

## ABSTRACT

“Sweet Spirit Hovering Around Me”:  
Texas Methodist Women Face the Civil War

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Since the publication of David Bebbington’s seminal work, *Evangelicals in Modern Britain*, historians have defined “evangelicals” as those Christians who prioritize activism, biblicism, conversionism, and crucicentrism. This thesis examines the efficacy of that model to describe the women of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) in Texas during the American Civil War (1861-1865). I argue that the “Bebbington quadrilateral” aptly defines the institutional MECS during these years. However, white Methodist women diverged from that model as they grappled with the trauma of war, evincing a tenuous commitment to these “hallmarks” of evangelicalism even as they enthusiastically supported the Confederacy and embraced unconventional views of death and the afterlife. Black evangelical women, dealing with the trauma of slavery, also diverged from that model, holding similar tenuous commitments while participating in supernatural practices known as “spiritism.” Both black evangelical and white Methodist women maintained their new religious syntheses into the Reconstruction years.

"Sweet Spirit Hovering Around Me": Texas Methodist Women Face the Civil War

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of History

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## DEDICATION

To my family and friends whose love and prayers have given me the strength to carry this project through to completion. And to God, my Rock and my Redeemer (Psalm 19:14).

## CHAPTER ONE

### Why Texas Methodist Women?

#### *Thesis Overview*

Sarah Pier (later Sarah Pier Wiley), a young Methodist woman, was dreadfully missing her absent fiancé who was fighting on a distant battlefield during the Civil War. Writing to her fiancé, Sarah said: “I feel so near to you tonight – as if my spirit was holding communion with yours. I am enough of a spiritualist to believe that not impossible, on the contrary I believe it to be possible. I believe two spirits that are attuned alike, two hearts that love can through some unknown source communicate in language irrepressible – with each other - & I would not believe otherwise for the world – for it is such a comfort.”<sup>1</sup> This quotation is particularly striking because it explicitly states that Sarah chose to adapt her beliefs about the spiritual realm because of the comfort these new beliefs offered her. Such new beliefs meant a great deal to Sarah: they offered her the opportunity to commune with her absent loved ones, the ability to transcend her loneliness and grief for these men by being with them in a spiritual sense. Sarah was a religious innovator; she did not merely absorb and accept the teachings of her church but rather intentionally shaped her own faith to meet her felt needs. This pattern recurs throughout the writings of white Methodist women in Texas during the Civil War; Sarah’s ideological shift is just one of many that occurred during the Civil War years.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers, Inclusive: 1838-1868 (bulk 1853-1865)*, Accession #139, Box 1, Folder 5, Correspondence 1862-1865, n.d., letter from Sarah C. Pier to Mr. Wiley, n.d., Texas Collection, Baylor University.



In this thesis I will explore the difference between lay (specifically female) religious beliefs and practices, as compared to the doctrinal teachings and normative practices of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (hereafter MECS), in Texas, during the Civil War. I argue that overall white Methodist and black evangelical women departed from the conventional evangelical teachings of the MECS and adapted their faith to address the trauma they experienced in their daily lives. However, I find that neither white Methodist nor black evangelical women were as deeply pious as would have been expected; religion formed only a small part of their lives and was overshadowed by more mundane practical concerns.

I will begin this introductory chapter by defining my argument in light of the historiography and addressing the broader issue of women's religious history, or the idea of gender and religion. Next, I will briefly sketch the social context of antebellum Texas, focusing on its diverse populations and the difficulties white and black women faced. I will then present introductory considerations regarding antebellum Methodism and the 1845 split over slavery. Then, moving to a specific Texas focus, I will discuss the racial tensions which have come to be known as the Texas Troubles of 1860, trace their religious roots and connection to the sectional conflict in the Methodist Church, and finally elucidate how these tensions affected the daily lives of Texas women.

The second chapter will further describe the activities of the MECS in Texas. I will present the sermons of a prominent Methodist minister in Texas, the Reverend Homer Spellman Thrall, and focus upon how they present conventional evangelical views and subtly advance the Confederate cause. I will then discuss the hymnody of the MECS and how traditional evangelicalism is affirmed through the hymns, as compared to a non-

denominational evangelical hymnal of the times, and contrasted with midcentury secular music. The faith of African American evangelicals, as expressed through the hymnody of their spirituals, will be examined for its adherence, and points of departure, from conventional evangelical faith. Finally, I will discuss the involvement of white and black women in church-sponsored activities of the MECS, such as revivals, Sunday Schools, and pro-Confederate activism. I will also cover the divergent sermon experiences of white and black women within the MECS. Black women were also engaged in formal religion, but several areas looked different as participation in the white-dominated MECS services may have been either coerced or forbidden; they also may have been involved in a parallel religion with different services and thus hearing different sermons.

My third chapter will discuss the religion of white women during the Civil War years. Utilizing diaries and correspondence, I argue that religion was actually only a small part of their lives, and what religion was there was not exactly what they were being taught. White women departed from the message of the MECS in several ways. Based on their extant writings, they were not terribly pious people; more specifically, they were not attending church very frequently, and they recorded few prayers and devotional musings. Rather, they devoted most of the space in their diaries and letters to romantic love, news of the war, or the mundane details of day-to-day life and work, such as weaving, conflicts with enslaved persons, and so forth. Denominational distinctives did not figure much into the writings of white women. Departing from the fervent appeals of the MECS, white women were not very engaged in evangelism, concentrating their efforts on pro-Confederate activism. They neglected the cross of Christ as a focal point of devotion. Finally, their view of death shifted from a standard evangelical conception of

heaven and hell, to a belief that the spirits of the dead (and even the absent) were able to be present with their loved ones on earth; further, dead people transformed into angels.

What caused these dramatic shifts in white women's faith? The trauma of the Civil War caused them to seek a hyper-comforting evangelicalism to help them cope with all the death and carnage around them. The popular Spiritualism of the nineteenth century, while not being totally adopted by these Methodist women, certainly left its mark on their beliefs. And, more broadly, Methodist women were affected by an attitude of pragmatism, the compulsion to meet practical needs and simply to survive. They were not as interested in abstract theology or orthodox doctrine, as much as crafting their own faith that would fit with their everyday lives.

Chapter Four deals with the faith of enslaved evangelical women.<sup>2</sup> Enslaved women experienced the Civil War differently than white Methodist women did; therefore, they departed from evangelical teaching in different ways. First, they were more pious than white women in the sense that a great portion of the primary sources they produced relate directly to religion.<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, they were not explicitly Methodist and did not seem terribly devoted to their denominational affiliations and distinctives, even less so than white women, focusing instead on a sort of generic evangelical faith. Enslaved evangelical women expressed distrust in certain expressions

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<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the vast majority of my sources (WPA slave narratives) do not express any denominational affiliation so it is virtually impossible to identify someone as being Methodist or not. Therefore, I have had to broaden this chapter to evangelical enslaved women more generally.

<sup>3</sup> Again, slave narratives are very limited as sources. Because we do not know the questions they were asked by the interviewers, it is important not to read too much into their greater proportion of religious material.

of white Christianity but held onto their own forms of devotion. Also, evangelical biblicism was somewhat less emphasized; as non-literate persons, and also in line with their African traditions, they found spiritual truth all around them, in the natural world, rather than just in the written words of the Bible. Judging by the lack of mention in slave narratives, the cross of Christ was not a major priority for these women. Finally, enslaved evangelical women believed strongly in the power of spirits and ghosts in their lives (henceforth this cluster of beliefs will be referred to as “spiritism”).

Why did enslaved women express their faith differently than white Methodist women during the Civil War? First, the war itself did not affect slaves in the same way, as most slaves in Texas were non-literate and many white slaveholders purposefully barred their slaves from news of the war. While they might have hoped for freedom should the North win, most Texas slave narratives seem to communicate a lack of engagement with the Civil War; likely the war did not create nearly as much trauma for the already victimized enslaved women as it did for their white neighbors. More importantly, most of the wartime expressions of faith seem to have carried over from the antebellum years. I argue that slave religion had already adapted itself to the traumatic context of slavery and so did not have to newly adjust to war-related trauma and the experiences of violence, suffering, tragedy, and death. It has also been noted by scholars such as Albert Rabateou that spiritism and lack of biblicism was a holdover from African culture.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Albert J. Rabateou, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Chapter Five argues that the postwar expression of black evangelical and white Methodist women's faith does not differ significantly from that of the war years. White women, especially elites, experienced a significant social shift during the Reconstruction years. Interestingly, their religious practices do not seem to have kept pace with the changes. Black women also experienced a significant social shift in both positive and negative ways. They were freed from formal institutionalized slavery and legally permitted to seek literacy and education; however, they still experienced economic hardship and horrific violence from the white community. Black women expressed religious independence by joining new (or new to the South), all-black denominations, such as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church. Having already adapted to the wartime difficulties they experienced, evangelical women of both races weathered the storms of Reconstruction by holding onto the faith that had sustained them in the past.<sup>5</sup>

### *The Bebbington Quadrilateral*

I originally looked at the Bebbington quadrilateral as my interpretive lens. The classic historical definition of evangelicalism, the quadrilateral posits that evangelical groups, such as Methodists, can be distinguished by their unique commitment to four ideological and behavioral stances on faith. First, evangelicals are engaged in activism, which Bebbington defines as evangelistic efforts to bring others to an acceptance of the

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<sup>5</sup> In making this argument, I am going against Drew Gilpin Faust's masterful work *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008). I am not trying to make a counterclaim for the whole South or refute her whole argument, but merely to point out that this was not how things went in Texas, according to the primary sources.

Gospel. Second, evangelicals adhere to biblicism, a commitment to finding religious truth in the Bible alone, and generally resulting in a more literalist interpretation of Scripture. Third, evangelicals hold to conversionism, the belief that a conversion or “born again” experience is necessary for salvation. Fourth, evangelicals believe in crucicentrism, or devotion to the crucified, suffering Christ as the central focus of worship.<sup>6</sup>

This description very much holds true of the MECS, as will be detailed in Chapter Two. However, I found that this was not the most accurate lens to describe the faith of the women I studied. Bebbington’s sense of activism refers to evangelistic activity, whereas the women I studied were largely seeking a faith-based impetus for social action, as they (however imperfectly) merged their religious beliefs with their social concerns, seeking to enact their version of a just society. This tendency manifested itself in pro-Confederate activism (for white women) and advocacy for emancipation and equality (for black women). Biblicism received scant coverage in the primary sources; occasionally the women reported on the sermons they heard, and two women mentioned the importance of Bible reading in their devotional lives, but such references to biblicism are few and far between. Conversionism was occasionally mentioned, with one woman journaling about her own conversion narrative and another discussing revivals in her church, but typically conversionism was not a central component of the Methodist women’s faith. Most surprisingly, only one woman discussed the cross of Christ at all; as will be detailed below, Jesus received scant devotion from white Methodist and black

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<sup>6</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicals in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2-17.

evangelical women in this era if we judge from the extant first-person primary sources available to us.

How to interpret such silence regarding biblicism, conversionism, and crucicentrism is a difficult question to answer. It is possible that the women assumed the importance of the Bible, conversion, and Christ's atoning death and did not mention it in their diaries and letters because it was so much a part of their daily lives they did not consider it extraordinary enough to chronicle. Or perhaps they were truly uninterested in any of these components of faith.

### *Why Texas Methodist Women?*

Civil War Texas is a largely understudied field, particularly in religious contexts, so I am excited to contribute to the historiography on that. But regarding Methodism specifically, these women felt a great deal of control over their own destiny. The doctrines of free will and falling from grace shaped the fabric of their spiritual lives and practices.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps they felt more spiritual and social pressure to remain within the faith, considering that they believed that maintaining their salvation depended on their own efforts. Therefore, they were especially motivated to create forms of devotion which were helpful in enabling them not to abandon their faith during the turbulent war years. Additionally, they were not constrained by traditional ecclesiastical forms in the same way as Protestant women of other denominations might have been.<sup>8</sup> The continual

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<sup>7</sup> Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 27-46.

<sup>8</sup> See Nelson, Naomi L. Nelson, "She Considered Herself Called of God: White Women's Participation in the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church, 1820-1865" (PhD

turnover of pastoral care through the itinerancy system might have created a lack of accountability for Methodist women, leaving them free to innovate as needed.

Another aspect of Methodism that encouraged women's religious innovation was its history of progressive gender roles in the church. Methodists were originally influenced by an egalitarian ideology that valued the spiritual contributions and even preaching of women, the working class, and ethnic minorities. While this emphasis had foundered in the years preceding the Civil War, perhaps Methodist women still felt a strong sense of their own religious authority and agency, and this enabled them to pursue more creative routes to spiritual growth. Further, Scott Stephan has documented the sense of spiritual and moral power that evangelical women felt in the antebellum years in the domain of the home; even as the "separate spheres" doctrine was formally touted, submission to husbands did not render women religiously powerless or weak.<sup>9</sup>

As we study evangelical women, it is pivotally important to include African American women as a key part of the narrative. In the past, white historians have overlooked the historical contributions of African Americans to a shameful degree; this intentional oversight has been especially pronounced for African American women. Catherine Clinton writes, in a tone of righteous indignation, "African American women have been absent not only from historical accounts of the Civil War...Instead of seeking out the flesh-and-blood women who contributed to the rebirth of American freedom

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diss., Emory University, 2001), 29, for a brief comparison of Methodism with other denominations.

<sup>9</sup> Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).



during this era and after, the myth of the Mammy was carefully cultivated.”<sup>10</sup> Cultivating a multidimensional historiographic image of black women is not only more equitable but also much more accurate. If we hope to understand the experiences of enslaved persons, we must be open to hearing directly from them, trying our best to reconstruct their lives from the limited primary sources available to us.

### *A Word on Women’s Religious History*

It is also my strong belief that women’s religious history is entirely worthy of scholarly attention. Anne Braude’s seminal essay, “Women’s History *Is* American Religious History,” makes the point that the most obvious reason to study women’s religious history is simply that the majority of religious persons in America everywhere and at all times have been female.<sup>11</sup> When she wrote in 1997, the majority of religious history had been written by men and about men and tended to focus on elite (male)

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<sup>10</sup> Catherine Clinton, *Stepdaughters of History: Southern Women and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 84. She explains the “myth of the Mammy” as the depiction of African American women as happy, devoted, and subservient slaves to their white masters.

<sup>11</sup> Anne Braude, “Women’s History *Is* American Religious History,” in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997). Most dramatically, she states flatly, “...we cannot expect to understand the history of religion in America until we know at least as much about the women who have formed the majority of participants as we do about the male minority who have stood in the pulpit” (1107). Cynthia Lynn Lyster makes a similar point about southern religion in her essay, “Women and Southern Religion,” in *Religion and the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, ed. Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Matthews (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Braude narrates that “the nineteenth century saw a vast increase in the activities and influence of the female laity” (Braude, “Women’s History,” 97), and my project fits into the larger historiography on the expansive involvement of women in the church and their private devotional lives.

clerical voices. Thankfully, since that time there has been a flowering of scholarly interest in women's religiosity and hundreds of books and articles have been published exploring this pivotal area.

However, for whatever reason, the majority of works in women's religious history have been narrowly focused on the closely related issues of female ordination and preaching.<sup>12</sup> The standard narrative is that women were oppressed by their religion, pushed into silent submission against their wills by male clergy and patriarchs, but that they managed to subvert the hierarchy and find ways to assert their agency in this context. Finally, after decades of effort, women in mainline denominations achieved their dream of female ordination and preaching in the twentieth century. The tone of this historiography is very Whiggish and tends to be rather elitist, describing the heroic struggles of a few elite women to secure more of a public leadership role in their churches.<sup>13</sup> To me, along with other female scholars, this historiography is both stereotypical and minimalistic; for one thing, not all women desired to preach, just as not all men desired to preach. Catherine Brekus also explains that many women who hold traditional or conservative beliefs assert their agency in fighting to preserve these beliefs,

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<sup>12</sup> A few examples will suffice: Jean Miller Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient: A History of Women in American Methodism, 1760-1939* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1999); Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1965). Butterfield defines "Whig" historiography as conceptualizing historical events as an inevitable march towards progress. In the religious realm, Whig historiography would view groups seen as "traditional" or "conservative," such as Roman Catholics or conservative/complementarian evangelical Protestants, in a negative sense, as regressive and holding back the tide of history.

not overturn the status quo.<sup>14</sup> And Ann Braude herself states, “Women’s significance in groups considered marginal must not be allowed to obscure their centrality in maintaining what scholars traditionally have called the ‘mainstream.’”<sup>15</sup> Surely some women found meaning and happiness through their voluntary embrace of domesticity and traditional gender roles rather than being forcibly subordinated by insensitive hierarchs.<sup>16</sup>

My larger issue with such a depiction of women’s religious history is that it ignores and minimizes so much of women’s religious experiences and praxis, focusing instead primarily upon a few elite women’s struggle for ordination and the right to preach.<sup>17</sup> My goal in this thesis is to illumine some of the broader aspects of Methodist women’s religiosity: their beliefs about social activism and the afterlife, and how these beliefs manifested themselves in actions such as prayer, devotional practices, activism,

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<sup>14</sup> Catherine Brekus, “Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History,” in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 27-28.

<sup>15</sup> Braude, “Women’s History,” 90.

<sup>16</sup> Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, “Women and Southern Religion,” 266-267. For twentieth-century examples of this phenomenon, see R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) and James Ault, *Spirit and Flesh: Life in a Fundamental Baptist Church* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004). Braude writes, “It can also be argued that debates about gender roles have increased the vigor of conservative religious groups. Some studies suggest that women are attracted to conservative religious communities precisely because they offer access to traditional roles of wife and mother.” (Braude, “Women’s History,” 103).

<sup>17</sup> As Cynthia Lynn Lyerly writes, “[women] had personal, interior religious lives that could not be contained. They communed with God, prayed, read Scripture, pored over devotional literature, and searched their hearts for godliness and sin...the study of women and religion must encompass both [public and private]” (Lyerly, “Women and Southern Religion,” 249).

evangelism, journaling, and correspondence. I hope to draw attention to women whose experiences have historically been ignored and overlooked, downplayed as insignificant, or otherwise degraded. I want to uplift our view of these women so that they are treated with the respect they deserve as legitimate moral and religious agents.

### *Antebellum Texas Women*

During the antebellum years of the late 1840s and 1850s, Texans were finding their place in the new republic. As "frontiersmen," citizens of a new state officially annexed in 1845, white Texans had the opportunity to shape a new society, and they chose to establish slavery as their official socioeconomic system. Traffic in slaves was so prevalent that enslaved persons comprised one-third of the total Texas population by the time the Civil War began.<sup>18</sup> In the past, particularly after Lost Cause ideology became dominant in the 1890s, white historians as well as the shapers of popular culture have depicted slavery as a benign institution in which enslaved persons and their white "families" coexisted in a state of mutual care, harmony, and benevolence. While a few Texas slave narratives express a sense of closeness and harmony with slaveholders,<sup>19</sup> such harmony was not the norm. Slave narratives more often chronicle horrific tales of

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<sup>18</sup> B.P. Gallaway, ed., *Texas: The Dark Corner of the Confederacy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 24, in Rosalie Beck, "For the Love of God and Country: Texas Baptist Women and the Civil War," *Texas Baptist History: The Journal of the Texas Baptist Historical Society* 35-36 (2015-2016), 25.

<sup>19</sup> Again, slave narratives are a source which must be interpreted with great caution, considering possible intimidating behaviors, bias in interpretation, and selective transcription on the part of the editor. But several slave narratives do tell stories of caring slaveholders, usually women.

abuse and inhumane treatment at the hands of slaveholders and sometimes white neighbors.

At the same time as the injustices of slavery thrived in Texas, the new state marginalized free people of color; they were not only subject to various types of severe legislation, but also their very presence was forbidden in Texas since 1836.<sup>20</sup> Such legal barriers and the intimidation and fear such hateful laws would have evoked among the free black population proved to be largely successful, as by 1861 free people of color comprised less than one-fifth of one percent of all African Americans in Texas.<sup>21</sup> Whether free or enslaved, then, black Texans endured persecution, violence, and hateful vitriol at horrific levels.

White people in Texas, especially elite slaveowning ones, were perpetrators of violence and causers of displacement among the black population. But their lives were by no means smooth and easy, either. Usually emigrants from other southern states, white Texans were isolated from their families and friends and often living in lonely remote locations. Additionally, their physical health troubled them greatly; throughout the nineteenth century, white women's diaries and letters complain of suffering through frequent physical ailments such as difficulties with their eyesight, headaches (sometimes migraines), fevers, cysts or growths, and malaria. Death in childbirth, for both mothers and children, was a troublingly real risk for these women. Physical maladies often

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<sup>20</sup> Ron Tyler and Lawrence R. Murphy, eds., *The Slave Narratives of Texas* (Austin, TX: State House Press, 1997), xxxix; Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 201.

<sup>21</sup> Beck, "For the Love of God," 25, gives the statistics: the entire state population was 604,215; the enslaved population was 182,566; and the population of free people of color was 355.

affected the enslaved population as well, and white women frequently chronicle either nursing their slaves or calling the doctor to care for them.

Emotional pressure upon women, both free and enslaved, also would have affected Texan women. The secular songs of the antebellum period provide an interesting barometer of the cultural values regarding women's roles that Texas Methodist women could have felt the need to conform to. Stephen C. Foster's "Jenny June" (1854) presented the idealized woman as pure, cheerful, and uplifting to her male companion (possibly a beau). No doubt the pressure to be sincere would be stifling at times: "For her heart is warm and pure/And as guileless as the flowers/In the sweet summer time."<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the woman in Foster's "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming" (1855) was also uplifting and cheerful with a "light...heart."<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the same expectation was placed upon African Americans in the popular ballad, "My Old Kentucky Home, Good-Night" (Stephen C. Foster, 1853); Foster said, "'Tis summer, the darkies are gay."<sup>24</sup> This racist epithet combined with the expectation of assumed happiness would have no doubt been very painful for the African Americans who heard this song.

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<sup>22</sup> Gregg Smith, ed., *America's Bicentennial Songs from the Great Sentimental Age, 1850-1900, Stephen C. Foster to Charles E. Ives* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1975), "Jenny June," 20-22, quotation from page 22. For a (somewhat dated) discussion of the importance of sincerity in nineteenth-century culture, particularly in regard to women's roles, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982).

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *America's Bicentennial Songs*, "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming," 26-37, quotation from page 32.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., "My Old Kentucky Home, Good-Night," 126-130, quotation from page 127.

As a border state and a frontier state, Texas was deeply affected by immigration and emigration; the population was rapidly growing as both foreigners and native-born Americans of all races flooded into Texas. European immigrants, including German Catholics, entered Texas through the port city of Galveston, while emigrants from other states came to the fertile cotton-growing area seeking economic prosperity. The Texas-Mexico border was also a site of contention as some slaveowners feared that their slaves would be induced to run away to Mexico as a conveniently nearby location. And sporadic armed conflicts with Native Americans still troubled white Texans as well. Altogether, antebellum Texas was a diverse society, but beset by aggressions and fears of cultural others as well as illnesses and isolation. What could religion offer the troubled residents of Texas and how did they use it to cope with their situation?

### *Antebellum Methodism*

In the antebellum years, residents of Texas were converting to the "frontier religion" of Methodism in droves. In *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South*, Mitchell Snay writes that as of 1850, Methodism "outnumbered all other denominations in...Texas" as well as other Southern states.<sup>25</sup> To give just one specific example, Brazoria County only counted twelve churches in 1860: "one Baptist, one Roman Catholic, two Presbyterian, and eight Methodist."<sup>26</sup> While not unanimously

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<sup>25</sup> Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 127.

<sup>26</sup> This data comes from the 1860 census cited in Sallie McNeill, *The Uncompromising Diary of Sallie McNeill, 1858-1867*, ed. and with an introduction by Ginny McNeill Raska and Mary Lynne Gasaway Hill (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 9. The editors explain that although most Texans were not formal members of any religious group, Methodists had a "statewide dominance" (9).

by any means, a majority of religious Texans selected Methodism as their denomination of choice.

Methodism was a natural fit for Texas for several reasons: itinerant preachers were able to reach a large amount of territory in a vast and sparsely settled area, and it was democratic, welcoming all people to participate without regard to social status.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the denomination was newly popular throughout the nation as a result of the Second Great Awakening of the 1820s. Robert Miller refers to Methodism as “literally the most extensive national institution in antebellum America other than the federal government.”<sup>28</sup>

However, that “national institution” was in no way unanimous, united, or undivided. Several small-scale splits in the early nineteenth century (resulting in the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church) were followed by a much larger split in the 1840s over the issue of slavery. The split began at the 1844 General Conference, when the southern delegates supported the installation of slaveholder James Osgood Andrew as bishop, while the northern delegates opposed it. (Although John Wesley and the early Methodists had been opposed to slavery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this emphasis on equality had

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They cite James A. Creighton, *A Narrative History of Brazoria County* (Waco, TX: Brazoria County Historical Commission, 1975), 37, 48.

<sup>27</sup> John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 191, 194; Daniel Scalberg (Multnomah University History Department Chair), class lecture, spring 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Robert J. Miller, *Both Prayed to the Same God: Religion and Faith in the American Civil War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. – Lexington Books, 2007), 64.



gradually died away in the southern states as the church moved to support the dominant social order of the times.) Although the split provides obvious evidence of irreconcilable differences, at first the northern and southern branches maintained joint publishing arms and cooperated in numerous small enterprises before tensions erupted into vitriolic propaganda (on both sides) and nasty court battles in the late antebellum years.<sup>29</sup>

*Privileged Paranoia: Texas Slaveholders Face the Abolitionist Agitators*

The sociocultural tensions in antebellum Texas and the religious tensions in antebellum Methodism converged in a series of intensely dramatic events in the 1850s, culminating in 1860, known as the “Texas Troubles.” As stated above, Methodism was riven by propagandistic vitriol. In 1857, MECS minister William Gannaway Brownlow said of the MEC (northern branch), “[If] we find any of them in Heaven, where we expect to go after death, we shall conclude they have got in by practicing a fraud upon the door-keeper!”<sup>30</sup> It is amazing to reflect that such hateful words referred to Brownlow’s own theological brothers, the Methodist Episcopal Church, North. In the same source quoted

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<sup>29</sup> Several good general histories cover American Methodism from its beginning to the present and spell out these historical developments in more detail. An excellent place to start is this survey of transatlantic Methodism: David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005). For a look at a specific regional history, see Christopher H. Owen, *The Sacred Flame of Love: Methodism and Society in Nineteenth-Century Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998). Jean Miller Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, is very focused on the narrow issue of women’s preaching but has helpful explanations of the development of American Methodism more generally.

<sup>30</sup> William Gannaway Brownlow, *A Sermon on Slavery: A Vindication of the Methodist Church, South: Her Position Stated. Delivered in Temperance Hall, In Knoxville, On Sabbath, August 9th, 1857, to the Delegates and Others in Attendance at the Southern Commercial Convention* (Knoxville, TN: Kinsloe & Rice, 1857), 13. Accessed on HathiTrust.

above, *Sermon on Slavery: A Vindication of the Methodist Church, South: Her Position Stated* (1857), Brownlow referred to Northern abolitionists as “bigots” and slavery as “[divinely sanctioned].” Brownlow talked about the Southern branch of the Methodist church, which had broken off, as “a sister Church, struggling against a God-forsaken combination of Freesoilers, Black Republicans, and Abolitionists.”<sup>31</sup>

Slaveholders in the denomination viewed themselves as a persecuted minority, victims of the power mongering of the Northern Methodists.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, they saw the Northern Methodists as violators of the concept of the separation of church and state, arguing that “the abolitionists had violated a sacred tenet of Methodism by injecting slavery, a political issue, into the life of the church.”<sup>33</sup> So in the eyes of Southern Methodists, “the true principles of Methodism” were only practiced in their own southern branch.<sup>34</sup> This polarizing anger and bitterness permeated Southern Methodism and was expressed in increasingly forthright, forceful, and furious propaganda.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, the Northern Methodists were none too pleased with their southern brothers, viewing the southerners as the true betrayers of their shared Wesleyan

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>32</sup> Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 130-31.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 131, cf. 132.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>35</sup> Snay cites many examples of official statements from various dioceses of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, all with an indignant and defensive posture towards their Northern brothers (ibid., 131-134).

heritage.<sup>36</sup> Looking back at these events, historians agree with the North; John H. Wigger, for one, argues that Methodism's need to appeal to the masses led them to compromise on the important issue of slavery.<sup>37</sup> But at the time the issues were not so clear-cut; the condemnation was certainly not one-sided, and bitter conflicts plagued relations between the two churches. This has been conceptualized as nothing less than a full-fledged "war" in which "[resolutions], pastoral addresses and editorials in regional *Advocates* lobbed volleys...section against section, conference against conference, church against church."<sup>38</sup>

In *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, Mark Noll flags the importance of the Methodist and Baptist denominational splits to nineteenth-century American evangelicals, quoting from John C. Calhoun and Henry Clay.<sup>39</sup> Both men said that the demise of the evangelical synthesis portended a larger split in the American synthesis and

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<sup>36</sup> J. Gordon Melton, *A Will to Choose: The Origins of African American Methodism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 181.

<sup>37</sup> Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 193.

<sup>38</sup> Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Erin Miller Schmidt, *American Methodism: A Compact History* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), 87. See also Miller, *Both Prayed to the Same God*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 27-28. Noll cites C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schism and the Coming of the Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), especially page 106, where Clay is quoted; Richard K. Cralle, ed., *The Works of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 4, *Speeches of John C. Calhoun, Delivered in the House of Representatives and the Senate of the United States* (New York: D. Appleton, 1854), 557-58.

therefore was greatly to be mourned.<sup>40</sup> Historians today corroborate this idea.<sup>41</sup> To nineteenth-century Americans, the split was not merely a church squabble but rather a foreboding symbol of the hatred and division in their country.

Concurrently with the religious tensions in the Methodist theological camp, sociopolitical tensions wracked the frontier state of Texas. A series of rumored slave insurrections and lynch-mob style vigilante “justice” terrorized Texas residents, particularly targeting enslaved persons and suspected Northern abolitionists. The most dramatic of these alleged plots occurred in 1860 and is known as the “Texas Troubles.” These two conflicts, the religious and the political, were connected to each other. I believe that the Texas Troubles were deeply entangled in the 1844 split in the Methodist Church and the subsequent tensions between the MEC and the MECS. Additionally, primary source accounts were spiced with religious rhetoric, further underscoring the essentially religious nature of the conflict. The religious language used by the MECS in particular provided them a self-justifying, self-exonerating view of the Texas Troubles. Not only this, the religious rhetoric intensified the conflict in their minds and spurred them on to violence in the form of vigilante “justice.”

What did the MEC/MECS division mean for Texans? A wave of paranoia and panic swept Texan Methodism as people feared that abolitionist agitators from the Northern branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church were fomenting slave revolts in their

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<sup>40</sup> Noll, *Civil War*, 27-28.

<sup>41</sup> For example, see Richard Carwardine, “Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War,” in *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press – Kingswood Books, 2001), 331.

region. These haunting fears drove Texas Methodists during the antebellum years to relate to their Northern counterparts with fear and hostility, trying to protect their region from the evil influence of the radical rebels, who only a few years before would have been embraced as brothers and sisters in Christ. For example, an 1859 meeting of the Northern Methodists at Timber Creek was threatened and run out of the state because they were suspected of “spreading abolitionist ideas and documents among the people.”<sup>42</sup> And Parson McKinney, possibly a Methodist preacher, was severely beaten by a vigilance committee and run out of Dallas.<sup>43</sup> Those who found themselves on the wrong side of the Methodist split, or those who were associated with the North (as Iowa-born Parson McKinney was) could expect no mercy at the hands of their supposed countrymen or fellow Christians.

This tension and fear was exacerbated by the many groundless yet often-repeated rumors of slave insurrections in the Southern states, which grew in frequency and

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<sup>42</sup>Donald E. Reynolds, *Texas Terror: The Slave Insurrection Panic of 1860 and the Secession of the Lower South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 16. Reynolds cites a primary source document, the Bonham *Era*, March 19, 1860, clipped in Nashville *Christian Advocate*, April 21, 1860. He also cites Charles Elliot, *South-Western Methodism: A History of the M.E. Church in the South-West, from 1844 to 1864* (Cincinnati, OH: Poe & Hitchcock, 1868), 127-129.

<sup>43</sup> Donald E. Reynolds details this incident in *Texas Terror*, 17, and his footnote (also from page 17) is worth reproducing in full: “McKinney’s denominational affiliation is uncertain. Most contemporary editors and politicians referred to him and his ministerial friend, William Blunt, as Methodists and thus connected both men with the Timber Creek ‘vanguard’ that allegedly sought to abolitionize Texas. However, a northern journal in Blunt’s home state of Wisconsin later reported that both men were ‘of the Campbellite persuasion.’” (Madison *State Journal*, n.d., quoted in William Lloyd Garrison, *The New ‘Reign of Terror’ in the Slaveholding States for 1859-1860* [New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969], 30. Reynolds also cites David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 175.

severity after Nat Turner's rebellion.<sup>44</sup> Texas historian Donald E. Reynolds claims that this seemingly irrational fear had at least some slight basis in reality, as enslaved persons frequently responded to their masters with "individual acts of rebellion."<sup>45</sup> At the same time, white Southerners believed that African Americans were "naturally docile," and thus attributed insurrections and even "slave rebelliousness" to Northern abolitionists.<sup>46</sup> So while paranoia was very much an aspect of the Texan Methodists' interaction with the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, the Texans' fears of a massive slave rebellion were also caused by a logical extension of their own beliefs and experiences.

The most intense outbreak of the overall tension took place in an event known as the Slave Insurrection Panic of 1860 or the "Texas Troubles." In his monograph on the topic, Donald E. Reynolds argues that this little-known event acted as a precipitating crisis for secession, which of course soon led to the Civil War itself.<sup>47</sup> Other than the general "fear of abolitionist activity" which upset the South as a whole in this time, Reynolds flags a drought, "frontier lawlessness," and conflicts between Native

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<sup>44</sup> Reynolds, *Texas Terror*, 2. Reynolds cites Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 136. Stampp said that, "Hardly a year passed without some kind of alarming disturbance somewhere in the South."

<sup>45</sup> Reynolds, *Texas Terror*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., xi. Randolph B. Campbell succinctly makes the same argument in *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*, 220. And this appears to be the official interpretation propounded by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission. "1860: Big Trouble," *Texas State Library and Archives Commission*, February 19, 2016. <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/exhibits/civilwar/trouble.html>.

Americans and Mexicans as additional stressors in Texas.<sup>48</sup> The actual event consisted of rumors of arson and poisoning plots in the Dallas area on the part of slaves and abolitionists, leading to the executions of three African American men in Dallas and somewhere between thirty to one hundred people in total.<sup>49</sup> While much ink has been spilled by historians as to whether the plot did or did not actually exist,<sup>50</sup> Donald Reynolds spells out in great detail that the plot most likely was a figment of the white imagination, as the fires could have started accidentally and no evidence was produced to indicate a linkage to poisons or abolitionists.<sup>51</sup> His argument seems convincing to me. Regardless, that is not my concern here, as I am more focused on religious issues.

I argue that the Texas Troubles were partially caused by the 1844 split in the Methodist Church and the subsequent tensions between the MEC and the MECS. Though social factors definitely played a part in the Texas Troubles, the paranoia was largely a continuation of the conflicts in the Methodist denomination. Further, the Texas Troubles were couched in religious rhetoric; the historical actors viewed the events in question in explicitly biblical terms. This religious basis is not something which has yet been discussed in the historiography of the Texas Troubles. The major book on the topic, Reynolds's *Texas Terrors*, never mentioned religion in relation to the event. The brief

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<sup>48</sup> Reynolds, *Texas Terror*, 8.

<sup>49</sup> The numbers of casualties come from Donald E. Reynolds, "Texas Troubles," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed April 30, 2019, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/vetbr>. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Modified on July 12, 2016. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

<sup>50</sup> Reynolds, *Texas Terror*, 198-203.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 203-11, 214. Again, Randolph B. Campbell concurs with Reynold's conclusion (*Gone to Texas*, 220).

accounts I have read in other reference or survey works do not address religion, either. Are historians purposely ignoring religion because of their presentist biases against religion?<sup>52</sup> I would say that the neglect is more due to the lack of scholarly coverage of the “Texas Troubles”; perhaps as more studies are published, religion will come to the forefront of the discussion. In any case, I posit that religion was demonstrably important to those instigators of the Texas Troubles. Methodism was the most numerically prominent and socially powerful religious denomination in Texas, so it stands to reason that it would have played a part in this extremely important, yet understudied event in Texas history. The primary source documents prove this assumption to be correct; religion, and specifically Methodist issues, are demonstrably found in the rhetoric of the primary source accounts of the Texas Troubles.

One example of the tie between the Texas Troubles and the church split is found in the *Houston Weekly Telegraph* of August 14, 1860. The author stated that the vigilance committees were formed to “detect, arrest, and bring to condign punishment the vile, secret, rascally emissaries and assassins sent among us by the abolitionist preachers and ‘Viceregents of God’ of the north...” The author thus claims that the supposed perpetrators of the violence and destruction were Christians with a northern abolitionist background. Later on he writes, “When we see...professors of the religion of Christ, ministers of his Gospel...all openly, boldly, avowedly and publicly...disregarding, trampling upon and violating the Constitution and the laws of the country, it is worse than madness to doubt danger to our lives and property.” Such dramatic inflammatory

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<sup>52</sup> This question was raised by T. J. Geiger (Baylor University English professor), in discussion with the author, May 2, 2019.



language again takes quite a religious angle, accusing the opponents of being false believers. In rhetoric studies, this type of language is known as “cunning projection,” or projecting accusations of “vice” and “villainy” upon one’s opponent in order to deflect attention from one’s own evil activities. Texans were blaming Northern abolitionists for breaking the law through reckless violence, when they themselves were rounding up people and lynching them.<sup>53</sup> This could also be seen as an instance of “identity as argument,” the idea of emphasizing one’s own virtuous identity, in this case as a Christian, in order to discredit the other.<sup>54</sup> The same issue of the Houston newspaper responds indignantly to accusations in the *New York Tribune* that innocent MEC preachers were persecuted in Texas by saying that only Parsons McKinney and Blount were “run out because they openly preached abolitionism.”<sup>55</sup> Clearly for this author, there was a strong linkage between the Texas Terrors and the earlier Methodist conflicts.

An example of more general religious rhetoric is found in a letter from James A. Cox to Governor Sam Houston, penned on August 8, 1860. Cox writes, “with but Little provisions in our Country and every one in debt[,] our horses stolen[,] o[u]r negroes minds Poisoned by abolition influences, we are beginning to think that Jordan am [sic] a

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> All the primary source quotations in this paragraph come from E. H. Cushing, *The Weekly Telegraph* (Houston, Tex.), vol. 26, no. 24, ed. 1, Tuesday, August 14, 1860, newspaper, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph236106/>, accessed May 1, 2019, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, crediting The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

hard road to travel.”<sup>56</sup> Cox refers to Jordan, a ubiquitous metaphor for death and heaven which I frequently encountered in my research. Cox seems to be saying that abolitionists and the social unrest they stirred up made it likely that the slaveholding class would die violent and terrible deaths. Rather than referring to death in secular terms, Cox makes sure to use religious rhetoric. This may have been to make his case more dramatic and persuasive to the governor, as Sam Houston was very pro-Union and anti-secession.<sup>57</sup>

Another example of religious rhetoric is found in the newspaper account of the burning of Henderson, Texas in the August 18, 1860 issue of the *Texas Republican* newspaper. The author writes that those whose properties were allegedly arsoned were “men...who were shining examples of industry and moral worth” and cast the townspeople as pious Methodist and Presbyterian worshippers who were in religious services when their town was burned around them.<sup>58</sup> Clearly, the African Americans who were blamed by the newspaper authors were seen as immoral infidels, and those who supposedly had their buildings burned were innocent, devout Christians. In this sense the conflict was cast in religious terms.

So how did the Texas Troubles affect female Texas residents? No doubt white Texas women were largely caught up in the paranoia that surrounded them. For example, in a diary entry dated August 10, 1860, Sallie McNeill commented that a few days past

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<sup>56</sup>James A Cox, to Sam Houston, August 28, 1860, in “1860: Big Trouble,” *Texas State Library and Archives Commission*, February 19, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> “1860: Big Trouble.”

<sup>58</sup>Loughery, Robert W. *Texas Republican*. (Marshall, Tex.), Vol. 11, no. 48, ed. 1, Saturday, August 18, 1860, newspaper, August 18 (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht1095216/m1/2/?q=dallas>: accessed May 1, 2019), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History.

was the “time appointed for a general rising of Negroes against the Whites. Urged on by Abolitionists they burnt towns & houses in the northern portion of the State.”<sup>59</sup> Caught up by the racism around her, Sallie seems to have accepted these rumors without questioning them, and mentioned “[p]atrols and vigilance committees” without any sense of injustice or indignation. She did, however, exude a sense of confidence, saying, “There is little danger apprehended.”<sup>60</sup> As Sallie was located in rural Brazoria County, perhaps this shows that the full-scale paranoia did not filter into the rural areas and was more an issue in Dallas proper. However, in any case, it is clear that even a reasonable, reflective, religious person like Sallie McNeill was affected by rumors of the Texas Troubles and believed what she heard, at least to some degree. It is possible, too, though Sallie did not record this directly, that she envisioned these trouble-making abolitionists as preachers, thus confirming the religious basis of the conflict.

For black women, the Texas Troubles would have had a more ominous edge. Largely powerless to fight back, black women, especially in Dallas, would be victimized as furious, frenzied white men took vengeance on their supposed enemies. Most of the alleged arsonists would probably have been male, thus sparing black women from direct involvement with the conflict. However, their husbands, fathers, brothers, friends, and pastors could have been lynched, imprisoned, or beaten during the uprising. Besides the tragic implications for African American families, the absence or disability of their male

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<sup>59</sup> McNeill, *The Uncompromising Diary*, 82. The editors of Sallie McNeill’s diary seem uncertain about her denominational affiliation (9), but as she attended Baylor University, I would be prone to assume she was more a Baptist than a Methodist. However, white Methodists in general were just as concerned about the Texas Troubles as white Baptists, possibly more so.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

protectors could have made black women even more vulnerable to even more physical and sexual violence and harassment than they would normally have been.

The Texas Troubles were just one manifestation of the sectional conflict that began to affect black and white Texas Methodist women in the late antebellum years. In the years ahead, these women would see their nation ripped apart, would send their men off to war (white men on the Confederate side, and those black men who were able to go, on the Union side), and would begin to experience death, destruction, and economic deprivation on a major scale. This looked a bit different for enslaved women, who were already experiencing trauma, death, and suffering every day through the inequities and abuses of the slave system. The Civil War added to their struggles in the short term but also promised a potential path to freedom should the Union win the war. How would Texas Methodist women respond to the problems that lay in their paths? What would their churches tell them to do and believe, and would they comply? The next chapter will detail the sermons, hymnody, and activities of the formal, institutional Methodist church in Texas during the Civil War. We will see how women were being taught to interpret Scripture, deal with their experiences, and respond to God in a time in which their faith was being challenged through suffering and grief.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “Believe the Gospel Word”: The Institutional MECS

#### *Introduction*

Thundering from the pulpit, the powerful and prominent Methodist preacher Homer S. Thrall exhorted his audience with these stirring words about the efficacy of true conversion:

If we leave out of the account the mystery of the incarnation of Christ, there has never been witnessed by heaven or earth, such an astonishing work as the new birth of the soul. It was wonderful to those who witnessed the miracle of Christ, to see the lame made to walk – the blind to see – the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak, in obedience to his commands. But upon every soul that has entered upon a life of obedience and faith, has been wrought a miracle more wonderful than those. It was indeed a wonderful thing to break the power of disease by a word, and send the healthy currents of life through the wasted body. But how much more wonderful is that work upon the soul which breaks the fetters of sin; which overcomes the bent of our nature, and the force of habit; which supplants love with hatred and hatred with love; and which sends thrilling through the soul the currents of a new life with other aims, and fears, and hopes!<sup>1</sup>

This quote encapsulates the message of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) in Texas: the glory of Christ as God and man, the necessity of conversion and a new life in Christ, the power of redemption as enacted by Christ. The MThe MECS was essentially a conventional evangelical group promoting activism, biblicism, conversionism, and crucicentrism. They taught a standard evangelical view of death and heaven. The MECS promoted slavery and the Confederacy to some degree, but they also

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<sup>1</sup> Homer S. Thrall, Eph. 2:1 Sermon, Homer S. Thrall Sermons, Box 579B, Bridwell Library Special Collections, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, 7-8.

engaged in much rhetoric about the spiritual equality and unity of all true believers, which could have worked to opposite ends. An examination of their sermons and hymnody will elucidate these trends.

### *Methodist Sermons*

Historians have written extensively about the politicized nature of Civil War sermons.<sup>2</sup> According to these historians, ministers usually supported the political affiliation of their region. However, as we have already seen, Texas was a hotbed of religious and political controversy, with much diversity in its preachers. As late as 1860, Northern Methodist preachers conducted their ministries in Texas, although they were met with violence and persecution. Surprisingly, then, Texas Methodist sermons took a different tack. Far from being politicized, MECS preachers taught conventional evangelicalism, including activism, biblicism, conversionism, and crucicentrism. They taught a standard evangelical view of death and heaven. While they supported the Confederacy in a moderate, measured, and subtle fashion, they also advocated for the essential unity of all Christians and the impermanence of earthly relations.

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy L. Wesley, *The Politics of Faith During the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), discusses political rhetoric from the pulpit, arguing that ministers in both Union and Confederate territory played an important political role in their communities. Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), argues that religious ideas served to both justify and question the concept of Southern separatism, eventually leading to secession. David B. Chesebrough's compilation of sermons, *"God Ordained This War": Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1875* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), again emphasizes the importance of sermons, arguing that ministers generally expressed the political views predominant in their communities. All three scholars concur in the political role of sermons.

In this section, I will focus on the sermons of Reverend Homer Spellman Thrall. This choice is justified by several reasons. First, Reverend Thrall's works have rarely if ever been cited in any published scholarly works and deserve consideration for that reason alone.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, he is considered one of the most important figures in the early history of Methodism in Texas.<sup>4</sup> As a young man, he attended Ohio University, where he heard about the Methodist mission to Texas and wanted to join it.<sup>5</sup> Ordained as a Methodist minister in 1842, he arrived in Texas that same year and started his 50-year ministry in Texas.<sup>6</sup> In 1844, the Methodists split over slavery, and Thrall sided with the Southerners.<sup>7</sup> Thrall arrived in Austin in 1845 or 1846.<sup>8</sup> The church he was coming to lead had actually been uprooted by Native American attacks and Mexican uprisings.<sup>9</sup> They had all dispersed, and so Thrall preached in the legislature.<sup>10</sup> He had to support

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy S.G. Binkley (Archivist at Bridwell Special Collections, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University), in discussion with the author, December 4, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Norman W. Spellman, "Thrall, Homer Spellman," *TSHA: Texas State Historical Association*, accessed November 29, 2018.  
<https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fth35>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> According to the First United Church of Austin, Thrall arrived in 1845 ("History: The Story of First Church," <https://fumcaustin.org/aboutus/history/>). But according to the Handbook of Texas Online, Thrall arrived in 1846 (Norman W. Spellman, "Thrall.")

<sup>9</sup> "History: The Story of First Church."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

himself by teaching school and sleeping on the floor of a lawyer's office.<sup>11</sup> The Austin Methodist congregation (which included then-governor of Texas, J.P. Henderson) bought a church building in 1847.<sup>12</sup> Thrall went on to be a part of the creation of the *Texas Wesleyan Banner*, become involved in the American Bible Society in the early 1850s, and participate in leadership roles in the Methodist conferences of Texas.<sup>13</sup> He taught at Ruttersville College, received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Southwestern University and wrote five popular history books about the history of Texas and Texas Methodism.<sup>14</sup> Because of his prominence and because of the circuit-riding system, the majority of Thrall's sermons were delivered several times to different churches, meaning that his message impacted many listeners. I have focused on the three extant sermons of Reverend Thrall which were delivered during the Civil War years (on Ephesians 2:1, Romans 4:25, and Hosea 6:1) as well as a March 1865 poem which was preserved among his writings.<sup>15</sup>

Overall, I think that Reverend Thrall's preaching would be somewhat engaging for his audience of laywomen because of his eloquent yet intellectual approach. Thrall's homiletic-style sermons base themselves on a single verse of Scripture, then depart from there to explicate a concept through a discourse peppered with diverse biblical references.

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<sup>11</sup> Paraphrased from *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Spellman, "Thrall."

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Sermon on Eph. 2:1; sermon on Rom. 4:25; sermon on Hos. 6:1; untitled poem, Homer S. Thrall Sermons, Box 579B, Bridwell Library Special Collections, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, 30.



Thrall does not open his sermons with a “hook” or any sort of engaging exempla. Rather, he dives right into the theological debate he wants to explicate, thus presuming a felt need for this theology. He assumes that his audience wants to listen to a lengthy theological discourse. In fact, no exempla or stories show up in his sermons at all. And Reverend Thrall engages his audience primarily on a theological level, with very few moral applications at all.

Thrall uses male gendered language throughout his sermon, referring to all people as “man.”<sup>16</sup> Rare instances of gender-inclusive language in the sermon includes “his creatures,” “beings” and “people.”<sup>17</sup> He never directly addresses the female sector of his audience; the words “woman,” “female,” “lady,” or even the feminine pronoun never show up in his extant sermons. However, when Thrall uses the word “man,” he is never referring to specifically masculine beings but speaking broadly to all of humanity. Thrall’s use of gendered language was probably not an exhibition of sexism. Most likely this wording choice was merely a recognition that his words were generally applicable to all of humanity, rather than gender-specific to men or women.

Reverend Thrall’s focus was obviously not on the aural/oral aspects of his sermon; there are no instances of rhyme, alliteration or assonance. He sometimes used very long words and sentences; the diction is exceptionally complex, which would not

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<sup>16</sup> Lecture on Romans 3:20 (“Good Works”) Homer S. Thrall Sermons, Box 579B, Bridwell Library Special Collections, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 19, though some of these uses of “man” are in biblical quotations from the King James Version.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1, 13, 9, 18. However the uses of “people” are referring to Israel and to the Church, and the latter is a direct biblical quotation.

lead to easy listening. Reverend Thrall never directly addressed the audience or made any reference to the physical space in which he was preaching, probably because it was intended as a circuit-riding sermon which would be relevant to any group in any physical space. However, Reverend Thrall had an exceptionally beautiful, unique turn of phrase, so that his sermon would probably have been enjoyable to listen to. Additionally, his words seem to connote emotion and passion; it would not be difficult to imagine him weeping or beaming with joy, depending on the portion of the sermon. We turn now to a consideration of the content of Reverend Thrall's sermons as correlated with the Bebbington quadrilateral.<sup>18</sup>

### *Evangelistic Activism*

Activism is a minor and implied aspect of Reverend Thrall's preaching. In the quote above from the Ephesians 2:1 sermon, Thrall referenced changed "habit" as well as "a new life with other aims."<sup>19</sup> Presumably some of these new activities would include evangelism of various sorts, but Reverend Thrall does not directly say so. The Hosea 6:1 sermon calls the audience to "earnest endeavors after obedience," but is not specific.<sup>20</sup> So evangelistic activism was not a central focus of Reverend Thrall's preaching, although it may be noted that he himself was engaging in evangelistic activism as he preached sermons about the atoning death of Christ (Romans 4:25) and the necessity of the new birth (Ephesians 2:1).

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<sup>18</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicals in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2-3.

<sup>19</sup> Eph. 2:1 sermon, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Hos. 6:1 sermon, 5.

## *Biblicism*

Biblicism is much more strongly evident in Reverend Thrall's sermons. In Reverend Thrall's sermons, the vast majority of spiritual authority cited is that of the Bible. Although he favors homiletic rather than expository preaching, he nevertheless supports his points with Scripture. For example, he tells the story of the Corinthians, the Ephesians, and the Apostle Paul to compare the power of the new birth to the physical resurrection of Lazarus.<sup>21</sup>

Referring to the Bible, Thrall says, "The will of God is fully and clearly revealed to us in the Scriptures. In them are made known all the doctrines we are required to believe, and all the precepts we are bound to obey."<sup>22</sup> To Reverend Thrall, then, the Bible is the sole source of spiritual truth, and he specifically repudiates any need for "new revelations."<sup>23</sup> He further comments on the sufficiency and perspicuity of Scripture; "the Scriptures are full, and plain in every essential particular."<sup>24</sup> However, human sinfulness and worldliness bars the unregenerate from proper application and obedience, or even acceptance of the Scriptures, as the case may be, despite any amount of scriptural knowledge and training they may have.<sup>25</sup> Waxing eloquent upon the convert's newfound interest in the Bible, Thrall writes:

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<sup>21</sup> Eph. 2:1 sermon, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

But how different do those truths appear! How different now the import of those familiar passages! What glory now gilds the sacred page!...the word of God no longer appears to be a dead letter, but a lively oracle, imbued with the presence of the living Spirit.<sup>26</sup>

### *Conversionism*

Reverend Homer Thrall was extremely committed to conversionism, preaching an entire sermon on the new birth from Ephesians 2:1. He dramatically and eloquently contrasted the old life of spiritual deadness with the transformation wrought by Christ and the Holy Spirit through the new birth.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, to Thrall, conversion is a work of God alone.<sup>28</sup> According to Reverend Thrall, no unconverted person can please God, even if he or she is respectable and moral, or familiar with the Scriptures.<sup>29</sup> Reverend Thrall even said that conversion is more miraculous than the healings performed by Christ during his earthly ministry!<sup>30</sup>

How did Reverend Thrall define conversion? He viewed conversion as the reception of a “new heart,” one of holiness, which led the believer to holy action, good works in the world.<sup>31</sup> Rather than mere repentance or change of actions, conversion entailed being made new on the inside. Conversion begins with new understanding of the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 8, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

Bible, or as Thrall put it, the “illumination of the mind.”<sup>32</sup> Specifically, the convert was to understand his or her sinful nature, the “love, and grace, and compassion of God”<sup>33</sup> and the “knowledge of Christ.”<sup>34</sup> A regenerated moral character would be the natural result of this illumination.<sup>35</sup>

Reverend Thrall was so serious about conversionism that he prompted his auditors to self-examination, asking probing questions to assess their spiritual states as they listened to the sermon. Interestingly, however, he seemed to assume his listeners were converted, encouraging them to press on towards Heaven and press into Christ, rather than giving an altar call or an opportunity to repent or be converted at the mourner’s bench.<sup>36</sup> David Bebbington has written of evangelicals’ unique commitment to the doctrine of assurance, and we see this clearly exhibited in Reverend Thrall.<sup>37</sup> In one place he wrote,

And what ground of assurance do we possess, if we are united to him by faith. There is now, therefore, no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. As sure as Christ died for us – as sure as he was delivered for our offences, and as sure as God is faithful + just; so sure are we of our blessed deliverance.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 9-10; cf. 11.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., quote from 14.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., quote from 14.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 17-19.

<sup>37</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicals in Modern Britain*, 6-7.

<sup>38</sup> Rom. 4:25 sermon, 20-21. See also 23, 24.

## *Crucicentrism*

In his sermon on the new birth, Reverend Thrall discussed what the prospective Christian was to believe, before the conversion experience would take place. He beautifully and movingly describes the doctrine of substitutionary atonement held by many evangelicals<sup>39</sup>:

In that sublime tragedy enacted on Mount Calvary, he beholds the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory – the offering up of the great atoning sacrifice for sin. He recognizes in Christ the sinner’s substitute at the bar of God’s justice, taking upon himself the iniquities of his people, and paying their penalty with an agony which mortals never know.<sup>40</sup>

Substitutionary atonement was also taught in a later sermon, as he mentioned the “great atoning work of Christ.”<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, in that sermon, he also seemed to adhere to the governmental theory of the atonement, seeing the death of Christ as a satisfaction of God’s justice, “the foundation on which depends the stability + authority of his moral government.”<sup>42</sup>

Reverend Thrall further demonstrates his commitment to crucicentrism by preaching an entire sermon on Romans 4:25, which reads, “Who was delivered for our offences: and was raised again for our justification.”<sup>43</sup> To Reverend Thrall, correct beliefs

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<sup>39</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicals in Modern Britain*, 15-16.

<sup>40</sup> Eph. 2:1 sermon, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Rom. 4:25 sermon, 3. See also 8-9, 11-14, 15-16, 20, 21, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 7-8. For a theological explanation of the governmental theory of the atonement, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic – Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 720-723.

<sup>43</sup> Rom. 4:25 sermon, throughout.

about the death and resurrection of Christ are the only grounds for human salvation.<sup>44</sup> He believed that the death of Christ was fore-ordained by God as the plan of redemption for sinful and helpless humanity.<sup>45</sup> To Thrall, God's justification of humanity through Christ's death was the greatest act of the Deity, and it is for this reason that Christianity is superior to "any other religion."<sup>46</sup> Incidentally, Reverend Thrall may have been expressing anti-Semitic prejudice when he says, "Hear the taunts, + jeers, + insults, of the infuriated fiends whose venomous spite is let loose upon him."<sup>47</sup> In any case, Reverend Thrall's obvious devotion to the passion of Christ is exhibited in an emotionally affecting narrative of the suffering Christ endured in his life and death, culminating in two verses of Isaac Watts' hymn, "Alas and Did My Savior Bleed."<sup>48</sup> It is followed by an equally passionate declaration of Christ's resurrection.<sup>49</sup>

### *Preaching and the Confederacy*

Although Reverend Thrall avoided any direct reference to the Confederacy in the extant sermons available, he seemed to express a sense of regret, sorrow, and resignation under the chastening hand of God as the war ground to a close. He composed an untitled

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1, 13.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 20. For a discussion of the history and various versions of this hymn, see Isaac Watts, "Alas and Did My Savior Bleed," [https://hymnary.org/text/alas\\_and\\_did\\_my\\_savior\\_bleed](https://hymnary.org/text/alas_and_did_my_savior_bleed)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

poem in March of 1865 which addressed the sorrows of earthly pilgrimage and the joys of heaven. The poem is rather vague; nevertheless, some of the words about the pains of earthly life and submission to God's discipline were no doubt inspired by the war itself. For instance, he comments, "But now these ties are wholly riven/And I have little here to love./I'd gladly yield my heart to Heaven/Fix my sad gaze on hopes above!"<sup>50</sup> While there is no indication that Reverend Thrall shared this poetry with his congregation or in any public venue, he nonetheless must have carried this attitude with him into the pulpit and affected his listeners thereby.

More directly, in December of 1864, Reverend Thrall preached a sermon on Hosea 6:1, which reads, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up" (KJV). He also cited several other passages at the top of his sermon notes, including Lamentations 3 (affirming God's faithfulness to the Israelites in the midst of the Babylonian Captivity), Psalm 74 (reflecting on the destruction of Solomon's Temple), and Psalm 51 (David's repentance for his adultery with Bathsheba). Each of these biblical poems reflect upon God's discipline of his wayward and sinful people yet affirms his love for them; each of these poems must have reflected Reverend Thrall's perception of the Confederacy's situation.

Reverend Thrall begins his Hosea 6:1 sermon by expressing his convictions about the "true cause of all the ills and sufferings of life": human sin, starting with the Garden of Eden. This rather simplistic treatment of the problem of evil, progresses to a discussion of "God's absolute [sovereignty]."<sup>51</sup> Almost reminiscent of the twentieth-century

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<sup>50</sup> Untitled poem, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Hosea 6:1 sermon, 1-2.



prosperity gospel<sup>52</sup>, Thrall presents the “connection which has ever been observed between holiness and happiness on the one hand, and between sin and misery on the other.”<sup>53</sup> Fortunately he nuances his view a bit by explaining that sometimes human repentance does not avert suffering and that sin is not always the direct cause of trials, but is always the indirect cause.<sup>54</sup> Reverend Thrall goes on to assure his auditors that their suffering is just repayment for their sin and disciplinary training towards righteousness, as well as remind them of God’s presence in their pain.<sup>55</sup> The purpose of the sermon is to exhort the audience towards “repentance,” “prayer,” “faith,” and “obedience.”<sup>56</sup> He prompts his congregation along these lines by saying the following: “Seasons of extraordinary or general affliction should cause careful + searching examination – deep humility, earnest, constant prayer for deliverance, a turning from sin and from all the frivolities of the world, into the way of holiness, and to the stern and solemn realities of religion.”<sup>57</sup> In other words, like other preachers of the time, Reverend Thrall believed and implicitly taught that sin and worldliness caused the losses of the Confederacy and that repentance would encourage God to turn the tide of the war in a more favorable direction.

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<sup>52</sup> See Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Hosea 6:1 sermon, 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

On the other hand, Reverend Thrall's nonpartisan theological discourses may have served to temporarily divert his listeners from the ongoing war and prompting them to reflect on eternal and spiritual realities rather than the fate of their nation-state. Some of his statements almost seem to repudiate the importance of the war. For example, in his sermon on the new birth, Reverend Thrall stated,

The Scriptures recognize but two classes of men. To one or the other of these classes, every individual belongs...One is carnal – the other spiritual. In the affairs of time and sense, these classes may be linked together by common interests, and sympathies, and hopes. But here the communion of their joys and sorrows ends.... there is no bond of fellowship.... They separate by a perpetually increasing divergence.<sup>58</sup>

Ultimately this type of reasoning would probably lead to a realization of the spiritual commonalities of devout Northerners and Southerners and cut down on bitter partisan enmity. Reverend Thrall says as much in his Hosea 6:1 sermon as he explains that earthly trials discipline Christians to develop the “highest and most difficult of virtues,” including “Forgiveness” and “Love + prayer for enemies.”<sup>59</sup>

### *Views of Death and the Afterlife*

Reverend Thrall taught his auditors to distinguish between physical, spiritual, and eternal death, viewing each as punishment for sin. He said,

The death penalty of man's disobedience is of a three-fold character. 1<sup>st</sup> Natural death, which is the separation of the soul from the body. 2<sup>nd</sup> Spiritual death, which is the separation of the spirit of God from the soul. 3<sup>rd</sup> Eternal death, which is the final separation of both soul and body from the presence of God. From natural death there is no escape. The unalterable decree is written on every nerve and

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<sup>58</sup> Eph. 2:1 sermon, 17.

<sup>59</sup> Hosea 6:1 sermon, 5.

fibre [sic] of our bodies – ‘dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.’ But from spiritual death, and its terrible issue in the death eternal, we may be rescued.<sup>60</sup>

Thrall went on to eloquently compare natural (physical) death to spiritual death.<sup>61</sup>

The burden of the sermon is about Christ saving humanity from spiritual death and the effects of salvation on one’s current relationship with God, not on describing the afterlife. However, Reverend Thrall conceived of heaven as a place of joy and peace. In his poem he wrote of “Heaven, where rapture never dies –/Where ne’er is heard the world’s harsh scoff.”<sup>62</sup> He also referred to heaven as a place of hope, and as something much greater than all earthly joys.<sup>63</sup> Life was essentially conceived of as a struggle to get to heaven and to focus on heavenly things above earthly ones, an essentially Wesleyan view of free will as a powerful agent for human salvation.<sup>64</sup>

Reverend Thrall did not seem to conceive of any earthly presence of departed spirits. In his poem he writes of the “misty...film/That memory gathers round the dead!”<sup>65</sup> Those dead are not present with us in any way other than our memories. However, Reverend Thrall did engage with the nineteenth-century cultural preoccupation with death, expressing the fears that must have been in the hearts of many due to the traumatic losses of soldiers as well as high rates of diseases, childhood mortality, and so on. He

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<sup>60</sup> Eph. 2:1 sermon, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>62</sup> Untitled poem, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., whole poem.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 2.

described Christ's resurrection as "returning from the shady valley, to assure us that the monster which made it terrible is slain."<sup>66</sup> Further commenting on the perennial human fear of death, he preached,

With our instinctive dread of that dark unknown that lies beyond the grave, we need a Savior stronger than death + who has shown his power to conquer it. We stand shivering upon the shore of a vast ocean, + shrink as we gaze upon its illimitable waters; hence it is necessary that he who is to be our trust in death, should come back from that unknown sea, to assure us that he has made the perilous voyage, + is able to conduct us in safety over the dark + stormy waste, to those blessed abodes beyond, where storms + night never come. Now Christ's resurrection precisely meets this necessity of our being.<sup>67</sup>

Reverend Thrall thus explains that Christ is the only one who can meet the human need to understand death; he is the only one who should be communicated with beyond the grave. Perhaps this is a subtle repudiation of Spiritualism or even of female Methodists' novel views of death which I will discuss in Chapter Three.

In the next breath, he directly addresses those in his audience who are grieving the loss of a loved one:

It [Christ's resurrection] is the precious fact that has hallowed the grave, + made it but the couch of repose to slumbering dust. It is this that whispers comfort to the mourning heart, for it comes with the gladdening message that the parted shall meet again – that the form which has been laid down in corruption, shall come forth again in incorruption, like to the glorious body of the risen Christ.<sup>68</sup>

Obviously Reverend Thrall is not insensitive to the deaths his auditors have suffered. He is truly trying to take a pastoral role (in the nurturing sense of the word) and to relate the orthodox Christian faith with their felt needs to deal with grief and loss.

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<sup>66</sup> Rom. 4:25 sermon, 23.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 24.

### *Methodist Hymnody*

Beth Barton Schweiger has documented the ubiquity of sacred song, particularly hymns and camp meeting songs, across the South in the nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup> Methodists were well-known for their singing from their early years as a movement.<sup>70</sup> Reverend Homer Thrall quoted from hymns in his extant sermons; what is unknown is whether he sang the tune or merely repeated the words. In either case, Thrall's inclusion of the hymns indicates the importance of sacred song in expressing devotion, teaching doctrine, and aiding the memory of the worshiper, and demonstrates the ubiquity of hymns in Methodist practice.<sup>71</sup>

Published soon after the 1845 Methodist split, John Early's hymnal, *A Collection of Hymns for Public, Social, and Domestic Worship*, appears to be one of the few hymnbooks that the MECS published during the antebellum and Civil War years.<sup>72</sup> This hymnal was very much a Methodist publication; the preface states, "This hymn book is truly Wesleyan, or rather *Scriptural* [italics in original] in its sentiments, and also in the prominence given to those subjects which are of the greatest importance in the Christian life."<sup>73</sup> The book was written, however, to supersede the original MEC hymnal as it was

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<sup>69</sup> Beth Barton Schweiger, *A Literate South: Reading Before Emancipation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 125-149, especially page 142.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 132-133.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> John Early, *A Collection of Hymns for Public, Social, and Domestic Worship* (Charleston, SC: John Early for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 184).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

seen as “in many respects defective.”<sup>74</sup> Of course, there is no guarantee that MECS churches in Texas would be singing out of this hymnal; they may have been using an older hymnal from the Methodist Episcopal Church before the split, or they may have used a generic evangelical hymnbook (more on this below). But an analysis of these hymns can give insight on the general contours of MECS teaching in this era.

### *Activism*

What did John Early’s MECS hymns teach about activism and evangelism? First, evangelistic appeals are common in this volume. There is an entire section entitled “The Gospel Call” entirely comprised of invitation hymns, with such titles as “The Hearty Welcome,” alongside “Come to Jesus,” “Universal Invitation,” and “The Chief of Sinners Invited.”<sup>75</sup> One such invitation hymn is entitled “Return to Me,” which may reflect the Methodist doctrine of falling from grace; it mentions the “reclaiming grace” of God, which could be talking about the re-salvation of someone who was converted, and then fell away.<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, there are two specific hymns entitled, “Before Preaching to the Young,” which appeal to them to be saved from sin at an early age.<sup>77</sup> Of course, singing such songs would constitute evangelistic activism on the part of the church and particularly the officiating clergyman.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. Section is from 73-80; these hymns are found on 73-74.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 76-77, quote from 76.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

The duty for Christians to preach the gospel was also clearly and explicitly taught in this collection. The “Special Occasions” section has a sub-section about “Missions,” which contains four songs about the conversion of Jews to Christianity, one about Muslims (“Mohammedans”), and one about “The Heathen” in general.<sup>78</sup> There are calls and charges for missionaries, and, although taking a very imperialistic and ethnocentric tone, some genuine concern for communicating the gospel of Christ may be detected.<sup>79</sup>

### *Biblicism*

Another subsection under “Special Occasions” is entitled “Bible.”<sup>80</sup> While not as long and impassioned as the section about “Missions,” nevertheless a commitment to evangelical biblicism may be detected in such songs as “Search the Scriptures” and “Delighting in the Word.”<sup>81</sup> The songs teach that the Bible is the source of spiritual truth, particularly concerning Christ and the Gospel, and that the Bible can convict sinners and backsliders and bring about repentance. Interestingly, several of the songs that are ostensibly about the Bible are really about missions and the zeal to spread the gospel and the Scriptures overseas, such as “Spread of the Scriptures” and “Universal Dissemination.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 146-152, esp. 148.

<sup>79</sup> See especially ibid., “Missionaries Charged,” 151.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 152-153.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 152, has the song titles.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 153, has the song titles.

## *Conversionism*

Conversionist Christianity is clearly present in this volume as well. The song “Before Preaching to Formalists” reveals the belief that one can be part of “the Christian world” yet not regenerate, and “Before An Awakening Sermon” prays for salvation for the audience through repentance and faith, outlining the stages of conversion as conviction, “sacred grief,” and “sacred peace.”<sup>83</sup> There is also a section on “Justification and the New Birth.”<sup>84</sup> It includes such hymns as “Concluded,” which, speaking of the regenerate, says “Our nature’s turn’d, our mind/Transformed in all its powers.”<sup>85</sup> The MECS believed and taught that one could not properly relate to God without being converted and being made new in Christ.

I will mention here as a side note, which relates as a sort of second conversion for the elite Christians,<sup>86</sup> there is an entire forty-hymn section on “Entire Sanctification and Perfect Love.”<sup>87</sup> The MECS, then, placed a heavy emphasis on the belief that the Christian could be totally renewed and transformed, transcending his or her sin nature to

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 334-359.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>86</sup> For a discussion of the importance of the doctrine of entire sanctification in the Methodist life, see Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=23651&site=edhost-live&scope=site>), 32-33. For a discussion of entire sanctification as almost a second conversion experience, see Naomi L. Nelson, “She Considered Herself Called of God: White Women’s Participation in the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church, 1820-1865” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2001), 37-44.

<sup>87</sup> Early, *A Collection of Hymns*, 359-399.



be totally sanctified, but only through resting in the finished work of Christ, not through self-effort. One concise hymn expressing such sentiments is ‘This Is the Will of God,’ which included the following verse:

He wills that I should holy be:  
That holiness I long to feel;  
That full divine conformity  
To all my Savior’s righteous will.<sup>88</sup>

Such dramatic prayers as the following from “Longing to Be Complete in Christ” are part of this collection:

Speak the second time “Be clean”  
Take away my inbred sin:  
Every stumbling-block remove;  
Cast it out by perfect love.<sup>89</sup>

The narrator of the next hymn expresses incredulity but also faith that he or she can possibly: “Never speak one evil word/Or rash, or idle/or unkind.”<sup>90</sup> Standards were high within Southern Methodism, then, and adherents probably would have felt a great deal of pressure as a result.

### *Crucicentrism*

Devotion to the cross and passion of Christ, and the crucified Savior, were ubiquitous throughout this volume. “Looking at the Cross” urged not only reflection and thankfulness, but also obedience in light of the death of Christ.<sup>91</sup> “Subdued by the Cross”

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 92.

expressed a similar devotional posture.<sup>92</sup> Substitutionary atonement is clearly taught in such hymns as “Triumph,” which speaks of Christ’s death in the following manner:

Ah! Praise to the Lamb  
Accepted I am, I’m bold to believe on my Jesus’s name.  
In him I confide, His blood is applied;  
For me he has suffer’d, for me he has died. <sup>93</sup>

Other songs that promote this ideal are “Receiving the Atonement” and “Exulting in the Atonement.”<sup>94</sup> Jesus, then, to the MECS, had died in the place of sinning humans, to pay for their sins.

Unlimited atonement is a significant part of the Methodist view of the Cross of Christ, and, predictably, shows up in this volume. For example, “Universal Invitation” includes the following words:

Sinners, believe the gospel word:  
Jesus has come, your souls to save!  
Jesus has come, your common Lord;  
Pardon ye all through Him may have, —  
May now be saved, whoever will:  
This man receives the sinners still.<sup>95</sup>

“Receiving the Atonement” also emphatically hammers home this point with italics, insisting:

Lord, I believe were sinners more  
Than sands upon the ocean shore,  
Thou hast for *all* a ransom paid,  
For *all* a full atonement made.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 98.

## *Satan*

Surprisingly, in this short hymnal of about four hundred hymns, about twenty of them spoke about Satan. “Retirement” spoke of “the world” as “where Satan wages still/His most successful war.”<sup>97</sup> Satan urges the unregenerate towards hypocrisy and enslaves them to sin.<sup>98</sup> Distressing Christians is also part of his work.<sup>99</sup> Satan promotes “Deliver Us From Evil,” however, speaks of Satan as an ever-present foe, who can nonetheless be vanquished by Christ.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, Christ’s defeat of Satan is mentioned on several occasions.<sup>101</sup> And Christ’s followers can participate in this battle through prayer: “Satan trembles when he sees/The weakest saint upon his knees.”<sup>102</sup> Satan, although he tries to “condemn” Christians, is incapable of doing so because of Christ.<sup>103</sup> Oddly for Methodists, who believed in falling from grace, the same hymn, alluding to John 10:27-30, later mentions that Satan is unable to cause Christians to lose their salvation.<sup>104</sup> Satan, thus, is Christians’ ever-present enemy, but Christ can and does defeat him, often using

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 190. One front of this war is Asia, where Muslims are compared to Satan as drawing people away from salvation (“For the Mohammedans,” 140).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., “Concluded,” 76; ““Help Thou My Unbelief,”” 82.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., “The Effort,” 83. See also “The Lord Will Provide,” 122.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 179. “Sixth Petition,” 23, expresses similar sentiments.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., “Seen of Angels,” 36. See also “Psalm 46,” 47.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., “Opening Exercises,” 168.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., “Psalm 179,” 49. See also “The Effort,” 83; and “Sunday School Celebration,” 148, which confidently asks God’s protection for the children against Satan.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 179.

the agency of human beings through prayer. Nothing particularly radical or noteworthy is said in this area. Demons are largely out of the picture, except that the name of Christ is said to cause “devils” to “fear and fly.”<sup>105</sup> They are also referred to as irredeemable “rebel-angels.”<sup>106</sup> The hymn “Watchfulness” asks for deliverance from spiritual warfare: “My spirit, Lord, alarm/When men and devils join.”<sup>107</sup> Humans and demons, then, are able to team up for the dark side of spiritual warfare. Also “The End of Life” teaches that just as angels take regenerate souls to heaven, “devils” take unregenerate souls to hell.<sup>108</sup>

### *Angels*

Angels are an extremely substantial topic in this hymnal, garnering almost a mention per page.<sup>109</sup> Angels “worship God aright,” providing an example for the believer.<sup>110</sup> They worship in love and submission, particularly in light of God’s trinitarian nature, and their witnessing of God’s creation work, Christ’s actions while on earth, and

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., “The Minister’s Theme,” 54; see also “Psalm 74,” 49. “Hardness of Heart Lamented” says something similar about the “judgments” of God (76).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., “The Warning,” 70.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 111. See also untitled hymn, 153; “Closing the Exercises,” 167.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., throughout the whole collection.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., “The Trinity,” 7; “Praise to the Redeemer,” 39; “Praise to Jesus,” 39; “Revelation 5:11-14,” 40; “Therefore With Angels,” 62; “The Invitation,” 64; “Whom We Have Not Seen, We Love,” 92; see also “Opening Worship,” 16; “O Worship the King,” 19; “Te Deum,” 22; “Priesthood of Christ,” 34; “Revelation 5:12-14,” 40; “Stupendous Love,” 40; “Wonders of the Cross,” 41; “The Minister’s Theme,” 54.

the ascension.<sup>111</sup> Of course, angels are an integral part of the nativity story as they announced Christ's birth to the shepherds, and of the resurrection narrative as they proclaimed that Christ overcame death.<sup>112</sup> They also are a big part of the story of Jacob's ladder.<sup>113</sup> They rejoice when people receive salvation.<sup>114</sup> However, even they "dimly see" the Father in His kingly majesty<sup>115</sup> and "veil their eyes" because of Christ's glory.<sup>116</sup> Since even "archangels" cannot understand God, how much less so frail humanity!<sup>117</sup> However, humans are situated directly below angels in God's hierarchy of the

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., "The Trinity," 7; "The Trinity," 8; "The Plurality in One," 8; "Psalm 148," 21; "He Saw the City and Wept Over It," 27; "Psalm 68:17-18," 34; "Let All the Angels of God Worship Him," 36.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. Regarding the nativity: "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," 23; "The Incarnation," 23-24; "The Song of the Angels," 24; "Luke 2:8-14," 24; "They Shall Call His Name Immanuel," 25; "Star of the East," 25; "Praise to the Redeemer, 39". There is also a throwback allusion to this when talking, I think, about the millennial kingdom of Christ, or possibly the widespread conversion of the heathen, which may be the same thing, in "Psalm 72," 139, and something similar is said in "For the Heathen," 141-142, idea on 142. Regarding resurrection: "Resurrection," 32; "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," 33; "Psalm 24:7-10," 33; "Seen of Angels," 36.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., "Jacob's Ladder," 36.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., "Seen of Angels," 36; "1 Corinthians 1:30-31," 38; "The Savior's Praise," 38; "The Gospel Supper," 64. Humans can participate in this ("Luke 15:10," 95).

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., "To God the Father," 9; "Vehement Desires," 81; untitled hymn, 82.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., "Majesty and Mercy," 11. Christ is called the "Lord of angels" ("Mark 13:15-16," 58).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., "Job 11:7-9," 12. Also even their angelic names (possibly meaning praises) cannot describe God's majesty ("Various Offices of Christ," 37), and "Revelation 5:12-14" also expresses the inadequacy of angelic praise (40).

universe.<sup>118</sup> One hymn even states that angels “vie with man’s more favored race.”<sup>119</sup> Similarly, angels are excluded from God’s redemptive plan in this reference in “In the Sanctuary”: “Never did angels taste above/Redeeming grace and dying love.”<sup>120</sup> God’s physical presence is “[beyond] what angel minds can paint.”<sup>121</sup> And God seems to value human praise more than angelic praise.<sup>122</sup> Yet God is the only source of joy for angels.<sup>123</sup> In one place the “flame of angelical love” for Christ is referred to.<sup>124</sup> He reigns over angels, and God shares with them the “palace” of heaven.<sup>125</sup> Angels are seen as sinless, which fully sanctified Christians can also become.<sup>126</sup> They perfectly enact God’s will “in heaven,” serving as an example for Christians.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., “Psalm 8,” 16.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., ““Seen of Angels,”” 136.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 64. Angels are also excluded from the joy of the Christian’s communion with God (“Concluded,” 97).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., “Opening the Exercises,” 168.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., “Malachi 3:16-17,” 163.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., “All-Sufficiency,” 12; “The Plea,” 84; “Longing for Christ’s Appearing,” 173. Humans can experience similar joy in Christ (“Seraphic Joy,” 94). On a somewhat similar note, “Opening Exercises” refers to Christ’s body as “angels’ food,” meaning a source of true meaning and joy (161), and “Eucharistic Prayer” conveys the same idea (184).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., untitled hymn, 132.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., “1 Chronicles 29:10-13,” 14; “Revelation 21,” 131.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., “Sanctifying Faith Implored,” 104.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., ““Enter into Thy Closet,”” 182.

Angels' job is to serve God and to "guard his churches when they pray."<sup>128</sup> They also guard and serve Christians living on earth.<sup>129</sup> Oddly enough, they even serve as guardians for Christians' bodies when they die.<sup>130</sup> The most clearly spelled-out description of angels' work in this regard is found in "Witness of Adoption," which reads:

Angels our servants are  
In heaven, who dwell in love  
And keeping all our ways  
And in their hands they bear  
The sacred sons of grace.<sup>131</sup>

They also seem to be keeping an eye on humans and evaluating their behavior: "Let fools my wiser choice deride/Angels and God approve."<sup>132</sup> In a possible allusion to 1 Corinthians 11:10, which may refer to an angelic witness to church activities, "Joining the Church" calls in both human and angelic witnesses for the vow of church membership.<sup>133</sup> And angels seem to rejoice in answered prayer for humans.<sup>134</sup> They

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., "Psalm 103:19-22," 18.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., "Concluded," 50; 'Thy Will Be Done,' 188, refers to a "strength'ning angel" and alludes back to the Garden of Gethsemane. The sense of guardian angels is invoked in "Sluggishness Lamented," 108; "Psalm 34:1-9," 120; "Ministering Spirits," 124; "Concluded," 124; "Evening," 176; "Evening," second version, 176-177, idea on 177; "Evening," third version, 177; "Evening," fourth version, 177; "Evening," fifth version, 177; "Evening," seventh version, 178.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., "Funeral of a Christian," 136.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., "The Choice of Moses," 118.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., "Psalm 111," 169.

participate in spiritual warfare on the side of God and Christians.<sup>135</sup> Another task for angels is to guide the souls of deceased Christians to heaven.<sup>136</sup> At the end of time, angels will serve as harvesters in the ingathering of Christ's kingdom.<sup>137</sup> Interestingly, in an interpretive reference to Revelation 2-3, ministers are called the "angels of the church."<sup>138</sup>

Angels are not equated with the souls of dead Christians as far as I can tell. "Psalm 148" distinguishes between "angels" and "saints above."<sup>139</sup> A similar distinction is made in "The Invitation" and the hymn "Revelation 7:9-12."<sup>140</sup> One potentially untraditional statement about angels is found in "'Whom We Have Not Seen, We Love':

Angels now, are hov'ring round us  
Unperceived they mix the throng  
Wond'ring at the love that crowned us  
Glad to join the holy song.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., "'The Lord of Hosts Is with Us,'" 124.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., "Closing Conference," 56-57, idea on 57; "The Pilgrimage," 103-104, idea on 104; "Desiring to Depart," 129; "The Full Assurance of Hope," 134; "Funeral of a Christian Sister," 137; "Funeral of a Christian Brother," 138; untitled hymn, 164; "A Religious Household," 181; "'Our Consolation Aboundeth,'" 189; "End of the Journey," 189; "'The Dying Christian to His Soul,'" 190; "The Dying Christian to His Soul," second version, 190; "To the Departing Saint," 190; "'Then Cometh the End,'" 190. "Then Cometh the End" interestingly refers to angels as guardians of the deceased soul even while in heaven, until the last trump. See also "The End of Life": "Shall I my everlasting days/With fiends or angels spend" (126-127, quote from 127).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., "Ecclesiastes 11:6," 114. See also "The Last Days," 129, which refers to the archangel blowing the last trump before Christ returns, and "'Come Lord Jesus,'" 129, which discusses the same thing more obliquely, as well as "Watch Night," 152. Angels are also present in "The Advent of the Judge," 129, and pour out the bowl judgments of Revelation 16 in "'Prepare to Meet thy God,'" 130.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., "Angels of the Church," 53.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 64; 131. See also "'Our Consolation Aboundeth,'" 189.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 92.



It seems, though, that this unseen hovering is merely in the sense of guardian angels, not in the sense of deceased-spirits-turned-into-angels that we will see in women's diaries in the following chapters. Another oddity on this topic is found in the second version of "Funeral of a Christian Sister," which reads:

How happy the angels that fall  
Transported at Jesus's name  
The saints whom he soonest shall call  
To share in the feast of the Lamb.<sup>142</sup>

I would interpret this as discussing saints and angels as two separate groups, but I am not fully sure on that.

Finally, "Praying for Recovery" at first glance is really striking, asking an angel for healing and promising submission to it, but I think the hymn is ultimately referring to Christ:

Angel of covenanted grace,  
Come, and thy healing power infuse;  
Descend in thy own time, and bless,  
And give the means their hallow'd use.

Obedient to thy will alone,  
To thee in means I calmly fly;  
My life, I know, is not my own,  
To God I live, to God I die.

Thy holy will be ever mine:  
If thou on earth detain me still,  
I bow, and bless the grace divine—  
I suffer all thy holy will.

I come, if all my strength restored,  
To serve thee with my strength renew'd.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 137.

Grant me but this, I ask no more—  
To spend and to be spent for God.<sup>143</sup>

### *Heaven*

What was the MECS theology of heaven? First, heaven was heavily prioritized; it was a very prominent topic with about 700 mentions in the hymnbook of four hundred hymns.<sup>144</sup> I am concerned here, however, with the topic of heaven as an eternal destination, not the use of “heaven” as a synonym for God, or, alternatively, the sky or outer space. Even with this stipulation, the concept of heaven is nearly ubiquitous here.

In the MECS hymnal, heaven was ultimately the place of God’s presence.<sup>145</sup> Conversely, being in God’s spiritual presence, no matter where the physical location of one’s body, constitutes a sense of heaven on earth.<sup>146</sup> Indeed, Charles Wesley’s “Sixth Petition” includes the following prayer: “Renew, enlarge, and fill our heart/With peace, and joy, and heaven, and God.”<sup>147</sup> Particularly striking was the hymn “Love Which Passeth Knowledge,” as it contains the following verse:

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., throughout the whole collection.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., “The Trinity,” 7. Although another version of “The Trinity” on page 9, alluding to Revelation 20:11 on the great white throne judgment, states, “When heaven and earth are fled/Before thy glorious face/Sing, all the saints thy love hath made/Thy everlasting praise.” So even heaven cannot always contain or maintain the presence of God. See also “The Glory of God,” 10, which teaches the same material. See also “To God the Holy Ghost,” 10, which refers to God’s inescapable presence in both heaven and hell, alluding to Psalm 139; and untitled hymn, 10, which comments, “In earth, in heaven, in all thou art.”

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., “All-Sufficiency,” 12; “The Father of Mercies,” 14.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 23.

Ask but his grace, and lo, 'tis given  
Ask, and he turns your hell to heaven  
Though sin and sorrow wound my soul  
Jesus, thy balm will make it whole.<sup>148</sup>

Here heaven and hell are used figuratively in very powerful ways.

For the MECS, heaven was a place of stability which does not change.<sup>149</sup> In heaven, there would be no sin or sorrow.<sup>150</sup> Heaven is the place where angels dwell, praising God (as mentioned above).<sup>151</sup> The existence of heaven also glorifies God: “Let heaven and earth’s stupendous frame/Display their Author’s power.”<sup>152</sup> The thought of God’s heavenly glory prompts a spirit of creaturely submission to the Creator.<sup>153</sup> Heaven is the place where God’s will is totally carried out<sup>154</sup> and where He sits on His glorious throne.<sup>155</sup> The earthly church could give Christians glimpses of heaven; “Opening Worship” refers to a church service as “heaven’s gate.”<sup>156</sup> Also, in the millennial

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., “Majesty and Mercy,” 11-12, idea on page 12.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., “He Beheld the City and Wept Over It,” 27.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., “The Trinity,” 7.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., “To God the Son,” 9.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., “Divine Majesty,” 11.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., “Divine Excellence,” 10; “Majesty and Mercy,” 11-12, idea on page 12.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., untitled hymn, 10.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 15.

kingdom earth would become heaven.<sup>157</sup> This was also said of Christ's first advent.<sup>158</sup>

How could one get to heaven? By accepting the Gospel, as mentioned above in the conversionism section.<sup>159</sup> God led the believer to heaven, not his or her self-effort,<sup>160</sup> and Christ made that decision, ultimately.<sup>161</sup> The death and resurrection of Christ made his followers "heirs of heaven."<sup>162</sup> As Charles Wesley beautifully said it, "The great I AM – from heaven he came/To make that heaven our own."<sup>163</sup> Also, those who had died were in heaven with their personalities and individualities intact.<sup>164</sup>

### *Death*

The MECS hymnal shows a great preoccupation with death, with over fifty hymns in the section entitled "Death and the Future State."<sup>165</sup> The inevitability of death is the theme of "Psalm 39," "Psalm 90," and "The Brevity of Life."<sup>166</sup> The songs take the

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., "The Trinity," 7.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., "'Glory to God in the Highest,'" 24.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., "Psalm 19, Before Morning Sermon," 16.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., "Psalm 23," 17. Even Charles Wesley's hymnic rendition of "Psalm 24:1-6," a biblical passage that makes no mention of such concepts, directed the promise of heaven to a righteous man, but defined this as "Whoe'er by grace is saved from sin" (17).

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., "'He Conquered When He Fell,'" 41.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., "'It Is Finished,'" 30.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., "His Regal State," 35.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., "Praise to Jesus," refers to "our friends in heaven" (39).

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., throughout whole collection.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 125, 126.

tone of a solemn warning to choose Christ rather than the world, before death leads the sinning soul to hell.<sup>167</sup> Sometimes the songs can be rather morbid, such as the imagery in “A Voice from the Tomb” of all humanity “walking downward to the grave.”<sup>168</sup>

However, nothing unconventional is said here; the themes that are covered include the eternal fate of heaven or hell, the relief that death brings to the Christian soul, and the second coming of Christ with the Last Judgment, along with the provision of appropriate funeral hymns.<sup>169</sup>

### *Denominationalism*

Unlike the two hymnals I will discuss below, in the Methodist hymnal, nothing whatever is said of denominationalism in either a positive or negative sense. Whenever the church is mentioned, the *Collection* is generally speaking of the universal Church of all true Christians, or the local church for Methodists to join. Nothing is said of unity with other denominations explicitly, nor is anything said about the importance of being Methodist, although Methodist distinctives are clearly taught, as discussed above.

### *The Confederacy*

Jeffrey Williams discusses the violent hymns of early Methodism in his seminal work, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by*

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<sup>167</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, “Dwelling Among the Tombs,” “A Voice From the Tombs,” 126.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, “A Voice from the Tombs,” 126.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, “Section VIII: Death and the Future State,” 125-138.

*Force*.<sup>170</sup> He argues that the violent actions of early Methodists, in their complicity with slavery, the Civil War, and Native American warfare and banishment to reservations, were precipitated by the violent rhetoric about spiritual warfare they heard at their churches, including in their hymnody. I am not out to dispute that claim, but I will contend that Methodists were not alone in their emphasis on spiritual warfare, as detailed below. Yet spiritual warfare is a minor theme of the collection, as the subsection on “The Church Militant” reveals.<sup>171</sup> The imperialistic tone of this section is painfully obvious as one of the hymns mentions that Christ “spreads through all the earth abroad/The vict’ry of his cross.”<sup>172</sup> Christ is referred to as the Captain, and Christians as soldiers, while Satan and demons are seen as the adversary (not other human beings).<sup>173</sup>

Because the Civil War and the Confederate nation were still years away from coming to fruition when this hymnbook was published, nothing directly is said about them. However, as noted above, the split with the MEC was tacitly affirmed in the preface. Additionally, southern social relations were wholeheartedly commended in this hymnbook. There are specific songs “For a Servant,” “For A Master,” and “For the Head of a Family.”<sup>174</sup> The two versions of “For A Servant” teach submission in painfully humiliating terms, commanding the servant “Thy earthly master to revere/As standing in

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<sup>170</sup> Jeffrey Williams, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by Force* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>171</sup> Early, *A Collection of Hymns*, 50-53.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-53.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

thy [Christ's] place" and in another place the duty to "bow" "at his commands."<sup>175</sup> Also, another hymn refers to African Americans as "the servile progeny of Ham."<sup>176</sup> "For A Master" enjoins just treatment and a sense of shepherding one's subordinates towards Christ, yet also contains the following reprehensible verses:

The servant faithful and discreet,  
Gentle to him, and good and mild,  
Him I would tenderly entreat,  
And scarce distinguish from a child:  
Yet let me not my place forsake,  
Th' occasion of his stumbling prove,  
The servant to my bosom take,  
Or mar him by familiar love.

Order, if some invert, confound  
Their Lord's authority, betray, —  
I hearken to the gospel sound  
And trace the providential way.  
As far from abjectness as pride,  
With condescending dignity,  
Jesus, I make thy word my guide,  
And keep the post assigned by thee.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 149. To be fair, it is pleading for Christ to save them through His blood, but still it is a humiliating and demeaning form of address. For a discussion of the rhetorical uses of the curse of Ham, see A. Nevell Owens, *Formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Nineteenth Century: Rhetoric of Identification* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 194. This of course promotes the paternalistic view of social relations popular at that time. It also conflates adherence to Christ and Scripture (particularly a conservative interpretation thereof) with adherence to the social system of slavery. For a discussion of the conflation of orthodoxy with acceptance of slavery, see Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*.

### *Evangelical Hymnody*

When compared with generic evangelical hymns, we see that the MECS hymnal was par for the course, conforming strongly to mid-nineteenth-century American evangelical norms. One enormously popular nineteenth-century songbook which was actually comprised mostly of hymns was William Walker's *The Southern Harmony*, first published in 1835, then 1847, and again in 1855.<sup>178</sup> Intended as a nonsectarian work with broad appeal to all American Protestants, *The Southern Harmony*'s subtitle claimed it to be "Well Adapted to Christian Churches of Every Denomination, Singing Schools, and Private Societies" and credited songs to both Baptist and Methodist sources, among others.<sup>179</sup> Indeed, one song directly addresses and excoriates denominationalism; "Millennium" speaks of a time "When Jesus' pure testimony will gain the day/Denominations, selfishness, will vanish away."<sup>180</sup> The general evangelical institution of Sunday School receives a nod in the hymn, "O Come, Come Away," while the ever-popular Sabbath legislation is referred to in "Missionary's Adieu."<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> See Glenn C. Wilcox, "Introduction," in William Walker, *The Southern Harmony, and Musical Companion, Containing A Choice Collection of Tunes, Hymns, Psalms, Odes, and Anthems Selected from the Most Eminent Authors in the United States and Well Adapted to Christian Churches of Every Denomination, Singing Schools, and Private Societies*, ed. Glenn C. Wilcox (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), iii.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., title page.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., "Millennium," 75; see oblique reference to the issue in "Morning Worship, (Or Natchez)," 285.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., "O Come, Come Away," 144; "Missionary's Adieu," 290.



It is evident, however, that Methodists had a hand in the formation of the book, as the theology leans in that direction rather than just nondenominational evangelical. The cherished Methodist doctrine of unlimited atonement, meaning that Christ died for all people's sins rather than just those of the elect, is found several times in this hymnal. For instance, "The Midnight Cry" said,

Room for you, and room for me  
And room for coming sinners  
Salvation pours a living stream  
For you and all believers.<sup>182</sup>

This originally Wesleyan belief had, by the mid-nineteenth century, become standard among American evangelicals, primarily because of the Second Great Awakening which was largely instituted by Methodists. Similarly, the doctrine of falling from grace, or losing salvation, is strongly implied in at least one instance. The song "Milledgeville" discusses a believer's struggle for eternal life and determination to press on towards heaven, even at one point saying that their sin "drove thee [God] from my breast."<sup>183</sup>

Particularly odd and noteworthy songs include *The Romish Lady*, a melodramatically anti-Catholic hymn; *Star of Columbia*, a nationalistic and imperialistic song referring to America as "queen of the world"; *The Indian's Petition*, which struck a tenuous balance between empathy for Native Americans and assumption of governmental righteousness; and *Ode on Science*, which promises immortality to American devotees of

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., "The Midnight Cry," 32.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., "Milledgeville," 300.

science.<sup>184</sup> However, these four songs were unique and outside the norm of this collection.

*Southern Harmony and the Quadrilateral*

For the most part, the hymnbook propounded a generic evangelical faith, adhering well to the themes of Bebbington's quadrilateral. Evangelistic activism finds its expression in songs promoting the foreign missionary enterprise, such as "Isles of the South," "Missionary Hymn," "Drummond," "Missionary's Adieu," and "Missionary Song."<sup>185</sup> Although likely well-intentioned, this evangelistic activism often took a reprehensively imperialistic bent, as in these words from "Missionary Song":

Let the Indian, let the Negro,  
Let the rude barbarian see  
That divine and glorious conquest  
Once obtained on Calvary;  
Let the gospel, let the gospel  
Loud resound from pole to pole.<sup>186</sup>

Biblicism formed another component of the hymnbook, as several of the songs expressed deep respect for the Scriptures and belief in their truth and guiding power.<sup>187</sup> Particularly noteworthy was "The Family Bible," which sentimentally immortalizes "the

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., "The Romish Lady," 82; "Star of Columbia," 260-61; "The Indian's Petition," 269; "Ode On Science," 210-212.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., "Isles of the South," 86; "Missionary Hymn," 111; "Drummond," 196; "Missionary's Adieu," 290; "Missionary Song," 197.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., "Missionary Song," 197.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., "Nashville," 271, and "Willoughby," 277, which are the same lyrics with different tunes; "The Young Convert," 308; "Precious Bible," 311.

Bible that lay on the stand” in family devotions.<sup>188</sup> Conversionism was exemplified in the evangelistic invitations in “Invitation” and “Royal Proclamation” and in the testimonial nature of such songs as “M.C.H. Davis’ Experience.”<sup>189</sup> Some songs such as “Mission” and “Transport” expressed both testimony and invitation.<sup>190</sup>

Finally, crucicentric devotion found expression in the hard-hitting song “Pardoning Love,” which refers to human guilt over the death of Christ; as well as “The Sufferings of Christ,” a rather graphic description of the crucifixion; other crucicentric songs include “Crucifixion,” “Cross of Christ,” and “Behold the Lamb of God,” among others.<sup>191</sup> Most of the crucicentric songs expressed a belief in substitutionary atonement. For example, “Behold the Lamb of God” includes these lines:

Come, sinners, see him lifted up...  
For you he drinks the bitter cup...  
The rocks do rend, the mountains quake,  
While Jesus doth atonement make,  
While Jesus suffers for our sake...<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., “The Family Bible,” 20-21.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., “Invitation,” 303; “Royal Proclamation,” 146; “M. C. H. Davis’ Experience,” 81. See also “Farewell,” 81; “Jubilee,” 118; and “Wilmot,” 165, for invitations.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., “Mission,” 96; “Transport,” 152.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., “Pardoning Love,” 268; “The Sufferings of Christ,” 85; “Crucifixion,” 25; “The Cross of Christ,” 35; “Behold the Lamb of God,” 320.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., “Behold the Lamb of God,” 320.

### *Spiritual Warfare and the Civil War*

As discussed above, Jeffrey Williams chalks up all violent actions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Methodists to their violent rhetoric about spiritual warfare.<sup>193</sup> Methodists were joined by other American evangelicals in this emphasis on spiritual warfare. *Southern Harmony* contains plenty of decidedly martial hymns, including “Faithful Soldier,” “Christian Soldier,” and “Contented Soldier.”<sup>194</sup> The words of “Contented Soldier” can be interpreted as rather violent: “I’ve listed, and I mean to fight/Till the warfare is over, hallelujah!/Till my foes are put to flight/Till the warfare is over.”<sup>195</sup> The popular American evangelical movement thus counted many soldiers in its ranks. However, this martial imagery was balanced by the millennial aspirations to world peace present in such songs as “War Department” and “Eltham.”<sup>196</sup>

*Southern Harmony* took a relatively nonpartisan stance on the Union/Confederate spectrum. While the conflict was not full-blown in 1855 when this edition was published, the vitriolic Baptist and Methodist church splits had already occurred, and much mud-slinging and political agitation were afoot on both sides. *Southern Harmony* does not take a stand on the political conflict; it is clear that editor William Walker intended to stay out of the fray, probably to maintain profitable sales in both North and South. References to

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<sup>193</sup> Jeffrey Williams, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism*.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., “Faithful Soldier,” 122; “Christian Soldier,” 95; “Contented Soldier,” 314. See also “Zion’s Light,” 270, and “The Trumpeters,” 301.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., “Contented Soldier,” 314. However, the song takes a less violent tone when we consider the references to love and grace in the same song.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., “War Department,” 94; “Eltham,” 307. See also “Stonington,” 279, which talks about the peaceful “gospel trumpet” and how it puts an end to “vengeance.”

issues of slavery and race are few and far between. “Knoxville” mentions that “parents, children, bond, and free” could “see” “fair Canaan’s land” or heaven, while “Heavenly Vision” included “bond and free” among those who fled from divine judgment in the last days. This does imply, then, that slavery will last until the end of time, but is still quite an oblique reference. Referring to Galatians 3:28, “Shepherd” comments that “Gentile and Jew, and bond and free/Are one in Christ their Head.”<sup>197</sup> Thus *Southern Harmony* promotes the idea that slaves are full participants in the plan of God, whether in judgment or in salvation, and of one body with the other Christians in their church. In one sense this is egalitarian ideology, but on the other hand is decidedly anti-radical as no comments are made about the earthly status of slaves. This would make sense as the title seems to be marketing to southerners.

### *Death, Heaven, and Angels*

*Southern Harmony* thus expresses some standard, conventional evangelical themes which have been fairly consistent for most evangelicals through time. However, some distinctive topics are covered; the nineteenth-century audience was obviously preoccupied with death as it forms a major, perhaps the overriding, theme of the book.<sup>198</sup> The volume could be positively morbid at times, including such ghastly lines as these:

Your sparkling eyes and blooming cheeks  
Must wither like the blasted rose

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., “Knoxville,” 140; “Heavenly Vision,” 209; “Shepherd,” 267.

<sup>198</sup> See *ibid.*, “Minister’s Farewell,” 14; “Hicks’ Farewell,” 19; “Evening Shade,” 46; “The Watchman’s Call,” 65; “Legacy,” 73; “The Mouldering Vine,” 87; “An Address for All,” 99; “Funeral Anthem,” 187-188; “Farewell Anthem,” 214-216; “Funeral Thought,” 257; “When I Am Gone,” 305; “Thou Art Passing Away,” 329, and many more.

The coffin and the winding sheet  
Will soon your active limbs enclose.<sup>199</sup>

As such, judgment sometimes appears in the songs and occasionally they take on a menacing, threatening tone; one even addresses the tortures of damnation in hell.<sup>200</sup> But the general tenor of the songs about death is about heaven, finding peace in the presence of God and rejoining the saints who have gone before.<sup>201</sup> For the most part, what is said about death is standard evangelical fare, discussing the tremendous struggle of life before reaching the glorious beauty of heaven. Death is conceptualized as the soul being brought to heaven by angels, where the person will be with God in perfection forever and reign with God.<sup>202</sup>

Indeed, there is a strong emphasis on angels, even in songs that are not primarily about death and heaven, as the ones who bring the dead to heaven and as those who praise God and serve as messengers for God in heaven.<sup>203</sup> Angels also have a role on earth, watching what happens and sometimes serving as guardian angels (this last is

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., “Mission,” 96.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., “Judgment,” 47; “Arlington,” 285; “The Narrow Way,” 289; “Mission,” 96; “Land of Pleasure,” 63; “The Watchman’s Call,” 65.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., “Minister’s Farewell,” 14; “Hicks’ Farewell,” 19; “Land of Pleasure,” 63.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., “O Come, Come Away,” 144; “Sweet Solitude,” 155; “Happy Land,” 89; “Indian’s Farewell,” 25; “All Is Well,” 306.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., “Alabama,” 116-117; “Portuguese Hymn,” 136; “O Come, Come Away,” 144; “Sweet Solitude,” 155; “Azmon,” 181; “Eton,” 181; “Heavenly Vision,” 206-10; “Zion’s Light,” 270; “Hope,” 272; “Shirland,” 272; “The Weary Pilgrim’s Consolation,” 298; “Coronation,” 299; “All Is Well,” 306; “Travelling Pilgrim,” 313; “Intercession,” 324; and many others.

mostly in reference to Christ).<sup>204</sup> It is never directly communicated whether or not angels are the souls of dead Christians, so it is not clear whether or not the authors or singers had that impression. One verse in “The Weary Pilgrim’s Consolation” may possibly be hinting in that direction, but it is unclear:

How sweet to reflect on the joys that await me  
In yon blissful region, the haven of rest  
Where glorified spirits with welcome shall greet me  
And lead me to mansions prepared for the blest.<sup>205</sup>

What we can know for sure is that nineteenth-century evangelicals had at least a preoccupation if not an obsession with angels.

### *Broader Cultural Norms in Secular Music*

#### *Death, Heaven, and Angels*

Even the secular songs of the antebellum and Civil War years betray a cultural preoccupation with death. Stephen C. Foster’s “Ellen Bayne” (1854) spoke of the woman’s subconscious desire for her deceased loved ones as expressed in her dreams at night: “Forms long departed/Greet thee again/Soothing thy dreaming heart/Sweet Ellen Bayne.”<sup>206</sup> Similarly, Foster’s highly sentimental ballad, “The Voices That Are Gone” (1864) would have spoken volumes to a bereaved, grieving wartime audience. It focused

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., “Hebron,” 288; “Sweet Gliding Kedron,” 200; “The Shepherd’s Star,” 310.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., “The Weary Pilgrim’s Consolation,” 298.

<sup>206</sup> Gregg Smith, ed., *America’s Bicentennial Songs from the Great Sentimental Age, 1850-1900, Stephen C. Foster to Charles E. Ives* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1975), “Ellen Bayne,” 23-25, quotation from page 24.

on both earthly (through memory) and heavenly reunions with deceased loved ones.<sup>207</sup>

The last verse in particular presents an idealized vision of the good death and heavenly reunion with loved ones:

So when life's bright sun is setting  
And its day is well nigh done  
May there be no vain regretting  
Over mem'ries I would shun  
But when death is o'er, to meet me  
May such much-loved forms come on  
And the first sounds that shall greet me  
Be the voices that are gone.<sup>208</sup>

For the most part, even secular music promoted a roughly conventional evangelical view of death. In the New Testament epistles, the Apostle Paul refers to death as sleep, as does Christ in the gospels on at least one occasion.<sup>209</sup> Nineteenth-century secular songwriters pick up on this metaphor; Charles Mueller writes, “thou in death art sleeping” of the deceased Lilly Bell (“Lilly Bell,” 1853).<sup>210</sup> Lilly Bell was conceptualized as singing with the angels and as “far away” and absent.<sup>211</sup> Interestingly, however, Mueller portrays the beau or husband as being able to hear these songs.<sup>212</sup> The emphasis on angels so

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., “The Voices that are Gone,” 38-40.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., quotation from pages 38-39. For a discussion of the “good death,” see Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 183-220.

<sup>209</sup> John 11:11-14; 1 Corinthians 15:51; Thessalonians 4:13.

<sup>210</sup> Smith, *America's Bicentennial Songs*, “Lilly Bell,” 120-122, quotation appears on page 121, 122.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., quotation and idea on page 121.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., idea on page 121.



prominent in the MECS hymnbook and in *Southern Harmony* also appears in secular music. In the song “Nelly Gray” (B.R. Hanby, 1856), death was conceptualized as “somebody knocking at the door.”<sup>213</sup> And angels were intimately involved in that death, both “calling” to summon him, and “[clearing] the way” to heaven.<sup>214</sup> Interestingly, the narrator could “see my Nelly Gray,” his deceased wife or beau, up in heaven as he was dying.<sup>215</sup>

### *Gender in Secular Music*

Such seemingly morbid and death-centered material, however, was counterbalanced by other wartime tunes such as Foster’s *Mr. and Mrs. Brown* (1864), which was intended to be humorous.<sup>216</sup> It depicted a dialogue between a husband and wife, stylized as a “quarrel” in the lyrics, and it ended with a happy resolution.<sup>217</sup> However, beneath the surface the song includes marital tension and distrust, escalating to the point of threatening desertion or divorce, about a husband’s late return from work (it can be inferred that he was drinking from the word “hic” reported in his lines) and a

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<sup>213</sup> I found the date for this song on “Darling Nelly Gray,” *Duke University Libraries Digital Collections, Historic American Sheet Music*, n.d., [https://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/hasm\\_a3400/](https://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/hasm_a3400/). Accessed February 19, 2020. Smith, *America’s Bicentennial Songs*, “Darling Nelly Gray,” 123-125, quote on page 123.

<sup>214</sup> Smith, *America’s Bicentennial Songs*, “Darling Nelly Gray,” 123-125, quote on page 123.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., quote on page 124.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., “Mr. & Mrs. Brown,” 79-80, quotation from 80.

wife's marital infidelity.<sup>218</sup> In the end the tension is resolved by both husband and wife promising fidelity and the husband's further promise to "always stay at home."<sup>219</sup> The almost frantic domesticity reflects a larger issue of spousal absence leading to distrust, which would have been widespread during the Civil War. Another wartime song exalting love-based companionate marriage was Foster's "Somebody's Coming to See Me Tonight" (1864). Thus love, marriage, and domesticity, even while disrupted by the war, were still championed in contemporary music as the ideals to be sought and fought for.

### *African American Spirituals*

Enslaved women no doubt sang hymns with their white counterparts and participated in the popular music of the times. However, African American evangelical Christians developed an alternative worship tradition sung in their church services, in the fields, and around the house as they worked.<sup>220</sup> These spirituals were sometimes based off of music originated in Christian groups dominated by whites, Methodist or other, but all spirituals were expressive and creative in their own way.<sup>221</sup> Spirituals expressed the

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., quotation from 80.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>220</sup> John W. Work, ed., *American Negro Songs: 230 Folk Songs and Spirituals, Religious and Secular* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 18, makes the case that "It [the spiritual] served as the work song and as the social song," alongside the "religious expression" we normally associate with spirituals. He goes on to claim that African American church members were forbidden from "singing all songs of a secular nature," which seems a strong claim to me (18). Be that as it may, it is evident that spirituals were a part of enslaved people's daily life outside of the church walls.

<sup>221</sup> In making this statement, I am not saying that the songs were less worthy of respect than white music. I highly object to Work's depiction of the spirituals as wholly derivative and, worse, inferior and crude (ibid., 129). His racially offensive perspective was a product of his own times.

theological emphases important to African American Christians generally. Unfortunately, it is difficult to reconstruct which specific songs would have been sung by slaves in Texas in the nineteenth century as opposed to other southern states, except those mentioned explicitly in slave narratives. Additionally, it is nearly impossible to distinguish denominational identity in Texas slave narratives other than generic evangelicalism, as most of the slave narratives do not identify denominational affiliation at all. I will describe this phenomenon in more detail in Chapter Four, but for now I will simply say that African American evangelicals in Texas, by and large, were not terribly committed to their denominational identity.<sup>222</sup> Despite these limitations, it is still instructive to examine spirituals to grasp the general tenor of African American evangelicalism during the nineteenth century.

In some ways, spirituals were expressions of conventional evangelical faith, although some distinctions appear. The first thing we can say about these spirituals is that they do display affinities with the Bebbington quadrilateral, just as much as is seen in the hymns of white Methodists, or white evangelicals in general. Spirituals express evangelistic activism; devotion to the Bible as the source of spiritual truth (biblicism); the need for the new birth (conversionism); and a special emphasis on the atoning death of Christ as a focal point of worship and devotion (crucicentrism).

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<sup>222</sup> This assessment differs from Work's view (*ibid.*, 23). I am not sure if enslaved persons in Texas were actually different than enslaved persons elsewhere. Perhaps Work is simply judging off the one song he adduces in evidence of his position without evaluating all available evidence (23-24).

## *Activism*

A passion for evangelism appears in the form of appeals to sinners for salvation. Such appeals, when sung, would constitute evangelistic activism on the part of the singers. For just one example, “The Rocks and the Mountains” called out, “Sinner, singer, give up your heart to God,” “Seeker, seeker, give up your heart to God,” “Mourner, mourner, give up your heart to God.”<sup>223</sup> “Somebody’s Knocking At Your Door” and “Poor Sinner” were songs wholly dedicated to appeals to the unconverted, the former taking a particularly sweet and winsome tone towards the conversion process with refrains such as “Jesus calls you” and “Can’t you trust Him?”<sup>224</sup> A more condemnatory tone was taken in the evangelistic appeal on “I’m Workin’ On the Buildin’”:

If I was a sinner,  
I tell you what I would do,  
I’d throw away my sinful ways an’ work on the buildin’ too.

If I were a dancer,  
I tell you what I would do,  
I’d throw away my dancin’ shoes an’ work on the buildin’ too.

If I was a gambler,  
I tell you what I would do,  
I’d throw away my gamblin’ dice an’ work on the buildin’ too.<sup>225</sup>

There were also songs about the activity of evangelism, enjoining it as a sacred duty upon all Christians. “Daniel Saw the Stone” promised, “[I’m] Going to preach about

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 54. See also *ibid.*, “Pray On,” 81; “Come Here Lord,” 85; “Sinner Please Don’t Let this Harvest Pass,” 191, for examples of evangelistic appeals.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 192, 193.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 97.

that stone [Jesus].”<sup>226</sup> Predictably, “Witness” called for Christians to be “a witness for my Lord.”<sup>227</sup> Even more directly, “Balm in Gilead” made it clear that evangelistic activism was expected of all Christians regardless of their spiritual giftings and abilities:

If you cannot preach like Peter,  
If you cannot pray like Paul,  
You can tell the love of Jesus,  
And say, “He died for all.”<sup>228</sup>

### *Biblicism*

Although enslaved Christians were mostly illiterate, and thus unable to read the Bible, their spirituals inculcated a deep respect for the Bible as the Scriptures, the holy Word of God, as well as a knowledge of biblical stories and themes. Familiarity with the Bible is also evident, as, for instance, “The Signs of Judgment” directed the reader to “Read the book o’ Saint Luke/’Bout the twenty first chapter see the sign of the judgement/The Time is drawing nigh.”<sup>229</sup> Evangelical biblicism is thus present in the spirituals as the Bible is referenced as the source of spiritual truth. For example, “Holy Bible” starts with this refrain: “Holy Bible, Holy Bible, Holy Bible, book divine, book divine,” and goes on to encourage the auditors with the stories of Mary (probably referring to the mother of Jesus) and Thomas, and the comfort God and heaven bring to the faithful.<sup>230</sup> “Witness,” which tells the stories of Methuselah, Samson and Delilah, and

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., “Daniel Saw the Stone (Second Version),” 121.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 77-179, quote from 177.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 106.

Daniel in the lion's den, also includes the repeated refrain "You read in the Bible and you understand" and once says, "...this we know, For the holy Bible tells us so."<sup>231</sup> "I Heard the Preaching of the Elder" rehashes the stories of Noah and Jonah and the chorus contains repeated references to the Elder "[preaching] the Word of God."<sup>232</sup>

### *Conversionism*

Spirituals also teach conversionism very frequently. In a book of about two hundred traditional African American songs, mostly spirituals, at least sixty of them make direct or indirect references to conversionism, making this one of the dominant themes of the collection.<sup>233</sup> Indirect allusions include casual addresses to "mourners" and seekers. For example, "Roll, Jordan, Roll," states, "O seeker you ought to have been there/Yes my Lord/A-sitting in the kingdom/To hear old Jordan roll."<sup>234</sup> But much more common is direct teaching of conversion via the sung conversion narrative. "The Religion that My Lord Gave Me" is a good example of such a narrative, along with "A Little Talk of Jesus," "Roll On," and "O Make Me Holy."<sup>235</sup> Interestingly, "Good Lord I Done Done" lists multiple stages or steps to conversion: praying, mourning, and

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 177-179, quotations from 177-178.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>233</sup> I am referring to *ibid.*, throughout.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 59, 78-79, 80, 87. Interestingly, the song "Inching Along" bears testimony to a gradual conversion: "It was inch by inch that I sought the Lord/Jesus will come by-and-by/It was inch by inch that he saved my soul/Jesus will come by-and-by" (125). However, this is most definitely the exception among the songs in the collection; most bear testimony to a dramatic and instantaneous conversion experience.

shouting.<sup>236</sup> Probably the most dramatic instance is the spiritual entitled “The Gift of God,” which gives testimony to the saving power of God in conversion as well as the weakness of human nature even in the converted:

When I was seeking Jesus,  
And thought he couldn't be found,  
The grace of God came in my soul,  
And turned me all around.

When first I got converted,  
I had no doubts at all,  
But I've had so many crosses  
That I feel the least of all.

The song ends with a solemn warning:

Yonder comes my brother  
Whom I loved so well  
But by his disobedience  
Has made his home in hell.<sup>237</sup>

Other such solemn warnings of eternal judgment for the unconverted are found in “Ain't You Glad You Got Good Religion?” and “The Downward Road is Crowded.”<sup>238</sup> And the evangelistic appeal of “Sinner Please Don't Let This Harvest Pass” ends with a threat that the auditors might “die and lose your soul at last.”<sup>239</sup> A warning is implied in the statement, “I'm so glad I got my religion in time” in “What Shall I Do?”<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 66, 163.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 162.

## *Crucicentrism*

Crucicentrism formed another major theme of the collection. Editor John W. Work waxes eloquent on this point: “In my opinion these black singers reached the pinnacle of noble, expressive, and dramatic description in their tragic, beautiful, poignant portrayal of the crucifixion.”<sup>241</sup> I most definitely agree with this assessment. “Calvary” focuses upon the death of Christ as the focal point of worship of Jesus: “Ev’ry time I think about Jesus/Surely He died on Calvary.”<sup>242</sup> “They Led My Lord Away” movingly depicts the trial of the innocent Savior, which resulted in his unjust condemnation; interestingly, the depiction chalked up Christ’s death to “The Jews and Romans, in-a one band” rather than an anti-Semitic conception that attributed the guilt to the Jews alone.<sup>243</sup> “He Never Said a Mumblin’ Word” reflects on the silence of Christ during the crucifixion, possibly leading the enslaved audience towards thoughts of non-resistance towards their own white oppressors.<sup>244</sup> Crucicentrism received a brief treatment in “You Hear the Lambs A-Crying,” which depicts the restoration of Peter after he had denied Christ: “Wasn’t that an awful shame/He hung three hours in mortal pain.”<sup>245</sup>

Perhaps the most emotional expression of crucicentrism is manifested in the haunting melody, “Were You There?”:

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 114.



Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?<sup>246</sup>

The song goes on to ask the audience, “Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?” “Were you there when they pierced Him in the side?” “Were you there when the sun refused to shine?” “Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?”<sup>247</sup> The painful questions push the auditors to consider the moment of Christ’s crucifixion in an empathic manner.

Similarly, “The Angels Done Bowed Down” portrays Christ’s emotion in a highly emotional manner: “While Jesus was a-hanging upon the cross the angels kept quiet till God went off/And the angels hung their harps on the willow trees to give satisfaction till God was pleased.”<sup>248</sup> The abandonment of Christ on the cross and a deep desire for reconciliation with the Father echo through this spiritual. Such depictions indicate the devotion to the Cross of Christ that must have been felt by the enslaved community.

Specifically, as in the white evangelical community of the time, spirituals also conceptualized the death of Christ as substitutionary atonement. The death of Christ was brought about “to save my soul from a burning fire.”<sup>249</sup> In a reference to John 1:29, Jesus was called “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world,” and again

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., “Live A Humble,” 184.

emphasizing imagery from the Pentateuch, “leaning on the Lord” was the way “out [of] the wilderness” and into the Promised Land of heaven.<sup>250</sup> The evangelistic appeal of “Sinner, Please Don’t Let This Harvest Pass” was punctuated by this verse about substitutionary atonement:

Sinner, O see the cruel tree, cruel tree,  
Sinner, O see the cruel tree, cruel tree,  
Sinner, O see the cruel tree,  
Where Christ died for you and me, you and me.<sup>251</sup>

More uniquely, spirituals contain ubiquitous allusions to Christ as the Lamb of God, a phrase which further illuminates the traditional evangelical adherence to the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. The metaphor would have been especially powerful for enslaved persons as it highlights Christ’s helplessness and victimization during his passion and death, both painful realities that slavery would have forced them to experience as well. One oft-repeated phrase is “I’m purchased by the dying Lamb.”<sup>252</sup> This phrase not only presented the singer’s identity as a redeemed and regenerate person, but also pointed to the power of powerlessness as exemplified in Christ’s self-sacrifice on the Cross.

The doctrine of unlimited atonement, or free grace, also received much coverage as salvation is frequently offered to all.<sup>253</sup> (As mentioned above, unlimited atonement was

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., “I’ve Got Out the Wilderness,” 185.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>252</sup> For example, see *ibid.*, “O Make Me Holy,” 87; “Come Down,” 88; “My Soul’s Been Anchored in the Lord,” 133.

<sup>253</sup> While not directly teaching unlimited atonement, “New Born Again” also repeats the phrase “free grace” many times (*ibid.*, 151).

originally a Wesleyan and Methodist distinctive but eventually became diffuse throughout American evangelicalism throughout the nineteenth century.) “I Believe This is Jesus” states, “He offers all His pard’ning grace.”<sup>254</sup> Even more directly, “My Name’s Written on High” directly teaches, “Jesus died for ev’ry man.”<sup>255</sup> Similarly, “I Will Pray” includes the phrase, “Jesus died for ev’ry sinner.”<sup>256</sup> And most dramatically, “There’s Room Enough,” while not exactly teaching universalism, leans in that direction with its refrain:

Don’t stay away, don’t stay away, for my Lord says there’s room enough  
Room enough in the heav’n for us all, my Lord says there’s room enough  
So don’t stay away.<sup>257</sup>

#### *Christian Community in Spirituals*

Another emphasis in spirituals is that of the “band” of Christians. The spirituals are clear that there is a core of regenerate members of the Christian community along with sinners, gossips, and backsliders that will ultimately be excluded from the heavenly Kingdom. And it was an exclusive community; “Roll On” claimed, “The Heav’nly land so bright and fair/There are very few seem going there.”<sup>258</sup> In the black Christian community, one could not claim whiteness, power, wealth, or any other earthly status symbol, to exalt oneself; if someone was truly regenerate, he or she was a spiritual elite,

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 80.

no matter how they appeared in the eyes of the world. The essential unity of Christians would no doubt enable enslaved persons to feel a sense of dignity and worth far above that accorded to them as the “chattel” of their slaveholders. This group was led by an “Elder” which provided an alternative structure of authority, leadership, and submission to the broader social structure which ultimately controlled their lives as slaves.<sup>259</sup> And ultimately Christ Himself was seen as the leader, as referenced in the spiritual, “He’s A Mighty Good Leader.”<sup>260</sup> Thus the black Christian community was subversive of the white hierarchy and claims to power, offering an alternative identity and hierarchy for its adherents. Although insubordinate rhetoric was probably rarely openly expressed in front of whites, the Baptist-based spiritual “My Good Lord’s Done Been Here” included these radical lines:

You may be a white man  
White as the drifting snow  
If your soul ain’t been converted  
To Hell you’re sure to go.<sup>261</sup>

Of course, this community was not without its own internal tensions. In “Good Morning, Everybody,” the second verse repeats the refrain “You may call me ‘hypocrite member’...But my soul got happy this morning.”<sup>262</sup> In other words, the singer was setting

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<sup>259</sup> The relationship with one’s Elder was seen to be an eternal one (ibid., “King Jesus Built Me A House Above,” 227). The Elder was typically a church leader, specifically a preacher (“I Heard the Preaching of the Elder,” 183) and a church planter (“Ol’ Elder Brown’s,” 241).

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 48. The same thought is expressed in “Thank God I’m On My Way to Heaven,” 90. “Hypocrite members” are also referred to in “In This Lan’,” 84.

himself or herself up in defiance of the church hierarchy's discipline, or at least church gossip, in declaring regenerate status against the allegations of the community. Hypocrisy even in the conversion process must have also been a problem, judging by these words in another song: "Some seek the Lord and don't seek him right, fool all day and pray at night."<sup>263</sup> And "God's Goin' to Straighten Them" speaks of "deacons," "preachers," and "members in [the] church" who "ain't straight."<sup>264</sup>

### *Spirituals and Satan*

An interesting minor theme in the spirituals is Satan's opposition to the Christian life. In "My Name's Written on High," Satan is seen as an opposing spiritual force attempting to keep the Christian from heaven:

O get back, Satan, let me by  
My name's written on high  
Going to serve my Jesus till I die  
My name's written on high.<sup>265</sup>

Similarly, "Going Home in the Chariot" addresses the audience, which seems to be unconverted persons, regarding the role of Satan in their lives:

O never you mind what Satan say  
Going home in the chariot in the morning  
He never did teach one sinner to pray  
Going home in the chariot in the morning."<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., "I Know the Lord's Laid His Hands on Me," 168.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., "My Name's Written on High," 137.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., "Going Home in the Chariot," 139.

Additionally, “Tryin’ to Cross the Red Sea” contains the following references to

Satan:

I went down in the valley to offer up prayer,  
Tryin’ to cross the Red Sea,  
when I got there ol’ Satan was there  
Tryin’ to cross the Red Sea.

Ol’ Satan’s mad an’ I am glad,  
Tryin’ to cross the Red Sea,  
He missed that soul he thought he had  
Tryin’ to cross the Red Sea.  
I wonder what ol’ Satan’s grumblin’ about,  
Tryin’ to cross the Red Sea,  
He’s down in hell and can’t get out  
Tryin’ to cross the Red Sea.

Satan is thus compared to the evil Pharaoh in the Exodus narrative, who tried to pursue his former slaves (the Israelites) through the Red Sea and was drowned in the attempt. Similarly, although Satan tries to pursue Christian souls, Jesus delivers them through the trials of life and leads them to safety in heaven while simultaneously leaving Satan in eternal death in hell. All these references to Satan seem to focus only on Satan’s relationship with the Christian in terms of hindering spiritual growth, progress, or salvation. Also, in each song, Christ is shown to be more powerful and successfully defeats Satan.

### *Hell and Judgment*

Additionally, hell and judgment comprise a significant theme in this collection. “The Gift of God,” as mentioned above, describes a brother’s “home in hell,” merited by “his disobedience.”<sup>267</sup> One such manifestation of disobedience that could send the sinner

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., “The Gift of God,” 61.

to hell was gambling: “Done told you once, done told you twice/There’s sinners in hell for shooting dice.”<sup>268</sup> Similarly, “Bye and Bye” includes the following passage:

Hell is deep and dark despair  
I’m goin’ to lay down my heavy load  
Stop [poor] sinner and don’t go there  
I’m goin’ to lay down my heavy load.<sup>269</sup>

In other words, hell was the justly merited punishment for sin, but could be averted by the sinner, who was to be pitied if he or she was consigned to hell.

Oddly enough, another verse of “Bye and Bye” says,

I know my robe’s goin’ to fit me well  
I’m goin’ to lay down my heavy load  
I tried it on at the gates of hell  
I’m goin’ to lay down my head load.<sup>270</sup>

This could be interpreted as a testimony of being saved, as the singer nearly went to hell but was bound towards heaven instead (the image of the robe refers to heaven). A similar testimony is found in “I Hear the Angels Shoutin’,” which presents the salvation of the singer from hell and the appropriate prevention of hellfire:

Where do you think I [found] my soul,  
Listen to the angels shoutin’,  
I [found] my soul at hell’s dark door,  
Listen to the angels shoutin’.  
Before I’d lay in hell one day,  
Listen to the angels shoutin’,  
I’d sing and pray myself away.  
Listen to the angels shoutin’.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., “Little David,” 124.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 209-210.

Likewise, “Live A Humble” praises God for saving the singer from hell through Christ:

Ever see such a man as God?  
He gave up His Son for to come and die  
Gave up his Son for to come and die  
Just to save my soul from a burning fire.<sup>272</sup>

The burning fire does not pose a problem for the singer; he or she recognizes the justice of God in the penalty of hell, but also the justice of God in substitutionary atonement, sending His Son to pay the penalty for human sin and save sinners from hell.

The retributive role of hell in the spirituals is further underscored by the song, “Got A Home in That Rock,” which retells Christ’s parable of the rich man and Lazarus, recorded in Luke 16:19-31:

Poor old Laz’rus, poor as I  
Don’t you see? Don’t you see?  
Poor old Laz’rus, poor as I,  
Don’t you see? Don’t you see?  
Poor old Laz’rus, poor as I  
When he died had a home on high  
He had a home in-a that Rock,  
Don’t you see?

Rich man, Dives, lived so well,  
Don’t you see?  
Rich man, Dives, lived so well,  
Don’t you see?  
Rich man, Dives, lived so well,  
When he died he found home in hell,  
Had no home in that Rock,  
Don’t you see?<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 169.



Obviously, the subversive nature of this song, which condemns the rich and corrupt Dives to hell, while sending the innocent man “poor as I” to heaven, would not have been lost on the enslaved audience. However, for the most part, what is said about hell in these spirituals is conventional evangelical doctrine: hell as eternal punishment, justly merited by sin, but averted by conversion, brought about by faith in the atoning death of Christ.

Judgment is a significant threat in the spirituals, which emphasize the apocalyptic nature of the last judgment before God at the end of time and the severity of divine judgment on human sin.<sup>274</sup> The song “No Hiding Place” takes a particularly ominous tone about the inevitability and inescapability of God’s judgement, particularly for the sinner:

There’s no hiding place down here,  
There’s no hiding place down here,

Went to the rocks for to hide my face,  
Rocks cried out “No hiding place,”  
There’s no hiding place down here.

Boat man, boat man, row one side,  
Can’t get to heav’n ’gainst wind and tide,  
There’s no hiding place down here.

Sinner man, sinner man, better repent,  
God’s going to call you to judgment.<sup>275</sup>

This haunting, ominous tone also appears in “Live A Humble,” which comments:

See God [and] you see God [and] you see God in the morning  
He’ll come riding down the line of time

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<sup>274</sup> See *ibid.*, “O Rocks Don’t Fall On Me,” 126; “Going Home in the Chariot,” 139; “You’d Better Min’ [Mind],” 212; “My Lord’s Goin’ Move This Wicked Race,” 217; “See the Signs of Judgment,” 225; “O It’s Goin’ to Be A Mighty Day,” 232.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 149. See also “Got to Go to Judgment,” 91, for another discussion of inevitability of God’s final judgment.

The fire'll be falling  
He'll be calling, 'Come to judgment come.'<sup>276</sup>

The emphasis on divine judgment at the end of time could promote a subversive disregard of the human master's opinions and judgments; ultimately the result of the only important judgment comes from God and God alone, which frees the believer from fear of human judgment and criticism.<sup>277</sup>

### *The Second Coming of Christ*

Alongside judgment, the second coming of Christ is a semi-prominent topic in the spirituals. In the song "Inching Along," the emphasis seems to be on the hope that the second coming brings to the believer to "keep a-inching along," as every other line in both the verses and chorus is "Jesus will come by-and-by."<sup>278</sup> Similarly, "Rise, Shine, For Thy Light is A 'Comin'" promotes a lifelong spiritual journey on the basis that "My Lord says he comin' bye'n'bye."<sup>279</sup> "O Rocks Don't Fall On Me" includes a verse, referring to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 about the second coming of Christ, that says, "The trump shall sound, and the dead shall rise/Rocks and mountains, don't fall on me/And go to mansions in-a the skies/Rocks and mountains, don't fall on me."<sup>280</sup> On the other hand, "Ride on

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., "Nobody Knows Who I Am," 189, says as much: "O, nobody knows who I am, a who I am, till the judgment morning!...If you don't believe that I've been redeemed, follow me down to Jordan's stream."

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 126. "You May Bury Me in the East" also refers to the same biblical passage (56). "My Lord What A Mourning" alludes to 1 Thessalonians 4, but the emphasis is more on the judgment and division between Christians and non-Christians,

King Jesus” focuses more on the judgment side of Christ’s return, as, referring to Revelation 19:11-21 about the return of Christ in judgment and the Battle of Armageddon, it says, “King Jesus rides on a milk-white horse/No man can hinder him/The river of Jordan he did cross/No man can hinder him.”<sup>281</sup>

Overall, however, what is said about the second coming of Christ is aptly summarized in the song, “I’m going back with Jesus”:

I’m going back with Jesus when He comes when He comes  
And I’m going back with Jesus when He comes when He comes  
O He may not come today,  
But He’s coming anyway  
And I’m going back with Jesus  
When He comes, when He comes.

And we won’t die anymore when He comes when He comes  
And we won’t die anymore when He comes when He comes  
O He may not come today,  
But He’s coming anyway  
And we won’t die anymore  
When he comes, when he comes.<sup>282</sup>

In other words, the second coming of Christ is primarily conceptualized as a joyful occasion for the believer to look forward to, the time from which immortality and eternal reunion with God will be complete.

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and about “[waking] the nations under-ground,” than about the Christians going to heaven.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 49; the part about the River of Jordan no doubt refers to Christ’s overcoming death.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 98. One unique thing about this song is the third verse, which says, “And He’s going to bring my mother with Him [when] He comes” (98). So even though the living believer will ascend with Christ at the second coming, believers who have already died will accompany Christ in the second coming (1 Thessalonians 4 says that believers who have already died will go up to heaven along with living believers).

## Heaven

Although the dark side of Christianity (Satan and hell) does receive quite a bit of coverage in the spirituals, heaven is a much more prominent topic, with around seventy-five mentions in a collection of about two hundred songs.<sup>283</sup> Space constrains me from writing about all of them, but a few thematic highlights include the idea of the new Jerusalem,<sup>284</sup> life as an arduous pilgrimage to heaven,<sup>285</sup> heaven as a place of joyful reunion with God,<sup>286</sup> the robes worn in heaven,<sup>287</sup> heaven as a place of eternal praise,<sup>288</sup> and heaven as a place of rest and Sabbath.<sup>289</sup> Considering how these ideas would have been received in the enslaved community, it is easy to see why such a doctrine of heaven was appealing. In heaven, social relations would be rectified (the idea of the New Jerusalem) and the trials and temptations of life, exacerbated by slavery, would be resolved (pilgrimage over). In heaven, no one could bar one's access to God (despite earthly tensions in the black church community or being barred by a slaveholder from

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<sup>283</sup> I am again referring to Work, *American Negro Songs*.

<sup>284</sup> See *ibid.*, "I Want to Be Ready," 50.

<sup>285</sup> See *ibid.*, "Keep Me From Sinking Down," 54; "Bye and Bye," 63; "Poor Me," 67; "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray," 72-73; "Roll On," 80; "Thank God I'm On My Way to Heaven," 90; "Swing Low," 152.

<sup>286</sup> See *ibid.*, "The Gift of God," 61; "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray," 72-73; "Wish I's In Heaven Settin' Down," 95.

<sup>287</sup> See *ibid.*, "Bye and Bye," 63; "Wish I's In Heaven Settin' Down," 95; "I Have Another Building," 186.

<sup>288</sup> See *ibid.*, "Show Me the Way," 74.

<sup>289</sup> See *ibid.*, "Wish I's in Heaven Settin' Down," 95; "Religion Is a Fortune," 172; "Every Day'll Be Sunday," 213.

participating in religious activities). The robes of heaven would be not only an expression of dignity, but also an equalizing factor as everyone, black and white, who got to heaven would be wearing the same thing. It is also interesting to note that the robes were white, specifically, which could have been seen as a sign of status in a white-dominated society.<sup>290</sup> And eternal praise, rest, and Sabbath would be very appealing for those who spent their lives in arduous and hazardous labor.

### *Death*

The process of death itself was also a fixation for those who sang spirituals, presumably due to the ubiquity of premature death by abuse, starvation, or childbirth for slaves. As such, many spirituals come across as rather morbid to the twenty-first century reader; the songbook includes songs like “When I’m Dead,” “You May Bury Me in the East,” “Death’s Goin’ to Lay His Hand Upon Me,” “The Hammers Keep Ringing,” “Somebody’s Buried in the Graveyard,” and “I Feel Like My Time Ain’t Long.”<sup>291</sup> However, enslaved persons faced up squarely to the reality of death and, like their white evangelical counterparts, accorded death a large place in their thoughts. The most frequent analogy for death was crossing the Jordan River, and fear was generally acknowledged about this journey. However, based on the trials and temptations of mortal life (not to mention the painful realities of slavery), there was also an extreme sense of relief, of achievement for going through life without giving up faith, and of hope of restoration in heaven. The thoughts and concerns of enslaved persons on this topic, as

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., “I Have Another Building,” 186.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 119, 56, 107, 116, 127, 135.

compared to those of white persons, actually held much in common, and spirituals do not seem to express unconventional views of death compared to the norms of evangelicalism at the time.

### *Angels*

Since white evangelicals were very preoccupied with angels during this era, and this comes through in their music, how does this compare for African American evangelical spirituals? First, angels are seen as heavenly beings and accessible to the believer when he or she has died: “When I get to [heaven] I want you to be there too/When I cry out ‘holy’ I want you to say so too/I’ll be talkin’ with the angels.”<sup>292</sup> Second, angels observed the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.<sup>293</sup> Angels are involved in the judgment process for unregenerate persons who have infiltrated the church in the last days.<sup>294</sup> Angels were also seen as bringers of the souls of dead Christians to heaven,<sup>295</sup> and they rejoice in the salvation of Christians by “shouting.”<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., “Jesus Goin’ to Make Up My Dying Bed,” 112-113, quote from 112. A similar thought is expressed in “Religion Is A Fortune,” 172.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., “The Angels Done Bowed Down,” 117; “’Twas on One Sunday Morning,” 101. Angels are also mentioned as “rockin’ Jerusalem” and “ringing [them] bells,” which I think has to do with ushering in the second coming of Christ, or possibly the church bringing in Christ’s postmillennial kingdom or ascending to heaven (this song is unclear).

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., “This Is A Sin-Trying World,” 136: “Way over yonder in the harvest fields/The angels shoving at the chariot wheels.” See John 4:24-30, 36-43 for Christ’s parable of the weeds in the field, which I think this is referring to.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., “Swing Low,” 152; “What Shall I Do?,” 162; “I Have Another Building,” 186.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., “Listen to the Angels Shoutin’,” 209. This is probably a reference to Luke 15:7.

They along with Christians formed a “band” or team of those serving God in heaven.<sup>297</sup> Angels also get an offhand reference as exemplary singers.<sup>298</sup> Angels, thus, do form a significant subtheme of the collection, but they are not nearly as predominant as in white evangelical hymnbooks of the time. Nothing particularly novel or groundbreaking is said about angels in the spirituals, either; they seem to merely echo New Testament themes without much theological inventiveness.

### *Denominationalism*

This compilation of African American spirituals, like the *Southern Harmony*, does not focus much on denominational distinctives.<sup>299</sup> Indeed, an ecumenical, almost anti-denominational spirit is promoted by spirituals such as “You’re My Brother So Give Me Your [Hand]”:

It makes no difference what church you may belong to,  
While trav’lin thru this barren [land],  
But listen if you’re workin’ for Christ my Redeemer,  
You’re my brother so give me your [hand].

We may not belong to the same denomination,  
While trav’lin thru this barren [land],

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., “Poor Mourner’s Got A Home,” 194.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., “Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveller [sic],” 190. See also “Every Day’ll Be Sunday,” 213.

<sup>299</sup> I feel that Work’s assessment of the extreme factionalism between Methodists and Baptists, the partisan nature of African American religion, does not hold up if we are judging by the standard of these spirituals (ibid., 23-24). However, further study outside the scope of this thesis would be instructive here. My impression is that African American Christians in Texas, male and female, Baptist, Methodist, or whatever else, were not terribly committed to their denominational identity, by and large, because it is almost never mentioned in slave narratives.

But if you take me by my [hand] an' lead me home to my Lord  
You're my brother so give me your [hand].<sup>300</sup>

While obviously coming from a Baptist perspective, “Don’t You Let Nobody Turn You [Round]” explains that Baptists and Methodists will “shake each other’s [hand]” in heaven, and that both Baptists and Methodist denominations have unregenerate members who are bound for hell.<sup>301</sup> Only “My Good Lord’s Done Been Here” exhibits such a die-hard Baptist view that even in heaven, the singer would “join the Baptist Band.”<sup>302</sup> Similarly, “There’s A Meeting Here Tonight” explained that “the best” camp meeting was “among the [Methodists].”<sup>303</sup> Although these last two named exhibit some partisan spirit, there is no hint that the Baptists would exclude the Methodists from salvation or even from fellowship or cooperation, and vice versa.

### *Spiritual Warfare*

A final interesting point of comparison between the music of black and white evangelicals revolves around the concept of spiritual warfare. As noted above, Jeffrey Williams has argued that violent rhetoric about spiritual warfare, particularly in hymnody, pushed white Methodists to commit violent actions, notably against slaves.<sup>304</sup> Spiritual warfare may or may not have been used to justify physical violence against

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 150. A similar spirit is exhibited by “There’s Something On My Mind,” 222.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 219-220, quote from 219.

<sup>304</sup> Williams, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism*.



minorities, but it is also demonstrably true that that way of thinking was also part of the mindset of enslaved persons. Not just the victimizers, but the victimized, believed in spiritual warfare; not just the oppressors, but the oppressed, incorporated this perspective into their worldview. Enslaved persons identified themselves as part of the “bloodwashed army,” and “bound to fight until [they died].”<sup>305</sup> Part of the emphasis on spiritual warfare for enslaved men might have been to bolster their self-esteem and sense of masculinity; being treated as children and sometimes even sub-humans, would have been humiliating and belittling. So the opportunity to view themselves as soldiers would have been very meaningful. Consider this deliberately masculinized rhetoric: “We want no cowards in our band/We call for valiant hearted men.”<sup>306</sup> Addressing one another as “soldier of the cross,” as occurred in “We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder,” would have been very meaningful.<sup>307</sup>

### *Spirituals Summary*

We see, then, that African American spirituals were roughly akin to the music of the white majority evangelical culture. Like most evangelicals, black Christians promoted evangelistic activism, biblicism, conversionism, and crucicentrism. They taught conventional views of death, heaven and hell, the second coming of Christ, and the last judgment, looking forward to the justice and redemption that each of these stages of

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<sup>305</sup> Work, *American Negro Songs*, “My Name’s Written on High,” 137; “Marching Up the Heavenly Road,” 181.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., “Great Day,” 182. These same words are also found in “March On,” 204-205.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 220.

God's plan would bring to fruition. Angels and Satan were significant spiritual forces either promoting or undermining God's plan and the believer's salvation, but Christ overrode them both. Although blacks' emphasis on spiritual rectitude and religious authority might be subversive of the white social and spiritual hierarchy, such undertones were generally muted in their music. Denominational differences, when discussed at all, were either deplored as unnecessary or seen as minor distractions to the deeper brotherhood of all Christians. Entering into the martial attitude of the times, they accepted spiritual warfare imagery with gusto.

#### *White Methodist Women's Church Experiences*

Sarah Pier, a white Methodist woman living in Travis, Texas, provided a fairly extensive record of her parish church experiences; I will therefore utilize her diary and letters as primary sources for this section. Judging from the number of journal entries in which they appeared, it seems that ministers filled a somewhat significant role in Sarah's life. A diverse cadre of men functioned in this way for her, as seven different preachers were specifically mentioned: Parson Kenney, Parson Stone (also Dr. Stone, who may or may not have been the same person), Dr. Follensby, Mr. Kemp, Mr. Matthews, Mr. Cyrus Campbell, and Mr. Dabney.<sup>308</sup> This may reflect a Methodist propensity for rotating preachers and revival services, as each of these references seem to be in connection with her local church. Indeed, the rotational nature of Methodist preaching was clearly referenced on January 18, 1863: "it is Parson Stones [sic] day to preach- - the 3d Sunday

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<sup>308</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers, Inclusive: 1838-1868 (bulk 1853-1865)*, Accession #139, Box 1, Folder 4, Journal, 1863, throughout (Texas Collection, Baylor University).

in the month.”<sup>309</sup> Despite the inconsistency in preachers, it appears that she had a relatively close relationship with at least one of these clergymen and his family: “I went (horseback & alone) to Parson Kenney’s to see Sue and her babe, (Rebecca Estelle) found both well- - the babe is pretty and they seem very proud of it...Mr. Kenney’s health is very poor.”<sup>310</sup> So although Sarah did not hear sermons from one person consistently, she still had a somewhat strong relationship with at least one preacher in her parish.

Although church mattered in Sarah’s life, it seems that her church held rather infrequent services. Sometimes this seemed to be weather-related; on January 18, 1863, she wrote, “Today is Sabbath day- - it is raining so we will have no church.”<sup>311</sup> At other times, no explanation is given: “There is to be no church today.”<sup>312</sup> Presumably this was due to the Methodist custom of circuit-riding preachers rather than full-time pastors for a given parish. That circuit-riding was practiced in Sarah’s congregation is also clear from several other remarks in Sarah’s diary. Sometimes people went to church to hear a particular preacher; on July 12, 1863, the McRee family came specifically because it was “Parson Stone’s day for preaching.”<sup>313</sup> Sometimes no preaching occurred at all.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 1. Similar remarks are made on January 25, 1863 (3) and March 15, 1863 (10).

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 4. This comment is repeated on Feb. 8, 1863 (7) and March 15, 1863 (8).

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 34.

Another reason for decreased frequency of services is suggested by noted historian George C. Rable in his book, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the Civil War*. He writes, "Small congregations and struggling denominations became righteous remnants facing an uncertain and frightening future. If that future rested with young people, the irregular worship services made Sunday schools even more vital for spiritual growth."<sup>315</sup> Because so many male church members were off fighting on the battlefields, church attendance was diminishing<sup>316</sup> and church budgets were very strained. In this light, the reason for Sarah's Sunday School teaching (discussed below) becomes clearer; it was a necessity of wartime.<sup>317</sup>

Parishioners' spotty attendance on church days was pronounced. This was true of Sunday School as well as church services.<sup>318</sup> Sarah herself was no exception, as she recorded skipping church and prayer meeting several times.<sup>319</sup> Weather definitely kept Sarah from church at times.<sup>320</sup> And perhaps Sarah's and her fellow parishioners' poor attendance was partially due to the frequent illnesses and ailments they were experiencing. On almost every page of her journal, Sarah recorded that she or someone

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<sup>315</sup> Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 245.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.* Rable writes, "...with a goodly number of Sunday school teachers serving in the army and despite some reluctance, calls soon went out for women to take up the slack."

<sup>318</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4 – Journal, May 31, 1863 (23) regarding Sunday School; August 2, 1863 (39), regarding a church service.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 28, 1863 (46).

else had a fever, headache, eye problem, or other medical issue.<sup>321</sup> Indeed, Sarah explicitly stated at one point that she did not go to church when she was sick.<sup>322</sup> It is also possible that the frontier context also caused circuit-riding preachers to be more spread out and offer services less frequently than would be the case in the more settled areas of the South and Southeast. Yet if reasonably possible to attend, church attendance was at least somewhat prioritized in Sarah's culture.<sup>323</sup> Church was seen as an event for which preparation is necessary; it was important to look one's best.<sup>324</sup> Although she and her fellow parishioners were not always consistent attenders, Sarah highly valued her church. She wrote about church nearly every Sunday, even if only to say that church was canceled or she felt too sick to go.<sup>325</sup> Her parish community was undoubtedly at the forefront of her mind.

Sarah's diary offers only small glimpses of the sermons preached in her church. On March 22, 1863, she wrote, "Sallie & I went to Church today. Mr. Kemp preached from Luke 9-23 & 27. a very good sermon."<sup>326</sup> This text reads, "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him *deny* himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me....But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid., throughout.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., May 3-4, 23, 1863 (18, 22).

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., May 18, 1863 (21).

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., February 22, 1863 (7).

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., throughout.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., March 22, 1863 (11).

death, till they see the kingdom of God.”<sup>327</sup> Perhaps Mr. Kemp utilized this text to urge his audience to take up arms in the sacred cause of the Confederacy, prepared to face death if necessary. The Confederate commitment of the Methodist church in Travis makes this a likely interpretation. Or perhaps he was urging a more generic life of self-sacrifice, looking forward to eternity in heaven or the second coming of Christ. This text could plausibly be used in either of these ways, and Sarah did not indicate which route Mr. Kemp took, or neither. Either way, activism was the desired end of this sermon, either in the pro-Confederate or evangelistic senses.

Most of the time that Sarah noted the sermons which she heard, she merely gave a cursory evaluation.<sup>328</sup> However, some evaluations were more detailed and thus more enlightening for our purposes. On February 22, 1863, Sarah complained, “Mr. Kemp preached today but I did not get there in time to hear the text.”<sup>329</sup> This comment reveals a homiletic rather than expository style of preaching. Like Reverend Thrall, Mr. Kemp was not explicating a text throughout the sermon but basing his discourse on a text which was read at the beginning of the sermon. On September 27, 1863, Sarah lamented: “Went to Church all of us today expecting to hear Roof Campbell’s funeral preached but were disappointed. However Mr. Mathews preached a very good sermon.”<sup>330</sup> Evidently funeral sermons were anticipated as key events for the community. The Travis Methodist church

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<sup>327</sup> Luke 9:23, 27 (KJV).

<sup>328</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal, July 26, 1863 and April 26, 1863 (36, 17).

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

was making an effort to support its members in grief and bereavement and to teach them about the heavenly home that was waiting for them.

For Sarah and her friends and neighbors, sermons were not just in one ear and out the other. Preachers served as important arbiters of biblical truth, and congregants sought out the opportunity to hear them speak the Word of God.<sup>331</sup> Sarah's journal entry about riding with her friends to another town to hear the preaching, and her other entry about the McRee family coming out for Parson Stone's sermon, hearkens back to the Puritan "sermon-gadders" of two centuries before.<sup>332</sup> Indeed, the frequency with which Sarah recorded sermons suggests a commitment to biblicism in her Methodist church.

Additionally, the fact that Sarah sometimes remembered the texts on which sermons were based possibly indicates that the preachers she heard deeply stressed biblical themes, and that this made an impact on their congregation.<sup>333</sup> For example, on June 21, 1863, Sarah wrote: "I went to Church alone today. Mr. Matthews preached- - Robert Campbell's funeral sermon from John 14<sup>th</sup> Chap. & part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Verse- - "If a man die, will he live again?" It was an excellent sermon. I do so much love to hear Mr. M. preach- - he is my

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid., July 12, 1863 (32).

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., July 12, 1863, and Sept. 13, 1863 (32, 50). See Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590-1640* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14, 190, and 187-228, which discusses the Puritan phenomenon of "sermon-gadding," the practice of attending as many sermons as possible in multiple parishes outside one's own.

<sup>333</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Journal, March 22, 1863 and June 21, 1863 (11, 27).

favorite minister.”<sup>334</sup> Again, the preachers in the Travis Methodist church were addressing the theme of death and attempting to comfort the grieving audience.

Sarah’s Methodist tradition was revivalistic and she mentioned a number of revivals taking place.<sup>335</sup> In this context, Sarah may perhaps have been referring to Second Great Awakening-style manifestations of the Holy Spirit: “Mrs. McLaran professed religion and seemed very happy last night. Sue and Bolie & Fannie get very much excited every night. I never saw anyone shout as Sue & Bolie did last night and tonight.”<sup>336</sup> This emotional climate was probably influenced by one of the distinctive elements of Methodism. Alister McGrath, in his *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, flags “Wesley’s emphasis upon the experiential side of Christian faith,” which in his own time “led to a major religious revival in England.”<sup>337</sup> This emotional, revivalistic bent passed down to his spiritual descendants, the Methodists. Other than emotional responses, the other major result of the revival meetings as recorded in Sarah’s journal was that many people became church members in a short period of time.<sup>338</sup> Clearly, conversionism was a priority in the Methodist church Sarah attended. Whether it was a priority in Sarah’s own life and views of faith will be discussed in the

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>335</sup> For example, *ibid.*, July 28, 1863 (35).

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, August 24, 1863 (45).

<sup>337</sup> Alister F. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell – John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2013), 153.

<sup>338</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Journal, August 25, 1863 (45).



next chapter. Sarah never mentions crucicentrism even in the context of sermons; however, judging by Reverend Thrall's sermons, this neglect of crucicentrism was probably more on Sarah's end than that of the original sermon. In terms of pro-Confederate activism, Sarah's church was fairly tightly wed to the Confederate cause. Sarah's mother Lucy Pier wrote on January 1, 1863, that "[a] prayer meeting was held at the Church to pray for our soldier boys."<sup>339</sup> A few days later, Lucy Pier recorded that the church offered shelter to Confederate soldiers during their travels.<sup>340</sup> We see, then, that for white women in Texas, they experienced the MECS as a fairly conventional evangelical group, with a light emphasis on the Confederate cause.

#### *African American Women's Church Experiences*

There is a major source problem when we come to African American Methodist women's religion. This will be covered in much more detail in Chapter Four on African American evangelical religion, but for now I will briefly summarize by saying that slave narratives do not include denominational affiliation, and church records do not include enslaved persons, especially women. One Methodist church had an African American woman named Celia Craft on its membership rolls, but that is the extent of the extant sources on Texas Methodist women.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Lucy Merry Pier, *The Pier Diaries: The Diary of Lucy Merry Pier, August 12, 1852 through October 16, 1863, and the Diary of Sarah Pier Wiley, January 18, 1863 through May 3, 1870*, vol. 2, ed. Atta Wiley (Waco, TX: [s.n.] self-published, 1950). There are no page numbers in this volume.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, January 7, 1863.

<sup>341</sup> Email from archivist Bill Hardt at the United Methodist Church's Commission on Archives and History, Texas Conference, to the author, January 31, 2020.

What we can infer is that black women also engaged with formal religion in the MECS, but their experiences differed greatly from those of white women. Also, different enslaved women's experiences with the MECS varied considerably. Some enslaved women were forced to accompany their slaveowners to church, some came of their own choosing, and still others were forbidden to attend MECS churches and had to worship informally in secret. Or sometimes separate services were conducted for slaves by white Methodist ministers.<sup>342</sup> Therefore they might hear sermons directed to the congregation generally, like those of Reverend Homer Thrall we looked at earlier; separate sermons, or hortatory remarks within a sermon, directed to the enslaved population by the white community; or sermons by their own black preachers. These last are probably almost impossible to reconstruct because black preachers usually could not read and write until the Reconstruction period, and also because often the sermonic material would be clandestine and subversive, concealed from white slaveholders for obvious reasons. Similarly, church-sponsored activities were another instance illustrating the different social positions of white and black women. While some enslaved women were not allowed to participate in church-sponsored activities, or their participation was restricted by white-imposed parameters, other enslaved women were forced to participate. Still others could freely choose of their own accord.

Since detailed records do not exist of enslaved women's experiences in the MECS, we can only say that they did participate, but that unlike their white counterparts, they would probably have been considered second-class citizens in many congregations.

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<sup>342</sup> For example, Lucy Pier Stevens mentioned "negro church" services in *Another Year Finds Me in Texas: The Civil War Diary of Lucy Pier Stevens*, ed. Vicki Adams Tongate (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), entry for July 26, 1863, 132.

We must be sensitive to the diversity of black Methodist women's experiences and realize that their experiences differed from one another and from those of their white counterparts. Also, enslaved persons developed an alternative religious culture with their spirituals and separate sermons, which shared with other evangelicals and the MECS the characteristic emphases of activism, biblicism, conversionism, and crucicentrism (the last to a heightened degree). Both black and white evangelical churches in Texas had a strong focus on death, heaven, and angels during the antebellum and Civil War years. These emphases would influence congregants deeply, but women, both black and white, also took agency of their own spiritual lives and shaped their faith to meet their felt needs. We turn in the next chapter to the faith of white Methodist women in Texas during the Civil War.

## CHAPTER THREE

### “His Spiritual Presence Was Sensibly Felt”: White Methodist Women in Civil War Texas

#### *The Women*

Sarah Pier (later Sarah Pier Wiley) was a young Methodist woman living in Travis, Texas, during the turbulent Civil War years. She kept a meticulous daily diary chronicling her work, religious, and social experiences. Additionally, Sarah preserved her personal and family correspondence with Civil War soldiers and various war-related papers. Evidently the Pier family were loyal Confederates: not only did Sarah’s brother, Sammie, fight as a soldier, but Sarah’s papers also contain a series of Confederate keepsakes, including a highly sentimental, spiritual Confederate poem and inspirational lecture regarding the Confederate flag.<sup>1</sup> Sarah’s mother, Lucy Merry Pier, also kept a journal, which articulated an alternate perspective on the same events Sarah recorded. Comparing the two journals can render insight into generational differences in theology and religious practice. Complicating the narrative is the diary of Lucy Pier Stevens, Sarah’s cousin, also a Methodist although somewhat less devout, but originally from Ohio.<sup>2</sup> She went on an extended visit to her Pier relatives in 1859 but got trapped behind the Confederate lines when the war broke out in 1861.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers, Inclusive: 1838-1868 (bulk 1853-1865)*, Accession #139, Box 1, Folder 3, Civil War Materials, 1849-1862, The Texas Collection, Baylor University.

<sup>2</sup> The Pier diaries have received a cursory treatment in *Another Year Finds Me in Texas: The Civil War Diary of Lucy Pier Stevens*, ed. Vicki Adams Tongate (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016). However, Tongate’s work is primarily a transcription

Of all these women, Sarah Pier seemed to be the most explicitly pious. However, even for her, and much more so for the other Methodist women, religion was only a small component of life, dwarfed in comparison and thus sidelined to the looming struggles of looking for war news, dealing with illness, and completing the prodigious workload expected of a wartime woman in her various roles (entrepreneur, teacher, slaveholder, volunteer for the Confederate cause, etc.). Contrary to the popular notion of the extremely religious nineteenth century, what we see is that for Methodist women, even church members, theological and devotional concerns were not at the top of their minds. Also, denominational concerns were largely absent as well.

Texas Methodist women's faith prioritized few of the hallmarks of evangelicalism as formulated by David Bebbington in the famous "Bebbington quadrilateral."<sup>3</sup> As I established in the last chapter, the MECS was carefully and dogmatically teaching the doctrines of evangelism and the new birth, the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, and the unique spiritual authority of the Bible. But these doctrines rarely if ever show up in women's writings during the War. Whether they assumed these doctrines were true and thus not worthy of mention, or truly rejected them out of hand, or simply sidelined them as irrelevant, is not entirely clear, but the fact remains that these "hallmarks" were rarely if ever mentioned. Evangelistic activism and conversionism were both downplayed as political activism for the Confederacy came to the fore. Biblicism received the

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of Lucy's diary, and her introduction only devotes a few pages to religion. For clarity I will refer to Lucy by her married name, Lucy Pier Stevens, although she was unmarried during the Civil War Years.

<sup>3</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge – Taylor and Francis, 1980), 2-3.

occasional nod but was still a relatively minor aspect of Methodist religion for these women. And crucicentrism was, strangely, entirely absent.

So, what shape did Methodist women's faith take? A strong, though not unshakable, faith in God's guiding hand (i.e. Providence) weathered the women through the storms and trauma of war.<sup>4</sup> Finally, their views of death underwent a significant shift. Although dead Christians would go to heaven, they would also have a presence with their loved ones on earth. In these ways, women demonstrated a strong agency in shaping their faith to meet their needs in the context of crisis and trauma brought on by the Civil War.

### *Understanding the Spiritual Crisis*

Before we move into the more specific aspects of my argument, it is helpful to consider what the women were up against in terms of a spiritual crisis. Mark Noll's book *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* argues that the Civil War fundamentally challenged American theological understandings of Providence.<sup>5</sup> Sarah Pier's diary expresses these same tensions in deeply reflective and emotive ways although ultimately holding onto this understanding. Sarah's faith in God's providence was frequently referenced throughout her writings. She credited God with saved lives: "[during the battle of Berwicksberg, which the South won] God be praised that he is in his mercy has spared

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<sup>4</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), and George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), both argue that a continued dependence on Providence was important to Christians during the Civil War. Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), argues the opposite.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Noll, *The Civil War as A Theological Crisis*.

our loved ones.”<sup>6</sup> Over and over, Sarah used this language of “God sparing” soldiers from death, making it clear that she believed that He is the giver of life and death.<sup>7</sup>

Presumably, Sarah’s faith in God’s providential guidance of affairs would be comforting, serving as an anchor during the times of uncertainty, loss, and rejoicing that she experienced.

However, Sarah’s faith in Providence was not unwavering. In an interesting juxtaposition, she associated prayer with fate, implying that the two could coexist in her mind: “I pray that her future may be bright that the...[fond] hopes they both cherish now may not be blighted by the hand of fate.”<sup>8</sup> Sarah mentioned prayer and fate together again on July 17, 1863.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, as devout and conservative as she was, Sarah dabbled in fortune-telling, recording on September 15, 1863, “Em and I tried our fortunes with the new moon tonight.”<sup>10</sup> Perhaps these reflections on fate and fortune were an attempt to reconcile the uncertainty, death and destruction of war with faith in God. Sarah recognized destiny and purpose for people’s lives apart from God’s plan. Things happened because they had to be that way, but God was not necessarily responsible for it. This ambiguity must have caused emotional turmoil and confusion for her.

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<sup>6</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers, Inclusive: 1838-1868 (bulk 1853-1865)*, Folder 4, Journal, April 9, 1863 (14).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, April 22, May 3, 4, 1863 (16).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, July 8, 1863 (31).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, July 17, 1863 (32).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

Sarah's cousin Lucy also expressed a lack of faith in Providence: "How much I would give to see my dear brother this eve – but heaven knows if ever I can see one of my dear ones again."<sup>11</sup> And again, in talking about soldiers' plundering, Lucy reflects "that's the way of the world."<sup>12</sup> Such apathetic submission is found again in a reflection on the death of a neighbor: "...everyone seemed to mourn this loss. It seems hard to see a person so young & promising taken – but such is life...It seems very strange...But there it is. None can tell what a day may bring forth."<sup>13</sup> And again, "Mr T-'s letter brought the sad news of Joe Campbell's death. Poor boy, I hated so much to hear it, but such is the fate of war."<sup>14</sup> Apathetic submission did not, however, preclude earnest piety: "I never expect to see my firmness forsake me in such trials and pray God to instruct me in the way to act most wise in all circumstances. We spoke of the dark and dismal future of our hopes and fears and of their anticipation but 'tis so hard to tell what a day may bring forth that they were all [indecision]."<sup>15</sup> At times she did even express trust in God: "Yet it may be best – we [cannot] always see aright."<sup>16</sup>

Another interesting aspect of Sarah's method of processing difficult events was her belief in dreams as premonitions of future events. Sarah's dreams were very important to her, and she wrote about them on a number of occasions. On March 8, 1863,

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<sup>11</sup> Lucy Pier Stevens, *Another Year Finds Me in Texas*, July 14, 1863, 128.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, August 14, 1863, 139.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, September 9, 1863, 144.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, September 28, 1863, 146.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, November 8, 1863, 156.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, November 9, 1863, 156.3



Sarah said that she “dreamed...of my dear brother- - I dream of him often.”<sup>17</sup> And in one particularly notable incident, Sarah’s parents demonstrated a regard for and credulity in Sarah’s and their own dreams and acted on it. “We all, Ma, Pa, & I dreamed last night that Willie was sick, so this morning at the breakfast table I told Pa (sporting) that he had better go down there and see if he was sick. He said he would if Ma wanted to go for he would have to be at Jackson’s grove to drill tomorrow anyway. So they have gone and I am left to keep house.”<sup>18</sup> This was another opportunity for her to express agency and even spiritual authority of a sort in her home.

Further, the Civil War caused extreme variance in Sarah’s emotions as she considered the consequences of its battles for those she loved. At times, she expressed a melancholy hopelessness about the future and a fear for her loved ones’ lives who were fighting in the war.<sup>19</sup> At other times, battle victories and news of the safety of family and friends raised Sarah and her friends to a state of almost euphoric joy.<sup>20</sup> When a friend passed away, she offered a sentimental tribute to him in her journal and prayed for his

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<sup>17</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal (9).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, October 7, 1863 (55). Scott Stephan relates a similar incident in the antebellum South in which a father effectively prepared his son for professional success based on a dream (*Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008], 155). Perhaps dreams were particularly valued in this era. Stephen writes that, “Although he did not know whether dreams influenced the future, Sidney Bumpass confidently concluded ‘that they often influence our conduct’” (155). Clearly this perspective was held by the Pier family as well.

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal, February 22, 1863 (7).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, May 26, 1863 (22).

bereaved fiancée. This entry emphasized the importance of trust in God and fortitude in bearing trials. And yet the emotional power of her own grief threatened to overcome her willpower to use such fortitude.<sup>21</sup> Bitter, resentful and rebellious feelings about President Lincoln intermingled with her hope for peace.<sup>22</sup> The sad realities of war changed even Independence Day, traditionally a proud and jubilant day for Americans, into a day of anxiety and sorrow for Sarah.<sup>23</sup>

The highs and lows in her journal are both frequent and dramatic. Yet Sarah's religious beliefs, particularly the doctrine of Providence, served as a comfort and solace to her. I believe that she, and the other women discussed in this paper, would have felt a sense of helplessness in their lives, as they could not control war outcomes, politics, or even the actions of their family members. The women expressed frustration and disappointment in all of these external aspects of their lives. Yet what they could control was, to a large degree, was their internal religious beliefs and external praxis, and this would have given them a powerful sense of agency in their world.

### *White Women and the Quadrilateral*

#### *Evangelistic and Confederate Activism*

Methodist women were not just passive observers and recipients of ministers' teaching and administration of the sacraments, and they certainly did not just sit back and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., July 20, 1863 (37-38).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., March 4, 1863 (8).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., July 4, 1863 (30).

let the men run their society. This was expressed in Lucy Pier Stevens' diaries: "Poor Mollie liked to have disgraced herself by laughing at the table when Aunt Lu asked the Rev to ask a blessing. I do not like him at all or nothing like as well as his brother. He is so great an egotist & a greater puppy."<sup>24</sup> Methodist women did not express great deference towards their ministers and their opinions but thought independently. Sometimes Lucy went so far as to flout evangelical custom entirely: "Cousin Sara [sic] & Callie went to sunday school [sic] this morn – but I concluded last summer that did not pay, so stayed at home and finished reading *Old Mortality*, one of the *Waverly* novels."<sup>25</sup> Lucy also disregarded her pastor's views on dancing: "Aunt Lu – Uncle Pier, cousin Sara [sic] & Jane went to church this morn – I stayed at home and kept house - & so missed a lecture from Parson Kemp on dancing" (Lucy later records dancing on a number of occasions).<sup>26</sup> She did, however, attend church fairly frequently.

Their activism expressed both religious and political agency during this dark time in Texas history. For example, unlike her cousin Lucy, Sarah Pier taught Sunday School and thus served as a spiritual leader to the children of the community.<sup>27</sup> She wrote about Sunday School quite often, so it is safe to presume that it was important to her, although

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<sup>24</sup> Lucy Pier Stevens, *Another Year Finds Me in Texas*, 85.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, June 14, 1863, 120.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, June 18, 1863, 122. For an example of her participation in dancing, see September 7, 1863, 144.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal, April 6, 1863 (13).

she by no means taught every week.<sup>28</sup> Sunday School clearly took a certain amount of preparation time as well, though it is unclear whether this was merely dress and grooming preparations for appearing in public, or actual lesson preparation.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, Methodist women led their own prayer meetings, which is considered a legitimate form of activism, probably more so on the pro-Confederate than evangelistic side of activism.<sup>30</sup> For Sarah, this prayer meeting was the occasion of an important spiritual experience for her:

Made the first audable [sic] prayer I ever made, today in our female prayer meeting. I felt that it did me good, it was a heavy cross to take up. but when once assumed it seemed to [grow] lighter. These words from God's holy word gave me courage, What is man that thou should fear him.<sup>31</sup>

Sarah's Confederate activism went beyond the walls of her church, however. She wrote on March 9, 1863: "I feel as tho [sic] I was doing all I well could now (weaving every day, and knitting for the soldiers every night) unless I could feel convinced that there were persons that were really suffering or needy."<sup>32</sup> Lucy Pier Stevens mentioned

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., June 7, 14, 1863 (24, 25). The sporadic teaching could indicate a lack of commitment to the teaching., a frequently canceled class due to illness or the war itself, or perhaps a rotation of Sunday School teachers in much the same way as Methodist ministers rotated through the circuit riding system.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>30</sup> October 16, 1863 – Sarah C. Pier, *The Pier Diaries: The Diary of Lucy Merry Pier, August 12, 1852 through October 16, 1863, and the Diary of Sarah Pier Wiley, January 18, 1863 through May 3, 1870*, vol. 3, ed, Atta Wiley (Waco, TX: [s.n.] self-published, 1950), 3. Kimberly Harrison, *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 126-127, refers to prayer as a "patriotic duty" and "collective effort" for Confederate women.

<sup>31</sup> Sarah C. Pier, *The Pier Diaries*, vol. 3, November 25, 1863, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal (9).

that “Sara [sic] presented her flag” on “the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1861,” referring to the political action of sewing a Confederate flag as well as the more public presentation of that flag to a battalion.<sup>33</sup> According to her own account, Sarah spent most of her time at work, both in the family business<sup>34</sup> and in the war effort. Based on all the visiting and socializing she records elsewhere, I would doubt this was the case. But she clearly did work very diligently for both causes.

When participation in the war effort was not possible, Sarah expressed frustration. For example, when her friend was wounded in battle, Sarah expressed regret and distress, particularly due to her inability to help him.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in an emotionally compelling passage, Sarah indicates that she was emotionally invested in the war and saw herself as in some way fighting in it alongside her brother (even if only on a psychological level).

Oh! how I used to delight in the early spring flowers, birds etc. and how happy and light hearted I was then and even now I have a sad pleasure in them and could be almost happy if it were not for this dreadful, cruel war. I dreamed of seeing Sammie last night and of being in a battle with him. I hope to get a letter from him tomorrow evening.<sup>36</sup>

As a devoutly religious person, Sarah probably engaged in evangelistic and Confederate activism at least partially in obedience to her understanding of Scripture and in conformity with what she perceived as God’s leading in her life. However, activism probably also served as an emotional comfort for Sarah in the context of war. Activism

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<sup>33</sup> Lucy Pier Stevens, *Another Year Finds Me in Texas*, January 20, 1863, 88.

<sup>34</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal, Jan. 25, 26, 27, 29, and 30; Feb. 6, 1863 (3, 5).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, June 2, 1863 (24).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 15, 1863 (6).

enabled her to participate in the Confederate struggle for her community while upholding her culture's gender norms of patient, courageous and hardworking womanhood. Both kinds of activism offered opportunities for her to shape her church, the children of her community, and the world more broadly.

What of Sarah's mother, Lucy Merry Pier? The first thing that should be said is a caveat about how Mrs. Pier's diary differs from Sarah's; it is much more concise and much more riddled with writing mistakes. It is difficult to know whether this diary reveals her whole range of thought; the many spelling and punctuation mistakes in Lucy's diary might indicate a lack of formal education on Lucy's part leading to a lack of confidence in writing and a tendency to be exceptionally concise. However, Lucy's journal is still a useful source as a window into the thoughts of the older generation of Texas Methodist women during the Civil War.

Interestingly, Sarah's mother may not have been very involved in church. In both her own diary and Sarah's diary, no explicit mention was made of Lucy's participation in services, Sabbath school, prayer meetings, or quarterly meetings – the core of religious activities that shaped Sarah's life.<sup>37</sup> However, Lucy recorded some of Sarah's church involvement and discussed church events. She may have had any number of motivations for doing so, such as spiritual interest and engagement, interest in her daughter's

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<sup>37</sup> However, Mrs. Pier does mention on January 4, 1863, that there is "No church to day." Whether this is a general note of interest or whether it indicates that she herself would have attended church had it been open is up to interpretation. Similarly, she records the preacher on January 25, 1863, and Sarah's attendance on April 4, 1863 (Lucy Merry Pier, *The Pier Diaries*, vol. 2.).

activities, or a respect for the church as a social cornerstone of the community.<sup>38</sup> In any case, Mrs. Pier's attendance at church was probably negligible. I am not sure why she did not attend church; perhaps her responsibilities at home were too great to allow her much time away. This seems plausible since her husband was sometimes absentee, living away in the mountains much of the time.<sup>39</sup> The Pier family owned a store and farm, which could have monopolized Mrs. Pier's time when combined with social interactions, supervision of slaves, and family responsibilities.<sup>40</sup>

What Sarah's mother was primarily interested in was preserving a record of the work of her slaves and family, the visits the Pier family received, and the people they in turn visited. Her diary thus presented the information of a dry to-do list or guest book on most days. This somewhat tedious record actually reveals her commitment to political activism of a sort. In *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion*, Kimberly Harrison argues that Confederate women used their diaries as a crucial context for agency and self-understanding in a confusing and turbulent time.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., February 15, 1863, and February 22, 1863. Tongate, *Another Year Finds Me in Texas*, in the introduction to her transcription of Lucy Pier Stevens's diary, comments on the social role of the church: "The institution of the church dictated much of the social landscape in Lucy's world. Revival services...formed the locus of social activity for the community" (34).

<sup>39</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 5, Letter from Sarah Pier to Sammie Pier, Feb. 5, 1862, 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal, January 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, February 6, 1863 (3, 5), and Folder 9, Obituary for James Bradford Pier in the Toledo (Ohio) *Blade*, April 12, 1888, 1. It is also entirely possible that Lucy Merry Pier actually did go to church and not write about it, but since she writes that Sarah did and does not mention her own participation, it seems an unlikely interpretation.

<sup>41</sup> Harrison, *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women*.

Regarding slavery, she says that women's control of their slaves (which was sometimes merely an illusion) was an important way to maintain the traditions of Southern society.<sup>42</sup> Thus Lucy's relationship with her slaves equated to advocacy of tradition, or a type of activism.

The most striking thing about Mrs. Pier's diary is what is missing from it. Unlike her daughter, she did not record her prayers and worries for absent soldiers, not even her only son who was fighting in the war. The only indication of such thoughts occurs on April 2, 1863:

Mr. Pier rec'd. a note from Mary Cameron yesterday saying that Tom Cleveland was dead was taken prisoner at Ark. Post and died at Chicago of small Pox [sic]. Poor Tom he will be very much missed by his friends and as he was an only son too. Many a poor soldier will find a *stranger's* grave in this fratricidal [sic] war.<sup>43</sup>

If Mrs. Pier was imagining how she would feel if she lost her only son, she did not say so. Although her anxieties must have been deep, she seems to have not allowed herself to give in to these feelings, focusing on activism and practical responsibilities of daily life instead. In this way, she obviated the necessity to enter into the "theological crisis" which Noll writes about, the crisis which Sarah so poignantly articulated in her writings.<sup>44</sup> And thus she had no need to embrace the new beliefs about death that so helped her daughter Sarah as she faced the Civil War.

Lucy Pier Stevens at least expressed a general adherence to the principle of activism, citing as a lesson she read in a book: "Good may be done by all, no matter what

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>43</sup> Lucy Merry Pier, *The Pier Diaries*, vol. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Noll, *The Civil War as A Theological Crisis*.



their station.”<sup>45</sup> However, I did not come across records of Lucy’s actually participating in evangelistic or Confederate activism so perhaps her adherence to activism was more in ideology than practice. She approved of the idea of activism in theory but did not act on this belief.

### *Biblicism*

As discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, Sarah Pier recorded sermons and the biblical text they were based upon in her journal. This biblicism empowered Sarah to actively engage with the messages she was hearing at church.<sup>46</sup> However, such sermonic journaling was rather rare for her, and it usually took in the form of one- or two-sentence sermon summaries and the quotation of one verse or sometimes just a citation of the reference. Biblicism, thus, while existing as part of her unique synthesis of religious practices, was definitely a minor part of the synthesis.

Even though Lucy Pier Stevens was not terribly devout, on at least one occasion even she made a brief notation of the biblicist sermon she sat through on February 1, 1863: “Heard parson [sic] Stone preach from the text ‘What-must-I-do to be saved.’”<sup>47</sup> And as a schoolteacher, she catechized her children in faith: “I asked my children bible [sic] questions.”<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, she must have approved of Sunday school on at least

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<sup>45</sup> Lucy Pier Stevens, *Another Year Finds Me in Texas*, February 15, 1863, 95.

<sup>46</sup> Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590-1640* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010) emphasizes the importance of sermon note-taking in his second chapter as a facilitator of understanding and memory (95).

<sup>47</sup> Stevens, *Another Year Finds Me in Texas*, 92.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, December 23, 1863, 163.

some level, or felt that she had to pretend she did, because she taught her students the song, “O Come, Come Away.”<sup>49</sup> As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this evangelical hymn was specifically about the importance of Sunday school.

### *Conversionism*

Conversionism is an area where women expressed moderate levels of commitment but also shifting views. Sarah Pier’s commitment to conversionism becomes clear through a careful perusal of her journal. Her attendance at revivals and engagement in evangelism demonstrate this commitment. Yet it is noteworthy that Sarah expressed a mundane, down-to-earth perspective on the revivals sweeping her town; she recognized the fleeting nature of some revival conversions and the legitimacy of others.<sup>50</sup> It is interesting that Sarah never used language about the Holy Spirit’s role in the revival or people passively receiving God’s grace and being saved. Rather, she emphasized human agency and used non-supernatural language in discussing conversion: “joined the church,” “professed religion.”<sup>51</sup> For example, Sarah recorded her young friend Callie’s conversion experience as a gradual, human-centered process culminating in church membership, rather than a sudden moment of God’s intervention in her life culminating in a salvation experience.<sup>52</sup> According to Sarah, the progression took place in this way:

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal, August 27, 1863 (45-46).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., August 29, 1863 (46).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., August 24, 27, 30, 31 (45-47).

“There were a great many up to be prayed for last night, Callie among the number...Callie is very serious of late and is up to be prayed for every night. I believe she has experienced a change of heart...Laura, Callie & Maggie asked me a number of questions about the church rules &c today. I got the discipline and read and explained them to them. I thought they were intending to join the church...Callie... [went up to the mourner’s bench tonight] ...Our meeting closed tonight. Callie joined the church and professed religion.”<sup>53</sup>

Lucy Pier Stevens also spoke of a revival in a similar human-centered way, commenting, “They are going to have meetings now for some time, going to try for a revival, I believe.”<sup>54</sup> Also she reported that “Bolie & Sue McLarin & Fanny C got to shouting to night & Sue to dancing she got so happy.”<sup>55</sup> She did not mention the Spirit moving or the converts getting saved or any other typical evangelical rhetoric about conversion. Lucy had an impersonal, curious, almost clinical, description of the revival: “This eve...I went to church, but as no one but Mrs Chapman once & Mr Cy- C- once shouted, I missed seeing a sight I have never seen. There were about fifteen went forward this eve.”<sup>56</sup>

Christine Leigh Heyrman describes a similar viewpoint during both Great Awakenings in *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*. She writes, “Even among evangelicals there were doubters who dissected in clinical detail the varieties of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., August 24, 27, 30, 31 (45-47).

<sup>54</sup> Stevens, *Another Year Finds Me in Texas*, August 22, 1863, 141.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., August 23, 1863, 142-143.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., August 26, 1863, 143.

religious ecstasy and looked for explanations in nature rather than the supernatural.”<sup>57</sup>

While Sarah did not go this far, she nevertheless took a less supernatural view of the events she witnessed. Perhaps her way of describing conversion was influenced by a Methodist belief in human agency and ability to choose conversion. Earle Cairns describes Methodist theology as “Arminian” and elsewhere writes that “Arminius believed that man was able to initiate his salvation after God had granted him the primary grace to enable his will to cooperate with God.”<sup>58</sup> This could accurately summarize Sarah’s characterization of Callie’s conversion. To Sarah, Callie’s conversion was up to Callie, not the Holy Spirit. Callie chose her own path to God.

During this revival, Sarah showed her own human agency as she actively proselytized her friends. Clearly she was seen as a knowledgeable spiritual leader by other women, as she noted, “...Laura, Callie & Maggie asked me a number of questions about the church rules &c today. I got the discipline and read and explained them to them.”<sup>59</sup> Sarah’s instincts were correct about those who would be converted; it seems that she was spiritually or psychologically perceptive.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps she remembered her thoughts

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<sup>57</sup> Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 78.

<sup>58</sup> Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 386, 317. For the latter quotation, he cites James Arminius, *Works*, trans. James Nichols and W.R. Bagnall, 3 vols. (Buffalo, NY: Derby, Miller and Orton, 1853), 1:329; 2:472-73.

<sup>59</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal, August 30, 31, 1863 (46).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, September 1, 1863 (46-47).

and feelings during the time directly before her own conversion experience and could see the signs of an impending conversion.

Sarah also felt no qualms about privately judging the depth of someone else's faith commitment: "Uncle Henry seems very happy in the enjoyment of his religion this afternoon. I hope he may continue so & I believe he is sincere."<sup>61</sup> She could discern, or at least believed she could discern, the spiritual state of another person and even conjecture as to his future spiritual state. Sarah's Methodism also shines through in this comment. Cairns writes of Arminius, John Wesley's spiritual forebear, that, "Arminius answered the Calvinistic insistence on the perseverance of the saints by stating that God would give the saints grace so that they need not fall but that the Scriptures seemed to teach that it was possible for man to fall away from salvation."<sup>62</sup> Sarah seemed to believe that if "Uncle Henry" chose to do so, he very well could leave his faith and the happiness he felt in professing it. His salvation was not guaranteed, no matter how heartfelt his conversion, if he chose to abandon his own faith later on. It was up to him whether or not he would "continue so."<sup>63</sup> And Lucy made similar remarks affirming Arminianism and human agency: "Sallie Catlin & Sis Torrence both joined the church greatly to my surprise, or the former was, may she prove faithful."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., May 24, 1863 (28). Tongate, *Another Year Finds Me in Texas*, 34, comments on Lucy Pier Stevens doing the same thing.

<sup>62</sup> Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, 317. For this quotation, he cites James Arminius, *Works*, trans. James Nichols and W.R. Bagnall, 3 vols. (Buffalo, NY: Derby, Miller and Orton, 1853), 1:254; 2:497.

<sup>63</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal, May 24, 1863 (28).

<sup>64</sup> Stevens, *Another Year Finds Me in Texas*, August 26, 1863, 142.

Sarah's commitment to conversionism was poignantly manifested when she witnessed the death of a young neighbor boy. While acknowledging the wrenching grief in her own heart and that of her neighbors, Sarah wrote about the relief everyone felt when reflecting on the likeliness of his conversion.<sup>65</sup> Near the end of the extended deathbed scene, she penned these words:

[We] sang one verse of "O Sing to Me of heaven" as well as we could but it was sad singing...Mr. Campbell had prayers around the bed, what a blessing is [prayer] Without God and a hope of heaven how can anyone live!...He was very serious during the meeting- - went to the mourner's bench once. Asked his Uncle Cyrus to pray for him night before last and he prayed himself- - and made several remarks that lead them to think he was resigned and wiling to die...<sup>66</sup>

As Sarah faced situations of grief, her faith in the efficacy of conversion and the blissful heavenly home that awaited the converted comforted her. Presumably her dedication to conversionism was motivated by a desire to see her friends and neighbors in heaven, a desire made deeper and more urgent every day as more and more people she knew died of illness or battle-related injuries.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> For a discussion of the good death, see Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 183-220.

<sup>66</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal, September 9, 1863 (48-49).

<sup>67</sup> In *Redeeming the Southern Family* (1-2 and throughout), Scott Stephan emphasizes the longing for others' conversion leading to heavenly bliss that southern evangelicals felt before the Civil War. However, Stephan's treatment primarily deals with the familial context, while Sarah's Civil War-era conversionism seems broader, extended to the whole community.

### *Crucicentrism*

Devotion to the cross of Christ is conspicuously absent from all the white women's primary sources that I interacted with. The reason for this silence on a subject usually so prioritized by evangelicals, is unclear. Apparently, reflections upon such beliefs did not seem helpful or relevant to the women during the war. Christ's willingness to sacrifice Himself for others could have inspired both Union and Confederate soldiers and civilians who was jeopardizing their own lives, physical health and safety, and possessions for their cause and ostensibly the people they thought would benefit from it. However, this same self-sacrifice could be damaging to morale, particularly on the Confederate side, because it would stand in stark contrast to the American and Confederate historical emphasis on fighting for one's own rights (both state and individual). Additionally, as the South considered itself the more righteous and truly Christian side in the war,<sup>68</sup> admission of sin and need for the atoning sacrifice of Christ would not jive well with the self-righteous pride of the populace. Such speculations may be interesting, but ultimately we have no record of why the women jettisoned crucicentrism during the war years.

### *Shifting Views of Death*

Methodist women's personal commitment to activism of one kind or another and biblicism, as well as conversionism, indicates that they absorbed the messages of their parish communities, at least to some degree. They were influenced by the words of their preachers and the spiritual environment that they found themselves in. However,

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<sup>68</sup> Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*.

Methodist women also adapted their religion to accommodate their own feelings of crisis and grief by changing their views of death.

Sarah Pier left some interesting accounts of her beliefs about death and even absence, some of which were undoubtedly influenced by Spiritualism. She firmly believed that communion with dead or absent spirits was possible. For example, she wrote on March 8, 1863, “I give kind, loved lost friends this sweet sad hour to thee - - to holding a silent communion- - my spirit with thine.”<sup>69</sup> On July 20, 1863, she recorded:

I dreamed of seeing Sammie night before last- - his face was so fair and innocent, and I drew him up to me and reverently pressed my lips to his noble brow and breathed a prayer for him the while- - Oh! is it impossible that his spiritual presence was sensibly felt by me.<sup>70</sup>

Writing to her fiancé, Sarah said:

I feel so near to you tonight – as if my spirit was holding communion with yours. I am enough of a spiritualist to believe that not impossible, on the contrary I believe it to be possible. I believe two spirits that are attuned alike, two hearts that love can through some unknown source communicate in language irrepressible – with each other - & I would not believe otherwise for the world – for it is such a comfort.<sup>71</sup>

The latter quotation explicitly stated that Sarah chose her Spiritualist-type beliefs for the comfort they offered her. Changing her views of death in this way meant a great deal to

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<sup>69</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal (9). The year of this letter is not explicitly stated. Stephan records very similar language being used in the late 1850s in Virginia of an absent lover (*Redeeming the Southern Family*, 74). Sarah’s view of the communion of spirits was likely in accordance with that of her broader culture.

<sup>70</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Folder 4, Journal (34).

<sup>71</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Accession #139, Box 1, Folder 5, Correspondence 1862-1865, Letter from Sarah C. Pier, Evening, 28<sup>th</sup>. The year of this letter is not explicitly stated.



Sarah: it offered her the opportunity to commune with her absent loved ones, the ability to transcend her loneliness and grief for these men by being with them in a spiritual sense.

Like her cousin, Lucy Pier also embraced novel views of death. While talking to a Mr. Groves, she reported that he said his wife “is now an angel in heaven.”<sup>72</sup> Lucy did not dispute this or comment on it, so it appears that she took this view of death. Lucy also recorded a funny story that was passing along the grapevine that “they would have to plant cotton seed in the graves out there to resurrect the dead.”<sup>73</sup> Sometimes, however, she seemed a bit more conventional, as illustrated from this quote from when a friend died: “As long as life lasts your memory will be with us.”<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Lucy seemed to be gratified when a slave on the Pier plantation “wished I might live for-ever [sic] and when called to die that I might find a seat prepared for me on the right-hand of the Savior.”<sup>75</sup> Lucy raged against death and specifically childhood mortality: “And the poor afflicted Mother – it seems almost impossible for her to say – Thy will -oh God! be done.”<sup>76</sup> And again, “How deeply the heart spoke in taking a farewell.”<sup>77</sup> So although she was not

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<sup>72</sup> January 13, 1863, in Lucy Pier Stevens, *Another Year Finds Me in Texas*, 87.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., January 22, 1863, 89.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., July 3, 1863, 128.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., December 25, 1863, 164.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., October 20, 1863, 155.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., October 22, 1863, 155.

entirely radical in her beliefs about death, Lucy joined her cousin in a lack of acceptance of traditional Methodist doctrines about death.

### *Conclusion*

Utilizing Methodist women's diaries and letters as a historical source draws attention to the creative ways in which women dealt with the trauma of the Civil War. The writings of both Sarah and Lucy Pier point toward the use of subtle pro-Confederate activism in the form of broad social engagement with their community and hard work as coping mechanisms.<sup>78</sup> But Sarah's diary chronicled her additional commitment to certain revised types of conversionism and Spiritualism, eliminating the traditional evangelical emphasis on crucicentrism to form an updated evangelicalism. Meanwhile, Lucy Merry Pier's diary eschewed spiritual reflectiveness to focus on day-to-day activism alone. And Cousin Lucy Pier Stevens expressed a vague and slight commitment to activism of any sort, biblicism, and conversionism, going along with Sarah's novel views of death as well. These women were strengthened by the disparate ways they chose to live their lives as they faced the fear and uncertainty of war.

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<sup>78</sup> Tongate, in *ibid.*, 8, uses similar language to describe Lucy Pier Stevens's attendance at parties.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “Besting the Ghost”: Enslaved Evangelical Women in Civil War Texas

#### *Introduction*

As already established in this thesis to this point, the Civil War was a key turning point in the religious experiences of millions of Americans. Mark Noll refers to this time as one of “theological crisis,” arguing that the war prompted widespread reconsideration of hermeneutics in regards to slavery as well as deeper questioning of the concept of providence in general.<sup>1</sup> Noll says that, “The Book that made the nation was destroying the nation [through the war].”<sup>2</sup> During these turbulent years, men and women questioned their core beliefs as they tried to find God’s presence in their suffering and sought His will in the midst of the confusion that wracked their respective cultures.

For African Americans, the Civil War represented a particularly massive disruption to their way of life. Surprisingly, it did not prompt innovative or creative theological reflection from enslaved evangelical Christians in Texas. This does not mean that African American religion is not creative or innovative; they had already shaped a creative synthesis of traditional African beliefs and American evangelicalism, adapting it to the trauma of slavery.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 1-6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>3</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

So how specifically did enslaved Texan Methodist women respond to the uncertainties and tensions caused by the Civil War? In contrast to white Methodist women, we can say that African American evangelical women's piety was more deeply felt and a more essential part of their lives.<sup>4</sup> This is evident from the much more frequent mentions of religious beliefs and praxis than is found in the primary sources produced by white women. Although they expressed distrust in certain expressions of white Christianity (as will be detailed below), enslaved women held onto their own forms of devotion. Although piety was high, denominational adherence was fairly low; African American women in Texas seemed to hold more to a generic evangelical faith, as did their white counterparts. This does not mean, for either group, that they were not members of specific denominations, but it does mean that certain denominational issues (i.e. mode of baptism, whether or not one can lose their salvation) were not mentioned in the primary sources they produced. More significantly, we do not see enslaved women defining themselves as Methodists, Baptists, etc., in the slave narratives.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Although, as I have mentioned above, we have no way of knowing what the interviewers in the WPA slave narratives asked or if there was selective transcription of certain aspects of the interview.

<sup>5</sup> Although there are over twelve hundred pages of slave narratives, the word "Methodist" only appears four times in the entire Library of Congress digitized Texas slave narrative collection (*Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Parts 1-4, Adams-Young*, 1936, Manuscript/Mixed Material, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn161/>). I spoke to Bill Hardt, the archivist of the United Methodist Church's Commission on Archives and History, Texas Conference, and he said that, "In all my years of searching, I have found the name of only one woman - - Celia Craft of Bastrop County, and that reference is just a list of members of the church so it doesn't tell us anything about her experience" (email in discussion with the author, January 31, 2020). Thus I decided to change the focus of this chapter to "evangelical enslaved women" rather than "Methodist enslaved women."

I am not sure why this was the case but can only speculate that such minor denominational issues did not feed women's souls during the trying times of slavery and war. They would have been more concerned with issues such as death and the afterlife or weathering human suffering. At least these are the topics that receive much more coverage in the sources.

As for the specific form of piety, I argue that African American evangelical women in Texas held onto their religious beliefs and traditions from the antebellum years; they retained many aspects of their evangelical identity. As before the war, they placed a significant emphasis on the presence and power of the spiritual realm (i.e. ghosts, spirits, demons, and magical practices) as a way to cope with the injustices and conflicts of their lives. As discussed throughout this thesis, in the famed "Bebbington quadrilateral," evangelicals are defined as those Christians with a particular commitment to activism, biblicism, conversionism, and crucicentrism.<sup>6</sup> I argue that enslaved Texan evangelical women responded to their circumstances with a continuous emphasis on activism (as much as they could practice as tightly controlled enslaved women) and conversionism. Biblicism was somewhat present, but as non-literate persons, and also in line with their African traditions, they found spiritual truth all around them, in the natural world, rather than solely in the written words of the Bible. Crucicentrism was entirely jettisoned. Probably the most significant aspect of their faith was their commitment to the

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<sup>6</sup> David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2-3. A similar argument to what I am making, also based on the quadrilateral, was suggested by Dr. Barry Hankins, (Baylor University History Department Chair) in discussion with the author, November 12, 2018.

spirit realm, which offered a connection with their religious heritage from Africa.<sup>7</sup> In short, African Americans had already created a religious synthesis to deal with the trauma of slavery and did not make significant religious innovations to process the potential trauma of the Civil War.

### *The African American Experience in Civil War Texas*

What pressures prompted these changes, or lack thereof, in African American religious life? The war had the potential to significantly impact African Americans in both positive and negative ways. With emancipation an enticing promise just out of reach, those enslaved persons who were able to, followed the progress of the war. The few free people of color in Texas must have questioned their own future in a shifting society, wondering how their social standing would change under emancipation. Yet if the Union should lose, enslaved African Americans would be in bondage for the foreseeable future with little hope of escape, and free people of color would continue to be in danger of enslavement. There were very few black soldiers in either army who came from Texas, but a few African Americans fought in the Union Army, and some

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<sup>7</sup> J. Gordon Melton posits a general syncretism between Methodism and African folk religions but feels that African practices were “[suppressed]” through Methodism (*A Will to Choose: The Origins of African American Methodism* [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2007], 179, see also 178). But based on the slave narratives I have read, I believe that many African practices were actually retained and Christianity added onto them. This accords with Raboteau’s *Slave Religion*, which emphasizes the continuities between evangelical worship and African traditional worship practices (132-133, 149). However, Raboteau does not mention the belief in ghosts and spirits as part of the overlap between Christianity and African traditional religions (see also 127).

slaves served their masters in the Confederate Army; these men and their families would share the uncertainties and fears sweeping America as the war went on.<sup>8</sup>

African Americans in Texas had occupied a confusing and difficult social position for generations, but the situation was exacerbated by the war. By that time, nearly one-third of the total population of Texas was enslaved.<sup>9</sup> With some exceptions, enslaved persons in Texas were treated abominably; the majority of Texas slave narratives tell horrific tales of abuse. Yet, being enticingly close to the Mexican border, where slavery was illegal, slaves could allegedly escape to freedom more easily than slaves in other states.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, there was an exceptionally low number of free people of color in

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Donald Yacovone, *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* (Carlsbad, CA: SmileyBooks - Hay House, Inc., 2013), 114. Gates and Yacovone write that the Union Army offered fugitive slaves a safe haven; in their words, “word soon spread that a slave could get free by running to the boys in blue” (114). They also note that fugitive slaves were sometimes rebuffed, murdered, abused, or even “[illegally traded]...with the enemy” (114). So, for fugitive slaves, fighting in the Union Army carried more dangers than for their white counterparts. Gates and Yacovone note that “AME Church leaders advised their parishioners that they simply had no business fighting for a country that oppressed them” (112). So not every enslaved person considered it a privilege to fight for the Union. Despite these caveats and limitations, African Americans still entered the war in large numbers on a national level, almost 200,000 in all (Gates and Yacovone 121). However, of Texans specifically, only “forty-seven African Americans...joined the Union Army” (Ralph A. Wooster, *Civil War Texas: A History and a Guide* [Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1999], 39). For a slave narrative of an African American persuaded by his master to join the Confederate Army, see James Cape in Ron Tyler and Lawrence R. Murphy, eds., *The Slave Narratives of Texas* (Austin, TX: State House Press, 1997), 101.

<sup>9</sup> Gallaway, B.P., ed., *Texas: The Dark Corner of the Confederacy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994], 24; Rosalie Beck, “For the Love of God and Country: Texas Baptist Women and the Civil War,” *Texas Baptist History: The Journal of the Texas Baptist Historical Society*, 35-36 (2015-2016), 25.

<sup>10</sup> Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, xxxvii-xxxviii. See also Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 207.

Texas, this group comprised only one-fifth of one percent of the total African American population.<sup>11</sup> As in other areas of the South, free people of color were a very vulnerable population, at risk of being seized and enslaved by unscrupulous slave traders; their situation was more dire because after 1836, free people of color were legally prohibited from living in Texas and were subject to severe discriminatory laws.<sup>12</sup> So African Americans in Texas stood to gain a great deal should the Union win the war. They could be freed from bondage and abuse and enabled to pursue economic advancement and social opportunity without fear.

All Texans would be affected by the Civil War. On the positive side, Texas was not a major theater of the war and was quite distant from most of the eastern battlefields, so most black and white Texas women were spared from witnessing combat or suffering attack upon their persons or property by Northern soldiers.<sup>13</sup> This did not mean that Texans were not personally invested in the war, however; all Texans, black or white, would have known someone who was fighting in the Confederate Army. Military service

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<sup>11</sup> Beck, "For the Love of God," 29, gives the statistics: the entire state population was 604,215; the enslaved population was 182,566; and the population of free people of color was 355.

<sup>12</sup> Gates and Yacovone, *The African Americans: Many Rivers*, quote from the narrative of Solomon Northrup, a free black from New York who was "drugged, chained, and sold to a slave trader named James H. Burh who transported the helpless Northrup to New Orleans and a life of slavery that endured until his rescue in 1853" (85; narrative is quoted on 86-87; see also 91-92). See also Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, xxxix; Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 201.

<sup>13</sup> Wooster, *Civil War Texas*, 31. They did, however, have extensive contact with "the large number of refugees who came to Texas from Arkansas and Louisiana to escape invading Union armies" (32).



was nearly ubiquitous among white men, even more so than in other Confederate states.<sup>14</sup>

Some enslaved persons expressed regret at the dangerous military service or death of their white slaveholders while others would probably have been relieved, but in either case this would have been an emotional strain.<sup>15</sup>

African American Texan women's experience of the war was complicated by the unique dynamics of the intersectionality of race and gender. Like other Texas women, most enslaved women were distant from the battlefield and relied on news provided by letters from soldiers and newspaper accounts, both of which would arrive weeks after the fact. Yet African American women faced an extra barrier in this area; illiteracy likely predominated in the slave community through the inequities of the slave system.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, information was often filtered through their slave masters, who were able to selectively provide the information they wanted their slaves to hear. This same dynamic would later affect people's experiences of post-war emancipation, which were often unduly delayed by the former masters.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> J. M. Carroll, *A History of Texas Baptists* (Dallas, TX: Baptist Standard Publishing Co., 1923), 311, in Beck, "For the Love of God," 29. Beck also cites Wooster, *Civil War Texas*, 44-45.

<sup>15</sup> For examples of regret, see Andrew Goodman and James Hayes in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 98, 99.

<sup>16</sup> Angela Boswell, "Black Women during Slavery to 1865," in *Black Women in Texas History*, eds. Bruce A. Glasrud and Merline Pitre (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 16, says that slave literacy was not illegal in Texas like other states. However, since many Texas households (both slaves and masters) came from other Southern states (15-16), custom would probably preclude slave literacy in most cases.

<sup>17</sup> John Bates in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 123-124; Isabella Boyd, 125; Tempie Cummins, 125.

The slave population in Texas had recently experienced dramatic growth through the heart-breaking realities of what Gates and Yacovone call the “Second Middle Passage”: the forced migration of thousands of African Americans from the Upper South to the cotton-growing states, including Texas, following the invention of the cotton gin.<sup>18</sup> The pressures of the war only intensified the situation. Texas was seen as a safe haven by slaveholders, a desirable place to move their human property as a slave state distant from the bloody battlefields.<sup>19</sup> Worse than such displacement was the illegal and ruthless manner in which slave traders brought victims to Texas.<sup>20</sup> In one notorious case, a slave trader pretended to be friendly to slaves and engineered their flight from their Missouri plantations, only to kidnap them and sell them in Texas.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in his slave narrative, Lee Anderson Pierce stated that “Marse Fowler didn’t have much regard for he [sic] black folks. Two families of them was stolen niggers. A spec’lator [sic] done stole them in Arkansas and fetch them to Texas.”<sup>22</sup> Worse, some enslaved women were compelled to enter “forced [marriages]” or participate in other inhumane forms of

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<sup>18</sup> Gates and Yacovone, *The African Americans*, 79.

<sup>19</sup> Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, xxii. Wooster clarifies, “[The slave population] was increased by more than thirty thousand slaves ‘refugeed’ by Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi planters fleeing from federal forces that occupied their states” (*Civil War Texas*, 45).

<sup>20</sup> Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, xxv.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 3, Lewis-Ryles*, 186.

“breeding.”<sup>23</sup> African American women were thus exposed to the ambiguities of war in more profound and varied ways than their white counterparts.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, because many slaves were non-literate and excluded from participation in war news, they did not experience the war as deeply as their white counterparts. And most wartime expressions of faith seem to have carried over from the antebellum years, probably because slave religion had already adapted itself to the traumatic context of slavery and so did not need to adjust to new war-related trauma.

### *Source Problems*

As a preliminary caveat, I will note that a serious methodical problem plagues all American historians dealing with slavery: the paucity and poor quality of primary sources written by enslaved persons.<sup>25</sup> In this thesis, I have mostly relied upon slave narratives, which are some of the only primary sources produced by enslaved persons. Unfortunately, a majority of slave narratives were recorded in the 1930s by white interviewers in a Works Progress Administration (WPA) program under Roosevelt’s New Deal. Most interviews were recorded in shorthand and transcribed later, rather than

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<sup>23</sup> Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, cite several slave narratives in support of this claim (xxvi). To place this uniquely Texan phenomenon in a transatlantic context, one may consult Gates and Yacovone who write, “After the 1808 ban on the international slave trade, American slave masters turned to ‘growing’ their own laborers. Of all the slave societies in the New World, the United States alone succeeded in creating a slave force that reproduced itself” (*The African Americans*, 77).

<sup>24</sup> That said, Boswell argues that “the lives, roles, and experiences of most African American women [were] mostly unaffected during the Civil War” (“Black Women during Slavery,” 30). From what I have read in slave narratives, I would agree with this assessment.

<sup>25</sup> This is detailed in the “Preface” to Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, iix-x.

preserved word-for-word using audio equipment, and the questions posed by interviewers were not recorded at all. This causes serious limitations: the problem of bias and stereotyping by interviewers, the lack of context in not knowing what the interviewees were responding to, and also the lack of detail in slave narratives due to their extreme brevity, most being a mere five pages long.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the advanced age of the former slaves as well as the chronological distance of over sixty years from the events in question create further complications in terms of accuracy. Encouragingly, Tyler and Murphy note that, “this does not mean that the questions and answers should be ignored; it means merely that we must use them as we use all historical sources, with proper caution.”<sup>27</sup> While it is difficult to recreate the spiritual practices of enslaved persons in as much detail as we would wish, we can still gain a general understanding of their faith and practice.

One question that could be raised in terms of slave religion was whether slaves’ identification with Christianity, where this was the case, was by choice, by default, or by compulsion. Tyler and Murphy report that, by and large, slaves’ church membership was tied to the church of their masters.<sup>28</sup> However, this does not preclude a genuine religiosity on the part of the slaves. Slave narratives report many instances of voluntary religious praxis, such as secret church services of preaching and prayer, conjuring and counter-

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<sup>26</sup> These issues are raised in *ibid.*, as well as a personal conversation between the author and her research advisor. Michael Parrish (Baylor University History Professor), in discussion with Kari Johnson, March 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, ix.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxv. Raboteau maintains that this was especially a rural phenomenon (*Slave Religion*, 137-38).

conjuring practices, and the singing of spirituals. Since these actions were undertaken without white command or permission, and often at the risk of severe punishment if detected, it becomes clear that at least some enslaved persons held their Christian convictions deeply and personally and did not just act like Christians to please their slaveholders.

### *The Appeal of Evangelicalism*

Evangelicalism offered close, affirming egalitarian relationships within the congregation.<sup>29</sup> Enslaved women were seen as sisters on the same spiritual journey as their male counterparts. This was exemplified by a song quoted by Moses Hursey,

*Sisters, won't you help me bear my cross,  
Help me bear my cross.  
I done been wearing my cross,  
I've been through all things here.  
Cause, I want to reach over Zion's hill.  
Sisters, won't you please help bear my cross  
Up over Zion's hill?*<sup>30</sup>

Women were thus appealed to as fellow Christians who could help the men to grow spiritually. Whether or not Hursey was explicitly Methodist, the words of Hursey's song are reminiscent of the close quasi-familial relationships formed between Methodists that Christine Heyrman details in her *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Again, the primary source evidence I found in my research accords with the argument of Raboteau's *Slave Religion*, which flags evangelicalism's "inclusiveness which could border on egalitarianism" (139) and the inclusion of African American lay preachers (136).

<sup>30</sup> Moses Hursey, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 81.

<sup>31</sup> Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

Another benefit was that evangelicalism encouraged ecstatic joy.<sup>32</sup> Julia Frances Daniels referred to Sunday meetings, “held...in front of [Uncle Joe’s] house,” as “the liveliest days that there ever was...I used to say, ‘I liked meetings just as good as I liked a party.’”<sup>33</sup> Clearly, Sunday meetings were a source of joy for Daniels. The religious affiliation of Uncle Joe and his parishioners was not clearly specified. It is possible, however, to assume that the meetings might have been influenced by Methodism. Historian J. Gordon Melton writes,

Why, then, would they [slaves] choose Methodism—setting aside for the moment consideration of any supernatural qualities of the Christian faith? For those stuck in the drudgery of plantation life, Methodism offered an immediate benefit in its value as entertainment and diversion. While meetings were often just before or after the end of a long day of hard work, the Methodist prayer and class meetings rose above the mundane with their singing, self-expressive bodily movements, and sermons (oratory being the oldest of the arts).<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, whether biblicist preaching was an element of these services is a reasonable conjecture, but not actually stated in Daniels’ narrative.

Similarly, religion brought a sense of escape to the enslaved persons on John McCoy’s plantation. John McCoy did not deplore the social situation they faced, except obliquely in his commentary on religion: “Old Marse didn’t work his [slaves] Sunday like some white folks did. That was the day we had church meeting under the trees. The spirit just came down out of the sky, and you forgot all your troubles.”<sup>35</sup> For McCoy,

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<sup>32</sup> See Naomi L. Nelson, “She Considered Herself Called of God: White Women’s Participation in the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church, 1820-1865” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2001), 31.

<sup>33</sup> Julia Frances Daniels, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 82.

<sup>34</sup> Melton, *The Will to Choose*, 177.

<sup>35</sup> John McCoy, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 47.

religion was a source of comfort and solace, and this spiritual support was found through formal, organized church services, which were nevertheless held outside. The denominational affiliation of these outdoor services was not clearly indicated.

The possibility of religious leadership could also be appealing for enslaved persons. On Charlotte Beverly's plantation, religious leadership by the slaves was tolerated but considered a questionable activity with a dubious status:

One of the slaves was a sort-of-preacher, and sometimes massa allowed him to preach to the [slaves], but he had to preach with a tub over his head, because he got too happy he talked too loud. Somebody from the big house was liable to come down and make him quit because he was making a disturbance.<sup>36</sup>

While slave preaching was not outright forbidden, it was clearly within certain boundaries which could not be transgressed. This demonstrates that slave religion was to some degree restricted.

However, occasionally enslaved preachers were treated with great respect by the white community. One particularly notable case is that of "Uncle Mark," a preacher in the MECS tradition in Texas. He served throughout the antebellum years, having been licensed at least by 1852.<sup>37</sup> Even the local Baptists hired him from his slaveholder to preach for a while.<sup>38</sup> White Methodist pastor Joseph Sneed evaluated him as "grave and

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<sup>36</sup> Charlotte Beverly, in *ibid.*, 83.

<sup>37</sup> Washington/Rock Island Quarterly Conference Minutes, Oct. 16, 1852 [The General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church, Texas United Methodist Historical Society Archives, Conroe, TX].

<sup>38</sup> Oscar Addison, *The Life and Times of Rev. Joseph P. Sneed, A Former Methodist Preacher, Late a Member of the North West Texas Annual Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, by Rev. Oscar M. Addison of the Same Conference* (n.p., n.d.), 117.

dignified, and his manner becoming and impressive.”<sup>39</sup> Mark was able to read and began sermons with an “opening hymn.”<sup>40</sup> Mark felt the need to appear “meek and obedient,” but nonetheless was valued and honored by white auditors.<sup>41</sup> Eventually “he was purchased from his master by the church, and left free to dispose of his time and preach as he might determine.”<sup>42</sup> Freedom, religious equality, and even authority over white people was thus possible for this one black minister, at least.

A somewhat different account of Mark comes from W.P. Harrison’s 1893 work, *The Gospel Among the Slaves*.<sup>43</sup> Harrison, quoting from Homer S. Thrall whose sermons we examined in Chapter Two, writes:

At Independence he found one of the most able and influential preachers he has ever met. He was universally known as “Uncle Mark.” The planters paid his master for his time, and he traveled extensively, preaching, organizing churches, and doing an excellent work for his people. About that time the owner of Uncle Mark removed to the West, and the planters, unwilling to lose his labors and influence among their slaves, raised the money among themselves, and purchased him; but as our laws did not allow of emancipation, he was deeded to three Methodist preachers in trust for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South...In 1853 the Texas Conference elected Uncle Mark to deacon’s orders as a local preacher and Bishop Paine ordained him at the Conference at Bastrop.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> W.P. Harrison, ed., *The Gospel Among the Slaves: A Short Account of Missionary Operations Among the African Slaves of the Southern States* (Nashville, TN: The Methodist Episcopal Church, South – Barbee & Smith, Agents, 1893), accessed on archive.org.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 357.



This account seems to refer to Mark as a preacher only to enslaved persons, but Reverend Thrall still seems to respect Mark's ministry and to convey the idea that other whites did at the time as well. He also comments that Mark would preach to a black and white audience at camp meetings.<sup>45</sup>

Reverend Thrall also refers with some respect to an African American MECS preacher named Nace Duval, "an excellent Christian with considerable preaching ability."<sup>46</sup> He was, to Thrall's knowledge, providing the "only religious services held in the city" of Austin in 1844, a situation Thrall would soon change as he started the church there.<sup>47</sup> Even though Reverend Thrall obviously did not see Duval's preaching as sufficient for the city, he acknowledged that "[he] had considerable influence with the whites, and, with his assistance, we built a small house of worship for the negroes."<sup>48</sup>

### *Negative Experiences with Evangelical Religion*

These relatively positive experiences with faith were offset by tales of neglect or abuse related to religious observance. Christianity was not an option universally available to the slaves, nor was it always practiced in a positive, upbuilding way. Lizzie Jones recorded that, "We never had a school or church in slavery time."<sup>49</sup> On her plantations, slave weddings were a casual, even dehumanizing occurrence with no religious

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 356.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Lizzie Jones, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 41.

connotations whatsoever. Jones said, “Slaves weren’t married by no Good Book or law, neither. They’d just take up with each other and go up to the Big House and ask massa to let them marry. If they were old enough [over 20 years old], he’d say to the boy, ‘Take her and go home.’”<sup>50</sup> On this plantation, one of two things could be going on in the area of religion. Either the master was completely irreligious on a personal level so never considered providing religious opportunities for his slaves, or he considered religion to be somehow the special domain of white people, too socially disruptive for the slaves to get involved with.

Adeline Cunningham recorded a general sense of neglect and inhumane treatment on her plantation.<sup>51</sup> As part of this pattern, she said, “No, sir, we didn’t get any holidays. Sundays we ground corn, and the men split rails and hoed with the grubbing hoe.”<sup>52</sup> It is unclear whether that Sundays were reserved for slaves’ personal chores rather than the master’s work, or whether they were days of everyday labor just like the other six days. Either way, no Sunday services were provided for the slaves, and they were expected to work rather than participate in Sabbath rest or religious observance. This spiritual neglect correlates with the other forms of neglect which were sadly all too pervasive on the plantation.

For Jacob Branch, Sabbath observance was a bright source of light in a terrible existence. His mistress was exceptionally cruel and violent towards her slaves, and his

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Adeline Cunningham, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 42.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

mother was often the victim of her cruelty.<sup>53</sup> To Jacob, “Slavery, one to another, was pretty rough. Every plantation had to answer for itself.”<sup>54</sup> Jacob reported that “Sunday was the only rest day, and then the white folks allowed us to play.”<sup>55</sup> Jacob’s religious affiliation is not specified.

William Moore’s associations with religion were more negative. He recorded, “Some Sundays we went to church some place. We always liked to go any place. A white preacher always told us to obey our masters and work hard and sing, and when we died we’d go to heaven.”<sup>56</sup> This squares with Texas historian Randolph Campbell’s understanding that “thousands were permitted to attend the services of the familiar Protestant denominations such as Methodist and Baptist, where white ministers told them to be ‘obedient, industrious, trusty, and faithful’ in order to win eternal salvation.”<sup>57</sup> Campbell’s interpretation is somewhat questionable, as historic evangelicals would not affirm any good works as necessary prerequisites for salvation, but nevertheless, the preaching of obedience and conformity was no doubt common.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Jacob Branch, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 59, 61.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>56</sup> William Moore, in *ibid.*, 83.

<sup>57</sup> Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 206.

<sup>58</sup> Melton argues that “Southern Methodists now assumed that slavery was a long-term institution to which they must accommodate if the church was to have any role in the society. Capers’ new program [plantation missions] allowed some response to the slave culture. The program also partially answered charges from the North (and internationally) that the South represented a moral failure in its acquiescence to slavery. The church would do what it could to ameliorate the situation of the slave” (*A Will to*

Besides these fairly conventional experiences and their biblicist implications, an odd restriction was placed on slaves' spirituality:

Marse Tom didn't mind us singing in our cabins at night, but we'd better not let him catch us praying. Seems like [slaves] just got to pray. Half their life was spent in praying. Some [slave] took his turn...to watch and see if Marse Tom was anywhere about; then they circled themselves on the floor in the cabin and prayed. They go moaning low and gentle, "Some day, some day, some day, this yoke is going to be lifted off of our shoulders."<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps these dissident elements of slave prayer were threatening to whites. This was a kind of activism which was unacceptable in the eyes of the master.<sup>60</sup>

A similar anecdote was recorded by Katie Darling. While interacting with her mistress,

One time when a cannon fired, she said to me, 'You little black wench, you [slaves] aren't going to be free. You're made to work for white folks.' About that time she looked up and saw a Yankee soldier standing in the door with a pistol. She said, "Katie, I didn't say anything, did I?" I said, "I'm not telling a lie; you said [slaves] aren't going to get free."<sup>61</sup>

Whether this refusal to lie was an expression of literalist obedience to Scripture or a purposeful intention to get her mistress in trouble, either way could be construed as anti-Confederate activism for a cause she believed was morally right. Indeed, William Moore describes the reaction of himself, his mother, and his family when they were finally freed:

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*Choose*, 174-175). In other words, white Southern Methodists basically fully accepted slavery. Enslaved Methodists, however, did not (177).

<sup>59</sup> William Moore, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 83.

<sup>60</sup> Heyrman documents the paranoia of slave masters in considering "all Baptists and Methodists, merely by virtue of their regular communication with bondpeople, as accomplices in subverting white supremacy" (*Southern Cross*, 47).

<sup>61</sup> Katie Darling, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 106.

“We all cried and sang and prayed and were so excited...”<sup>62</sup> Evangelical faith could support its adherents in times of joy and deliverance just as well as in times of sorrow. And this evangelical faith subtly affirmed activism, biblicism, and conversionism, eschewed crucicentrism, and included a strong emphasis on the afterlife, ghosts, and magic.

### *African American Women and the Quadrilateral*

#### *Activism*

Tyler and Murphy relate an anecdote which illustrates the seriousness of Methodist slaves’ evangelistic activism in the years before the war. Spearheaded by enslaved persons, fundraising and building efforts resulted in two new church buildings, a Baptist and a Methodist church.<sup>63</sup> Clearly evangelical slaves valued their church; this anecdote demonstrates a fairly high level of engagement with denominationalism among the enslaved persons of at least one Texas community, leading to activism in terms of fundraising and building the churches. Women were doubtless an important part of this effort but we do not know to what degree they, or anyone in this effort, were motivated by racial pride and a sense of their own spiritual dignity before God; a desire to evangelize the community; an emphasis on denominational differences so that the two churches could not combine building efforts or share a space; or some other concern. Either evangelistic or social activism, then, could be undergirding this effort.

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<sup>62</sup> William Moore, in *ibid.*, 18.

<sup>63</sup> Tyler and Murphy, *ibid.*, xxxv.

Regarding anti-Confederate activism, Lee Anderson Pierce mentioned the fact that the Methodist church in Sulphur Springs housed a militia organized by African Americans to protect African Americans during the war years. “A cullud [sic] man at Jefferson, named Dick Walker, got up a cullud militia to keep the Klux off the niggers. The militia met here in the old African Methodist Church.”<sup>64</sup> Presumably women would not have been in this militia, but they probably gave their approval and endorsement for these men to gather in their church.

### *Biblicism*

Biblicism was not something that most enslaved women addressed directly in their slave narratives; most of what we can know about this aspect of their faith is only discernable if we are looking hard for it. In the antebellum years, Isaac Martin recounted tales of a master with a general sense of consideration for his slaves.<sup>65</sup> Regarding religious observance, Martin noted,

They didn't do regular work on Sunday. Every Sunday one of the other women had to take the place of the cook so she could get off. All of them who could would get off and go to the church for the preaching. Them whose turn didn't come one Sunday would go another till they all got around to go.<sup>66</sup>

Clearly, religious involvement was something the master prioritized for his household, including female slaves. Biblicism became a priority for these women, as they were able to hear the preaching of Scripture in church services.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Federal Writers Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 3*, 186.

<sup>65</sup> Isaac Martin, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 38-39.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>67</sup> Raboteau also flags the biblicism of slave religion (*Slave Religion*, 239-41).

Hagar Lewis documented an unusually agreeable relationship with her slaveholder before the war: “Missus Mary McFarland, my mother’s mistress and mine, taught us children with her own, taught us how to read and write. She treated us just like we were her children.”<sup>68</sup> Surprisingly, this was a completely legal activity; “Texas never passed laws forbidding teaching slaves to read and write.”<sup>69</sup> Her husband fed the neighbors’ neglected slaves and tried to prevent slave abuse on the part of his neighbors, to the point of legally prosecuting them.<sup>70</sup> Regarding religion, “Miss Mary’d make our Sunday dresses. My mother put colored thread in woven material, and they were pretty.”<sup>71</sup> Sabbath observance was a key part of Lewis’s childhood, and again biblicism may have been linked with this as she heard sermons preached at church.<sup>72</sup>

Indeed, a Methodist commitment to biblicism on the part of the religious community, black and white, led to increased literacy in more than one instance. A.M. Moore mentioned this in his slave narrative, stating, “Just before the war they began to let Negroes preach and have some books, a hymn book and a Bible.”<sup>73</sup> At least some of the

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<sup>68</sup> Hagar Lewis, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 43.

<sup>69</sup> Boswell, “Black Women during Slavery to 1865,” 16.

<sup>70</sup> Hagar Lewis, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 43.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>72</sup> However, Campbell writes that “Nearly all [owners] gave Sunday as a day of rest, except perhaps during cotton picking season” (*Gone to Texas*, 204). Since Sabbath observance was widespread throughout the antebellum South, it did not necessarily indicate a deep evangelical religiosity or a commitment to attending church and hearing biblicist preaching. This must be kept in mind throughout the narratives which follow discussing Sabbath observance. In this particular case, having a special dress probably meant that Hagar Lewis would be appearing in public in the community at church.

<sup>73</sup> *Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Part 3*, 119.

enslaved men and women in Moore's Methodist church were evidently able to read and instruct other slaves from the Bible, and the church was anxious to have them do so. This biblicism no doubt empowered the enslaved community with greater knowledge of their faith, which could be put to either progressive or reactionary purposes.

While Methodist biblicism had some strong egalitarian elements, sometimes it was put to quite reactionary ends. For Callie Shepherd, religious affiliation and biblicism compelled her to avoid running away from slavery during the antebellum years. After describing the runaways she knew, Callie stated, "But I never got a whipping, cause I never went with the colored generation. I sat right in the buggy with the white children and went to hear Gospel preaching."<sup>74</sup> Callie was accorded a place of privilege in getting to ride with the white children from church, which perhaps explains why she chose to do so rather than run away like many other slaves she knew. However, her engagement with biblicism is noteworthy here.

On the other hand, slaves' biblicism could be put to more socially progressive ends even before the war. The most strongly biblicist "subversive" incident came from the narrative of John Bates.<sup>75</sup> He said,

My Uncle Bent he could read the Bible, and he always told us someday we'd be free, and Master Harry laughed, haw, haw, haw, and he said, "Hell, no, you'll never be free; you haven't got sense enough to make a living if you were free." Then he took the Bible away from Uncle Bent and said it put bad ideas in his head, but Uncle got another Bible and hid it, and master never found out.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Callie Shepherd in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 64.

<sup>75</sup> Boswell, "Black Women During Slavery," 29.

<sup>76</sup> John Bates, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 123.



Clearly biblicism was often put to socially destabilizing ends, and this would have affected the women of the enslaved evangelical community.

### *Conversionism*

Andrew Goodman mentioned religious conversion almost as a rite of passage for the young people on his plantation before the war:

Old massa built us a church, and an old man, Kenneth Lyons, who was a slave for the Lyons family nearby, used to get a pass every Sunday morning and come preach to us. He was a man of good learning and the best preacher I ever heard. He baptised [sic] in a little old mudhole down back of our place. Nearly all the boys and gals got converted when they were about twelve or fifteen years old.<sup>77</sup>

This religious experience seemed to affect teenagers of both genders. With such mass conversions, one wonders if social pressure was involved, but surely some of the conversions must have been genuine. Conversionism was a significant component of the spirituality on this plantation.<sup>78</sup> However, for the most part, conversionism was rarely addressed in slave narratives, especially those of women.

### *Crucicentrism*

Interestingly, unlike the religiosity found in African American spirituals, we do not see crucicentrism featured as a key part of evangelical women's faith as expressed in slave narratives. Again, as with white women, it is anyone's guess whether enslaved women assumed and internalized the salvific importance and devotional value of the

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<sup>77</sup> Andrew Goodman in *ibid.*, 82.

<sup>78</sup> The primary source evidence I uncovered confirms the argument in Raboteau's *Slave Religion* that evangelicalism was more acceptable to enslaved persons than more liturgical traditions because its revivalistic conversionism required only belief and repentance rather than a long, complex catechesis (126, 132-33).

atonement death of Christ and so did not feel a need to express it. Likely this was true, but if it was not mentioned in the primary sources they produced, it can be questioned how deeply enslaved evangelical women did value crucicentrism on a personal level. However, the medium of slave narratives obscures the issue, as the interviewers may have also internalized crucicentrism or considered it uninteresting and therefore guided the interview in another direction.

### *Views of Death, the Afterlife, and the Spiritual Realm*

Many slave narratives expressed a syncretism of evangelicalism and African beliefs about demons, ghosts, and magic both before and after the war. Rosanna Frazier said that, “[My slave master] was the Methodist preacher and furnished us church. Sometimes he had camp meeting, and they cooked out-doors with the skillets.”<sup>79</sup> Frazier’s master had a reputation in the community for being excessively kind to his slaves, and Frazier commended him for his generosity in “[giving] Saturday and Sunday off” and “[giving] good food.”<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, he did not oppose consumption of hard liquor, providing his slaves with whiskey at “corn shucking time.”<sup>81</sup> Frazier did not talk about her own engagement with religion, but clearly she respected the religious faith of her master because of its positive fruits in his life.

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<sup>79</sup> Rosanna Frazier, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 25.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

However, Frazier also believed fervently in the power of what she called “hoodoo.”<sup>82</sup> From love charms to ways to “conjure” up sickness or insanity, Frazier allegedly experienced and witnessed many demonstrations of this spiritual power.<sup>83</sup> She believed that she herself had been recently blinded by a conjurer at the time of the WPA interview in the 1930s.<sup>84</sup> Oddly, Frazier did not discuss how these “hoodoo” practices intersected with Christianity, if they did at all for her. But by believing in “hoodoo,” Frazier did not have to blame God for her uncomfortable circumstances or view Him as distant and disengaged; she could ascribe her blindness to human evil.

Silvia King described another positive experience with religion, again linked with a more magical spirituality. Her master treated his slaves in a relatively benign manner, feeding them well and making sure their shelter was adequate.<sup>85</sup> King reported that, “Most every night he went around the quarters to see if there was any sickness or trouble.”<sup>86</sup> Though not commenting on the specific denominational expression of faith, King said that, “Sometimes the preacher told us how to get to heaven and see the ring

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<sup>82</sup> Rosanna Frazier, in *ibid.*, 90.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* See also Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), which emphasizes the link between evangelical Christianity and supernatural healing practices (42). Fett cites Yvonne Chireau, “Conjure and Christianity in the Nineteenth Century: Religious Elements in African American Magic,” *Religion and American Culture* 7 (Summer 1997), 42.

<sup>84</sup> Rosanna Frazier, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 89-90.

<sup>85</sup> Silvia King, in *ibid.*, 37.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

lights there.”<sup>87</sup> This anecdote is directly after her descriptions of having their physical needs met, so it seems that King’s thought is that slaves’ physical and spiritual needs were cared for on her plantation. Later on she states that alcohol consumption was allowed and encouraged on their plantation, but without drunkenness: “Marse always had the [slaves] take some apples and make cider, and he made beer, too. Most of us had cider and beer when we wanted it, but nobody got drunk. Massa would sure cut us if we did.”<sup>88</sup> This moralism in terms of abstention from drunkenness was an evangelically-based commitment which the slaveholder enforced for his slaves.

King’s conventional Christianity was augmented by diverse spiritual practices. She described a fellow slave’s divination, which revealed whether “a [slave] was going to get whipped”; a magic spell to get out of “law trouble”; and a way to use the “shoosting root” to “get more money or a job or most anything.”<sup>89</sup> Interestingly, King did not explicitly attempt to reconcile these practices with evangelical Christianity. Perhaps the two spiritualities were completely separate and never converged in her mind. While this is not clear from her narrative, it is clear that her spiritual practices made it possible for her to assume agency in her own life. In situations in which she might feel powerless, such as being whipped, in legal trouble, or in need of money or a job, magic could ensure the outcomes she needed.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Silvia King, in *ibid.*, 89.

Florence Ruffins also held a strong belief in ghosts and the spirit realm. Ruffins stated that interaction with ghosts was not necessarily tied with evil magic: “Then my pappy and mammy both could see them, and they had special powers, but they were good powers. They had no use for the devil spells and all such.”<sup>90</sup> Moving on from this interesting tidbit, she then gives her perspective on Spiritualism:

In the old days before surrender the colored folks talked about ghosties and haunts, but since education is for the colored folks, some of them like to say spirit instead of ghost. Now they have the church, and they say the preacher can bring the ghost—but they call it the spirit—to the meeting and talk with them. That is the spiritualist church.<sup>91</sup>

Belief in ghosts also helped Ruffins reflect on the evils of slavery:

In that there same country, there was a farm that sure was haunted. Many families tried to live in that house, but were forced to move. It was supposed the [slaves] which the cruel master of that farm killed in slave times came back to tantalize. The ghost came in the night and walked back and forth across the yard, and they could see them as plain as day. There was nobody who could stay on that farm.<sup>92</sup>

For Ruffins, the slaves who had been murdered in their lifetimes were able to get revenge on their slaveholder through haunting his property as ghosts.

Interestingly, Ruffins explicitly connected her belief in ghosts with her biblicist evangelical faith. She stated:

There is only one way to best the ghost, and it is to call the Lord, and he will banish them...Right here in this house, a person died and their spirits tantalize at night. It comes after we go to bed and patters on the floor with the bare feet and rattles the paper. That sure gets me all quivering. I have to get the Bible and call the Lord to banish them. But I’ve seen that shadow of that ghost often, and it is a man ghost, and it looks sad.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Florence Ruffins, in *ibid.*, 92.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

Whether Ruffins read certain passages from the Bible or merely used the Bible as a physical talisman to send away the ghosts is unclear. Either way, for Ruffins, God's power is clearly tied with the holy book, and she holds the Bible in very high esteem in the postbellum years.

Another slave narrative, that of Ellen Thomas, emphasized her strong belief in ghosts. For Thomas, someone's evil behavior in their lifetime could be exposed through what happened with their ghosts. She said,

Another time I was stayed with Mrs. Reedes. Mr. Reedes was killed, and all night long he'd come back and grind coffee and sprinkle it all over us. I was so badly scared I nearly died. Next morning, there'd be coffee all over the floor. We supposed it was Mr. Reedes' ghost. They say if a person was wicked they come back like that.<sup>94</sup>

Even if someone's evil behavior was never confronted while he was alive, it would not be concealed forever. In this sense, divine justice prevailed in Thomas' view of ghosts.

Belief in ghosts was a very common theme in women's slave narratives. Susan Ross also said that she had "[seen] but one ghost" and "often [felt] the spirits close by [her]."<sup>95</sup> Isaac Martin, speaking of a female slave, remembered an occasion on which "[his] uncle's wife" brought him near the graveyard and showed him a ghost.<sup>96</sup> Isabella Boyd told a "ghost story" which she evidently believed to be true.<sup>97</sup> Patsy Moses described her involvement in "conjures and voodoo and luck charms and signs."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ellen Thomas, in *ibid.*, 93.

<sup>95</sup> Susan Ross, in *ibid.*, 93-94.

<sup>96</sup> Isaac Martin, in *ibid.*, 94.

<sup>97</sup> Isabella Boyd, in *ibid.*, 94-95.

<sup>98</sup> Patsy Moses, in *ibid.*, 87.

Talismans such as the rabbit's foot, horseshoes, and charm bags were all a part of her spiritual repertoire.<sup>99</sup> Far from being original, based on her own spiritual experiences, these charms were passed down through family tradition "from my daddy and mammy and the old folks."<sup>100</sup> No effort to integrate these practices with Christian spirituality was explicitly detailed in Moses' account, other than one reference to "[being] on the side of God."<sup>101</sup> All these firsthand accounts fit well into the established historiography on slave religion; Boswell mentions the "[prominence]" of "slave conjurers or magician/curers" "in the slave community."<sup>102</sup> These instances of magic and supernaturalism offered the promise of justice for adherents or an explanation of otherwise inexplicable events.

More traditional African magic practices, like those described above, were often combined with an emphasis on Satan, demons, and hell to make sense of the trials slaves were subjected to. Sarah Ford reported,

The overseer was Uncle Big Jake, who was black like the rest of us, but he was so mean I suspect the devil made him overseer down below a long time ago. That was the bad part of Massa Charles, because he let Uncle Jake whip the slaves so much that some like my papa who had spirit was all the time running away.<sup>103</sup>

Clearly, Ford believed in a literal devil and hell as unseen realities affecting her daily life, both her experiences of abuse and the family instability resulting from it. Sarah's specific

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>102</sup> Boswell, "Black Women during Slavery to 1865," 29. See also Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*.

<sup>103</sup> Sarah Ford, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 53.

religious affiliation is unknown, however. Ford employed similar apocalyptic terms when talking about the end of slavery. She said, “Lord me, there’s heaps of things went on in slave times that won’t go on no more, because the bright light came, and it ain’t dark no more for the black folks.”<sup>104</sup> For Ford, the end of slavery effected a very positive change in her life, and she continued to process her experiences in biblical terms.

Focus on the justice of eternal deserts was a common response in the African American evangelical community, for both men and women, before and after the war. Andy J. Anderson said that,

The war broke out, and that made the big change on the master’s place. He joined the army and hired a man named Delbridge for overseer. After that, the hell started to pop [describing several forms of abuse]...I guess that Delbridge went to hell when he died, but I don’t see how the devil could stand him.<sup>105</sup>

However, sometimes the apocalypticism was not to be immediately fulfilled. For Susan Merritt, referring to the murderers of newly freed slaves, “There sure are going to be lots of souls crying against them in Judgement!”<sup>106</sup> Looking forward to the end times was a strong component of slaves’ evangelical biblicism during this time.

However, occasionally other spiritual explanations met these felt needs. One time, a slave narrative referred to God Himself as bringing justice immediately. Annie Row’s master responded to the potential end of slavery with a violent desire to kill his slaves, and she said,

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<sup>104</sup> Sarah Ford, in *ibid.*, 64.

<sup>105</sup> Andy J. Anderson, in *ibid.*, 98. Randolph B. Campbell also quotes an East Texas slave narrative expressing similar sentiments (*Gone to Texas*, 207).

<sup>106</sup> Susan Merritt, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 120.



But the good Lord took a hand in that mess, and the marster hadn't gone far in the field when he dropped all of a sudden. The death set in on the marster, and the [slaves] came running to him. He couldn't talk or move, and they toted him in the house. The doctor came, and the next day marster died.<sup>107</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Enslaved evangelical women did not just absorb whatever they heard; despite the restrictions placed upon them by their masters, they chose to embrace or reject the words of white preachers and religious leaders. William M. Adams described the outward acquiescence but private non-compliance of his slave community when “a white preacher” unsuccessfully tried to persuade them to “‘pray for the South to win.’”<sup>108</sup> Enslaved evangelical women used their own religious agency to decide which beliefs and practices would be most beneficial for them to adopt.<sup>109</sup>

Although evangelical religion could be oppressive for some enslaved persons, I argue that it was mostly a positive influence in their lives and led to concrete practical results in their communities. Enslaved women's evangelically motivated evangelistic activism resulted in church construction and a relatively conservative moral code, while their anti-Confederate activism was at least uplifting to them if not effective on an individual-plantation level. A fairly light emphasis on biblicism and conversionism is found in the slave narratives; however, in the cases where it did come up, earnest biblicism led enslaved persons to consistent church attendance and enthusiastic involvement in slave services and prayer meetings, while a sincere commitment to

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<sup>107</sup> Annie Row, in *ibid.*, 114.

<sup>108</sup> William M. Adams, in *ibid.*, 96.

<sup>109</sup> Melton, *A Will to Choose*, 177.

conversionism formed a significant component of their spiritual lives and religious community.

All of these traditional hallmarks of evangelicalism were at least somewhat important to enslaved Texas women, but they also exchanged crucicentrism for spiritism in order to create a religious synthesis that met their spiritual needs. For enslaved evangelical women, their belief in the unseen spirit world of ghosts and demons provided them an anchor in a trying time, a sustaining spiritual solace. When they experienced abuse, they could take comfort in the fact that the trial was sent by Satan and his minions rather than by God. When they wanted vengeance on their oppressors, they could rest in the fact that ghosts would bring justice. When they wanted to control the outcome of an important issue, they could rely on magic practices to make sure that the right thing would happen. Combining these new beliefs and practices with the traditional evangelical emphases on activism, biblicism, and conversionism empowered these women to face slavery and the Civil War with confidence.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### “I Won’t Be Reconstructed”: Texas Methodist Women Deal with Reconstruction

#### *Introduction*

The rapid social, economic, and cultural transformation of Reconstruction Texas contrasted sharply with antebellum culture as well as the difficult years of the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> The classic Civil War historian James M. McPherson goes so far as to refer to the Civil War as “the ‘Second American Revolution’ of 1861 to 1865.”<sup>2</sup> Scholars such as McPherson and Orville Vernon Burton have argued that the demise of slavery ushered in the modern age of free-market capitalism.<sup>3</sup> This claim has recently been questioned by

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine A. Jones explains that this historiographical claim has been contested by recent scholarship in her historiographical essay, “Women, Gender, and the Boundaries of Reconstruction” (*Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 1 [March 2018]: 111-131, doi:10.1353/cwe.2018.0005). According to Jones, scholars have recently decided that the historiography to this point has “[overstated] Reconstruction’s rupture with the past” (112) and that Reconstruction was never a golden age of democracy but always “exclusionary” (112). Be that as it may, the fact remains that women’s lives changed in dramatic and obvious ways during Reconstruction, some of which will be detailed below. My interaction with the primary sources suggests that women reeled in shock (some positive and some negative) in response to these changes. This assessment is consistent with the stance of Elizabeth Parish Smith, who writes of the “economic devastation and legal revolution in the years following the Confederacy’s defeat” (“‘In Times of Change and Trouble Like These’: Commonalities among Southern Women during Reconstruction,” in *Women and the American Civil War: North-South Counterpoints*, ed. Judith Giesberg and Randall M. Miller [Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2018], 264).

<sup>2</sup> James M. McPherson, “Foreword,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), xiv.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv; and Orville Vernon Burton, *The Age of Lincoln: A History* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux - Hill and Wang, 2008).

historians, but in any case, the transition from plantation slavery to a wartime economy to wage labor to the sharecropping system, all within a decade or two, must have sent economic shockwaves throughout Texas culture. When at last the chips had fallen and the war was over, Texas society looked to be headed in a new and radical direction. The following sections will discuss how Reconstruction society functioned in Texas and how it affected the lives of average black and white women.<sup>4</sup>

### *Spiritual Changes During the Civil War*

To recap my thesis to this point, I have argued that the Civil War saw many new developments in the lives of white Methodist women and black evangelical women in Texas.<sup>5</sup> White Texas Methodism was partially but not entirely politicized during the war

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<sup>4</sup> Jones makes the point that women's experiences during Reconstruction are valuable in investigating the broader social context of Reconstruction. Her words are eloquent enough that they are worth quoting in full: "Gathering evidence of women's agency is not an end in itself, but a fuller understanding of how women cultivated the era's democratic potential and its exclusions is essential to understanding Reconstruction and its place within the nineteenth century" ("Women, Gender, and the Boundaries of Reconstruction," 112-113).

<sup>5</sup> My argument is limited by the extant primary sources. For African American women, I have mainly relied on slave narratives, which are problematic for a number of reasons (interviewer bias, lack of context because interviewers' questions are not recorded, and a seventy-year distance from the events described being some of the most glaring). Unfortunately, many slave narratives do not include explicit religious reflection; even fewer discuss specific denominational affiliation (only four times in the 1,200 pages of Texas slave narratives is Methodist identity ever mentioned). Therefore, I have decided to cover African American evangelical women rather than Methodists specifically. However, it can be assumed that a significant amount of them were Methodists for two reasons: Methodism was the largest Protestant denomination in Texas at the time (Sallie McNeill, *The Uncompromising Diary of Sallie McNeill, 1858-1867*, ed. and with an introduction by Ginny McNeill Raska and Mary Lynne Gasaway Hill [College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009], 9, and enslaved persons were frequently drawn to the Baptist and Methodist churches above other contenders (John Work, *American Negro Songs* [Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998], 23).

years; I have not encountered explicit political commentary in sermons, but primary sources indicate that Methodist churches were sometimes used as recruitment bases and Confederate hospitals.<sup>6</sup> Although most Methodist women I have studied seemed to be deeply involved in their churches and receptive to the words of their ministers, they were also independent religious agents taking control of their own religious beliefs and praxis.<sup>7</sup>

My argument takes as its starting place the Bebbington quadrilateral, the quintessential historiographical interpretation of evangelicalism. According to David

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<sup>6</sup> Homer S. Thrall, Homer S. Thrall Sermons, Box 579B, Bridwell Library Special Collections, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, 7-8; Sarah Pier Wiley, *Sarah C. Pier Wiley Papers*, Accession #139, Box 1, Texas Collection, Baylor University.

<sup>7</sup> This concept is beautifully explained by Jennifer Newman Trevino in her review of Scott Stephan's excellent study, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 152. Trevino writes, "Women were not merely victims trapped in the confines of their religious beliefs, which were used by the male hierarchy to manipulate them... Women, as the moral guardians of their families, took responsibility upon themselves" (Review of *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South*, *Alabama Review* 63, 151-153 [April 2010, doi:10.1353/ala.2010.0030, 151-153], 152, 153). Additionally, Charles F. Irons writes in his review of the same book: "[Stephan argues] that women did not need any formal role within the church in order to gain satisfaction from their spiritual lives" ("The Cult of Domesticity, Southern Style," *Reviews in American History* 38 [June 2010, www.jstor.org/stable/40865350, accessed February 18, 2020, 253-58), 255. See also Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, "Women and Southern Religion," in *Religion and the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, eds. Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Matthews (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 268, for a brief discussion of the significance of listening to sermons in women's lives. I think that it is a profound historiographical error to automatically cast women who did not have a preaching role or ordained clerical status as powerless or oppressed and I have striven to avoid that error in my own work. These women had religious power in their own lives, even if we might not consider their actions to be radical by twenty-first century standards; as R. Marie Griffith writes in her "American Religious History and Women's History: Old Divides and Recent Developments," it is unfair that historians tend to have an underlying "animosity toward religion as invariably debilitating for women" (*Reviews in American History*, 1997, doi:10.1353/rah.1997.0046, 220).

Bebbington, evangelicals can historically be characterized as those Christians who put a particular emphasis on activism, biblicism (a commitment to “Scripture alone,” taken as literally as possible), conversionism (the necessity of being “born again” through a conversion experience), and crucicentrism (unique focus on the cross of Christ). I have found through my primary source research that this quadrilateral very accurately describes the MECS throughout the antebellum and Civil War years. However, the Bebbington quadrilateral is largely inadequate to describe white Methodist women during the war. They held very loosely to evangelistic activism and were much more committed to pro-Confederate activism. They adhered to biblicism and conversionism to some slight degree but almost totally eschewed crucicentrism. The most significant religious shift was new beliefs about death and the afterlife, as Methodist women came to believe that the dead, although angels in heaven, were simultaneously present with their loved ones on earth. Such new beliefs met their needs as they struggled with the grief of losing family members in the war. For enslaved women, there was a pronounced silence on the issue of crucicentrism, alongside a loose commitment to activism, biblicism, and conversionism. The most striking aspect of their faith before and during the war was a commitment to spiritism, which I define as a strong belief in supernatural beings such as ghosts and demons as well as involvement in occult practices such as magic spells. The slave narratives reveal that this revised synthesis carried over from the antebellum years and continued through the Civil War.

To spell this out in more detail, the eschatological hopes of enslaved women seemed to be rapidly coming to fruition as the war progressed and the Union inched towards victory. They continued their participation in spiritistic practices even as they

carried on what anti-Confederate activism seemed possible for them. Biblicism and conversionism remained minor aspects of their faith. However, after reading dozens of women's slave narratives, I did not encounter any mention of crucicentrism (the cross of Christ, his sacrificial atonement, the blood of Jesus cleansing from sin, etc.). By far the most significant aspect of their faith, spiritism continued to sustain them as they fueled their hope for justice with occult practices such as conjuring and eschatological beliefs such as eternal punishment for wicked slave owners. All of these religious beliefs and practices were essentially holdovers from the antebellum years, because their faith had already well adapted to the trauma of slavery and did not need to shift to accommodate the turbulence of war.

Meanwhile, the spiritual lives of white women were also significantly shaped by the Civil War.<sup>8</sup> Evangelistic activism was transformed into actions undertaken to benefit the Confederate cause, and such actions were so widespread that they probably (however unfairly) contributed to the northern stereotype of southern women as overactive and dominating, leading the weak and inept politicians of the Confederacy by their apron-springs.<sup>9</sup> After all, "the Confederate cause elevated white women as principal objects of

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to the revised quadrilateral discussed below, many scholars have noted the restructuring of the doctrine of providence and an increasingly prominent emphasis on the will of God (Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015]; Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004], and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988]). These themes are ubiquitous throughout the primary sources I have interacted with as well.

<sup>9</sup> Nina Silber, "Intemperate Men, Spiteful Women, and Jefferson Davis," in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, eds. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

obligation and thus encouraged those women to see themselves as vital components of the southern struggle, the essential foundation, in effect, for which that cause had been launched.”<sup>10</sup> Women’s political actions might include “sewing uniforms for the men” or engaging in “days of fasting and prayer” to seek “God’s blessing” for the war effort.<sup>11</sup> Even individual devotional prayer practices could take on an activist tone as women truly believed that their prayers ensured their soldiers’ safety and could even affect the outcome of the war.<sup>12</sup>

Devotional biblicism, where it did exist, became focused on Scripture that seemed particularly relevant to the war effort.<sup>13</sup> Conversionism, though a sporadic part of white women’s faith, carried on as it had done in the antebellum years, as Methodist women continued to attend and promote revival meetings. However, crucicentrism faded into the background from their spiritual reflections; just like their African American counterparts, these women did not record any special devotion to the cross or blood of Christ. New beliefs about death simultaneously became an important part of white Methodists’ faith

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<sup>10</sup> Nina Silber, *Gender and the Sectional Conflict: The Steven and Janise Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era*, ed. William A. Blair (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 69. Surprisingly, Silber goes on to argue that Confederate women “[melded] home and country” (69) to the point where they essentially lacked “civic identity” (70), I point I would definitely dispute based on the Confederate activism I have seen in the primary sources both during and after the war.

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Newman Trevino, “Elizabeth Rhodes: An Alabama Woman’s Religious Beliefs during the Civil War,” *Alabama Review* 62, no. 4 (October 2009): 243-261, doi:10.1353/ala.2009.0046, 257.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.



as they sought to connect with their absent loved ones.<sup>14</sup> This revised synthesis became the cornerstone of white Methodist women's faith.

### *The Social Context of Reconstruction*

As the Civil War came to a close, Methodist women, black and white, must have marveled at the purposes of the Almighty. Delivered from their bondage at last, formerly enslaved women must have rejoiced in the goodness of their Heavenly Father. Felix Haywood's slave narrative exemplified this exuberant rejoicing; he quoted a song talking about emancipation, "*Hallelujah broke out...And I'm heading for the Golden shore.*" The men and women in Haywood's slave community, then, were comparing their physical freedom to the spiritual freedom of Heaven.<sup>15</sup> In the eyes of formerly enslaved women, the justice and power of God were on display for all to see.

God's new purposes for His oppressed daughters might even include full participation in the body politic; before the Fourteenth Amendment was passed, women did not know whether or not they would be included as voters and holders of civic office.<sup>16</sup> Texas freedwomen would have hoped for education and literacy as well as

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<sup>14</sup> Lysterly, "Women and Southern Religion," argues, "Beyond the formal women's societies were also the noninstitutional, parallel, and even 'shadow' churches of believers who stretched the notion of heresy perhaps to the breaking point by harboring beliefs and insights that were reassuring and meaningful to women and never submitted to men for approval" (248). This is exactly what I uncovered in my research, a sense of women's doctrinal adaptability as they created religious practices that met their needs. Even more directly, Lysterly goes on to address Spiritualism on the same page.

<sup>15</sup> Felix Haywood, in *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, ed. Ron Tyler and Lawrence Murphy (Austin, TX: State House Press, 1997), 113.

<sup>16</sup> Kathi Kern, *Mrs. Stanton's Bible* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 37, 56. See also Clinton and Silber, *Divided Houses*, 280. Rebecca A. Kosary, "'To Punish and Humiliate the Entire Community': White Violence Perpetrated Against

economic prosperity and a good future for their children.<sup>17</sup> They would have also been elated with the freedom of movement that was now available to them, as well as the possibility to remain in family groups and not be torn apart by the brutalities of slavery.<sup>18</sup>

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African-American Women in Texas, 1865-1868,” in Kenneth W. Howell, ed., *Still The Arena of Civil War: Violence and Turmoil in Reconstruction Texas* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2012), speaks of “a period of social, political, and economic uncertainty” for African Americans of both genders, 328.

<sup>17</sup> These hopes were soon dashed in dire poverty for most formerly enslaved women, however. See Catherine Clinton, “Reconstructing Freedwomen,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, eds. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, many African American women were unable to find their family members who had been sold far away, killed in the war, or otherwise lost to them (Smith, “In Times of Change,” see especially 264). Additionally, many would have become quickly disillusioned because of the horrific acts of violence (sexual or otherwise) committed by whites upon themselves, their husbands, and their friends and neighbors. They would have quickly realized that many whites resorted to violence to discourage black independence, freedom of movement, and self-esteem (Kosary, “To Punish and Humiliate,” 327-353). See Eli Davison, in *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 123, and Agatha Babino (*Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 1, Adams-Duhon*, 1936, manuscript/mixed material, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn161/>), 38. See also Rebecca A. Czuchry, “In Defense of Their Families: African American Women, the Freedmen’s Bureau, and Racial Violence During Reconstruction in Texas,” in *Lone Star Unionism, Dissent, and Resistance: Other Sides of Civil War Texas*, ed. Jesus F. de la Teja (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016). Even in this often terrifying environment, however, African American women frequently demonstrated optimism and hope for the future by turning to the Freedman’s Bureau for legal protection, protection which tragically did not materialize nearly often enough (Czuchry, “To Punish and Humiliate,” 184-188; Clinton, “Reconstructing Freedwomen,” 318). Interestingly, Elizabeth Parish Smith argues that, at least in the broader South, some black women were able to find justice through the court system (“In Times of Change,” 270), citing Michael A. Ross, *The Great New Orleans Kidnapping Case: Race, Law, and Justice in the Reconstruction Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), and Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997) in making this claim. Of course the probability of obtaining a just outcome must have varied greatly case by case, but, as Smith points out, the fact that such outcomes ever occurred shows that Reconstruction was not entirely a dark time for African American women and that at least a few would be able to hold onto a sense of justified optimism for their futures (270).

As Czuchry writes, “One of the most profound consequences of emancipation was the hope that black families could live free from the authority of whites.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Parish Smith comments, “For black families, to construct a household was to claim the companionship, self-sufficiency, and privacy that had been impossible under slavery; it was, in short, to affirm dignity as a family and as a race.”<sup>20</sup> For newly freed women, no hope seemed too unrealistic, no dream too lofty.<sup>21</sup> After all, they must have reasoned, “with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26 KJV).<sup>22</sup> In the event, however, most African Americans in the South did not see drastic improvement in their standard of living or even basic freedoms under Reconstruction. Most quickly found out that the new sharecropping system was basically slavery in a new guise, curtailing free labor, freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, and so forth.<sup>23</sup>

A number of the Texas slave narratives also express a sense of disorientation and a reluctance to leave the white slaveholders and plantations where the freed persons had

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<sup>19</sup> Czuchry, ““To Punish and Humiliate,”” 182.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, ““In Times of Change,”” 265.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>22</sup> Again, however, reality fell short of these women’s cherished hopes. Rather than revered wives and mothers like their white peers, African American women were still stereotyped as “[promiscuous]” and they frequently did not have the resources to keep their children safe and healthy (Clinton, “Reconstructing Freedwomen,” 310, 318). Even their husbands (rightly or wrongly) occasionally accused African American wives of adultery and sued for divorce, often drawing on sexist and racist stereotypes in doing so (Victoria Bynum, “Reshaping the Bonds of Womanhood: Divorce in Reconstruction North Carolina,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Sectional Conflict* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], 329-331).

<sup>23</sup> Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 134.

spent their lives prior to Emancipation.<sup>24</sup> Louise Matthews noted that her former slaveowner commended his former slaves' faithfulness and cried because, according to himself, he loved his slaves and would miss them.<sup>25</sup> Mandy Hadnot said that she and her mother remained on their plantation and had a close and positive relationship with their former slave mistress.<sup>26</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, Susan Merritt's slave narrative explained that her former slaveowner had not actually freed his slaves for several months after emancipation should have gone into effect.<sup>27</sup> So emancipation and its fallout during the Reconstruction years was sometimes emotionally confusing and conflicted rather than pure and joyous ecstasy for former slaves.<sup>28</sup>

While, by and large, African American hopes soared sky-high, white women would have experienced a sense of disorientation at the changes the Civil War had wrought. Thousands of women lost fathers, brothers, husbands, lovers, and friends on the battlefield.<sup>29</sup> Those fortunate enough to see all of their menfolk returned safely from the

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<sup>24</sup> Andrew Goodman, James Brown, Elsie Reece, James Hayes, Isaac Martin, John Sneed, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 115-16, 120-21.

<sup>25</sup> Louise Mathews, in *ibid.*, 120. The same thing happened to Anderson Edwards, Isabella Boyd, Tempie Cummins, Anderson Edwards, and Isabella Boyd, in *ibid.*, 123, 125.

<sup>26</sup> Mandy Hadnot, in *ibid.*, 124; her mistress engaged in religiously based healing practices when she got sick and "cried right along with me." She also made Mandy's wedding dress and provided her with money and various consumer goods.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Merritt, in *ibid.*, 120.

<sup>28</sup> For a historiographical essay arguing for more nuanced depictions of enslaved women, see "Mammy by Any Other Name," in Catherine Clinton, *Stepdaughters of History: Southern Women and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 75-112.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, "In Times of Change," 264.

war would nonetheless notice changes in the men they loved, whether physical injuries, mental and emotional trauma, or if nothing else life-shaping experiences that the women had no context to understand or share in.<sup>30</sup> Further, many homes and businesses were destroyed or damaged during the course of the war.<sup>31</sup>

The loss of slaves obviously changed elite white women's economic status and released the workforce which they had come to depend upon.<sup>32</sup> But, in a broader sense, emancipation also changed the social status and sense of superiority white women could draw on in their culture.<sup>33</sup> As I alluded to earlier, white southern women were stereotyped by northerners as disorderly, rebellious and scrappy, all traits which were anathema to both northern and southern gender norms of the time.<sup>34</sup> This would have been humiliating and hurtful, striking at the very heart of their identity as righteous southern women. No doubt the stereotype of "spiteful, angry women" had some truth to it, as the bitterness southern women felt at the northern invaders (to their minds) would have resulted in actions that might have been perceived as disrespectful to the soldiers who marched through their towns.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kimberly Harrison, *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 143.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, "In Times of Change," 267-68.

<sup>33</sup> Tragically, Kosary writes that white women's sense of disorientation in the postwar years and their position of subjugation to white men sometimes led to violence perpetrated by white women against their African American neighbors ("To Punish and Humiliate," 330).

<sup>34</sup> Silber, "Intemperate Men."

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., quote from 304, see also 293-294.

On a deep spiritual level, white women must have wondered where God was in their situation. How could He let the “righteous cause” of the Confederacy be defeated? Had they been wrong in discerning God’s will?<sup>36</sup> Or was their defeat a manifestation of God’s judgment on them for their sins? Was this the trouble and persecution Jesus predicted for His followers?<sup>37</sup> After all, the South had interpreted their social structure and religious beliefs as those most faithful to a conservative interpretation of the Bible.<sup>38</sup> And what did God have in store for their future? Such questions would have troubled their minds daily.

On June 3, 1865, Sarah Pier Wiley, a Methodist woman in East Texas, wrote despairingly in her diary, “Oh! the unhappy state of our country! We know not what fate awaits us.”<sup>39</sup> And on the very next day, Sarah penned these words of anger and confusion: “God only knows what is ahead of us. All looks dark.”<sup>40</sup> Previously, during the war itself, Sarah had expressed a sense of optimism for the future, a certainty of

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<sup>36</sup> See Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*.

<sup>37</sup> Biblicist women would have been familiar with passages such as Matt. 24-25, discussing the future tribulation to come, and John 15:18-16:4, talking about persecution for Jesus’ followers. For highly committed Confederate women, it would be natural to apply such passages to their present situation and assume that they were being persecuted for their faith as expressed in their commitment to perceived “biblical” hierarchies of race and gender.

<sup>38</sup> See Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *The Pier Diaries: The Diary of Lucy Merry Pier, August 12, 1852 through October 16, 1863, and the Diary of Sarah Pier Wiley, January 18, 1863 through May 3, 1870*, vol. 3, ed. Atta Wiley [Waco, TX: self-published, 1950], 151.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

victory, combined with a submissive trust in God. Understandably, however, as soon as the war ended in bitter defeat, Sarah's hopefulness and trust became bitterness and fear. Her thoughts and feelings must have been congruent with those of many other white women across the state, particularly elites whose fortunes were tied up with the slave system. Status, life's direction, and even survival seemed to be in question all at once, not to mention the profound sense of religious disorientation.

### *African American Women's Reconstruction Religion*

As they adjusted to the new social context of Reconstruction Texas, the faith of Methodist white and evangelical black women continued to sustain their hope.<sup>41</sup> Surprisingly, for both black and white women, although their society was at least nominally "reconstructed," their faith was not. First and most obviously, most of them remained committed to the denominational expression of Christianity that had previously sustained them. In terms of the Methodist denominational family, although most African American women left the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for obvious reasons (the most prominent being its antebellum support of slavery), most Methodist freedwomen stayed in the broader Methodist fold, joining black denominations such as the African

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<sup>41</sup> Jenifer Newman Trevino writes of an Alabama woman, "The one thing that kept her going and reassured her fears was her firm belief that God governed her life. No matter what happened, whether it was the death of her children or the Civil War, Rhodes's religious beliefs provided a mainstay, a pillar of support and stability in an uncertain and changing world" ("Elizabeth Rhodes: An Alabama Woman's Religious Beliefs during the Civil War," *Alabama Review* 62 [October 2009]: 243-261, doi:10.1353/ala.2009.0046, 261). I similarly contend that the faith of Texas Methodist women continued virtually unchanged throughout the war and Reconstruction.

Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church.<sup>42</sup>

White women, too, continued in their Methodist commitments. To cite just one example, Pauline Maedgen joined a Methodist church in 1860 and remained in that tradition through the war years. Although she commented in an 1867 letter that specific denominational affiliation was not as important as a heart of faith, it should also be noted that she kept being a Methodist, joining a different Methodist church with her husband after their 1870 marriage.<sup>43</sup> Maedgen's story is part of a broader national trend of continuity in Methodist identity in the Reconstruction years. Indeed, one historian records that, "In 1868 Ulysses S. Grant remarked that there were three great parties in the United States: the Republican, the Democrat, and the Methodist Church."<sup>44</sup>

For freedwomen, their antebellum evangelicalism, with the spiritism they continued to nurture, was sufficient during the Civil War years and continued in essential continuity after the war had ended. Although black women experienced traumatizing and heartbreaking events during the Civil War and afterwards, their faith had sustained them through the traumatizing and heartbreaking events of slavery and war and did not need to change much during the Reconstruction years. For white Methodist women, however,

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<sup>42</sup> Reginald F. Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring: Methodist Preachers and the Crisis of Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>43</sup> Pauline Maedgen, letter to Moritz Maedgen, August 19, 1867, in Moritz and Pauline Maedgen, *Moritz Maedgen Papers, 1833-1898, Undated (bulk 1862-1879)*, Accession #0056, Box 1, Folder 6, The Texas Collection, Baylor University.

<sup>44</sup> Richard J. Carwardine, "Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War," in *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press – Kingswood Books, 2001), 309.



their religious practices had not been borne out of struggle, sorrow, and suffering; the pain they felt during the Civil War was largely new to them, and they were left scrambling to find something in their religion to help them through it. They turned to Spiritualism and continued to do so throughout the Reconstruction era as they sought to process their grief for the loved ones they had lost.

For African American women, then, their practice of anti-Confederate activism, small amounts of biblicism and conversionism, and spiritism remained largely unchanged, though adapting itself in small ways to the changed social context of Reconstruction Texas. Much of the quasi-political activism black women engaged in was the promotion of a better life for themselves, their children, and their fellow freedwomen. Kimberly Harrison writes of the “challenges that black men and women faced as they spoke and acted to establish their rights when facing former slaveholders who not only denied but actively worked against their agency.”<sup>45</sup> Fighting for their rights entailed a wide array of actions and choices that courageous black women made. For example, they bravely defended themselves and their families from violence (whether through avoidance, the legal system, or, rarely, physical self-defense). They finally obtained legal marriage with their husbands and they sought to “[set] up their own households with their own family members.”<sup>46</sup> This was always easier said than done, particularly considering how many black families had been separated through the brutalities of the slave system or

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<sup>45</sup> Harrison, *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women*, 164-169, quote from 169. See also Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 126.

<sup>46</sup> Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 127.

through the violence of war.<sup>47</sup> Freedwomen also had to work to provide for themselves and their families if they were single, single mothers, or, most commonly, their husbands were so poorly paid that their incomes were inadequate.

Basic survival, then, became almost political activism for these women as they asserted their right as fellow human beings to have food and clothing, safety, and freedom, over against the prejudice, discrimination, and violence many of their white neighbors thrust upon them. They were working against the sociopolitical system that they had known their whole lives, which can be considered significant political activism.

Black women explained the faith-based basis behind their activist struggle for survival. William Moore's mother urged his son to run away from his former master's control, and a white woman named Miss Mary enabled this; in response the freed people "cried and sang and prayed and were so excited we didn't eat any supper."<sup>48</sup> For Mrs. Moore and her fellow freed people, religious devotion gave them the strength and motivation to fight for their freedmen. And when Susan Merritt expressed her indignity against freed people being shot, she expressed it in explicitly apocalyptic and biblical terms: "There sure are going to be lots of souls crying against them in Judgement!"<sup>49</sup>

Considering the unimaginable challenges and seemingly insurmountable obstacles that they faced every day, it is notable that Texas Methodist freedwomen extended their activism outside the home and the workplace to include church-based moves towards

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<sup>47</sup> For example, see Julia Malone, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 126.

<sup>48</sup> William Moore, in *ibid.*, 118.

<sup>49</sup> Susan Merritt, in *ibid.*, 120.

independence and autonomy. But to these women of faith, their religious community was incredibly important, worth time, money, and sacrifice. Therefore, African American Methodists started joining northern-based, all-black denominations, such as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church, in droves.<sup>50</sup>

Most people have deduced from the twentieth-century civil rights movement that the black church is an important institution, providing an institutionalized source of moral and material support for members as well as an organization for community activism. But what is less well-known is that the black church was, and continues to be, important to its members for religious reasons as well. African American Christians were finally able to choose their own ministers, exercising some modicum of control over the sermons they heard. Although black preachers such as “Uncle Mark” had conducted their ministries in Texas before the Civil War, they were often under the authority of white denominations headed by white hierarchs and therefore unable to exercise full religious independence. Sermons had been a key source of religious discontent in the years of slavery when slaves were subjected to discourses enjoining obedience to their white “superiors,” and little else.<sup>51</sup> One particularly galling example may suffice. Wes Brady wrote, “We went to church on the place and you ought to have heard that preachin’. Obey your massa and missy, don’t steal chickens and eggs and meat, but nary a word ’bout havin’ a soul to

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<sup>50</sup> See Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring*.

<sup>51</sup> This is ubiquitous in the sources. See, for example, William Moore, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 83.

save.”<sup>52</sup> To escape from such one-dimensional and oppressive preaching must have felt like a great relief for devout African Americans. Moreover, African American denominations offered their members the chance to worship in their traditional, culturally significant ways.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, all-black religious communities offered all their members, male and female, a sense of dignity and worth and rehabilitation for their identity, which had been assaulted in the slavery years by the proponents of the “curse of Ham” ideology.<sup>54</sup>

African American women also participated in more directly political community activism. They celebrated Juneteenth each year, which commemorated the end of their many years of slavery. They also participated in Civil War memorial societies for Union soldiers.<sup>55</sup> Community activism, however, could have been significantly hampered by the ever-present possibility of white violence towards any black person who was perceived as overly powerful or threatening to the establishment.

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<sup>52</sup> Wes Brady (*Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 1, Adams-Duhon*), 135.

<sup>53</sup> This has been documented by several historians. See, for example, David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 133-135.

<sup>54</sup> See A. Nevell Owens, *Formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Nineteenth Century: Rhetoric of Identification* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> Micki McElya, “Southern Memories and Reconstruction: The Shifting Grounds and Contested Places of Women’s Civil War Memorial Work,” in *Women and the American Civil War: North-South Counterpoints*, ed. Judith Giesberg and Randall M. Miller (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2018), 312, 315.

Biblicism was still a minor priority for Methodist freedwomen. For example, Florence Ruffins talked about “[getting] the Bible” as a way to “banish” ghosts, seeing the Scriptures as a source of power and protection in her life. Conversionism also continued to be a part of Methodist freedwomen’s faith. For instance, Julia Blanks was proud to report that she had officially joined the Methodist church and been baptized, evincing a higher level of commitment than that of the disengaged (in her perception) congregants who attended her church.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Mary Ellen Johnson spoke eloquently of her conversion experience and her hope of heaven years after the war.<sup>57</sup> African American women did not evince any commitment to crucicentrism. Of all the slave narratives I have read, not one talks about the atoning death of Christ, being redeemed, being cleansed from sin, or any similar concept. It appears that crucicentrism simply was not a key part of their faith, before, during, or after the Civil War.

Spiritism, for African American women, did not end by the time of the Civil War. Freedwomen revealed a continued interest in such practices during the Reconstruction years. For example, Patsy Moses stated, “The old voodoo doctors were those who had the most power; it seems, over the nigger before and after the war.”<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, she compared the “conjure doctor” to the “preacher” in her slave narrative.<sup>59</sup> Silvia King

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<sup>56</sup> Julia Blanks (*Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 1, Adams-Duhon*), 13.

<sup>57</sup> Mary Ellen Johnson (*Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 2, Easter-King*), 224.

<sup>58</sup> Patsy Moses, in Tyler and Murphy, *The Slave Narratives of Texas*, 87-88.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

expressed faith in magic spells after the war as well.<sup>60</sup> And Willis Easter grew up in the antebellum years singing a song his mother taught him which asked God to protect him from Satan and conjurers and lead him to heaven; he continued his belief in ghosts and conjuring throughout his life.<sup>61</sup> Florence Ruffins also expressed a continuing belief in ghosts but explicitly connected it to her evangelical faith, talking about Scripture reading and prayer as the way to “banish” ghosts.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps most interesting of all, Florence Ruffins also explained the connection between spiritism, broadly conceived, and the more structured Spiritualism:

In the old days before surrender the colored folks talked about ghosties and haunts, but since education is for the colored folks, some of them like to say spirit instead of ghost. Now they have the church, and they say the preacher can bring the ghost—but they call it the spirit—to the meeting and talk with them. That is the spiritualist church.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, spiritism remained culturally powerful for African American believers, even to the point of becoming institutionalized in churchly form.

For African American women, spiritism served an important social function. It gave power to the powerless, enabling them to feel a sense of triumph over their white oppressors and a sense of control over their own lives. Knowing that at any time they could become sick and not have money to pay for the medical care they needed and knowing that they could easily lose what little financial security they had would be emotionally difficult, to say the least. Women would also fear that they or their loved

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<sup>60</sup> Silvia King, in *ibid.*, 89.

<sup>61</sup> Willis Easter, in *ibid.*, 90-91.

<sup>62</sup> Florence Ruffins, in *ibid.*, 92-93.

<sup>63</sup> Florence Ruffins, in *ibid.*, 92.

ones could at any time face legal trial or, even worse, the lynching mob, for any perceived or contrived affront to white supremacy in their community, and this possibility would also be terrifying to them. So, the perceived ability to conjure or to access the aid of acclaimed conjurers would have provided a sense of emotional stability, and, even more importantly, agency over their own lives.

### *White Women's Reconstruction Religion*

White women's faith was also not essentially "reconstructed" in the years following the Civil War. They had already found the helpfulness of shifting views of death during the war years and added it into their spiritual repertoire along with pro-Confederate activism and a light adherence to biblicism, and conversionism. The continuities are stronger than the discontinuities when considering white women's religious practices in the Reconstruction era.

Female Confederate activism did not end with the formal defeat of the Confederacy.<sup>64</sup> Such activism had been based upon evangelicals' self-concept as the

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<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, Kimberly Harrison writes about the silence of southern women directly after the Civil War in terms of documenting political events in their diaries. She also comments on how most southern women, according to their diary entries, avoided acts of public hostility towards the Union, even in personal encounters with northerners (*The Rhetoric of Rebel Women*, 146-159). But even in this silence Harrison argues that women were "[making] pragmatic rhetorical choices" and views their "recollection as an active process" (159), which we could then categorize as legitimate activism in a sense. Harrison goes on to talk about how women became less involved in political prayer practices and, at least rhetorically, retreated from the public sphere to focus on domesticity (164). But again, I would see this as activism in a sense as women were intentionally choosing their own priorities and promoting their vision of southern society as normative (see also Harrison, 169). See also Kassia Waggoner and Adam Nemmers, eds., *Yours in Filial Regard: The Civil War Letters of a Texas Family* (Fort Worth, Texas: TCU Press, 2015), 231-235, and Sarah Pier Wiley, *The Pier Diaries: The Diary of Lucy Merry Pier, August 12, 1852 through October 16, 1863, and the Diary of Sarah Pier Wiley, January 18, 1863 through May 3, 1870*, vol. 4, ed. Atta Wiley [Waco Texas:

“moral guardians of the southern people.”<sup>65</sup> Such an identity was hard to give up, and southern women generally chose to cling to this rather paternalistic view even after the war years. Therefore, southern women generally worked to preserve their southern identities and labored to perpetuate the myth of the lost cause.<sup>66</sup> For example, in Waco the Daughters of the Confederacy were already an active, functioning group by 1866.<sup>67</sup> This group did not preserve many records of their activities, but they did preserve scrapbooking materials, including poems that expressed nostalgia and pride in their Confederate history.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, southern women engaged in activism as they participated in Confederate burials and memorials.<sup>69</sup> These types of activities were vitally

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self-published, 1950], October 14, 1865. Both of these primary sources explicitly connect domestic responsibilities to the “duties” of evangelical faith.

<sup>65</sup> Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), quoted in Trevino, “Elizabeth Rhodes,” 255.

<sup>66</sup> As Catherine A. Jones writes, “By foregrounding white women’s retreat from politics, historians may have underestimated their role as bulwarks against Reconstruction” (“Women, Gender, and the Boundaries of Reconstruction,” 114).

<sup>67</sup> [Waco, Texas] United Daughters of the Confederacy: Mary West Chapter Collection, Box 1, Folder 3, The Texas Collection, Baylor University. Oddly enough, the national United Daughters of the Confederacy began in 1894, but the folder has a document from the Waco Daughters of the Confederacy in 1866. Perhaps the local chapters existed before the national organization. See Micki McElya, “Southern Memories and Reconstruction,” for an explanation of the significance of such groups; she also cites an address by Mildred Lewis Rutherford to further illuminate this (“Wrongs of History Righted,” Address of the Historian General to the Annual Convention of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Savannah, Georgia, 1914).

<sup>68</sup> McElya, “Southern Memories and Reconstruction.” McElya also comments on the importance of “archives generated by women’s activities in loose associations or formal organizations” (306).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, throughout. See also Silber, *Gender and the Sectional Conflict*, 73, for further explanation.



significant in “cementing particular interpretations of the Civil War and its legacies” and in “[broadcasting]...particular versions of the past in order to shape the present and future,” including of course the Lost Cause ideology.<sup>70</sup> According to Nina Silber, such Lost Cause quasi-political activism was encouraged by men who “sought to recapture the patriarchal world of the old South by symbolically employing white women as the central worshippers of male Confederate veterans.”<sup>71</sup>

At the same time, these women were making claims about their own identity as shapers and molders of their societies and in some small way finding “permanent visibility” for themselves, as their names were also displayed on these memorials and cemeteries.<sup>72</sup> As McElya so eloquently writes, “The glorification of the gendered and racialized domestic work of tending to the dead, including the celebration of Southern white women’s adaptability and resolve...began [even] before the demise of Confederate public institutions” and of course continued through the Reconstruction years and even later.<sup>73</sup>

Memorializing the Confederacy and the Civil War led naturally into a host of other sociopolitical efforts for white women. Nina Silber writes,

Southern white women frequently used their positions as memorializers and commemorators as a springboard to other social causes. They drew on a constructed memory of the Confederacy in campaigning for a diverse range of issues such as prohibition, public assistance for impoverished Confederate

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<sup>70</sup> McElya, “Southern Memories and Reconstruction,” 306, 312.

<sup>71</sup> Silber, *Gender and the Sectional Conflict*, 75.

<sup>72</sup> McElya, “Southern Memories and Reconstruction.” See also Silber, *Gender and the Sectional Conflict*, 70.

<sup>73</sup> McElya, “Southern Memories and Reconstruction,” 311.

widows and children, educational reform, and even suffrage...racial segregation and black political disenfranchisement.<sup>74</sup>

Additionally, moving back into evangelistic activism, white Texas women engaged in many church activities during the Reconstruction years, continuing their involvement as Sunday School teachers and hostesses for itinerant preachers. They also expanded their duties into reform and benevolent societies, most notably the Woman's Missionary Society of the Board of Missions (founded in 1878).<sup>75</sup> Other such societies included temperance groups, the American Tract Society, and the American Bible Society, just to name a few.

On a personal level, Methodist women continued to be involved with in families', friends' and neighbors' lives, serving them by meeting their physical needs. Sarah Pier Wiley's diary is filled with ubiquitous references to illnesses and ailments, providing manifold opportunities for nursing both inside and outside the home. Sarah recorded going to visiting and nursing ill friends and caring for ill family members on almost every page of her diary. Evidently this was an important part of her life, something she had grown accustomed to doing, because when she was prevented from doing so on one occasion, she expressed her regret in poignantly emotive terms: "I feel like a caged bird because I cannot fly to her bedside and help nurse her, one of my best and dearest

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<sup>74</sup> Silber, *Gender and the Sectional Conflict*, 82-83, 95.

<sup>75</sup> Jean Miller Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient: A History of Women in American Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 168.

friends.”<sup>76</sup> On a small-scale level, benevolent activism is manifested in such accounts of care for the sick.

White Methodist women maintained their tenuous commitment to biblicism as well. Besides choosing to attend Bible-saturated services and listen to biblicist sermons, they also continued to engage in biblicist devotional practices in their personal lives. Conversely, some Methodist women became less engaged in formal, institutional expressions of faith after the war ended. For example, Sarah Pier Wiley, ostensibly because of her own poor health and nursing duties with families and friends, basically did not attend church between May of 1865 and April of 1866. However, on many of the same Sundays that she skipped church because she was not feeling well enough, she went on walks and gave and received formal calls, possibly hinting that her health served more as an excuse than anything else.<sup>77</sup>

Conversionism also remained a minimal priority for Methodists in the Reconstruction years. Sarah Pier Wiley’s diary records sessions of “protracted meetings” on three separate occasions in 1865 and 1866.<sup>78</sup> Noting this as an event important enough to record in her diary, Sarah commented that two neighbors had become members at her church.<sup>79</sup> And crucicentrism continued to run low on popularity in this era. Methodist

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<sup>76</sup> Sarah Pier Wiley, *The Pier Diaries: The Diary of Lucy Merry Pier, August 12, 1852 through October 16, 1863, and the Diary of Sarah Pier Wiley, January 18, 1863 through May 3, 1870*, vol. 3, ed. Atta Wiley (Waco, TX: self-published, 1950), April 28, 1865, 147.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, throughout.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* However, Sarah did not attend any of them, ostensibly because of her poor health.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, August 12, 1865, 159.

women, even devout ones, did not spend much time and energy reflecting on the cross of Christ. To give just one example, Sarah Pier's diary does not mention Christ's atoning death in any way, shape, or form during the Reconstruction years.

Rather, Methodist women continued to devote most of their spiritual energy to activism and in maintaining their novel views of the dead. Unlike African American spiritualism, such new views did not include any engagement with magic or any emphasis on supernatural eschatological themes, both of which were important components of the spiritism of newly freed women. One example of the new views of death is found in the diary of Sarah Pier Wiley, who wrote, one month after the death of her infant daughter, "My loved one has been an angel a month today. How sensibly I feel her sweet spirit hovering around me- - precious one- - if that is as some think an illusion- - tis a happy comforting one."<sup>80</sup> Although her deceased daughter was conceived of as an angel, she also was with her mother on earth.

Why did white women continue to hold such unorthodox views of death in the postbellum years? Ann Braude has posited that adherence to Spiritualism served as an important way for women to exercise religious leadership in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and that this experience propelled them into the women's suffrage movement.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps the Methodist women I have studied felt powerless in the turbulent environment of the Civil War and Reconstruction, and therefore creating new views of death in some way enabled them to feel a sense of agency over their own spiritual lives.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., March 11, 1866, 176.

<sup>81</sup> Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

Another thing I uncovered in my research was that the Methodist women often expressed less connection to their churches than I would have expected. Spotty attendance due to illness and inclement weather were common. Even when the women were able to attend church, because of the itinerant system and the disruptions of the Civil War and Reconstruction years, their preachers varied from week to week. Furthermore, Methodist polity mandated that ministers rotate annually from circuit to circuit or parish to parish, further disrupting the relationship between pastor and parishioner. The lack of spiritual accountability, community, and support because of these factors probably encouraged women to adhere unorthodox religious beliefs about death more so than women in other religious traditions.

### *Conclusion*

After four terrible years of suffering, separation, and sorrow, the Civil War had ended. The Methodist women of Texas had weathered the storm depending on their faith to sustain them. For enslaved women, political, though not evangelistic, activism formed an important part of their religious praxis during the Civil War, even though as slaves their activities were severely curtailed. Enslaved people at least to some degree depended on the promises they found in their Bibles and on the promise of changed lives through conversion. However, unlike most historic evangelicals, enslaved evangelical women did not evince any interest in crucicentrism, in the centrality of the atoning death of Christ. They did, however, express deep interest and involvement with the supernatural, including ghosts, demons, magic, and “conjuring.” All of this supernaturalism I have here termed “spiritism.”

The turbulent years of Reconstruction did not substantially change black evangelical women's faith. Of course, freedom from slavery opened many new opportunities for activism, although these opportunities were still limited by the exigencies of survival in a severely oppressive society. The struggle of black women to survive and protect themselves and their children from physical harm, I have argued, constitutes significant quasi-political activism considering the social context of Reconstruction Texas. Additionally, the formation of new African American denominations such as the AME and AMEZ Churches, celebration of Juneteenth, and the formation of memorial societies to commemorate African American contributions to the Union war effort, all exemplified a dramatic commitment to sociopolitical activism during the Reconstruction years. As for the other aspects of African American women's evangelical faith, we see a continued minor interest in biblicism, and conversionism continued to be a priority, as exemplified in African American participation in revivals and camp meetings. Spiritism was never abandoned as a cornerstone of African American faith, including its vengeful tone towards white oppressors. For African American Methodist women, faith did not change in terribly dramatic ways during the Reconstruction period, other than receiving a significant boost through emancipation and the ensuing freedom to form new denominations.

For white women, a similar pattern emerges. Although this is disputed in the historiography, my primary source research found that white Methodist women in Texas were very engaged in various types of quasi-political activism during the Reconstruction period. Like their African American sisters in the faith, new types of activism became open to them after the war had ended. Although direct political involvement in the

Confederate cause, which had been deeply engrossing to these women, was no longer an option, this did not preclude all forms of sociopolitical activism. On the contrary, Methodist women continued to express their faith and morality through the organizations they chose to align themselves with, both in and out of the church. Their activism included community involvement, such as the formation of Confederate remembrance societies such as the Waco United Daughters of the Confederacy and the promotion of the temperance cause and eventually even women's suffrage. Additionally, white Methodist women were deeply involved in evangelistic activism in their church communities, teaching Sunday schools and starting groups such as the Women's Missionary Society of the Board of Missions.

Just as in the war years, women's slight commitment to their sacred Scriptures (biblicism) was exemplified through their involvement in biblicist churches and devotional biblicism. They continued to promote and attend conversionist, revivalist gatherings such as protracted meetings, even as they continued to neglect crucicentrism as a central tenet of their faith. And, as in the war years, these women turned to new beliefs about death as a way to connect to their absent loved ones, who had passed away during the bloody Civil War.

In conclusion, we see that, whether or not they realized it at the time, black, newly freed evangelical women and white, elite Methodist women actually had much in common in terms of religious praxis throughout the Reconstruction years. Carrying over from their religious practices during the Civil War, black and white Methodist women shared a commitment to activism, biblicism, and conversionism as components. They jettisoned the traditional evangelical commitment to crucicentrism, and, adapting

evangelicalism to fit their spiritual needs, replaced it with spiritism (in the case of black women) and new beliefs about death (in the case of white women). Methodist women would not be reconstructed in their faith, no matter how the rest of society might change.



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