Lewis Glover Pray, *The History of Sunday Schools and of Religious Education from the Earliest Times* (Boston: Crosby and H. P. Nichols, 1847), Richard Gay Pardee, *The Sabbath-School Index. Pointing Out the History and Progress of Sunday-Schools, with Approved Modes of Instruction* (Philadelphia: J.C. Garrigues & Co., 1868), Oscar S. Michael, *The Sunday School in the Development of the American Church* (Milwaukee: The Young Churchman Co., 1918), and Edmund Morris Fergusson, *Historic Chapters in Christian Education*: *A Brief History of the American Sunday School Movement, and the Rise of the Modern Church School* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1935).

Literature Review

Historiography of Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Social Reform

Historians have engaged in robust discussion about the origins of nineteenth-century volunteerism, but these narratives minimize the influence of childhood and youth. Initial scholarship characterized reform as a tool for social control and class domination, downplaying the role of revivalism and evangelical impulses such as conversionism and millennialism in generating reform movements. Proponents of this thesis asserted that the growth of industrialization, immigration, and egalitarianism that occurred between 1800 and 1860 produced widespread concern that traditional morality and authority were in decline. Attempting to define themselves as the "respectable" segment of society, middle-class Protestants created hierarchical voluntary associations intended to impose virtue on the unruly masses and restrict the growth of liberal democracy. Charles C. Cole was one of the first historians to advance this social control thesis in 1954 in his book, *The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1820-1860*.[9] In 1960 Clifford S. Griffin employed the same interpretive framework in *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865*. Griffin was the first to apply the term "social control" to nineteenth-century benevolence, and he characterized reformers as reactionary conservatives obsessed with maintaining social power.[10]

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[9] Charles C. Cole, *The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1820-1860* (New York: Octagon Books, 1954).

[10] Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960). Griffin first employed the term "social control" in an earlier article entitled "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XLIV (Dec. 1957): 423-444.

Charles Foster employed the social control thesis in his 1960 transatlantic study of the United Front, a term he gave to the nineteenth-century evangelical network of interdependent voluntary associations.[11] Foster characterized the United Front as an organized religious reform effort that began in Britain in the late eighteenth century and migrated to the United States in the early nineteenth century. While he acknowledged that evangelical reformers on both sides of the Atlantic aspired to save souls and usher in the millennium, he asserted that these efforts were fundamentally rooted in a desire to impose order on an increasingly chaotic society. According to Foster's interpretation, Christianity was on the wane during the eighteenth century due to the rising popularity of Enlightenment thought. At the same time that Christianity was ostensibly declining, industrialization and immigration progressed at alarming rates, leading conservatives to fear that social hierarchy would be overthrown by the forces of democracy and degeneracy. Conservatives reacted to these alarming social changes by creating the Second Great Awakening, which in turn led to the formation of mass moral reform movements designed to function as tools for social engineering. Foster asserts that British and American evangelical reformers were middle-class professionals who were bound together by the common drive to produce "solid characters formed by Christian nurture…conformity to an approved body of ideas and attitudes enforced by social pressure…[and] a body politic pervaded by the Protestant Christian ethic in substance if not in form."[12]

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[11] Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), viii.

[12] Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*, 9-10.

Two monographs published in 1987 also emphasize the centrality of social control to evangelical reform efforts. Paul Johnson argued in *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* that religion, particularly revivals, was a means of easing the tensions of capitalist expansion in early nineteenth-century America. Johnson tracked how the rapid expansion of the market following the completion of the Erie Canal produced economic prosperity for a growing middle-class, while simultaneously facilitating the emergence of a young and rootless working population. As a result, merchants and manufacturers began to lose the control they traditionally exercised within cities like Rochester, New York. As a result, the revivals led by Charles Grandison Finney proved to be particularly appealing to Rochester's master artisans, grocers, and merchants, the "entrepreneurs who bore direct responsibility for disordered relations between classes."[13] These same working-class converts initiated a host of social reforms following the revivals and made Rochester a seedbed for Whig politics. For Johnson, therefore, the 1830s workingmen's revivals functioned as attempts by businessmen to assert their hegemony over common wage-earners.

Unlike Johnson, Ronald G. Walters did not embrace every element of the social control thesis in his 1987 book, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, as he felt that the motives and goals of reformers encompassed far more than the desire to retain power. He acknowledged that evangelical Protestantism provided a major impetus for reform, in that it inspired reformers with a vision for achieving social change through individual conversions with the ultimate goal of inaugurating a utopian millennial age. Nevertheless, Walters still argued that these evangelical reformist impulses were generated in reaction

[13] Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 106.

to the massive social transformations that occurred after the War of 1812, including urbanization, westward expansion, and the shift to a more competitive and expensive marketplace. Similar to Foster, Walters described the optimistic millennial hopes of evangelicalism as being tempered by conservative fears of radical democracy and asserts that reformers aspired to use benevolence to "define the values and norms in a disunited society."[14] While he did not think that reformers were as manipulative and self-serving as scholars such as Griffin claim, Walters did assert that the social control thesis is a useful interpretive framework and seemed to view evangelicalism primarily as a tool reformers used to create a set of "respectable" middle-class values.

Both Foster and Walters used the Sunday school as a key piece of evidence for the social control thesis. Foster devoted a chapter to Sunday schools, contending that elites favored the movement because one of its primary functions was to teach Protestant morality to degenerate children. Thus, the institution functioned as "the principal instrument of aggression" by the elite upon the "rapidly growing, chaotic suburbs." Asserting that the movement aimed to regulate behavior, he claimed that "the Sunday school proved an effective means for the conservative element to digest and incorporate its radical environment."[15] Similarly, Walters argued that evangelicals used education as a means of compelling children to good behavior, designing programs for common and Sunday schools that would inculcate righteousness before godlessness had a chance to take root. By drilling good character into pupils, reformers "tried to create a new person,

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[14] Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 13, 206.

[15] Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*, 157.

incapable of immorality."[16] For Walters, the Sunday school was a means of manipulating behavior.

Walters was correct in asserting that the social control thesis offers a helpful perspective, in that it properly identifies reformers' preoccupation with preventing moral disintegration. This thesis is significantly flawed, however, in that it attempts to take one motivation for nineteenth-century reform and use it to explain the entire topic. By making the prevention of degeneracy the sole cause for benevolence, the social control thesis diminishes the vital role personal faith played in inspiring evangelicals to engage in reform. Nineteenth-century humanitarians repeatedly emphasized that their benevolent acts sprang from their Christian commitment and desire to save souls. The social control thesis tends to devalue these statements at best and ignore them completely at worst. The thesis also divorces reform from its religious context, minimizing the impact of elements like revivalism in producing enthusiasm for benevolence.

Moreover, the social control thesis does not fully account for the fact that most voluntary societies resisted clerical or elitist domination, enabling laymen and laywomen to run the associations. For example, by marginalizing the more egalitarian aspects of reform, the social control thesis overlooks the ways that benevolent organizations served as sources of empowerment and self-actualization for women. Most of the scholars cited above either fail to acknowledge female reform efforts, or only mention them briefly as a side note to their larger discussions about male benevolence work. Walters broke this pattern by briefly exploring ways that the ideology of female moral superiority enabled women to become involved in reform efforts like abolitionism, pacifism, and women's

[16] Walters, *American Reformers*, 194, 206, 209.

rights.[17] However, his discussion of female reformers is largely confined to one chapter, and there is little indication from the rest of the narrative that women formed the backbone of evangelical benevolence. Walters, Foster, and other proponents of the social control thesis apparently viewed the exercise of social power as a male privilege, and women are not portrayed as significant actors within the evangelical benevolent empire. This approach, by extension, minimized the impact of other social groups that lack the ability to exercise overt social power, particularly children. By defining benevolence as a struggle for control, the social control thesis employs a reductionist interpretation that diminishes the religious and democratized features of reform.

Recognizing that this interpretation delegitimized reformers' religious beliefs, subsequent works emphasized volunteerism's revivalist origins, asserting that evangelicals genuinely aspired to save souls and produce social uplift. In 1957 Timothy L. Smith challenged the social control thesis in *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*. Smith acknowledged that reform had social and economic motivations, but he asserted that revivalism was the main impetus behind evangelical humanitarianism. He asserted that revivalism produced "lay leadership, the drive toward interdenominational fellowship, the primacy of ethics over dogma, and the democratization of Calvinism," all of which were elements that characterized voluntary reform associations.[18] Revivalism also popularized the doctrines of millennialism, perfectionism, and sanctification. Smith maintains that these doctrines provided the ideological basis for reform, in that they inspired evangelicals to believe in the possibility

[17] Walters, *American Reformers*, 101-121.

[18] Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957), 8.

of social improvement and to work for the betterment of humanity. For Smith, reform was rooted in compassion not control, and religion was a vital motivating factor rather than a mere tool.

Lois Banner offered another serious challenge to the social control thesis in her 1973 article, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation." In this article Banner asserted strongly that "rather than trying to control the steady growth of egalitarianism in America," evangelical reformers "were trying to adjust to it."[19] She argued that religious benevolence was an idea embraced by Protestants of all creeds and classes, and that early nineteenth-century reform was driven by the need to accommodate the rapid expansion of evangelicalism.[20] Instead of highlighting the threat of disorder, Banner maintained that the United Front originated from two related ideologies. The first was post-millennialism, or the belief that Christians could usher in Christ's return by converting the world to Protestantism and eradicating sin from society. The second concern was Christian republicanism, which was the idea that the dissemination of Protestant morality was essential to the stability and preservation of the American republic. Banner argued that reformers were chiefly inspired by these two concerns and that their ultimate desire was to create a utopian society.[21]

Following the publication of Banner's article, historians gave increased attention to the religious impetus behind nineteenth-century social reform. Taking into account the remarkable rise in religious enthusiasm produced by nineteenth-century revivalism,

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[19] Lois Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," *Journal of American History* 60, no. 1 (June 1973): 25.

[20] Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control," 25, 28-29.

[21] Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control," 35-41.

scholars began connecting the emergence of benevolence to the general expansion of evangelicalism and the popularization of theologies like post-millennialism. More importantly, they recognized that voluntary associations were intended to improve rather than control society. For example, Robert T. Handy argued in *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* that voluntary societies were designed to create a society in which Protestantism and democracy were "mutually reinforcing."[22] Like Banner, Handy pointed to millennialism as the main inspiration for nineteenth-century reform and stressed that Protestant humanitarians desired to promote morality for its combined spiritual and temporal benefits.[23]

Similarly, Robert Abzug asserted in *Crumbling Cosmos: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* that reformers were not reacting to the growth of egalitarianism. Rather, reformers "sought to sacralize the world" by bringing all aspects of life under the domain of evangelical Christianity, believing that this would not only sanctify society but contribute to the nation's prosperity.[24] Abzug acknowledged that reform was influenced by many sources, including anxiety over immigration and capitalism, but he maintained that evangelistic and millennial motivations dominated all other concerns and that optimistic desires for improvement trumped manipulative attempts at control.

Recent scholarship affirms that both social concerns and religious ideals motivated benevolence, striking a middle interpretive course that stresses the duality of

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[22] Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 27.

[23] Handy, *A Christian America*, 29-24.

[24] Robert H. Abzug, *Crumbling Cosmos: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 8.

reformers' intentions. Steven Mintz echoed Banner's argument that the United Front was inspired by millennialism and Christian republicanism. Mintz's book, *Moralists and Moralizers*, argues that reformers balanced their fears over social transformation with religious optimism born out of their belief in the power of evangelism to remake the world. Although asserting that Enlightenment thought, republican ideals, and the industrial revolution provided an ideal context for reform, Mintz affirms that many nineteenth-century humanitarians were inspired by sincere religious devotion to a heavenly cause.[25] As Mintz argues, this complex combination of secular and religious motivations makes it "impossible to categorize reformers simply as humanitarians or social controllers."[26]

Similarly, in his book *America's God*, Mark Noll argued that voluntary societies were motivated by the interconnected aims of expanding evangelicalism, cultivating common sense morality, and supporting republicanism. According to Noll, this synthesis of religious and patriotic concerns produced an "evangelical surge" of voluntarism that enabled reform associations to gain widespread acceptance and caused them to play a vital role in the creation of America's national culture.[27] Sean Wilentz's *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* also describes how benevolence was rooted in the emotional revivals that swept the country during the Second Great Awakening. He

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[25] Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Moralizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[26] Mintz, *Moralists and Moralizers*, xvii-xviii. Similar scholarship includes Kathleen D. McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[27] Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 161-186.

contended that these revivals "paradoxically challenged and confirmed existing structures of authority."[28] The reform movements that sprang out of these revivals were similarly paradoxical, in that they offered activists a more egalitarian form of expressing their faith while simultaneously seeking to enforce conservative and hierarchical standards of morality.

In 2006 Daniel Walker Howe offered another analysis of reform that demonstrated the permanence of the interpretive shift toward emphasizing reformers' combined spiritual and social motivations. Howe's book, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, describes how mass revivalism led to an unprecedented rise of evangelicalism within American culture. These evangelicals were inspired by their devotion to Christ and enthusiasm for the egalitarian principles of republicanism to remake society through activism. By converting the world, evangelicals aspired to not only disseminate biblical virtues but help usher in Christ's return. Howe argued that for evangelical reformers "liberation and control represented two sides of the redemptive process."[29] He stated that reformers were typically members of the middle class who aspired to use voluntarism to "infuse the marketplace with moral meaning" and thereby create a cohesive group identity.[30] At the same time, evangelical reform also empowered individuals of all backgrounds to "function as moral agents" within society.[31]

Embracing the multiplicity of reformers' intentions, the newest scholarship seeks to diversify scholarly narratives about the forces propelling volunteerism. Amanda

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[28] Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 267.

[29] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought,* 193.

[30] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought,* 189.

[31] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought,* 187-188.

Porterfield highlighted the role of authoritarianism and skepticism in building reform institutions. She argued that "the 1790s saw rising panic about how to get along in the new world of American liberty, where old traditions of decorum had broken down, stability was a memory about the past, and innocence an invitation to predators." She went on to assert that "religious institutions grew as much to manage mistrustful doubt as to relieve it."[32] Similarly, Jonathan Den Hartog examined the influence of political partisanship, particularly Federalism.[33] Sam Haselby argued that early nineteenth-century Protestantism should be understood as a contest between the "frontier revivalism" of the West and the "national evangelists" of the Northeast, or members of the elite "who represented Reformed Protestantism and a new, nationalist missionary movement."[34]

The increasing dominance of the social improvement perspective also produced importance changes in scholarly interpretations of the Sunday school movement. For example, Sunday schools took center stage in John W. Kuykendall's *Southern Enterprize: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South.* This study examined the missionary activities of five national benevolent societies, including the ASSU. Founded in 1824, the northern-based ASSU aspired to plant Sunday schools throughout the United States. To that end, the society initiated a mission program called the Southern Enterprize in 1833, which was designed to establish Sunday schools throughout the Southern states. Four other societies – the American Tract Society, the

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[32] Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 2.

[33] Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt;* Jonathan Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

[34] Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2-3, 24.

American Bible Society, the American Education Society, and the American Home Mission Society – also launched mission programs in the South during the same period. Kuykendall asserted that these programs were not motivated by fear of social unrest but were inspired by the hope that mission work would speed the coming of the millennium. This millennial dream was shared by most southerners in the 1820s, allowing all five societies to function harmoniously in the region. From 1830-1860, however, growing sectional tensions over slavery threw millennial hopes into disarray and led southerners to distrust outside interference. Facing opposition, the five societies chose to ignore slavery in order to maintain support, which Kuykendall interprets as an abandonment of their millennial mission. Kuykendall's study employs a millennial interpretation of reform not only to analyze the ASSU's mission program, but also to explain how the society contributed to the rise and decline of the United Front in the antebellum period.[35]

The Sunday school movement also figures prominently in recent studies of nineteenth-century evangelical print culture. David Nord included the ASSU in his analysis of the cooperative relationship between printing and benevolence. In line with general reinterpretations, Nord argued that evangelical reform "reveals the power of Christian faith to energize human action." He asserted further that "evangelism, in social reform as well as religion, idealized the power of print and made print central to the voluntary associations that dotted the cultural landscape of early nineteen-century America."[36] Candy Gunther Brown agreed with Nord's definition of reform and the

[35] John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).

[36] David Paul Nord, "Benevolent Books: Printing, Religion, and Reform," in *An Extensive Republic: Printing, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 221. See also David Paul Nord, *Faith*

idealization of print, adding that Protestant humanitarians desired to use publishing "to incarnate the gospel in popular cultural forms" and foster a sense of unity among evangelicals by creating "a textually defined community."[37] Both of these authors argued that the ASSU played a central role in harnessing the power of print technology for the benefit of the United Front. Nord and Brown wrote that the ASSU was one of the primary suppliers of religious publications for children in the antebellum period, producing innovative Sunday school materials designed to cultivate children's spiritual sensibilities. Immensely popular, these publications enabled the ASSU to shape the spiritual and moral development of thousands of children throughout America. Consequently, both authors not only agreed that the ASSU was central to the expansion of religious printing, but indicated that the organization played a vital role in socializing untold numbers of young people into a common evangelical culture.

Historians have also noted the Sunday school's influence on the development of nineteenth-century common schools. In *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820*-1980, David Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot argued that the Second Great Awakening released immense social energy, much of which was channeled into educational reforms. The Sunday school was one of the first products of this new social concern with education, and Tyack and Hansot asserted that the movement was the forerunner of the weekday common school system.[38] Through the Sunday school,

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in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[37] Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 60-61.

[38] David B. Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 34-35.

educators tested new instructional methods and experimented with curriculum production. The innovations pioneered by Sunday schools easily translated into weekday schools, and until the mid-nineteenth century educators from both systems worked closely together. According to Tyack and Hansot, this partnership was based on "a common belief that the United States was a redeemer nation entrusted with a millennial destiny. Schools and churches were institutions designed to produce a homogenous moral and civic order and a providential prosperity."[39] Given their focus on social history, Tyack and Hansot stressed the didactic function of Sunday schools over their religious impact, but they acknowledged that all educational systems of the period were grounded in "a deep vein of millennial thought in religion [that] became suffused with republican aspirations."[40] Consequently, both weekday and Sunday schools worked together to diffuse a "common value system" founded upon a "Protestant-republican ideology" designed to ensure the future prosperity of the nation.[41]

In addition to these broad studies, a small collection of scholarly monographs focusing specifically on Sunday schools exist that generally agree with the social improvement perspective. One useful study is Edwin Wilbur Rice's *The Sunday-School Movement, 1780-1917, and the American Sunday-School Union, 1817-1917*. Published on the ASSU's one hundredth anniversary, this book is highly informative and is still regarded as the most comprehensive history of the organization.[42] Rice's central

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[39] Tyack and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue,* 19.

[40] Tyack and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue,* 3.

[41] Tyack and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue,* 20-21.

[42] Rice's book contains an extensive amount of primary source quotations from ASSU and related Sunday school documents. In this sense, then, the monograph functions partly as a primary source. However, most Sunday school historians who followed Rice, including Anne Boylan, consider Rice's book

objective was to demonstrate that Sunday schools only existed to convert children to Christianity, a goal that he achieved reasonably well through his careful attention to the sources. He also sought to defend the ASSU's interdenominational structure, called the union principle. He argued that the union principle enabled the ASSU to achieve widespread influence and described the society as being completely unbiased in all its activities. This second objective caused Rice to turn a blind eye to opposition to the society, and parts of his work read like a panegyric rather than scholarly history. Nevertheless, Rice's book still serves as a vital source of information on nineteenth-century Sunday schools, and effectively argues that the ASSU's primary aim was to sanctify pupils' hearts not control their behavior.[43]

In 1971 Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright published a short study of the Sunday school movement entitled *The Big Little School: Sunday Child of American Protestantism*. Although designed for a general audience, the book is based on solid historical research and offers a broad overview of the movement from its beginning in 1790 to World War II. In keeping with recent reinterpretations of reform, the authors stressed that the movement was rooted in revivalism and inspired by millennialism. They also contended that the Sunday school helped define basic Protestant doctrine for generations of young Americans and decisively shaped the institutionalization of evangelical reform. Because of this, Lynn and Wright argued that Sunday schools are a prime example of the flowering of popular American Protestantism. Calling Sunday

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to be a secondary source and cite it as such. Because it is still the most detailed account of nineteenth-century Sunday schools published to date, this dissertation continues the tradition of using Rice's book as a secondary source.

[43] Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement, 1780-1917, and the American Sunday-School Union, 1817-1917* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1917).

schools "American Protestantism's training ground," the authors declared that the Sunday school is "the *big* school in matters religious…. Compared to public education, Sunday school is marginal to American society, yet is an important *little* school in the rearing of the whole nation. The Sunday school is the big little school of the United States."[44]

Anne Boylan published the most authoritative study of the Sunday school yet in 1988. Her book covers the period from 1790-1880 but is organized thematically, analyzing such diverse issues as the creation of the ASSU, the movement's influence on developing new methods of evangelizing children, and the role of women in benevolence. Boylan emphasized that nineteenth-century Sunday schools were inspired by millennialism and Christian republicanism. She acknowledged that a primary function of the institution was to propagate upper-class Protestant values among lower-class children, but she also pointed out that most poor parents already wanted these morals transmitted to their offspring and, therefore, embraced the Sunday school as an agent of positive change. Boylan also asserted that, as the movement expanded, reformers reorganized Sunday schools to serve children from all classes. Thus, she argues that the institution was not intended to function simply as a form of social control. Instead, Sunday school workers were driven by a desire to evangelize, hoping to simultaneously create dedicated Christians and upright citizens. By combining evangelistic and patriotic concerns, the movement conformed to the mission of the United Front and contributed to the dissemination of Protestant morality throughout the country. Boylan warned historians not to overlook the movement's educational influence, asserting that "the impact of nineteenth-century Sunday schools was dramatic. For through them passed millions of

[44] Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright, *The Big Little School: Sunday Child of American Protestantism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), xi.

children who came into contact, briefly or for an extended period, with the tenets and world view of evangelical Protestantism. As an agency of cultural transmission, the Sunday school almost rivaled the importance of the nineteenth-century public school."[45]

Taken together, these general reinterpretations of reform demonstrate that a primary aim of voluntary benevolence was to improve society. Historians currently emphasize the millennial and Christian republican ambitions of nineteenth-century humanitarianism and characterize reformers as genuinely concerned with social uplift, not just social control. By applying this perspective to Sunday schools, historians discovered that the movement rested on a similar combination of religious and patriotic aims. Consequently, the reductionist perspective was removed from the scholarship and historians now recognize that Sunday schools accomplished far more than the manipulation of behavior. As scholars like Boylan and Nord pointed out, the widespread acceptance of Sunday schools functioned to standardize Protestant morality and established a tangible religious experience for thousands of American children. The movement thereby socialized children into the evangelical community and served as a vital transmitter of antebellum cultural values. While Sunday schools fulfilled an important social role, this was merely an outgrowth of the movement's evangelistic ambitions.

Despite these historians' attempts to create a more balanced narrative, both within social reform generally and Sunday schools specifically, most of this scholarship operates separately from the growing fields of women's religious history and the history of childhood. Given that these two groups were intricately connected to the development of

[45] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 33.

Sunday schools and American reform, this scholarship needs fresh scholarly analysis that integrates these fields, rather than treating them as subcategories. Sunday school historiography is also outdated in other ways. Boylan's monograph, which was published three decades ago, is a product of the new social history. As such, it is primarily an institutional history that describes the details of Sunday school structure, pedagogical techniques, and attendance statistics. Such work is immensely valuable for bringing the operation side of the Sunday school movement to life. However, Boylan's monograph does not fully situate the Sunday school movement within either the larger narrative of American evangelical growth or the construction of nineteenth-century American childhood, fields that have grown immensely since her book was published. Moreover, her book provides only a brief overview of the movement's formative years of growth between 1790 and 1824. Rather, it focuses primarily on the operations of the ASSU from the mid-1820s onward. As a result, her narrative does not provide an adequate picture of the significant interactions that occurred between the rise of evangelical benevolence, youth activism, and sentimentalized constructions of childhood that grounded the entire Sunday school movement.

Thus, the field is ripe for a study that brings together these disparate streams of conversation. Moreover, incorporating childhood as an interpretative lens can be particularly helpful for answering a question that as yet remains only partially addressed in existing literature, which is how values are transmitted to the next generation on the ground. This question has begun to receive attention among historians of higher

education.[46] However, it is often surprisingly absent from histories of the other educational and reform movements founded in the nineteenth century to construct a Christian nation. Historians such as Porterfield and Haselby have identified the (usually white male) actors who attempted to create the Benevolent Empire and articulated their stated goals, but they often do not consider how these reform movements were sustained from generation to generation. Scholarship on American evangelical reform, therefore, could particularly benefit from incorporating the history of childhood, along with literature on the individuals usually tasked with childhood nurture – namely women – into the narrative.

Historiography of Nineteenth-Century Women's Reform

Responding to the paucity of scholarly sources on female reform efforts, women's historians began crafting an alternative narrative for evangelical benevolence in the 1960s that placed women at the center. Initial analysis of this topic was grounded in the concept of separate spheres, originally advanced in Barbara Welter's 1966 article "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." Welter argued that nineteenth-century society was divided into strict categories of male/public and female/private, with women relegated to a narrow domestic sphere.[47] In a 1977 study, Nancy Cott asserted that the rhetoric of separate spheres "bound women together even as it bound them down."[48] Building off

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[46] Andrea L. Turpin, *A New Moral Vision: Gender, Religion, and the Changing Purposes of American Higher Education, 1837-1917* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), Charles Dorn, *For the Common Good: A New History of Higher Education in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).

[47] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966): 151-174.

[48] Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 1.

their network of female domestic connections, women starting organizing reform organizations designed to fulfill their dual desires for self-improvement and social uplift. Women used the ideology of separate spheres to assert that their spiritual purity and feminine sensibilities made them specially suited for benevolence. Simultaneously, however, male evangelicals employed the same ideology to confine women "to pious self-expression, sex-specific duties, and subjection to men."[49] As a result, benevolence work served to heighten women's "gender-group consciousness" of male subordination.[50]

In a groundbreaking 1980 study, Mary Beth Norton traced the origins of separate spheres ideology back to the American Revolution by arguing in *Liberty's Daughters* that the founding of the republic led to heightened social concern over the need to cultivate a virtuous citizenry. Since women were thought to have the most direct influence over their husband's and children's characters due to their role as keepers of the domestic sphere, they were considered vital to the cultivation of virtue among American citizens. Domesticity thereby became relevant to the political health of the nation and enabled women to argue for their intellectual and moral equality with men. Norton cautioned that most of the advances women made in this period took place in private, such as when they began exercising more control over their choice of marriage partners. Nevertheless, some of these advances were visible within the public sphere, like the noticeable increase in the founding of female academies that occurred after the war. Norton stated that the Revolution's impact was ultimately ambiguous due to the lack of public changes it produced for women, but the republican emphasis on virtue still enabled women to

[49] Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 159.

[50] Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 154.

establish a political significance for domesticity that eventually paved the way for female reformers to begin exercising a more expansive social influence.[51]

The same year Norton's book was published, Linda Kerber produced *Women of the Republic*, which traces the rise of an ideology Kerber termed Republican Motherhood. According to Kerber, white men failed to recognize or implement the truly democratic implications of the Revolution, thereby preventing socially marginalized groups like women and African Americans from reaping the full benefits of republicanism. Resenting this exclusion, women collectively created an ideology that linked domesticity, especially motherhood, to the creation and maintenance of public virtue. By widening the definition of politics to include the cultivation of citizenship and by stressing that this cultivation occurred primarily within the home, women were able to make their role as mothers socially relevant and respectable. Kerber asserted that Republican Motherhood was popularized through the expansion of female educational opportunities and the dissemination of Revolutionary-era writings on gender equality from reformers like Benjamin Rush and Mary Wollstonecraft. She properly qualified her argument by acknowledging that Republican Motherhood did not produce political equality between the genders, as evidenced by the ineffectiveness of female petitioning and limited changes in divorce laws after the war. Like Norton, Kerber concluded that the Revolution was inherently paradoxical for women, in that it provided them with an ideology that justified their involvement in creating public virtue while simultaneously denying them full access to the political benefits of liberty. Despite this paradox, Kerber

[51] Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980).

depicted Republican Motherhood as an important precursor to future calls for gender equality and female activism.[52]

Following the publication of these seminal works, scholars sought to nuance Norton's and Kerber's arguments about the content and function of Republican Motherhood. In a 1997 article, Margaret Nash argued that historians overemphasize the political importance of motherhood in the Revolutionary Era at the expense of women's other social roles. She used education to illustrate this point, focusing on the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia that was founded in the 1780s by reformers like Benjamin Rush. Nash contended that this school was not significantly influenced by Republican Motherhood. According to the curriculum and public speeches given by trustees and students, the school espoused the belief that women exercised a morally uplifting influence over all men, not just their sons. This concept was related to Republican Motherhood in that it emphasized women's role in promoting virtue, but it did not circumscribe female influence to the domestic task of childrearing. The school was also motivated by the Enlightenment idea that girls were intellectually equal to boys and deserved a rigorous education that prepared them to lead personally fulfilling and socially useful lives. Based on this conclusion, Nash asserted that neither female academies nor "the general civic discourse defined women only or primarily in terms of their motherhood."[53] Rather, educators like Rush emphasized the "prevailing idea of republican womanhood, of which motherhood was only one piece."[54] Nash believed that

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[52] Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

[53] Margaret A. Nash, "Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 2 (1997): 191.

[54] Nash, "Rethinking Republican Motherhood," 174-175.

Republican Motherhood was a valid concept, but that it only provided part of the rational for women's entrance into the public sphere. In Nash's view, the Republican Motherhood thesis should be minimized in favor of the notion of republican womanhood, which enables historians to consider the full scope of women's social activities in the post-Revolutionary era.[55]

In addition to Nash, other scholars attempted to disprove or expand the concept of Republican Motherhood. Mary Kelley argued in her book on women's education in the early republic that the term "gendered republicanism" is more appropriate than Republican Motherhood, since women's moral authority in the republic was thought to extend beyond the task of childrearing. She asserted that women used the principles of republicanism to argue that their role as nurturers of public virtue was not rooted solely in their authority as mothers, but in their intellectual equality with men tempered by their uniquely feminine sensibilities and moral strengths.[56] Kelley further contended that women used gendered republicanism to justify their participation in the "civil society," which was the social space where both genders met, expressed and shared ideas, and shaped public opinion apart from direct political action.[57] Similarly, Rosemarie Zagarri attempted to disprove Norton's and Kerber's argument that women of the early national period did not take active roles in shaping politics. She did this by broadening the definition of politics to mean any sort of participation in civil society, regardless of whether or not these activities impacted the structure and practice of government. This

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[55] Nash, "Rethinking Republican Motherhood," 171-191.

[56] Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 25-26.

[57] Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 5.

generous definition enabled Zagarri to recognize the widespread impact of women's participation in informal politics, which included activities ranging from political petitioning to sewing flags for the Federalist Party. She asserted that women engaged in these activities in large numbers after the war, but that this practice of gender inclusivity within civil society gave way to a policy of exclusion in the 1830s due to the rise of party politics, separate spheres ideology, and gender essentialism. By describing how women used republicanism to gain social influence beyond that of motherhood, even if this influence was temporary, Kelley and Zagarri helped provide context for the ideological forces that enabled women's entrance into the civil sphere.[58]

As these historians were creating and revising theories on how political ideologies were used to expand women's social influence, other scholars began highlighting equally influential forces that propelled women into reform. Most of this early work emphasized the social control thesis. For example, Mary P. Ryan contended that the rise of middle-class evangelical culture was rooted in shifting family values and gender roles that occurred simultaneously with early nineteenth-century industrialization. Using a densely-researched social study of Oneida County, New York from 1790-1865, Ryan traced how the eighteenth-century model of self-sustainability and extended family connections gave way to a privatized nineteenth-century model that separated economic production from the domestic environment and stressed the importance of creating an intimate nuclear family. The nuclear family thereby became the custodian of social morality and provided the structure upon which to build mass revivalism, voluntarism, and industry. Women took an active role in this transition by managing the family economy and defining

[58] Rosemarie Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

themselves as the guardians of domestic virtue. Women's evangelical reform efforts serve as important evidence for Ryan's argument, and she used the social control thesis during her discussion of this topic. She asserted that evangelical women took the lead in founding the nation's first benevolent associations and acknowledged that many women were inspired to engage in this work by the religious enthusiasm they absorbed from revivals. Ultimately, however, Ryan defined reform as a tool that evangelical women used to establish social order and define middle-class values. Ryan's description of female benevolence in Oneida County serves to forcefully demonstrate the point that women were critical to the rise of evangelical reform, but her view that reform was used mainly to protect middle-class culture devalues the spiritual dimensions of nineteenth-century humanitarianism.[59]

In a related argument, Christine Stansell's *City of Women* contended that middle-class evangelical women were central to reform movements in New York City and that these efforts sprang out of the reciprocal relationship between gender and class formation. Surveying the development of industrialization in the New York City from 1789-1860, Stansell argued that the growing presence of women within the workforce sharpened class divisions and clarified the boundaries between male and female forms of labor. Working women became the "other" by which poor laboring men and middle-class evangelicals defined themselves. By asserting that working women should strive to maintain the ideals of domesticity, laboring men were able to project an image of weakness onto female workers that justified their relegation to lower wages and menial employment. Evangelicals also used laboring women's failure to live up to the ideals of

[59] Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida Country, New York, 1790-1865*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

domesticity to cast them as morally inferior beings needing benevolence. Middle-class female reformers thereby felt licensed to impose norms of decency, cleanliness, and order upon their working-class beneficiaries. For Stansell, benevolence reinforced the notion that middle-class women were the moral gatekeepers of society and enabled evangelicals to fashion a collective identity based on an inflated sense of purity. Stansell's Marxist interpretation of reform does not acknowledge the possibility that evangelicals could have been motivated by religious devotion or sincere belief that their norms would result in the betterment of the working class. Despite the deficiencies in her interpretation, however, Stansell offered valuable evidence for middle-class women's authoritative role in popularizing evangelical humanitarianism.[60]

As this brief overview has shown, scholarly work on women's history from the 1970s and 80s successfully recovered women's roles as legitimate and effective leaders within evangelical reform movements. These historians also uncovered various influences that led to female benevolence, focusing particularly on gendered republicanism and the rise of a middle class culture that stressed the social relevance of women's domestic piety. These discussions of women's reform efforts were often localized, as with Ryan's and Stansell's work, or tended to function as supplementary analysis to larger theoretical discussions of topics like Republican Motherhood. By the late 1980s scholars began recognizing the need to create an overarching narrative for female benevolence that explored the details of the topic and analyzed its relevance to American cultural developments, while also giving more attention to the religious dynamics of reform.

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[60] Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986).

In 1990 Lori Ginzberg attempted to satisfy this need in *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. This monograph explored the ideological and organizational frameworks that characterized female reform at the beginning of the nineteenth century and traces changes to these elements through the 1880s. Ginzberg asserted that female reformers adhered to a sentimentalized evangelical construct of womanhood that considered women to be spiritually and morally superior to men. This belief in uniquely feminine "influence" enabled women to organize reform efforts for the purpose of social improvement, but it also circumscribed their efforts to the sphere of moral suasion by requiring them to abstain from the ostensibly impure world of politics and economics. Ginzberg noted that this conflation of morality with femininity did not usually match female activists' practices, since women informally asserted themselves within the male sphere through activities like fundraising and political lobbying. By the 1850s, however, women realized that moral suasion failed to dramatically remake society and that they would need to assert direct political power to enact lasting change. The Civil War further popularized a masculine approach to reform that was more nationalistic and militaristic, thereby exacerbating this shift away from feminine moral suasion. After the war women reformers focused on professionalizing through political means, ultimately leading them to abandon the early nineteenth-century evangelical ideal of feminine moral superiority as a means of exercising social influence. Ginzberg did an excellent job of outlining the mechanics of reform, but she was curiously silent on the subject of how republicanism influenced female benevolence. Moreover, while she asserted that female benevolence was rooted in evangelical constructs, she did not fully explore reformers' spiritual

motivations, nor did she explain the origins of the evangelical conflation of femininity and morality. Despite these omissions, Ginzberg did not employ the social control thesis extensively, demonstrating that scholarship on women's reform was beginning to follow the interpretive shift toward emphasizing religious motives exhibited in other narratives from historians like Abzug.[61]

Anne Boylan continued this trend towards emphasizing the religious foundations of reform along with its social impulses in *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840*. Boylan asserted that female activism usually reinforced the republican-evangelical idealization of domestic piety and women's special moral influence. She described female benevolence as progressing through three stages. The first stage occurred from 1797-1806 and was a period of basic organization driven by a desire to disseminate republican domestic virtue throughout society. During the second phase, which occurred from 1812-1820, female reformers adopted religious motivations and rhetoric that merged republican virtue with evangelical piety. Casting activism as a natural outgrowth of religious enthusiasm and responsible citizenship, women stressed the social relevance of domestic piety, which in turn served to blur the lines between the public and private spheres. In the third wave that occurred from 1823-1840, women reformers worked to achieve total social reform and redress of female grievances, a contested approach that led to fracturing within women's activism. Boylan also discussed how women activists participated in politics and economics in both deferential and subversive ways. This reinforced her claim that female reformers reshaped the boundaries between public and private by merging personal piety with social concerns. Throughout

[61] Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

the book Boylan contended that benevolence served to perpetuate systems of power among female reformers and between men and women, but she did not define power strictly in terms of social control. Boylan acknowledged that benevolence work not only allowed women to assert agency, but to express their religious devotion. However, Boylan did not fully explain the shift from republican to evangelical motivations for reform. She asserted vaguely that the second and third waves of female benevolence was inspired by the Second Great Awakening, but she refrained from discussing how the evangelical model of true womanhood was created or how it supplanted gendered republicanism as the driving force behind humanitarianism.[62]

Although Ginzberg, Boylan, and other scholars devoted more attention to female reforms' spiritual motives, their failure to explain the origins of evangelical idealization of women's special capacity for benevolence is a major research gap. In contrast to the origins of gendered republicanism, which has been heavily analyzed by historians like Kerber and Nash, the evangelical model of true womanhood exists in scholarly literature without proper contextualization of its source. Even scholars of American women's religious history have not completely answered this question. For example, Nancy Hardesty's *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the 19th Century* begins its serious analysis around 1820, after the shift from a republican to an evangelical model of female benevolence supposedly occurred. Hardesty argued that women used revivalism to inject feminism into the social reform movements of the period, causing her to cast benevolence as a form of female empowerment. However, she did not pause to consider where evangelical feminism came from, but assumed that its existence was self-

[62] Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

evident to women activists.[63] Additionally, Marilyn J. Westerkamp asserted that women's participation in nineteenth-century reform was rooted in the Puritan tradition of emphasizing the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence within individual believers, which enabled female activists to argue that their benevolent efforts were divinely inspired. She stated that women's appeals to divine authority threatened the norm of biblical patriarchy and thereby conflicted with the evangelical insistence on a literal application of Scripture. As the result, women reformers were increasingly forced to emphasize their deferential role to men. Although Westerkamp showed that women's use of Holy Spirit theology was rooted in Puritanism, she did not explore the roots of nineteenth-century rhetoric about domesticity beyond a general assertion that it was related to a literalist reading of Scripture.[64]

Historians do not seem to fully understand how the eighteenth-century republican belief in the moral, and sometimes the intellectual, equality between the genders gave way to a nineteenth-century evangelical construct that stressed women's spiritual superiority and cast their humanitarian efforts in specially feminized terms. This is partially the result of the trend within the literature to take a women's history approach to female reform, rather than a gender-inclusive perspective. In the same way that general overviews of nineteenth-century evangelical reform usually fail to fully integrate women into their narratives, historiography on female evangelical activism usually minimizes male voices. Initially this was a pragmatic move, since historians needed to recover the

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[63] Nancy A. Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the 19th Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984).

[64] Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women in Early American Religion, 1600-1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

stories of female reformers and including men would have detracted from this goal. Now that the general contours of women's participation in nineteenth-century humanitarianism have been established, however, historians need to begin incorporating a gendered framework into their analysis. In 2002 Bruce Dorsey emphasized this need to take a more comprehensive approach to the study of evangelical benevolence in *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City.* Dorsey used Philadelphia as a case study that illuminates the gendered nature of evangelical efforts to address poverty, alcoholism, slavery, and immigration. His goal was to create an overarching gendered narrative that explains how evangelical benevolence influenced constructions of masculinity and femininity in both cooperative and competitive ways. He asserted that taking a gender-inclusive perspective allows historians to "glimpse a moment" when men and women used a "shared conception of religious activism" as a "means of bridging their differences," even as they "encountered that moment – and the gendered meanings embedded in it – in distinctly different ways."[65] Dorsey's work is an exemplary model of holistic scholarship that recognizes the gendered dynamics of evangelical reform.

Another recent scholarly work that integrates women into the narrative of reform is Kathleen D. McCarthy's *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865*. In this broad overview, McCarthy asserted that the development of American democracy and civil society were intricately linked to the growth of philanthropy, which she defined as both "giving *and* voluntarism."[66] Asserting that reform was inspired by

[65] Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 2.

[66] Kathleen D. McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 2.

"faith in egalitarian ideals, religious freedom, and the right to engage in civil activism," McCarthy argued that voluntarism was a means by which Americans – male and female, black and white – asserted individual agency and exercised the privilege of participating in the republic.[67] Nevertheless, as Catherine Brekus argues, the story of women's benevolent work, along with women's religious histories in general, still remain a sub-category within the master narratives on American religious history.[68] Scholars have given female reformers a voice, but it remains confined to the realm of women's history in spite of the fact that male and female reformers exhibited similar motivations and objectives.

Historiography of Children and Childhood

If women are often minimized within master narratives of American evangelical reform, childhood is almost entirely absent. At the same time, historians of childhood often overlook religion as a major force shaping children's lives. The history of childhood began in earnest as a field of scholarly inquiry in the 1960s with the publication of Philippe Aries' seminal work, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life.*[69] A product of the social constructionist turn, Aries' book argued that childhood is a relatively recent invention. He asserted that prior to the sixteenth century childhood did not exist as a distinct category of being, and that parents were essentially

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[67] McCarthy, *American Creed*, 1-2.

[68] Catherine Brekus, "Introduction: Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History," in *The Religious History of American Women: Re-Imagining the Past*, ed. Catherine Brekus (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2007), 1-34.

[69] The original title of this work, as translated into English, was *The Child and Family Life in the Ancien Regime*. However, the book was retitled *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* when it was translated into English in 1962, and this is the title that is most commonly employed today, hence its use above.

indifferent to their children. Beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, the popularization of sentimentalized views of children resulted in the creation of the dialectical and cultural construction of childhood as a unique phase of the lifespan. This in turn produced an intensified focus on rearing and regulating children, which according to Aries left inedible marks on the formation of modern society in Europe and the United States.[70]

Aries remains one of the most influential historians of childhood to date, yet his work has received substantial scrutiny. While accepting the idea of childhood as a social construct, many historians have pointed out continuities in the treatment of children that stretch as far back as the Greek and Roman eras, contradicting Aries' claim that childhood did not emerge as a unique life stage until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One of the first studies to make this claim was Lina Pollack's *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900*, published in 1983.[71] Hugh Cunningham made a similar contention regarding the medieval period, asserting that sentimentalized views of childhood existed in this era long before Aries' claimed the cultural turn toward childhood took place.[72] Many historians now advance a middle interpretive course that takes both the change and continuity theses into account. Nicole Eustace asserted that "Just as claims of radical disjuncture in the emotional lives of early

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[70] Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (London: Jonathan Cape LTD, 1962).

[71] Lina Pollack, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[72] Hugh Cunningham, "Histories of Childhood," *The American Historical Review* 103 (October 1998): 1197. See also Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London: Longham, 1999), William Koops and Michael Zuckerman, eds., *Beyond the Century of the Child: Cultural History and Developmental Psychology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003),

modem and modem children now seem unlikely and exaggerated, models of undifferentiated continuity appear overly simplistic, not to mention ahistorical."[73] Nevertheless, most historians of childhood do agree with Aries that an intensification of ideals and anxieties about childhood is a hallmark of the modern period.

This field is also marked by debate over another divide, primarily methodological in nature. Initially, historians tended to separate the history of children, which emphasizes lived experiences, from histories of childhood, which analyzes cultural constructions formulated within constantly shifting dialogical frameworks of meaning.[74] Joseph Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, leading historians of childhood in the United States, hinted at this divide in their entry on the "History of Childhood" within Paula S. Fass' *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood: In History and Society*: "When historians declare that children in the past were miniature adults or that childhood did not exist in a certain period, what do they mean? Are they referring to what adults thought childhood ought to be, what children actually experienced, or what children actually did?"[75] In general, historians now assert that the line between lived and constructed childhood is fluid, defying rigid divisions. As Julia Grant asserted, "children are born into childhood." [76] Thus, while a

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[73] Nicole Eustace, "Emotional Life," in *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood: In History and Society* by Paula S. Fass (New York: MacMillan, 2003), 314.

[74] Karin Lesnik-Oberstein argues that these cultural constructions of childhood are largely generated and sustained through print culture. Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, "Introduction: Voice, Agency, and the Child," in Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, ed., *Children in Culture, Revisited: Further Approaches to Childhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2-4. See also Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes, editors, *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), and Duane, *The Children's Table*, 1-15.

[75] Joseph Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, "History of Childhood," in *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood*, 427.

distinction between histories of children and histories of childhood still exists, most works attempt to integrate the two approaches. This is partly an issue of practicality. Primary sources from children are often in short supply, meaning that historians must usually combine their attempts to reconstruct children's lived experiences with assessments of adult constructions and perceptions in order to achieve a fuller picture of childhood in any particular era.[77]

Another major theoretical contention within the history of children and childhood is agency. Just as historians of women attempt to ascribe agency to their historical subjects, historians of childhood have sought to apply the concept of agency to children. As Grant notes, "historians, no less than psychologists, have been guilty of overrelying on parents as a shaping force in children's lives."[78] The interdisciplinary field of childhood studies emphasizes children's capacity to exist as social actors in their own right, as in sociologist Barrie Thorne's monograph *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School*, which highlights the importance of peers in shaping children's lives.[79] However, the concept of childhood agency is also inherently problematic. Thorne asserted that, while children have the capacity to engage in the type of agency that permits an

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[76] Julia Grant, "Review: Children versus Childhood: Writing Children into the Historical Record, or Reflections on Paula Fass's 'Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society'," *History of Education Quarterly* 45, No. 3 (2005): 471

[77] Historians of childhood often have to rely on a more creative array of primary source material to reconstruct children's lives experiences. For example, collection of innovative essays edited by Elliot West and Paula Perik utilize a variety of artifacts to assess children's culture, such as films, comic books, and dolls. See Elliot West and Paula Perik, *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850 1950* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992).

[78] Grant, "Review," 482.

[79] Barrie Thorne, *Gender Play: Girls and Boys at School* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993). For an additional overview of the use of agency in childhood studies, see Richard Flynn, "Introduction: Disputing the Role of Agency in Children's Literature and Culture," *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, and Cultures* 8, no. 1 (2016): 248-253.

individual the ability to "experience, interact, and make meaning," they are usually unable to engage in another dynamic of agency that permits "collective efforts to change existing power arrangements." Adults often act as the "agents" on behalf of children. For that reason, Thorne stated that "the quest to rescue children from a conceptual double standard and to include them in frameworks, such as theories of agency, that emphasize autonomous social action may be overdrawn."[80]

Similarly, historians stress that agency for children is constantly circumscribed by their dependence on adults.[81] As a group, children are considered biologically, mentally, and socially immature beings without the capacity to act with total independence. For that reason, they regularly appear throughout culture as symbols of helpless innocence and dependency, as Karen Sanchez-Eppler demonstrated in her study of nineteenth-century American fiction.[82] Kristine Alexander argued that the traditional definition of agency – or the ability to act in a way that produces "freedom, individual selfhood, intentionality, and choice" – is incompatible with most children's experiences due to their dependent states. Thus, the ubiquitous drive to find agency that defines the field of childhood studies is a "flawed intellectual project."[83] Alexander went on to advocate for a perspective shift

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[80] Thome, *Gender Play*, 771.

[81] Duane, *The Children's Table.*

[82] Karen Sanchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Other works that emphasize dependency within children's literature include Anne Scott MacLeod, *A Moral Tale: Children's Fiction and American Culture, 1820-1860* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, The Shoestring Press, 1975), and Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books, 1621-1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). For studies that stress the theme of children's agency in juvenile literature, see Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley, editors, *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), Paul B. Ringel, *Commercializing Childhood: Children's Magazines, Urban Gentility, and the Ideal of the American Child, 1823-1918* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), and Courtney Weikle-Mills, *Imaginary Citizens: Child Readers and the Limits of American Independence, 1640–1868* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

by asserting that concepts such as "emotional labor" can take the place of agency as a major interpretive lens within the history of childhood. Other scholars do not go as far as to claim that applying agency to childhood studies is an inherently flawed project. However, many are advocating that other interpretive approaches should take precedence. For example, Marah Gubar argued that historians should foreground children's inherent dependency as a way of framing investigations of how childhood is built on a network of relationships that provide a space for them to shape and be shaped by the adult-dominated culture around them. For Gubar, this kinship-model approach is a more accurate way of accessing how children's agency is grounded of relationally-based frameworks, particularly the family unit, in structuring young people's lives.[84] Despite these attempts to offer theoretical alternatives, agency remains a hotly contested issue. Nevertheless, discussions about how to fashion a nuanced concept of agency that reflects the realities of childhood appear to be gaining traction in the field.[85]

The themes of agency, the line between children and childhood, and change versus continuity are foundational parts of the historiography on nineteenth-century American childhood. Scholars of this subfield assert that the nineteenth-century was a defining period of transformation and innovation in the history of childhood. During this

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[83] Kristine Alexander, "Agency and Emotion Work," *Jeunesse* 7, no. 2 (2015): 120–128.

[84] Marah Gubar, "The Hermeneutics of Recuperation: What a Kinship-Model Approach to Children's Agency Could Do for Children's Literature and Childhood Studies," 291-310. See also Sara L. Schwebel, "The Limits of Agency for Children's Literature Scholars," 278-290, and Grant, "Review," 482-483.

[85] For example, the concept of agency and how to revise it was a major focus of the 2017 Society for the History of Children and Youth Ninth Biennial Conference, particularly during a roundtable discussion that featured Kristine Alexander (University of Lethbridge), Stephanie Olsen (McGill University), Karen Vallgårda (University of Copenhagen) entitled Against Agency - Toward New History-of-Emotions Approaches to Children as Historical Actors.

era, both within the United States and Europe, sentimentalized conceptions of childhood intensified in content and impact.[86] These romanticized ideals depicted young people as innocent creatures who experienced the world through emotions. Whereas the lines between adulthood and childhood could prove fluid in previous centuries, the nineteenth century marked the moment when childhood was firmly defined as a unique and separate category of life. During this stage of the life span, according to contemporary thinking, individuals received their most formative impressions. Children were increasingly portrayed as malleable, based on John Locke's idea of *tabula rasa*. As historian Barbara Finkelstein argues, "For the first half of the nineteenth century, coalitions of moral reformers…began consciously to conceptualize children as learners in need of carefully structured tutorial environments in which their physical, intellectual, imaginative, and moral capacities would be especially attended and nurtured."[87] Moreover, young people were depicted as being blessed with special purity and spiritual sensitivity, requiring protected environments designed to cultivate their innate sensitivity and goodness.[88]

Accepting the nineteenth-century as a watershed moment in the history of childhood, scholars have produced a rich array of studies that explore how these romanticized ideals impacted American society and politics, along with racial and gendered structures of power. For example, Jaqueline Reinier's *From Virtue to*

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[86] Anne Boylan, "Growing up Female in Young America, 1800-1860," in Hawes and Hiner, *American Childhood*, 134.

[87] Barbara Finkelstein, "Casting Networks of Good Influence: The Reconstruction of Childhood in the United States, 1790-1870," in Hawes and Hiner, *American Childhood*, 118.

[88] Philip J. Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), Jacqueline S. Reinier, *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood, 1775-1850* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), Joseph E. Illick, *American Childhoods* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

Character: American Childhood, 1775-1850 assesses changes in parenting and childrearing patterns in the early nineteenth century. She stressed that the rise of eighteenth-century enlightenment "anti-patriarchy" attitudes combined with Republican Motherhood to produce a heightened emphasis on shaping children's character, with the ultimate goal of creating adults who possessed the civic virtue required to sustain the American republic.[89] In another compelling study, Corinne T. Field argued that age was just as influential as gender and race in determining the political, social, and cultural divisions that defined antebellum America. Specifically, Field demonstrated that black and white women activists, along with black men, stressed both their capability and the necessity of reaching "equal adulthood" alongside white men in the political sphere, which meant the ability to vote at the age of twenty-one. In this way, age became a crucial way of articulating and pursuing the struggle for equality in the early republic.[90] Focusing primarily on the issue of race, Robin Bernstein argued that the concept of "childhood innocence" was central to the formation of race relations in the mid-nineteenth century United States. Whereas white children were imbued with innocence, black children were excluded from it, while African American adults were infantilized in similarly exclusionary ways. These conceptions figured prominently in the divergent racial agendas that evolved between slavery and abolitionism, which eventually paved the way for the anitblack violence and civil rights movements of the twentieth century.[91]

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[89] Reinier, *From Virtue to Character*. See also Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard University Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).

[90] Corinne T. Field, *The Struggle for Equal Adulthood: Gender, Race, Age, and the Fight for Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). See also, Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law, and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

These and related themes provide the foundation for Steven Mintz's synthetic work, *Huck's Raft.* In this masterful study covering the colonial period to the twentieth century, Mintz presented American childhood as both a terrifying and adventurous experience. He traced how, over several centuries, adults agonized over how to construct and manage childhood. But he also revealed the diverse ways children attempted to forge their own paths in response to the larger cultural and social changes constantly surrounding them. Mintz's work is the most comprehensive survey of American childhood published to date, and it is a complex monograph that underscores both the harsh realities and immense freedoms children experienced as they attempted to navigate the journey to adulthood.[92]

Despite the breadth and diversity of themes contained within studies of nineteenth-century American childhood, religion is primarily used as a backdrop rather than a principle theme of analysis. Indeed, theologians often outpace historians in using religion as a means of studying childhood. Scholars of religion have explored how Christianity provides robust theological understandings of children's rights, along with the role of the church in nurturing childhood spiritualty, intellectual formation, and physical wellbeing.[93] In contrast, the intersections between religion and childhood are

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[91] Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

[92] Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 1-7. See also James Marten, ed., *Children and Youth in a New Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), and Corinne T. Field and Nicholas L. Syrett, *Age in America: The Colonial Era to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

[93] For examples, see Pamela Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000); Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990); Peter B. Pufall and Richard P. Unsworth, eds., *Rethinking Childhood* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004); and Kathleen Marshall and Paul Parvis, *Honoring Children: The Human Rights of the Child in Christian Perspective* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews, 2004).

less prominent in historical studies. Notable exceptions exist, such as Lois Banner's 1971 article "Religion and Reform in the Early Republic: The Role of Youth."[94] In 2001, Marcia Bunge edited a collection of historical essays entitled *The Child in Christian Thought.* Moreover, several of the works cited above incorporate religion into their analysis.[95] For example, Jones argued that religious revivalism helped spur new parental techniques in the early nineteenth-century, while Rodney Hessinger acknowledged the importance of religious reform efforts to the creation and maintenance of the youth-oriented "cultural marketplace" that emerged in the antebellum era.[96] Additionally, while it is not strictly a history of childhood, Lincoln Mullen's discussion of the nineteenth-century diversification of religious options and the resulting expansion of religious choices involves analysis of children and institutions like Sunday schools.[97]

Nevertheless, none of these works exhibit sustained and focused analysis of interactions between childhood, Protestantism, and social reform in a manner comparable to the separate historiographical field of nineteenth-century religious volunteerism. In the same way that historians of religion do not consider how shifting constructions of childhood, along with the actual activities of children and youth, generated large-scale religious and social changes in the early republic, historians of childhood often minimize

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[94] Lois Banner, "Religion and Reform in the Early Republic: The Role of Youth," *American Quarterly* 23, no. 5 (1971): 677-695.

[95] Marcia J. Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001). See also Marcia J. Bunge, "The Child, Religion, and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understandings of Children and Childhood," *Journal of Religion* 86, no. 4 (2006): 549-579.

[96] Rodney Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America, 1780-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) 2.

[97] Lincoln A. Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation: A History of Conversion in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

religion as a major force shaping children's lives. They have also yet to fully analyze how religious authorities and organizations have historically created age-defined frameworks that both enhance and restrict childhood spirituality, or how children experienced these constructions. As a result, as with the history of women's religious reform movements, the history of childhood remains disconnected from the larger story of nineteenth-century American religious change.

Overview of the Study

Merging the fields of religion, childhood, and gender, this dissertation analyzes the Sunday school movement from 1790 to 1860 to show how concepts of childhood, and young people themselves, helped shape American religious culture. Religious disestablishment, republican concerns about virtue, and romanticized reconstructions of childhood led to a new focus on children within the Protestant reform movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Reformers began founding organizations and ministries designed for children alone on mass scale, thereby inaugurating a new phase within American Christianity when evangelical institutions were customized to specific life stages. Put another way, age became an increasingly crucial factor in determining the shape and substance of the American evangelical experience, and children became their own distinct religious marketplace. As a result, a significant portion of reformist energy was channeled toward disseminating child-centric religious institutions like Sunday schools throughout the country. This in turn established physical and imagined communities of faith exclusively for young people, both black and white, creating a new space for childhood spiritual activity that transformed the American religious landscape. Moreover, the institution helped popularize sentimentalized ideas about children,

particularly the notion that childhood was a distinct stage of life that requires specialized educational and spiritual nurture, in a manner that contributed to the formation of a broader child-centric culture that persists in the United States to the present. Despite the divide between histories of American religion and histories of American childhood, young people directly shaped the formation of early nineteenth-century Protestantism, even as evangelical institutions were integral to the creation of early nineteenth-century childhood. Thus, the priorities, power structures, and growth strategies undergirding nineteenth-century American religion and culture cannot be understood without taking young people into account.

The establishment of physical and imagined child-centric communities of faith changed the American religious landscape in several ways. They not only facilitated new pathways to religious belonging in the early nineteenth century, but also redistributed spiritual authority to two social groups, the first being young people themselves. Sunday schools promoted an alternative religious agency for children that empowered young people to participate in their own conversion processes, adopting innovative pedagogical methods that required pupils to actively engage with religious curriculum and encouraged them to seek personal relationships with God. Moreover, proponents of the Sunday school movement empowered adolescents to serve as teachers, hoping to inspire youth to take up the cause of national evangelism. Putting youth in positions of authority as teachers within these institutions enabled young people to assume unprecedented levels of religious leadership. Sunday schools thereby became transformative and transactional spaces where young people could both shape and be shaped by the growing Protestant community. As a result, in the early nineteenth century youth emerged as a significant group that helped

power the machine of volunteerism and contributed to the spread of evangelicalism on the ground.

At the same time, the newfound leadership adolescents were able to assume in Sunday schools, along with the measure of agency pupils could exercise in determining their receptivity to religious instruction, was constantly overseen and circumscribed by adults. The emergence of child-centric religious communities, therefore, complicates scholarly understandings of religious power in the nineteenth century. The presence of youth leadership reveals that evangelical reform was possibly more inclusive than scholars such as Porterfield and Haselby describe. However, children did not enjoy the full measure of religious democratization that Nathan Hatch claims swept American religious culture in this period.[98] Within Sunday schools, religious agency was limited by young people's inherent dependency on adults, underscoring the importance of age in structuring the evangelical experience.

Sunday schools also helped redistribute religious authority to women. As this dissertation shows, Sunday schools were particularly significant for allowing women who fell outside the marital-maternal model to expand their religious influence. Because these institutions were distinct from both the home and the church, they functioned as spaces in which unmarried or childless women could work to convert children in ways that were traditionally reserved for parents and pastors. This in turn redrew the boundaries surrounding female volunteerism and enabled single and childless women to claim a role

[98] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989). Similarly, Jon Butler describes the formation of an "antebellum spiritual hothouse" that gave Americans an unprecedented amount of religious options, see Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 225-288. See also Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation.*

in raising the next generation of Christian citizens in their own right. Yet Sunday schools were also appealing for married women and mothers, providing them with a means of extending the domestic work of childhood religious formation to a more public setting. In this way, Sunday schools helped pave the way for women to assume increasing amounts of social and religious empowerment. Ann Tylor Allen makes a similar argument in reference to women's roles in weekday public school initiatives like the kindergarten. She argues that the work of education "as a whole was part of the historical process that laid the foundations for the emergence of modern feminism in its many forms. It belonged to what in the nineteenth century was called the 'women's movement'…which included a variety of women's organizations and initiatives."[99] As an equally female-dominated institution, the Sunday school can be placed in this same category. The creation of child-centric religious communities provided a sphere of religious activity that constituted one of the most acceptable means of allowing women to assume control of transmitting values to the rising generation outside their own families, and recognizing this impact can function as a means of bridging the scholarly gap between women's religious history and master narratives of American religious history.

In order to trace the emergence of child-centric religious communities and how they challenged inherited patterns of social and cultural authority, this dissertation weaves together multiple lines of inquiry about children and childhood in the early nineteenth century. Building off Hugh Cunningham's concept of "children as both human beings and childhood as a shifting set of ideas," the project uses Sunday schools as a lens for exploring both how adults sought to construct childhood spirituality within the context of building a

[99] Ann Taylor Allen, *The Transatlantic Kindergarten: Education and Women's Movements in Germany and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7.

Christian nation, and how children experienced these shifting ideals within the concrete realm of religious institutions. The study primarily analyzes shifting cultural constructions and practices of childhood, but when possible the experiences of real children are also integrated into the narrative. This approach is in keeping with recent scholarship that, as historian of childhood Catherine A. Jones explains, resists "sharply dividing the social from the cultural in favor of integrating inquiry into children and childhood, acknowledging that children themselves made choices about their lives but always within real cultural and political constraints."[100] Additionally, as indicated above, another major theme of this dissertation is analyzing how shifts in gendered reform activities interacted with shifting construction of childhood to facilitate the emergence of female leadership within nineteenth-century evangelicalism. In this way, the dissertation combines the interpretive lens of gender with that of childhood, showing how both elements converged to shape Protestant culture.[101] Given the Sunday school's expansive reach in the early nineteenth century, this study also incorporates a wide range of denominations and regions. The first two chapters focus mainly on the Northeast and denominations such as the Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Congregationalists, since the leading Sunday school reformers initially came from these groups. The other three chapters broaden the focus to include Methodists and Baptists, plus increased emphasis on Sunday schools in the South. Moreover, issues of

[100] Catherine A. Jones, *Intimate Reconstructions: Children in Postemancipation Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 10. Scholarship that exhibits a similar approach includes Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future after Slavery* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), Bernstein, *Racial Innocence,* Anna Mae Duane, *Suffering Childhood in Early America: Violence, Race, and the Making of the Child Victim* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), and Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[101] This is in direct response to Brekus' call for more integrated gendered histories of American religion, see Brekus, "Introduction", 1-34.

race and class appear prominently alongside gender as crucial factors that shaped and complicated the spread of Sunday schools.

Frequently illiterate and usually excluded from formal positions of power, children usually leave behind few primary sources.[102] Yet, records left by the Sunday school movement present a variety of opportunities to piece together glimpses of childhood and children's lived experiences in the early nineteenth century. The foundational sources for this study are drawn from the movement's leading organizations, such as the American Sunday School Union, the New York Sunday School Union, and the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union. The sources include a range of materials, such as meeting minutes, published annual reports, and children's religious fiction. However, since this study is not intended to be an institutional history, it utilizes a variety of additional sources. Correspondence, diaries, and memoirs from Sunday school teachers and missionaries are extensively employed. Sermons on childrearing, childhood spirituality, or religious education provide another important supplemental source, as they offer a window into general attitudes toward children's place within American Protestantism during this period. Additionally, a significant portion of the dissertation focuses on analyzing the didactic literature disseminated to children through Sunday schools. Collectively, this material provides valuable insight into the ways evangelicals attempted to construct and standardize ideal Christian childhoods, while also providing snapshots into children's lived religious experiences.

As noted, the dissertation is divided into five chapters, plus the introduction and conclusion. The first section is composed of three chapters. Covering the period from

[102] Schwebel, "The Limits of Agency for Children's Literature Scholars," 278-290.

1790 to 1824, these chapters explore the changes that occurred between the founding of the first Sunday school organization in Philadelphia and the creation of the national American Sunday School Union. This section explains how the Sunday school went from being a regional humanitarian effort designed to educate the poor into a national evangelistic movement intended to foster conversion among children of all classes and races. This shift has not been thoroughly explored in previous historical literature, and as a result the first section of the project focuses on tracing this chronological change. The second half of the dissertation analyzes the methods, challenges, and impact of establishing Sunday schools as a national religious institution from 1824-1860. While chronology plays a role in this section, it is mainly thematic in focus, exploring how Sunday school leaders used the institution to socialize young people into the growing Protestant community and to repackage evangelical concepts in a child-friendly manner. This section also uncovers some of the discrepancies between ideals and realities within the movement, showing how the models of religious experience and behavior promoted by organizations such as the ASSU often failed to adequately address issues like sectional tension or racism.

Chapter One describes the initial founding of American Sunday schools in the 1790s, highlighting republican ideals of childhood that initially shaped the movement. Chapter Two moves the narrative into the early nineteenth century by examining how evangelical reformers combined revivalist impulses with sentimentalized views of childhood to remake Sunday schools into tools for converting children and empowering youth leadership. This chapter focuses in particular on women's efforts to found Sunday schools and the gendered implications of promoting male and female adolescent

leadership within these child-centric religious communities. Chapter Three focuses on the national organization founded in 1824, the American Sunday School Union, analyzing how this society attempted to dominate the emerging youth-oriented religious marketplace by expanding the spiritual influence white children could wield in Sunday schools while marginalizing African Americans. Chapter Four explores how Sunday schools contributed to children's religious publishing, emphasizing how ASSU literature promoted an ideal of alternative religious agency for children. Chapter Five reconstructs young people's lived experiences in antebellum-era Sunday schools, focusing on Protestant case studies from Massachusetts and Delaware, with Jewish Sunday schools from Pennsylvania and African American Sunday schools in the South included for comparison. This chapter highlights how these institutions fostered youth leadership on the ground, especially for adolescent women, while also assessing how issues of gender, race, and regionalism defined the rhythms of children's religious lives.

Taken together, these chapters demonstrate that ideas about childhood combined with religious beliefs to undergird the impulse toward social reform in the early national period. Reformers' growing obsession with formalizing childhood religious development, along with young people's participation in evangelical institutions, left indelible impressions on the priorities and strategies that sustained volunteerism. By founding these overtly religious institutions on mass scale, reformers offered children an innovative avenue for formulating and expressing their faith. They also provided a standardized form of religious education for thousands of young people grounded in sentimentalized constructions of children's spiritual malleability, which also helped socialize them into the wider evangelical community. In the process, reformers used

Sunday schools to integrate children's religious needs into the larger goals energizing the Benevolent Empire. In this way, the Sunday school's growth also represents a microcosm of the larger interaction between childhood and evangelicalism that occurred in this period. Shifts within Sunday schools reveal that as evangelical reform activity increased within the United States, childhood's visibility and value also increased. Influenced by eighteenth and early nineteenth-century reconstructions of childhood, reformers cared deeply about young people. Thus, childhood religious formation became a core value driving the Protestant project of creating a Christian republic, and religious educational institutions designed for children constituted one of the most impactful methods of building the Benevolent Empire. Moreover, ways that these child-centric religious communities facilitated access to spiritual leadership opportunities for groups like adolescents or single women helped expand the category of reformer to include a wider range of participants than historians often acknowledge.

Ultimately, this dissertation argues for the importance of incorporating age as a category of analysis into histories of American religion alongside equally significant factors such as gender and race. Such an interpretive lens not only demonstrates the crucial role that ideals of childhood, along with the actual activities of children and youth, played in the development of Protestant culture, but also reveals how life stages impact the American religious experience into the modern day. Just as significantly, this study opens up additional lines of scholarly inquiry by addressing the question of how religious values were transmitted on the ground from one generation to another within these new child-centric religious communities. Simultaneously, this study argues for the prominence of religion in giving shape and substance to American childhood. Sunday

schools disseminated innovative ideas about children's spiritual potential and malleability that changed the way adults treated young people within their religious communities. This in turn helped popularize the notion that childhood was a distinct stage of life that required special nurture, thereby supporting the larger formation of the child-centric and age-conscious culture that eventually dominated modern American society. The story of the nineteenth-century transformation of American childhood, therefore, is also the story of American religious expansion and cultural change.

CHAPTER TWO

"Reforming Morals and Manners": The Founding of American Sunday Schools

In his 1776 pamphlet, *Common Sense,* Thomas Paine declared that the Revolutionary War gave Americans the "power to begin the world over again."[1] As reflected in Paine's statement, supporters of the Revolution believed that the war was not only a protest again political tyranny, but an opportunity to recreate their national identity. The drive to envision society and government anew assumed heightened importance after the war. Benjamin Rush expressed both the optimism and anxiety of the period when he asserted in 1787 that "there is nothing more common than to confound the terms of the *American Revolution* with those of *the late American war*. The American war is over: but this is far from being the case with the American Revolution." Rush further explained that the true revolution would be accomplished when Americans applied themselves to the weighty task of preparing "the principles, morals, and manners of our citizens for these forms of government."[2] Like other leading patriots of his day, Rush believed that virtue, a term that encompassed a variety of public-spirited ethics such as responsibility and self-sacrifice, should be the foundation of an American approach to citizenship. The founders assumed that their republican experiment would thrive if virtue was cultivated throughout society and diligently passed on to the next generation.

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[1] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), accessed on November 8, 2014 from EBSCOhost, http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzIwMTEwNDlfX0FO0?sid=ce052358-f6ad-4d6a-9823-b37e868e474c@sessionmgr4004&vid=6&format=EK&lpid=np-2&rid=0.

[2] Italicized as in original, Benjamin Rush, "The Defects of the Confederation," as quoted in James Marten, ed., *Children and Youth in a New Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 130.

Without virtue, however, the Republic would descend into vice and ultimately disintegrate under the weight of corruption.[3]

The prioritization of virtue as key to the Republic's survival generated an important transition in attitudes toward children and childrearing in the post-Revolutionary period. According to historian James Marten, "as Americans tried to determine what it meant to be an American, they also wondered what it meant to be an American *child*."[4] Marten argues that the Revolution produced an "optimistic campaign to integrate young Americans into the republican experiment."[5] Children therefore assumed newfound significance within the Republic, becoming the primary object of founding generation's hopes and dreams for the future. Moreover, childrearing became linked to the preservation of republican virtue within the public sphere, thereby elevating the status of mothers with American society and helping to produce the ideology of Republican Motherhood.[6] The founders also believed that, in addition to proper

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[3] Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7-8; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 344-345, Mark Noll, *America's God*: *From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 57, 90, Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution.* New York: Basic Books, 2010), 99-101, Gordon Wood, *The American Revolution: A History* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2003), 94.

[4] James Marten, "Introduction," in Marten, *Children and Youth in a New Nation*, 5.

[5] Marten, "Introduction," 5. Additional scholarship within the history of childhood that shares this view includes Anne Scott MacLeod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds. *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), Jacqueline S. Reinier, *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood, 1775-1850* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard University Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), Joseph E. Illick, *American Childhoods* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley, eds., *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

[6] See Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and*

parenting, formal educational institutions shared direct responsibility for cultivating virtuous citizenship within children, leading to the creation of numerous schools and academies throughout the early national period.[7]

In the post-Revolutionary period, however, children became a focal point for the founding generation's fears. After the war, concern for cultivating virtuous citizenship in the rising generation was intertwined with larger anxieties over the future of the new nation. If young people failed to respect the principles of liberty and adopt civic-minded virtues, the Republic would supposedly crumble. Anxiety over children's potential to negatively impact the country's future represented just one of the many fears that shaped the new nation. Recent scholarship on the early national period highlights the role of anxiety and doubt in creating major religious, political, and social institutions.[8] For example, Amanda Porterfield argues that "the 1790s saw rising panic about how to get along in the new world of American liberty, where old traditions of decorum had broken down, stability was a memory about the past, and innocence an invitation to predators." She goes on to assert that "religious institutions grew as much to manage mistrustful

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Ideology in Revolutionary America (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), and Margaret A. Nash, "Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 2 (1997): 171-191.

[7] Scholarship on this topic includes David Tyack, "Forming the National Character: Paradox in the Educational Thought of the Revolutionary Generation," *Harvard Educational Review* 36 (1966): 29-41, Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), Wayne Urban and Jennings Wagoner, Jr., *American Education: A History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), Mintz, *Huck's Raft,* 71-72, Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), Nancy Beadie, *Education and the Creation of the Capital in the Early American Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[8] Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Jonathan Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

doubt as to relieve it."[9] Similarly, the increasing attention given to childrearing and childhood education in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was as much a response to growing unease about the stability and security of the Republic as it was optimism over children's place within it.

The American Sunday school movement was born directly out of the combined influences of optimism and anxiety about childhood, the cultivation of virtue, and the nation's future. The first Sunday school organization established in America, the First Day Society, was inspired by Christian republicanism and dedicated to solving the problem youthful degeneracy.[10] The society promoted a republican-humanitarian model of education, which sought to use religion to develop virtue among poor children in an attempt to fashion them into responsible citizens who would help ensure the survival of the new nation. As a result, the First Day Society was not strictly religious in form or function. Indeed, the society's ideology and methods exhibited a determination to use religion as a means to achieving republican ends. Ultimately, the members of the organization were more concerned with preventing the "deprivation of morals and manners" than saving souls, an orientation that provides valuable insight into ways that both religious and secular conceptions of childhood were reshaped in the early national period.[11]

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[9] Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt,* 2.

[10] The formal name for the organization was the Society for the Institution and Support of First-Day or Sunday Schools in the City of Philadelphia, and the Districts of Southwark and the Northern Liberties. Usually the organization was simply referred to as the First Day Society.

[11] First Day Society, *Constitution of the Society for the Institution and Support of First-Day or Sunday Schools in the City of Philadelphia, and the Districts of Southwark and the Northern Liberties, with A List of the Names of the Present Annual Contributors and the Members for Life. Rules for the Government of Said Schools, and a Summary of the Proceedings of the Society from Its Commencement to*

Sunday school historians, especially Anne Boylan, acknowledge that the First Day Society differed from the rest of the movement in its civic-minded, republican orientation.[12] However, the First Day Society is usually treated as an aberration within the movement. As a result, the broader social and cultural forces that brought Sunday schools to the United States, particularly the emergence of republican conceptions of childhood, are usually given cursory analysis within the literature. By marginalization the First Day Society, historians downplay the elements that initially Americanized the Sunday school movement and helped to ensure the institution's acceptance. Yet as an analysis of the organization's founding in Philadelphia in 1790 reveals, American Sunday schools were born out of the elevation of childhood that emerged as a result of the distinctly Christian republican drive to inculcate virtue within society. This republican-humanitarian emphasis injected a strain of civic-minded nationalism into the movement that persisted long after the First Day Society declined in the early nineteenth century, giving Sunday schools a distinctly American approach to shaping childhood.

Ideological and Social Context

While Sunday schools did not emerge as a formal reform movement until the late eighteenth century, the idea of devoting a portion of "the Lord's day" to educate children was not novel. Sunday schools appeared occasionally throughout the colonial period, mainly to provide catechetical training and sometimes a rudimentary education for

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July, 1810. With an Account of the Present State of the Funds. (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1810), v, University of Texas, Collections Deposit Library. Hereafter referred to *Constitution and 1810 Summary.*

[12] Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 156-157; Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright, *The Big Little School: Sunday Child of American Protestantism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 1-2; Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 7.

communities that lacked a regular weekday school. One of the first Sunday schools was founded in Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1674, and another was organized in Plymouth in 1680.[13] In 1740, Dr. Joseph Bellamy founded a Sunday school in Bethlehem, Connecticut, to instruct the children of his congregation in Scripture and the catechism.[14] A similar school was founded in the German community of Ephrata, Pennsylvania, in 1747 to "give instruction to the indigent children who were kept from regular school by employments which their necessities obliged them to be engaged at during the week, as well as to give *religious* instruction to those of better circumstances."[15] These schools were designed to address the specific educational or catechetical needs of children in particular congregations and tended to be implemented sporadically. Moreover, the Revolutionary War disrupted most colonial Sunday schools, such as when the Ephrata Sunday school was forced to close after the building was converted into a military hospital.[16]

The occasional use of Sunday schools in the colonial period was grounded in the larger premise that children needed to be nurtured in the religious beliefs of their fathers, an attitude that was particularly dominant in Puritan New England. According to Mintz, the Puritans were among the first to seriously reflect on the process of child development, writing more books on childrearing than any other group in the sixteenth and seventeenth

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[13] Pardee, *The Sabbath-School Index*, 13.

[14] Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 442.

[15] Italicized as original, records of the Brother's House in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, as quoted in Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 443; see also Pardee, *The Sabbath-School Index*, 13.

[16] For more on colonial Sunday schools, see Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 40-44.

centuries.[17] Puritans considered the family to be a "'little commonwealth,' the keystone of the social order and a microcosm of the relationships of superiority and subordination that characterized the larger society."[18] Believing that children were born with original sin, Puritan ministers urged parents to rid their offspring of corruption through strict discipline and constant prayer.[19] By the mid-eighteenth century the Puritan model of childrearing was modified into a more evangelical approach that stressed nurturing children's hearts over breaking their wills. Rather than highlight original sin, ministers such as Samuel Davies asserted that children possessed "that tenderness of heart, and those soft impressionable passions" which made them "more susceptive to religious impressions" than adults.[20] Portraying young people as spiritually malleable, Davies and other ministers began emphasizing the need to teach children the fundamentals of Christian doctrine in emotionally appealing ways.[21]

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[17] Mintz, *Huck's Raft,* 12-17.

[18] Mintz, *Huck's Raft,* 13.

[19] For an example of this kind of ministerial rhetoric, see Increase Mather, *Pray for the Rising Generation, or A Sermon Wherein Godly Parents are Encouraged, to Pray and Believe for Their Children, Preached the Third Day of the Fifth Month, 1678. Which day was set apart by the Second Church in Boston in New-England, Humbly to Seek Unto God by Fasting and Prayer, for a Spirit of Converting Grace, to be Poured out Upon the Children and Rising Generation in New-England* (Cambridge: Samuel Green, 1678). Philip Greven notes that there were varieties of Puritan approaches to childrearing, but he contends that the same basic emphasis on corruption, discipline, and nurturing toward godliness generally applied throughout the New England colonies. Mintz also asserts that because the Puritans dominated childrearing publications, their influence in this area was paramount even in areas outside New England and can be considered the standard model for the colonial period. See Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), and Mintz, *Huck's Raft,* 12-17.

[20] Samuel Davies, *Little Children Invited to Jesus Christ. A sermon, Preached in Hanover County, Virginia, May 8, 1758. With an Account of the Late Remarkable Religious Impressions Among the Students in the College of New-Jersey*, 5th edition (Hartford: T. Green, 1765), 4.

[21] For examples of the new emotional approach to children's religious education, see Davies, *Little Children Invited to Jesus Christ,* Anonymous, *A Plain Discourse for Little Children, With Recommendatory Preface by the Rev. T. Jones of St. Saviour, Southwark,* 7th edition (Boston: Samuel Kneeland, 1965), and John Lathrop, *The Importance of Early Piety: Illustrated in a Discourse, Preached at*

After the Revolution ministers began promoting a child-centric approach to religious education for its temporal as well as its spiritual impact. Recognizing the social and political benefits of childhood religious education arose partly in response to the growth of Christian republican ideology. Most of the founding generation believed that religion was the most effective tool for cultivating disinterested virtue. Protestantism provided the moral foundation required to sustain republics, making religion an essential tool for shaping the nation's character and safeguarding its survival.[22] This presumed partnership between religion and republican liberty created a unique approach to nation-building known as Christian republicanism, an ideology that provided America "with a new moral vision."[23] In 1788 Tristram Gilman, a Congregationalist minister from Maine and future trustee of Bowdoin College, affirmed a Christian republican perspective by arguing that both "the church and commonwealth" would profit from cultivating children's unique spiritual capacities. Gilman asserted that religious education not only taught young people to "fear the Lord," but it also equipped them with virtues that would enable them to become "useful members of society in their generation."[24] Similarly, in a sermon delivered in 1789, College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) president

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the Desire of a Religious Society of Young Men, in Medford, New-England, March 20th, 1771 (Boston: Thomas, 1771).

[22] Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 583, 593; Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 199-200, 212. Mark Noll offers a detailed description of the development of Christian republicanism in *America's God*, 54-103.

[23] Kidd, *God of Liberty*, 98.

[24] Tristram Gilman, *The Right Education of Children Recommended, in a Sermon, Preached in a New School-House in North-Yarmouth, September 23, 1788; and Now Published by the Desire of Those Who Heard It* (Boston: Samuel Hall, 1789), 19, 21. Gilman also took a leading role in a major revival that came to Maine in 1791. Information on Gilman obtained from Harvard College Library, "Gilman, Tristram, 1735-1809. Tristram Gilman Sermons and other Papers: Guide," http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~hou00305, and "Collections of the Maine Historical Society," http://archive.org/stream/collectionsofmai02lcmain/collectionsofmai02lcmain_djvu.txt

John Witherspoon argued that an individual's piety and usefulness in adulthood was largely determined by the religious impressions received in childhood.[25] Using the logic of Christian republicanism, Witherspoon believed that adults should take every opportunity to develop children's spiritual potential, since this would not only bring them "within the bonds of God's covenant" but would foster the "prudent, watchful, guarded conduct" required to support the new nation.[26]

The clergy's growing emphasis on the joint spiritual and social value of providing religious education for children corresponded with the rising importance placed on young people throughout American culture in the post-Revolutionary period. After the war, children were elevated to the status of citizens in training. Far from being passive onlookers to the republican experiment, children could directly contribute to the nation's development by dedicating themselves to cultivating virtue and thereby develop into future American leaders.[27] Considering young people the hope of the future, patriot elites like Noah Webster urged adults to remember that they had "a national character to establish" in the hearts of their children.[28] Similarly, Samuel Stillman wrote that "knowledge and virtue are the basis and life of the Republic; therefore, the education of children and youth, should be the first object of the attention of government, and of every class of citizen."[29] By disseminating a common civic morality to the rising generation

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[25] John Witherspoon, *A Sermon on the Religious Education of Children. Preached, in the Old Presbyterian Church in New-York, to a very Numerous Audience, on the Evening of the Second Sabbath in May* (Elizabethtown: Shepherd Kollock, 1789), 20.

[26] Witherspoon, *A Sermon on the Religious Education of Children,* 5, 23.

[27] Reinier, *From Virtue to Character,* 20-46.

[28] Noah Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America," in Frederick Rudolph, ed., *Essays on Education in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 77.

based on the republican ideals of liberty and disinterested benevolence, the founders believed they could create a homogenous national identity out of the disparate groups that formed the country.[30]

This drive to inculcate virtue within youth was optimistic, but children also functioned as a focal point for the founding generation's fears. Rising birthrates and population increase were particularly alarming to republican elites. The population grew by 137 percent between 1740 and 1770, and the number continued to rise in subsequent decades.[31] Between 1790 and 1825, the population swelled from four million to over eleven million.[32] This spike occurred simultaneously with a perceived breakdown in traditional family structures and the apprenticeship system. The growth of urbanization and industrialization gave young people, especially boys, greater economic options and inspired many of them to leave their families to seek their fortunes independently in the cities.[33] Urban populations rose at an astonishing pace, roughly quadrupling in number between 1790 and 1825. By leaving the protection of families and masters for unsupervised city life, young people ostensibly removed themselves from the moral safeguards idealized by ministers and risked descending into vice.[34] Thus, the Revolution

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[29] Samuel Stillman, *An Oration, Delivered July 4th, 1789, at the Request of the Inhabitants of the Town of Boston, in Celebration of the Anniversary of American Independence* (Boston: B. Edes & Son, 1789), 25, Early American Imprints, Series I, Evans (1639-1800).

[30] Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, 240.

[31] T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 61.

[32] Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, 75.

[33] Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, 56-89, 253-255. See also Reinier, *From Virtue to Character*, 103, 114. For case studies on the breakdown of the apprenticeship system, see Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, and Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

elevated the status of children only insofar as they remained within the confines of the traditional family and dedicated themselves to pursing republican virtues. Young people who transgressed these boundaries or who lacked stable families and a proper education fell outside the Christian republican ideal and were considered a threat to the republic.

The issue of population growth and young people's increasing mobility were particularly anxiety inducing because they supposedly contributed to the larger post-Revolutionary problem of poverty. Poor people of any age were thought to be especially inclined toward vice, because they supposedly existed in a state of ignorance and degeneracy.[35] Consequently, patriot leaders were anxious to check the growth of poverty in major cities, like Philadelphia. In the 1780s Philadelphia was the largest city in the United States and served as the political, intellectual, and commercial capital. The city was dominated by mercantile and upper class elites like Benjamin Rush.[36] This progressive and religiously tolerant group felt that the growth of poverty threatened their efforts to make Philadelphia into the ideal republican city.[37] By 1784 at least fifteen percent of Philadelphia's population was considered poor, a designation that encompassed both those dependent on charity for survival and unskilled manual laborers.[38] The elite felt that many of these poor Philadelphians used the Revolution as

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[34] Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, 174; Noll, *America's God*, 57; Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 345-347. The term vice was used as a foil to the term virtue, generally encompassing negative character qualities like greed, self-seeking, and idleness.

[35] Noll, *America's God*, 57; Kidd, *God of Liberty*, 218; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 21-22.

[36] Gary Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 108, Russell F. Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 122; 172.

[37] Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 197-198; Nash, *First City*, 176; John K. Alexander, *Render Them Submissive: Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760-1800* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 4-6.

license to claim privileges they did not deserve due to lack of education and wealth.[39] The *Freemen's Journal* complained in 1787 that "the American character [is marked] with an over-driven sense of liberty….This high sense of Liberty has, indeed, even in ruder minds, produced a fierce independent spirit, without which the Revolution could not have been effected; but it has also in too many created a licentiousness, at present very detrimental, and incompatible with good government."[40] The Synod of Philadelphia expressed a common anxiety in 1780 when it complained of the decay in "piety, the degeneracy of manners, want of public spirit and prevalence of vice and immorality.'"[41]

While secular and religious authorities agreed that poverty and ignorance posed a direct threat to republican virtue, they disagreed over how to shield young people from these dangers. For ministers like Davies and Gilman, genuine morality was rooted in devotion to Christ, and conversion was the fundamental goal of education.[42] In the post-Revolutionary period, however, many educational theorists began to argue for a more general Christian-republican approach to education that, although acknowledging the importance of religion in promoting morality, primarily aspired to cultivate good citizenship. One of the most articulate spokesmen for this civic-minded, humanitarian model of education was Benjamin Rush. Raised a Presbyterian, Rush became

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[38] Alexander, *Render Them Submissive*, 8-9.

[39] Nash, *First City*, 178-179; Alexander, *Render Them Submissive*, 30-31; Weigley, *Philadelphia*, 158-159, 166-167.

[40] *Freeman's Journal*, August 22, 1787.

[41] As quoted in Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 213.

[42] In addition to the sermons already cited as evidence of this view, see Philip Doddridge, *Sermons on the Religious Education of Children* (Boston: Kneeland, 1763), and Samuel Spring, *Three Sermons to Little Children; On the Nature and Beauty of the Dutiful Temper* (Newburyport: John Mycall, 1783).

increasingly liberal in his theology and eventually became a Universalist, although he maintained ties to the Presbyterian and Episcopalian Churches.[43] Rush was involved in numerous causes like temperance and abolitionism throughout his life, but educational reform was the one initiative he pursued with consistency and passion. He influenced a variety of educational movements, including Sunday schools. His writings reveal significant contrasts between the civic humanitarian approach to education and the catechetical model promoted by many eighteenth-century clergymen, differences that profoundly shaped the way Sunday schools were initially constructed in the United States.[44]

In his 1798 essay, *On the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic*, Rush stated that republican governments placed special moral responsibilities on its citizens, making it crucial for schools to produce "wise and good men.[45] Rush argued that the best way to accomplish this goal was to infuse instruction with Protestant morality, a belief shared by most educational theorists at the time.[46] Rush grounded his proposal in the assumption that "a Christian cannot fail of being a republican" because "every precept of the Gospel inculcates those degrees of humility, self-denial, and brotherly kindness, which are directly opposed to the pride of monarchy and the pageantry of a court. A Christian

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[43] Kidd, *God of Liberty*, 110-111; May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 208-209.

[44] Robert H. Abzug, *Crumbling Cosmos: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 11-29; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 475; May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 208-211.

[45] Benjamin Rush, "On the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," in Runes, ed., *Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush*, 87.

[46] William H. Jeynes, *American Educational History: School, Society, and the Common Good* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), 38-42; Timothy L. Smith, "Protestant Schooling and American Nationality, 1800-1850" *Journal of American History* 53, no. 4 (1967): 679-680.

cannot fail of being useful to the republic, for his religion teacheth him, that no man 'liveth to himself'."[47] Unlike the clergy, however, Rush did not emphasize Protestantism for its spiritual superiority. He asserted that all religions taught beneficial moral lessons and expressed an openness to having non-Christian beliefs taught in the classroom, but felt that Protestantism should be dominant because it offered the most clear and convincing system of ethics.[48]

Additionally, Rush felt that religion was only one of many tools for creating virtuous citizens. Unlike most ministers of the period, he did not believe that innate depravity was the cause of poverty and crime, asserting instead that "vices and punishments are the fatal consequences of the want of a proper education in life."[49] Rush supposed that the remedy for the ailment of vice was to develop humanity's common moral sense, an idea originally promoted by Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Francis Hutcheson.[50] According to Hutcheson, all of humanity possessed an innate, God-given moral intelligence that allowed them to distinguish between right and wrong.[51] Morality could be systematically developed through education, and Rush felt that schools should focus on nurturing this common moral sense.[52] He also embraced Locke's argument that

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[47] Benjamin Rush, "On the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," in Runes, ed., *Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush*, 87-88.

[48] Rush, "Mode of Education," 88-89.

[49] Benjamin Rush, "Education Agreeable to a Republican Form of Government," in Runes, *Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush*, 100.

[50] Benjamin Rush, "The Bible as a School Book. Addressed to the Rev. Jeremy Belknap, of Boston," in Runes, ed., *Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush*, 126-127.

[51] Noll, *America's God*, 93-94; Jaqueline Reinier, "Rearing the Republican Child: Attitudes and Practices in Post-Revolutionary Philadelphia," *William and Mary Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1982): 156.

[52] Noll, *America's God*, 93-94, 106; Reinier, "Rearing the Republican Child," 156; Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 65.

environment was critical to the development of virtue, causing him to recommend that teachers use methods like exercise and cleanliness to instill good habits.[53] Rush felt that if educators merged these enlightenment principles with Protestant values, "the combined and reciprocal influence of religion, liberty and learning upon the morals, manners and knowledge" of students would raise them to immeasurable "degrees of happiness and perfection."[54] He believed that the goal of education was not to indoctrinate students but to "inspire them with republican principles," create a homogenous American identity, and "convert men into republican machines."[55] Unlike many clergymen of his day, Rush's educational philosophy was not oriented around conversion, but aimed to produce virtuous citizens.[56]

Reframing education as a means of preserving the Republic from corruption and perfect the rising generation inspired philanthropists like Rush to found new educational initiatives in the post-Revolutionary period. After the war many northern states proposed a variety of public school legislation, but most failed because states were hesitant to impose taxes for public programs. Moreover, the majority of the population was rural, making a uniform system of mandatory education difficult to enforce.[57] As a result, education remained a largely privatized and humanitarian endeavor, with schools divided

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[53] Rush, "Mode of Education," 88, 91-92; Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 20; Reinier, "Rearing the Republican Child," 151-154, 158.

[54] Rush, "Mode of Education," 96.

[55] Rush, "Mode of Education," 88, 90-92. For the general view, see Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 6-7, and Urban and Wagoner, *American Education* 87; Tyack, "Forming the National Character", 29-33.

[56] Kidd, *God of Liberty*, 111.

[57] Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 471-472; Reinier, *From Virtue to Character*, 102-103, 114-115.

between pay schools for the upper and middle classes and charity schools for the lower class.[58] Weekday charity schools for the poor became increasingly popular in urban areas like Philadelphia, New York, and Boston in the late eighteenth-century.[59] Charity schools were normally overseen by private reform organizations or churches, and were created largely to manage the perceived threat of poverty. In the case of Philadelphia, the city's large Quaker population was particularly active in supporting weekday charity schools.[60] Most of these institutions taught only the rudimentary subjects like reading and writing.[61] Attendance at charity schools, however, was contingent upon young people not having to work during the week, an impractical requirement since most poor children were required to help financially support their families.[62] Realizing that weekday schools could only reach a limited number of impoverished children, reformers began seeking additional educational options for the lower class. This need for alternatives to weekday schools, along with growing anxiety over creating an intelligent and virtuous community, created an ideal context for the creation of American Sunday schools.

Origins of American Sunday Schools

The man primarily responsible for bringing the Sunday school movement to the United States was Rush's friend and fellow reformer, Bishop William White. Born in 1748, White was an Anglican priest who enthusiastically supported American

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[58] Smith, "Protestant Schooling and American Nationality," 681.

[59] Weigley, *Philadelphia*, 224-226; Jeynes, *American Educational History*, 37-42; Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 69; Tyack, "Forming the National Character," 29-41.

[60] Reinier, *From Virtue to Character*, 115.

[61] Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 51-57.

[62] Reinier, *From Virtue to Character*, 103.

independence. He served as a chaplain to the Continental Congress and developed friendships with leading patriots like George Washington. In 1779 he was appointed rector of St. Peter's and Christ Church in Philadelphia after the loyalist pastors of the congregations fled for England, serving both churches in what was known as the United Parish. After the war White dedicated himself to ensuring the survival of the new Episcopal denomination. He presided over the first General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 1785, and one year later he was elected bishop of the diocese of Pennsylvania. He was also an indefatigable reformer, serving in organizations dedicated to causes like prison reform and the prevention of prostitution.[63]

White traveled to London to be consecrated as a bishop in 1786. During this trip he was introduced to Britain's Sunday schools, a reform movement that began six years earlier under the direction of a printer and philanthropist named Robert Raikes.[64] Concerned with the problems of poverty and crime plaguing his native city of Gloucester, Raikes was especially appalled by the way that Sunday was "prostituted to bad purposes" because of the "lawless state of the younger class, who are allowed to run wild on that day, free from every restraint."[65] He attributed this "state of degradation" not only to lack of adult supervision but to "ignorance of the most elementary principles of right and wrong, morality and immorality."[66] Attempting to combat this problem, Raikes aspired to

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[63] David Hein and Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *The Episcopalians* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 51-60, 317-319.

[64] Alfred Gregory, *Robert Raikes: Journalist and Philanthropist. A History of the Origin of Sunday Schools* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1877), 43-45. See also Pardee, *The Sabbath-School Index*, 14-15; Henry J. Harris and Josiah Harris, *Robert Raikes: The Man and His Work* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1899) 35, 64, 222; Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 21, 23-25.

[65] Robert Raikes, editorial, *Gloucester Journal*, 1783, in Harris and Harris, *Robert Raikes*, 62.

turn Sunday into a time for training in literacy and good character. In 1780 he hired several respectable women to teach reading and the Anglican catechism to as many children as he could gather on Sundays.[67] The women were also required to ensure that the "set of little heathens" attended a church service, maintained a clean appearance, and showed respect for authority.[68] According to a contemporary, Raikes designed his system with a "benevolent [rather] than a religious motive," hence the emphasis on respectability and responsibility.[69] By 1783 Raikes was so pleased with the experiment that he published a short report of it in his newspaper, the *Gloucester Journal*, followed by a similar report a year later in the popular *Gentlemen's Magazine*, in which he claimed that through his Sunday schools "the behavior of the children is greatly civilized."[70]

The use of Sunday schools spread rapidly among British philanthropists following the publication of Raikes' report. Interested in both the intellectual and moral improvement of the poor, humanitarians like William Wilberforce endorsed Raikes' new educational system, leading John Wesley to comment approvingly in a 1784 journal entry that "'I find these schools springing up wherever I go'."[71] In response to support from

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[66] Harris and Harris, *Robert Raikes*, 43.

[67] Robert Raikes, letter to Colonel Townley of Bolton on 25 November, 1783, published in *Gentleman's Magazine* 54 no. 1 (1784): 410-411; Robert Raikes, "An Account of the Sunday-Charity Schools, Lately Begun in Various Parts of England," *Arminian Magazine Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption*, Jan.1778-Dec.1797, 8, 41-43, retrieved June 1, 2016 from http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/3057492?accountid=7014

[68] Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement, 1780-1917, and the American Sunday-School Union, 1817-1917* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1917), 15; Raikes, "An Account of the Sunday-Charity Schools"; Raikes, letter to Colonel Townley.

[69] John J. Powell, letter to authors, 1863, in Harris and Harris, *Robert Raikes*, 55-56.

[70] Raikes, editorial. For further information on Raikes' and his Sunday school system, see Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 13-21, 437-440; Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, 21-23; Harris and Harris, *Robert Raikes*.

[71] John Wesley, diary entry, 1784, as quoted in Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, 42.

leading public figures like Wesley and Wilberforce, several Sunday schools organizations were founded throughout the 1780s. The most influential was The Society for the Encouragement and Support of Sunday Schools, founded in London by Baptist merchant William Fox in 1785.[72] Fox started this interdenominational society to organize and maintain Sunday schools and to distribute information about Raikes' system to the public.[73] The society's goal was to "prevent vice – to encourage industry and virtue – to dispel the darkness of ignorance – to diffuse the light of knowledge – to bring men cheerfully to submit to their stations – to obey the laws of God and their country – to make…the country poor, happy - to lead them in the pleasant paths of religion, and to…prepare them for a glorious eternity."[74] White arrived in London at the same time that Fox's society was growing in influence among the city's Anglican churches, and he possibly learned of Sunday schools through this association.[75]

Following the lead of the Anglican clergy, White returned to Philadelphia in April of 1787 determined to make Sunday schools an established part of the Episcopal Church. White explained his attraction to the movement in *A Sermon on the Festival of the Holy Innocents*, which he preached in 1817 at St. James' Church in Philadelphia for a

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[72] This organization is normally referred to simply as the Sunday School Society within the historiography. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, 33.

[73] Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 22.

[74] Circular prepared by William Fox prior to the first general meeting of the Sunday School Society, in Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, 33-34. See also Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 21-23.

[75] White never stated exactly how he discovered Sunday schools, but the timing of his visit to London strongly suggests that he learned of the movement during this trip. Sunday school historians all agree that White was introduced to Sunday schools during his trip to London, but none of them explain how this occurred. See Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 45; Edmund Morris Fergusson, *Historic Chapters in Christian Education*: *A Brief History of the American Sunday School Movement, and the Rise of the Modern Church School* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1935),14; Oscar S. Michael, *The Sunday School in the Development of the American Church* (Milwaukee: The Young Churchman Co., 1918), 54.

gathering of teachers and pupils from several Episcopal Sunday schools. In his sermon, White recounted his history of involvement with Sunday schools, explaining that his original aspirations for the movement were rooted in his religious convictions. In keeping with Episcopal doctrine, White held that belief in Christ was the only way to gain eternal salvation, but he maintained that faith could be implanted through infant baptism. In his sermon, White ignored the evangelical emphasis on the necessity of a personal conversion experience, asserting instead that parents could choose to place their infants "under the gracious covenants of God."[76] "For this reason," he stated, "Christian parents have no further duty enjoined on them in relation to their children, than to 'bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord:' it being presumed that they are already owned by him as his."[77] With the assurance that an infant's eternal redemption was secure, parents and pastors should focus on developing Christian character within children.[78] In keeping with standard doctrine, White believed that such moral cultivation was necessary in order for children to achieve sanctification, since baptism did not automatically enable converts to lead honorable Christian lives.[79]

As explained in his sermon, White initially believed that Sunday schools could greatly assist the Episcopal Church in catechizing young people. By gathering children under a church-sponsored Sunday school for instruction in literacy and the catechism, White believed that the congregants could "train their offspring in the paths of

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[76] William White, *A Sermon on the Festival of the Holy Innocents. With Reference to an Assembling of the Sunday Schools of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the City and Liberties of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: William Fry, 1818), 4, University of Texas Collections Deposit Library.

[77] White, *Sermon*, 6.

[78] White, *Sermon*, 7.

[79] White, *Sermon*, 7.

righteousness."[80] This would not only ensure that children behaved uprightly in the present and achieved heavenly rewards in the future, but would also secure a new generation of members for the struggling denomination.[81] Moreover, White hoped that the basic education offered by such institutions would encourage unconverted poor families to send their children to Sunday schools. This would bring impoverished children under the patronage of "the members of our churches" and thereby "nourish [them] unto eternal life."[82] The nourishment White envisioned, however, was designed mainly to construct character. White never mentioned that a conversion experience should be a specific goal for Sunday school education, describing the institution primarily as a means of diffusing Episcopal doctrine and recruiting church members.[83]

Eager to implement his vision, in November of 1788 White proposed that Christ Church open a Sunday school for boys, which would eventually be expanded into another school for girls once adequate funds were raised.[84] Beyond allowing White to preach sermons promoting his idea, however, the church's vestry did not execute the plan.[85] Historian Oscar S. Michael suggests that the vestry was reluctant to act because the proposal was based on a British "innovation," while historian Edwin Wilber Rice attributes their delay to the belief that Sunday schools were a "man-made appendage"

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[80] White, *Sermon*, 13, 15.

[81] White, *Sermon*, 7, 13, 15.

[82] White, *Sermon*, 8, 16.

[83] White, *Sermon*, iv.

[84] Walter Herbert Stowe, ed., *The Life and Letters of Bishop William White, Together with the Services and Addresses Commemorating the One Hundred Fiftieth Anniversary of His Consecration to the Episcopate* (New York: Morehouse Publishing Co., 1937), 163.

[85] Minute of Christ Church Vestry, November 22, 1788, in Stowe, *The Life and Letters of Bishop William White*, 163; Fergusson, *Historic Chapters in Christian Education in America*, 14.

that profaned the Christian Sabbath.[86] These explanations are inadequate in light of the fact that the historical literature on American Sunday schools, including White's rhetoric, is virtually devoid of anti-British sentiment. Moreover, White's religious goals for Sunday schools likely would have calmed fears that such institutions violated the Sabbath. A more reasonable explanation is that the vestry simply lacked the necessary finances, a situation implied by the church's minute books. According to minutes from November of 1788, the United Parish responded to White's Sunday school proposal uncertainty, stating ambiguously that the plan could only be executed if "'sufficient funds should be raised.'"[87] Historian Lois Banner notes that during the late eighteenth century most denominations were plagued with similar economic considerations. Most churches concentrated on rebuilding membership and finances, which had diminished during the Revolutionary War, temporarily limiting the growth of church-sponsored reform programs like Sunday schools.[88]

Due to Christ Church's inability to support his plan, White recognized the need to widen his denominational vision and make the Sunday school movement broadly appealing to progressive Philadelphian reformers. White tried to gain the patronage of educational philanthropists by reshaping his goals for Sunday schools, devising a plan for making them into a weekend extension of the burgeoning weekday charity school movement. Specifically, he began to promote Sunday schools less as a religious tool and

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[86] Michael, *The Sunday School*, 54; Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 48-49.

[87] Minute of Christ Church Vestry, November 22, 1788, in Stowe, *The Life and Letters of Bishop William White*, 163.

[88] Lois Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," *Journal of American History* 60 no. 1 (June 1973): 25-29. For the Revolution's impact on American churches, see Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 194-224.

more as a solution to the problem of vice that was thought to stem from poverty. Like Rush, White believed that the uneducated poor were more likely to turn to a life of crime, asserting that "of those who fall under the penalties of the law, the far greater number have laboured under the ignorance of letters."[89] White differed from Rush in his belief that crime stemmed from human sinfulness, but his assertion that poor people were more likely to act on their sinful impulses was in basic agreement with Rush's views on the corrupting influence of poverty.[90] By emphasizing reformers' shared anxiety over the degrading impact of ignorance and poverty, White created a powerful social argument for establishing Sunday schools.

As explained in his 1817 sermon, White refocused his Sunday school plans on the single aim of teaching literacy to poor children. Such a system would not only dispel the ignorance that promoted crime, but would also accomplish "one of the best uses of Sunday schools – the preventing of much disorder, on that day in particular, in the streets."[91] His reasoning was reminiscent of the philosophy behind Raikes' system, and White actually used the British model as evidence for how Sunday schools improved society. He cited the British movement as proof that literary-oriented Sunday schools were useful "for securing the public peace and of private rights." He further claimed that "wherever Sunday schools have been established, the morals of the common people have been improved, and the property of people of better condition has been more safe."[92] White believed that establishing a similar system in the United States would not only

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[89] White, *Sermon*, 11.

[90] White, *Sermon*, 6-7.

[91] White, *Sermon*, 11.

[92] White, *Sermon*, 11-13.

produce the same social benefits but would also contribute to the higher goal of preserving the republic, stating that "our comfort by day, and security by night, are not independent on what we may be now doing, for the educating of the children of the poor."[93]

Prioritizing literacy required White to surrender his original goal of using Sunday schools to transmit Protestant doctrine to the rising generation. Under his former denominational plan, White hoped that Sunday schools could be used to acquaint underprivileged children with Christian principles and generate members for the Episcopal Church. His new focus, however, caused him to think of the schools primarily as a tool for dispensing literacy to poor children and train them to behave as intelligent, upstanding citizens. In his 1817 sermon, White asserted that this shift in focus was an unfortunate necessity due to the inherent difficulties involved with trying to undertake "the work of education, consistently with fidelity to the gospel ministry."[94] White never ceased to imagine that Sunday schools would operate under a religious influence, particularly since they would be conducted on the Christian Sabbath, but he also knew that trying to market the movement as a social reform effort while retaining allegiance to the Episcopal Church would be religiously polarizing.[95] White asserted that the only way to avoid sectarian squabbles over curriculum was to adopt a "plan of indifference to the opinions of one Christian denomination or another."[96] He hoped that denominational

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[93] White, *Sermon*, 11, 16

[94] White, *Sermon*, 10.

[95] Virtually all educational leaders at the time shared White's assumption that education would be influenced by religion in some form or fashion, see Smith, "Protestant Schooling and American Nationality," 679; Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 157.

Sunday schools would be created once the movement became popular and desired instructors to be mindful of the spiritual impact they could have on their pupils even in the midst of teaching literacy.[97] Nevertheless, White felt that, given the current environment, "the comfort of the social state" was "a sufficient excitement of endeavour."[98] By stressing the movement's potential for fostering virtue among poor children, White chose to present Sunday schools as a tool for social engineering that appealed to the humanitarian impulses and Christian republican ideals of Philadelphian elites.[99]

By 1790, White successfully used this reformulated vision for Sunday schools to win approximately ten influential supporters his cause. He began by giving special sermons promoting the movement, which enabled him to obtain support from Christ Church congregants, like physician William Currie.[100] Additionally, White drew on his preexisting connections to Philadelphian reformers to gain sponsors from outside his congregation. The most prominent educational leader White recruited was his neighbor and close friend Benjamin Rush. Many of the other men White drew to the Sunday school cause were similarly active philanthropists engaged in other forms of social improvement, such as Matthew Carey, a printer and liberal Roman Catholic who regularly advocated for expanding Philadelphia's poverty relief programs.[101] Other

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[96] White, *Sermon*, 9.

[97] White, *Sermon*, iii-iv, 9, 13.

[98] White, *Sermon*, 13.

[99] Jeynes, *American Educational History*, 43-44.

[100] Minute of Christ Church Vestry, November 22, 1788, in Stowe, *The Life and Letters of Bishop William White*, 163.

influential supporters included the mayor, Samuel Powell, and Quaker merchant Thomas P. Cope.[102] While all of these men were comfortably established in prominent careers, the group was neither religiously nor politically uniform, including supporters of both the Federalist and Democratic-Republican parties. Nevertheless, as enlightened republican gentlemen, they were united in their approach to using education to mold poor children into good citizens and thereby transform them into virtuous young patriots.[103]

On December 19, 1790, White gathered his group of supporters to discuss the possibility of starting a Sunday school society for Philadelphia and the surrounding districts. On December 26, after finalizing a constitution, the group formally launched the First Day Society, an organization dedicated to the management, promotion, and financial support of Sunday schools. Anyone could become an annual member of the society by paying one dollar, or could achieve lifetime membership through paying ten dollars. The members annually elected a governing body of four officers and a Board of Visitors, charging the latter group with the task of making monthly visits to the schools to ensure proper maintenance.[104] White was elected President, a post he held until his death in 1836.[105] With the necessary structure in place, in March of 1791 the society opened the

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[101] Nash, *First City*, 146-147.

[102] "To the Citizens of Philadelphia, and of the Districts of Southwark and the Northern Liberties. The Address of the Society for Establishing Sunday Schools," *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, March 25, 1791; Boylan, *Sunday School*, 7; Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 45.

[103] Boylan, S*unday School*, 7.

[104] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1810 Summary*, iv.

[105] Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 46.

first three Sunday schools in Philadelphia: two for boys taught by John Poor, and one for girls taught by John Ely.[106]

First Day Society's Mission and Methods

In planning the society, the founders adopted White's reformulated vision for a civic-minded Christian republican organization, rather than his original religious ambitions. The society's constitution made no mention of God, conversion, or Protestant doctrine, stating instead that the organization was motivated by two social concerns. The first was that poor children, or "the offspring of indigent parents," lacked the opportunity to attend weekday schools, often because they had to work.[107] The society found the absence of these children from school disturbing due to its belief that "the good education of youth is of the first importance to society" because it prepared children "for virtue, freedom, and happiness."[108] The second major concern was that poor children often used their free time on Sunday "to the worst of purposes, the depravation of morals and manners," which was just the sort of disorder that elite Philadelphians feared.[109]

The First Day Society proposed to remove these social threats by using Sunday schools as a tool to conform children to the mold of good citizenship. To that end, the organization's three schools restricted their activities to teaching reading and writing,

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[106] "Sunday Schools," *General Advertiser*, August 1795; Boylan, *Sunday School*, 7; Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 45. John Ely was also head of the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia, founded by Rush.

[107] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1810 Summary*, iii.

[108] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1810 Summary*, iii, 20; "To the Citizens of Philadelphia," *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*. This belief was common among all eighteenth-century social and political leaders, Tyack, "Forming the National Character," 35.

[109] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1810 Summary*, iii. Reinier, *From Virtue to Character*, 79-80.

skills that were considered crucial for attaining enlightened morality.[110] Additionally, as in Raikes' schools, the society required its pupils to follow a strict behavioral code of deference, cleanliness, and self-discipline. Rewards and punishments were based on good behavior and academic progress. If any student was "guilty of lying, swearing, pilfering, indecent talking, or any other misbehaviour," teachers were obligated to "point out the evil of such conduct" and, if the student proved unrepentant, expel the offender from the school.[111] Such discipline would supposedly teach the pupils to act like "opulent and respectable members of the community."[112] The First Day Society required its pupils to copy upper-class Philadelphian standards of conduct, despite the fact that these children were generally excluded from the elite community they were being trained to model due to their poverty.[113]

Although the First Day Society maintained separate schools for boys and girls, it did not discuss its educational methods in specifically gendered language and appeared to maintain the same educational expectations for all pupils. Adopting a gender-neutral approach to curriculum would have strengthened the organization's alignment with a progressive republican approach to education. After the Revolution enlightened educational reformers began lobbying for an expansion of formal schooling opportunities for young women equivalent to those provided for young men.[114] Such intellectual

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[110] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1810 Summary*, iv; 16. Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 34.

[111] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1810 Summary*, 16.

[112] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1810 Summary*, 21.

[113] This attitude was typical of many poverty reforms of the period, see Alexander, *Render Them Submissive*, 5-6.

training would equip women to be respectable mothers, enable them to become intellectual partners with their future husbands, and act as moral barometers for society.[115] Using this rational, reformers began opening schools that provided girls with the curriculum used boys, with the addition of domestic skills training. For example, Rush and Poor co-founded the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia in the 1780s, which provided instruction in subjects such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography. The school was specifically modeled after the Academy of Philadelphia for boys, which Benjamin Franklin helped establish in 1749.[116] The First Day Society probably operated on a similarly gender-neutral curricular model and appeared to affirm the importance of educating both girls and boys to become productive members of the community.

Notably, there is no indication that the society employed women as teachers or officers. Some women were listed as paying members, but they were a definite minority within the organization. Out of the two-hundred fifty annual paying members listed for 1813, only twenty-eight were women.[117] The lack of female administrators or teachers in

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[114] Nash and Kelley argue that previous historians, including Norton and Kerber, have over-emphasized the differences between male and female education in the post-Revolutionary era. In contrast to this approach, Nash contends that during this period "assumptions regarding women's work as wives and mothers did not result in curricular ideals very different from those held for men." Similarly, Kelley asserts that women used education to dismantle false boundaries between male and female rights, which justified their entrance into the civil sphere. See Nash, *Women's Education in the United States*, 10-11, and Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 5-15.

[115] Nash, *Women's Education in the United States*, 25. See also Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 25-27; A. Kristen Foster, "'A Few Thoughts in Vindication of Female Eloquence': The Case for the Education of Republican Women," in Marten, ed., *Children and Youth in a New Nation*, 129-148.

[116] Nash, "Rethinking Republican Motherhood," 181-182. For additional examples see Reinier, *From Virtue to Character*, 107-108.

[117] First Day Society, *Constitution of the Society for the Institution and Support of First-Day or Sunday Schools in the City of Philadelphia, and the Districts of Southwark and the Northern Liberties, with A List of the Names of the Present Annual Contributors and the Members for Life. Rules for the Government of Said Schools, and a Summary of the Proceedings of the Society from Its Commencement to*

a male-dominated organization such as the First Day Society is not necessarily surprising, given that women were just beginning to emerge as leaders within reform movements in this era. Prior to the 1790s, female leadership in humanitarian organizations was rare. As Bruce Dorsey argues, the virtue that late eighteenth-century reformers aspired to dispense through philanthropy was associated with masculinity, meaning that women's initial entrance into benevolence work was sometimes considered an intrusion into the male sphere.[118] As the nineteenth century dawned, women assuming increasingly active roles within reform movements, but they often struggled to justify their actions as legitimate philanthropic efforts that did not require male supervision.[119] For example, one critic of the newly-founded Boston Female Asylum asserted in 1803 that it was "unnatural" for "frail feeble *woman*, to thwart the design of her creation" by overseeing humanitarian associations.[120] Pioneering female reformer Isabella Graham noted in 1804 that often "men could not allow our sex the steadiness and perseverance necessary" to lead benevolent societies.[121] Such opposition did not prevent Graham from founding two

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Sixth Month, June, 1813. With an Account of the Present State of the Funds (Philadelphia, 1813), 11-18, University of Texas, Collections Deposit Library. Hereafter referred to as *Constitution and 1813 Summary*. I was unable to find a list of names for earlier years.

[118] For a thorough discussion of how late eighteenth-century reform was considered masculine in form and function, along with an explanation of how women initially justified their entrance into humanitarian work, see Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 28-49.

[119] Boylan argues that the period from 1797-1806 contained the "first wave" of female activism, when women created basic organizational models for female reform work that rested on the conflation of republican ideals of virtue with domestic femininity. See Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 17-24.

[120] "Curtis" articles in the *Worcester Aegis*, 1803, as quoted in Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism*, 20.

[121] Isabella Graham, address to young ladies, 1804, excerpt given in Joanna Bethune, ed., *The Power of Faith, Exemplified in the Life and Writings of the Late Mrs. Isabella Graham* (New York: American Tract Society, 1843), 232.

Sunday schools that same year in New York. Unlike the First Day Society, Graham's schools were dedicated to "giving religious and catechetical instruction," setting a pattern for female leadership within the evangelical Sunday schools that rose to prominence in the early nineteenth century.[122] Within the republican-oriented First Day Society, however, female leadership was apparently not encouraged, despite the organization's efforts to educate girls.

If women were barely mentioned in First Day Society records, African Americans were completely ignored. Here again the First Day Society stands in contrast to the evangelical Sunday schools that emerged in the 1810s, which not only mentioned African American pupils repeatedly but celebrated their achievements within the movement. Interestingly, in the same year that the First Day Society was founded, the Methodist-Episcopal Church Conference urged its congregations to adopt Sunday schools for the purpose of "instructing poor children (whites and blacks) to read." Minutes from the conference session implore "bishops, elders, deacons, or preachers to teach (gratis) all that will attend, and have a capacity to learn," regardless of race. Like the First Day Society, the Methodist-Episcopal Church apparently viewed Sunday schools primarily as a philanthropic effort designed to dispense literacy education, given that goals such as conversion or catechetical instruction were not mentioned.[123] However, in contrast to the First Day Society, the denomination proposed to adopt Sunday schools partly for the

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[122] New York Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools, *The First Report of the New-York Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools, Read at their Annual Meeting, April 9, 1817* (New York: J. Seymour, 1817), 3-4, Boston Athenaeum. Graham opened a similar Sunday school in Greenwich in 1814.

[123] *Minutes Taken at the Several Conferences of the Methodist-Episcopal Church, in America, for the Year 1790* (Philadelphia: Prichard & Hall, 1790), 11, Early American Imprints, Series I, Evans (1639-1800).

purpose of reaching the African American population. The First Day Society did not exhibit similar ambitions. Given Philadelphia's large African American population, black pupils may have attended the organization's schools, but if this was the case their presence went unnoticed.

As part of its primary effort to craft poor children into virtuous citizens, the First Day Society incorporated religious elements into the curriculum that were considered vital to republican education. Pupils were required to attend a church service between the morning and evening teaching sessions.[124] Additionally, the society's constitution stipulated that the only textbooks allowed in the schools were the Bible "and such other moral and religious books, as the Society may, from time to time, direct."[125] Due to his Christian republican convictions, Rush was enthusiastic about using the Bible as a textbook in Sunday schools. In his 1791 essay, *The Bible as a School Book*, Rush acknowledged and approved of the fact that Scripture could lead to conversion, but he advocated its use in schools because it was "the best means of awakening moral sensibilities in [children's] minds."[126] He further argued that the practice of using the Bible as the only textbook in Raikes' Sunday schools made British students more respectable, and he suggested that the American movement could produce identical results by following the same practice.[127] Rush believed that instruction in the Bible was valuable primarily because it was "the only means of establishing and perpetuating our

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[124] These sessions were held from approximately seven to nine in the morning and one to three in the afternoon, see First Day Society, *Constitution and 1810 Summary*, 16.

[125] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1810 Summary*, iv.

[126] Rush, "The Bible as a School Book," 125.

[127] Rush, "The Bible as a School Book," 129.

republican forms of government…for this divine book, above all others, favours…all those sober and frugal virtues, which constitute the soul of republicanism."[128] The First Day Society apparently supported Rush's idea of using Scripture primarily as a textbook, given that it only discussed the Bible in the context of teaching literacy. However, the organization eschewed his proposal that the Bible should be the only textbook in Sunday schools. Beginning in 1792, the society supplemented Scripture with additional textbooks, such as Dr. Joannes Florentius Martinet's *Catechism of Nature* and Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*.[129]

The members of the First Day Society minimized the evangelistic uses of Scripture and sought to run the society like a professional rather than a religious organization. Though pupils were required to attend a church service, they were not encouraged to become members of a specific denomination or make professions of faith. All three schools operated on White's interdenominational plan and were not connected to specific churches. In place of a denominational affiliation, the society lobbied for an act of incorporation, which it received in 1796.[130] The First Day Society took its status as a corporation seriously and viewed its work as the fulfillment of a public duty. The fact that the society paid its teachers indicates that it viewed the three schools as providing a legitimate service to the Republic.[131] The organization also formally advocated for all forms of public education. One of the officers' first official acts was to send a petition to the Pennsylvania Legislature calling for the establishment of a state-funded school

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[128] Rush, "The Bible as a School Book," 130.

[129] For more information, see Reinier, "Rearing the Republican Child," 161-162.

[130] See the society's 1796 version of the constitution, in *Constitution and 1813 Summary*, vi-x.

[131] Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*, 158.

system.[132] The organization clearly believed that it made a vital contribution to the stability and success of not just Philadelphia, but society at large. The members expressed this conviction in an appeal for funding published in March of 1791, in which they asserted that their schools enabled poor children to become "qualified and disposed to add to the prosperity and reputation of our country, who might otherwise have added to its disgrace by their vices and to its taxes by their misery."[133]

While the First Day Society supported "religious improvement," its primary goal was "the good education of youth."[134] In keeping with Christian republican principles, the society used spiritual tools to support enlightened morality, making religious aspirations subservient to the cultivation of virtuous citizenship. As Mark Noll argues, this synthesis between Christianity and republicanism was a uniquely American idea.[135] By grounding Sunday schools in the Christian republican model, the First Day Society not only Americanized the movement but invested it with a purpose that went beyond the amelioration of poverty, aiming at the loftier goal of securing a stable and prosperous future for the Republic. The members asserted that the social advantages of such a movement served to make the value of the First Day Society self-evident to "the friends of humanity and virtue, and place it upon a footing with the many other public spirited institutions which now flourish among us."[136]

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[132] Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 45-46; Pray, *The History of Sunday Schools*, 206.

[133] "To the Citizens of Philadelphia," *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*.

[134] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1810 Summary*, iii; Boylan, *Sunday School*, 7-9; Fergusson, *Historic Chapters in Christian Education*, 14.

[135] Mark Noll argues that the synthesis of Christianity and republicanism, was a uniquely American idea. By fashioning Sunday schools according to this Christian republican synthesis, the First Day Society made its version of the movement uniquely American. See *America's God*, 54.

Decline of the Republican-Humanitarian Sunday School Model

Initially, the First Day Society's predictions of future prosperity seemed correct. During the first three weeks of their existence, the society's three schools attracted around 120 pupils. By 1800 the schools had enrolled a total of 2,120 male and female students.[137] Despite this initial success, however, the organization continually struggled to fund its schools. The society relied on donations, which steadily diminished with each passing year. In 1799 the society had 646 members but only received 370 annual membership fees. The First Day Society attributed this discrepancy to "deaths, removals from the City and refusals to pay."[138] One explanation for some of these deaths and departures is the annual bouts of yellow fever that struck Philadelphia with a vengeance in 1793-94 and again in 1796-98.[139] Membership and subscriptions continued to decline from 1800-04.[140] Consequently, in 1805 the society closed one of the boys' schools and temporarily ceased paying tuition for the girls' school in 1806.

These cuts allowed the First Day Society to save enough money to reopen both schools in 1808, and in 1810 a posthumous donation enabled the organization to open a fourth school for both genders. The new school attracted 140 students during its first year, which was "a greater number than can be well accommodated or faithfully instructed."[141] Even with this revitalization, however, the society remained unable to

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[136] "To the Citizens of Philadelphia," *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, March 25, 1791.

[137] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1810 Summary*,18.

[138] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1813 Summary*, 24.

[139] Weigley, *Philadelphia*, 197.

[140] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1813 Summary*, 24-25.

[141] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1810 Summary*, 19.

solicit steady donations.[142] The organization's 1813 report called the continued lack of funding "a cause of regret" and pleaded, "let not…members become so soon weary of well-doing….An active, personal engagement in the affairs of the Society, would not be found an irksome, but pleasing, employment."[143] By 1815 it was clear that these appeals were ineffective. The economic and social turmoil caused by the War of 1812, followed by the financial panics of 1814 and 1819, probably made subscriptions nearly impossible to obtain.[144] Historian William Jeynes notes that the entire charity school movement faced similar monetary woes during this period, asserting that "the hearts of those who operated the charity schools were larger than their pocketbooks."[145]

By the nineteenth century, the First Day Society also faced issues of leadership and loss of social function. As religious competition for membership intensified, William White returned his attention to his original dream of founding denominational Sunday schools. White's increasing preoccupation with denominational schooling, combined with Benjamin Rush's death in 1813, left the First Day Society bereft of its two most powerful leaders.[146] Additionally, the society also lost its identity as one of Philadelphia's suppliers of public education. By the early nineteenth-century the idea of state sponsored public education became widely accepted. Northern states such as Massachusetts and New York started implementing state-funded public schools, leading to further decline

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[142] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 8.

[143] First Day Society, *Constitution and 1813 Summary*, 21.

[144] Weigley, *Philadelphia*, 256.

[145] Jeynes, *American Educational History*, 49.

[146] White, *Sermon*, 13-16; Michael, *The Sunday-School*, 64; Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 62.

within the charity school movement. These developments specifically impacted the First Day Society in 1818 when the Pennsylvania legislature established Philadelphia as the state's first public school district, depriving the organization of its key social role.[147] With its function and message failing, the First Day Society was forced to permanently close its schools in 1819. It continued to exist as a corporation, but only in order to donate its annual subscriptions to other educational societies.[148]

The most significant reason for the decline of the republican-humanitarian Sunday school model espoused by the First Day Society, however, surpassed issues of finances or social function. In 1817 the First Day Society managers noted in meeting minutes that declining enrollments could be increasingly attributed to "the introduction of…Sunday schools…by religious societies."[149] As this comment indicates, the First Day Society's emphasis on respectability and citizenship was rapidly becoming obsolete in the face of more compelling spiritual messages generated by the rapid spread of evangelicalism.[150] As more egalitarian religious aims began to dominate American reform movements, the republican-humanitarian model of using education as a tool for social engineering rapidly gave way to new evangelistic goals. Although commitment to Christian republicanism initially ensured the First Day Society's success, this model proved unable to compete with the increasingly popular evangelical Sunday school organizations that appeared first in Philadelphia in 1811, and later throughout the entire country.

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[147] Nash, *First City*, 180; Weigley, *Philadelphia*, 226; Reinier, *From Virtue to Character*, 117.

[148] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 9.

[149] First Day Society, Board of Visitors, Minutes, May 2, 1817, Presbyterian Historical Society, as quoted in Boylan, *Sunday School*, 9.

[150] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 9.

At the same time, the eighteenth-century emphasis on inculcating virtue within children continued to be an important justification for founding Sunday schools into the nineteenth century. The goals exhibited by eighteenth-century organizations such as the First Day Society affiliated Sunday schools with the political and social elevation of childhood that occurred in the post-Revolutionary era, thereby producing a distinctly Americanized iteration of the institution. Although nineteenth-century Sunday schools would abandon the First Day Society's insistence on using religion only as a tool for cultivating virtue, the movement continued to treat children as citizens in training and regarded childhood education as crucial to the Republic's success. In this way, the First Day Society's demise did not translate into decline for the entire movement. Rather, the eighteenth-century model gave Sunday schools a broad social and cultural appeal that helped facilitate the institution's transformation into child-centric evangelistic tools for Christianizing the nation, a phenomenon discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

"Aim at Nothing Lower than the Salvation of Immortal Souls": The Rise of Evangelistic and Child-Centric Sunday Schools

As the year 1822 drew to a close, Reverend Joel Hawes, pastor of the First Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut, gave an impassioned sermon on "the dealings of God" in "forming a new era in the history of the church."[1] Hawes supported this bold claim by citing "the great movements of the day….in promoting the cause of Christian benevolence," or the rapid multiplication of missionary, Bible, and religious tract societies throughout the globe.[2] He then asserted that "the subject of home missions has been exciting a deeper and more efficient interest. Never has there been so much done, to improve the moral and religious state of the people."[3] Significantly, Hawes pointed to the Sunday school as one of the more innovative home missionary efforts recently implemented by reformers to extend "the kingdom of redemption over the whole earth."[4] He further claimed that this institution was one of most effective means of nurturing childhood piety. Because of Sunday schools, "efforts to enlighten and save the young have been multiplied, beyond what was ever before witnessed."[5] Hawes rejoiced at the Sunday school had joined the ranks of other benevolent societies in evangelizing

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[1] Joel Hawes, *"What Hath God Wrought!" A Sermon, Delivered in Hartford, on the Last Sabbath of the Year 1822* (Hartford: W. Hudson and L. Skinner, 1823), 3, Boston Athenaeum.

[2] Hawes, *"What Hath God Wrought,"* 19.

[3] Hawes, *"What Hath God Wrought,"* 6.

[4] Hawes, *"What Hath God Wrought,"* 6.

[5] Hawes, *"What Hath God Wrought,"* 11.

the nation, exclaiming that "in reflecting on these efforts to send the gospel to the destitute, we cannot but ask, 'What hath God wrought'!"[6]

Hawes' admiration for the Sunday school movement's evangelistic potential is striking in light of the institution's eighteenth-century focus on citizenship and social engineering. As demonstrated in this sermon, the Sunday school movement underwent a profound shift in motivations and objectives in the nineteenth century. Inspired by a range of cultural and religious influences, including youth involvement in revivals and romanticized constructions of childhood, evangelical activists reshaped the Sunday school into a voluntary reform organization dedicated to spiritual regeneration rather than behavioral control.[7] This transformation was especially evident in the regional Sunday school societies created in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston in the 1810s, since records from these groups survive in larger numbers. However, the new evangelistic model of Sunday school education was widely accepted throughout the eastern seaboard in states ranging from South Carolina to Maine. Supported by volunteers from a variety of social and denominational backgrounds, evangelistic Sunday schools aspired to use the institution to nurture childhood spirituality. Moreover, in contrast to earlier organizations like the First Day Society, nineteenth-century Sunday school associations viewed literacy as a means of diffusing Protestant doctrine and aimed to engage hearts rather than minds, believing that this was the only way to produce genuine morality.

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[6] Hawes, *"What Hath God Wrought,"* 6.

[7] I use the term "evangelical" and "evangelicalism" as defined by David Bebbington in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1970s* (London: Routledge, 1988), 2-17.

Significantly, as Hawes highlighted, adopting an evangelistic focus led reformers to target children as the primary objects of Sunday school education. Although some adults, particularly African Americans, continued attending Sunday schools, leaders of the nineteenth-century movement aspired to craft an institution that focused on childhood and adolescent religious formation. In the process, reformers inaugurated a new phase within American Christianity when Protestants began founding religious institutions specifically for children and youth on an unprecedented scale. Motivated by a combination of optimism and anxiety about childhood, reformers like Hawes stressed the imperative of evangelizing children and promoting youth leadership. For Protestant activists in the early republic, children were key to social and religious renewal, making them inseparable from the creation of early nineteenth-century benevolence. This synergistic relationship between childhood, youth, and benevolence is particularly evident within changes made to Sunday schools in early national period. Reformers' efforts to remake Sunday schools into child-centric, evangelistic institutions that empowered youth leadership demonstrate that shifting constructions of childhood and the rise of volunteerism reinforced and enriched each other, a phenomenon that is often overlooked in traditional narratives of American religious growth.[8]

[8] Even if historians do recognize the presence of youth leadership or the growth of child-centric approaches within reforms like the Sunday school, most minimize the early national period to focus on the antebellum era, emphasizing the activities of national organizations such as the American Sunday School Union. Major examples include Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright *The Big Little School: Sunday Child of American Protestantism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), David B. Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), Jacqueline S. Reiner, *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood, 1775-1850* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), Steven Mintz,

Creating an Environment for Evangelical Transformation

Multiple factors converged to transform the Sunday school into an evangelistic institution in the early nineteenth century. Since this shift occurred simultaneously with the brief rise and fall of humanitarian-republican Sunday school groups like the First Day Society, the evangelistic model was partially motivated by the same concerns described in the previous chapter. Anxieties over population increase, the decline of patriarchal family structures and the apprenticeship system, and the apparent rise in degeneracy among youth continued to plague reformers well into the mid-nineteenth century. The growth of industrialization and the resulting creation of the urban middle class also increased fears that many children were not being raised in the moral environment supposedly provided by nuclear family structures.[9] However, the more significant reason for the movement's transformation was the growth of evangelical Protestant that occurred in the first half of the nineteenth century.[10] Many factors contributed to this rise in evangelical fervor, such as the official disestablishment of religion following the Revolution. Deprived of state support, nineteenth-century churches were thrust into a religious marketplace that required them to actively compete for converts and experiment with aggressive methods of recruitment.[11] Not all denominations thrived in this new

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Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Boylan is a partial exception here, in that she offers a fairly throughout explanation for why the Sunday school underwent an evangelical transformation. However, her analysis mainly focuses on the mid-1820s onward, drawing heavily from national Sunday school society materials and antebellum sources.

[9] Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida Country, New York, 1790-1865*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[10] Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 165-166.

[11] For more information on the disestablishment of religion and the creation of a religious marketplace, see Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

marketplace, but disestablishment triggered an overall increase in religious mobilization and church membership.[12]

The resurgence of religious revivals during in the early nineteenth century played an even more important role in spreading evangelicalism throughout the Early Republic. Scholars typically refer to this phenomenon as the Second Great Awakening, a term that is not without problems but still remains the most recognizable way of referring to this period of revivalism in American history. The Second Great Awakening originated with outdoor camp meetings held in the West, the most famous of which occurred in 1801 at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. These meetings sought to foster public conversion experiences among attendees, and they usually featured highly emotional preaching and displays of "divine power in the audience."[13] The revivals became more subdued after spreading eastward in the 1810s, but they continued to release powerful religious energies that mobilized evangelical activity in urban areas.[14] For example, in an 1811 report titled "A Narrative of the State of Religion," the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia reported that many "especially visible" revivals had taken place in the city.[15]

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[12] For a complete discussion, see Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 268-274.

[13] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 50-55, 58; Mark Noll, *Protestants in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 61-62. Major works on the Second Great Awakening include Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 50-55, 58, John Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury & the Methodists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins. *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*.

[14] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 186-188, Walters, *American Reformers*, 21-22.

[15] General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, "A Narrative of the State of Religion," *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*.

The report asserted that "an increased exertion for the promotion of pure and undefiled religion" resulted in the founding of many Bible, missionary, tract, and praying societies. These developments led the General Assembly to conclude that "infidelity appears to be declining" and "we have sweet and conciliatory evidence that God is in the midst of us."[16]

As the General Assembly's report indicates, most evangelicals in the Northeast focused on channeling their revivalist fervor into creating voluntary benevolent societies.[17] Offering an alternative to the authoritarian religious establishments of the colonial era, these benevolent organizations enabled the laity to actively participate in the burgeoning evangelical community regardless of gender or social status, leading to their rapid multiplication in the 1810s and 1820s. By the middle of the nineteenth century Protestants created an array of associations dedicated to causes like temperance, abolition, and women's rights.[18] Many of these organizations were interregional and interdenominational, helping members to envision themselves as part of a larger imagined community of reformers that they referred to as the Protestant United Front or the Benevolent Empire.[19] Historians have debated the motivations and objectives

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[16] General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, "A Narrative of the State of Religion," *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*. For more on early nineteenth-century revivals in the Northeast, particularly urban areas, see Whitney R. Cross, *The Burnt-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), Marion Bell, *Crusade in the City: Revivalism in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1977), Terry Bilhartz, *Urban Religion and the Second Great Awakening: Church and Society in Early National Baltimore* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1986).

[17] Mark Noll defines voluntary societies as "organizations set up independently of the churches and governed by self-sustaining boards for the purpose of addressing a specific problem." Noll, *Protestants in America*, 67.

[18] Lois Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation." *Journal of American History* 60, no. 1 (June 1973): 39-40, Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 191-193.

[19] Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*, 129; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 192.

involved in the creation of the Benevolent Empire, with earlier scholarship characterizing these reform efforts as a form of social control and class domination.[20] Subsequent works stressed volunteerism's revivalist origins, asserting that reformers genuinely aspired to convert souls and produce social uplift for the downtrodden.[21] The most recent scholarship affirms that both social concerns and religious ideals motivated benevolence work, striking a middle interpretive course that stresses the duality of reformers' intentions. As Steven Mintz argues, "antebellum reform combined a humanitarian impulse to redeem and rehabilitate the victims of social change and a paternalistic impulse to shape character and regulate behavior."[22] He further asserts that reformers' main achievement was to establish "a new moral perspective," which "provided the sanction for a wide range of reform proposals….that makes it impossible to categorize reformers simply as humanitarians or social controllers."[23] Sam Haselby argues that the

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[20] Clifford S. Griffin was the first to apply the term "social control" to nineteenth-century reform in an article entitled "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XLIV (Dec. 1957), 423-444. Scholarship that employs the social control thesis to explain nineteenth-century reform includes Charles C. Cole, *The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1820-1860* (New York: Octagon Books, 1954), Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960), Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*.

[21] Works that take this approach include Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957), Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control," Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), Robert H. Abzug, *Crumbling Cosmos: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[22] Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Moralizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), xvii.

[23] Mintz, *Moralists and Moralizers*, xviii. Other recent scholarship that affirms the duality of reformers' intentions includes Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), Kathleen D. McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), Noll, *America's God*,

executive leadership within these associations were often members of the intellectual elite or the merchant middle class, a group he calls "national evangelists." Haselby describes adult male members of the Northeastern gentry, including New England Congregationalists and Federalists, as being particularly influential in shaping evangelical reform institutions, especially since they dominated official leadership roles by the antebellum period.[24]

However, young people of both genders were also heavily involved in the rise of revivals and evangelical benevolence.[25] Historian Joseph Kett argues that a close association between youth and revivalism developed during this period, asserting that "during the revivals of the early 1800s…a tendency toward teenage conversions began to emerge…which hardened into a mold by mid-century."[26] Revivalists repeatedly noted that awakenings often began and expanded due to involvement from "youth," a flexible term that encompassed ages ranging anywhere from ten to thirty.[27] Surveying the revivals from 1798-1810, Ebenezer Porter, a Congregationalist minister and professor at Andover

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Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), Howe, *What Hath God Wrought.*

[24] Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, 2-3, 24. See also Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise of the American City: The New York City Mission Movement, 1812-1870* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971).

[25] Lois Banner argues that "youth" were actually the majority of converts during the Second Great Awakening in "Religion and Reform in the Early Republic: The Role of Youth," *American Quarterly* 23, no. 5 (1971): 678-679. Mary P. Ryan also highlighted the high involvement of and special attention given to young people in "A Woman's Awakening: Evangelical Religion and the Families of Utica, New York, 1800-1840," in *History of Women in the United States,* Nancy Cott, ed. (New York: K. G. Saur, 1993), 57-58.

[26] Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 64.

[27] As Joseph Kett explains, the concept of an "adolescence" as defined in modern terms was just developing in this period, leading to greater flexibility in the ages that could actually be considered part of "youth." See Joseph Kett, "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2, no. 2 (1971): 283-298.

Seminary, reported that "in respect to age, the subjects of these revivals were generally in early and middle life….very young children were often deeply impressed, and in many instances continued to give evidence of a saving change of heart."[28] A Universalist minister from Connecticut, Menzies Rayner, made a similar claim, describing how youth often "exhorted" in revival meetings and stating that "the subjects of these extraordinary movements, are principally young people, and especially females."[29] A revival that swept Boston from 1803-1805 exhibited high levels of youth involvement.[30] Similarly, in his *Accounts of Revivals,* covering 1815-1818, Baptist minister Joshua Bradley repeatedly mentioned with wonder that children and youth experienced conversation at revivals alongside adults. In an 1816 revival at Troy, New York, Bradley reported that "among children and youths, the work of grace spread with the greatest rapidity. Numbers from eight years old and upward were deeply convinced of their guilt and ruin by nature."[31] The community of Poultney, Vermont, was swept up in a revival in 1816, and "many of the converts were in the bloom of youth."[32]

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[28] Ebenezer Porter, *Letters on Religious Revivals, Which Prevailed About the Beginning of the Present Century* (Boston: Congregational Board of Publication, 1858), 10. For additional examples, see 10-11, 32-33, 93-94.

[29] Menzies Rayner, *A Dissertation Upon Extraordinary Awakenings, or, Religious Stirs: Conversion, Regeneration, Renovation, and a Change of Heart: Conference Meetings: Extraordinary Gifts in Extempore Prayer: Evangelical Preaching, &c., &c.* (Hudson: William E. Norman, 1816), 11-12. For examples of young people "exhorting" in revival meetings," see 46-47.

[30] Thomas Baldwin, *A Brief Sketch of the Revival of Religion in Boston, in 1803-5* (Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, extracted from Massachusetts Baptist Magazine, 1826), Boston Athenaeum.

[31] Joshua Bradley, *Accounts of Religious Revivals in Many Parts of the United States from 1815 to 1818: Collected from Numerous Publications and Letters from Persons of Piety and Correct Information* (Albany: G. J. Loomis & Co., 1819), 173.

[32] Bradley, *Accounts of Religious Revivals,* 132.

In numerous cases, children and adolescences were responsible for bringing revivals to a particular town. Recounting the beginnings of an 1816 revival in Hebron, Maine, Bradley wrote that "it was first reported that several youths were thought to be under serious concern for their souls. In September, a revival was apparent….The good news that this or that youth was under concern for his soul, or rejoicing in the love of God, daily awakened attention."[33] Speaking of the 1816 Troy awakening, he wrote that children "appeared to be the favored instruments in the hands of God, of awakening, convincing, and converting each other."[34] A revival that began in Eaton, New York, in 1817 was due to the initial conversions of some local school children. Bradley recorded that "these converts were faithful in exhorting each other daily. It was astonishing to hear them invite, and exhort their fellow children, and youths to flee from the wrath to come. From the age of nine to forty-five, about one hundred were hopeful converts in the town."[35] Bennet Tyler's *New England Revivals* contains similar accounts of revivals beginning with young people, such as an awakening that occurred in Canton, Connecticut from 1798-1799 due to the spread of "serious impressions" among the children.[36] Indeed, Tyler noted that *New England Revivals* was designed to inspire young people to engage in awakenings, since a "large proportion" of the converts in his account were youths and

[33] Bradley, *Accounts of Religious Revivals,* 41-42.

[34] Bradley, *Accounts of Religious Revivals,* 173.

[35] Bradley, *Accounts of Religious Revivals,* 210.

[36] Bennet Tyler, *New England Revivals: As They Existed at the Close of the Eighteenth and the Beginning of the Nineteenth Centuries: Compiled Principally from Narratives First Published in the Conn. Evangelical Magazine* (Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1846), 25.

this should make revival narratives "particularly commended to the attention, and diligent perusal" of young readers.[37]

Nineteenth-century revivalists recognized that youth possessed the zeal required to follow Christ, leading many to assert that late adolescence was an ideal age for conversion.[38] Hoping to capitalize on this lowering of the acceptable age of conversion, reformers turned their attention to preparing young people to make professions of faith, primarily through the means of religious education. Tyler noted that in Washington, Connecticut, local churches established regular catechetical meetings for young people as a result of a revival that occurred in the town in 1802.[39] Porter claimed that "it was a common thing that hopeful converts exhibited a strong desire for improvement in religious knowledge." Churches regularly organized meetings for youths to study the Bible and "promote their advancement in intellectual and religious knowledge. Under this impulse of religious feeling, the progress actually made by many in a correct understanding of Christian doctrines was greater in one month than it had been during their whole lives."[40] Bradley reported that, as a result of an 1816 revival in Greensborough, parents began organizing meetings for children "to assemble for the purpose of reading the Scriptures, and repeating different catechisms." Bradley considered these meetings forerunners of the Sunday school movement, but noted that at the time "this was done without any knowledge of similar institutions in the United

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[37] Tyler, *New England Revivals,* xi.

[38] Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 115-118; Reiner, *From Virtue to Character,* 78-79.

[39] Tyler, *New England Revivals,* 311.

[40] Porter, *Letters on Religious Revivals,* 93.

States."[41] These meetings encouraged young people's continued participation in revivals and local church life, while also helping ministers ensure that evangelicalism was appropriately disseminated to the rising generation.

In addition to high youth involvement in revivals, evangelical concern with providing specialized religious instruction for young people was also born out of the larger cultural acceptance of sentimentalized conceptions of childhood. Historians of this era typically point to the early nineteenth century as a time when "views of childhood changed dramatically."[42] New romanticized constructions of childhood depicted young people as innocent creatures who experienced the world through their emotions. Childhood began to be treated as a distinct category of life during which individuals received their most formative and lasting impressions.[43] Children were increasingly portrayed as unusually malleable, requiring protected environments designed to cultivate their innate sensitivity and goodness. As historian Barbara Finkelstein argues, "For the first half of the nineteenth century, coalitions of moral reformers…began consciously to conceptualize children as learners in need of carefully structured tutorial environments in which their physical, intellectual, imaginative, and moral capacities would be especially attended and nurtured."[44] Consequently, nineteenth-century evangelicals began asserting

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[41] Bradley, *Accounts of Religious Revivals,* 150.

[42] Anne Boylan, "Growing up Female in Young America, 1800-1860," in Hawes and Hiner, *American Childhood*, 134.

[43] Anne M. Boylan, "The Role of Conversion in Nineteenth-Century Sunday Schools," *American Studies* 20, no. 1 (1979): 39.

[44] Barbara Finkelstein, "Casting Networks of Good Influence: The Reconstruction of Childhood in the United States, 1790-1870," in Hawes and Hiner, *American Childhood,* 118.

that children were blessed with special purity and spiritual sensitivity that needed to be nurtured with kindness.[45]

As childhood was reconstructed into a period of prolonged innocence and malleability, evangelical leaders developed a heightened interest in creating specialized learning environments that would support young people's spiritual development. Reverend James Dana asserted in an 1806 sermon that the Bible commanded parents and other authority figures to give children "the earliest instruction" in spiritual matters in a manner customized to their sensitive minds.[46] In an 1814 sermon entitled *Religion Recommended to Children and Youth*, minister Isaac Smith exemplified the growing belief in the plasticity of childhood by urging congregants to remember that "the earliest impressions are commonly reckoned the most lasting." Thus, every effort should be made to acquaint children with religion early to ensure that faith becomes "more familiar and…more agreeable" as they advance in age.[47] Another sermon collection, written anonymously "by a Lady," was similarly focused on urging young people to make a religious commitment to Christ early in life. Employing the sentimentalized language of the period, the author proclaimed that "the arms of [Jesus'] love and compassion are…open to receive you….Go, Children, to this compassionate Savior….Jesus himself

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[45] For more on 18th century attitudes toward children, see Catherine Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 33-58, and Philip J. Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). For more on the early nineteenth-century reconstruction of childhood, see Boylan, *Sunday School*, 133-165; Kett, "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth-Century America," 283-298; Reiner, *From Virtue to Character;* Ryan, "A Woman's Awakening," 63-65, Finkelstein, "Casting Networks of Good Influence," 111-135; Mintz, *Huck's Raft*.

[46] James Dana, *Sermons to Young People, Preached A.D. 1803, 1804. On the Following Subjects* (New Haven, CT: Sidney's Press, 1806), 432.

[47] Isaac Smith, *Religion Recommended to Children and Youth, in a Discourse, Written Chiefly for Their Use* (Boston: J. Belcher, 1814), 18.

encourages and *invites* you; saying "Come unto me – suffer *little children* to come unto me."[48] Protestants began taking it for granted that childhood was a crucial preparation period for conversion, heightening the importance of religious educational structures for children that developed their unique spiritual sensibilities.

Growing awareness of children's potential for early conversion, along with romanticized reconstructions of childhood, not only provided space for youth to engage in revivals but also motivated reformers to create programs specifically for children. Many of the benevolent associations that emerged in the urban Northeast catered directly to children's needs. Weekday public schools, orphan asylums, houses for juvenile delinquents, and infant schools were all designed to provide children with proper spiritual influences that would also produce moral and intellectual uplift. Evangelical women were especially active in pioneering these child-centric reforms. Such work was viewed as a proper extension of women's domestic, maternal roles. Moreover, because women were deemed to be naturally pure and sensitive, they were supposedly more adept at nurturing childhood innocence. As Anne Boylan asserts, "new ideas about childhood…went hand-in-hand with new prescriptions about female behavior."[49] With women leading the charge, evangelicals became more concerned about tailoring reforms to specific life

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[48] Anonymous, *Sermons to Children. To Which are Added Short Hymns, Suited to the Subjects* (Andover, MA: Flagg and Gould, 1815), 4.

[49] Boylan, "Growing up Female in Young America," 155. For more on this topic, see Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, Nancy A. Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the 19th Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986), Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), Carolyn J. Lawes, *Women and Reform in a New England Community, 1815-1860* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women in Early American Religion, 1600-1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (New York: Routledge, 1999), Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism.*

stages, making children's developmental needs a major facet of United Front initiatives.[50] It was from this growing enthusiasm for age-specific reform endeavors that the evangelistic Sunday school model was born.

Founding Evangelical Sunday Schools

According to traditional narratives within Sunday school historiography, the first overtly evangelistic Sunday school established in America began under the direction of the Evangelical Society of Philadelphia in 1811.[51] The Evangelical Society was founded in 1807 by Archibald Alexander, pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church, to promote "knowledge of and submission to the Gospel of Jesus Christ among the poor" and to give "religious instruction to the ignorant." The Evangelical Society started schools, held weekday and Sunday evening services "for instruction and for prayer," founded chapels, and in 1809 helped launch the first African Presbyterian church.[52] The Evangelical Society was comprised of middle-class Presbyterians with a "glowing zeal" for social reform. One member, Alexander Henry, was an Irish immigrant who ran a flourishing import business and actively supported the city's Bible and Religious Tract Societies.[53] Unlike the First Day Society, the Evangelical Society required all members to participate

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[50] Finkelstein, "Casting Networks of Good Influence," Reiner, *From Virtue to Character*; Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 75-93; Rodney Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America, 1780-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

[51] The main historiography supporting this narrative is Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement, 1780-1917, and the American Sunday-School Union, 1817-1917* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1917), Lynn and Wright, *The Big Little School*, and Boylan, *Sunday School.*

[52] Alexander, Archibald, letter recounting the formation and work of the Evangelical Society, 1840, in "The Presbyterian Evangelical Society of Philadelphia," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 5, (1909-1910): 150-153.

[53] Anne M. Boylan, "Presbyterians and Sunday Schools in Philadelphia, 1800-1824," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 58, no. 4 (1980): 305; For more on Alexander Henry, see Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 95-97; Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*, 159.

in recruitment and instruction. Alexander stated that "every member of the Society was to be 'a working man.'"[54] This emphasis on personal involvement encouraged members to explore new evangelistic methods, and before long the society recognized that Sunday schools could be an effective proselytizing tool.

The Evangelical Society began experimenting with Sunday schools due to the influence of Robert May, a British emissary from the London Missionary Society.[55] May wrote to the Evangelical Society in July of 1811 offering his assistance with starting a Sunday school in Philadelphia based on the "modern" system recently adopted in British Sunday schools.[56] This system completely removed literacy instruction from Sunday schools and devoted the class period to Bible reading, prayer, singing hymns, and reciting Scripture passages memorized by the children during the previous week. The system also granted tickets to the pupils who gave the best recitations, which could be traded in for religious books or tracts.[57] The Evangelical Society accepted May's offer to implement these methods in Philadelphia. May arrived in the city in October of 1811 and served as the society's Sunday school superintendent until January of 1812, when he departed to serve as a missionary in India. In a note scribbled at the front of his personal record book, May explained that "when tis said the school of October 1811 was the *first* Sabbath in the

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[54] Alexander, letter, in "The Presbyterian Evangelical Society of Philadelphia," 152. The emphasis on "personal exertions" was typical of most voluntary societies, see Boylan, *Sunday School*, 13.

[55] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 13.

[56] Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 52; The British Sunday school movement experienced its own evangelical transformation at the turn of the century, see Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976.)

[57] For more information, see Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 444-445, and Boylan, "Presbyterians and Sunday Schools in Philadelphia," 303.

U.S. of America, it is meant the first for *gratuitous* instruction and where *religious instruction* was…fully attended to." May went on to highlight the key differences between his school and those of the First Day Society, explaining that in the latter organization "their *teacher was paid*, for teaching, and *religious instruction*" was not conducted.[58]

During his short tenure as superintendent, May earned a reputation for being a "zealous minister of Christ, and faithful friend of Sunday School children."[59] Following the British system, May used his school to introduce children to the foundational Protestant doctrines and to encourage them to obey the Bible.[60] May also started another school for literacy training soon after founding the Sunday school, but he specified that this former institution must operate on weekdays and students must pay tuition. In contrast, the Sunday school operated on a volunteer basis, solidifying its affiliation with the emerging culture of evangelical benevolence.[61] May's religious goals for the school were also evident in the curriculum, which revolved around group prayer sessions, hymn singing, and Bible reading. In his record of the first Sunday school meeting held on October 20, 1811, May described "the children and grown persons one and all falling upon their knees before God. Such a sight was strange and wonderful to all. Children and

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[58] Italicized as in original, Robert May, introductory note to minutes, 1, in Robert May Minutes and Register, 1811-1812, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. Hereafter referred to as Robert May Minutes and Register.

[59] "Sabbath Schools," *The Religious Intelligencer*, June 12, 1819

[60] For more on May's system, see Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 444-445, and Boylan, "Presbyterians and Sunday Schools in Philadelphia," 303.

[61] Noll, *America's God*, 182; Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 55.

parents who never bowed their knees before now were kneeling before God their Maker." He also wrote that "many were in tears" after the sermon.[62]

The first meeting attracted sixty-seven students, but the school quickly drew over 100 children weekly. By the fifth meeting in November of 1811, May wrote with pleasure that the children "were somewhat more regular and orderly than the first. We begin to know our children and they to know us."[63] Having secured consistent attendance, May focused on drilling children in the catechism and Scripture memorization, using the rewards system as motivation.[64] The school continued to prosper after May's departure for India in 1812, enrolling over 1,800 students over five years. More importantly in the Evangelical Society's estimation, many pupils made public professions of faith and joined local churches.[65] This successful use of Sunday schools to evangelize children inspired other reform organizations to adopt the same educational model. For example, the Union Society, a female-led organization created in 1804 for the education of poor girls, also opened a Sunday school in 1811 that enrolled over 300 students.[66]

As the evangelistic Sunday school model spread, women quickly emerged as leaders of the new movement. The Boston Society for the Religious and Moral

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[62] Robert May, "First Sabbath Meeting, October 20, 1811," 3, in Robert May Minutes and Register.

[63] Robert May, "Fifth Sabbath, November 17, 1811," 8, in Robert May Minutes and Register.

[64] See Robert May, Minutes, 1-20, in in Robert May Minutes and Register.

[65] A list of the names of Sunday school converts was inscribed on the front inside cover of May's minute book, see Robert May Minutes and Register.

[66] Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 51.

Instruction of the Poor,[67] an interdenominational organization founded in 1816 for the purpose of providing a variety of relief programs for the lower class, successfully opened the city's first evangelical Sunday schools largely due to women's efforts.[68] After attracting approximately five hundred children to attend the society's first two Sunday schools within one year, the organization affirmed its "warmest gratitude to God for thus raising up helpers in the work of charity among that sex, whose means and opportunities are no less calculated to remedy, than their hearts are providentially formed to sympathize in the sufferings of the unfortunate." The society went on to state, "to every female, whose resources and leisure enable her to devote a portion of her time, however scanty, to this work of benevolence, we would say in the words of our Savior, 'Go thou and do likewise'."[69] A newspaper called the *Christian Messenger* expressed similar praise in an 1817 article, stating "it must be recorded to the honor of the female sex, that the first exertions [regarding evangelical Sunday schools] in the cities of New York and Philadelphia were made by them….it would seem as if conscious that the woman was 'first in the transgression,' they resolved she should not be last in endeavoring to diffuse the blessing of salvation."[70]

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[67] I will refer to this organization as the Boston Society for the Poor throughout the rest of this chapter.

[68] For the society's mission statement, see Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Report of the Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor. Presented at Their Annual Meeting, October 8, 1817* (Boston, 1817), 1, Boston Athenaeum. Hereafter referred to as *1817 Report.*

[69] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *1817 Report.*3. The society's first two Sunday schools were located in School Street and Mason Street. The former attracted around 164 students, and the latter attracted around 336 students.

[70] "A Brief Account of the Origin, Progress and Improvement of the Sunday School System of Education," *Christian Messenger,* October 1, 1817.

Despite the article's condescending tone, the *Christian Messenger* was correct in asserting that women pioneered evangelical Sunday schools. Female efforts to establish Sunday schools in Philadelphia inspired similar work in New York City, leading to the creation of the New York Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools by educational pioneer Joanna Bethune.[71] Bethune learned of Sunday schools around the same time that her mother, celebrated female educator Isabella Graham, founded a Sunday school in 1803. Throughout the following decade, most of Bethune's reform efforts were focused on founding organizations such as the New York Orphan Asylum. In 1815, however, her interest in Sunday schools was renewed when she noticed that "the ladies of Philadelphia…outran their sisters in New York, in this useful work."[72] She began corresponding with Philadelphian Sunday school workers of both genders, including Alexander Henry, asking for advice on founding a regional Sunday school organization.[73] By 1816 Bethune gathered enough information to begin the process of founding a Sunday school society for New York. Interestingly, she initially hoped that "the gentlemen would have come forward in the business" of founding this organization.[74] According to the Female Union's first annual report, Bethune "anxiously

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[71] For the sake of brevity, I refer to the women's Sunday school organization as the Female Union. I refer to the corresponding male society, the New York Sunday School Union Society, as Male Union. I chose to capitalize the word "male" when referring to the latter organization, despite the fact that this word does not actually appear in the society's title, because it is the most efficient and obvious way of distinguishing it from the Female Union.

[72] George Bethune, *Memoirs of Mrs. Joanna Bethune* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1863), 90; New York Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools, *The First Report of the New-York Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools, Read at their Annual Meeting, April 9, 1817* (New York: J. Seymour, 1817), 5, Boston Athenaeum. Hereafter referred to as Female Union, *First Report*.

[73] Female Union, *First Report*, 5.

[74] "A Brief Account of the Origin, Progress and Improvement of the Sunday School System of Education," *Christian Messenger*, October 1, 1817. The newspaper editor states that the letter's author

looked to the other sex to come forward in so arduous an undertaking, wishing only to be assistants to them."[75] When male reformers failed to respond promptly to Bethune's call, her husband Divie supposedly said that "there is no use in waiting around for the *men*" and encouraged her to "gather a few ladies of different denominations" to start a female-led association.[76]

With this spousal encouragement, Bethune contacted her pre-established network of female reformers who had assisted her with other benevolent endeavors, like the Orphan Asylum. Most of these middle-class women were affiliated with Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Dutch Reformed churches.[77] Responding warmly to Bethune's idea, these women collectively established the Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools in January of 1816. The society's main function was to found and oversee auxiliary Sunday schools throughout the city. Auxiliaries were generally attached to local churches and provided basic religious and literacy instruction to poor women and children of both genders.[78] The leadership was entirely female, with Bethune serving in the lead position of First Directress.

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wished to remain anonymous, but it seems clear from the details provided that Bethune is the most likely author.

[75] Female Union, *First Report*, 6.

[76] Italicized as in original, Bethune, *Memoirs of Mrs. Joanna Bethune*, 120. The author of this memoir, George Bethune, was Joanna Bethune's son. Bethune claims to have given his mother's writings verbatim in this memoir, although he certainly may have edited them in order to present a more positive picture. To my knowledge, however, the writings included in this memoir are consistent with the period and other Sunday school accounts.

[77] Bethune, *Memoirs*, 120-121. For more on the denominational makeup of the Female Union, see Boylan, *Sunday School*, 79.

[78] For more on the Female Union's administrative structure, see "Constitution and Rules," in Female Union, *Second Report*.

According to the Female Union's 1817 report, Bethune's actions made male reformers ashamed of their lack of initiative, and they soon "pleaded for the same privilege" of founding a gender-specific Sunday school organization. An anonymous letter to the *Christian Messenger* also affirmed that "gentlemen are mustering their numbers, to follow the example of the ladies, and to take charge" of male Sunday school pupils.[79] Accordingly, one week after the founding of the Female Union, Divie Bethune gathered a group of male reformers, most of them from the merchant middle class, to create the New York Sunday School Union Society. Like his wife, Divie Bethune was already a leading evangelical reformer who was active in numerous other benevolent organizations. Both Unions shared the same administrative structure and regularly traded supplies. Moreover, many of the leaders and subscribers from both organizations were probably related. In its first year of existence, at least thirty percent of the Female Union's leaders shared the same last name as one of the Male Union's officers or subscribers.[80] Philadelphia's earliest Sunday school societies displayed similar patterns of male-female cooperation. For example, the Female Sunday School Society of St. Peter's Church in Philadelphia received support from prominent ministers, boasted numerous male subscribers, and used an administrative structure virtually identical to the city's male organizations.[81] Although often segregated in name and executive leadership, the

[79] "A Brief Account…of the Sunday School System of Education," *Christian Messenger*.

[80] For a list of ministers involved, see Female Union, *First Report*, 2, *The Fifth Report of the New-York Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools, Read at their Annual Meeting, April 13, 1821* (New York: J. Seymour, 1821), 40, and New York Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools *Seventh Report of the New-York Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools, Read at their Annual Meeting, April, 1823* (New York: J. Seymour, 1823), 2, Boston Athenaeum. Hereafter referred to as Female Union, *Seventh Report*.

first evangelical Sunday school unions of this period were built on interconnected networks of male and female reformers committed to supporting one another in the work of creating religious learning communities for children.

By 1817 a vibrant system of evangelistically-oriented Sunday school societies emerged along the eastern seaboard, ranging from South Carolina to Maine.[82] These schools generally adopted curriculum similar to May's, emphasizing prayer, worship, and Scripture memorization. However, most early evangelical Sunday schools continued to incorporate literacy training into their curriculum, due to the fact that public weekday schools did not become established in many parts of the country until the 1830s.[83] Eager to continue the movement's growth, the New York and Boston organizations began expanding operations into the rural parts of their respective states. Additionally, in May of 1817 Divie Bethune traveled to Philadelphia to help fourteen of the city's Sunday school societies consolidate into a regional organization called the Sunday and Adult School Union (SASU).[84] Similar in structure to the New York Unions, the SASU's

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[81] For an example, see Female Sunday School Society of St. Peter's Church, *Second Annual Report of the Female Sunday School Society of St. Peter's Church* (Philadelphia: William Fry, 1818), Boston Athenaeum.

[82] Sunday school societies were especially prolific from 1815-1817, see Lynn and Wright, *The Big Little School*, 3.

[83] Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 57-60; Boylan, *Sunday School*, 19; Tyack and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue*, 29. Boylan notes that the decision to retain literacy training in early evangelical Sunday schools "was made in conjunction with, not in place of, other free schooling opportunities." See Boylan, *Sunday Schools*, 29.

[84] Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 60-63; Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 159-160. For communication between the SASU and Divie Bethune during the organization's founding period, see "Sunday and Adult School Union to Divie Bethune, July 18, 1817," in Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Association Letter Book, 1817-1824, American Sunday School Union, Papers, 1817-1915, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, 5, 23. Hereafter referred to as SASU Letter Book. American Sunday School Union, Papers, 1817-1915, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia hereafter referred to as ASSU papers.

purpose was to establish and supervise Sunday schools throughout the mid-Atlantic region. The group pledged to provide educational materials to auxiliaries, as well as generate and distribute financial support.[85] Like the New York and Boston associations, the society adopted an interdenominational structure, explaining that "the comparative *fewness* of Christians calls for all practicable and profitable union among themselves."[86] In reality, the organization was comprised primarily of Presbyterians and Episcopalians, since these denominations were numerically dominant in Philadelphia. Over time, auxiliaries affiliated with Dutch Reformed, Methodist, and Baptist denominations also joined.[87] The SASU quickly emerged as one of the most vibrant Sunday school associations, supervising forty-three schools within its first year of operation. Forty-one were located in Philadelphia, a remarkable figure considering that the First Day Society, which was in the midst of decline, never operated more than four schools in the city.[88]

Shifting to a Child-Centric Evangelistic Model

As the name indicates, the Sunday and Adult School Union initially taught pupils of all ages, a pattern that also applied to the other regional Sunday school organizations. For example, at its founding in 1819, the Pendleton Sunday School Society in South Carolina included adults in its goal of giving "religious instructions," adding that "indigent children and adults who are unable to read may be admitted as learners."[89] Due

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[85] Sunday and Adult School Union, Constitution, in *First Report*, (Philadelphia, 1818), 27-28, ASSU papers. See also "A System for the Internal Regulation of Sunday Schools," in *First Report*, 29-31.

[86] Italicized as in original, Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 3.

[87] Boylan, "Presbyterians and Sunday Schools in Philadelphia," 305-306.

[88] Boylan, *Sunday Schools*, 11.

to the literacy training provided by these associations, illiterate adults were often interested in attending Sunday schools. From the beginning, however, children were the majority of pupils, prompting evangelical Sunday schools to target this age group. Despite the Pendleton Society's inclusion of adults in its mission statement, its instructions to Sunday school teachers only mentioned young people, stressing that instructors had a "special duty to impress upon the minds of the children the necessity of repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." [90] SASU annual reports also expressed a comparable intention to make children its primary mission field. The second annual report asserted in 1819 that auxiliaries were the divinely-appointed "instrument of bringing these little children to Christ."[91] The reports rarely mentioned adults, asserting instead that the organization's driving motivation was to ensure that "all our children may be taught of God."[92] Boston's Society for the Poor was similarly focused on children. Employing the sentimentalized language of the period, the society argued that "children are pliable. Their early age is tender, and capable of impressions."[93] Stressing the innate innocence of childhood, the society claimed that children were easier objects of

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[89] Pendleton Sunday School Society, *"Pendleton 9th December, 1819," 2, in Records of the Pendleton Sunday School Society, 1819-1824*, copied by Mary Pope Jacob, WPA State-wide project 65-33-118, supervised by Anne King Gregorie, 1936, University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library. Hereafter referred to as Pendleton Sunday School Society Records.

[90] Pendleton Sunday School Society Records, "Pendleton 24th June, 1820, Duties of Teachers," 14.

[91] Sunday and Adult School Union, *The Second Report of the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, Held at their Annual Meeting, Held in St. Paul's Church, May 25, 1819* (Philadelphia: Clark & Raser, 1819), 56-57, ASSU Papers.

[92] Sunday and Adult School Union, *Second Report*, 63; "Extracts from the Fourth Report," *Religious Intelligencer.*

[93] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *The Annual Report of the Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor. Presented at Their Anniversary, Nov. 8th, 1819* (Boston, 1819), 11, Boston Athenaeum. Hereafter referred to as *1819 Report.*

conversion and that reformers could not "hope to be more useful than by laboring" in Sunday schools for the rising generation.[94]

In contrast to this positive emphasis on young pupils, many Sunday school organizations began negatively portraying adults as being set in their ways and unresponsive to religious instruction. In 1818 an SASU affiliate called the Auxiliary Evangelical Society complained that adult pupils were unreliable and prone to "abandon themselves to their wonton vices." As a result, the auxiliary decided to direct its "principle attention to the instruction of children." The Boston Society for the Poor stated in 1822 that adults, "who are grown accustomed to evil are, for the most part, incorrigible." Although acknowledging that divine providence could bring anyone to salvation, the society portrayed adults as unlikely candidates for conversion in comparison to children, asserting that as the former advanced in age they "will plunge…deeper and deeper into wretchedness." This probability, the society asserted, should intensify Sunday school workers' focus on bringing children to salvation. "If their fathers and mothers are beyond the reach of its healing balm – if no exertion of benevolence can wean them from the practices which habit has rendered imperious – at least let the community see that the evil descends no further."[95] As youth conversions during revivals multiplied and sentimentalized views of childhood became established parts of evangelical thinking, Sunday schools gradually stopped recruiting adults. By the 1820s, most organizations catered exclusively to children.[96]

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[94] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Sixth Annual Report of the Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor. Presented at Their Anniversary, Nov. 6, 1822* (Boston, 1822), 18, Boston Athenaeum.

[95] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Sixth Annual Report*, 18-19.

[96] For more on this shift, see Boylan, *Sunday School*, 133-165.

African American adults were the noticeable exception to this change. In major urban centers like Philadelphia, free blacks had begun carving out independent communities by celebrating their own holidays, founding their own reform organizations, establishing the first African denomination in 1816 under the guidance of leaders such as Richard Allen. Nevertheless, blacks were excluded from most public school systems, making African American adults eager to access the literacy instruction provided by Sunday schools.[97] For example, in 1819 blacks represented nearly two thirds of the SASU's almost eleven hundred adult students.[98] The society was willing to overlook the ages of these students because most white Protestants tended to infantilize African Americans. Thus, black adults' supposed state of childlike dependency enabled them to be an exception to the growing child-centric rule. The Auxiliary Evangelical Society reported patronizingly to the SASU that these students, "notwithstanding their unpromising appearance, evince a capacity for improvement not to be despised. More rapid improvement had not been witnessed in any school than here."[99] The Boston Society for the Poor also opened several schools specifically for blacks in 1820, stating that the adult pupils "are very attentive to instruction, respectful and grateful to their teachers."[100] Samuel Bacon, founder of a Sunday school society in York County,

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[97] For examples from Philadelphia, see Russell F. Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 254-255; Boylan, *Sunday School,* 23, Gary Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 147, 180, Howe, *What Hath God Wrought,* 55, 182-183. See also Richard Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

[98] Boylan, *Sunday School,* 23.

[99] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report,* 24. Additional examples on page 9.

[100] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Sixth Annual Report*, 15. For the opening of the African adult school, see Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of

Pennsylvania, reflected the common belief that African Americans were spiritually and mentally destitute when he stated that "the moral condition of no class of the population of Pennsylvania exhibits so much debasement and wretchedness, as that of the free blacks." Bacon therefore established a Sunday school specifically for African American adults to provide an "opportunity for improving their minds," which many embraced.[101] Similarly, the New York Female Union actively recruited African American adults. Believing that women were the best teachers of women, the society was particularly concerned with educating black females, calling them "long neglected beings" in need of salvation and literacy.[102] As a result, higher numbers of African American women attended New York's Sunday schools. In some auxiliaries, adult black students outnumbered child pupils of both races.[103]

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the Poor, *Fourth Annual Report of the Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor. Presented at Their Anniversary, Oct. 11, 1820* (Boston, 1820), 6-7, Boston Athenaeum.

[101] J. Ashmun, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Rev. Samuel Bacon, A. M., Late, and Officer of Marines, in the United States' Service: Afterwards, Attorney at Law in the State of Pennsylvania: And Subsequently, a Minister of the Episcopal Church, and Principle Agent of the American Government for Persons Liberated from Slaveships, on the Coast of Africa; Where He Terminated His Life in the Month of May, 1820* (Washington D.C.: Jacob Gideon, 1822), 107, Boston Athenaeum. For more on nineteenth-century racist paradigms that denied innocence to African Americans, see Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). See also Corinne T. Field, *The Struggle for Equal Adulthood: Gender, Race, Age, and the Fight for Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), and Courtney Weikle-Mills, *Imaginary Citizens: Child Readers and the Limits of American Independence, 1640–1868* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

[102] Female Union, *Second Report*, 50; New York Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools, *The Third Report of the New-York Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools, Read at their Annual Meeting, April 21, 1819: To Which is Added an Appendix* (New York: J. Seymour, 1819), 11. Hereafter referred to as Female Union, *Third Report.*

[103] For examples, see Female Union, *Second Report*, 67, 10, and *Third Report*, 8, 12. The Female Union's desire to attract students from among the underprivileged and racial minorities reflects larger nineteenth-century female concerns over inequality. According to Ginzberg, "the ideology of a benevolent femininity" naturally sought to "mute real differences among women." Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 25. Boylan supports this assertion, arguing that women were always especially concerned with improving the condition of other underprivileged women, and that this focus on women only grew as female activism expanded, see *The Origins of Women's Activism*, 32. This approach not only allowed middle-class female reformers like Bethune to assert more social authority over other women, but enabled

Benevolent associations in the South also recruited black pupils during the initial transition to an evangelistic Sunday school model. Yet in contrast to northern Sunday schools, southern organizations apparently struggled to sustain comparable levels of enthusiasm for teaching African Americans. During a special meeting held in April of 1822, the Pendleton Sunday School Society resolved to start a school for blacks without specifying a target age group.[104] A few months later, the superintendent of the black Sunday school, Major Elam Sharpe, reported to the association that he was able to convince "many respectable people in the neighborhood….of the necessity of defuring [sic] the principles of the Christian religion *even* among negroes."[105] He went on to describe how "the coloured people under my care have behaved themselves with distinguished propriety and been very generally very attentive to their books….I have found no difficulty in the capacities of negroes more than in white people and think they may easily be learned to read the Scriptures." Despite this positive report, Sharpe asked to be released from his post as superintendent, citing family obligations.[106] Apparently, the society was only able to keep the black school going after Sharpe's departure by passing a special resolution allowing teachers in this particular Sunday school to be paid.[107] The fact that the Pendleton Society had to use payment to incentivize teachers'

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the organization to target the unmet educational needs of New York's poor women, thereby creating a powerful argument for the association's usefulness.

[104] Pendleton Sunday School Society Records, "1822 April 11th Special Meeting held in Pendleton C.H.", 20.

[105] Italicized as in original, Pendleton Sunday School Society Records, "Pendleton C.H., S.C. 27 June, 1822, Annual Meeting", 27.

[106] Pendleton Sunday School Society Records, "Pendleton C.H., S.C. 27 June, 1822, Annual Meeting", 27.

[107] Pendleton Sunday School Society Records, "Court House, S. C., 4th Thursday 27th June 1822", 29.

participation in black Sunday schools indicates that Southerners were hesitant to integrate African Americans into the Sunday school movement, a reluctance that would harden into overt hostility toward black inclusion by mid-century.

Shifting to a child-centric model not only reflected the movement's embrace of sentimentalized constructions of childhood, but also solidified the Sunday school's evangelistic orientation. As noted, the primary motivation behind focusing on children was the belief that they were easier to convert. Unlike the First Day Society, which targeted children to alleviate poverty and cultivate citizenship, early nineteenth-century Sunday schools were child-centric because they aspired to save souls. The SASU asserted that Sunday schools existed to instruct pupils in the "essential principles of the gospel" and that the movement's teachers were the divinely-appointed "instrument of bringing these little children to Christ."[108] The SASU envisioned religious education as a means of occupying "the citadel of the heart" with the "seed of divine truth," believing that this spiritual awareness would inspire children to pursue salvation.[109] The Boston society declared that Sunday schools were not designed merely "to instruct the ignorant," but to "fix the attention of youth on divine things, by inducing them to reverence the Sabbath, to attend on public worship, [and] to read the Bible."[110] The New York Female Union affirmed an identical goal, adding that Sunday schools made pupils "hopefully pious" and laid a sure foundation "for future growth in religious knowledge."[111] In the third annual

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[108] Sunday and Adult School Union, *Second Report,* 5, 56-57.

[109] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report,* 34-35, 39; see also "Extracts from the Fourth Report," *Religious Intelligencer;* Walter, *American Reformers,* 194.

[110] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *1817 Report,* 3.

[111] Female Union, *Third Report,* 17. The Male Union used similar language, see *First Report,* 5.

report from 1819, the Union boldly declared that it aimed "at nothing lower than the salvation of immortal souls."[112]

These organizations also believed they had a distinct part to play in inaugurating the millennium, asserting that converting children was pivotal to society's eventual sanctification.[113] The SASU even claimed that Sunday schools were "among the most efficient and successful means of extending the kingdom of 'Emanuel God with us.'"[114] This self-designation endowed the movement's pursuit of child conversions with a larger objective than ensuring individual salvations. By tying child-centric reform to the inauguration of the millennium, Sunday schools aspired to make childhood religious formation an indispensable component of the Benevolent Empire's desired outcomes.[115]

Hoping to maximize the Sunday school's evangelistic potential, reformers developed curricular models that embraced romanticized conceptions of children's malleability. In the popular 1817 manual, *The Sunday School Teacher's Guide*, Sunday school instructors were told to focus on "awakening" children's spiritual sensibilities by appealing to their emotions. "By all that is awful, and all that is pathetic in religion, admonish and exhort the children. Endeavor to awe them by the terrors of the Lord, and

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[112] Female Union, *Seventh Report*, 14. For similar language in the Male Union, see also New York Sunday School Union Society, *The Second Report of the New-York Sunday School Union Society, Presented on the 12th of May, 1818*. New York: J. Seymour, 1818), 4, Boston Athenaeum. Hereafter referred to as Male Union, *Second Report*.

[113] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 36, 40; *Second Report*, 60. See also Walters, *American Reformers*, 24, Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 289, and Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control," 35.

[114] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 34.

[115] For examples of how Sunday school organizations outside these three major cities shared this conversion-centric, millennial outlook, see Pendleton Sunday School Society Records; Nathan Parker, *An Address Delivered May 23, 1820, to the Teachers of the South Parish Sunday School Portsmou*th (1820), Boston Athenaeum, and *An Address Delivered Before the Teachers of the South Parish Sunday School* (1823), Boston Athenaeum.

melt them by his mercies."[116] Another instructional book, *Teacher's Manuel*, reminded Sunday school workers that children were like "wax" that was "warmed and softened by the heat of youthful feeling, and awaits the impressions which we are desirous of fixing upon it."[117] According to the educational theory of the time, the best way to make impressions on children was through memorization.[118] May's school helped popularize this method for Sunday schools, and the regional societies used students' diligence in memorizing Scripture as a way to measure spiritual growth. The SASU reported with satisfaction that in some schools children regularly memorized entire books of the Bible, considering this to be a sign of "great love for and delight in the holy Scriptures."[119] The New York Unions also celebrated their students' ability to memorize large amounts of Scripture, asserting that through this exercise "many of them have been led to more serious thoughts respecting their responsibility to that God who searcheth the heart."[120] The Boston Society for the Poor also praised its pupils for their diligence in committing portions of Scripture, catechisms, and hymns to memory, devoting portions of each annual report to describing how many passages children could recite.[121]

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[116] John Angell James, *The Sunday School Teacher's Guide*, 6th edition (Birmingham: John Knott, 1817), 68. This book was create in England, and the SASU reprinted and distributed multiple editions.

[117] W. F. Lloyd, *Teacher's Manuel; Or, Hints to a Teacher on Being Appointed to the Charge of a Sunday School Class* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1825), 47-48.

[118] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 40-44.

[119] Sunday and Adult School Union, *Second Report*, 12, 19, 25.

[120] Male Union, *Second Report*, 8. For examples of student memorization from both Unions, see Female Union, *Seventh Report*, 14, and Male Union, *Second Report*, 7. The Unions judged male and female students by the same standard of success, asserting that both genders had the duty and privilege of mastering the Bible. This practice supports Margaret Nash's argument that curriculum ideals for males and females were essentially identical in this era. See Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 10.

[121] See reports from the Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor from 1818-1834, Boston Athenaeum.

Sunday school teachers recognized that memorization and religious "exhortations" improved children's morality and intellect, as well as their spiritual sensibilities. SASU auxiliaries regularly exulted that "evident improvement in the morals of the children has been the reward of the teachers."[122] This moral improvement was usually defined as an increase in respectful, reverent conduct. Auxiliaries often reported that mischievous students became more punctual, orderly, and attentive.[123] This behavioral improvement was used as evidence for the "saving benefit" of evangelical Sunday school education.[124] Similarly, the Female Union believed that its spiritual influence was evident in the behavioral improvement displayed by students during and after Sunday school meetings. The second report claimed that, after the establishment of both New York Unions, "the reformation in our streets must be apparent to everyone who walks out on…the Lord's day." The report further asserted that "nor is the change less observable during the week….the female associations have 'covered these naked with garments;' their teachers have taught them to respect themselves…and in numerous instances, have placed them in situations where they may become useful members of society."[125] Since the societies gave prizes to students for good conduct, however, Sunday schools also provided a less than spiritual incentive to conform to Protestant standards of piety. Prizes were also awarded to students who recited the most verses, making it is possible that children memorized Scripture out of a desire for temporal

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[122] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 12.

[123] For examples, see Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 14, 17; *Second Report*, 26, 28.

[124] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 21.

[125] Female Union, *Second Report*, 3-4.

rewards. The associations failed to mention the possibility of these additional motivators, believing that memorization and improved morality were the product of spiritual lessons taught in the schools.

By using behavior to measure success, reformers also continued to affirm the Sunday school's founding goal of disseminating virtue to secure the Republic. Most Sunday schools still catered to impoverished children in the early national period, since they were deemed in special need of religious instruction.[126] Like the First Day Society, the Boston Society for the Poor maintained that "among an ignorant and neglected population, the tendency to vice…is strong and rapid." Therefore, "a wise economy, and a regard to the protection and security of property, require, that the means of moral and religious instruction be furnished to all classes of society, but especially to the poor."[127] Other evangelistic Sunday schools also embraced the Christian republican view that religion produces virtue as an additional incentive for their work.[128] Yet unlike eighteenth-century Sunday schools, the nineteenth-century model made citizenship training subservient to religious goals. While using improved behavior as evidence of success, evangelistic associations expressed frustration if moral transformation was not followed progress toward conversion. For example, the 1818 SASU report stated that an auxiliary called the Canaan Society School "speaks favourably of the progress and deportment of the scholars, but laments that so little of saving benefit appears to be the result of their labours."[129] For the SASU, true progress was made when students

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[126] James, *The Sunday School Teacher's Guide*, 2-3.

[127] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *1819 Report*, 22.

[128] For the SASU's similar beliefs, see Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 36-40; *Second Report*, 13, 58-59, 61.

"exhibited such a change of conduct, as indicates a change of heart."[130] Similarly, the New York Female Union spoke for the entire movement when it affirmed that, despite any temporal and social benefits, the Sunday school's "most glorious fruit" was generating youth conversions.[131] Thus, the new evangelistic model inverted the movement's previous understanding of the relationship between religion and republicanism, making virtue a by-product rather than the goal of Sunday school education.

Yet as indicated by the reports above, many Sunday schools struggled to meet their evangelistic aims. Overall, narratives of student conversions are noticeably absent from auxiliary reports. Although it was the largest Sunday school organization, the SASU did not generate many converts. In 1818 the Combined Schools of the Northern Liberties, an SASU auxiliary, reported only one conversion out of 450 students.[132] Another SASU auxiliary, the Newtown Sabbath School Association, reported that none of its scholars had converted and apologized for not presenting "a more satisfactory report."[133] The New York and Boston Sunday schools often lamented that, despite signs of moral improvement, "there does not appear to be decided evidence of real piety" among most pupils.[134]

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[129] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 18-19.

[130] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 9.

[131] Female Union, *Third Report*, 7. See also Male Union, *Second Report*, 4.

[132] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 11, 17-18.

[133] Sunday and Adult School Union, *Second Report*, 17.

[134] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Fifth Report*, 10, Boston Athenaeum.

The organizations dealt with this lack of verifiable converts by emphasizing the romanticized ideal of childhood as a crucial period of spiritual preparation, which would be followed by conversion in adolescence or adulthood. As Sunday school supporter and Unitarian minister from Boston Ezra S. Gannett stated, "we are not educating children so much for immediate excellence as for the duties and trials of future life, for manhood and womanhood, for death and eternity. It is unreasonable to repine because we cannot gather fruits which immortality must ripen."[135] This further explains the societies' emphasis on outward markers of improvement as signs of inward transformation. Organizational reports stressed that the battle for a child's soul was partially won once they started attending Sunday school. The SASU claimed that God would "open the hearts of the children" who came to Sunday school and lead them to faith.[136] While this process was often slow and imperceptible, the societies never doubted that their religious instruction would eventually produce "fruit unto eternal life."[137] By making attendance or good conduct likely precursors to salvation, auxiliaries could assert that they made children "hopefully pious," even if verifiable conversions were slow to appear.[138]

Empowering Youth Leadership

Despite the Sunday school's questionable proselytizing influence, the new child-centric, evangelistic model was indisputably successful at attracting a wide range of

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[135] Ezra S. Gannett, *An Address Delivered Before the Boston Sunday School Society, on the Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Sunday School Institution, at the Federal Street Church, September 14, 1831* (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1831),25.

[136] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report,* 23.

[137] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report,* 38.

[138] Sunday and Adult School Union, *Second Report,* 17.

supporters. Executive leadership within these associations usually hailed from Haselby's national evangelist camp. Most of the SASU's board of managers and officers were middle-class men who belonged to the Second and Fifth Presbyterian Churches or St. Paul's Episcopal Church.[139] Alexander Henry, who served as president throughout the society's existence, belonged to Second Presbyterian Church. Manager and vice president Thomas Latimer attended the same congregation. At least four managers came from St. Paul's Church, including John Bankson and vestryman John Claxton. In addition to denominational ties, the leaders shared philanthropic and business connections, while some were also related. For example, Claxton's son served as a publication agent, and his nephew was one of the secretaries.[140] SASU leaders not only used their pre-existing alliances to expand Sunday schools throughout Pennsylvania, but to other parts of the country. Managers Latimer and Joseph Dulles used business ties to introduce Sunday schools to Presbyterians in Charleston, making these schools the SASU's first out-of-state auxiliaries.[141]

These middle-class merchants and churchmen easily fit within Haselby's national evangelist category, but the movement also included supporters with other social and religious affiliations. For instance, a group of Catholic men started the Roman Catholic Sunday School Society in Philadelphia, demonstrating the movement's broad appeal to

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[139] The SASU board of managers consisted of twelve annually-elected members who supervised auxiliaries. Six managers also served as officers, a group composed of a president, two vice presidents, two secretaries, and a treasurer. See Sunday and Adult School Union, Constitution, in *First Report*, 27-28.

[140] For more on the mangers and officers, see Boylan, "Presbyterians and Sunday Schools in Philadelphia," 305-306.

[141] Boylan, "Presbyterians and Sunday Schools in Philadelphia," 306; Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 5-6.

an expansive range of reformers.[142] Catholics were also active in the Brandywine Manufacturer's Sunday School, founded in 1816 at Wilmington, Delaware.[143] Additionally, Samuel Bacon, founder of the York County Sunday School Association, wrote to a friend that two Sunday schools in rural Pennsylvania were overseen by farmers.[144] Indeed, Bacon regularly noted that members of the lower class participated in founding and running Sunday schools in high numbers in the rural parts of the state. Bacon, who was a lawyer, wrote that "with the exception of myself…we do not have one active member above the grade of a mechanic. We are shoe-makers, tailors, carpenters, masons, blacksmiths – almost to a man." Bacon further described how one leader "is yet a mere youth." Because of this, "all our learned and genteel people stand aloof. They neither raise a hand, nor give a cent." Notably, Bacon noted that this middle-class resistance was not only due to the low status of many Sunday school enthusiasts in this area, but also because numerous leaders "are all young." Bacon was undeterred by such criticism, asserting that "Christ is our leader, and we shall triumph."[145]

The York County Sunday School Association was not unusual in relying on youth leadership. Gannett asserted that by the 1830s "seventy-five thousand teachers are engaged in Sunday schools," most of whom were "young men and women."[146] Many of

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[142] The only primary source I have been able to find for this organization is Roman Catholic Sunday School Society, *The Managers of the Roman Catholic Sunday School Society: Request the Serious Attention of the Members of the Different Roman Catholic Congregations of this City* (Philadelphia, 1817), University of Texas, Collections Deposit Library.

[143] See Ruth C. Linton, "To the Promotion and Improvement of Youth: The Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School, 1816-1840" (master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1981), and Boylan, *Sunday School*, 38.

[144] Ashmun, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Rev. Samuel Bacon*, 130.

[145] Ashmun, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Rev. Samuel Bacon*, 124.

[146] Gannett, *Address*, 22.

the teachers who pioneered evangelistic Sunday schools were adolescent converts seeking outlets to express their newfound faith. For example, young men from Andover Theological Seminar regularly visited the Boston Sunday schools to assist instructors, particularly by making house calls to visit with pupils. [147] The Boston Society for the Poor felt that these young men were unusually effective at bonding with students and recruiting new pupils, asserting that they "deserve a tribute of gratitude for their kind and gratuitous cooperation with us in our exertions among the poor population of the city."[148] Similarly, reports from the New York Unions asserted that most of its teachers were "the youth of our country."[149] The Unions took great pride in their young teachers, upholding them as paragons of virtue who were genuinely concerned for students' spiritual welfare.[150] In 1819 the Female Union report included a letter from fourteen young female teachers, who entreated "the prayers of all interested in the work, that they may not only be instrumental in improving minds, but also in benefitting the souls of those committed to their care."[151] By joining Sunday schools as teachers, adolescents of both genders were empowered to shape children's religious formation while also establishing their own identities as evangelical activists who belonged to a network of like-minded volunteers.[152]

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[147] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Seventh Report of the Directors of the Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor. Presented at the annual Meeting, Nov. 13, 1823* (Boston, 1823), 19-22, Boston Athenaeum.

[148] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Seventh Report*, 22.

[149] For an example, see Female Union, *Third Report*, 4. See also Banner, "Religion and Reform in the Early Republic," 678-679.

[150] For examples, see Female Union, *Seventh Report*, 14, and Male Union, *First Report*, 13.

[151] Female Union, *Second Report*, 8-9.

[152] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 103.

Sunday school teaching often held particular appeal for unmarried adolescent women. The ideal of true evangelical womanhood prioritized women's spiritual influence as wives and mothers, yet the Sunday school movement provided a forum for single women to exercise spiritual authority over children in their own right. This was the case with Harriot Lathrop Winslow, who converted in 1809 at the age of twelve after attending revivals in her hometown of Norwich, Connecticut.[153] As she grew into young adulthood, Winslow dedicated herself to evangelical activism, starting groups such as the Society for the Relief of Poor Women and Children. During a visit to New York City in 1816 at the age of eighteen, Winslow met Joanna Bethune and learned about Sunday schools. Inspired by Bethune's success, Winslow returned to Norwich determined to start a school of her own. The clergymen in the town initially opposed her endeavor, fearing that her efforts to instruct children in the faith would usurp their authority.[154] As a result, Winslow initially had trouble recruiting pupils. When a few of the students converted, however, Winslow convinced the ministers of her the school's value and continued the work unopposed from that point.[155] Winslow's role as a Sunday school superintendent proved to be a turning point in her spiritual journey, empowering her to pursue even more controversial forms of benevolence. She went on to become one of the first American female missionaries, an unusual role for women at the time.[156]

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[153] Miron Winslow, ed., *Memoir of Mrs. Harriet L. Winslow, Thirteen Years a Member of the American Mission in Ceylon* (New York: The American Tract Society, 1840), 18.

[154] Dana Robert describes Winslow's decision to found a Sunday school as pushing "the boundaries of women's public role beyond its socially accepted limits." See Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 13.

[155] Winslow, *Memoir*, 65-66, 75-76.

In other cases, Sunday schools provided a forum for youth who had not fully committed to activism to begin experimenting with benevolence work. In the Boston Sunday schools, adolescent pupils were sometimes asked to serve as teachers for younger classes in the hope that "there may be a succession of Teachers of Sabbath schools raised up from among those who had been scholars themselves."[157] Additionally, Sunday schools not only provided a place for adolescents to experiment with benevolence, but to wrestle with more fundamental decisions about their personal faith. Many societies even encouraged unconverted young people to serve as teachers. The Male Union justified its acceptance of unconverted youth volunteers by arguing that Sunday schools were a means to salvation for instructors as well as students.[158] The Union asserted that many of its teachers, "while endeavoring to explain to their pupils the doctrines and duties of religion, have been strongly impressed with their own need of divine illumination and forgiveness; and whose convictions and anxieties have issued their hopeful conversion to the love of God."[159] The Female Union was similarly hopeful that Sunday school work would result in the conversion of teachers, and this often turned out to be the case. Between 1816 and 1821, ninety-eight Female Union teachers were converted in the society's Sunday schools, while only sixty-nine students were converted.[160] Because

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[156] Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 12-14. The history of both Catholic and Protestant missions was already long, rich, and complex by this period. But this was a field historically dominated by men, making Winslow's actions revolutionary for her time.

[157] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *1819 Report*, 9.

[158] Male Union, *First Report*, 8.

[159] Male Union, *First Report*, 9.

[160] Female Union, *Fifth Report*, 31. This is but one of many examples of teachers' conversions that about in the Female Union's reports. Boylan argues that this high rate of conversion among teachers was common for all Sunday school organizations, see *Sunday School*, 103-104.

Sunday school teaching could be the final step in a young adult's journey to salvation, most organizations were reluctant to deny unconverted individuals a chance to participate. In this way, nineteenth-century Sunday schools not only helped broaden the category of "national evangelist" by facilitating involvement from various social classes and denominations, but also created a unique space where youth could achieve leadership status within the burgeoning evangelical community. As Gannett explained, Sunday schools aspired to empower adolescents to shape "the destinies of the republic" through evangelism, helping propel the spread of youth volunteerism.[161]

Children's Responses and Growth of the Evangelistic Model

Youth leadership in evangelical Sunday schools is relatively easier to track in comparison to reconstructing children's responses to the institution. Society reports were written by adults for the purpose of providing yearly summaries for adult financial supporters. As a result, children's voices are rarely heard in these records. Narratives of pupils' conversion occasionally appear, but overall such accounts are noticeably lacking in the reports. While it is possible that auxiliaries did not keep formal count of these events, SASU schools did not usually generate large amounts of converts at a time. In the 1818 report, the Fifth Presbyterian church stated that in one of its schools only two out of over one hundred pupils "have become the subjects of a work of saving grace."[162] The Combined Schools of the Northern Liberties, an auxiliary located in a working-class suburb of Philadelphia, reported only one conversion out of 450 students that same year. The Sansom Street Sunday School Society reported only one public profession of faith

[161] Gannett, *Address,* 22.

[162] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report,* 13.

out of 240 students.[163] Similarly, the New York and Boston Sunday schools often lamented that "there does not appear to be decided evidence of real piety" among large groups of pupils.[164]

As noted, however, the regional associations pointed to student behaviors such as diligence in memorization or attentiveness to Sunday school lectures as signs that pupils embraced their proselytizing efforts. For example, the superintendent of Boston's School Street Sabbath School, John Gulliver, reported that "though I do not know that I can state any instance, in which attendance at the School as be blessed to the undoubted conversion of a child; yet there are numerous instances of children whose consciences are tender, and their minds very seriously impressed."[165] The regional societies seemed to prefer these "judicious" evaluations over inflated claims of conversions, maintaining that the fruit born of Sunday school instruction was often slow to ripen. As the 1821 SASU report asserted, "The practical influence of *Christian education* will be felt at the remotest period of existence."[166] The promise of future benefits from early religious education relieved the organizations of the responsibility of converting every Sunday school student in the present, allowing them to settle for partial fulfillment of their evangelical goals.

Yet happily for the organizations, some Sunday school pupils did have definitive spiritual awakenings. Although such accounts only appear periodically, many societies

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[163] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 11, 17-18.

[164] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Fifth Report*, 10.

[165] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Second Report*, 5. The School Street Sabbath School was one of the institutions supervised by the Boston Society for the Poor.

[166] Italicized as in original, Sunday and Adult School Union, "Extracts from the Fourth Report," *Religious Intelligencer*.

were able to offer examples of children's conversion experiences. These events often occurred after students came in contact with revivals. In 1823 Boston experienced a series of urban awakenings that proved popular among the city's Sunday school pupils. The Society for the Poor reported that "the revival of the spirit of religion among the inhabitants of this city during the year has been more than once referred to, and its fruits noticed. Several of the youth have been partakers of its sacred influence, and it is still advancing, as we trust, with incalculable blessings in its train, and evincing the power of faith and the efficacy of prayer."[167] In other cases, students were prompted to ask Sunday school teachers about conversion following the death of classmates. Death was a constant threat for children in this period, and Sunday schools provided a safe place for students to process these heartbreaking events. In 1822 Gulliver described how a young female student "initially stifled her convictions for years" but then came "under deep religious impressions" following the death of a classmate. Another girl had a similar experience around the same time. The death of a friend caused this pupil to feel "a distressing conviction that she was unprepared; and this distress continued until she made an entire surrender of herself to Christ."[168]

In other instances, children often relied on Sunday school teachers to guide them through their own deathbed experiences. Teachers regularly reported visiting children before their passing, such as when one instructor from Boston was summoned to visit a black pupil in order to prepare her for death. The teacher reported that this girl "expressed willingness to die" and "said the Savior was precious to her," recounting lessons she

[167] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Seventh Annual Report*, 18.

[168] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Sixth Annual Report*, 9.

learned in Sunday school as proof that she was ready for heaven. The teacher was so impressed by the child's ability to articulate spiritual principles that he believed she "died in faith."[169] Deathbed conversion accounts also appeared in reports from the other regional societies. In 1817 the New York Female Union described how Anne Fentine, a thirteen-year-old African American girl, attended Sunday school faithfully for four months before being confined to her bed with consumption. "Being apprised of the probability that she would not recover, her mind became convinced of the importance of obtaining an interest in that Redeemer whom she had so much disregarded." Anne began to pray regularly and "frequently requested the privilege of conversing with pious people," leading her to develop a sincere interest in making a profession of faith. About a month before her passing, "the fear of death no longer troubled her, and she 'greatly rejoiced in the hope of God'." The Union claimed that at the moment of her death, "raising her hands for the last time, she exclaimed 'Redeem me, redeem me!' and expired." The society remarked, "what an interesting and solemn warning is conveyed by this remarkable death, to all, but especially to the young!" Such stories also served as "a high encouragement…to those upon whom rest the responsibilities of gratuitous instruction," an attitude shared by the other regional associations when recounting pupils' deathbed conversions.[170]

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[169] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Sixth Annual Report*, 19-20.

[170] Female Union, *First Report*, 9-10. Deathbed conversions were also popular topics within early Sunday school literature. Sunday school organizations in Britain and the United States regularly published children's memoirs that recounted pupils' conversions before death, events that were usually preceded by the child's regular attendance at a Sunday school. For examples, see James Janeway, *A Token for Children: Being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives, and Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children. To Which is Added, Some Choice Sayings of Dying Saints* (Philadelphia: R. Aitken, 1801), Congregational Library and Archives; John Griffin, *A Child's Memorial: Containing an Account of the Early Piety and Happy Death of Miss Dinah Doudney, of Portsea, Aged 9 Years, Delivered to a*

Many of the children's conversion accounts followed the pattern expected of adults, which included a period of prolonged spiritual struggle and emotional agony before the actual moment of salvation.[171] A nine-year-old girl in Boston's School Street Sabbath School told her teacher that "she used to think of herself as some wicked, before she came to Sunday school – now she thought of herself as more so." As this conviction of sin began to intensify, her teacher "lately observed her crying." The school's report maintained that the girl explained her tears as being partially motivated by concern for the souls of her classmates as well as her own. The report claimed this pupil said, "If other children could only see their wicked hearts, they would all cry."[172] SASU conversion accounts also emphasized that children underwent emotional struggles prior to conversion, similar to adults. One of the society's auxiliaries in South Carolina, the Female First Female Sabbath School of Charleston, reported that a fourteen-year-old girl "was observed to be unusually impressed." When the teachers "asked several times the causes of her dejection," the student reportedly "burst into tears," explaining that she felt burdened by sin and longed to know the way to salvation.[173] There is obviously no way

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Congregation of Children, in Orange Street Chapel, on New Year's Day, 1805. To Which is Added, an Account of Miss Sarah Barrow, Who Was Burnt to Death, April the 4th, 1805 (Charlestown: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1809), Boston Athenaeum; R. Meek, *The Female Sunday School Teacher; Or An Account of the Life and Happy Death, of Miss E. Gillard. To Which is Added, The History of Susan Smith* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1822), Boston Athenaeum; Adkins Lancaster, *The Opening Bud; Or, Early Piety Illustrated: In A Memoir of Adkins Lancaster, Aged Six Years and Six Months; Including Original Letters, Written by Himself, 2nd edition*, (London: Printed for Francis Westley, 1822), Congregational Library and Archives; G. Hendley, *A Memorial for Sabbath School Girls, Being An Authentic Account of the Conversion, Experience, and Happy Death of Seven Children* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1824), Boston Athenaeum; Legh Richmond, *Annals of the Poor, "The Young Cottager"* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1829), Boston Athenaeum.

[171] For more on expected patterns within adult conversion narratives, see Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), and Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Knopf, 1997)

[172] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Second Annual Report*, 5-6.

to judge the authenticity of these accounts. However, the fact that they were included in the reports demonstrates Sunday school workers' genuine belief that children could be legitimately convicted of sin, and that childhood spiritual sensibilities were valid and praiseworthy parts of the evangelical experience.

These and other conversion narratives in society reports provide examples of children's positive responses to evangelical Sunday schools. Reformers' success in attracting pupils in a relative short time in another indication that the new child-centric Sunday school model appealed to young people. If numbers are any indication, reformers were highly successful in popularizing evangelistic Sunday schools. The New York Male and Female Unions collectively supported hundreds of auxiliaries in New York and nearby states like Delaware and New Jersey within only a few years of operation. Boston's Society for the Poor supported schools throughout Massachusetts and in additional states like Vermont by the 1820s. The SASU's growth was even more impressive. The Philadelphian organization was particularly adamant about the need to widen the Sunday school movement's geographic. After only two years of operation, the managers insisted to members, "Time is short, and much is to be done….Let your past success animate you to new and increased efforts."[174]

Propelled by a desire to spread religious education to all American children, the SASU hired a paid missionary in 1821. Reverend William C. Blair received a commission to address the "large tracts of country [that] are yet ignorant of the benefits

[173] Sunday and Adult School Union, *Second Report*, 10.

[174] Sunday and Adult School Union, *Second Report*, 45, 56, 59.

of Sabbath school instruction."[175] Blair traveled 2500 miles throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina to complete his charge.[176] He established sixty-one Sunday schools, revived twenty schools, and visited thirty-five others. He founded six tract societies and four adult schools.[177] Blair stressed the need for more workers to be sent into the field, suggesting "there ought to be eight or ten Sunday-school missionaries in every state."[178] Accordingly, the SASU M. A. Remley and Reverend Timothy Alden as additional missionaries in 1824.[179] Since most evangelical societies still operated on a voluntary basis at the time, the SASU's decision to hire professional missionaries revealed the strength of its compulsion to convert. It also signaled a shift in the SASU's role in the religious marketplace. Employing missionaries was a promotional strategy that demonstrated the society's desire to increase its competitiveness and influence within the Benevolent Empire. The society also attempted to enhance its marketability by focusing on publishing and distributing Sunday school material. By 1820, the SASU printed 45,000 Sunday school tracts a year, along with numerous curricular materials like catechisms and spellers.[180]

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[175] Sunday and Adult School Union, "Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, Fifth Report – May 21, 1822," *Boston Recorder*, June 8, 1822. For an example of the SASU's instructions to Blair, see "George B. Claxton for the Sunday and Adult School Union to William C. Blair, August 1, 1821," in SASU Letter Book.

[176] Sunday and Adult School Union, "Fifth Report," *Boston Recorder*.

[177] Sunday and Adult School Union, "Fifth Report ," *Boston Recorder*.

[178] William C. Blair to the Sunday and Adult School Union, in *Fifth Report of Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, Read at Their Annual Meeting, Held in the First Presbyterian Church, May21, 1822* (Philadelphia: I. Ashmead & Co., 1822), 61, ASSU Papers.

[179] "Sunday School Missionaries," *The Religious Intelligencer*, August 28, 1824.

[180] Reinier, *From Virtue to Character*, 89.

The SASU's efforts to enlarge its sphere of influence met with prompt success. Within its first year of operation the society supervised forty-three schools.[181] This growth caused the managers to assert that "this Union…though but recently formed, is fast advancing to the full attainment of all that it originally proposed…. System, zeal and perseverance, will, with the divine blessing, accomplish all we desire."[182] If the steady increase of SASU auxiliaries was any indication, this prediction proved correct. In 1819 the society received an act of incorporation and had 129 affiliates throughout Pennsylvania and nearby states like North Carolina and Delaware.[183] After hiring Blair in 1821 the organization grew to 313 auxiliaries. By 1824, only seven years after its founding, the Sunday and Adult School Union had 723 affiliates in seventeen states.[184]

As a result of this expansion, the evangelistic, child-centric model of Sunday school education quickly eclipsed the republican-humanitarian model. By providing a standardized form of religious education, Sunday schools established an accessible, legitimate religious experience for thousands of American children that helped socialize them into the wider evangelical community. Additionally, the transformation of Sunday schools from being civic tools for cultivating republican morality to evangelistic centers for fostering conversions enabled reformers to integrate children's spiritual needs into the larger project of creating the Benevolent Empire. Placing child conversion at the center of Sunday school education allowed regional organizations like the New York Unions to tap

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[181] Boylan, *Sunday Schools*, 11.

[182] Sunday and Adult School Union, *First Report*, 25, 34.

[183] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 9.

[184] "Sunday School Union: From the Seventh Annual Report of the Sunday and Adult School Union, 1824," *The Columbian Star*, June 19, 1824; Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 66.

into and intensify growing evangelical concern with nurturing children's spiritual sensibilities. It also helped widen the category of "reformer" to include adolescents. Ultimately, reformers' determination to ensure that all young people would be "taught of God" paved the way for ideals and anxieties about childhood to help propel the rise of volunteerism. As reformers such as Gannett recognized, young people were at the heart of benevolent activity. Consequently, organizations like the SASU became the new face of American Sunday schools and prepared the way for the one of the most important developments in the history of the movement: the creation of a national Sunday school union.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Dictators of the Consciences of Thousands of Immortal Beings": The American Sunday School Union and the National Expansion of Sunday Schools

On February 16, 1831, a group of United States Senators and Congressmen organized a "large and highly respectable meeting" in Washington D.C. to demonstrate support for the American Sunday School Union (ASSU), which was founded in 1824 to oversee the national spread of Sunday schools. Renowned statesmen not only "expressed the joy" they felt over the establishment of this society, but lauded the ASSU's particular efforts to found a Sunday school mission program for the Mississippi Valley region. Tennessee Congressman Felix Grundy, who chaired the meeting, asserted that Americans should financially support this program because it was designed to "extend the moral and religious culture to the rising generation" and "imprint on tender minds the great principles of knowledge, especially in morals and religion, at a period best fitted for impression and calculated to their proper effects on future life."[1] Theodore Frelinghuysen, a leading U.S. senator from New Jersey and strong advocate for evangelical reforms, spoke for all the attendees when he stated, "I always rejoice in the occasion that enables me to raise my voice in behalf of the Sunday school. I regard it…as the most benign enterprise of modern benevolence."[2] Frelinghuysen went on to outline the Sunday school movement's spiritual and moral benefits, ending his speech by boldly

[1] American Sunday School Union, *Speeches of Messrs. Webster, Frelinghuysen, and Others, At the Sunday School Meeting in the City of Washington, February 16, 1831* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1831), 3-4, Boston Athenaeum.

[2] American Sunday School Union, *Speeches of Messrs. Webster, Frelinghuysen, and Others,* 14.

claiming that "the genius of our constitution is propitious to the interests of the Sunday school….the pure spirit of republican liberty evokes its aid, and cherishes its fellowship, and he is unfaithful to his country, who would seek to impair its influence or check its progress."[3] Inspired by these words, attendees called upon every citizen to promote the efforts of the American Sunday School Union, especially by donating to the organization's mission fund. As Grundy claimed, if citizens united to support the ASSU, Americans "may live to see the day, when Sunday schools have imparted their benign influence to every family in our country, and that when we come to lie down in death, we may close our eyes upon a land of Sunday schools, of Bibles, and of Christians."[4]

As this Washington D.C. gathering demonstrates, Sunday schools underwent an important status change in the 1820s and 1830s, transitioning from regionally-focused efforts into a national movement. This expansion is significant not just from a structural standpoint. The founding of the American Sunday School Union marks a turning point in the way that evangelical reformers thought about and attempted to influence young people's spiritual formation. As Frelinghuysen and Grundy articulated, reformers began defining and deploying the idea of age-specific evangelistic tools in increasingly expansive ways for the purpose of Christianizing the entire nation. This in turn served to widen the Sunday school movement's sphere of influence. As the first society in American history to employ a child-centric religious educational institution on a national scale, the ASSU attempted to recast Sunday schools as a necessary means of spiritual formation for every child, not just the illiterate or destitute. Building on the space created

[3] American Sunday School Union, *Speeches of Messrs. Webster, Frelinghuysen, and Others,* 16.

[4] American Sunday School Union, *Speeches of Messrs. Webster, Frelinghuysen, and Others,* 4.

for child-centric evangelism established by societies like the SASU, the ASSU worked to formalize and standardize young people's religious experiences regardless of social and economic status. The society articulated this vision in its first annual report in 1825, expressing the desire to become "dictators of the consciences of thousands of immortal beings, on the great and all-important subject of the welfare of their souls."[5] In pursuing this aim, the ASSU made the Sunday school a respectable organization for the middle and upper classes while also helping to keep the conversion of youth central to the Protestant project of building a Christian nation.

This expansion of the Sunday school's sphere of influence occurred during a time when middle-class Protestants were wrestling with the increasingly independent roles youth assumed within American society. Young people were progressively granted more freedoms throughout the nineteenth century, such as the ability to choose their marriage partners or select new forms of employment outside of an indenture system. Rodney Hessinger contends that these changes undermined the influence of elders within society and produced a "cultural marketplace" that catered to youth empowerment.[6] Within evangelical circles, the competitive marketplace created by religious disestablishment became increasingly oriented around winning youth to the Protestant cause. Evangelicals became concerned with guiding "the next generation into stable and respectable stations into their families and communities" while also transmitting "values that would keep them in good stead in an ever-changing society."[7] Hessinger argues that the competition

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[5] American Sunday School Union, American Sunday School Union, *First Report*, 23, in American Sunday School Union, Papers, 1817-1915, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. Hereafter referred to as ASSU papers.

[6] Rodney Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America, 1780-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) 2.

between different evangelical groups to establish primary influence over the nation's youth "became a central dilemma in emerging bourgeois culture."[8] Competition to capture and maintain the attention of youth was exacerbated by the growth of what Jon Butler calls an "antebellum spiritual hothouse" that gave Americans an unprecedented amount of religious options.[9] Although built on earlier evangelical shifts toward child-centric evangelism, the ASSU was also created in response to these middle-class dilemmas and religious contests. As a result, the organization aspired to take a leading role within the emerging youth-oriented spiritual marketplace.

But the ASSU's drive to dominate the field of child-centric religious education did not go uncontested. As one of many voices competing for influence over America's rising generation, the ASSU's efforts to formalize and standardize Sunday school education generated larger conflicts about power and religious authority. Historians of childhood note that the concept of age is grounded in a system of power relationships that cut across and encompass other sources of authority, such as gender, race, or class.[10]

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[7] Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn*, 4.

[8] Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn*, 2.

[9] Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 225-288. For an overview of these options, see Mark Noll, *America's God*: *From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). For more on the early nineteenth century as a period of religious contest in America, see Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), Jonathan Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), and Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[10] Rachel Leow, "Age as a Category of Gendered Analysis: Servant Girls, Modern Girls, and Gender in Southeast Asia," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 4 (2012): 976; Steven Mintz, "Reflection on Age as a Category of Historical Analysis," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 91-94; Mary Jo Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 114-124; Anna Mae Duane, *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 1-15. Karin Lesnik-Oberstein makes the related argument that childhood is primarily a cultural construction formulated within constantly shifting dialogical frameworks of meaning, see Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, "Introduction:

Accordingly, the ASSU's attempts to institutionalize age-specific approaches to spiritual formation on a national scale provoked larger debates about which sources of authority are most qualified to guide children's religious and moral development. For example, within a decade of its founding, the society found itself embroiled in controversy after it petitioned the Pennsylvania state legislature for a charter in 1828. The petition was denied on the grounds that the ASSU's plan to become "dictators of the consciences of thousands" was actually a sectarian plot devised by elite Presbyterian clergyman to indoctrinate "infant minds."[11] ASSU leaders also had public disputes with other educational reformers like Horace Mann, secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, over the role of catechetical training in public schools. Historians such as Anne Boylan and Steven Mintz have used these particular conflicts as a lens for examining the development of church-state issues in the early republic or to explore how evangelicals struggled to maintain dominance within the public sphere.[12]

However, another highly significant conflict that scholars have yet to fully explore is the contest that the ASSU provoked over the Sunday school's role in shaping childhood spiritual formation in relation to parental authority. By attempting to make itself the "dictators of the consciences of thousands of immortal beings," the ASSU was

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Voice, Agency, and the Child," in Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, ed., *Children in Culture, Revisited: Further Approaches to Childhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2-4.

[11] American Sunday School Union, *The Charter; Being a Plain Statement of the Facts in Relation to an Application of to the Legislature of Pennsylvania, to Grant a Charter to the American Sunday School Union. With a Statement of the Resident Members of the Board of Managers, Belonging to the Methodist Episcopal Church, in Reference to Charges Made Against the Union by the Christian Advocate and Journal* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1828), Boston Athenaeum.

[12] Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Moralizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

accused of challenging the influence of parents, who were traditionally viewed as the ultimate sources of authority over children's spiritual development. Using carefully crafted rhetoric, the organization sought to mitigate fears that Sunday schools usurped parental authority by depicting the institution as a useful supplement to domestic religious training that also helped groom children for full church participation. More specifically, the ASSU cast the Sunday school as occupying a new "middle space" between the home and the church. As such, Sunday schools were natural extensions of the domestic realm, yet distinct from it due to the completely youth-oriented religious experiences provided for pupils. Additionally, the ASSU described Sunday schools as an enhanced version of familial influences that helped to create coherence between children's private and public religious experiences, facilitating an easier transition to adult evangelical life. The ASSU not only employed this rationale to strengthen its claim that Sunday schools were a necessary educational tool for all white American children, but also used it to reimagine the spiritual roles children could play within their families and communities. Exploring this conflict opens new avenues for understanding how evangelicals implemented their authority within the burgeoning youth-oriented religious marketplace, as well as how the Sunday school's national expansion enabled children to be viewed as spiritually and morally transformative agents.[13]

[13] This chapter focuses on the social diversification of Sunday school pupils and the conflicts over parental and pastoral authority within Sunday schools rather than providing a detailed history of the ASSU's founding and organizational structure. Anne Boylan's *Sunday School* already does an excellent job of providing this type of analysis.

Creation of the American Sunday School Union

As evangelicals competed with each other to capture and hold the attention of the increasingly independent younger generation, Sunday school workers surveyed the growth of their regionally-focused organizations and determined that the time was ripe for change. The shift from a republican-humanitarian model to an evangelistic, child-centric approach was complete by the mid-1820s. Sunday schools had spread rapidly across the Eastern Seaboard. Eager to capitalize on this growth, movement supporters began calling for more consolidation and cohesion between the regional societies.[14] In 1820, the New York Sunday School Union Society called for the movement to embrace the trend toward forming national benevolent organizations occurring on both sides of the Atlantic, citing the creation of the London Sunday School Union in 1803 and the American Bible Society in 1816 as examples. The New York Union wrote in its annual report of the "the great benefit which would result from a Union embracing *all the Sunday schools of the United States,* on a plan similar in some respects to the American Bible Society. Equally catholic in its principles and simple in its design, the Sunday school system would be equally benefited by such a union." The organization went on to assert that "your Committee do not perceive that any serious obstacle exists to prevent the prosecution of this enlarged plan, and they would rejoice if this hint should lead to the opening of an immediate correspondence with the principle societies of the United States for this purpose."[15] The Sunday School Union of Charleston, South Carolina, an SASU

[14] The drive to consolidate was typical of many other reform movements in the 1820s, see Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 162-164.

[15] New York Sunday School Union Society, *Fourth Report of the New York Sunday School Union Society, for the Year Ending May, 1820* (New York: Clayton & Kingsland, 1820), 17-18, Boston Athenaeum.

affiliate, made a similar appeal in 1823. Praising the growth of regional Sunday school societies, the auxiliary asserted that "we hope to see these Unions extend until their circles be united, and the glory of the Lord shall fill the whole earth."[16] That same year, speaking of the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, an auxiliary society in Princeton begged leave "to express the wish, that the Association, of which it is our privilege to form a part, may continue to flourish and extend its genial influence, till that happy day shall arrive when one mighty Union shall be formed" throughout not just the entire country, but the world.[17]

Throughout 1823, the Sunday and Adult School Union corresponded with the New York Sunday School Union Society and other major Sunday school associations about the formation of a national organization. The response was overwhelmingly positive, and the SASU invited delegates from all interested societies to convene in Philadelphia on December 11, 1823. At this meeting "the expedience of forming a National Society was determined" and the delegates agreed to allow the SASU to organize the new union.[18] According to the SASU, this decision was made because the society had "already extended its happy influence over a large portion of the states; and, although not in name it was in fact, a National society. It furnishes a broad and sure foundation upon which to erect a superstructure that should be in name, as well as in fact, a National institution."[19] On May 25, 1824, at its seventh annual meeting, the SASU

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[16] Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, *The Sixth Report of the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union: Read at Their Annual Meeting, Held in the German Reformed Church, May 27, 1823* (Philadelphia: I. Ashmead & Co., 1823), 55, in American Sunday School Union, Papers, 1817-1915, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia 5, 23. Hereafter referred to as ASSU papers.

[17] Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, *Sixth Report*, 42.

[18] American Sunday School Union, *First Report*, 3, ASSU papers.

adopted a constitution that reflected its new national outlook and changed its name to the American Sunday School Union. The SASU transferred its 723 auxiliaries and assets to the Union and invited other Sunday school societies to do the same.[20] Many organizations enthusiastically accepted, such as the New York Unions and societies in Charleston, Boston, and Princeton.[21]

Organized to "combine the efforts of the Sabbath School Societies," the American Sunday School Union retained many characteristics of its parent organization.[22] Like the Sunday and Adult School Union, the ASSU functioned to supervise and supply auxiliaries and to promote interest in Sunday schools, with the ultimate aim of generating conversions.[23] The structures of the two societies were virtually identical, and the ASSU continued to maintain Philadelphia as its home base while claiming an interregional, nonsectarian identity. Moreover, most of the founding personnel were previously leaders within the SASU. Alexander Henry was elected president, a position he maintained until his death in 1847. Other former SASU leaders served as managers and officers, such as Philadelphia merchants John Dulles and Thomas Latimer.[24] This continuity in personnel

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[19] "Report, Sunday and Adult School Union, 1824," in Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 78.

[20] American Sunday School Union, *First Report*, 4.

[21] Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*, 163-164.

[22] "Sunday School Union: Extracts from the Seventh Report of the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union," *The Columbian Star*, June 19, 1824.

[23] American Sunday School Union, Constitution, 1824, ASSU papers; *The Third Report of the American Sunday-School Union: Read at Their Annual Meeting, Held in the City of Philadelphia, on Tuesday Afternoon, May 22, 1827* (Philadelphia: I. Ashmead & Co., 1827), 11- 12, ASSU papers; *The Fifth Report of the American Sunday-School Union: Read at Their Annual Meeting, Held in the City of Philadelphia, on Tuesday Afternoon, May 26, 1829* (Philadelphia: I. Ashmead & Co., 1829), 6, ASSU papers.

[24] Anne M. Boylan, "Presbyterians and Sunday Schools in Philadelphia, 1800-1824," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 58, no. 4 (1980): 307; Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 78-79, 95.

produced a similar continuity in denominational affiliations among ASSU workers. At the time of its founding, ninety-four percent of the organization's managers came from the Presbyterian and Episcopalian denominations.[25] The society also relied on SASU networks to gain new personnel. For example, Dulles used his business connections to reformers in New York to hire two men that would become some of the ASSU's most influential leaders: corresponding secretary Frederick W. Porter and chief publication editor Frederick A. Packard. Porter was Episcopalian and Packard was Presbyterian.[26] The ASSU tried to attract leaders from evangelical denominations like the Baptists and Methodists, but by 1830 fifty-eight percent of the managers were still Presbyterian or Episcopalian.[27]

Despite the similarities between the two societies, the American Sunday School Union was not simply an expanded version of the SASU. As the first national Sunday school organization founded in the United States, the ASSU's ambition went far beyond that of previous societies. The constitution stated that, in addition to supporting existing auxiliaries, the society's primary aim was to plant Sunday schools in every community throughout the nation.[28] The managers asserted emphatically in the first annual report that their goal was "to place the means of learning to read and understand the Sacred

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[25] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 63.

[26] Boylan, "Presbyterians and Sunday Schools in Philadelphia," 306-307. For more on Packard, see Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 174-177.

[27] For the exact denominational breakdown of the 1830 group of managers, see "Appendix," in Francis Wayland, *Encouragements to Religious Effort; A Sermon, Delivered at the Request of the American Sunday School Union, May 25, 1830* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1830), 59, Congregational Library and Archives. Boylan provides detailed information denominational and social makeup of the main ASSU officers and managers during the organization's founding years, see *Sunday School*, 61-63.

[28] American Sunday School Union, Constitution.

Scriptures within the reach of every individual in our country."[29] Other reports emphasized the same objective, reminding members that the union existed "for the benefit of a *nation*."[30] The fourth report called auxiliaries "nurseries of the church of God" and expressed the hope that "many thousands" would spring up "in every section of the land."[31] George Boyd, an ASSU agent charged with raising funds, expressed the attitude of all personnel when he stated that the union was "designed to be a common fountain of truth" that would improve the religious and moral character of Americans.[32] In the minds of supporters, the ASSU existed not simply to supervise Sunday schools but to serve as a spiritual and moral guardian for the nation's youth.

Although the ASSU's ambitions were noticeably broader than those of its predecessors, the society was not the only evangelical reform movement with national goals. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Benevolent Empire had fully embraced the notion of national organizations. This shift occurred partly as a way of keeping pace with the other technological, economic, and communications revolutions taking place within the country. An anonymous author explained in the *Christian Advocate and Journal* in 1828 that "it is the order to the day to be national. We have our national theaters, national lottery offices, national hotels, national steam boats, and national grog shops….I see no reason why we should not have national societies, since this character gives those

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[29] American Sunday School Union, *First Report,* 12.

[30] Italicized as in original, American Sunday School Union, *Third Report,* 10.

[31] American Sunday School Union, *Fourth Report,* 4.

[32] George Boyd, "American Sunday School Union," *The Religious Intelligencer*, January 31, 1829. For more on the ASSU's general agents, see American Sunday School Union, *The Second Report of the American Sunday School Union: Read at Their Annual Meeting, Held in the City of Philadelphia, On Tuesday Evening, May 23, 1826* (Philadelphia: I. Ashmead & Co, 1826), 15, ASSU Papers.

societies a popularity and influence they could not otherwise sustain." As noted, the ASSU was inspired to follow in the footsteps of the American Bible Society, which was the first national benevolent organization founded in the United States in 1816. The year after the ASSU's founding, the American Tract Society was established, followed by the creation of the American Home Mission Society in 1826. These societies were national in scope and shared similar ambitions, and many of them worked closely with the ASSU. For example, in 1827 the American Bible Society produced a small New Testament for distribution in ASSU schools for the purpose reaching "thousands of poor children…in our large towns."[33] The American Bible Society and the other national societies not only shared a similar compulsion to convert youth, but also agreed that "the problem of America was ignorance (religious and otherwise), and knowledge was the cure."[34] By attending to the national distribution of Bibles, tracts, religious publications, and evangelical educational institutions like Sunday schools, these societies believed they could collectively purify society.[35]

Initially, however, the American Sunday School Union struggled to fulfill its national ambitions, at least in terms of the number of auxiliaries it supervised per state. In

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[33] *Annual Report of the American Bible Society* (New York: American Bible Society, 1829), 11, as cited in John Fea, *The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 54.

[34] David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). 81.

[35] For more on the development of national organizations within the Benevolent Empire, see Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*, Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), Mintz, *Moralists and Moralizers*, Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), Nord, *Faith in Reading*, Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), Fea, *The Bible Cause*.

1825, the society oversaw 1,150 Sunday schools with 48,681 pupils, and the following year this amount rose to 2,131 schools and 135,074 pupils. By 1829, five years after it was established, the ASSU supervised 5,901 schools with 349,202 students.[36] However, most of this growth was confined to areas in the North where Sunday schools were already well established. Out of the 5,901 ASSU schools, New York boasted 2,512 and Pennsylvania had 620. Virtually every other Northern state had between 200 and 300 Union schools.[37] In contrast, most states in the West and the South possessed very few ASSU auxiliaries. Only Indiana and Ohio had over 100 ASSU Sunday schools. Virginia and Georgia came close with ninety-four and ninety auxiliaries respectively, but these numbers were minimal compared to the North. Most of the other states in both regions, including South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky, had between twenty and fifty auxiliaries. Arkansas and Florida had only two ASSU schools, while the entire Michigan Territory had only one. These numbers were partially a reflection of the low white population in these states. Nevertheless, the ASSU believed that the lack of Sunday schools in these areas undercut its aspiration to assume national leadership within the youth-oriented religious marketplace.[38]

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[36] American Sunday School Union, *First Report*, 12; *Fifth Report*, 6. Boyd, "American Sunday School Union."

[37] American Sunday School Union, *Fifth Report*, 6.

[38] American Sunday School Union, *Fifth Report*, 6. It should also be acknowledged that these numbers don't reflect the total number of Sunday schools in a state, just the ASSU auxiliaries. However, Sunday schools that were not affiliated with the ASSU often went undocumented. Thus, the ASSU statistics remain the best indicator of Sunday schools in a particular region.

Strategies for National Expansion

Determined to expand its reach, the ASSU embarked on an aggressive program of expansion. The society first attempted to widen its scope using the medium of print, a strategy employed by all the other national benevolent organizations at the time.[39] By the 1820s, advances in print technology made publishing an efficient means of disseminating Protestant doctrine.[40] The ASSU and other national societies started using print to produce religious mass media, which historian David Nord defines as "*universal* circulation of the same message."[41] The ASSU believed religious publications could serve as a vital piece of evangelistic "moral machinery" that would allow the society fulfill its evangelistic aims.[42] Moreover, the managers pursued a strict nonsectarian approach to publishing in hopes of widening their Protestant denominational connections, asserting that they only wanted to print "those plain and simple gospel truths, which are peculiar to NO sect, but of vital importance to ALL."[43] Accordingly, one of the

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[39] For a thorough description of the ASSU's rationale behind launching a Committee of Publication, along with the society's goals for this initiative, see Archibald Alexander, *Suggestions in Vindication of Sunday-Schools, but More Especially for the Improvement of Sunday-School Books, and the Enlargement of the Plan of Instruction* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1829), Congregational Library and Archives.

[40] For a general discussion of the growth of evangelical publishing during this period, both commercial and religious, see Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 369-372; Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1798-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Nord, *Faith in Reading*.

[41] Italicized as in original, David Paul Nord, "Benevolent Books: Printing, Religion, and Reform," in *An Extensive Republic: Printing, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 236.

[42] American Sunday School Union, *The Fourth Report of the American Sunday-School Union: Read at Their Annual Meeting, Held in the City of Philadelphia, on Tuesday Afternoon, May 20, 1828* (Philadelphia: I. Ashmead & Co., 1828), 5, ASSU Papers; "Address of the Committee of Publication," in *First Report*, 23.

[43] American Sunday School Union, *Fourth Report*, 10.

organization's first acts was to found a Committee of Publication and hire Packard to serve as head editor.[44] Under Packard's leadership, the Committee created a new line of tracts, catechisms, hymnals, spelling books, and character-building short stories for children. Typically these materials were sold in 75-100 volume sets called "libraries." Additionally, the ASSU started a periodical called *American Sunday School Magazine*. Designed to encourage and advise teachers, the magazine helped individual workers feel connected to the wider ASSU community.[45] The society also produced a children's magazine called *The Youth's Friend*.[46] ASSU materials were immensely popular, and by 1830 the association distributed an impressive six million books, magazines, and pamphlets.[47] The organization was particularly successful in establishing Sunday school libraries, and by mid-century sixty percent of the nation's public libraries belonged to ASSU auxiliaries.[48]

Additionally, the society launched several ambitious domestic mission programs. In 1830 New York businessman and philanthropist Arthur Tappan, who was also an ASSU vice president, donated $2,000 to serve as the beginning of a $100,000 fund to be used to "attack the problem of 'infidelity' in the western states." Tappan made similar donations that same year to other national benevolent organizations, such as the American Bible and Tract Societies.[49] Buoyed by this sizable gift, several of the ASSU's

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[44] For more on Packard, see Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement,* 174-177.

[45] American Sunday School Union, *First Report,* 5.

[46] American Sunday School Union, *Fourth Report,* 6. The magazine's original title was *Teacher's Offering,* see American Sunday School Union, *First Report,* 5.

[47] Brown, *The Word in the World*, 105.

[48] American Sunday School Union, *Sixth Report,* 11; Tyack and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue,* 38.

prominent members, including acclaimed Congregationalist minister Lyman Beecher, proposed an ambitious initiative at the 1830 annual meeting called the Mississippi Valley Enterprise. This program resolved "that the American Sunday-School Union will…within two years, establish a Sunday-school in every destitute place where it is practicable, throughout the Valley of the Mississippi."[50] The target area covered an estimated 1,300,000 square miles, stretching from the Alleghenies to the Rocky Mountains and from Michigan to Louisiana.[51] The Mississippi Valley Enterprise passed by unanimous vote. Additionally, Tappan's gift generated so much enthusiasm among ASSU members that they adopted another initiative called the Southern Enterprize in 1833. This program committed the ASSU "to plant, and for five years sustain, Sabbath-schools in every neighborhood (where such schools are desired by the people)" in the Southern states.[52] This area covered an estimated 300,000 square miles and stretched from Maryland to Florida and from the southern Atlantic coast to Alabama.

The ASSU strategically appealed to middle-class anxieties and aspirations to market these initiatives. Building on the idea that children were easier objects of conversion than adults and therefore the key to Christianizing America, the ASSU offered its mission programs as a viable cure for the spiritual dangers supposedly threatening the West and the South. The society's objective for the Mississippi Valley

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[49] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 69; Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 196.

[50] American Sunday School Union, *The Sixth Report of the American Sunday-School Union: Presented at Their Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, May 25, 1830* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1830), 4, ASSU Papers.

[51] Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 51-77.

[52] American Sunday School Union, *The Ninth Annual Report of the American Sunday-School Union, May 21, 1833* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1833), vi, ASSU Papers.

and Southern Enterprises was "the preservation of religious institutions" and the dissemination of "the simplest truths of the holy Bible in their simplest forms."[53] In the 1831 report, the mangers insisted that "when we speak of religious education…we mean EDUCATION FOR GOD; and this implies not merely an education in the science of religion, but the feeling and experience of its transforming power upon the heart."[54] In a sermon given at the inauguration of the Southern Enterprise in 1833, Episcopalian bishop J. P. K. Henshaw explained that the "great end" of Sunday school mission programs was "the salvation of souls and the glory of God."[55] Henshaw characterized the mission programs as vital components of the larger evangelical crusade to make the United States into a Christian civilization and a natural step towards giving the Sunday school movement national influence.

In contrast to its regionally-focused predecessors, the American Sunday School Union further attempted to justify its initiatives by relying more explicitly on nationalistic, Christian republican rhetoric. ASSU managers believed that the populations of the West and the South would succumb to moral corruption if Sunday schools were not established there. As Sam Haselby argues, the frontier revivalism that emerged in the early national period produced religious movements that were more egalitarian, emotional, and chaotic than nationalist missionary initiatives based in the Northeast, which included the Sunday school movement. These frontier groups – such as the

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[53] American Sunday School Union, *Sixth Report*, 16.

[54] Capitalized as in original, American Sunday School Union, *The Seventh Annual Report of the American Sunday-School Union, May 24, 1831* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1833), 22, ASSU Papers.

[55] J. P. K. Henshaw, *The Usefulness of Sunday-Schools; A Sermon, Preached at the Request of the American Sunday School Union, in St. Andrew's Church, Philadelphia, May 20, 1833* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union), 20-23.

Methodists, Mormons, Disciples of Christ, and the Millerites – not only challenged the dominance of the middle-class intellectual reformers who aspired to lead the Christianization of the Republic, but also represented a threat to the new American political order. Thus, Haselby argues that the religious conflicts that emerged in the antebellum era were primarily social and geographic in nature, rather than denominational. The ASSU missionary programs substantiate this assessment. In an 1826 report, the managers argued that the missionary programs were necessary because the rural parts of the country were in danger of falling prey to "vice and infidelity." The ASSU argued that "the virtue of a people depend on the principles imbibed in youth, and…in a government like ours, the prosperity of the nation depend, as without controversy it does, on the virtue of the people." By planting Sunday schools in the West and South, the ASSU could further the nationalist missionary impulse could implant "in the hearts of the people those principles which alone can qualify them to be good citizens, and…preserve the nation from that ruin with which it will be overwhelmed" if the rising generation was not properly educated in Protestant norms.[56]

Similarly, in a sermon given at the 1830 annual meeting, the acclaimed Baptist minister and president of Brown University, Francis Wayland, reminded listeners of the correlation between evangelism and the preservation of liberty. He claimed that Sunday schools provided important moral training for the next generation of American leaders while affirming the patriotic necessity of supporting ASSU mission programs.[57] In using

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[56] American Sunday School Union, *Second Report*, 15-16. See Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*.

[57] Wayland, *Encouragements to Religious Effort*, 34; American Sunday School Union, *Seventh Report*, 5; *Eighth Report*, 39.

this Christian republican rhetoric, the ASSU claimed that cultivating good citizenship was not the primary focus, arguing that its ultimate purpose was "to turn the anxieties and contemplations of children, *first of all*, to the proper business of a soul providing for its interests with God."[58] Nevertheless, the organization actively promoted the belief that Sunday schools should be a positive means of enforcing bourgeois virtues on the frontier's lower classes. Supporters thereby hoping to make "the objects of this Society…alike interesting to the Christian and the Patriot," harkening back to rationales initially employed to support eighteenth-century Sunday school organizations.[59]

If the list of ASSU leadership and financial supporters is any indication, the society's strategy of combining child-centric evangelism with Christian republican rhetoric to justify its national expansion was effective. At the very least, it proved to be strong recruiting material among the Northern elite. The men who emerged as the strongest advocates for the ASSU mission programs were also among the most prominent ministers and reformers of the 1830s, including Lyman Beecher, Francis Wayland, and the Tappan brothers. Moreover, as the Washington D.C. meeting demonstrated, leading politicians also threw their weight behind the ASSU's national goals, which served to elevate the public perception of the entire movement. During the D.C. meeting, speakers attempted to tie the society to other influential politicians, including President Andrew Jackson. In its published account of the meeting, the ASSU pointed out that the President

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[58] Italicized as in original, American Sunday School Union, *Sixth Report*, 24.

[59] American Sunday School Union, *First Report*, 18. Wayland was not the only minister to use this rhetoric in support of the Sunday school movement generally and the ASSU specifically. The sermons given at the organization's anniversary celebrations generally employ similar appeals to the Sunday school's crucial role in raising up future generations of Christian citizens. For example, see Isaac Ferris, *An Appeal to Ministers of the Gospel in Behalf of Sunday-Schools. A Sermon, Preached at the Request of the Board of Managers of the American Sunday-School Union, May 19th, 1834* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1834), Boston Athenaeum.

was scheduled to attend the meeting but was prevented by ill health, and that he was a financial contributor to the society.[60] The ASSU may have been especially motivated to establish connections to such well-known public figures in the wake of the 1828 controversy over their petition for a charter, hoping that demonstrations of support from a diverse group of politicians and ministers would help quell fears that the society's mission programs were a front for an insidious sectarian plot.[61] The society used every opportunity to claim support from other public figures, even going to far as to make the Marquis de Lafayette a lifetime member following his visit to an ASSU school in Philadelphia. In an address supposedly written from pupils, the society exulted that, "to know that Lafayette, the benefactor of our country, and of the human race," supported the movement "will be to us a most pleasing reflection; and it will serve as an additional incentive to diligence" in their efforts to found Sunday schools.[62]

Given the clear advantages of claiming affiliation with such well-known individuals as Lafayette or Jackson, it is possible that the ASSU exaggerated the extent of this support. Nevertheless, by the 1830s the organization has amassed verifiable endorsements from enough powerful religious, political, and business leaders to place the ASSU squarely within the respectable "national evangelists" camp. Haselby asserts that the national antebellum-era reform societies were run by a class of "national evangelists" from the intellectual elite and the merchant middle class, "who represented Reformed

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[60] American Sunday School Union, *Speeches of Messrs. Webster, Frelinghuysen, and Others*, 4.

[61] For more on this controversy, see American Sunday School Union, *The Charter*, and Boylan, *Sunday School.*

[62] Joseph L Inglis and Frederick W. Porter, "The Children's Address to General La Fayette; Licet Sabbatis Benefacere. Address to General La Fayette," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 2, (1825), American Periodicals, 295

Protestantism and a new, nationalist missionary movement."[63] The ASSU carefully cultivated relationships with these elite supporters of reform, thereby attempting to raise the profile of the organization and establish its legitimacy and respectability as a leader within the youth-oriented religious marketplace.[64]

Remaking the Sunday School Pupil

Obtaining endorsements and financial support from high-profile ministers or politicians was simply one piece of the ASSU's strategy for achieving national expansion. In reality, the apparent ease with which the organization seemed to attract endorsements from elite supporters masks the deeper reality that expanding the Sunday school movement's sphere of influence was a frequently contested and even contradictory process. In order to legitimize its status as a respectable institution, the ASSU realized that its true target audience was ordinary middle-class parents and children. Reformers had successfully transformed Sunday schools into a child-centric benevolent endeavor by the 1820s, but indigent and illiterate young people were still considered the main object of Sunday school education. Building off the pattern established by Raike's British system and the First Day Society, most reformers assumed that Sunday schools were designed primarily for poor children.

Consequently, middle-class parents were often reluctant at best, or opposed at worst, to send their children to Sunday schools due to the fear that they would be

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[63] Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, 2-3, 24. Den Hartog also emphasizes the intellectual and political underpinnings of Northeastern reform movements, see Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety*, 1-18, 167-201.

[64] For more on the social and religious makeup of ASSU leadership and supporters, see Boylan, *Sunday School*, 61-61.

degraded by associating with other indigent pupils. Removing this stigma became the ASSU's central concern in the 1820s and 1830s. The society's officers was acutely aware that middle-class parents' resistance to sending their children to Sunday schools severely undercut their aspiration to become a leading source of spiritual formation for the nation's rising generation. Winning middle-class approval for the movement, therefore, was crucial to establishing the Sunday school's dominance within the growing youth-oriented religious marketplace. As noted, middle-class society became increasingly concerned with capturing and retaining the attention of youth in the antebellum period. The ASSU aspired to harness this growing bourgeois obsession for the Sunday school cause, realizing that without middle-class approval the organization's ambition to attain national influence would remain unfulfilled. In order to establish childhood evangelism as a pillar initiative within the Benevolent Empire, the socio-economic ranks associated with the category of "Sunday school pupil" required expansion.

Using the publishing arm of the organization, the ASSU began working to recast the image of the ideal Sunday school pupil. One of the first public articulations of the ASSU's intention to expand the category of Sunday school pupil appeared in *The American Sunday School Magazine*. In 1825, the society reprinted a sermon preached by A. W. Leland in Salem, Massachusetts that outlined the rationale for incorporating bourgeois children into the Sunday school movement.[65] Leland began by acknowledging, "It has been said that Sunday schools were principally useful in rescuing the children of poverty and vice from ruin….Therefore there has sometimes existed an idea of degradation and abandonment connected with sending children to these blessed

[65] I have been unable to find identifying information about A. W. Leland.

institutions." Leland sought to dismantle this claim by affirming that the Protestant message of redemption and sanctification available through Jesus Christ taught in Sunday schools was universally applicable to all people, regardless of age or social station. "Sunday school instruction is like that holy gospel whence it is derived," Leland declared. "It extends its blessing equally and impartially to all classes in a whole world of sinners." He went on to point out that "children of science, refinement, and affluence" possessed the same "sinful nature" and needed the same "pardoning mercy" as indigent young people. Thus, the same means of leading poor children to Christ "must not…be disdained or undervalued" by the children of the rich. Leland concluded by asserting that if Sunday schools extended their influence to every social rank, they would "be principally instrumental in spreading the triumphs of redemption, in raising up a generation of devoted Christians, and in introducing the era of millennial glory."[66] Leland's sermon reflected the broader ASSU position that children's need for religious training trumped socio-economic divisions, making every young person an ideal candidate for Sunday school education.

The idea that Sunday schools were a universally acceptable means of dispensing evangelical values to young people regardless of social or economic background was a common theme in *The American Sunday School Magazine* throughout the 1820s. In a response to Leland's sermon published in February of 1825, an anonymous author extolled "the blessings which the gospel offers to *all* who embrace it."[67] The Protestant

[66] A. W. Leland, "Sunday Schools Not for the Poor Only," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 2, no. 1 (1825): 13.

[67] Italicized as in original, "'Sunday Schools Not for the Poor Only'," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 2, no. 2 (1825): 50.

message of salvation was the great equalizer, the author contended, and Sunday schools provided the model incubator in which children's innate spiritual sensibilities could be nurtured. Appealing to new sentimentalized constructions of childhood, the author stressed that children's innate religious proclivities needed to be appropriately cultivated. Contrary to common assumptions, however, the author argued that being born into middle- or upper-class families did not automatically guarantee thorough spiritual training.[68] The author highlighted this point by assert that, "since wealth does not entail knowledge or piety, it follows, that schools designed to give religious instruction are as necessary for one class as for another."[69] Another article published in the same issue echoed this theme, stating that "it must be observed form the numerous examples of a *disregard* to the *holy Sabbath*, that the children of the *rich*, stand as much in need of religious instruction as the children of the poor." Although rich children were "skilled in science and literature, their scanty knowledge of the principle of revealed religion, is too frequently an affecting evidence, how truly prone the heart is in *prosperity* to *'forget God,'*."[70] The author concluded by arguing that "the pious rich…of every rank" could bestow no greater gift on society than by dispensing "*religious* instruction…on a few selected objects of their benevolent care, either from among the poor, or their own equals in society" within Sunday schools.[71]

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[68] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 17.

[69] "'Sunday Schools Not for the Poor Only'," *The American Sunday School Magazine*, 50.

[70] Italicized as in original, "Plan of Sunday School Instruction in Private Houses," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 2, no. 2 (1825): 35.

[71] "Plan of Sunday School Instruction in Private Houses," *The American Sunday School Magazine*, 35.

In addition to offered arguments for sending middle- and upper-class children to Sunday schools, the ASSU sought to remove the stigma surrounding attendance by projecting an image of respectability onto current pupils. Most issues of *The American Sunday School Magazine* included extensive activities and attendance reports from specific auxiliaries. Designed to serve as publicity pieces, many of these reports carefully highlighted the respectable children who attended Sunday schools. One article offered a "sketch of the character of a class of Sunday scholars" by listing each pupil by name, offering short description of their progress, and ending with a note on the child's family of origin. For example, a child named John B. was described as having parents who were "professing Christians, and of a respectable rank." Most of the other pupils listed by name in this report also had "reputable" parents from "a respectable rank." Some of the parents were described as "indifferent to religion," and a few came from the poorer classes of society. Overall, however, the report took pains to note that the common denominator between these parents was their respectable social rankings, descriptions that were also employed with pride in other ASSU auxiliary reports.[72]

The ASSU also leveraged its connections to elite ministers to legitimize claims of respectability in individual auxiliaries. Reports that Lyman Beecher personally led groups of middle-class children to ASSU schools on Sunday mornings were widely circulated in this period.[73] Reverend Gregory T. Bedell, the minister at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, reportedly performing a similar act in an effort to raise the profile of the church's Sunday school. According to the secretary at St. Andrew's, Bedell "brought his

[72] "Traits of Juvenile Character," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 2, no. 2 (1825): 75.

[73] This story is repeated in many places, including Marianna C. Brown, *Sunday School Movements in America* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1901), 23, and Boylan, *Sunday School*, 18.

son to be entered as a scholar. May the example lead others, who have heretofore felt themselves above sending their children to Sunday school to go and do likewise."[74] Other auxiliary reports similarly emphasized the involvement of ministers. Additionally, many claimed that the children of leading social figures like judges and businessmen attended Sunday schools. Boylan asserts that, as a result of these strategic marketing efforts, "American Sunday schools acquired more varied clientele than British ones, which remained bastions of working-class culture for decades."[75] By the 1830s, the white middle-class child became the new face of the American Sunday school movement.

A cost of inclusion and visibility for white middle-class children, however, was the systematic exclusion of African American pupils from ASSU publicity. Even as the ASSU attempted to make itself respectable by seeking a more socially-expansive sphere of influence, the organization displayed an increasingly racist approach to child evangelism that contradicted its stated goal of treating all young people as valid candidates for Sunday school education. As noted in the previous chapter, African American children were frequently described as ideal candidates for Sunday school education during the movement's evangelical transformation. Reports from SASU auxiliaries, for example, frequently praised black pupils for their spiritual progress. While this praise was usually laced with notable condescension and paternalism, the initial drive to make Sunday schools into a child-centric evangelistic tool made space for black participation. In contrast, the ASSU's aspirations for achieving respectability and middle-

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[74] William Bacon Stevens, *The Past and the Present of St. Andrew's* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman, 1858), 50, as cited in Boylan, S*unday School,* 18.

[75] Boylan, *Sunday School,* 18. For the British Sunday school movement, see Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).

class approval caused it to downplay African American involvement. Black Sunday schools existed throughout the antebellum period. Nevertheless, the ASSU rarely mentioned the existence of these schools, let alone reported on their progress, which is yet another factor that contributed to the supposedly low amount of Sunday schools in western and southern states. This approach was not characteristic of all Sunday school organizations. Some organizations that embraced abolitionist tendencies, such as the Massachusetts Sabbath School Union, were far less reluctant to highlight African American involvement.[76] As far as official ASSU promotional material was concerned, however, the project of becoming "dictators of the consciences of thousands of immortal beings" catered to white children at the expense of supporting black pupils.

The ASSU's efforts to downplay African Americans' involvement was also linked to its embrace of the union principle, or a strict nonsectarian approach to Sunday school work. ASSU literature, curriculum, and auxiliaries were all supposedly designed to teach only the "essential principles of the gospel" in the hope that such training would awaken children's spiritual sensibilities and encourage conversion without reference to specific denominational creeds.[77] In practice, the union principle required the ASSU to avoid any potentially contentious subject for the sake of maintaining peace. This not only caused the society to remain conspicuously silent on the subject of race, but also motivated the organization to completely ignore the specific issue of slavery in an effort to ensure public acceptance.[78] In 1833 the society ordered its missionaries to "*studiously*

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[76] For an example, see Massachusetts Sabbath School Union, "African Sabbath Schools," *The Sabbath School Treasury,* Volume I (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1828), December issue, 90-91.

[77] Sunday and Adult School Union, *The Second Report of the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union, Held at their Annual Meeting, Held in St. Paul's Church, May 25, 1819* (Philadelphia: Clark & Raser, 1819), 5, ASSU Papers.

and *constantly*" avoid "the subject of *slavery*, abolition, and every other irritating topic."[79] The Committee of Publication followed a similar course. Pledging to avoid controversial topics, the Committee asserted that it only wanted to print "those plain and simple gospel truths, which are peculiar to NO sect, but of vital importance to ALL."[80] By refusing to address slavery, the ASSU hoped to project an image of neutrality and keep their programs from becoming entangled with racial controversy.

Unfortunately for the ASSU, these efforts usually met with suspicion and critique. Claiming the union principle proved especially problematic for the mission programs, given that these initiatives were launched during a period of escalating antagonism between Northern reformers and Southern slaveholders. The Compromise of 1820 and tariff controversies caused many Southerners to become wary of outside intrusion and suspect that Northerners were covertly plotting to generate social unrest.[81] Nat Turner's rebellion of 1831 further ignited Southern opposition to Northern reformers, since the event was partially attributed to the distribution of abolitionist literature by visiting benevolence workers. As slave anti-literacy laws were enforced with increasing ferocity, ASSU missionaries found it difficult to make any headway in the region. For example, missionaries sometimes struggled to distribute ASSU publications, as Southerners feared

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[78] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 26-28, John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), Robert W. Lynn and Elliot Wright, *The Big Little School: Sunday Child of American Protestantism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 34-37.

[79] Italicized as in original, American Sunday School Union, "Instructions to Missionaries," Minutes of the Committee on Missions, June 25, 1833, ASSU Papers.

[80] American Sunday School Union, *Fourth Report*, 10.

[81] Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize*, 39-46; Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 140-141.

that these resources would incite slaves to revolt.[82] Sunday school missionary William Blair reported that Southerners were suspicious of any material produced in the North, writing that "there exists in the South a general prejudice against Philadelphia and everything connected with it....The reason usually given is a general charge of unfairness in dealing, intrigue, or something of that sort."[83]

The rise of militant abolition only exacerbated these tensions. In the 1830s antislavery workers such as William Lloyd Garrison began to assert that slavery was not only a sin, but *the* national sin that would be the undoing of evangelicals' millennial hopes if it continued unchecked. Claiming that God was preparing to judge the United States for the transgression of racial bondage, abolitionists demanded the immediate annihilation of the system.[84] Outraged slaveholders feared that abolitionists were taking over control of the Benevolent Empire.[85] ASSU missionaries were conscious of the danger of being associated with the antislavery movement, such as when ASSU missionary James Welch reported that "on the subject of abolition the sentiments of the agent *will be known*. To *refuse* to declare his sentiments when asked, would be sufficient to convince a Southerner that he is an abolitionist."[86] Welch considered the situation so

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[82] Boylan, *Sunday School,* 82; Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize,* 76-77; Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *"When I can Read My Title Clear:" Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 125-128.

[83] William Blair to Hugh DeHaven, Jr., April 29, 1822, ASSU papers, as cited in Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize,* 39.

[84] For more on the rise of immediate abolitionism, see Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 135-160; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), 33-49; Anne C. Loveland, "Evangelicalism and 'Immediate Emancipation' in American Antislavery Thought," in John R. McKivigan, ed, *Abolitionism and American Religion* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), 2-18.

[85] Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples,* 12-13.

volatile that he counseled the ASSU to carefully screen all their missionaries to ensure that their beliefs did not conflict with Southern norms. Another ASSU representative, F. L. B. Shaver, reported that in South Carolina, the locals' "inventive imaginations associate Northern influence – a rupture of our civil compact - dissolution of all social order – an armed host of incendiary *abolitionists* – blood and murder - and a thousand other hydra-headed gorgons dire, with the establishment of a Sabbath school." Shaver acknowledged that not all Southerners exhibited such extreme antagonism, but asserted that even those "who are ashamed of such incongruous absurdities, as stoutly maintain that there must be some 'Yankeeism' in the matter."[87]

In order to calm Southern anxiety over abolitionism, the ASSU redoubled its efforts to pursue the union principle and project neutrality. Organizations such as the ABS and the ATS followed suit, attempting to cooperate with the slave system in order to "establish an image of conservative respectability among the people of the South."[88] Unlike the ASSU, however, the ABS and ATS discussed the issue of slavery multiple times. Although they never officially condemned the institution, they openly expressed willingness to assist auxiliaries that desired to evangelize African Americans.[89] The ASSU's refusal to take a similar stand proved supremely frustrating to some of the organization's financial supporters, including leading abolitionists Arthur and Lewis

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[86] James Welch to Fredrick W. Porter, May 16, 1836, ASSU Papers, as cited in Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize*, 77.

[87] Italicized as in original, F. L. B. Shaver to John Hall, April 15, 1829, ASSU papers, as cited in Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize*, 108.

[88] Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize*, 115; Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 139.

[89] For more on the general benevolent response to slavery, see Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize*, 76-80, and Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 141-145.

Tappan.[90] Both brothers were key financers for the ASSU's mission programs and Lewis also served in various leadership positions in the early 1830s. The Tappans were understandably dissatisfied with the ASSU's approach to slavery, and by the early 1840s they virtually disappeared from the society's records. Boylan asserts that the brothers withdrew their support because of the ASSU's policy of neutrality, a reasonable assumption in light of the fact that "to the abolitionists…taking no position on slavery was tantamount to supporting it."[91]

The ASSU's attempt to secure a respectable reputation by emphasizing white middle-class participation at the expense of resisting racial injustice proved to be a double edged sword. Adopting the union principle helped support the society's claims that white children would not be dragged into contentious, degrading issues like slavery if they attended Sunday schools. Instead, they could focus on the "pure" gospel message unadulterated by topics of social or political debate. At the same time, the ASSU's zealous efforts to win the favor of bourgeois Americans at the expense of publicly supporting African American pupils or condemning slavery caused the society to lose key supporters almost as quickly as they were gained. The union principle proved to be a major fault line within the Sunday school movement that prompted serious debates with abolitionists later in the antebellum period, controversies that will be discussed in a later chapter.

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[90] The Tappan brothers were involved in founding the American Anti-Slavery Society the same year they financed the start of the ASSU's Southern Enterprize, and their involvement in both initiatives did not go unnoticed by slaveholders. ASSU missionary J. B. Ballard reported in 1837 that the society "would be more popular with many in the South, if the name Arthur Tappan was not among its officers…. In some few instances I have intentionally omitted to show the names of the officers, on his account." J. B. Ballard to John Hall, February 3, 1837, in ASSU Papers.

[91] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 83.

Parental Authority and Sunday Schools

Removing the social stigma surrounding middle-class involvement, along with the racial contradictions inherent in that initiative, were only the beginning of major issues involved in institutionalizing the Sunday school movement. The ASSU faced an even more significant challenge to its efforts to achieve national influence. By aspiring to make Sunday schools a standard part of every child's religious upbringing, the ASSU provoked broader questions about the role of benevolent institutions in fostering child conversions. Specifically, the society unintentionally became a competitor with evangelical Protestant parents, who were viewed as the rightful custodians of children's spiritual formation.[92] By the antebellum period, the family was one of the most powerful organizing features of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. Historians like Mary P. Ryan, Joseph Illick, and Steven Mintz contend that the emergence of evangelical culture in the early nineteenth century was directly related to the increasing glorification of the nuclear family as the ultimate source of piety and goodness. Shifts in family values and gender roles occurred rapidly throughout the early nineteenth-century, often in response to the spread of industrialization. Eighteenth-century models of self-sustainability and extended family connections gave way to a privatized nineteenth-century model that separated economic production from the domestic environment and stressed the importance of creating an intimate nuclear family. Families thereby became the perceived custodians of

[92] During this period, theologians debated the extent of parental involvement in facilitating child conversions. Some contended that children had to make individual choices to convert, just like adults, regardless of home environment, infant baptism, or other forms of parental involvement. Others, such as Horace Bushnell, asserted that children of Christian parents could be nurtured into the faith. For more, see Boylan, *Sunday School*, 133-165, Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), Marcia J. Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), and Lincoln Mullen, *The Chance of Conversion: A History of Conversion in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

social morality and provided the structure upon which to build mass revivalism and voluntarism.[93] This shift toward viewing the nuclear family as the heart of American Protestantism was aided by the popularization of the ideal of true evangelical womanhood. This construction of femininity asserted that women's supposed predisposition to piety and purity enabled them to exercise powerful moral influences over society through their efforts to nurture religious devotion within the home.[94]

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[93] Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida Country, New York, 1790-1865*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Joseph E. Illick, *American Childhoods* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) 55-100; William G. McLoughlin, "Evangelical Childrearing in the Age of Jackson: Francis Wayland's Views on How and When to Subdue the Willfulness of Children," in Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 87-107; Daniel T. Rogers, "Socializing Middle-Class Children: Institutions, Fables, and Work Values in Nineteenth-Century America," in Hawes and Hiner, *American Childhood*, 119-132. See also Jacqueline S. Reinier, *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood, 1775-1850* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[94] In 1966, historian Barbara Welter started scholarly conversation about this topic by arguing that nineteenth-century evangelicals promoted a "cult of domesticity." See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966): 151-174. Although this term is still used occasionally, most scholars now argue that that the boundaries between female-domestic and male-public were much more permeable and less focused on motherhood than Welter acknowledged. Therefore, subsequent scholarship employs the term "true evangelical womanhood" in an attempt to provide a more accurate description of the kind of feminine spirituality that nineteenth-century evangelicals promoted. For example, see Margaret A. Nash, "Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 2 (1997): 191-191; Anne Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). For a thorough discussion of true evangelical womanhood and how the shift toward nuclear family structures facilitated the creation of this concept, see Scott C. Martin, *Devil of the Domestic Sphere: Temperance, Gender, and Middle-Class Ideology, 1800-1860* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism*, Carolyn J. Lawes, *Women and Reform in a New England Community, 1815-1860* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women in Early American Religion, 1600-1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (New York: Routledge, 1999), Catherine Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845 (*Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986), Nancy A. Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the 19th Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).

Given the heightened emphasis evangelicals placed on the family throughout the nineteenth century, some middle-class parents initially objected to sending their children to Sunday schools for reasons that surpassed the stigma of mingling with the lower classes. As an ASSU auxiliary from St. Mary's, Georgia reported in 1826, respectable families felt that "the very invitation" to send their children to Sunday school "was an implied censure on their conduct, an impeachment of their capacity to instruct their children at home."[95] This complaint was a regular objection leveled against Sunday schools since their evangelical transformation. Bourgeois parents claimed that their own education and social station implied that, unlike indigent parents, they were already equipped to catechize their own children. Thus, attempts to nationalize the Sunday school movement and make them socially inclusive served as indictments on middle-class parents' abilities to train their offspring. As noted in an article in *The American Sunday School Magazine* in 1824, critics of the movement claimed that Sunday schools "detach the young from the care of their natural guardians, and interrupt, or overthrow family religion." Moreover, Sunday schools usurped a father's responsibility to make "his own dwelling a mansion of domestic piety" and "tend to displace" maternal connections with children that facilitated spiritual formation. For these reasons, critics asserted that the ASSU and similar Sunday school organizations aspired to become the "absorbents of all the family religion in the land," thereby disrupting the divinely ordained process of bringing children to Christ. [96]

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[95] "St. Mary's, Georgia," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 3 (1826): 10.

[96] "Influence of Sunday Schools Upon Family Religion," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 1, no. 2 (1824): 39.

In contrast to these accusations, the ASSU took pains to exalt parents' spiritual authority. Another ASSU periodical, *The Quarterly Sunday School Magazine,* affirmed that "no duties…are so important in their ultimate bearing, as those which are performed in the bosom of a family." The future of the church and the morality of society were directly dependent on the cultivation of domestic piety, the ASSU claimed.[97] In an article published in the same magazine in 1831, the society described the family as the "empire" that sustained "the true spirit of religion." Parents were entrusted with ensuring that religious devotion was cultivated in this empire, with fathers assuming primary responsibility for maintaining the family altar.[98] Additionally, consonant with the ideal of true evangelical womanhood, the ASSU described mothers as having special influence, since "they have the principle charge of the child at the period of life" when young people develop religious sensibilities.[99] The issue, therefore, was not that the ASSU refused to recognize the role of parents in facilitating children's spiritual formation. Rather, the society needed to provide a rationale for why Sunday schools did not usurp parental authority, despite the fact that the ASSU openly aspired to dominate the field of childhood religious education.

In response to claims that Sunday schools were "absorbents of family religion," movement supporters claimed that such charges imposed a false dichotomy between

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[97] "Art. VII – Thoughts on the Marriage Relation and the Duties and Obligations Which Spring from the Organization of Families," *The Quarterly Sunday School Magazine* 8, no. 2 (1831): 157.

[98] "Art. IV – Thoughts on the Duties Growing out of the Family Relation," *The Quarterly Sunday School Magazine* 8, no. 3 (1831): 206.

[99] "Art. IV – Early Piety. Two Sermons by Rev. Jacob Abbott, Boston, Mass. National Preacher, New York, 1831," *The Quarterly Sunday School Magazine* 8, no. 4 (1832): 312. Similar ideals about motherhood were expressed in "Art. XV – Testimonies in Favour of Early Instruction," *The Quarterly Sunday School Magazine* 8, 1 (1831): 91.

parental instruction and Sunday school instruction. Far from overriding parental authority, Sunday schools were actually an ideal supplement to familial influences. In a promotional book published by the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society entitled *Letters on Sabbath Schools*, an anonymous superintendent argued that Sunday school workers "should not be understood to devalue the labors of those pious parents, who strive to train up their children in the way they should go; nor to lessen their responsibility to execute this great duty which they owe to God, to their children, to the world." Rather, the superintendent claimed, "we would be understood to say, that the Sabbath school proves to be a powerful auxiliary to the efforts of pious parents and guardians."[100] Because the spiritual and moral principles imparted in Sunday schools were consonant with those that religious parents would teach their children, the institution only expanded children's opportunity to be spiritually edified.

ASSU publications affirmed that evangelical parents should take advantage of every opportunity to ensure that their children received additional religious instruction, asserting that sending them to Sunday school "would no more interfere with household exercises, than does attendance upon the ministrations of a regular clergyman."[101] While parental instruction remained of paramount importance, reformers used sentimentalized constructions of childhood to argue that young people's delicate sensibilities necessitated their enrollment in specialized institutions that catered to their distinct life stages. Because Sunday schools provided this customized environment for spiritual nurture, the

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[100] Anonymous, *Letters on Sabbath Schools*, (Boston: William Peirce, on behalf of Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1835), 17-18, Boston Athenaeum.

[101] "Influence of Sunday Schools Upon Family Religion," *The American Sunday School Magazine*, 39.

ASSU even claimed that "it is a duty which parents owe their sons and daughters to require their attendance," and if they failed in this responsibly "it is a public insult to the gospel."[102] Children were "the hope of the church." Consequently, no effort should be spared to ensure that the godly influences provided in evangelical homes were duplicated in "every department of sacred charity…and every operation of pious zeal, for the advancement of Christ's kingdom."[103]

Supporters did not stop at claiming that Sunday schools "do, in fact, harmonize in all points with the spiritual complexion of our most decent and devoted families."[104] They further asserted that Sunday schools served as a safeguard against nominally Christian parents. As noted above, reformers argued that being born "respectable" did not automatically translate into a thorough religious upbringing. In a sermon promoting the establishment of Sunday schools preached in Charleston, South Carolina, Reverend Thomas House Taylor of St. John's Parish claimed that "there is at present an apathy prevailing on the subject of Christian education, even among the most enlightened classes around us, which to every mind of religious sensibility and reflection, is frightful."[105] While it is impossible to assess the accuracy of Taylor's fear, his concern reflected a common anxiety shared by other reformers of the period. ASSU workers regularly

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[102] "Parents Ought to Instruct Their Children," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 3 (1826): 279.

[103] "Parents Ought to Instruct Their Children," *The American Sunday School Magazine,* 279, "Education of Children," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 3, (1826): 69.

[104] "Influence of Sunday Schools Upon Family Religion," *The American Sunday School Magazine,* 39.

[105] Thomas House Taylor, *An Address, Delivered before the Charleston Infant School Society, in St. Michael's Church, Charleston, on the Evening of the 30th October, and in the Circular Church, on the Evening of the 13th November, 1831* (Charleston: J. S. Burges, 1831), 8, University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library.

asserted that middle-class parents should not assume that the social status into which their children were born would ensure their interest in Christianity. The souls of children were too malleable and precious for such assumptions. Parents should take every precaution at their disposal to ensure conversions, including Sunday school attendance.[106]

Moreover, if parents did send their children to Sunday school, ASSU workers warned, they must still guard against apathy. As A. B. Muzzey argued in *The Sunday School Guide, And Parent's Manuel*, parents should not view Sunday schools as replacements for familial instruction. Parents must actively participate in their children's Sunday school education by helping children memorize their lessons and asking them to recite what they learned from Sunday school teachers.[107] The ASSU also encouraged parental participation through other means, such as asking them to volunteer as teachers, holding special prayer services for parents, and hosting class showcase events for pupils' adult family members.[108] In this way, the ASSU aimed to make Sunday school more than a "powerful auxiliary" to parents. Sunday schools were designed to be an extension of the domestic realm. Parents should naturally inhabit both spheres in a way that seamlessly facilitated children's acclimation to the wider evangelical community. By categorizing Sunday schools as an extension of the home and attempting to increase middle-class parents' participation, the ASSU sought to initiate a shift in the way evangelicals

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[106] "Art. VI. – Sunday Schools Considered as a System of Education," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 8, no. 1 (1831): 44.

[107] A. B. Muzzey, *The Sunday School Guide, And Parent's Manuel* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, and Benjamin H. Green, 1838), Congregational Library and Archives.

[108] "Improvement in Sunday Schools. Plan for Promoting an Intercourse with the Families Connected with the School," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 1 (1824): 174; "The Elder Scholars: A Plan for Securing to Them the Benefit of Sabbath School Instruction, Particularly Addressed to Heads of Families," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 2, no. 2 (1825): 37.

identified the source and significance of domestic piety. Spiritual formation may begin with parents, but the entire Christian community was responsibility for ensuring that children were nurtured in godliness. As one of the first religious institutions created specifically for children, the ASSU argued, Sunday schools were the ideal complement to domestic training that deserved the support of all Christian parents.

The society's attempts to define Sunday schools as supplemental to domestic instruction was further revealed in its descriptions of teachers. According to the ASSU, Sunday school teachers actually provided parents with an invaluable service by helping prevent children from becoming bored with domestic instruction. A female author simply identified as Harriet wrote in *The American Sunday School Magazine* in 1825 that parents ran the risk of becoming "too much familiarized" to their children. As a result, their teachings "may not make as deep an impression as when bestowed by one with whom they [children] are not so intimate." In contrast, Sunday school teachers possessed "the impressive charm of novelty" because they only saw children once a week. Harriet argued that such novelty worked in the parents' favor, since Sunday school teachers could leverage their power to refocus children's attention on spiritual matters when they become disenchanted with domestic instruction. Teachers thereby bolstered parental authority by reawakening spiritual sensibilities that would hopefully send children back to the family altar with renewed interest. Harriet asserted that this knowledge should motivate parents to cultivate their own religious devotion, stating that "if you are pious yourselves, the teachers of those schools will aid you in leading your children up the hill

of Zion."[109] By utilizing Sunday schools as an outside source of support, parents could diversity their children's spiritual experiences without overextending their own influence.

The idea that teachers naturally worked in cooperation with parents was probably enhanced by the fact that women comprised the majority of Sunday school instructors by the mid-nineteenth century. Like Harriet, women also contributed to ASSU publications, wrote juvenile literature and curriculum for Sunday schools, and ran auxiliaries.[110] The ASSU regularly issued calls for teachers that specifically targeted women, given their assumed proclivities for such work. In 1825 the society reported that "the concurrent testimony of experience, of reports of schools, and of opinions, is, that the success of Sabbath schools depends in a great degree upon 'the piety and active benevolence of females'." The ASSU further claimed that, while men often idled away their Sundays, women were "in many parts of the country…the bold pioneers of this religious enterprise."[111] In fact, women dominated the movement to such an extent that local auxiliaries had to issue special pleas for men to become involved. In 1827 the South Carolina Sunday School Union expressed confusion as to why female Sunday school teachers "outpaced the males by one half." The Union asked the men of the community to volunteer as teachers, asserting that "even though whose talents and merits justly elevate them to power and influence in society, will lose nothing of their dignity, by taking part in this work of benevolence."[112] Despite these pleas, by the antebellum period Sunday

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[109] "Sunday Schools for the Rich as Well as the Poor," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 2 (1825): 333.

[110] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 114-126, Page Putnam Miller, "Women in the Vanguard of the Sunday School Movement," *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 76, no. 1 (1998): 45.

[111] "Benevolence of Females," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 2 (1825): 272.

school teaching was clearly women's work. Since women defined their benevolent activities as extensions of their domestic roles, their work as teachers potentially helped reinforce the notion that Sunday schools were a modified version of familial nurture. Parents could rest assured that their children were being sent to an environment in which proper caregivers were at the helm, who were especially suited to assist in the sacred responsibility of nourishing children's religious sensibilities.

Significantly, these depictions of Sunday schools as auxiliaries to parental authority also worked to elevate children's significance within the evangelical community. The ASSU sought to bolster its claims that Sunday schools enhanced family religion by asserting that children who attended these intuitions could actually serve as morally and spiritually transformative agents for adults. According to this logic, Sunday school attendance extended benefits to multiple recipients. It provided children with a protected environment for socialization and nurture outside the home, while also enabling them to transfer the religious lessons they acquired back to the domestic sphere for the benefit of parents. In an 1824 article from *The American Sunday School Magazine*, the ASSU claimed that Sunday school pupils helped make Christianity "a topic of mutual exercise and conversation between parents and children." Moreover, Sunday school pupils "have been known, in very many instances, to have first introduced it [Christianity] into dwelling-places where before it was utterly unknown." Children could impart the gift of religious knowledge to their elders, because "parents in spite of themselves, feel an interest in that which interests and occupies their children; and

[112] South Carolina Sunday School Union, *Report of the South-Carolina Sunday School Union, for the Year Ending Dec. 1826* (Charleston: C. C. Sebring, 1827), 10-11, University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library.

through the medium of natural affection have their thoughts been caught to the subject of Christianity."[113] Children could not only spiritually and morally edify adults by talking about their lessons, but also by bringing Sunday school literature into the home. Children could thereby spark religious devotion among entire families. According to ASSU, Sunday schools helped make pupils active participants in the evangelical project of converting the nation by inspiring adults to pursue Christianity.

To that end, the society popularized stories of children converting adult relatives. One of the most famous narratives involved a little girl named Mary Paxson of Winchester, Illinois. A devoted Christian, Mary had been instructed by her teacher to bring a friend to the local Sunday school. Mary begged her father, Stephen, who "was fond of worldly pleasures," to be her guest.[114] Wary of church but not wanting to disappoint his daughter, Stephen agreed. When the next Sunday arrived, little Mary dragged her father to Sunday school and persuaded him to stay for the entire service. Shockingly, Stephen enjoyed it and asked to come again. Through time, what began as a means of appeasing his daughter became a means of saving grace for Stephen. He was converted and became an ASSU missionary, traveling the West founding Sunday schools. Stephen was revered as one of the most effective domestic missionaries of his era. Yet, popular ASSU accounts of his conversion usually focus on Mary's role in bringing her father to Sunday school and thereby helping to bring about his conversion. The ASSU's best-selling biography of Stephen stated that it was "the influence of a little

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[113] "Influence of Sunday Schools Upon Family Religion," *The American Sunday School Magazine*, 39.

[114] B. Paxson Drury, *A Fruitful Life: A Narrative of the Adventurers and Missionary Labors of Stephen Paxson* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1882), 28.

child" that "gave to the Valley of the Mississippi one of the most useful men of this generation."[115] The story of Mary Paxson, the child evangelist, was just one of many similar stories of children's remarkable spiritual influence that the ASSU promoted throughout the nineteenth century. In story books, biographies, and magazines, the ASSU cast Sunday schools not simply as a means of converting children, but also as a venue in which children could help convert adults, including their own parents.

The ASSU also believed that children were key to recruiting support for the national spread of Sunday schools. While securing endorsements from ministers, politicians, or even parents was crucially important, the ASSU ultimately would have failed if children had not found Sunday schools appealing. The society recognized this fact and also understood that the enthusiasm they hoped to generate in pupils could in turn generate similar enthusiasm among adults. The ASSU was not the only group to highlight children's role in producing parental support for Sundays. *The Religious Intelligencer* asserted in 1824 that children could be the key to changing adults' minds about the institution, citing the story of a child named Clarissa as an example. Clarissa's father was adamantly opposed to Sunday schools, but after Clarissa started attending and exhibited a marked improvement in behavior, he began to take an interest in the school. He eventually "became awakened" and "found peace in believing" due to Clarissa's example.[116] While this story may be fictional, it does demonstrate the growing evangelical belief that children could play a role in recruiting supporters for the Sunday school movement. Simply by attending and absorbing Sunday school lessons, young

[115] Drury, *A Fruitful Life*, 34.

[116] "The Sabbath School," *The Religious Intelligencer* 9, no. 10 (1824): 158.

people could spark parental interest in the institution. Reformers hoped that, as in the story of Clarissa, such interest would not only benefit the movement, but result in the conversion of entire families.

Additionally, the ASSU affirmed that attending a Sunday school could serve as a means of spiritual uplift for entire towns. The organization claimed that Sunday schools functioned as vital centers for community worship and religious instruction in regions of the country that lacked established churches. Moreover, they could revive religious enthusiasm "in places where it was before unknown, or to restore it in places, where, through decay of Christianity, for one or more generations, it had for some time been suspended."[117] *Letters on Sabbath Schools* echoed this sentiment. The author claimed that Sunday schools exerted a powerful sanctifying influence "not only in the pupil and teachers, but in the families connected with them, and thus through the community in which they are providentially located."[118] Supporters of the movement believed adolescent teachers exerted a particularly sanctifying influence on whole towns. As noted in the previous chapter, the evangelical version of the Sunday school movement was partially pioneered by youth. The ASSU continued the pre-established pattern of recruiting young people to serve as teachers, recognizing that this practice had communal as well as personal benefits. By assisting children on the path to conversion, adolescent Sunday school teachers were not only personally edified but also contributed to the betterment of entire communities. An excerpt from the Methodist General Assembly published in *The American Sunday School Magazine* in 1824 asserted that "very much

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[117] "Influence of Sunday Schools Upon Family Religion," *The American Sunday School Magazine*, 39.

[118] Anonymous, *Letters on Sabbath Schools*, 13-14.

good has been accomplished by the instrumentality of young ladies and gentlemen" who served as Sunday school teachers in "new and destitute regions of the church."[119] Similar praise for how adolescent teachers helped raise the level of spiritual devotion in entire towns were common in other ASSU publications. Such depictions were designed to expand evangelical understandings of the roles children and youth could play via Sunday schools. For the ASSU, Sunday schools were a space that not only empowered children to inspire religious devotion in parents, but also endowed youth with the ability to work for the sanctification the larger community.

Ultimately, the ASSU's efforts to define Sunday schools as a natural extension of the domestic sphere had significant implications for the way evangelicals began reimagining the spiritual influence young people could assume in the early nineteenth century. In addition to expanding ideas about sources of childhood religious formation, the society also sought to highlight ways the movement allowed young people to act as spiritually transformative agents. The ASSU thereby attempted to reconstruct the religious significance bestowed upon childhood and youth. Of course, these were rhetorical constructions designed to support the society's aspirations to dominate the youth-oriented religious marketplace. Children may have been unaware of these new avenues for exercising religious agency, while some were excluded from these depictions, such as with African American pupils. Young people may have also participated in Sunday schools out of compulsion or for less than spiritual motivations. Moreover, many may have resisted the middle-class norms that the ASSU sought to project onto the movement, thereby failing to generate the familial and communal

[119] "General Assembly's Narrative," *The American Sunday School Magazine* 1 (1824): 19.

edification described above. Nevertheless, as Boylan points out, the ASSU's eventual success in ensuring the national spread of the movement indicates that Sunday schools resonated with children on some level. Otherwise, Sunday schools would have been a temporary phenomenon.[120] More significantly, attending Sunday school was still an entirely new option for most American children in the antebellum period. Simply attending, therefore, enabled children to participate in a religious innovation that was unavailable to earlier generations. Even if children did not fully understand or embrace the spiritually transformative roles Sunday schools supposedly offered, the act of participating still marked these young people as members of the broader evangelical effort to Christianize the nation.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the ASSU's efforts to redefine the function and impact of Sunday schools for parents and children alike began yielding encouraging results. In 1843 J. W. Foster, a Sunday school superintendent in South Parish, New Hampshire, asserted that it was no longer necessary "to discuss the merits or demerits of the Sunday school as an institution. The question of its existence as a regular part of the administration of Christian instruction in the church must be considered as settled."[121] Judging by the movement's growth, Foster's claims were not unfounded. By 1832, over ten percent of American children attended an ASSU school.[122] According to Boylan, the movement became so well respected that by the 1850s a church without a Sunday school was considered an anomaly.[123] The formation of denominational Sunday school

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[120] Boylan, *Sunday Schools*, 38-39.

[121] J. W. Foster, *Address Delivered on the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the South Parish Sunday School, June 11, 1843*, no publication information, 10, Boston Athenaeum.

[122] Boylan, "The Role of Conversion in Nineteenth-Century Sunday Schools," 32.

organizations helped the ASSU achieve this growth. In 1828 the Methodist General Conference created its own Sunday School Union.[124] Baptists followed suit in 1832.[125] Nevertheless, the ASSU's efforts to secure middle-class support and redefine the Sunday school as an extension of the domestic sphere were crucial to the movement's national spread. The society cultivated elite support networks and disseminated carefully crafted arguments defending its claims to leadership within the youth-oriented religious marketplace, enabling the movement to acquire national recognition and respectability.

As a result, Boylan argues that Sunday schools made a dramatic impact on the American religious landscape, becoming vital transmitters of evangelical religious and cultural values throughout the antebellum period.[126] From an institutional growth perspective, the ASSU apparently succeeded in becoming "dictators of the consciences of thousands of immortal beings." Auxiliary growth, however, only tells one piece of the story. The Sunday school exercised a potentially more impactful cultural influence through publications. ASSU juvenile literature was especially popular in the antebellum period, disseminating a distinct brand of child-centric religious devotion to hundreds of young people. In the process, the ASSU attempted to define the ideal Christian child through the medium of print and thereby further extend its influence over the nation's youth. It is to this subject of how the ASSU depicted and prescribed childhood spirituality in Sunday school publications that the next chapter now turns.

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[123] Boylan, *Sunday Schools,* 162-164.

[124] Boylan, *Sunday School,* Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement,* 381.

[125] Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement,* 380.

[126] Boylan, *Sunday School,* 33.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Make Your Savior Your Friend": American Sunday School Literature and the Construction of Children's Alternative Religious Agency

In an annual report from 1825, the American Sunday School Union boldly claimed to possess the means of becoming "dictators of the consciences of thousands of immortal beings, on the great and all-important subject of the welfare of their souls."[1] The society went on to explain that it could achieve this spiritual influence via a special tool: publications. The ASSU affirmed that juvenile literature was key to their evangelistic endeavors, perhaps even more significant than the society's two domestic mission programs, calling evangelical print culture "a most important part of the great moral machinery" that comprised the Benevolent Empire.[2] As discussed in the previous chapter, the ASSU founded a Committee of Publication in 1824 and began investing considerable energy into producing and disseminating Sunday school reading material. By 1830, only six years after its founding, the ASSU distributed over six million children's books, magazines, curricular materials, and other publications.[3] This number continued to grow annually, making the ASSU one of the leading religious publishers of

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[1] American Sunday School Union, *First Report*, 1825, in American Sunday School Union, Papers, 1817-1915, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia 5, 23. Hereafter referred to as ASSU papers.

[2] American Sunday School Union, *The Fourth Report of the American Sunday School Union: Read at Their Annual Meeting, Held in the City of Philadelphia, on Tuesday Afternoon, May 20, 1828* (Philadelphia: I. Ashmead & Co., 1828), 5, ASSU papers.

[3] American Sunday School Union, *Second Report* , 4-5; *Fourth Report*, 4-5; "American Sunday School Union," *Christian Watchman*, June 9, 1826; Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1798-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 105; U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, "Population of the States and Counties of the United States: 1790-1990," United States Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/pop1790-1990.html (accessed June 30, 2013).

the nineteenth century.[4] The ASSU aimed to use this material "to turn the anxieties and contemplations of children, *first of all*, to the proper business of a soul providing for its interests with God."[5] In the process, the society did not simply aspire to bring children into the evangelical Protestant fold. Rather, as stressed in an ASSU short story published in 1844, the organization sought to empower juvenile readers with tools to take control of their own religious formation and find spiritual empowerment through devotion to Christ, thereby assisting them in "making your Saviour your friend."[6]

The ASSU was not alone in believing that publishing was foundational to evangelism. Early nineteenth-century evangelicals shared the belief that reading constituted an essential means of spreading the word of God, prompting organizations such as the American Tract Society and the American Bible Society to focus their energies exclusively on publishing. For Protestants in the early national and antebellum periods, reading was a mentally and spiritually transformative act, and religious publications provided the common framework for understanding and enacting piety. For that reason, evangelical publications are one of the best ways of understanding popular religion during this period. Charles Lippy notes that it is within these sources of popular religion that scholars can fully appreciate how historical actors "erect for themselves worlds of meaning…create identities for themselves…[and] engage in the age-old task of

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[4] David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 82.

[5] Italicized as in original, American Sunday School Union, *Sixth Report*, 24.

[6] American Sunday School Union, *The Poor-House; or, Who Maketh us to Differ?* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1844), 47.

religion by finding a way to make sense out of their lives."[7] Kyle Roberts agrees that religious publications were one of the most powerful generators of lay Protestant culture and argues that the rapidity with which evangelicalism spread in nineteenth-century America was due in large measure to the popularity of this literature.[8] Moreover, as Candy Gunther Brown and David Paul Nord demonstrate, evangelical publications enabled nineteenth-century Protestants to achieve a sense of membership within an increasingly global, textually-defined community of believers. Brown notes that this "textual model of community" transcended "temporal, geographic, and denominational barriers to collective identity."[9] As a result, nondenominational publishing societies like the ASSU and ATS "accelerated a larger process in which evangelical ideas of Christian fellowship shifted from membership in a local congregation to a more diffuse sense of belonging" within a community that was imaginative and textually defined.[10]

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[7] Charles Lippy, *Being Religious, American Style: A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 10. Historians now recognize that some of the most powerful forms of religious experience are popular in nature, grounded in personal and lay experiences rather than institutional settings. As Kyle Roberts asserts, "the experience of religion for most men and women is…found less in the unquestioned adoption of official church doctrine, as formulated by institutions and authors, and more in the creation of a rich, personal syncretism, blending the oral and the written, the orthodox and the folk." Because reading is an inherently individual act, evangelical publications were a key means of achieving this type of personally syncretic religious experience. See Kyle Roberts, "Locating Popular Religion in the Evangelical Tract: The Roots and Routes of The Dairyman's Daughter," *Early American Studies* 4:1 (Spring 2006): 234. For works that broke new interpretive ground in this area by locating the production and dissemination of popular religion outside institutional churches, see Peter Williams, *Popular Religion in America: Symbolic Change and the Modernization Process in Historical Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1980) and David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989). Other works that investigate popular religion using nontraditional forms of evidence include Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1995); David Hall, ed. *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Stephen Marini, "Hymnody as History: Early Evangelical Hymns and the Recovery of American Popular Religion," *Church History* 71, 2 (June 2002): 273-306.

[8] Roberts, "Locating Popular Religion in the Evangelical Tract," 237.

[9] Brown, *The Word in the World*, 23.

Historians of childhood contend that publications such as the ASSU's were especially influential in creating identities and imagined communities for young people in the antebellum era. Karin Lesnik-Oberstein and Susan Honeyman argue that childhood is primarily a cultural construction formulated within constantly shifting dialogical frameworks of meaning, which are largely generated and sustained through print culture.[11] During the antebellum period, juvenile literature produced by the ASSU and other societies constituted a core part of these dialogical frameworks of meaning. Thus, such publications offer a valuable window into the religious world that adults tried to construct for children. Historians have applied various interpretive lenses to this material, generally focusing on either its limitations or innovations. More specifically, historians of childhood have grappled with the question of how much agency, if any, these publications gave children over their own piety. One of the central goals of the field since its inception is to demonstrate that young people have the capacity to act as independent historical agents.[12] This interpretive agenda appears in various studies of antebellum

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[10] Brown, *The Word in the World*, 61. See also Nord, *Faith in Reading*. The concept of imagined, textually-defined communities created and mediated through print culture originated with Benedict Anderson. In his now famous study of the formation of nationalism, Anderson argued that imagined communities are born when individuals begin to conceive of themselves as connected to "a deep, horizontal comradeship." Anderson asserted that this comradeship is most often fostered by the creation and dissemination of print cultures that establish "imagined linkages" between ideas and peoples, which in turn provide members of an imagined community with a common language for constructing representations of their group identity. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

[11] Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, "Introduction: Voice, Agency, and the Child," in Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, ed., *Children in Culture, Revisited: Further Approaches to Childhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2-4.

[12] Anna Mae Duane, "Introduction" and "Part One: Questioning the Autonomous Subject and Individual Rights," in Anna Mae Duane, editor, *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 1–18; Mary Jo Maynes, "Age as Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1.1 (2008): 114–24. See also the rest of the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, which addresses the major interpretive role agency has played in the field.

children's literature, such as Paul Ringel's *Commercializing Childhood*, which argues that children acted as consumers within the nineteenth-century literary marketplace by purchasing and reading juvenile magazines.[13] However, the drive to find agency within children's historical experiences frequently runs counter to the reality that children are born into a state of dependency and are biologically, mentally, and socially immature beings without the capacity to act with total independence in most cases. Some scholars choose to emphasize this reality when assessing juvenile literature, including Karen Sanchez-Eppler, who demonstrates that nineteenth-century American authors regularly used fictive children to symbolize dependency and innocence.[14]

Finding interpretations such as Sanchez-Eppler's to be more descriptive of children's historical experiences than those that stress autonomy, some scholars have begun to abandon the idea of assigning traditional agency to young people.[15] For example, Kristine Alexander argues that the traditional definition of agency – or the ability to act in a way that produces "freedom, individual selfhood, intentionality, and choice" – is incompatible with most children's experiences due to their dependent states. Thus, the ubiquitous drive to find agency that defines the field of childhood studies is a "flawed intellectual project."[16] However, such conclusions assume that historians can

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[13] Paul B. Ringel, *Commercializing Childhood: Children's Magazines, Urban Gentility, and the Ideal of the American Child, 1823-1918* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015). See also Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley, editors, *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), and Duane, *The Children's Table.*

[14] Karen Sanchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Other works that emphasize dependency within children's literature include Anne Scott MacLeod, *A Moral Tale: Children's Fiction and American Culture, 1820-1860* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, The Shoestring Press, 1975), and Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books, 1621-1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

[15] Robert Flynn, "Introduction: Disputing the Role of Agency in Children's Literature and Culture," *Jeunesse* 8, no. 1 (2016):248-253.

emphasize either independence or dependence when assessing childhood. In reality, children's religious experiences often constitutes multiple states of being, which traditional definitions of agency are inadequate to explain. ASSU religious literature in particular espoused a concept of agency that embraced children's dependent states alongside their capacity for semi-autonomous action. Phyllis Mack refers to this complex type of religious empowerment as alternative religious agency. Using the example of eighteenth-century Quaker women, Mack argues for an alternative form of religious agency based on the ability to make choices that do not always lead to obvious power advantages but still enable an individual to exercise her own decision-making capacities, even if it leads to greater subjugation. Mack demonstrates that Quaker women found self-fulfillment in choosing submission as a lifestyle, and she asserts that historians must account for this alternative definition of agency in order to fully understand women's religious experiences.[17]

Similarly, historians miss the richness of the religious world that Sunday school literature constructed for children by not accounting for alternative religious agency. Reading ASSU literature through the lens of submission as a means of self-actualization

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[16] Kristine Alexander, "Agency and Emotion Work," *Jeunesse* 7, no. 2 (2015): 120–28. Alexander goes on to advocate for a perspective shift by asserting that concepts such as "emotional labor" can take the place of agency as major interpretive pathways. Other scholars do not go as far as to claim that applying agency to childhood studies is an inherently flawed project. However, many are advocating that other interpretive lenses should take precedence. See Sara L. Schwebel, "The Limits of Agency for Children's Literature Scholars," *Jeunesse* 8, no. 1 (2016): 278-290, and Marah Gubar, "The Hermeneutics of Recuperation: What a Kinship-Model Approach to Children's Agency Could Do for Children's Literature and Childhood Studies," *Jeunesse* 8, no. 1 (2016): 291-310.

[17] Phyllis Mack, "Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism," *Signs* 29, no. 1 (2003): 149-177. See also Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Lynn M. Thomas also offered a related, general critique of agency as traditionally used in women's history, which reinforces the need for alternative definitions and interpretive lenses advanced by historians like Mack. Lynn M. Thomas, "Historicizing Agency," *Gender & History* 28, no. 2 (2016): 324-339.

reveals that the concept of alternative religious agency can be extended to include children, or at the very least, literary depictions of childhood spirituality. While the characters in ASSU literature are obviously fictional, they were still designed to represent real behaviors and attitudes that American children should adopt. Put another way, this juvenile fiction was meant to serve as a guide to life. ASSU literature reveals a great deal about how Sunday school children were expected act within the wider evangelical community and how, if at all, they could exercise religious agency, making the application of alternative agency to this material a fruitful avenue for exploring how childhood was constructed in the antebellum era. On the one hand, this literature seems to restrict childhood spiritualty to an entirely dependent sphere. However, applying the concept of alternative religious agency reveals that, for the ASSU, children bore ultimate responsibility of choosing lifestyles of submission and piety. This literary portrayal is especially evident within the ASSU's short stories, both fiction and nonfiction. The juvenile heroes in ASSU stories sought spiritual fulfillment through obedience to the Bible and engagement in devotional religious practices, which earned them divine blessings. It was these children, the ASSU claimed, who were able to enjoy friendship with their Savior. In contrast, rebellious boys and girls rejected lifestyles of submission and experienced heartbreak as a result. In this way, ASSU literature presented a two-sided construction of childhood spirituality that was both dependent and assertive, suggesting that these publications promoted an alternative form of religious agency that offered children the opportunity to use submission as a pathway to spiritual empowerment.

ASSU publications promised to show children a direct pathway to relationship with God, showing them how to take charge of their own spiritual formation. At the same time, this literature also reveals the limitations evangelicals attempted to place on the application of alternative religious agency. A key component of the ASSU's depiction of children as having the capacity to choose lifestyles of piety was encouraging them to engage with major social reforms, such as global missions or temperance. However, this call to reform society stopped short of addressing the issue of slavery. As contention over slavery mounted in the antebellum period, the ASSU clung to its position of neutrality in order to placate evangelicals on both sides of the issue. This policy only enraged abolitionists, eventually erupting into a confrontation between New York businessman and philanthropist Lewis Tappan and ASSU head editor Frederick Packard in 1848 over the organization's refusal to explain the realities of the slave system to children. Rooted in opposing beliefs regarding the nature of benevolence, the debate between Tappan and Packard revealed a major fault line within the ASSU's literary construction of childhood spirituality. By avoiding slavery, the ASSU's attempt to promote alternative religious agency for children fell short of addressing one of the most pressing moral issues of the day. In the process, the 1848 book debate revealed irreconcilable differences between reformers over how to define "true Christianity" within juvenile religious literature.[18] Ultimately, historicizing the concept of agency as portrayed within ASSU short stories reveals that antebellum Sunday school material aspired to empower young people to make their Savior their friend, while simultaneously attempting to control the outworking of children's faith within the public sphere.

[18] Mark Noll makes a related argument in *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

The Mechanics of Evangelical Print Culture

Juvenile Sunday school literature was born out of a particular religious and cultural moment, but was also grounded in a longer tradition of evangelical publishing rooted in the eighteenth-century Great Awakening. Revivalists such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield strategically used print media to publicize their meetings and promote conversion narratives, thereby attempting to fan the flames of awakening by building a transnational readers network of lay evangelical enthusiasts.[19] Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, evangelicals continued to refine their efforts to proselytize and reform through print. Embracing the commercialization of print as a means to accomplish religious ends, reformers adopted cutting-edge technology and distribution techniques, signifying their intention to dominate rather than reject the marketplace.[20] The ASSU purchased stereotype plates soon after founding the Committee

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[19] For more, see Frank Lambert, *"Pedlar in Divinity": George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

[20] Initial scholarship on the commercialization of nineteenth-century America and the United States usually portrayed the growth of print culture and the general spread of materialism as secular phenomenon that was either at odds with or absorbed religion. For an overview of this approach, see David W. Haddorff, "Religion and the Market: Opposition, Absorption, or Ambiguity?" *Review of Social Economy* 58 (December 1, 2000): 483-504. More recent revisionist work, however, challenges the notion that commercialization and the growth of nineteenth-century material culture were inherently secular endeavors. Rather, this scholarship contends that Christians embraced the overall commercialization of the marketplace, along with advances in print technology and new commercial strategies for reading the swelling ranks of urban reading audiences, as unprecedented opportunities to achieve moral and spiritual uplift for themselves and their customers. For examples of this approach, see Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988); A. M. C Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798-1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); McDannell, *Material Christianity*, G. R. Searle, *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Lambert, *"Pedlar in Divinity"*; David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Mark Noll, ed., *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Leslie Howsam, *Cheap Bibles: Nineteenth-Century Publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); David Nash, "Reconnecting Religion with Social and Cultural History: Secularization's Failure as a Master Narrative," *Cultural and Social History* 1 (2004): 303; Nord, *Faith in*

of Publication, an expensive investment that testified to the society's commitment to becoming a professional printing organization.[21] The American Tract Society began utilizing a steam-driven press to maximize productivity. These societies relied on central publishing hubs in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, cities that possessed the necessary technology and capital to rapidly produce thousands of materials. The organizations also utilized a vast network of local agents who took and delivered book orders, such as ASSU missionary James Welch.[22] The American Bible Society adopted similar strategies, as did organizations across the Atlantic, including the Religious Tract Society in London.[23] Adopting shared techniques and strategies, these organizations expand evangelical publishing into a network that spanned the globe for the purpose of spreading the Christian gospel message.

By the antebellum period, the mass production of religious literature reached unprecedented levels, flooding the American literary market with new lines of newspapers, tracts, novels, hymnbooks, journals, devotional books, and periodicals. By 1830, the ATS produced six million tracts per year. The ASSU claimed similar figures.[24]

Reading; Aileen Fyfe, *Science and Salvation: Evangelical Popular Science Publishing in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Brown, *The Word in the World*, Roberts, "Locating Popular Religion in the Evangelical Tract," 233-270; Stewart Davenport, *Friends of the Unrighteous Mammon: Northern Christians and Market Capitalism, 1815-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Mark Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible In American Public Life, 1492-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); John Fea, *The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Joseph Stubenrauch, *The Evangelical Age of Ingenuity in Industrial Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[21] Nord, "Benevolent Books," 235.

[22] Brown, *Word in the World*, 6-9. See James Welch's diary for descriptions of his duties as an ASSU book agent, see James E. Welch, *Diary, 1832-1859*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

[23] The most recent study of the American Bible Society is Fea, *The Bible Cause.* The most thorough and recent student of the Religious Tract Society is Fyfe, *Science and Salvation.*

The creation of libraries was key to sustaining this level of literary output. As noted in the previous chapter, the ASSU Committee of Publication began packaging 75-100 volumes of diverse material – including tracts, hymnals, spelling books, and short stories – into "libraries" for distribution at cost to auxiliaries, who would then use this material as rewards for deserving Sunday school pupils.[25] According to the ASSU, by 1826 seventeen percent of affiliated schools housed Sunday school libraries. By 1832, this number had grown to seventy-five percent.[26] Consequently, the ASSU became the overseer of a complex literary system of production and dissemination that helped socialize Sunday school teachers, students, and their families into the textually-defined evangelical community. Moreover, as Boylan and other historians note, these Sunday school libraries served a significant educational function, in that they formed the base curriculum by which pupils were taught to read. Given that public weekday schools remained scarce in rural parts of the country well into the mid-nineteenth century, evangelical literature such as that produced by the ASSU became a powerful means of dispensing literacy throughout the country.[27] Spiritual and moral improvement remained

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[24] For more on the ASSU's motivations for founding the Committee of Publication, along with their printing and distribution strategies, see Archibald Alexander, *Suggestions in Vindication of Sunday Schools, but More Especially for the Improvement of Sunday School Books, and the Enlargement of the Plan of Instruction* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1829), Congregational Library and Archives.

[25] Brown, *The Word in the World,* 61; Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 82; "American Sunday School Union," *Christian Watchman*, June 9, 1826.

[26] Boylan, *Sunday School,* 48-49. For a yearly breakdown of statistics and information on overall growth, see American Sunday School Union, *Second Report* , 4-5; American Sunday School Union, *Fourth Report,* 4-5; American Sunday School Union, *Sixth Report,* 11; "American Sunday School Union," *Christian Watchman*, June 9, 1826; David B. Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 38; Brown, *The Word in the World*, 105.

[27] Tyack and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue,* 19-21, 34-35.

the primary goal, but Sunday school libraries also performed the secondary role of attracting families to local auxiliaries due to their basic educational benefits and because they provided free reading material.[28] Thus, as Stephen Rachman notes, this literature became a key part of "the rise of a popular religious culture that could be shared well beyond the walls of one church or the tents of the largest revival," thereby bolstering the transformative power of evangelical printing.[29]

National reform societies such as the ASSU, ATS, and ABS produced most of this remarkable literary output throughout the nineteenth century, but smaller denominational organizations such as the Methodist Sunday School Union also contributed to the growing evangelical print community. The transatlantic foundations of evangelical print culture persisted as well. Initially, most of the religious literature printed in the United States was British in origin. One of the most popular examples was *The Dairyman's Daughter*, an English tract written by Anglican minister Legh Richmond that sold millions of copies on both sides of the Atlantic.[30] By the antebellum period, however, societies like the ASSU began to express discomfort with their reliance on British material, insisting that American children should be shaped by readings that reflected their own nationality. In its 1831 report, the ASSU asserted, "We have no need to go abroad for subjects and scenes of interest. American divines, statesmen and benefactors-American mountains, forests, prairies and rivers-American history, hopes and prospects-may surely furnish subjects enough of grateful, profitable and interesting

[28] Nord, "Benevolent Books," 235.

[29] Stephen Rachman, "Introductory Essay to Shaping the Values of Youth: Sunday School Books in 19th Century America Digital Collection" Michigan State University Libraries Online, accessed from http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/ssb/?action=introessay#9.

[30] Roberts, "Locating Popular Religion in the Evangelical Tract," 236.

contemplation to American children."[31] Given their belief that the growth of Christianity and the prosperity of the United States were linked, the Committee of Publication desired to print materials that supported American nationalism and helped children connect their piety with their patriotism.[32]

Despite these declarations, however, the ASSU continued to reprint many English sources. The society did become increasingly scrupulous about vetting this reprinted material for noticeably British content, and the committee often added a title page to books stating that these works had been "revised" to reflect an American context. This also led the society to republish many British sources anonymously. In volumes where foreign content was not removed, the committee added an introduction explaining analogies between English and American examples or pointing out the universal applicability of such content. For example, the introduction to Mary Bayly's *Ragged Homes and How to Mend Them* asserted that the English scenes and locations described in the book bore striking resemblances to American cities. Thus, "if the admirable tact and judgement, and especially the EMINENT EVANGELICAL SPIRIT, which characterize the measures detailed in these pages, shall furnish hints or motives to the like efforts in similar sections of our own cities, the purpose of republishing the volume will be answered."[33]

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[31] American Sunday School Union, *The Seventh Annual Report of the American Sunday School Union, May 24, 1831* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1833), 20.

[32] The desire to promote "American" content was shared by many authors of juvenile literature and educational material in this period, see John G. Crandall, "Patriotism and Humanitarian Reform in Children's Literature, 1825-1860," *American Quarterly* (Spring 1969): 3-23, and Gretchen A. Adams, "'Pictures of the Vicious Ultimately Overcome by Misery and Shame': The Cultural World of Early National Schoolbooks," in James Marten, ed., *Children and Youth in a New Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 149-169.

The more significant disclaimer that the ASSU also included in every title page concerned the society's nonsectarian stance. Every ASSU publication included a statement of approval from the Committee of Publication, which supposedly signaled that the work would be acceptable to any Protestant denomination. This assumption was based on the specific structure and methods that guided the committee. Composed of a minimum of five men, the committee could not contain more than two members belonging to the same denomination at any given time.[34] Moreover, every text the committee vetted had to be approved by unanimous vote.[35] These guidelines supposedly helped the ASSU ensure that it only printed materials that taught "those plain and simple gospel truths, which are peculiar to NO sect, but of vital importance to ALL."[36] Like other national reform organizations, the ASSU aspired to transform readers' minds and hearts by acquainting them with "the great and cardinal points of Christian belief," specifically the evangelical doctrines of innate depravity, future punishment, and the need for personal salvation experiences through Christ.[37] The society recognized that, because Sunday school materials were taken by pupils from the classroom into homes, adults might also read ASSU publications. This made the organization especially intent on pursuing a nonsectarian approach not only to prevent children's minds from being

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[33] Capitalized as in original, Mary Bayly, *Ragged Homes and How to the Mend Them* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1864): 9-10.

[34] The exact number of members varied throughout the years, sometimes reaching close to twenty members. I did not find a record of women serving on the committee, although they often authored ASSU publications.

[35] American Sunday School Union, *First Report*, 6.

[36] American Sunday School Union, *Fourth Report*, 10.

[37] American Sunday School Union, *Fourth Report*, 5; Boylan, *Sunday School*, 10.

confused by the minutia of doctrine, but to also avoid offending parental readers who would adhere to a range to denominations and sects. As discussed later in the chapter, however, this obsession with nonsectarian material created a major fault line in the ASSU's publication strategy that ultimately prevented the committee from adequately confronting some of the most pressing religious and social issues of the day, keeping them from developing the broad interdenominational following they desperately craved.

Embracing the commercialization of print, maintaining transatlantic connections, and promoting nationalistic and nonsectarian material were not the only forces propelling the ASSU's publication initiatives. Another major element undergirding the society's efforts was the creation of a child and youth-centric market as a specialized subset of evangelical publishing. Prior to 1800, publications aimed at children were relatively rare. As Rachman notes, "There was certainly little systematic thought about the particular requirements of childhood as a category different from adulthood, let alone what might be suitable literature for children."[38] Although neither were written for children, *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe* were two of only a few books that enjoyed wide circulation among children. The others were usually educational curriculum - such as Webster's spelling book and *The New England Primer* - or other forms of overtly didactic religious material like Isaac Watt's *Divine and Moral Songs*. Pirated editions of children's stories such as John Newberry's *Goody Two Shoes* and *History of Giles Gingerbread* were reprinted in the United States during the eighteenth century, but they were circulated sporadically and their general availability is unclear.

[38] Rachman, "Introductory Essay."

Late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century reconstructions of childhood worked to change these trends. Growing recognition of childhood as a distinct period of life requiring customized protection and nurture motivated authors to produce juvenile literature that catered to children's innocence and emotional sensitivity. Moreover, the creation of a youth-oriented religious marketplace discussed in previous chapters also motivated reformers to create juvenile literature within an increasing sense of urgency. The evangelistic fervor generated by the Second Great Awakening and its accompanying millennial hopes drove evangelical authors to view print as an essential building block in their efforts to secure the Christianization of the nation among the rising generation. Children constituted an important readership due to their status as future converts and citizens, making juvenile literature its own niche field within the textually-defined evangelical community.[39] Consequently, authors began aiming their work at children. In an anonymous collection of tales published in 1803 called *The Happy Family; or, Winter Evenings' Employment*, which covered topics ranging from slavery to general moral formation, the editor specifically hoped "to draw the attention of young minds" to the collection's contents. "Should it prove successful but in one instance, my labor is rewarded," the compiler stated, affirming the vital importance of bringing every young person into the evangelical fold.[40] Similarly, Nathaniel Willis, founder of the popular

[39] For more, see MacLeod, *A Moral Tale*, Avery, *Behold the Child*, Patricia Crain, *Reading Children: Literacy, Property, and the Dilemmas of Childhood in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). For more on the growth of children as consumers and the formation of markets that targeted children, which included but was not limited to print culture, see Richard O'Brien, *The Story of American Toys: From the Puritans to the Present* (New York: Abbeville, 1990), Karin Calvert, *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), Rodney Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America, 1780-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), and Ringel, *Commercializing Childhood*.

juvenile magazine *Youth's Companion*, asserted that "this is a day of particular care for Youth. Christians feel that their children must be trained up for Christ. Patriots and philanthropists are making rapid improvements in every branch of education." Literature, Willis believed, must make similar improvements and should become the instruments by which children's "minds be formed, their hearts prepared, and their characters moulded for the scenes and duties of a brighter day."[41] Authors of such publications believed that children were the hope of the church and the nation, and all religious material should help young people reach conversion as early as possible. They also believed that this literature was instrumental in helping children cultivate piety following conversion, providing an imaginary framework in which children could pursue proper religious development.

As the growth of the children's print culture spiked in the early nineteenth-century United States, organizations like the ASSU entered this increasingly secularized market determined to sanctify and utilize this realm for evangelistic purposes.[42] As noted, the ASSU viewed child-centric religious publications as one of the most important pieces of the "great moral machinery" available to save souls and generate childhood piety.[43] The society recognized, however, that there were ideological tensions underlying its efforts to use publishing to achieve evangelistic, millennial aims. By the antebellum period, writing had emerged as a sustainable profession for laymen, not just specially trained printers, leading to charges that the ASSU only produced children's literature to make a profit.

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[40] Anonymous, *The Happy Family; or, Winter Evenings' Employment. Consisting of Reading and Conversations, in Seven Parts* (New Haven: Sidney's Press, 1803), v.

[41] Nathaniel Willis, Prospectus, *Youth's Companion* (April 16, 1827): 1.

[42] MacLeod, *A Moral Tale*, 22-23, Jacqueline S. Reinier, *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood, 1775-1850* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 93-95.

[43] American Sunday School Union, *Fourth Report* 5.

Over the course of his missionary travels Welch encountered this accusation time and time again in rural parts of the country, where perceptions of urban reform societies as being money-driven machines designed to trick poor folk out of their hard earned savings often ran strong.[44] Other domestic missionaries regularly encountered the same resistance. Sam Haselby argues that this tension was evidence of "the primary conflict in American religion during the early republic," which occurred between "frontier revivalism and a nationalist missions movement" based in the Northeast.[45] Because it was led by men from the northern nationalist missions camp, the ASSU and its publications were perceived as a threat to many Americans in rural areas, complicating the society's ambition to use print to define ideal Christian childhoods for the rising generation across the country.

Printing fiction was another particularly fraught issue for evangelical publishers, since novels and short stories were often considered dangerous for children. Not only could such literature tend toward the sensational, fantastical, or even prurient, but it could encourage children to take imaginative liberties with Scripture or desensitize them to secular temptations. The ASSU acknowledged these fears, yet they also recognized fiction's enduring popularity among their target audience. As Boylan explains, "there was give-and-take between students and Sunday-school workers. Superintendents and teachers agreed on the inclusion of question books, catechisms, Bible concordances and dictionaries, Scripture biographies, and inspiring life stories, but they also recognized that

[44] See James Welch, Diary, entries for 1832-1834, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

[45] Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3.

children seldom checked out these books voluntarily."[46] This was the case with the other major reform societies, given that fiction their fastest growing and most frequently reprinted genre by mid-century.[47]

Recognizing their inability to fight the popularity of fiction, reform societies turned their energies toward repackaging these publications according to evangelical standards. Boylan notes that by the antebellum period Sunday school workers affirmed the need to provide children with religious literature that was not just uplifting, but entertaining.[48] In keeping with romanticized views of children as being primarily driven by their emotions, Sunday school workers recognized that fiction could actually be more effective at reaching pupils' hearts because it first captured their imaginations. As a librarian at the Seventh Presbyterian Church Sunday school in New York asserted, entertaining publications were innately "within the compass of these youthful minds." Thus, Sunday schools could prove more impactful by accepting this reality and providing students with fiction grounded in evangelical principles that encouraged refined "taste for reading."[49] The ASSU not only heeded such advice, but also worked to make their products visually appealing by using beautiful illustrations and ornate covers to catch the eye of youthful readers. By accepting rather than rejecting the rise of novel reading as a popular pastime, the ASSU established itself as a leading religious voice within this marketplace that was otherwise perilous for child readers. Desiring to desire to "convey

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[46] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 50.

[47] MacLeod, *A Moral Tale*, 20-29.

[48] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 50.

[49] Seventh Presbyterian Church Sunday School Teachers' Association, New York, Minutes, December 3, 1857, Presbyterian Historical Society.

the most important truths in the most pleasing form," ASSU fiction enjoyed increasingly wide circulation by mid-century.[50] Indeed, historian Anne Scott MacLeod credits the ASSU with helping to create "the bulk and the concept of juvenile fiction….books for children, and particularly books of fiction," were among the most influential products the ASSU produced, surpassing its mission programs in influence and longevity.[51]

Constructing Children's Alternative Religious Agency

Short stories were a core component of the ASSU's publishing strategy. Ranging in length from twenty-five to over one hundred pages, these narratives recounted tales of fictional boys or girls in their childhood or early adolescence who struggled with various temptations, losses, or hardships. Most of these stories did not focus specifically on conversion experiences.[52] Instead, they provided models of acceptable Christian behavior by narrating how the main characters were either rewarded for obeying the Bible or punished for disobeying it. Despite these stories' clear focus on outward actions, they were not designed to simply manipulate behavior. Within ASSU fiction, characters' behaviors reflected their spiritual states. Godly figures proved the legitimacy of their conversions by remaining morally pure. Unconverted characters revealed the depths of their degeneracy through their misdeeds. These contrasting examples were designed to provide young people with usable models of Christian piety that they could apply to their own lives. This in turn would not only enable them to maintain proper relationships with

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[50] American Sunday School Union, *Third Report,* 3.

[51] MacLeod, *A Moral Tale,* 21-22.

[52] Reinier, *From Virtue to Character,* 94. In contrast, as Diana Pasulka Walsh argues, other types of literature such as child hagiographies focused extensive attention on children's conversion experiences. See Diana Walsh Pasulka, "A Communion of Little Saints: Nineteenth-Century American Child Hagiographies," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23, no. 2 (2007): 51-67.

God, but would also help them conform to a textually-defined evangelical culture. Reflecting the religious world in which they were written, ASSU literature promoted principles that were intended to help children express their faith through behaviors that were recognizable and desirable within the growing Protestant community.[53]

Attempting to reinforce behaviors that reflected proper beliefs, ASSU publications regularly employed two interrelated literary representations of childhood spirituality as being both dependent and assertive. The first representation portrayed children as generally lacking independent agency. Rather, they were entirely dependent on God's grace, correction, or aid to carry them through life. More specifically, children were often depicted as helpless victims of suffering, or as observers to the suffering of others. These experiences provided them with opportunities to trust in God's sovereignty. One of many examples comes from an 1832 story called *Biography of Two Little Children*. One of the story's main characters, fourteen-year-old Mary Haye, becomes ill and learned that she was to die at a young age. Although initially distraught, Mary chose to suppress her fear and comply with God's will, stating that "the valley of death is dark, but the Lord can make it light and pleasant."[54] The story went on to explain how "all the time that she was sick, she showed by her conversation, that she was willing to trust God in all things." Mary's submissive attitude enabled her to achieve the nineteenth-century

[53] MacLeod, *A Moral Tale*, 41-43, Reinier, *From Virtue to Character*, 89-96. For more on the formation and dissemination of ideals that were increasingly identified as representative of respectable Protestant middle-class culture during this period, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America*, Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the New York Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 75-93.

[54] American Sunday School Union, *Biography of Two Little Children* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1832), 14.

ideal of a "good death," and her story served as an example of how children can "have the comfort of religion" by choosing "to trust in God."[55] Similarly, in an 1844 story called *Willy Graham; or, The Disobedient Boy*, a father recounted his life story of suffering and loss to his rebellious son in an effort to persuade the boy to repent of his disobedient ways. The father told Willy that he must be prepared for trials to come at any moment, and that when these struggles occur he must remember that "whatever [God] orders for me is just and right, whether he condescends to show me the reasons for it or not; and that no matter how painful the trials he…send upon me may be, it will be my part to bow in submission."[56] In the end, Willy was so moved by his father's story of suffering that he abandoned the "very wicked, sinful thoughts in his heart" and began living in accordance with biblical precepts.[57]

ASSU stories stressed that children were ultimately powerless to choose their life circumstances, partly because of their automatic dependence on adults. Children were not portrayed as having social or religious authority and were shown as generally helpless in the face of death, disease, or hardship. At the same time, they also did not portray children as complete victims. Even if children could not change the circumstances of their suffering, the narratives often depicted child characters as having the power to change their responses to hardship. This was the case in the story of Mary Haye. ASSU publications taught that, no matter the trial, if children remained humble Jesus would

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[55] American Sunday School Union, *Biography of Two Little Children*, 15. For more on the nineteenth century concept of the "good death," see Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008).

[56] American Sunday School Union, *Willy Graham; or, The Disobedient Boy* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1844), 35.

[57] American Sunday School Union, *Willy Graham*, 9.

become their "friend for health or sickness, prosperity or adversity."[58] In this way, children's automatic state of dependency could become a pathway to intimacy with God, provided they responded properly to trials. ASSU fiction encouraged children to achieve these appropriate responses by reading the Bible and praying daily. The Bible not only contained the way to conversion, but also offered children direct access to the divine because, according to the ASSU, Jesus would become their personal teacher as they read the Scriptures. *Biography of Two Little Children* praises a girl called Ann Drewsbury for continually reading the Bible, stating that she did this because "she thought that God would love her, if she did all she could to know and understand what he had written for our good. And we hope that God did love her; and that He taught her how to understand what she learnt, and to love Jesus Christ."[59] Child readers were also encouraged to access God through prayer. One 1847 publication described how God answered the prayers of a poor boy by healing his sick mother. The narrator of the story went on to entreat: "Let every child who reads this remember it, and be encouraged to form the habit of secret prayer; of going to God with thanksgiving for every mercy, and with supplication in every time of need."[60]

As these examples indicate, the fact that children were automatically relegated to states of dependency - bound to receive whatever life circumstances God sent while remaining subservient to adults - did not reduce them to positions of absolute powerlessness. The ASSU consistently employed another literary representation of

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[58] American Sunday School Union, *The Poor-House, Or, Who Maketh Us to Differ?* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1844), 47.

[59] American Sunday School Union, *Biography of Two Little Children*, 12.

[60] American Sunday School Union, *The Silver Dollar* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1847), 43.

children as active decision makers alongside the representation of children as dependents. While children were bound in ASSU stories to endure whatever sufferings heaven chose to send, they were also portrayed as having the ability to prove the legitimacy of their faith in moments of hardship by choosing to exhibit humble submission to God's will. ASSU literature was clear that adults, such as parents, Sunday school teachers, or ministers, could not make this choice for children. Juvenile characters had the power, and the responsibility, to maintain a lifestyle of reverent obedience for themselves. The introduction to an 1845 ASSU publication called *Life in Earnest* commanded readers to "live with habitual reference to the great end of life." The author went on to explain that Christian children were obligated to "make the life that now is, with all its relations and obligations, not only entirely subordinate to the life that is to come, but directly and in the highest degree conducive to the glory and happiness of the soul in that coming life….to seek with intense, agonizing effort the glory of God, and the bliss of dwelling in his presence eternally."[61] While the ASSU affirmed that children had to be carefully nurtured in the faith and could not control their own circumstances, the society's publications also granted young people a measure of responsibility for their own piety.

ASSU fiction not only depicted adults as being incapable of choosing godliness for children, but actually portrayed them as potential avenues for young people to practice alternative agency. Within the genre of Sunday school literature, children experienced religious formation and exercised agency in the midst of an interconnected web of relationships comprised of peers and adult authority figures. A growing number of childhood studies scholars emphasize that one of the most distinct aspects of childhood is

[61] James Hamilton, *Life In Earnest; or, Christian Activity and Ardour Illustrated and Commended* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1845), 3.

its relational, kinship-based nature. Whereas previous scholarship on childhood tended to divide the human experience into homogenous, often antagonistic binary categories of adults versus children, more recent work stresses that these two groups are both diverse and interwoven. For example, Sanchez-Eppler asserts that studying childhood forces historians to "examine what it might mean to claim voice, agency, or rights for a figure who is not, cannot, and indeed should not be fully autonomous. Children's dependent state embodies a mode of identity, a relation to family, institution, or nation, that may indeed offer a more accurate and productive model for social interaction than the ideal autonomous individual of liberalism's rights discourse ever has."[62] Similarly, Anna Mae Duane asserts that studying childhood highlights the constant social reality of interdependence, along with the fact that humans of all ages are continually being shaped in response to the authoritative forces that exist around them. She argues that "actual children raise uncomfortable questions that complicate the stance that authority is inherently oppressive and that subversion and resistance are unqualified positives."[63] Because children are in many ways incapable of achieving or exercising independence, dependency is not an automatically oppressive for them nor is agency only expressed through autonomy, but is dependent upon the relationships that define their lives.[64]

ASSU portrayals of the adult-child relationship clearly affirmed the concept that dependency and subversion are not unqualified ills, but were normal parts of the childhood experience that could actually facilitate greater spiritual development. These

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[62] Sanchez-Eppler, *Dependent States,* xxv.

[63] Duane, *The Children's Table,* 7.

[64] Marah Gubar makes a similar argument for the utility of adopting a kinship model as a primary interpretive lens for studying childhood because dependency and relationships are one of the most distinctive aspects of children's lives. See Gubar, "The Hermeneutics of Recuperation," 291-310.

stories employed a kinship-based model of social and religious interaction wherein children did not discover spiritual agency autonomously from adults, but in relationship with them. Demonstrating respect for the godly instruction provided by parents and pastors was a particularly important way for child characters to exercise alternative agency, because it gave them the opportunity to practice obedience. Child characters frequently interacted with mother and father figures in these stories, and those who listened to parental instruction received spiritual edification and blessings.[65] Depictions of parents providing wise counsel to children, such as in *Willey Graham,* are one of the most common motifs running throughout ASSU literature. Similarly, in *Tommy Wellwood*, the title character and his sister, Mary, listened carefully to their father explain Christianity's eternal benefits in the wake of their mother's death.[66] Another father character, called Mr. Leeds, provided similar religious instruction in *Life and Death of Two Young Ladies, Contrasted*. Mr. Leeds extolled the virtues of Christian devotion with his daughter's friend, Melissa, in an attempt to awaken the girl's piety.[67] Through these depictions, the ASSU aspired to present the parent-child relationship not as a source of oppression or antagonism, but as nurturing relationships that provided child characters with the opportunity to receive spiritual edification and even achieve self-actualization through submission to godly counsel.

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[65] For examples, see American Sunday School Union, *The Way to be Happy. A Narrative of Facts* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1827), 5-16; *Biography of Two Little Children,* 10; *Willy Graham,* 30-35; and *The Silver Dollar,* 6.

[66] American Sunday School Union, *Tommy Wellwood; or, A Few Days of Incident and Instruction* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong and Crocker & Brewster, 1824), 45-48.

[67] A Lady, *Life and Death of Two Young Ladies, Contrasted* (New-York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, [1829-1831?]), 13-16.

The ASSU also praised Sunday schools and church for being relationally-based settings in which children could develop devotional patterns leading to spiritual empowerment. In a poem from an ASSU book called *Simple Rhymes for Little Children*, an anonymous narrator exclaims, "I love, when Sabbath morning comes/To see the children leave their homes/Then haste away to Sunday-school." The poet went on to explain that if children "holy keep that sacred day/And learn to read, and sing, and pray/God will reward them with his love/And give them mansions far above."[68] Sunday school teachers were usually the only adults that these fictional children interacted with directly, with the exception of relatives like parents, aunts, and uncles. Occasional examples exist of children coming into contact with ministers. In a short story from *Real Children: Their Sayings and Doings*, two children named Lucy and Stevie reflected on a conversation they witnessed between their father and a kindly pastor named Mr. Milner. The father faced imminent death due to illness, and Mr. Milner used this trial to encourage him to develop religious devotion. Stevie commented that this conversation revealed how their father regretted not having come to Christ sooner. Lucy agreed, adding that "Mr. Milner said *we* could begin now; and I'm going to." In this way, children were inspired by both positive and negative adult examples to take ownership of their own piety.[69]

Even this story, however, reflects a degree of distance between children and official religious authorities like ministers. These relationships are frequently depicted as

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[68] American Sunday School Union, *Simple Rhymes for Little Children* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1835), 12.

[69] "What Stevie Did for His Father," in American Sunday School Union, *Real Children: Their Sayings and Doings* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, [1860-1868?]), 8-9.

being mediated through parents, demonstrating that young people occupied the lowest rung of the ladder within the evangelical hierarchy. Such depictions also reinforced middle-class domestic order, wherein children remained within the shelter of home and reserved full engagement with the outside world for adulthood. Nevertheless, this often limited contact with the broader religious community did not mean that children's spiritual experiences were less legitimate than those of adult believers. Children's status as dependents made their piety less publically visible within a religious culture dominated by adults, but the ASSU still affirmed that non-domestic settings like Sunday schools and churches provided vital contexts in which young people could express devotion. Within this juvenile literature, young people developed spiritual lives in kinship with the wider community of Christian believers. Observing adult models of piety and demonstrating respect for elders through attentiveness and obedience were foundational to children's performance of alternative religious agency.

Indeed, ASSU stories presented children's ability to submit to godly counsel and cultivate piety as having a direct and profound impact not just on their daily lives, but on the lives of those around them. Sunday school literature stressed that children could use their behaviors and choices to help build Christ's eternal kingdom. These publications presented an authorial view of childhood that affirmed young people could act as Christian soldiers in the battle to save souls, thereby arguing for children's direct involvement in the larger Protestant project of evangelizing the nation. An anonymously published story portrayed two fictive boys, Samuel and James, using their knowledge gained in Sunday school to convert their irreligious father and mother. In this tale, the script is flipped, with children imparting religious education to wayward parents rather

than acting as passive recipients of adult tutelage.[70] Similarly, in another anonymously written short novel about "two young ladies," the death of one title character named Melissa prompts her cousin, Theodore, to confront his adult relatives about the state of their souls. After watching Melissa's family mourn from afar, Theodore went to Mr. Leeds, the father of the other title girl, and exclaimed, "I am now convinced, that religion is a real change, and is worth more than both the Indies." Eager to tell others about his newfound revelation of the peace that comes with knowing Christ personally, the boy set off to convert his aunt and uncle.[71] Like Samuel and James, Theodore demonstrated that children could bring adults into the Protestant fold. Building on popular ideas about young people's innate purity and spiritual sensitivity, authors of juvenile Sunday school literature sought to demonstrate that children's natural ability to place wholehearted trust in Christ's redemptive love could act as a powerful means of persuading adults to convert.

These short stories also depicted children as having the power to impact the temporal settings around them, either by living morally for the benefit of others or succumbing to worldly self-indulgence. Children who made moral choices and capitalized on opportunities to do good for others were rewarded with divine blessings, usually in the form of material benefits. For example, in an 1847 short story called *The Silver Dollar*, a young boy named John decided to donate his money to the missionary box at church, rather than use it to buy toys like he initially desired. John's uncle noticed

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[70] Anonymous, *Richard and James, or, The Duty of Obedience: A Tale, Designed for the Instruction of Young Persons: To which are added, A Short Account of Samuel and James, Two Pious Brothers; and Some Interesting Anecdotes* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1820), 31-34.

[71] A Lady, *Life and Death of Two Young Ladies*, 28-29, 32-33.

his generosity and gave the boy the toys he wanted as a birthday gift, thus proving that goodness is always rewarded.[72] In contrast, other ASSU stories explained the dangers of departing from the path of godliness. *The Fretful Girl*, published in 1850, tells the story of a girl named Sarah who always complained about her circumstances and greedily wished for things she did not possess. One day Sarah's maid warned that she "must not be so discontented-like, perhaps God will be angry with you, and give you something to grieve about, that is really a trouble."[73] Sarah did not heed this advice, and her father soon lost all his money and the family was forced to live in poverty. Even this trial did not cause Sarah to repent of her greed, and it was not until the death of her beloved cousin that she felt "guilty and self-condemned…[and] was forced to cry out, in the deep anguish of her heart, 'What must I do to be saved?'"[74] In the epilogue to this story, the ASSU admonished readers that "true contentment is the offspring of true religion….[but] when God's gifts and blessings are despised and abused, they are very near to be taken away, and given to those who will prize them more and use them better."[75] Such stories offered children literary building blocks for structuring lifestyles that not only pleased God and conformed middle-class behavioral norms, but contributed to the wellbeing of those around them.

ASSU literature provided scripts for how children could perform selfless acts of piety that benefitted the local communities in which they lived, but these stories also

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[72] American Sunday School Union, *The Silver Dollar*, 68-70.

[73] American Sunday School Union, *The Fretful Girl* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1850), 61-62.

[74] American Sunday School Union, *The Fretful Girl*, 83.

[75] American Sunday School Union, *The Fretful Girl*, 62.

encouraged children to recognize their duty to support the imagined global community of Christian believers. As Emily Conroy-Krutz argues, American evangelicalism embodied an increasingly global orientation throughout the nineteenth century. Building on the Protestant missionary efforts pioneered by Great Britain, American reform organizations aspired to make the United States the leading disseminator of what Conroy-Krutz calls "Christian imperialism," or an active engagement with the rest of the world that involved cultural change and evangelization.[76] The Sunday school movement was similarly swept up in this passion for global Christian engagement. The ASSU and other national evangelical publishing powerhouses such as the ATS celebrated the work of missionaries who founded Sunday school abroad, like Harriet Winslow.[77] The ASSU also published biographies of famous missionaries to inspire and instruct children, including the popular *Life of Mrs. Ann H. Judson, Late Missionary to Burmah*.[78] Affiliated Sunday school organizations, such as the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, published similar material such as child-friendly sermon collections from John Scudder, a missionary to Ceylon, which were designed to foster young people's awareness of the global implications of the Protestant mandate to save souls.[79]

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[76] Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015). See also Lisa Joy Pruitt, *A Looking Glass for Ladies: American Protestant Women and the Orient in the Nineteenth Century* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005); Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

[77] Winslow's memoir contains extensive description of her work as a Sunday school teacher in Ceylon. Miron Winslow, ed., *Memoir of Mrs. Harriet L. Winslow, Thirteen Years a Member of the American Mission in Ceylon* (New York: The American Tract Society, 1840),

[78] James D. Knowles, *Life of Mrs. Ann H. Judson, Late Missionary to Burmah; With an Account of the American Baptist Mission to that Empire* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1830).

Other stories made emotional appeals to children designed to spark their interest in alleviating the plight of foreign "heathens." One story narrated the struggles and sorrows of an African boy named Mossetse, who was forced into a nomadic lifestyle after being orphaned at a young age and "grew up like the rest of the heathen, in sin and ignorance."[80] Fortunately for Mossetse, he eventually encountered missionaries in the course of his wanderings, converting to Christianity and finding joy in God's love. The story's conclusion bluntly stated, "This little account also shows the value of Christian missions. The African orphan would not have known who had saved him in all his dangers, if the missionaries had not been sent to preach the gospel in his land….May those children in Christian lands who help to send the gospel to the heathen, learn to know the value of that gospel themselves."[81] *The Life of Africaner, A Namacqua Chief, of South Africa,* recounted the tale of how the title character was converted from a murderous cattle thief into a devout Christian due to the steadfast efforts of a missionary named Mr. Moffat. After living in a missionary compound to learn about the Bible and receive catechetical training, Africaner returned home and assumed "the religious instructions of his people, and remained constantly with them till his final removal to the everlasting world."[82] In the concluding reflections to this story, the narrator admonished child readers to "bless God for appointing their lot to be so different to that of Africaner,

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[79] John Scudder, *Sabbath School Missionary Associations: With an Address to Sabbath School Children in the United States, on the Subject of Their Engaging in the Work of Foreign Missions* (Boston: Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1841).

[80] "The African Orphan Boy," in *Congo's Kraal* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, n.d.), 11.

[81] "The African Orphan Boy," 16.

[82] American Sunday School Union, *The Life of Africaner, A Namacqua Chief, of South Africa* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, n.d.) 22.

and millions more at present in the world. Remembering also that to whomsoever much is given, from them much will be required."[83] The ASSU advised children to begin acting on their duty to support global missions by praying for missionaries and contributing to missionary boxes kept in most Sunday schools, like John did in *The Silver Dollar*. Such advice extended the implications of the ASSU's authorial presentation of children as evangelists.[84] Young people's performance of alternative religious agency through selflessly donating pennies to their Sunday school missionary box or praying daily for foreign missions enabled them to engage with global efforts to evangelize the lost and thereby cultivate a sense of belonging with the imagined global community of believers.

Sunday school literature also aimed to raise children's awareness of social reform endeavors, such as temperance. Supporting benevolent causes that contributed to civic order and could help usher in the millennium was a major value of nineteenth-century American middle-class society.[85] ASSU literature reflected these mainstream social values and aspired to foster children's engagement with national reform initiatives from a young age.[86] Other publishers of Sunday school literature, like the ATS, pursued similar

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[83] *The Life of Africaner,* 26.

[84] For related discussions of how the figure of the child as evangelist was used in literature about missions and the global expansion of Protestantism and American democracy, see Sanchez-Eppler, *Dependent States,* and Crain, *Reading Children*, 85-88.

[85] W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Irvington, NY: Columbia University Press, 1981); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984): 306-314; Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Scott C. Martin, *Devil of the Domestic Sphere: Temperance, Gender, and Middle-Class Ideology, 1800-1860* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

[86] For an example, see "On Intemperance," in *The Union Spelling Book* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1838), 70-71.

goals. The ATS focused particularly on temperance, since alcohol was considered one of the greatest social sins threatening the nation in the antebellum period. Given that drinking was commonplace, organizations like the ATS assumed that many children might not view alcohol consumption as dangerous.[87] Thus, they aspired to use Sunday school literature to present the evils of drinking in order to frighten children into reframing their view of alcohol.[88]

For example, one tale recounted the story of a deacon who was brought to mental, financial, and spiritual ruin after developing a taste for alcohol. In detailed, emotionally-laden language, the story told how this deacon, although achieving high moral character and professional success early in his life, was ensnared by the temptation of drinking because he became prideful in his accomplishments and gave up regular spiritual disciplines like daily prayer. His growing neglect of his family and increasingly violent behavior ultimately drove his wife to insanity. In the story's conclusion, the author warns that the deacon's story is not unique, lamenting that "the seeds which produced such a frightful harvest of misery and ruin were sown in childhood and youth, by unthinking parents and friends, who considered *temperate drinking* as necessary and innocent."[89] Such stories were designed to raise children's awareness of the temptations that surrounded them, while reminding young people that the power to resist such evils ultimately rested in their own hands. By taking ownership of their spiritual growth, child

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[87] For data on average alcohol consumption per capita in this period, see W.J. Rorabaugh, "Estimated U.S. alcoholic Beverage Consumption, 1790-1860," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 37 (1976): 360-361.

[88] MacLeod, *A Moral Tale*, 108-111.

[89] Italicized as in original, "The Ruined Deacon, A True Story," in Lynde Palmer, *The Little Captain. A Temperance Tale* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1861), 35-36. The other stories in this collection contain nearly identical literary themes.

readers could be spared the torturous end that befell the deacon and his "maniac wife." Moreover, these stories demonstrated that reform initiatives like temperance were not the property of adults alone, but that young people should also invest in supporting such efforts for the good of society.

By calling children to recognize how their spiritual choices impacted their local and global communities, along with repeated efforts to interest children in social reforms, Sunday school publications sought to equip young people with literary road maps for Christian living. ASSU literature in particular promoted the idea that, although children were inherently dependent beings who were bound to accept their life circumstances, they also had the ability to determine their behaviors and responses to these circumstances. Through the act of submitting to biblical precepts, children could achieve alternative religious agency and spiritual blessings via self-abnegation. In this way, ASSU literature showed children how they fit within the broader evangelical community. Moreover, it outlined a way for Protestants of any age to imagine both the possibilities and limitations of childhood religious agency. Even if children's choices to pursue obedience and submission did not alter their state of dependency on adults, such choices did enable them to take partial ownership of their spiritual formation in relationship with other Christian believers and even offered them various ways to participate in large-scale evangelical initiatives, like temperance.

Limitations of ASSU Literary Constructions

The ASSU intended for such portrayals to be normative and to serve as a means of socializing children into the wider world of Protestantism. At the same time, however, these efforts were seriously undercut by the organization's shift toward a racial approach

to childhood religious formation. As noted in the previous chapter, the ASSU's drive to make itself respectable to the white middle-class caused the society to systematically exclude African Americans and turn a blind eye to slavery. ASSU Sunday school literature was created by white middle-class adults for white middle-class children. Due to the society's union principle, the ASSU publishing committee became increasingly wary of even hinting at the subject of slavery or abolitionism throughout the antebellum period. As a result, although the society claimed to use publications to prepare children to confront social evils with the power of Scriptural knowledge, the ASSU usually failed to include the most pressing moral issue of the day in its literature. Other evangelical publishers were similarly hesitant to condemn slavery outright. But since many were northern-based, they sometimes included subtle anti-slavery messages in their literature.[90] Rachman explains that "as the issue of slavery came to be a moral touchstone many other issues were discussed in terms of slavery."[91] For example, in *The Young Woman's Friend,* evangelical writer Daniel Eddy illustrated the unequal gender relations between men and women within marriage by comparing this relationship to slavery. Marriage, like slavery, left women without protection from men and reduced single women to essentially being sold at auction.[92] Eddy, who was a Presbyterian, wrote another story named *Black Jacob*, the memoir of a pious black man who was murdered, framed the title character's experiences around the issue of racial inequality. Jacob was

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[90] MacLeod, *A Moral Tale*, 111-116, Lesley Ginsberg, "Of Babies, Beasts, and Bondage: Slavery and the Question of Citizenship in Antebellum American Children's Literature," in Levander and Singley, *The American Child*, 85-105. See also Deborah C. De Rosa, *Domestic Abolitionism and Juvenile Literature, 1830-1865* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

[91] Rachman, "Introductory Essay."

[92] A. Daniel Eddy, *The Young Woman's Friend, or, The Duties, Trials, Loves, and Hopes of Woman* (Boston: Wentworth, 1857).

not a slave and the book did not advocate for the abolition of slavery, but this story highlighted the evils of chattel slavery for the purpose of illustrating how this racist system created a culture in which all black people were placed in a position of "general ignorance and degradation."[93]

The American Sunday School Union printed *Black Jacob* a few times in the 1830s and early 1840s, as did other organizations such as the American Tract Society and the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This book, however, is one rare example of the ASSU even gesturing towards racial issues. While the ASSU hoped that its union principle would help Sunday schools achieve national acceptance, this policy of neutrality ultimately weakened the society's credibility in the eyes of other reform organizations by the end of the antebellum period.[94] Slavery became the major fault line undercutting the ASSU's stated goal of evangelizing every American child, and Sunday school literature became the battle ground in which this weakness was revealed. Hints that the society was on increasingly tenuous ground regarding its refusal to speak out against slavery appear in the late 1840s. The ASSU was particularly troubled by denominational schisms that occurred among the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, all of which erupted to a certain degree over the issue of slavery.[95] Since most of the ASSU's supporters came from these denominations, the schisms meant that members

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[93] A. Daniel Eddy, *"Black Jacob," A Monument of Grace. The Life of Jacob Hodges, an African Negro, Who Died in Canandaigua, N. Y., February 1842* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1842), iii.

[94] The American Bible Society was similarly criticized by abolitionists for refusing to condemn slavery, see Fea *The Bible Cause*.

[95] C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 67-78. See also Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

who were formally united in the Sunday school cause were now pitted against each other. The society's 1846 report mournfully noted that "an increasing spirit of sectarianism" had generated "suspicion and distrust everywhere."[96] Imploring members to avoid contentious issues, which by implication included slavery, the report advised members to devote their energies to "the diffusion of elementary religious and moral truth, by the agency of Sunday schools and library books."[97]

Simultaneously, abolitionists became increasingly aggressive in their attempts to persuade other reformers to condemn slavery. Antislavery workers grew impatient with the tactic of moral suasion because it failed to result in immediate emancipation, but they disagreed over new measures to adopt. The Garrisonian faction urged complete disassociation from the government and religious institutions, while other leaders such as New York businessmen and philanthropists Lewis and Arthur Tappan maintained a more traditional evangelical approach that favored "church-oriented agitation" and political persuasion.[98] Nevertheless, all abolitionists agreed that more provocative methods were required if the nation was to be delivered from the sin of racial bondage. Lewis Tappan led the way in attempting to force benevolent associations to become abolitionist. In the 1840s he began conducting unofficial and unwelcome investigations of the national

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[96] American Sunday School Union, *The Twenty-Second Annual Report of the American Sunday School Union* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1846), 35-36.

[97] American Sunday School Union, *Twenty-Second Report*, 37.

[98] Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 161; Orville Vernon Burton, *The Age of Lincoln* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 44-45. See also John R. McKivigan, *The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 56-73, John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), and Caleb W. McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

reform associations in the hope that publicizing their indifference toward slavery would shame them into abolitionism. He charged that many of the societies received financial support from Southern slaveholders, making them complicit with the system. He castigated the ABS and ATS for failing to advertise antislavery literature in their catalogues or design programs specifically for African Americans. Accusing the national benevolent organizations of capitulating to racism, Tappan even cofounded an alternative national society, the American Missionary Association, which was blatantly abolitionist.[99] Tappan was intent on transforming the Benevolent Empire into an antislavery network, and it was only a matter of time before the ASSU's Sunday school literature became a target for his attacks.

The confrontation began in 1847, when an ASSU member residing in Charleston, South Carolina, complained that one of the society's books criticized slaveholders. The book, entitled *Jacob and His Sons*, contained a passage stating that slaves were "bought and sold like beasts, and have nothing, but what their master chooses to give them….They do not like to be slaves…but they are not permitted to leave their masters whenever they wish." More significantly, the passage asserted that masters use slaves "cruelly, beat them, and starve them, and kill them; for [the slaves] have nobody to help them."[100] Although the book had been in circulation since 1832, the provocative passage

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[99] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War against Slavery*. (Cleveland, OH: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969), 313-315; John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 133-145; James Essig, *The Bonds of Wickedness: American Evangelicals Against Slavery, 1770-1808* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); McKivigan, *The War against Proslavery Religion*, 111-127.

[100] Lewis Tappan, ed., *Letters Respecting a Book "Dropped from the Catalogue" of the American Sunday School Union in Compliance with the Dictation of the Slave Power* (New York: American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1848), 6.

apparently escaped attention until this member pointed out "the odious sentences" to the ASSU Committee of Publication and to several Southern newspapers.[101] The resulting outcry made the ASSU anxious and led the society to ban further printing and distribution of the book. In keeping with the policy of silence, the Committee of Publication claimed that "the exciting subject of slavery" was not a factor in this decision. Instead, the Committee asserted that the book "had defects on other and general grounds, and had, moreover, nearly ceased to circulate."[102]

While Southerners were satisfied with this explanation, many Northern reformers were outraged. The Wisconsin Sunday School Union submitted a remonstrance to the ASSU in February of 1848 charging the society of catering to Southern slaveholders and thereby departing from the union principle. The *Boston Record* expressed "contempt and indignation….that the Christian men of the North should thus bow and cringe at the despotic mandates of slavery."[103] Lewis Tappan expressed a similar view, citing the ASSU's actions as proof of "the control [slavery] exercises over the literature and religion of the Northern States."[104] In early 1848 Tappan wrote to inform head ASSU editor Frederick Packard of his intention to publish the protests issued against the suppression of *Jacob and His Sons*. Tappan asserted that this information would "cause great alarm and grief to all friends of liberty and true Christianity, and lead perhaps to a

[101] Tappan, *Letters*, 4.

[102] "Minute of the Committee of Publication," in Tappan, *Letters*, 5.

[103] Tappan, *Letters*, 20-21.

[104] Tappan, *Letters*, 3.

correction of the evil." Tappan hoped to force Packard to reverse the ASSU's decision, warning that if he did not do so "dissatisfaction will greatly increase."[105]

In February of 1848 Packard replied to Tappan in a letter defending the suppression of the book, claiming that the decision was made independent of pressure from slaveholders.[106] He pointed out that although many abolitionists worked in the Committee of Publication, "it has been our uniform endeavor" to avoid slavery, "regarding it as [an issue] with which our Society cannot meddle, without a palpable neglect of the obvious endeavor for which it was organized, and a vast sacrifice of the highest and most important interests that are entrusted to us." He begged Tappan to refrain from publishing criticisms of the decision, saying that it would only increase "pre-existing and injurious prejudices against our Society" that would result in financial losses and hinder the spread of Sunday school literature.[107] He justified this plea further by arguing that that piety could be separated from social issues, making evangelism and antislavery two separate causes. For Packard, slavery was a political matter best decided outside of religious institutions such as the Sunday school, hence his insistence that Tappan confine his abolitionist activity to "a free press and a free ballot box."[108] He did not believe slavery was a sin and asserted that reformers should focus on achieving gradual moral improvement through conversions rather than cataclysmic social change, as this offered evangelicals the best chance of weathering the sectional storm. Packard

[105] Tappan, *Letters*, 21.

[106] Tappan, *Letters*, 24.

[107] Tappan, *Letters*, 25.

[108] Tappan, *Letters*, 26.

warned Tappan that attaching antislavery sentiments to Sunday schools would drive away potential converts, thereby "sealing their bondage to ignorance and sin."[109]

In his response to Packard, Tappan asserted that the ASSU editor was "laboring under a great mistake" in assuming that the book's suppression did not cater to slaveholders.[110] He claimed that by dropping the book members of the Committee of Publication became "apologists, if not defenders, of the atrocious system."[111] For Tappan, the marginalization of African Americans within the Sunday school movement was a self-serving measure that belied the ASSU's stated goal of bringing Christianity to every child.[112] He charged that the society's "truckling to Southern arrogance is unworthy of a benevolent [society]…and disgraceful to the nation and Christianity."[113] Tappan not only castigated the ASSU's policy of neutrality because it exhibited hypocrisy and bias, but because he believed it was detrimental to the foundations of evangelical benevolence. In his view, Christians could not ignore the social implications of the gospel and were obligated to attack all forms of evil regardless of the cultural costs. He believed that the dissemination of personal piety should result in the complete moral overhaul of society, making antislavery a necessary component of evangelism. Tappan charged that, by turning a blind eye to slavery, the ASSU practiced a form of counterfeit evangelism that devalued the power of conversion and caused the organization to miss an opportunity to "promote the real welfare of American youth and

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[109] Tappan, *Letters*, 25.

[110] Tappan, *Letters*, 27.

[111] Tappan, *Letters*, 30.

[112] Tappan, *Letters*, 34.

[113] Tappan, *Letters*, 32.

please the Savior."[114] Tappan concluded by asserting that the ASSU "is a great engine for good or evil, and the friends of a pure Christianity, and of free institutions, cannot bear to see it wielded by the slaveocracy of the country."[115] By attempting to separate reform into spiritual and social categories, the ASSU deluded itself into thinking that it was "effecting essential good," when in reality the society was "doing much mischief" that counteracted "the cause of truth, freedom, and Christianity.[116]

Much to Packard's dismay, Tappan proceeded to publish these letters in a pamphlet that also contained other protests of the ASSU's suppression of *Jacob and His Sons*. This was the first time that the ASSU's policy of neutrality was discussed and criticized publically. But to Tappan's frustration, the pamphlet did not cause the organization to abandon its approach to slavery. The ASSU did not issue a public response to Tappan and failed to mention the 1848 book controversy in subsequent reports. The society also persisted in its practice of neutrality and continued ignoring African American involvement in the general Sunday school movement. Simultaneously, southerners continued to express antagonism toward the ASSU because of its northern roots. Sunday school missionary Randolph Sailor reported from Tennessee that "the feeling of hostility against the North seems to be widening and deepening, being stimulated by the constant publication, in the newspapers here, of the arrest of abolition emissaries who have come under the disguise of teachers, agents, pedlars, etc."[117]

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[114] Tappan, *Letters*, 36.

[115] Tappan, *Letters*, 35.

[116] Tappan, *Letters*, 28-29.

[117] Randolph Sailor to Westbrook, December 14, 1859, ASSU Papers, as cited in Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize*, 131.

Abolitionists also remained supremely frustrated with the ASSU. In the minds of antislavery reformers, the society remained a pawn in the hands of slaveholders unless it explicitly refuted slavery.

The ASSU's failure to issue such a statement led William Lloyd Garrison to include the organization in his 1855 proposal to the American Anti-slavery Society that contained a scathing critique of the northern benevolence. Garrison condemned many reform groups for refusing to support abolitionism, including the ASSU, charging that they were "in league and fellowship with the slave-holders of the South, utterly dumb in regard to the slave system, and inflexibly hostile to the antislavery movement." His proposal further asserted that such organizations be "instantly abandoned by everyone claiming to be the friend of liberty and a disciple of Christ."[118] The ASSU book controversy even generated trans-Atlantic criticism. In 1852 African American abolitionist William Wells Brown published a report in the London *Morning Advertiser* that urged both American and British churches to withdraw financial support from the ASSU, declaring that the society "is not only pro-slavery, but…the apologist of slavery."[119]

The ASSU stubbornly chose to maintain its policy of neutrality on slavery even in the face of intense criticism, believing that such a course of action was consistent with the goals of genuine benevolence. ASSU workers like Packard maintained that the primary

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[118] William Lloyd Garrison to the American Antislavery Society, 1855, as cited in Robert W. Lynn and Elliot Wright, *The Big Little School: Sunday Child of American Protestantism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 38.

[119] William Wells Brown, letter to the editor, *London Morning Advertiser*, May 15, 1852, in *The Black Abolitionist Papers: Volume I, The British Isles, 1830-1865*, C. Peter Ripley, et al., editors (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 314.

task of evangelical reform was to share the Protestant message of salvation in order to generate converts. Packard further asserted that contentious social issues like slavery were tangential to this goal, making neutrality essential for evangelism. Such attempts to define benevolence in strictly spiritual terms, however, contradicted the portrayals of alternative religious agency contained in other ASSU publications. As demonstrated, the ASSU asserted that children had the responsibility to choose faith in Christ for themselves and to live in accordance with biblical principles of obedience and service. This call to service included an imperative to engage in reforms like missions and temperance. But as the 1848 book controversy reveals, it ultimately failed to call children to wrestle with the reality of slavery. Abolitionists like Tappan were appalled by this contradiction, viewing neutrality not as a necessary component of evangelism but as an excuse for perpetuating a grievous social sin. Such an approach was, in Tappan's words, contrary to the abolitionist version of "true Christianity," which sought to apply the Protestant gospel to every moral dilemma.[120]

At the same time, the ASSU's institutional failings regarding slavery did not entirely negate the innovative ways that its Sunday school literature attempted to construct textually-defined religious identities and functions for children in the nineteenth

[120] Tappan, *Letters*, 34. These contradictory stances on the meaning of "true Christianity" and its application to slavery were not confined to the debate between the Sunday school movement and abolitionists. Mark Noll argues that "the story of theology in the Civil War was a story of how a deeply entrenched intellectual synthesis divided against itself, even as its proponents were reassuring combatants on either side that each enjoyed a unique standing before God and each exercised a unique role as the true bearer of the nation's Christian civilization." Although Noll refers primarily to the clergy, the debate between Packard and Tappan reveals that this theological identity crisis also included lay evangelical reformers. The cultural conflict over slavery forced a religious response from reformers throughout the nation, laying bare divergent ideals of benevolence that rocked the benevolence movement to its core and created a culture of extremism that left ultimately left evangelicals unable to find an amicable solution to their differences. See Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 21. See also George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 16-22.

century. ASSU literature presents a host of complex and sometimes contradictory depictions of childhood spirituality, combining children's reality of dependency with their potential for moral assertiveness or invitations to engage in social uplift with strenuous avoidance of the inconvenient truths of slavery and racism. But ASSU short stories were consistent in depicting children as having the ability to choose lifestyles of humility and piety as a pathways to achieving spiritual fulfillment. Within ASSU juvenile literature, children's spiritual sensibilities were celebrated and their religious choices were significant. Young people's decisions to submit or rebel to biblical precepts impacted the world in which they lived despite their dependent states, generating either blessings or punishments. ASSU stories thereby empowered children to take responsibility for their spiritual formation and provided literary building blocks for assessing the importance of young people's religious choices to the adult-dominated community of believers. These Sunday school publications offered young people a mental framework for formulating, evaluating, and expressing their piety that truly aspired to help children make their Savior their friend. As such, they would have performed a vital socializing function for Sunday school pupils that contributed to the overall growth of American evangelical print culture.

While assessing individual children's responses to ASSU publications is nearly impossible due to lack of sources, this literature's widespread distribution indicates that they must have contained some sort of religious and cultural resonance for Sunday school pupils.[121] But focusing on literary constructions only tells one side of the story. This chapter adds to the previous chapter's assessment of the top-down methods the ASSU

[121] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 33.

employed to achieve national influence by analyzing how publications functioned ideologically and practically within the organization. As noted, this literature was created by white middle-class adults for the purpose of defining, empowering, and constraining children's approaches to the Christian faith. These constructions are vital to understanding the Sunday school movement's institutional mission and methods, yet they are not exact portrayals of children's actual experiences on the ground. Children did not always embrace Sunday school teachings with the enthusiasm portrayed in ASSU short stories, nor did the concept of alternative religious agency always result in self-actualization for every pupil. Moreover, issues of race, gender, and denominationalism posed more significant problems within actual Sunday schools than most ASSU literature acknowledged. The vital question of how children actually experienced Sunday schools on a weekly basis remains unanswered if the movement is just considered from an organizational or theoretical perspective. It is to this subject of children's lived religious experiences in Sunday schools that the final chapter now turns.

CHAPTER SIX

"The Attachment of the Pupils to the School is Remarkable": Reconstructing Lived Experiences in Antebellum Sunday Schools

In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Mark Twain offers a fictional account of Sunday school life that does little to endear readers to the institution. In Twain's telling, Sunday school was a place that independent-spirited boys like Tom "hated with his whole heart."[1] The Sunday school experience was monotonous, marked by rote memorization, Bible prizes, and ticket reward systems, which Tom shamelessly games. The institution represented a system of burdensome behavioral regulations that were "based on an idealization of virtue at odds with the nature of children and perhaps human nature altogether, one that produced boredom, hypocrisy, and uncritical obedience."[2] The fictional teachers in Twain's story do not improve the situation, being "so separated…from worldly matters" that they were almost entirely alienating to their young charges.[3] For Tom, Sunday school was an experience that children "worried through," only to have the "restless, noisy, and troublesome" affair repeat relentlessly the following week.[4]

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[1] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (first published 1876, reprinted by London: Penguin Books, 1994), 30.

[2] Stephen Rachman, "Introductory Essay to Shaping the Values of Youth: Sunday School Books in 19th Century America Digital Collection," Michigan State University Libraries Online, accessed from http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/ssb/?action=introessay#9.

[3] Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, 33.

[4] Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, 31.

While Tom Sawyer is a fictional character, Twain is not the only author to depict Sunday schools as boring, static, or repressive institutions. In his classic monograph, *The Making of the English Working Class,* E. P. Thompson portrayed Sunday schools as tools of middle-class domination imposed on an unwilling lower class for the purpose of maintaining social control, even going so far as to call the institutions forms of "religious terrorism."[5] Subsequent work on Sunday schools from historians such as Thomas Laqueur and Anne Boylan, along with recent scholarship on evangelical reform movements as a whole, has effectively overturned Thompson's claims.[6] Nevertheless, Sunday schools are still usually discussed in primarily institutional or statistical terms that emphasize the question of social impact rather than attempting to put a human face on the movement. Boylan's treatment, for example, is part of the new social history and focuses on outlining the details of Sunday school structure, pedagogical techniques, and attendance statistics. Such work is immensely valuable for bringing the operation side of the Sunday school movement to life. But as E. Brooks Holifield argues, much more work remains to be done before historians can fully grasp the nuances and complexities of

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[5] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 375-379.

[6] Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976); Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988). Examples of scholarship that challenges the social control thesis that originally dominated the historiography of nineteenth-century evangelic reform movements includes Lois Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation." *Journal of American History* 60, no. 1 (June 1973): 23-41, Robert H. Abzug, *Crumbling Cosmos: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Moralizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), xvii-xviii. Similar scholarship includes Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), and Mark Noll, *America's God*: *From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

children's lived religious experiences within Sunday schools and comparable religious institutions.[7]

This chapter contributes to that project by attempting to reconstruct the Sunday school experiences of children and teachers from two specific institutions: the Mason Street Sabbath School in Boston, Massachusetts, and the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School near Wilmington, Delaware. These two Sunday schools were selected because their records were unusually well maintained and in abundant supply, providing rich scope for comparative analysis.[8] While these two Sunday schools are certainly not representative of the entire movement, they do suggest common patterns of experience that provide a valuable lens for exploring the shape and content of children's spiritual worlds in the nineteenth century. Contrary to Twain's depiction, the rhythms of Sunday school life were complex and often fulfilling. In an effort to enrich this analysis further, the chapter also draws appropriate comparisons to broader trends within the Sunday school movement while also contrasting these two institutions with other distinct examples, primarily those drawn from the experiences of Jewish and enslaved African American Sunday school pupils.

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[7] E. Brooks Holifield, "Let the Children Come: The Religion of the Protestant Child in Early America." *Church History* 76, no. 4 (2007): 750-777.

[8] The Mason Street Sabbath School papers are housed in the Congregational Library and Archives and the Boston Athenaeum. To my knowledge, I am the first to use the bulk of this material in an academic study. The Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School has an exceptionally well-preserved archival collection housed at the Hagley Museum and Library near Wilmington, Delaware. While Boylan mentions this Sunday school a few times in her monograph, the most thorough treatment of the school is Ruth Linton's master's thesis, "To the Promotion and Improvement of Youth: The Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School, 1816-1840" (University of Delaware, 1981) and her article, "The Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School: An Adventure in Education in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Delaware History* 20 (1983): 168-184.

Three particularly salient themes emerge from this analysis, the first being the prevalence of attempts to personalize Sunday schools in order to make the experience more impactful for children. These efforts in turn encouraged pedagogical innovation and collaboration between teachers and pupils, while also empowering marginalized groups like single women to find their own religious voice. Second, Sunday schools invited students and teachers to engage in communities that nurtured spiritual development while enabling children to develop intimate relationships that enriched their social networks. Finally, Sunday schools sometimes functioned as spaces for subverting cultural and social values. This was particularly true of African American Sunday schools, which often enabled slaves to achieve religious and intellectual self-actualization in defiance of racist norms and could even become a pathway to more radical forms of activism, such as abolitionism. Taken together, these three themes provide compelling glimpses into the religious and cultural worlds that Sunday school children inhabited in the nineteenth century, demonstrating the institution's impact not just on individual participants but on the formation of American religious culture as a whole.

The Case Studies

The Mason Street Sabbath School was founded in 1816 by the Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor. Opening with ten teachers plus a superintendent, the school admitted children ages five and above. Classes were gender segregated, a practice shared by most Sunday schools founded in the early nineteenth-century that persisted into the antebellum era. The school attracted 336 pupils within its

first year.[9] By the 1830s, the Mason Street Sabbath School enrolled between 200 to 250 pupils annually, although the number of active students was generally around 150.[10] Approximately 35 teachers staffed the school under the oversight of superintendent Samuel H. Walley, who created the majority of the school's surviving records. Walley was a prominent businessman and politician. He was a member of the Massachusetts State House of Representatives in 1836 and 1840-1846, serving as speaker from 1844-1846. In addition to his political and business roles, Walley actively supported benevolence work and was a corporate member of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions from 1848-1867.[11] Like other respectable gentlemen of his day, he was concerned with providing religious education for the common folk of Massachusetts, and he served as the Mason Street Sabbath School superintendent from as early as 1835 to at least 1842.[12] By the time Walley assumed this role, the nonsectarian Mason Street Sabbath School had joined the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society and focused on providing religious education for both middle-class and poor children. Female students generally outnumbered male students, and this gender pattern held true for the teachers as well.[13]

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[9] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Report of the Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor. Presented at Their Annual Meeting, October 8, 1817* (Boston, 1817), 3, Boston Athenaeum. Hereafter referred to as *1817 Report.*

[10] See Samuel H. Walley, Reports of the Superintendent of Mason Street Sabbath School 1835 and 1837, Congregational Library and Archives.

[11] Biographical data accessed from http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=W000087.

[12] The earliest record I have been able to find from Walley's term as superintendent is a letter he wrote to Mason Street Sabbath School teachers dating from 1835, housed at the at the Boston Athenaeum. Walley's record book, contained at the Congregational Library and Archives, is dated 1838-1842.

[13] For examples, see Walley, 1835 and 1837 reports.

Founded a year after the Mason Street Sabbath School, the rural Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School was located near Wilmington, Delaware, and catered to the children of local factory workers and farmers. Given that public weekday education was slow to develop in Delaware, the Sunday school combined emphasis on evangelism and religious instruction with training in reading, writing, and arithmetic, a practice that continued into the 1850s. In 1856, the nonsectarian Brandywine Manufactures' Sunday School became affiliated with the newly formed Christ Church Episcopal congregation, at which point the lessons became increasingly denominational in focus. When the school first opened under the direction of mill owner John Siddell in 1817, however, the founders proclaimed that "our school agreeably to its constitution admits children of every denomination who are equally entitled to its benefits….we are obliged to avoid sectarianism as much as possible and to dwell chiefly on those doctrines in which all Christians agree."[14] As with many Sunday schools founded in this era, the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School initially admitted adults alongside children. But in keeping with the larger trend, young people comprised the majority of pupils and the school was entirely child-centric by the 1820s. The school became an ASSU auxiliary in 1824, primarily for the purpose of obtaining the society's cheap nonsectarian reading material.

As noted, the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School was founded by a mill owner, John Siddell, who also served as the first superintendent. Local manufactory owners, managers, and workers constituted the majority of the school's financial

[14] Victorine Du Pont, Report to the ASSU, 1830, Winterthur Manuscripts, Group 6, Series A, Box 13, in the Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library.

supporters. Of these, the most powerful supporter was French immigrant Eleuthere Irenee du Pont, founder of the successful gunpowder manufacturing Du Pont Company. Du Pont donated the land for the Sunday school building and three of his daughters quickly rose to prominence within the institution as leaders. The oldest of his eight children, Victorine, was a pious and well-educated woman who was widowed in 1816 at the age of twenty-four. Turning to her family for solace, Victorine moved back in with her parents in 1818 and became the tutor to her younger siblings. Still disconsolate and searching for additional ways to occupy her time, Victorine developed an interest in the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School. By 1823 she maintained the school's accounts and purchased all supplies. By 1827 she replaced Siddell as superintendent, a post she maintained until her death in 1861. Although she was the official head of the school, Victorine was unpaid, which stands in contrast to her second-in-command, a paid male teacher who oversaw a corps of volunteer teachers. Nevertheless, Victorine clearly maintained full control of the school throughout her tenure as superintendent and the paid male teacher reported directly to her.[15] Like the Mason Street Sabbath School, the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School maintained gender segregated classes. Attendance was very similar between both schools, with the Brandywine school regularly enrolling over 200 pupils annually by the antebellum period. Of these, nearly 150 students participated consistently, with ages ranging from four to seventeen years old.[16] Females tended to outnumber males as both students and teachers. Victorine's younger siblings were faithful pupils at the school, and two of her sisters, Eleuthera and Sophie,

[15] Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 73-74.

[16] Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 50.

went on to become some of her most dedicated teachers when they reached adolescence.[17]

Personalizing the Sunday School Experience

As superintendents, Samuel Walley and Victorine du Pont worked to personalize the Sunday school experience for the benefit of their students, even as they simultaneously employed the standardized pedagogical practices recommended by the ASSU. Following opening prayers, hymns, and a message from the superintendent, pupils in both schools would divide into small groups to work through their lesson series, which were sequenced sets of ten to twenty Bible verses that students were required to memorize during the week. Teachers were provided with corresponding ASSU question books for quizzing students. This pedagogical approach was a direct reaction to the practice of rote memorization that dominated the American educational system in the early nineteenth century. Based on the idea that children's minds were empty receptacles that needed to be filled, educators believed that if children "commit the precious truths to their tenacious memories" their hearts and minds would necessarily be changed.[18] By the mid-nineteenth century, however, Sunday school leaders began to argue that memorization did not equal understanding.[19] Moreover, rote memorization generated an

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[17] Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 70.

[18] Boston Society for the Moral and Religious Instruction of the Poor, *The Annual Report of the Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor. Presented at Their Anniversary, Nov. 8th, 1819* (Boston, 1819), 14. See also Barbara Finkelstein, "Casting Networks of Good Influence: The Reconstruction of Childhood in the United States, 1790-1870," in Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 118-122.

[19] Boylan, *Sunday School,* 135-141.

unhealthy emphasis on the rewards system, in which students earned prizes, called premiums, based on the number of verses they could recite per week.

John Edmunds described these concerns in his reflections on his childhood Sunday school experiences growing up in Utica, New York. Edmunds was a faithful student the First Presbyterian Church Sunday School from the age of nine. He recalled that, when he was a pupil in the early 1820s, it was not uncommon for students to regularly recited one hundred verses every Sunday. He remembered that "we were stimulated by promises of reward to increase the number of verses to the greatest possible extend, and [our] ambition…was greatly excited to excel." According to Edmunds, "the result was inevitable, that so far as the exercises of the school were concerned, they consisted entirely of recitations, with no time for explanations or religious instruction."[20] Educators in both the Sunday school and public school systems expressed similar concerns with increasing regularity by the antebellum period, arguing that the common pedagogical reliance on memorization actually did very little to shape a child's intellect. Moreover, in the case of the Sunday school, children's tendency to focus on memorization merely for the sake of earning rewards interfered with the work of evangelism. The ASSU complained in 1827 "that many pupils of Sunday schools are ignorant of the meaning of those passages of scripture which they commit to memory."[21]

Attempting to enrich the Sunday school experience, the ASSU created and disseminated the lesson series model in the form of question books called the *Union*

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[20] Personal account of John H. Edmunds, in *A Memorial of the Semi-Centennial Celebration of the Founding of the Sunday School of the First Presbyterian Church, Utica, N.Y.* (Utica, NY: Ellis H. Roberts, 1867), 179.

[21] American Sunday School Union, *The Third Report of the American Sunday-School Union: Read at Their Annual Meeting, Held in the City of Philadelphia, on Tuesday Afternoon, May 22, 1827* (Philadelphia: I. Ashmead & Co., 1827), xxvii, ASSU Papers.

Questions. These lesson books contained questions for Sunday school teachers to ask pupils about the verses they were assigned to memorize during the week. The *Union Questions* did not contain prepared answers. Rather, the answers to the questions were all based on the assigned verses, requiring both teachers and pupils to achieve mastery of the Scriptural content in order to move through the curriculum. The ASSU asserted that this strategy would "excite the mind to a careful and thorough examination of the Scriptures."[22] Boylan argues that the popularization of this pedagogical model marked a significant transition in the history of Protestant religious education. From the Reformation onward the indoctrination of children was oriented around memorization and teaching young people to parrot the beliefs of their elders. Thus, by downplaying memorization and using materials that required students and teachers to work together to formulate answers, nineteenth-century Sunday schools "necessarily permitted some measure of initiative, even spontaneity" that fundamentally reoriented the Protestant approach to catechesis.[23]

As participants in these pedagogical shifts, the Mason Street Sabbath School and the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School utilized the *Union Questions.* Walley and du Pont also embraced the opportunity to implement their own curricular innovations by composing supplemental questions or scripture commentary. Du Pont believed that standardized lesson plans should be adapted to specific Sunday school classes. Thus, she took pains to develop additional questions for her teachers to use based on her personal knowledge of her students' needs and interests. She also encouraged instructors to

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[22] American Sunday School Union, *Union Questions 5* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1835), iii-iv.

[23] Boylan, *Sunday School,* 139.

internalize the lesson for themselves during the week so they could be fully equipped to explain the Scriptures to their students on Sunday.[24] Walley issued similar pleas, asserting that if teachers diligently studied the lessons during the week "a still greater amount of benefit would result to the scholar, and much information, as to the state of mind, would be elicited; and this might direct to cautions of counsels of a more appropriate character than might, perhaps, otherwise be given."[25] Like du Pont, Walley demanded much of his teachers. In a letter to instructors from 1836, Walley stressed the importance of memorizing the weekly scriptures in order to relate to students, adding that "where the lesson is rather longer than usual, you can dispense with a few of the verses at your own discretion; *but a portion I will always require*."[26] By personalizing the lesson series model and using the curriculum as a means of teacher-student bonding, Walley and du Pont exemplified broader attempts to make Sunday school education a more meaningful experience for young people.

Attempts to customize Sunday school curriculum also took parental preferences into account. Despite the ASSU's emphasis on providing nonsectarian material that could be used in any Sunday school, auxiliaries still had to confront the issue of denominational affiliation and catechesis. By the antebellum period several denominational Sunday

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[24] Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 52. Victorine's record books and lesson plans contain countless examples of customization and improvisation, for examples see Recitation and Premium Books 1828-1873, Box 3, Acc. 389, Folder 14, in the Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library.

[25] Samuel H. Walley, *Report of the Superintendent of Mason Street Sabbath School* (Boston, 1837), 11, Congregational Library and Archives. Hereafter referred to as 1837 Report. For examples of how Samuel also customized the Union Questions and incorporated the lesson series material into his superintendent addresses, see Walley, Record Book, 1838-1842.

[26] Italicized as in original, Samuel H. Walley to the teachers at the Mason Street Sabbath School, 1836, found in the back of *The Mason Street Sabbath School Library*, 1832, Boston Athenaeum. For an example of Mason Street Sabbath School curriculum, see *Mason Street Sabbath School, July 1837, How Sin Came Into the World*, Congregational Library and Archives.

school organizations formed to provide materials that supplemented ASSU curriculum or full curriculum for those Sunday schools that chose to affiliate with one denomination.[27] Individual Sunday schools determined the extent to which they utilized these denominational resources, resulting in a considerable degree of variation in this area. The Mason Street Sabbath School left denominational training to parents and pastors, encouraging pupils to find a church to attend along with their families.[28] Consequently, the students came from wide variety of denominations. The same was true of Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School pupils. In contrast to Walley, however, Victorine du Pont did not simply rely on parents and pastors to provide denominational training. Instead, she supplemented these efforts within the Sunday school itself. She assigned teachers to work in small groups with students that shared their same church affiliation, in order to facilitate denominational-specific catechetical training following the completion of the weekly lesson series. In this way, the students were permitted to "learn the catechism recommended by their parents or friends."[29] Although technically affiliated with the Episcopal Church by the 1850s, the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School also provided denominational education in the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist traditions.[30] Consequently, the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School was not only

[27] In 1828 the Methodist General Conference created its own Sunday School Union, and the Baptists formed their own organization in 1832. See Boylan, *Sunday Schools*, 162-164, and Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement*, 381.

[28] Walley, *1835 Report*, 9. See Walley, Record Book, 1838-1842.

[29] *Quarterly Sunday School Magazine* 7, (1831), 265.

[30] See Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School, Sunday School Receiving Books, 1827-1850, Box 1, Acc. 389, Folder 3, in the Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library.

more authentically interdenominational than many other auxiliaries, but the school also enabled parents to directly influence the teachers' curricular choices.[31]

Indeed, du Pont's eagerness to privilege familial denominational affiliations when planning her curriculum even extended to permitting Catholic catechetical training. A quarter of the Brandywine Manufactures' Sunday School pupils were Catholic, particularly Irish Catholic immigrants.[32] Eager to educate the children of these families, du Pont regularly received donations of Catholic curriculum, such as when she accepted nineteen Catholic catechisms for the school in 1827.[33] She also accepted prizes from a local priest to give to "the most attentive Catholic scholar," so that these children could participate in the awards system without compromising their family's faith tradition.[34] One Catholic employee in the Nemours cotton mill, Patrick McGran, enrolled his three daughters in the school. Mary, Hellen, and Ann attended from 1824 to 1830. Hellen married in 1842, and Ann entered a convent in 1834. She corresponded with the du Pont sisters after taking her vows, indicating that Ann formed meaningful bonds at the Brandywine Manufactures' Sunday School.[35] Accepting these students was unprecedented in an era when anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant sentiment was on the rise, providing a countercultural educational model that highlights the freedom individual

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[31] Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 46-47, Boylan, *Sunday School*, 38.

[32] Boylan, *Sunday Schools*, 38.

[33] See entry for March of 1827, in Du Pont, Account Book 1823-1839.

[34] Boylan, *Sunday Schools*, 38.

[35] Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 55; Boylan, *Sunday Schools*, 38.

Sunday schools could exercise in creating distinctive and sometimes radical educational experiences.[36]

While devout parents would have doubtless been pleased with these efforts to customize Sunday school instruction along denominational lines, children's reactions to the lesson series and individualized catechetical instruction are harder to determine due to paucity of sources. But several particularly dedicated students recorded their impressions of Sunday schools in their journals, offering rare glimpses into children's perspectives on the institution. One twelve-year-old girl from Boston, Anne Everett, was an eager Sunday school pupil. After returning from a visit to Medford in 1835, Anne wrote in her journal that "we were rejoiced to get home; I had not be to Sunday school for two Sundays, and I was very glad to get back to it."[37] Multiple entries from her journal in 1834 and 1835 reveal her interest in Sunday school exercises. In April of 1835 she wrote down the main points from the superintendent's message, which included the warning that "there is a God who knows everything which human beings do, even though it is concealed from everyone in the world. And he knows when you do wrong. So that if a bad child asks a younger one to do a bad action, and says, that nobody will know it, he does not speak truth, for God knows it."[38] In another entry from the same year, Anne wrote that the Sunday school message encouraged the children that "it was our duty to form some

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[36] For more, see Dale T. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986), John McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), and Jon Gjerde, *Catholicism and the Shaping of Nineteenth-Century America*, S. Deborah King, ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[37] Philippa C Bush, *Memoir of Anne Gorham Everett, with Extracts from her Correspondence and Journal* (Cambridge: Allen and Farnham, 1856), 10.

[38] Bush, *Memoir of Anne Gorham Everett*, 11.

friendship with another person, and that both we, and the person with whom we had formed the friendship, would be the better for it, for that we should mutually do each other good."[39] Henry Ward Beecher, son of acclaimed Congregationalist minister Lyman Beecher who would grow up to become a famous minister in his own right, was also a devoted Sunday school pupil in his youth. Henry journaled about the Bible class teachings, which he found "very interesting indeed." His superintendent, Mr. Newton, "commenced the New Testament and is going through it in course. The boys generally are very much pleased with the lecture."[40]

Most children's accounts of Sunday schools focus on memorization and the premiums they earned as a result. For example, another former student the First Presbyterian Church Sunday School, S. Wells William, wrote in mid-life that "my first remembrance of the Sunday school was standing up in a row, with many other children, to say our catechism….it was a point of emulation to answer each question instantly, and to repeat the verses of the lesson perfectly."[41] Ten-year-old Caroline Clarke (later Caroline Richard) of upstate New York memorized seven Bible verses to recite at Sunday school each week. Her younger sister, Anna, learned passages from the New England Primer, such as little rhymes that reminded children how "In Adam's fall we sinned all."[42]

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[39] Bush, *Memoir of Anne Gorham Everett*, 36.

[40] William C. Beecher and Samuel Scoville, *A Biography of Rev. Henry Ward Beecher* (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1888), 99.

[41] S. Wells Williams, "Letter to the Superintendent, Teachers, and Scholars of the Sunday School of the First Presbyterian Church, Utica," May 31, 1866, in *A Memorial of the Semi-Centennial Celebration of the Founding of the Sunday School of the First Presbyterian Church, Utica*, 35-36.

[42] Caroline Cowles Clarke Richard, *Village Life in America 1852-1872*; *Including the Period of the American Civil War as Told in the Diary of a School-Girl* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1913), 11, 17.

Similarly, eleven-year-old Robert Bishop took great pride in his ability to accurately recite large quantities of Sunday school material. In a journal entry dated February 27, 1859, Robert noted that "Mister Steuart" preached a Sunday school sermon but "I forget what his sub jeck was." He hastened to add, however, that "I lernt" the Sunday school memorization card he had been given the previous week "by hart," proudly asserting that "none of the others lernt thers but me."[43] As Robert's comment illustrates, reciting verses or catechetical lessons perfectly not only gained students premiums in the form of books, tracts, or other little prizes, but also enabled them to earn a measure of social standing amongst their peers.

The earnestness with which Wells, Caroline, and Robert memorized their Sunday school lessons reflected the common enthusiasm for the rewards system among most Sunday school pupils, and the students at the Mason Street Sabbath School and the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School were no different. A substantial amount of Walley's record book was devoted to keeping an account of the premiums awarded, testifying to high levels of sustained interest in the system amongst the students. Victorine du Pont kept similarly careful records of premiums, detailing dozens of pupils who earned prizes for memorization and good behavior throughout her tenure as superintendent. She and her sisters also took care to avoid the appearance of favoritism in dispensing rewards. Eleuthera wrote to her younger sister Sophie in 1828 explaining that she and Victorine devised a "new plan of giving out the premiums," in which the student who recited the most verses was entitled to pick their premium first, "and so on until the

[43] Robert Bishop, journal entry from February 27, 1859, in John Weatherford, ed., "School and Other Days, 1859: Selections from the Diaries of Robert and Sylvester Bishop," *Ohio Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (1961): 60. Original spelling maintained.

last. I [Eleuthera] think it would be a good plan for then we could not be accused of partiality nor could any of them be dissatisfied for it would depend wholly on their own exertions whether they have their choice among the first or the last."[44] Many of the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School students took pride in consistently achieving high marks for recitations and good behavior. Mary Aikin, the daughter of a blacksmith who began attending the school along with her brothers James, Samuel, and John in 1823, racked up numerous prizes over a multi-year period: tracts, storybooks, a psalmbook, a thread case, a "swiss collar pleated," and a "collar trimmed with Nun's lace." Her brother, James, on the other hand, was not nearly as dedicated. James forfeited a premium at least once a year for various minor offenses. Finally, he managed to win a story book, perhaps aptly titled *The Prodigal Son*.[45]

James may present a more accurate picture of the rate at which students earned premiums at the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School, not simply because other children were similarly prone to misbehave but because attendance often fluctuated. As in other Sunday schools, inconsistent attendance on the part of some pupils kept them from earning regular premiums. The same was true at the Mason Street Sabbath School. While the school averaged around 150 pupils annually, this number often varied considerably over the course of a year. For example, in 1837 attendance began at 202, but fell to 64 by the end of the year. Walley fretted over the "disadvantages resulting from these constant changes," pointing out that "the impressions which we hope to have made

[44] Eleuthera Du Pont to Sophie Du Pont, February 28, 1828, Winterthur Manuscripts, Group 6, Series C, Box 24, in Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records, Hagley Museum and Library.

[45] See Mark Books 1827-1833, Box 2, Acc. 389, in Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records, Hagley Museum and Library.

while with us, are more apt to be transient."[46] Nevertheless, use of the memorization and premium system even in the face of such difficulties testifies to its popularity among the students. As noted above, du Pont and Walley were deeply concerned with implementing additional teaching exercises that encouraged children to actually reflect on what they memorized, particularly the lesson book series. But their encouragement of the premium system demonstrates their awareness that Sunday schools were only viable insofar as they remained responsive not just to the spiritual needs of their students, but to their temporal desires as well. Thus, despite increasing disapproval of the system from educational leaders such as the ASSU, memorization remained a central feature of the Sunday school experience in part because, simply put, children wanted it. As Boylan notes, the persistence of the memorization and premiums system, although possibly "a means of manipulating children…also represented a capitulation on the part of teachers to children's interests." [47] Children's preferences exercised influence over Sunday school pedagogical practices, giving pupils a small measure of agency in shaping the institution.

In addition to supporting the memorization system, du Pont and Walley personalized the Sunday school experience in accordance with children's preferences in other ways. Financial records from both schools reveal that Walley and du Pont embraced the use of emotionally-based and imaginative juvenile religious literature described in the previous chapter, purchasing large quantities of ASSU children's publications annually to stock their Sunday school libraries.[48] Walley wrote in the Mason Street Sabbath School

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[46] Walley, *1837 Report*, 3.

[47] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 157.

[48] For examples, see Walley, Record Book, 1838-1842, and Victorine Du Pont, Account Book 1823-1839, Box 1, Acc. 389, Folder 6, in Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records, Hagley Museum and Library. Hereafter referred to as Du Pont, Account Book 1823-1839.

annual reports how he carefully selected intellectually stimulating and emotionally captivating reading materials for his pupils. He also reported with pride that popular juvenile magazines such as *Youth's Companion* were in high demand at his school.[49] Both superintendents desired to dispense Sunday school material that catered to children's sensitive dispositions, hoping that such strategies would enhance spiritual formation and generate consistent attendance.

Walley also introduced other innovative teaching strategies, such as the magic lantern, an early version of an image projector that utilized pictures painted or printed on pieces of glass. Arguing that "the mind is frequently instructed through the eye," Walley embraced the magic lantern as an ideal pedagogical tool for children, although he confined his slides "principally to objects connected with the scripture history." He hoped that "by vivid and beautiful delineations of animals, scenes, and objects of various kinds, upon the screen…salutary impressions have been made, striking and durable." Walley held special "exhibitions" featuring the projector and invited entire families to attend, events that he claimed were just as popular with parents as they were with children.[50] He was not alone in using tools such as the magic lantern to employ nature imagery to teach biblical principles. According to Holifield, "in an era when 'natural theology' seemed utterly convincing to most American theologians," Sunday school teachers often appealed to nature to describe the power and majesty of the divine realm.[51] Little Anne Everett reported that her Sunday school teacher used Archdeacon William Paley's

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[49] Walley, *1837 Report,* 11.

[50] Samuel H. Walley, *Report of the Superintendent of Mason Street Sabbath School* (Boston, 1835), 9, Congregational Library and Archives. Hereafter referred to ask 1835 Report.

[51] Holifield, "Let the Children Come," 770.

"watchmaker argument" to explain the existence of God: in the same way that a watchmaker's existence is inferred from the watch, "so we judge of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, by his great works."[52]

Children's accounts of Sunday school exercises reveal additional ways that teachers attempted to shape hearts and minds by appealing to pupils' emotions and making their classrooms more interactive. Caroline Clarke reported with excitement that a minister "brought an exhibition of a tabernacle just like the children of Israel carried with them to the Promised Land" to her Sunday school class, making the biblical story come alive. Sunday school teachers also increasingly embraced the use of songs to aid memorization and simulate enjoyable learning experiences.[53] In response to requests from her students, Victorine du Pont allowed the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School pupils to earn premiums from memorizing hymns, in addition to the scriptures assigned in the weekly lesson series.[54] Similarly, Walley reported that his students particularly enjoyed singing, asserting in his 1835 report that "attention continues to be given to this delightful part of our Sabbath School exercises, and the scholars discover much interest in it."[55] Earlier in the century singing was considered far too frivolous an activity for the lower classes, distracting them from the necessary work of cultivating order and propriety in deference to the upper classes.[56] By mid-century, however,

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[52] Bush, *Memoir of Anne Gorham Everett,* 12.

[53] Richard, *Village Life in America,* 21-22, 70.

[54] Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 47.

[55] Walley, *1835 Report,* 8.

[56] Harold Silver, *The Concept of Popular Education: A Study of Ideas and Social Movements in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965), 32-33.

educators like Walley and du Pont remade such frivolous activities into tools for capturing children's tender hearts with spiritual truths, such as "A sinner, Lord, behold I stand/In thought, in word, in deed/But Jesus sits at thy right hand/For such to intercede."[57] Du Pont and Walley believed, along with most Sunday school superintendents, that their students learned best when they enjoyed the methods of instruction. According to Holifield, by the antebellum period the popularization of these attempts to make learning enjoyable for student enabled "the children of the Sunday schools…[to] learn about Christianity in ways far more diverse and multifaceted than could earlier generations," thereby helping ensure the institution's continued success.[58]

While romanticized ideals of childhood undergirded the impulse to make Sunday school education more dynamic and diverse, women led the way in actually implementing these techniques. Anne Braude argued in her path breaking essay, "Women's History Is American Religious History," that given the disproportionate and enduring female presence in religious institutions compared to male presence, women have constituted the most historically powerful force in American religious culture.[59] Following Braude's lead, historians of women and religion have documented the increasing vigor of women's religious participation and the widening scope of their roles,

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[57] Hymn no. 32, "Sin Confessed and Pardon Sought," *The Sunday School Hymn Book* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1819).

[58] Holifield, "Let the Children Come," 775. See also Robert W. Lynn, *The Big Little School: Two Hundred Years of the Sunday School* (Birmingham, AL.: Religious Education Press, 1980), 2-38; Boylan, *Sunday School*, 6-21; Finkelstein, "Casting Networks of Good Influence," 123-128; Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1770-1880* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 10-88.

[59] Ann Braude, "Women's History Is American Religious History," in *ReTelling U.S. Religious History*, edited by Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 87-107. See also Catherine Brekus, "Introduction: Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History," in *The Religious History of American Women: Re-Imagining the Past*, edited by Catherine Brekus (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007) 1-34.

particularly during the nineteenth-century spread of evangelicalism. Much of this work has emphasized women's roles as leaders and activists in various reform movements, but many other historians have also explored how women shaped American religious culture in more mundane, ordinary ways.[60] For example, Janet Moore Lindman argues that in order for scholars to understand how Protestant Christianity allowed some women to pursue spirituality, selfhood, and independence in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they need to look "beyond the meetinghouse" and overt forms of activism to study women's lived religious experiences on the ground.[61]

Sunday schools reveal the multiple ways that women's lived religious experiences shaped the development of American religious culture, particularly their efforts to create new methods for transmitting religious values to the next generation. While not at the apex of formal authority within the Sunday school movement, female superintendents

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[60] Examples of the first type of scholarship includes Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida Country, New York, 1790-1865.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986), Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), Nancy A. Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the 19th Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women in Early American Religion, 1600-1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (New York: Routledge, 1999), Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), and Anne Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[61] Janet Moore Lindman, "Beyond the Meetinghouse: Women and Protestant Spirituality in Early America," in *The Religious History of American Women: Re-Imagining the Past,* edited by Catherine Brekus (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2007), 142-160. Similar scholarship includes Emily Clark, "Hail Mary Down by the Riverside: Black and White Catholic Women in Early America," in Brekus, *The Religious History of American Women*, Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), and Catherine Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

like Victorine du Pont used the autonomy available within individual auxiliaries to find their own religious voice. Whether by writing supplemental curriculum, personalizing standardized practices like the rewards system, or defying evangelical convention by accepting Catholic pupils, women like du Pont exerted an authority through Sunday school worked that determined rhythms of religious life for thousands of American children.

The same was true of the hundreds of nameless female teachers who worked in Sunday schools. As noted, female teachers consistently outnumbered male teachers in both the Mason Street Sabbath School and the Brandywine Manufacture's Sunday School, just as they did in the Sunday school movement as a whole.[62] Even if they were not authorized to make the type of administrative decisions afforded to superintendents like du Pont, these female teachers were the ones enacting the pedagogical innovations that transformed the face of Protestant religious education. A similar phenomenon held true within the broader field of public education. According to historian Mary Kelley, "American classrooms were rapidly becoming a woman's domain," and by 1860 sixty-five to eighty percent of the teachers in urban areas were female. Kelley argues that women's work as educators was "the key…to the influence they exercised as makers of public opinion."[63] Similarly, through the weekly work of Sunday school teaching, women

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[62] Boylan, S*unday School*, 114-116.

[63] Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 10, 15. See also Boylan, *Sunday School*, 114-126. Page Putnam Miller, "Women in the Vanguard of the Sunday School Movement," *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 76, no. 1 (1998): 45-54, Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 10-11, Lucia McMahon, "'Of the Utmost Importance to Our Country': Women, Education, and Society, 1780-1820," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29 (2009): 475-506, and Andrea L. Turpin, "Ideological Origins of the Women's College: Religion, Class and Curriculum in the Educational Visions of Catharine Beecher and Mary Lyon," *History of Education Quarterly* 50 (2010): 133-158.

helped shape children's religious worldviews and implemented new methods of values transmission on the ground. While the names of most female Sunday school teachers and superintendents never entered the historical record, from the perspective of the children, women were the face of religious authority and innovation.[64]

Notably, many of these women who pioneered innovations within Sunday school education were young, single, and childless. By the antebellum period, mothers were celebrated as the ultimate authorities over childhood spiritual nurture. But in Sunday schools, which were increasingly accepted as the non-domestic compliment to parental instruction, many of the female teachers were not themselves mothers. This was due in part to the youthful age of many of the Sunday school teachers. Eleuthera and Sophie du Pont, who became Sunday school teachers in their mid-teens, are just two examples of this trend. Both the Mason Street Sabbath School and the Brandywine Manufacture's Sunday School followed the then standardized practice of recruiting adolescent pupils to serve as teachers, sometimes called "monitors," to younger classes of Sunday school children.[65] In order to accomplish this, both schools used the ASSU's specialized Bible class curriculum, which was developed specifically for adolescents. As the Boston Society for the Moral and Religious Instruction of the Poor noted in 1822, Sunday school organizers noticed that when the movement was initially founded "there has a mistaken notion prevailed among some of the children, that when they arrive at the age of thirteen

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[64] This argument is in keeping with a major theme of Braude's work, which is that women's continued "female presence" in American religion constitutes a major force that challenges the powerful men who guard the gates of formal religious authority. See Braude, "Women's History Is Religious History," 91.

[65] Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 50. James Aikin, the student who struggled to earn premiums, is an example of a pupil who went on to become a monitor and then a full-fledged teacher in young adulthood.

or fourteen they are too old to go to a Sabbath school." The society lamented this trend, declaring that "in fact, they ought never to relinquish their connexion [sic] with it, but, when qualified to become teachers, should endeavor to pay the debt of gratitude they owe" by passing along the instruction they had received to younger children.[66]

Affirming this sentiment, the ASSU developed Bible classes for students age thirteen and above. This curriculum was designed to give adolescences a distinct sense of belonging and featured more in-depth lessons along with Sunday school teacher training. The ASSU not only hoped to use Bible classes to keep adolescents engaged with Sunday schools until they reached adulthood, but also aimed to mobilize youth to eventually assume leadership roles within the institution and thereby make the entire movement self-sustaining.[67] Bible classes were embedded into the Sunday school system by the 1830s and helped recruit adolescent women to join the ranks of teachers. Given the higher percentage of female instructors, young women apparently found this to be an appealing form of religious service.[68] In the process of pursuing spiritual self-actualization through service, these female teachers helped define the Sunday school as a space where single and childless women could take the lead in the work of spiritually nurturing children, which was yet another innovation pioneered in Sunday schools that helped expand the scope of women's religious activity.

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[66] Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor, *Sixth Annual Report of the Boston Society for the Religious and Moral Instruction of the Poor. Presented at Their Anniversary, Nov. 6, 1822* (Boston, 1822), 11-12.

[67] For more on the development of Bible classes, see Boylan, *Sunday School*, 109-111.

[68] For additional examples, see Harvey J. Graff, *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 123-127.

This phenomenon was true not simply within American Protestantism, but in other religious contexts as well. Similar pedagogical innovations pioneered by women are apparent within the few Jewish Sunday schools that were founded in the antebellum era, particularly one in Philadelphia led by educational reformer Rebecca Gratz. Born in Philadelphia in 1781, Gratz chose to remain unmarried in order to devote herself to various social and religious reform activities. She founded her first organization in 1801, the Female Association for the Relief of Women and Children in Reduced Circumstances, and in 1815 she helped establish the Philadelphia Orphan Asylum. In 1819, she founded the country's first nonsynagogal Jewish charity, the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society. By the antebellum period, Gratz was increasingly concerned with the lack of readily available religious education for middle- and lower-class Jewish children. At that time most synagogues did not offer child-centric religious education programs and only the rich could afford private religious tutors for their children. Gratz believed that providing a shared religious educational experience for Jewish children was crucial to maintaining the soul of the American Jewish community. Moreover, she felt that raising the intellectual profile of the Jewish community would earn the respect of the Christian majority.[69]

Thus, in 1838, Gratz established the Philadelphia Hebrew Sunday School Society, writing that "we have never yet had a Sunday school in our congregation, and so I have

[69] For more on Rebecca Gratz, see Ann Braude, "The Jewish Woman's Encounter with American Culture," in *Women and Religion in America,* Vol. 1, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds. (San Francisco: Harper, 1981); Edward Wagenknecht, *Daughters of the Covenant: Portraits of Six Jewish Women* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), and Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery: Finding a Place for Women in American Judaism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

induced our ladies to follow the example of other religious communities."[70] The school met on a Sunday, so as not to interfere with the Jewish Sabbath.[71] While the school accepted pupils of both genders, Gratz only permitted women to teach, which was remarkable in an era when the religious education of Jewish children was deemed to be the province of men.[72] Like Gratz, many of the women were single and childless. Copying the model used in Christian Sunday schools, Gratz encouraged female pupils to become teachers once they reached adolescence, providing a new outlet for young women to serve the Jewish community. Moreover, Gratz exercised significant agency in customizing other aspects of the Protestant Sunday school model. After striking a deal with the ASSU to purchase their curriculum at a discount, Gratz spent time each week pasting over the Christian portions so that only Old Testament material that cohered with the Jewish faith remained.[73] Rosa Mordeccai, Gratz's great-grandniece and a pupil at the

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[70] Rebecca Gratz, as cited in and Joseph R. Rosenbloom, "Rebecca Gratz and the Jewish Sunday School Movement in Philadelphia," *The American Jewish Historical Society* 48 (1958): 71.

[71] Jewish Sunday schools were held on the first day of the week rather than on the Jewish Sabbath because Sunday was "a general day of leisure, and it could be devoted to this pious object without interfering with the exercises of other schools, and the avocations of the teachers." See "Memorial for the Instruction of Religious Israelites in Philadelphia," in Hebrew Sunday School Society of Philadelphia, *Second Annual Examination of the Sunday School for the Instruction of Religious Israelites in Philadelphia, Held at the Synagogue Mikveh Israel, on Sunday the 29th of March, 1840, 245h of Vedar, 5600* (Philadelphia: printed by order of the congregation, 1840), 5. When other women followed Gratz's example by establishing similar schools in New York, Charleston, and Richmond, they too called their institutions Sunday schools and held them on the first day of the week. Rebecca Gratz's niece, Miriam Cohen, started at Sunday school in Savannah, and Gratz wrote to her in 1840 to say "do not call your Sunday *Sabbath* School, my dear Miriam, let someone mistake your meaning." Rebecca Gratz to Miriam Cohen, January 19, 1840, as cited in Rosenbloom, "Rebecca Gratz and the Jewish Sunday School Movement in Philadelphia," 77. Perhaps due to the similarities in name, initially there was "some prejudice…at first manifested by various persons, who fancied they discovered an objectionable imitation of gentile practices in this undertaking," but due to enthusiasm for the institution among the female teachers and Jewish children, these objections soon faded and the school enrolled approximately one hundred pupils annually. See Hebrew Sunday School Society of Philadelphia, *Second Annual Examination,* 6.

[72] Ellen M. Umansky, "Piety, Power, and Persuasion: A History of Jewish Women's Spirituality," in *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook*, Ellen M. Umansk and Dianne Ahston, eds. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 6.

school, recalled that "many a long summer's day I have spent, pasting pieces of paper over answers unsuitable for Jewish children, and many were the fruitless efforts of those children to read through, over, or under the hidden lines…."[74]

Like du Pont, Gratz usually wrote supplemental curriculum, except her material was not only customized to her students but also emphasized basic tenets of the Jewish faith. Mordeccai described how most Sunday school sessions began with Gratz delivering "a prayer of her own composition, which she read verse by verse, and the whole school repeated after her."[75] Ellen M. Umansky asserts that these acts of writing curriculum and reading their own prayers provided Jewish women like Gratz with a means of challenging the sex-segregated society that governed the Jewish community while also enabling them to develop a stronger spiritual voice. In this way, Jewish Sunday schools "both armed their students with the means of combating Protestant evangelical claims (and at the same time learning more about Judaism) and afforded their female teachers new opportunities for spiritual expression and for participation in communal religious life."[76] Ultimately, in both the Protestant and Jewish contexts, the development of innovative religious educational models for children resulted in an expansion of religious authority and expression for women.[77]

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[73] The ASSU also reportedly waived the copyrights to their materials as well, see Hebrew Sunday School Society of Philadelphia, *Second Annual Examination*, 6.

[74] Rosa Mordeccai, "Memoir of Rebecca Gratz and the Hebrew Sunday School of Philadelphia," in *Jewish Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, Lloyd P. Gartner, ed. (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1969), 56.

[75] Mordeccai, "Memoir of Rebecca Gratz," 56.

[76] Umansky, "Piety, Power, and Persuasion," 7. See also Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna, "Introduction," in *Women in American Judaism: Historical Perspectives*, Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna, eds. (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2001), 1-14.

Engaging in Community

In addition to personalizing Sunday school instruction, and the resulting space these efforts provided for both children and women to influence the scope and structure of American religious education, another defining feature of Sunday school life was engagement with community. As Marah Gubar argues, relationships are one of the most significant aspects of children's lives. Due to their innate dependency on adults and the institutions adults create to guide childhood development, the relationships children form with adults determine their ability to experience and shape the world around them. While they inhabit two separate groups, children and adults are fundamentally interdependent, and children's lived realities are determined by the relationally-based frameworks that structure their daily experiences, from the family unit to the classroom. For this reason, Gubar asserts that a kinship model of analysis is one of the most fruitful methods of interpretation within childhood studies.[78] The kinship model of analysis is particularly relevant to histories of childhood in the nineteenth century. As a plethora of institutions were created in accordance with romanticized views of childhood that attempted to dictate every aspect of children's lives, young people's available relationship networks changed. As one of these institutions, Sunday schools provided a new outlet for children

[77] For more on the Philadelphia Hebrew Sunday School Society's mission and structure, see Hebrew Sunday School Society of Philadelphia, *The Constitution & By-Laws of the Hebrew Sunday School Society of Philadelphia. And the Superintendent's Report of the School for 1858* (Philadelphia: L. R. Bailey, 1858), Hebrew Sunday School Society of Philadelphia, *Second Annual Examination*, and Rosenbloom, "Rebecca Gratz and the Jewish Sunday School Movement in Philadelphia," 71-77. Full society records are housed at Temple University in Philadelphia. I was unable to travel to Temple University to view the entire archival collection, hence the brief treatment of Jewish Sunday schools in this chapter. I hope to expand this theme significantly in my future monograph.

[78] Marah Gubar, "The Hermeneutics of Recuperation: What a Kinship-Model Approach to Children's Agency Could Do for Children's Literature and Childhood Studies," *Jeunesse* 8, no. 1 (2016): 291-310.

to engage with religious community, and the relational bonds forged between teachers and students were one of the most distinctive aspects of this institutional experience.

In attempting to forge child-centric religious communities for their pupils, the Mason Street Sabbath School and the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School also worked to connect students to larger adult-dominated communities. Walley encouraged all of his pupils to attend Sunday church services with their parents, and he invited parents to annual celebrations, such as Thanksgiving, New Year, and 4th of July gatherings.[79] He wrote in the school's 1835 report that "it has given great pleasure to the Superintendent and Teachers to notice such general attention these days; and particularly on the day of Thanksgiving, to have the apartment filled to overflowing, with the parents and friends of the scholars. When we can enjoy the cordial cooperation of these, we shall feel greatly encouraged in our labors."[80] These gatherings, which were wildly popular with Sunday schools across the country, typically featured hymns, scripture readings, prayers, and a special sermon written for the occasion. For the anniversary gatherings that celebrated the Mason Street Sabbath School's founding, Walley sometimes also recited the student code of conduct and read descriptions of Christian virtues such as charity and hope, reminding attendees of the Protestant values that bound children and adults together in their shared faith.[81] Students and parents also participated in state-wide days

[79] Walley, *1835 Report*, 9.

[80] Walley, *1835 Report*, 9.

[81] For an example, see *Exercises in Mason Street Sabbath School, on Sabbath Day, May 18, 1845, in Observance of the Twenty-Eight Anniversary of Its Establishment*, Congregational Library and Archives. The Congregational Library and Archives contains comparable anniversary celebration exercises for the Mason Street Sabbath School dated 1837-39, 1842, 1845-46, New Year's celebration exercises dated 1835, 1839, and 1842-46, plus a similar undated document.

of fasting, prayer, or thanksgiving initiated by the governor of Massachusetts.[82] David Waldstreicher argues that these types of public gatherings played a crucial role in fostering unity and creating national identity in the early republic.[83] These fasting, thanksgiving, or 4th of July Sunday school gatherings served a similar function, not only reminding children of their connections to the wider world of evangelical Protestantism but also socializing them into the rites and rituals of American nationalism.

The Philadelphia Hebrew Sunday School Society also held similar gatherings, but they aimed to socialize children into a different community. Beginning in 1839, Gratz invited parents to annual examinations to watch their children publicly recite the scriptures and Jewish catechetical lessons learned over the previous year. According to Rosa Mordeccai, the examinations were usually during Purim, one of the holy feasts in the Jewish calendar.[84] A report from the 1839 examination stated that "the day fixed upon was one of anxiety to many a little heart; and fathers and mothers too, looked forward with some thrill of hope and fear to the probation of their children." Fortunately for everyone involved, "the exercises were highly pleasing, and…the liberal contributions, which were voluntarily made without any solicitation, proved more clearly than words, how pleasing an object our brethren had witnessed that day."[85] Similarly positive results were reported after the second annual examination in 1840, with the anonymous writer asserting that the event was a reminder that "a good work had been

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[82] The Congregational Library and Archives contains Order of Exercises for Days of Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer, along with Days of Thanksgiving, dated 1835, 1839, and 1843-45.

[83] David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[84] Mordeccai, "Memoir of Rebecca Gratz," 58.

[85] "Memorial for the Instruction of Religious Israelites in Philadelphia," 6-7.

done in Israel."[86] In contrast to Protestant Sunday school gatherings designed to socialize children into the intertwined worlds of evangelicalism and patriotism, Hebrew Sunday School Society gatherings were opportunities for adults and children alike to affirm their Jewish identity. Holding the celebrations on Jewish holidays probably served to remind children that they inhabited a distinct religious community rooted in rituals and traditions that predated the culture of American nationalism surrounding them. Moreover, such events also enabled the students to demonstrate their affiliation with the faith of their elders, strengthening the bonds of common belief that bound children's and adult's spiritual worlds together.

In addition to holding events that enhanced the interconnectedness of childhood and adult communities in both Protestant and Jewish contexts, Sunday school workers also emphasized the importance of the teacher-student relationship. Sunday school publications and manuals depicted teaching as a primarily relational, emotional activity. The New York Sunday School Union Society proclaimed in 1817 that, alongside a "competent knowledge of the scriptures," teachers must possess "a capability of teaching in a manner adapted to the capacities of children" and "an ardent affection for young immortals."[87] Michael Floy, a twenty-five year old Columbia College graduate and a teacher in the New York Seventh Street Methodist Episcopal Church Sunday school, reflected a common sentiment when he wrote in his journal, "the children are very near my hearts….I must pray for them every day."[88] Similarly, Samuel Walley expected his

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[86] "Memorial for the Instruction of Religious Israelites in Philadelphia," 8.

[87] New York Sunday School Union Society, *Hints on the Establishment and Regulation of Sunday Schools* (New York: 1817), 8.

teachers to take a sentimental approach to Sunday school work by endeavoring to develop personal relationships with their students. Teachers of both genders were required to make weekly visits to their students' homes, offering council and encouragement for godly living. Walley noted in his 1835 report that "several of the teachers are accustomed to have their scholars meet them occasionally at their own houses, for Bible-reading, familiar conversation, and prayer. *It is a most desirable practice;* and the more widely it is adopted, the more successful will such teachers be in their Sabbath instructions."[89] He added that home visits enabled teachers to develop connections with students' parents as well, which would facilitate trust and collaboration in the great work of bringing children to Christ. Sunday school teachers also often served as sources of support and comfort to parents when Mason Street Sabbath School pupils feel ill or passed away.[90] Although focused on the salvation of children, Sunday school teachers operated in a web of relationships that extended well beyond the classroom.

Teachers and students at the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School developed an equally vibrant community. Victorine du Pont claimed that the students possessed an immense affection for the school, writing in an article for *The Sunday School Journal and Advocate of Christian Education* that "the attachment of the pupils to the school is remarkable and truly gratifying to their teachers….they attend as punctually on the coldest and most stormy winter days as they do in fine weather and they are so anxious to arrive in time that they have been known to set off without their breakfasts in

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[88] Richard Albert Edwards Brooks, editor, *The Diary of Michael Floy, Jr: Bowery village, 1833-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1941), entries from December 3, 1833, p. 26 and October 4, 1835, p. 187

[89] Italicized as in original, Walley, *1835 Report*, 5.

[90] Walley, *1837 Report*, 15.

the dread of being too late."[91]According to du Pont, the explanation for this unusual enthusiasm was the rapport pupils enjoyed with the teachers. Like Walley, du Pont required her teachers to make home visits, which normally occurred on Saturday due to the fact that most of the pupils worked in manufactories during the week. "There can be no doubt," she claimed, "that visiting the scholars, if judiciously conducted, may be the means of greatly increasing the benefits resulting from Sunday schools." The reason for this immense benefit was that a home visit "forms the most intimate connection between teacher and pupil – private instructions suited to the particular disposition of the child may be joined to those received in school and will greatly increase their effort."[92] She also expected teachers to "converse with [the students'] parents" about their progress, in order to keep Sunday school instruction a family affair.[93]

While such demands were time consuming for teachers, many of them actually made special efforts to see their students multiple times throughout the week. Joanna Smith, a close friend of the du Pont sisters who taught at a nearby Sunday school, started a sewing class for her female students, which carried the joint benefit of training pupils in practical domestic skills while also enabling her to maximize her mentorship opportunities. She wrote that "many of my Sunday scholars attended [the sewing group], and I am more and more convinced of the immense advantage to be gained from being

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[91] Victorine Du Pont, Report, *The Sunday School Journal and Advocate of Christian Education* November 24, 1830, Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library.

[92] Victorine Du Pont, Report to the ASSU, 1832, Winterthur Manuscripts, Group 6, Series A, Box 13, Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library. Hereafter referred to as Du Pont, 1832 ASSU Report.

[93] No title, description of Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School structure and rules, March 1, 1830, Winterthur Manuscripts, Group 6, Series A, Box 13, in the Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library.

associated with these charges during the week. I have then an opportunity of becoming acquainted with their habits and dispositions."[94] In a letter to her sister Sophie, Eleuthera du Pont described how she and Victorine implemented the same practice, exclaiming joyfully that "there will be at least 30" girls that would be included in the group.[95] Such activities facilitated the type of intimate connections Sunday school workers desired, and inevitably some close friendships emerged. Joanna commented once to Eleuthera that "I intend to make a pincushion for Elizabeth Petimange…for you know she was a great favorite of mine," revealing the affection she developed for particular pupils.[96]

Close ties developed easily between teachers and students at the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School, partly due the fact that many students attended for the majority of their childhood and adolescence. One example is Harlan Baldwin, who began attending the Sunday school in 1816 at the age of four. From a Baptist family, Harlan progressed so well in his studies that he became one of the school's first monitors, helping to teach younger classes of students. When his family's departure from the Brandywine forced him to leave the school in 1828, Harlan was heartbroken. Eleuthera wrote to Sophie that Harlan received a special card before he left, and "the poor fellow was quite overcome, the tears in his eyes; Sister made him a very impressive address. Would you believe he came to school when he was only four years old? He has been in constant attendance eleven years!" Eleuthera also described how his departure created a

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[94] Joanna Smith to Sophie du Pont, February 4, 1835, as cited in Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 53.

[95] Eleuthera du Pont to Sophie du Pont, February 28, 1828, Winterthur Manuscripts, Group 6, Series C, Box 24, in the Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library.

[96] Joanna Smith to Sophie du Pont, January 7, 1829, as cited in Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 56.

void amongst the younger students, who were left without a monitor. Victorine was at a loss as to who to replace him, "hesitating who she will have to that honor."[97] For Harlan, the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School played a formative role in his upbringing that provided him with a religious community that not only nurtured his faith, but provided him with meaningful friendships with mentors and peers.

Like Harlan, many other students attended the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School for extended amounts of time, and many of these pupils were related. The Aikin siblings described above are one example. Mary, Jane, and John Orr are another example of siblings who attended the school together. As with the Aikin siblings, Mary and Jane won more premiums than John, which was a gendered pattern of achievement that held true for most of the Sunday school's pupils.[98] But all of the siblings were regular attendees from 1827 through the mid-1830s, providing yet another example of how the Sunday school functioned as an extension of domestic spiritual training for members of the same family. These siblings did not leave any written records of their experiences. However, many other students maintained contact with the du Pont sisters after they reached adulthood, reporting when they married, had children, or lost family members. One student, James Perry, corresponded with Eleuthera regularly, writing to her in 1861 to express his deep sorrow at the death of Victorine.[99] After James was killed

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[97] Eleuthera du Pont to Sophie du Pont, March 4, 1828, Winterthur Manuscripts, Group 6, Series C, Box 24, in the Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library.

[98] For a full record of female versus male rewards, see Premium Books from 1828-1861, Box 3, Acc. 389, Folder 14, in the Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library.

[99] James Perry to Eleuthera du Pont Smith, November 20, 1861, Acc. 389, Folder 6, in the Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library.

in the Civil War in 1864, his sister sent Eleuthera a newspaper clipping reporting his death.[100] Eleuthera also developed a close relationship with Mary Wilkinson, and the two remained in contact for the majority of Eleuthra's life. In 1865, Mary wrote to express her disappointment at not being able to see Eleuthera during a return visit to the Brandywine. She reported that "I tried however to make the best of my disappointment by going to the Sunday school and looking in the window," describing how "I was soon wending my way through the woods and over the well remembered path as I used to go to Sunday school, how strangely familiar every object seemed."[101] These efforts to maintain contact with their childhood religious community indicate that these students developed genuinely affectionate relationships during their time at the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School. For students like Mary Aikin, James Perry, or Mary Wilkinson, the Sunday school was a powerful relationally-based experienced that produced fond memories and treasured friendships that they maintained throughout the course of their lives.

Of course, the child-centric religious communities that teachers worked to create in Sunday schools were not always perfect. Like the fictional Tom Sawyer, Sunday school pupils were sometimes rowdy and rebellious. Disruptions were bound to occur in classes of approximately 150 students aged four to eighteen, crammed into a single room for hours.[102] Students sometimes came to class unprepared, like James Aikin or John Orr.

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[100] Mary Jones to Eleuthera du Pont Smith, January 1864, Acc. 389, Folder 6, in the Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library.

[101] Mary Wilkinson to Eleuthera du Pont Smith, October 5, 1865, Acc. 389, Folder 6, in the Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library.

[102] Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 59.

Others, already restless from being cooped up during the week working in the manufactories, were inattentive to their teachers and a distraction to the other students.[103] Joanna Smith wrote in exasperation to Eleuthera du Pont in 1833 that "yesterday was my Sunday to teach, and a wearisome day I had, I can assure you! My children never behaved so detestably."[104]

As superintendent, it fell to Victorine du Pont to handle these behavioral issues, which she did by appealing to children's emotions. She described her disciplinary methods in a report to the ASSU, stating "corporal punishment ought [not] ever to be employed in Sunday schools; it is only by kindness and affection that we can hope to influence our scholars." She went on to assert that "the rod can never be employed with success except by a parent, in any other hand it will give birth to no other sentiments than Malice and Anger – Love is the power by which we must work."[105] Du Pont's views reflected the common educational theory of the time, which held that physical punishment on the part of a teacher was a cruel act that threatened a child's ability to learn and violated parental authority.[106] When a child did misbehave, du Pont usually settled the problem by withholding library privileges, which was a blow not just to the child but to entire families who enjoyed reading Sunday school literature in an era when books were scarce in rural areas.[107] Gratz employed an identical disciplinary system, and

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[103] For additional examples, see Graff, *Conflicting Paths*, 86.

[104] Joanna Smith to Eleuthera du Pont, April 15, 1833 as cited in Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 59.

[105] Du Pont, 1832 ASSU Report.

[106] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 30.

Rosa Mordeccai recalled that "good marks, pretty cards, and a general desire to improve or get a prize" kept behavioral issues to a minimum.[108]

Sunday schools teachers were also not saints. Joanna Smith admitted to Sophie du Pont that she disliked teaching the literacy portion of the curriculum, preferring older classes of students who could already read because "that makes it much more interesting."[109] Teachers in the Masson Street Sabbath School sometimes struggled with boredom as well. Samuel Walley often noted with frustration that, while there is usually "no want of Sabbath school teachers" at the beginning of a new school year, many often failed to attend to their duties faithfully as the year progressed. He feared that house visits in particular were "too much neglected," and believed that "much of the present want of excitement in the Sabbath school cause, can be traced to this concern."[110] While some teachers were legitimately prevented from fulfilling these duties due to illness and family or work commitment, not every Sunday school instructor exhibited the same zeal as the Joanna Smith and the du Pont sisters.[111] Moreover, while Boylan notes that most Sunday school teacher accounts indicate the instructors usually enjoyed a vibrant community of their own, these young men and women did not always get along.[112] Michael Floy wrote

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[107] Victorine Du Pont, Report to the ASSU, 1836, Winterthur Manuscripts, Group 6, Series A, Box 13, Brandywine Manufacturers' and Christ Church Sunday School Records Collection, Hagley Museum and Library. Hereafter referred to as Du Pont, 1836 ASSU Report.

[108] Mordeccai, "Memoir of Rebecca Gratz," 57.

[109] Joanna Smith to Sophie du Pont, 1828, as cited in Linton, "Promotion and Improvement of Youth," 53.

[110] Walley, *1835 Report*, 3.

[111] For additional complains about unreliable teachers and other difficulties from the Mason Street Sabbath School, see Boston Sabbath School Union, *Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Boston Sabbath School Union. Presented February 23, 1831* (Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1831).

[112] Boylan, *Sunday Schools*, 101-131.

patronizingly in a journal entry from 1836 that during a teachers' meeting the "females kept up such a clack among themselves that I was disgusted." Even the most dedicated of instructors could find the Sunday school experience trying at times.[113]

Similarly, not all students took a liking to their teachers. Caroline Clarke recorded how she and her sister Anna did not always enjoy visits from their Sunday school teacher, because sometimes "Mrs. Taylor" was too forceful in her religious opinions. On one visit Anna worried that "Mrs. Taylor must want me to become a missionary," at which point the eight-year-old "cried right out loud." Caroline "tried to comfort her and told her it might never happen, so she stopped crying." Caroline was discriminating in her views toward other teachers, wishing that "I could be as good and pretty" as one young lady but choosing to defy another because she deemed the teacher's rules to be petty.[114] Such accounts reveal that Sunday school communities were, above all, profoundly human experiences. Teachers and students were flesh and blood characters who did not always live up to the ideals promulgated in ASSU propaganda. Like a nuclear family, the individuals who comprised a Sunday school were not always angelic or collegial. Yet many of these interactions were surprisingly intimate, revealing that Sunday schools sometimes provided real community for teachers and pupils alike. For good or ill, the relationships young people built in Sunday school impacted their journey to adulthood, marking the institution as a significant kinship network that gave shape and substance to nineteenth-century American childhood.

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[113] Brooks, *Diary of Michael Floy*, July 6, 1836, 244.

[114] Richard, *Village Life in America*, 30-40.

Subverting Cultural Norms

While some aspects of the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School and the Mason Street Sabbath School were distinctive, on the whole both schools were fairly representative of white Protestant religious norms. Other Sunday school communities, however, sometimes functioned as spaces that subverted white antebellum religious and social values. This was certainly the case for many African American Sunday school pupils. African Americans' experiences in antebellum Sunday schools are harder to determine, given that thorough records were not kept of these institutions due to the broader cultural resistance to black education, particularly literacy education. Some Sunday school missionaries hesitated to use the word "school" to describe their efforts, preferring the more ambiguous term "catechesis" to avoid the implication that they were teaching African Americans to read.[115] Moreover, as described in previous chapters, the Sunday school movement as prescribed by the ASSU catered to white Southern racist norms. The ASSU downplayed African American involvement in Sunday schools and instructed their missionaries and publishers to avoid the subject of slavery at all costs, choosing social acceptance over racial justice.

Despite the fact that the standardized system of Sunday school education often perpetuated systems of racial inequality, historians such as Janet Duitsman Cornelius have shown that Sunday schools for African Americans existed throughout the country, particularly in the South where African Americans were the a majority of many state populations. Some of these schools were founded by white missionaries affiliated with the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist denominations. Some of the missionaries were

[115] Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 132.

also affiliated with the ASSU.[116] African Americans also took the lead in establishing their own Sunday schools. According to historian Carter Woodson, black Sunday schools began as institutions housed in white churches, then separated into all-black schools taught by whites, finally evolving into organizations led entirely by the African American community.[117] Black-led Sunday schools existed in large southern cities such as Savannah, Charleston, and New Orleans. In Baltimore, the city's twenty black churches ran Sunday schools for 2,635 pupils staffed by 348 instructors and containing 1,604 books. Sunday schools also existed in smaller towns such as Lexington, Kentucky or Macon, Georgia.[118] The African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion were also eager to found Sunday schools, arguing that these institutions were critically important for African American religious and intellectual uplift. The AME Church opened its first Sunday school in Ohio in 1829. The denomination established nineteen Sunday schools and five common schools by 1842 in locations that included the southern border cities of Baltimore, Saint Louis, and Louisville.[119]

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[116] Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 135-137; Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 151-163.

[117] Carter G. Woodson, *Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 163.

[118] Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 133.

[119] John B. McFerrin, *History of Methodism in Tennessee*, Vol. 2 (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1874); Daniel Payne, *History of the African American Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: Publishing House of the A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1891), 222-225; Richard Wright Jr., editor, *Encyclopedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: A.M.E. Book Concern, 1916), 14; Michael Patrick Williams, "The Black Evangelical Ministry in the Border States: Profiles of Elders John Berry Meachum and Noah Davis," in *Black Apostles at Home and Abroad: Afro-Americans and the Christian Mission from Revolution to Reconstruction*, edited by David W. Wills and Richard Newman (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982), 90; Boylan, *Sunday School*, 28-29; Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 133. General statistics on African American church involvement throughout the South in this period, see Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 199-208.

White founders of black Sunday schools justified their efforts as a necessary means of evangelism for African Americans. They also looked upon these schools as a means of curtailing African American efforts to attain religious leadership through preaching, lecturing, and catechizing.[120] Charles Colcock Jones, an affiliate of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes, asserted in 1833 that "the religious instruction of the negroes by judicious, sensible, and acceptable white men, will destroy the *common colored* preaching in the country, or at least weaken its influence to a considerable extent."[121] In reality, however, white women were far more likely to found Sunday schools for slaves.[122] Cornelius argues that adolescent women were particularly active in founding Sunday schools, since they had the leisure time required for such pursuits.[123] European travel writer Frederika Bremer recalled seeing "some young girls, the daughters and sisters of planters, who are not ashamed of keeping schools themselves for the children of the slaves on the plantation, and of teaching them to pray, to think, and to work."[124] The daughter of plantation owner Thomas Dabney "held a…Sunday-school for the negroes," who reportedly "delighted in the chants and hymns, and knew much of the service and the catechism by heart. Many years after they were free, a brawny

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[120] Raboteau, *Slave Religion* 151-163, 170-171; Stephen W. Angell, "Black Methodist Preachers in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1840-1866: Isaac (Counts) Cook, James Porter, and Henry NcNeal Turner," in *"Ain't Gonna Lay my 'Ligion Down": African American Religion in the South*, edited by Alonzo Johnson and Paul Jersild (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 87-109.

[121] Italicized as in original, Charles Colcock Jones, *Third Annual Report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes* (Savannah, 1835), 13.

[122] Daniel L. Fountain notes that the task of catechizing slaves usually fell to women, see Daniel L. Fountain, *Slavery, Civil War, and Salvation: African American Slaves and Christianity, 1830-1870* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 51.

[123] Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 135.

[124] Frederika Bremer, *Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, Vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1853), 434-437.

blacksmith sent a message to his teachers of these days, 'Tell de ladies I ain't forgit what dey teach me in de Sunday-school'."[125] As with the case studies described above, starting Sunday schools for African Americans provided single women with a forum for exercising spiritual authority over children, along with enslaved adults. Moreover, as Catherine Clinton argues, southern women used such activities to "attempt to enforce Christian principles and to deal morally" with a degrading social system.[126]

Teachers in African American Sunday schools were expected to focus on the basics of Christian doctrine while avoiding literacy instruction, restricting their activities to singing, prayer, and reciting catechetical lessons. According to southern anti-literacy laws, instruction should be entirely oral. [127] Wilton Northcross, a prominent postwar Baptist preacher who grew up enslaved on an Alabama plantation, described acceptable Sunday school educational goals for slaves when he recalled how his mistress "made all the children, both girls and boys, come to her every Sunday, and she taught…[from an] old catechism." Northcross recounted that his mistress "wanted them to know how to pray, how to tell the truth and not to steal, and always try to do right in the sight of everybody and in the sight of God." But she was careful to only use the catechism to teach the Lord's Prayer and a few other necessary doctrines, since "it was against the law for them to learn to read and write."[128]

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[125] Susan Dabney Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter* (Baltimore: Cushings & Bailey, 1887), 197-198.

[126] Catherine Clinton, "Caught in the Web of the Big House," in *The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family, & Education*, Walter J. Fraser, Jr., R. Frank Saunders, Jr, and John L. Wakelyn, eds. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 30.

[127] For just one example of how one Sunday school complied with these laws, see Calvary Church of Charleston, South Carolina, *Public Proceedings Relating to Calvary Church, and the Religious Instruction of Slaves* (Charleston, Miller & Browne, 1850), specific examples on pp. 5, 31, 82-83.

According to most white accounts, Sunday schools were popular among the slave population, with white teachers frequently rejoicing that black pupils were eager to learn the catechism and many claimed to experience "revivals of religion" in their schools.[129]

What many white Southerners were unwilling to admit, however, was that Sunday schools were popular amongst African Americans not simply for their spiritual benefits, but because many of these institutions provided literacy instruction in defiance of the law.[130] For example, in Episcopal Sunday schools in South Carolina, the approximately 1,041 black students who attended in the 1850s were given access to literacy aids as part of their education, including religious pamphlets, ASSU hymnals, and the *Child's Scripture Question Book.*[131] Former slaves also recalled receiving literacy instruction on plantation Sunday schools. Squire Dowd of North Carolina recounted how his sixteen-year-old mistress taught him to read in a Sunday school class on his plantation, a radical move that undermined the efforts of white male slave owners to use religious education to cultivate submission and docility amongst slaves.[132] Similarly, young female students from the Cedar Park School in Prince George's County, Maryland, attempted to start a Sunday school for black children that also included literacy instruction. Their efforts were ultimately thwarted due to strong resistance from local gentlemen, an example of

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[128] Recollections of Wilson Northcross, in George Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography,* Vol. 14, North Carolina (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), 1:268. Fountain argues that many female Sunday school teachers chaffed under this rule, complaining that slaves' illiteracy interfered with their ability to learn Scripture. See Fountain, *Slavery, Civil War, and Salvation*, 51.

[129] For more see Fountain, *Slavery, Civil War, and Salvation,* 37.

[130] Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 137-139.

[131] See *Journals of the Conventions of the Diocese of South Carolina* (1855), 46-47, 53, 68-69, 70-71.

[132] Recollections of Squire Dowd, in Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography,* 1:268.

the violent backlash that often occurred after the founding of black Sunday schools.[133] As described in the previous chapter, the rise of militant abolitionism in the North led Southerners to accuse Sunday school workers of being secret agents of the anti-slavery movement with increasing frequency throughout the antebellum period. When Sunday school teachers or missionaries were caught attempting the equally offensive work to teaching slaves to read, their personal safety was often in jeopardy.[134] African American students faced similar threats, such as when slave patrollers in Bourbon County, Kentucky, broke up a Sunday school and whipped all the adults who attended.[135]

Accusations linking Sunday schools with abolitionism were not entirely unfounded, as the institution sometimes became a pathway to resisting slavery. Frederick Douglass helped organize a Sunday school in Baltimore "at the house of a free colored man named James Michell." Douglass used the class meetings to strategize with the other enslaved students about how to escape from bondage. Eventually the school was disbanded by irate whites who accused Douglass of being "another Nat Turner."[136] While this particular escape plan never came to fruition, as Boylan notes, "the revolutionary potential of black literacy was not lost on Douglass."[137] In other cases, Sunday school

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[133] Described in a letter from Anne Coleman to Lucy Oliver, Dec. 24, 1833, Oliver Family Papers, 1807-1864, Accession #10307, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.

[134] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 28-29. Generally speaking, Southerners were wary at best of any norther missionary effort for the same reasons, see Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 163, and John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 76-77.

[135] Elisha Green, *Life of Rev. Elisha W. Green, One of the Founders of the Kentucky Normal and Theological Institute ... and Over Thirty Years a Pastor of the Colored Baptist Churches of Maysville and Paris* (Maysville, Ky., The Republican Printing Office, 1888), 15.

[136] Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Collier-MacMillan, 1962), 111, 151-153.

work amongst enslaved African Americans radicalized white teachers to join the abolitionist cause. This was the case with Levi Coffin, whose three year term as a Sunday school teacher in the South caused him to develop "a deep concern for the moral and religious welfare of my associates," an impulse that he channeled into antislavery work.[138] In another interesting case, a group of abolitionist women from the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society posed as Sunday school recruiters to gain entrance into the home of a man believed to be holding a young black girls as a slave against her will.[139]

Such examples of abolitionist connections to the Sunday school movement only confirmed Southern white fears that the institution could be a means of fomenting social subversion, which were further exacerbated by the trend towards facilitating limited religious leadership for African Americans within many Sunday schools. Black instructors were often allowed to serve as assistants to white teachers, although they were usually restricted to leading oral exercises such as recitations of prayers and scriptures.[140] Even the Calvary Church of Charleston, which was particularly careful to note in church records that they were complying with anti-literacy laws, allowed a few "colored persons as oral catechists in a limited degree, and under regulations which restrict them to a course prescribed by the white ministers."[141] For these African American instructors, the

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[137] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 29.

[138] Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, the Reputed President of the Underground Railroad; Being a Brief History of the Labors of a Lifetime in Behalf of the Slave, with the Stories of Numerous Fugitives, who Gained Their Freedom through His Instrumentality, and Many Other Incidents* (New York: AMS Press, 1971) 72-72.

[139] New England Historical Society, Boston Ladies Free the Slave Child Med, accessed from http://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/boston-ladies-free-slave-child-med/

[140] See Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *"When I can Read My Title Clear:" Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 96.

[141] *Public Proceedings Relating to Calvary Church*, 21.

Sunday school provided a space in which they could practice religious leadership. Such activity usually did not translate into full religious agency, and Sunday school workers who supported abolitionism were in the minority. Nevertheless, many African Americans were able to take advantage of the autonomy allowed within individual Sunday schools to assert their desire to manage their own religious education and thereby defy southern racist norms, an impulse that would eventually come to full fruition after the Civil War with the founding of organizations such as the African American Methodist Sunday School Union.[142]

As the historical voices of teachers and students reveal, lived experiences in Sunday schools were complex and dynamic. As an institution, the Sunday school offered opportunities to exercise creativity and leadership, particularly for women but sometimes for pupils as well. They helped disseminate romanticized conceptions of childhood through the implementation of innovative pedagogical methods, thereby contributing to the broader formation of a child-centric culture. Sunday schools were also remarkably adaptable, serving as a means of spiritual survival for Jewish congregations or as sites of social subversion and self-advancement for enslaved African Americans. Yet their impact was also ambiguous. In the end, Sunday schools did little to overturn racial hierarchies, and the pedagogical methods they employed were not universally appealing to all

[142] Mechal Sobel demonstrates that religious institutions such as churches where often spaces in which African Americans could circumvent the racist laws of the South for their own social, religious, and cultural advancement. Moreover, these attempts to achieve religious agency in the antebellum period provided the foundation for full African American religious autotomy in the post-war period. See Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 207-217. See also Paul Harvey, "'These Untutored Masses': The Campaign for Respectability among White and Black Evangelicals in the American South, 1870–1930" in *Southern Crossroads: Perspectives on Religion and Culture*, Walter H. Conser, Jr., and Roger M. Payne, eds. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 250.

students. While some participants reveled in the relational networks fostered in Sunday schools, others felt out of place in these communities.

Ultimately, the Sunday school's impact rested on the particular personalities that comprised each individual institution, a reality that is key to understanding the movement's overall success. While the institution was not automatically attractive to every child, it did not mandate attendance and participation in the same way that weekly public schools could. Through their attendance and participation, therefore, children were the ones who ensured whether or not a particular Sunday school would survive. Parents also played a key role by sending their children to the institution every week. Consequently, Sunday schools actively catered to the interests of children and parents, while aiming to provide young people with vibrant religious communities that could support them in the journey to adulthood. In this way, the Sunday school "not only helped to define childhood and shape its contours, it mediated the meaning of religious experience to millions of youngsters."[143] Far from being static or oppressive environments, Sunday schools were meaningful parts of nineteenth-century childhood that not only enriched the spiritual and social worlds of individual participants, but enabled ordinary children and adults alike to participate more fully in the formation of American religious culture.

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[143] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 165.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

On May 27, 1860, the South Carolina Sunday School Union gathered to celebrate its forty-first anniversary. An auxiliary of the ASSU, the society read reports from its eighteen schools, celebrating the work of 293 teachers on behalf of 1,800 students.[1] A representative of the ASSU, Lutheran pastor William S. Bowman, then addressed the members. Bowman reflected on how originally "the Sunday school enterprise, because connected with small people, was by many regarded as small work; and when it first commenced it was a very small thing indeed."[2] He reminded listeners of Robert Raikes and his efforts to pioneer Sunday schools in England in the 1780s, describing how the "radical change of manners and morals" that occurred among the street youths of Gloucester captured the attention of other philanthropists and caused the movement to spread to Ireland and Scotland. Bowman then recounted the beginnings of the American movement. As Sunday schools became a pillar of the evangelical Benevolent Empire, Bowman noted that "like every other good work, it had its opponents….But it conquered." Now, Bowman exulted, "from the rock-bound coast of Maine to the golden shores of California," hundreds of thousands of children attended Sunday schools weekly and learned "the way of life and salvation." Bowman marveled at the remarkable growth the movement experienced in less than one hundred years. He invited the audience to

[1] South Carolina Sunday School Union, *Constitution and By-Laws of the South Carolina Sunday School Union. Forty-First Anniversary Report and Proceedings* (Charleston: Evans & Cogswell, 1860), 8, University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library.

[2] South Carolina Sunday School Union, *Forty-First Anniversary Report and Proceedings*, 9.

give thanks for the Sunday school's successes and rejoiced to imagine "Robert Raikes standing on the battlements of Heaven, and, as he listened to the praises of the angel children above mingling their praises with those of the children of earth, exclaiming, in triumph, 'who hath despised the day of small beginnings.'"[3]

His brief comment about "opponents" aside, Bowman's purpose was to celebrate the South Carolina Sunday School Union's accomplishments and encourage further efforts. As such, his account of the movement minimizes the significant challenges and transformations that Sunday schools encountered in the first half of the nineteenth century. When the institution came to America, it was grounded in a republican-humanitarian vision for using literacy to mold poor children into virtuous citizens and thereby check the spread of vice. This vision floundered, resulting the in rapid decline of organizations such as the First Day Society. Simultaneously, an evangelistic and child-centric model developed that eventually dominated the Sunday school movement by the early nineteenth century. Targeting children as the most likely candidates for conversion breathed new life into the institution, leading to explosive growth and the founding of a national Sunday school organization in 1824. But the founding of the ASSU only intensified a host of additional challenges. As the ASSU attempted to become the leaders of the youth-oriented religious marketplace that emerged over the antebellum era, the society had to combat middle-class resistance to Sunday schools due to the fact that most pupils were from the lower class. Just as significantly, the ASSU's attempts to dictate children's religious education generated critiques that Sunday schools usurped the authority of parents.

[3] South Carolina Sunday School Union, *Forty-First Anniversary Report and Proceedings*, 10.

But these challenges provided an environment for another phase of transformation. Recognizing that winning middle-class approval was crucial to establishing the Sunday school's dominance within the field of children's religious education, the ASSU effectively diversified the social makeup of the movement over the 1820s and 1830s. The society also worked to recast Sunday schools as useful supplements to domestic religious training, occupying a new "middle space" between the home and the church. As such, Sunday schools were natural extensions of the domestic realm, yet distinct from it due to the completely youth-oriented religious experiences they provided for pupils. The ASSU not only employed this rationale to strengthen its claim that Sunday schools were a necessary means of religious formation for American children, but also used it to reimagine the spiritual roles children could play within their families and communities. According to the ASSU, children could act as spiritually and morally transformative agents within the growing evangelical community, serving as sources of conversion, not just targets of conversion.

These shifts served to reinforce the Sunday school's function as venues of religious activity for children and youth. Some auxiliaries, such as the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School, continued to teach literacy and perpetuated the movement's role as a provider of basic education for hundreds of American children.[4] However, as public weekday education spread throughout the country and the Sunday school embraced its emerging role as supplement to domestic religious instruction, the movement increasingly became a setting for creating children's religious communities

[4] Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 22-34, 167; Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 229.

through a variety of strategies. The ASSU popularized material for these communities that presented complex constructions of childhood spirituality as both dependent and assertive, promoting an alternative form of religious agency that offered children the opportunity to use submission as a pathway to spiritual empowerment. Superintendents and teachers also attempted to personalize Sunday schools in order to make the experience more impactful for children, encouraging pedagogical innovation and collaboration between instructors and pupils. At the same time, Sunday schools empowered adolescents to serve as teachers, establishing a model of cultivating youth leadership among pupils that helped make the movement self-sustaining.

As the institution's religious function continued to evolve over the antebellum period, local congregations began taking active roles in determining the catechetical education provided in Sunday schools. The Mason Street Sabbath School and the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday School are just two examples of the how the ASSU's nonsectarian stance created space for pastors and parents to incorporate additional denominational instruction into Sunday school curriculum. The creation of denominational Sunday school organizations that competed with the ASSU for dominance of the youth-oriented religious marketplace accelerated this trend. As a result, despite the ASSU's best efforts, the Sunday school movement assumed an increasingly denominational character. In contrast to the Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist leadership that originally defined the movement, the South Carolina Sunday School Union exemplified the denominational diversity that characterized Sunday schools by the 1860s. Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Huguenot, and

nondenominational congregations all participated in the society alongside Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist churches.

The Civil War disrupted the ASSU's national mission programs and caused its publication sales to drop sharply, providing additional space for denominational societies to assume leadership.[5] Whereas the ASSU hosted the first national Sunday school convention in 1859, the second convention held in 1869 was convened by a group of male Sunday school workers from New Jersey who had met the previous year at the Young Men's Christian Association convention. Methodists were also particularly active in leading the 1869 gathering, and most ASSU delegates were relegated to honorary positions.[6] The purpose of this convention and the subsequent gatherings convened every three years for the remainder of the century was to encourage mutual self-improvement among Sunday school instructors and share the latest teaching techniques. Attendees also heard reports from Sunday schools across the country, most of which were increasingly affiliated with denominational structures rather than the ASSU. Denominational differences were laid aside at the conventions, however. Anne Boylan asserts that the conventions "fostered a new type of interdenominational cooperation by ignoring doctrinal issues and bringing workers together on the basis of a common interest in teaching."[7] The gatherings later grew into the World Sunday School Conventions, the first of which was held in 1889. These events continued to foster interdenominational unity by prioritizing teacher training rather than emphasizing common points of doctrine,

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[5] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 85.

[6] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 86.

[7] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 87. For more on Sunday school conventions, see Boylan, *Sunday School*, 85-88.

as the ASSU had done. By the dawn of the twentieth century, therefore, leadership within the Sunday school movement was increasingly decentralized, resting with regional denominational bodies, even as teacher training materials and gatherings assumed a more authentically interdenominational character.

Despite the growing dominance of denominational leadership, the ASSU continued to found Sunday schools well into the twentieth century. The organization attempted to maintain its influence by adopting new methods of evangelism in the 1920s, such as Vacation Bible Schools and Bible conferences. As a result, the ASSU ceased to focus specifically on Sunday schools, leading the managers to change the organization's name to American Missionary Fellowship (AMF) in 1974. The AMF continued to develop innovative programs in order to expand its outreach, and in 2011 the society was rebranded as InFaith. According to the society's website, the name InFaith was adopted "in recognition of the active faith that all of its people must have to engage the world with the gospel, and the dynamic way in which the Spirit works in the hearts and minds of men and women and children—that no one program or method could anticipate or accomplish." The organization's "mission celebrates its DNA and in the same pioneering spirit of all who have come before, continues to teach the unchanging truth of God to an ever-changing culture." [8] InFaith emphasizes the strategy of empowering individuals in local communities to effect national change, supporting field staff and interns who engage in a variety of evangelistic strategies, such as prison visitation, church planting, Bible summer camps, and adult retreats.

[8] InFaith, "Our Heritage," accessed https://infaith.org/heritage

The South Carolina Sunday School Union also exemplified other significant features of the nineteenth-century Sunday school movement that continued to define the institution in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. When the society was founded, the constitution stipulated that "the male teachers of all schools connected with the Union shall be members," a curious rule that did not reflect the overwhelming presence of women within Sunday schools.[9] However, Bowman noted in his anniversary address that women were just as active as men in the South Carolina Sunday School Union. Women served as teachers, superintendents, and authors of curriculum, defining the movement as a largely female endeavor. These female volunteers constituted the force that powered the Sunday school machine on the ground. They also utilized Sunday school teaching to expand the definition of female benevolent activity to encompass the public religious education of children in ways that were previously granted predominately to men in the eighteenth century. Additionally, single and childless women used Sunday schools as a pathway to assuming religious leadership over young people alongside mothers, who were deemed the natural custodians of childhood religious nurture. In this way, Sunday schools opened up new spaces of religious activity for diverse types of women who expanded the scope of female religious authority in early nineteenth-century America.

At the same time, this expansion was limited, at least in the antebellum period. Sunday schools continued to emphasize the trope of true evangelical womanhood, which held that women's special natures made them especially suited to the work of childhood religious education. Women were never on the ASSU leadership board, in contrast to the early phase of the moment when women frequently ran Sunday school societies alongside

[9] South Carolina Sunday School Union, *Forty-First Anniversary Report and Proceedings*, 3.

men. Thus, while Sunday schools encouraged innovative forms of public female religious leadership over children, they did not completely overturn culturally prescribed gender norms. As Boylan notes, most female Sunday school teachers did not join the ranks of feminists in the early nineteenth century.[10] She argues that Sunday school work "unquestionably had great appeal to many women and enabled them to see themselves as significant and useful beings….providing space and breathing room." Yet, the institution maintained "clear boundaries on the definition of womanhood." Boylan goes on to argue, however, that the growth of the convention movement helped women begin to break these boundaries. Women "emerged as visible participants" alongside men at conventions, and the overall proportion of female delegates rose steadily.[11] More significantly, women began to teach mixed audiences by running workshops, leading demonstration classes, and lecturing on pedagogical techniques. Such practices defied the evangelical Protestant demand that women only publicly teach children and other women. Although initially facing strong opposition from male convention participants, women persisted in assuming these roles. By the 1870s, therefore, Sunday school work facilitated more overtly feminist activities for women, further transforming the gendered nature of religious leadership.[12]

While Sunday schools helped enhance women's religious presence, they failed to confront the issue of racism. African American pupils were celebrated in the early phases of the movement, but they were progressively sidelined in the antebellum era as Sunday

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[10] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 123.

[11] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 123.

[12] Boylan, *Sunday School*, 123-126.

schools attempted to achieve national scope. The drive to secure middle-class approval led the ASSU to minimize African American involvement and to strenuously avoid the issue of slavery. As a result, the society not only failed to devote adequate energy to founding black Sunday schools, but it also refused to take a stand on slavery within Sunday school literature, sparking massive controversy with abolitionists. Despite the lack of formalized institutional support, some African Americans were able to use Sunday schools to assert their desire to exercise agency over their children's religious education, and sometimes even to subvert slavery and racist social norms. African American congregations also took the initiative to establish their own Sunday schools, creating a parallel religious community for black children who were excluded from the larger movement. After the Civil War, these efforts blossomed into formal African American leadership within the Sunday school movement, particularly following the founding of the Sunday School Union of the African American Methodist Episcopal Church in 1887.[13] Nevertheless, in the first half of the nineteenth century the children's religious communities that formed within Sunday schools rarely crossed the racial boundary, serving to perpetuate discriminatory practices.

Bowman was completely silent on the issue of race in his brief history of the movement, despite the presence of black Sunday schools throughout the state of South Carolina. Even without accounting for these pupils, however, he was correct in describing the movement as having attained national influence. Over the course of the nineteenth century, ASSU missionaries established over 70,000 new Sunday schools, spreading the institution from the Atlantic to the Pacific.[14] By the antebellum period over

[13] Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 339.

ten percent of white American children attended Sunday school.[15] Consequently, the institution became an established part of American children's religious culture. Sunday schools not only socialized thousands of children into evangelical Protestant norms, but gave them a space for formulating and expressing their own religious identities. As the Mason Street Sabbath School and the Brandywine Manufacturers' Sunday Schools demonstrate, children's affinity for Sunday schools could vary dramatically by individual, but overall the institution achieved remarkable cultural resonance. In contrast to other nineteenth-century reforms such as temperance, Sunday schools developed a staying power that continues to shape the church experience for many children to this day. Part of this resonance stems from adult enthusiasm for the institution. By prioritizing child conversion, nineteenth-century Sunday schools gave the Protestant community a practical means of acting upon their concern with nurturing children's spiritual sensibilities. Evangelicals were certainly not disinterested in children's religious welfare prior to this point. Nevertheless, the ways reformers reshaped the Sunday school's mission and methods demonstrates that childhood religious formation assumed heightened importance in the early nineteenth century.

Such efforts ultimately would have failed, however, without the cooperation of children and youth. Young people capitalized on the new religious space opened up for them, particularly by assuming the role of teachers within Sunday schools. Adolescent leadership was key to the Sunday school's survival, demonstrating the broader

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[14] Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada,* 230.

[15] American Sunday School Union, *The Fourth Report of the American Sunday-School Union: Read at Their Annual Meeting, Held in the City of Philadelphia, on Tuesday Afternoon, May 20, 1828* (Philadelphia: I. Ashmead & Co., 1828), 4, ASSU Papers. This number would have been higher if it had included African American and Native American children.

importance of youth to the nineteenth-century benevolent enterprise. At times adolescent leadership was often fundamentally disruptive to established social and cultural norms, such as when young Sunday school teachers taught enslaved children how to read or included Catholics in their classes. But even these conflicts reinforce the extent to which youth played central, complicated roles within the rise of benevolence. Ultimately, reformers' determination to ensure that young people had access to religious communities created specifically for their life stages paved the way for ideals and anxieties about childhood and youth to help propel the rise of volunteerism.

As Bowman demonstrated in his 1860 sermon, the creation of Sunday schools embedded new ideals of childhood into American religious practice, and into the national culture broadly. Bowman concluded his remarks by exulting in "the capacity of children to understand the truths of the Gospel, and its present applications to the wants of children. The religion of Jesus – the scheme of redemption – falls within their understanding as within the understanding of an adult."[16] For Bowman and the pastors, reformers, and teachers of his era, children were not just the "small people" who filled pews alongside their parents on Sundays. They were capable of religious formation and expression in their own right. This ideal, translated into institutional practice within Sunday schools on mass scale, elevated the role that age and life stage considerations played in structuring the Protestant experience. It enabled young people to assume their own place within the child-centric religious communities that appeared over the course of the nineteenth century, ensuring that children and youth remained inextricably connected to the growth of the wider evangelical community. Sunday schools not only helped

[16] South Carolina Sunday School Union, *Forty-First Anniversary Report and Proceedings*, 12.

transmit Protestant values from generation to generation, but the age-specific programs and practices they popularized helped elevate young people's status generally within American society, paving the way for the emergence of the child-centric culture that defines the modern era. Using age as a lens of analysis, therefore, reveals that American religion and American childhood developed simultaneously. Recognizing how the two narratives are intricately interwoven establishes a fuller picture of how religious power, belonging, and identities were defined and negotiated in the formative years of the nation's history. Young people were at the heart of nineteenth-century benevolent activity, making childhood and youth indispensable components of American religious life.

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