

## ABSTRACT

A “Scourge and Minister”: Lyman Abbott, Liberal Protestantism,  
and American Warfare, 1861-1920

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Congregationalist minister and editor Lyman Abbott (1835-1922) is best known as a popularizer of modernist theology and as a representative of the Social Gospel movement. Less well understood are Abbott’s political opinions and philosophy. This thesis seeks to rectify this imbalance by examining Abbott’s writings concerning the three major American wars fought during his lifetime: the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I. In these three wars, Abbott strongly supported the United States and elevated each conflict to the status of a holy war. This thesis argues that the main reason Abbott supported these American wars was his refusal to distinguish between sacred and secular categories. Secondly, it also argues that Abbott’s positions were common to liberal Protestantism as a whole during the period under consideration. Thus, the thesis fills a gap in the literature on Abbott and liberal Protestantism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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and American Warfare, 1861-1920

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of History

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My greatest academic debt is to Dr. P.C. Kemeny and the history department of Grove City College, where I did my undergraduate work. Dr. Kemeny gave me books, listened to my ideas, and introduced me to the field of American religious history. He is

in every sense of the word a mentor. Dr. Gary Scott Smith improved my writing with the liberal use of his red pen and also helped prepare me for graduate work. Dr. Gillis J. Harp also helped me to become a better student and encouraged me to apply to graduate school. Dr. Mark Graham inspired me to become a professor through his lectures and palpable love for the historical profession. Spending the night at his house has been a highlight of my return trips to Grove City. It is to these men that I have dedicated this thesis.

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Finally, I would be remiss if I did not thank my family for their unstinting support during my time in Waco, Texas. Although they would have liked me to be closer to home, they allowed me to follow where the Lord has led. My brother Christopher and my father James are unfailing sources of support as well as models of godliness. Although my mother Joan passed away in 2003, I am grateful every day for her example. Without them, this thesis would never have been written.

## DEDICATION

To P.C. Kemeny and the history department of Grove City College



EPIGRAPH

*Heaven hath pleased it so...  
That I must be their scourge and minister.*  
--William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction: Scourge Them Out

#### *Introduction*

On December 29, 1889, the Reverend Lyman Abbott (1835-1922) mounted the platform to deliver the evening address to his congregation at Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York. It had been a little over two years since Abbott had been called to serve as Plymouth's interim minister, and a year and a half since he had been asked to become the permanent pastor there. Serving as Plymouth's minister was no minor task. The church had been founded in 1847 by the legendary Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887)—beloved shepherd to his congregation, renowned orator, and doyen of theological liberalism—and Beecher's influence had made Plymouth one of the most fashionable pulpits in the country by the time of his death in 1887, boasting a membership of 1,600 congregants. As a leading social institution of the city, the church's activities were frequently chronicled in the *New York Times* and its sermons reprinted in the *Brooklyn Eagle*.<sup>1</sup>

When the fifty-four year old Abbott entered the pulpit that evening in 1889, therefore, he recognized the vast influence that he exerted. If the congregation was expecting a pious message or a strictly exegetical sermon that night, however, they were disappointed. As was his wont, Abbott eschewed a purely spiritual theme for his address,

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<sup>1</sup> Ira V. Brown, *Lyman Abbott, Christian Evolutionist: A Study in Religious Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 115-16.

focusing instead on what he called “Puritanism in Politics.” Taking for his text a passage in Matthew 23 in which Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for honoring the prophets but failing to obey their commands, Abbott likewise criticized those who honored the Puritans only by remembering them on special occasions. Entreating his listeners to “do real honor to the spirit of Puritanism,” Abbott explained that the Puritans had gained crucial insight into the fact that “government was a divine institution based not upon the divine right of Kings, but upon the divine right of the people.” In contrast to this wholesome principle, Abbott argued that Thomas Jefferson and the “French Revolutionists” saw government as “an entirely secular affair.” The Brooklyn minister feared that this latter philosophy was all too prevalent in the world of his day. “There are traffickers and traders in the temple of liberty,” he warned, “Scourge them out.” How could this situation be rectified? Abbott enjoined the Plymouth congregation to “go into politics,” even “party politics.” It did not matter which party one joined, he prudently advised, so long as moral reform was achieved. “And let us make the government religious,” he concluded, “for atheism is as dangerous to the Nation as it is fatal to the individual.”<sup>2</sup>

The sermon was vintage Abbott. Drawing on ideas that he had used in the past and would appropriate again in the future, Abbott blurred the boundary between sacred and secular activities. Political participation was not an individual calling, a worthy vocation, or a good idea; it was a “duty” expounded upon from the Sunday pulpit.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the religious foundations and assumptions upon which good government rested had to be repaired. The republican system of government the United States

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<sup>2</sup> “Puritanism in Politics,” *New York Times* December 30, 1889.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

adopted, he implied, had a sacred origin, and its citizens therefore had a sacred obligation to keep the republic. These were themes, as we shall see, that surfaced again and again in Abbott's wartime writings. This chapter will first discuss the historiography of Lyman Abbott, noting the lack of attention that has been paid to his political philosophy. Second, it will define the term "liberal Protestantism" and seek to locate this thesis in the scholarly literature concerning theological modernism and American providentialism. Third, it will trace Abbott's life, focusing on his major personal and professional achievements. Finally, this chapter will state the overall argument of this thesis and seek to show where it fits in the current historiography.

### *Lyman Abbott in Historiography*

Despite the ubiquitous presence and intriguing nature of political rhetoric in Abbott's writing, historians have paid almost no attention to his conception of government, the United States, or democracy. The fullest study historians currently have of Abbott, Ira V. Brown's *Lyman Abbott, Christian Evolutionist* (1953), mentions Abbott's patriotism in passing but does not examine its origins or nature in detail. Although the book is an important contribution insofar as it dutifully chronicles the details of Abbott's life and his changing theology, its lack of an overall thesis and its neglect of the underpinnings of Abbott's political thought have invited other historians to supplement its findings. Unfortunately, few other historians have accepted this invitation. Nearly sixty years after the publication of *Lyman Abbott, Christian Evolutionist*, Brown is still the leading scholar on Abbott. In addition to his dissertation—which he converted to the 1953 biography—Brown published two scholarly articles on Abbott. The first (published by *The Journal of Southern History* in

1949) discussed Abbott's involvement in Reconstruction and his role in the American Freedmen's Union Commission. The second, which appeared in *The New England Quarterly* a year later, summarized Abbott's views of Christianity and evolution. Again, although both articles are helpful in their own way, neither discusses in any detail Abbott's political philosophy.

Scholars were mostly silent concerning Abbott from 1953 until the early 1990s. At that time, two works appeared simultaneously which discussed the Social Gospel and racial reform. These two works, Ronald C. White Jr.'s *Liberty and Justice for All* (1990) and Ralph E. Luker's *The Social Gospel in Black and White* (1991), argued that religious progressives paid more attention to racial reform than had previously been acknowledged. In both studies, Abbott was featured prominently, although not always positively.<sup>4</sup> While these historians emphasized Abbott's political thought more than Brown did, Abbott's wartime writings and political philosophy were not especially relevant to their purposes, and so were left out of their accounts. In 2003, historian Richard M. Gamble provided the most detailed analysis of Abbott's wartime rhetoric that historians currently have. In doing so, Gamble was building on an earlier work, Ray H. Abrams's classic *Preachers Present Arms* (1933), which discussed the role of American clergy in the Great War. Because both of these works deal solely with World War I, they will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Finally, in recent years, two other articles have focused on Abbott, but once again have been silent on his political commitments. In 2008, Hillsdale College professor

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald C. White, Jr. *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877-1925)* (1990; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); xix; Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 5-6.

Mark A. Kalthoff wrote a short article for *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* that highlighted the “progressive science and religion of Joseph LeConte, Henry Ward Beecher, and Lyman Abbott.” In the article, Kalthoff showed the extent to which Abbott revised traditional Christian belief based upon his acceptance of evolutionary theory.<sup>5</sup> Most recently, in 2010, Colin B. Chapell examined “race, gender, and self-government in the mind of Lyman Abbott.” Chapell ably demonstrated how “whiteness” was linked with “manliness” in Abbott’s mind and the implications this view had for Abbott’s perspective on African American civil rights.<sup>6</sup> Once again, although both of these articles are useful tools for the Abbott scholar, neither discusses Abbott’s wartime writings or his fervent patriotism.

#### *Liberal Protestantism and the Social Gospel*

The theological and intellectual movement with which Abbott is most closely identified is liberal Protestantism. Historian William R. Hutchison, whose *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (1976, rev. ed. 1992) was for many years the standard interpretation, identifies three components of liberal Protestantism: adaptation, cultural immanence, and “religiously-based progressivism.”<sup>7</sup> More recently, historian Gary Dorrien has written a three volume series entitled *The Making of American Liberal Theology* (2001-06). Dorrien emphasizes the social views of modernist thinkers in a way that Hutchison did not and stresses the “mediationist character” of the movement. That

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<sup>5</sup> Mark A. Kalthoff, “Optimistic Evolutionists: The Progressive Science and Religion of Joseph LeConte, Henry Ward Beecher, and Lyman Abbott,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 60 (June 2008): 84-94.

<sup>6</sup> Colin B. Chapell, “The Third Strand: Race, Gender, and Self-Government in the Mind of Lyman Abbott,” *Fides et Historia* 42 (Summer/Fall 2010): 27-54.

<sup>7</sup> William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* 3rd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 2.

is, liberal theology was not “revolutionary” but rather “reformist” in its attempt to maintain the faith. In Dorrien’s analysis, which this thesis accepts and follows, the term “liberal Protestantism” refers to a desire to reconfigure Christian teachings in the light of modern knowledge. Far from seeking to destroy Christian belief, liberals saw themselves as charting a viable “third way” between the extremes of atheistic unbelief on the one hand and what would later be termed “fundamentalism” on the other. From its origins in the late eighteenth century to its practice in the twenty-first century, this posture of accommodation and adaptation has remained consistent for liberal Protestants.<sup>8</sup> During Abbott’s period, liberal Protestantism was also called “The New Theology” or “Theological Modernism,” and its adherents sought to save Christianity from the threat of unbelief in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. This threat came mostly from Darwinism and higher criticism, two ideas that possessed scientific sanction and which called into question traditional understandings of biblical authority and inspiration.<sup>9</sup> Fearful that Christians would abandon the faith in light of these developments, liberal Protestants attempted to update Christianity to make it relevant for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their New Theology, they hoped, would prove both spiritually useful and intellectually respectable. “Modernism,” explained Shailer Mathews in 1925, was simply “a projection of the Christian movement into modern conditions...it distinguishes permanent Christian convictions from their doctrinal expression.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), xxi-xxiv.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 248-52; 349-52; George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Shailer Mathews, *The Faith of Modernism* (New York: Macmillan 1925), 15.

One aspect of these “permanent Christian convictions” was an emphasis on the social implications of Christian teaching. This in itself was hardly a new development; few groups in American history have matched antebellum evangelicals’ enthusiasm for social reform. Antebellum evangelicals adopted the causes of abolition, women’s rights, and temperance, for instance, with alacrity. As several respected historians have concluded, “Knowing that their bountiful heritage as Americans required much of them, Christians in the age of President Andrew Jackson struggled fervently to remake every part of their society according to Christian standards. On the eve of the Civil War no evil was safe from their burning gaze.”<sup>11</sup> Yet, what the practitioners of the postbellum Social Gospel—also termed “Applied Christianity” or “Social Christianity”—proposed, was of a different order than antebellum reform movements.<sup>12</sup> Where early social reformers such as Charles Finney had focused on the salvation of individual souls, Social Gospelers hoped to effect “social salvation.” Downplaying or disregarding humankind’s innate sinfulness, those who advocated the Social Gospel sought to redeem society at large through progressive political and social programs.<sup>13</sup> Although not limited entirely to

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<sup>11</sup> Mark A. Noll, George M. Marsden, and Nathan O. Hatch, *The Search for Christian America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 116.

<sup>12</sup> For a helpful discussion of the relationship between the two movements, see George M. Marsden, “The Gospel of Wealth, the Social Gospel, and the Salvation of Souls in Nineteenth Century America” in *Modern American Protestantism and its World: Protestantism and Social Christianity*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: K.G. Saur, 1992), 3-14.

<sup>13</sup> The literature on the Social Gospel is extensive. See, for example, Gary Scott Smith, *The Search for Social Salvation: Social Christianity and America, 1880-1925* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000); Christopher H. Evans, ed. *Perspectives on the Social Gospel: Papers from the Inaugural Social Gospel Conference at Colgate Rochester Divinity School* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999); Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White*; White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All*; Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Ronald C. White, Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976); Robert T. Handy, *The Social Gospel in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); Jacob H. Dorn, *Washington Gladden: Prophet of the Social Gospel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1967); and C. Howard Hopkins, *The*



liberal Protestants, theological modernists such as Washington Gladden, Walter Rauschenbusch, Josiah Strong, and George D. Herron by and large composed the ranks of Social Christianity's adherents.<sup>14</sup>

Historians have considered Abbott to be an important figure in liberal Protestantism and social Christianity. Although he was not a theologian or an original thinker, Abbott succeeded in spreading progressive ideas through his editorial work.<sup>15</sup> Historian William R. Hutchison has even labeled Abbott "the champion popularizer" of theological modernism, while Ira V. Brown has called Abbott "the outstanding figure in the liberalizing movement."<sup>16</sup> In addition, Abbott burnished his Social Gospel credentials through such books as *Christianity and Social Problems* (1896), through his frequent attendance at the Lake Mohonk conferences of social reformers Albert and Alfred Smiley, and through his partnership in the progressive movement with Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>17</sup> Seeing Abbott in context helps historians to develop a better appreciation of his political views.

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*Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940).

<sup>14</sup> For example, Washington Gladden, *Applied Christianity: Moral Aspects of Social Questions* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1886); Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907); *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1912); *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917); Josiah Strong, *Religious Movements for Social Betterment* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1900); George D. Herron, *The Christian State, A Political Vision of Christ: A Course of Six Lectures Delivered in Churches in Various American Cities* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1895).

<sup>15</sup> Brown, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse*, 116; Brown, vii.

<sup>17</sup> Lyman Abbott, *Christianity and Social Problems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1896); Brown, 89-112, 211.

## *Christianity, Warfare, and Providentialism*

This thesis will demonstrate that Abbott's enthusiastic advocacy of American warfare was part and parcel of liberal Protestantism, c. 1861-1920. Happily, the relationship between American Christianity and warfare has not been totally neglected by historians, although the topic has by no means been exhausted.<sup>18</sup> The most comprehensive study of this issue is an unpublished dissertation, completed in 1970 at the University of Kansas by Darrel E. Bigham. Titled "American Christian Thinkers and the Function of War, 1861-1920," the dissertation examines clerical attitudes toward the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I. Bigham argues that religious thinkers supported warfare because they saw in war an opportunity to urge people to return to righteousness and "to faith in God and the church." Not coincidentally, such a return to godliness would mean more prestige and influence for clergymen. "Religion was, in short," Bigham maintains, "to provide social control in war as well as in peace."<sup>19</sup> Bigham also criticizes the martial clergy, correctly, for their lack of moderation in support of the war. The clergy "failed to offer systematic reasons" for their support of warfare, he asserts, and "failed to provide the question with the attention it demanded."<sup>20</sup> In contrast to Bigham's claims, this thesis will demonstrate that Lyman Abbott (and his colleagues) thought about Christianity and warfare a great deal, and supported warfare

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<sup>18</sup> Each chapter will discuss the individual studies that are relevant to that chapter.

<sup>19</sup> Darrel E. Bigham, *American Christian Thinkers and the Function of War, 1861-1920* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Kansas, 1970), 4. This analysis adopts the "status anxiety thesis," the classic statement of which is Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955). A related concept, the "social control thesis" has also been applied to Christians and warfare by Ray H. Abrams, *Preachers Present Arms*. For a criticism of the "status anxiety" approach, see William R. Hutchison, "Cultural Strain and Protestant Liberalism," *American Historical Review* 76 (Apr. 1971): 386-411.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

for clearly defined reasons. While this thesis recognizes that human motivations are complicated and usually contain an aspect of self-interest, it rejects the “social control” concept as too reductionistic, and argues that theological and ideological motivations better explain Abbott’s reasons for his Christian patriotism.

Perhaps the most important reason that Abbott supported America’s wars was his belief in American providentialism. Historian Nicholas Guyatt has provided the most thorough treatment of this topic, distinguishing between three kinds of providentialism that Americans have employed. The first, “judicial providentialism,” assumed that God blessed nations that contained godly people and leaders, and punished nations whose leaders and population were wicked. No nation could claim special favor; each would be weighed on its merits. The second version, “historical providentialism,” espoused the idea that God had chosen certain nations to accomplish his goals in history and was constantly preparing them to achieve His divine plan. Finally, advocates of “apocalyptic providentialism” saw events in the book of Revelation being played out in history, with certain nations playing leading roles.<sup>21</sup> Other historians have concentrated even more on American millennialism. From their early days, colonists in British North America speculated that the new continent might be the site for the beginning of the millennium. Even as respected a voice as Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) thought that the millennium of earthly peace might begin in America.<sup>22</sup> Historian Ernest Tuveson traces the origins of such ideas and argues that the United States, viewing itself as a “redeemer nation,” has

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<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>22</sup> Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1949), 326.

alternated between moods of isolationism and messianism.<sup>23</sup> James Moorhead has also examined the role of millennialism in American history, most notably in *American Apocalypse* (1978) and *World Without End* (1999), the latter of which discusses the decline of postmillennialism. These works build on older studies such as Albert K. Weinberg's *Manifest Destiny* (1935), which treated similar themes.<sup>24</sup> As we will see, such ideas of chosen-ness and historical providentialism were indispensable in Abbott's justification of warfare.

### *The Life and Career of Lyman Abbott*

Abbott was born December 18, 1835 in Roxbury, Massachusetts, to Jacob and Harriet Abbott. Jacob was an educator and writer, whose moralistic *Rollo* books were popular with children. He was also a theological liberal, whose *The Corner-stone, or a Familiar Illustration of the Principles of Christian Truth* (1834) defined God as an "ALL PERVADING POWER, which lives and acts throughout the whole" and emphasized the humanity and moral example of Jesus. In fact, the book earned the condemnation of no less a figure than John Henry Newman.<sup>25</sup> Lyman was the third of four boys born to Jacob and Harriet. In 1838 the Abbotts moved to Farmington, Maine, where Abbott spent his boyhood, and in 1843 his mother died while giving birth. When his father and brothers

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<sup>23</sup> Ernest Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 213-14. See also, Clinton Rossiter, "The American Mission," *The American Scholar* 20 (Winter 1950-51): 19-28; and Conrad Cherry, Introduction to *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 20-21.

<sup>24</sup> James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978); *World Without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935).

<sup>25</sup> Brown, 3-5. Unless otherwise noted, all material under this heading comes from Brown.

moved to New York, Lyman stayed in Farmington where he attended a school managed by his uncle Samuel. In 1847, he undertook college preparation work at his Uncle Charles's school in Norwich, Connecticut, before joining his brothers at New York University (NYU) in 1849. The freshman Lyman was thirteen years old.

New York University was a tiny institution with four faculty members in 1850 and nineteen students in its 1849 class. Lyman lived with his brothers (who also attended NYU), steadily improved in his academics (graduating fourth in his class), and took his degree in 1853. After graduation, Abbott returned to Farmington, where he read law in preparation for joining the legal firm established by his older brothers Benjamin and Austin in New York. He tried his first case in 1855 and was admitted to the bar in November 1856. In addition to their legal work, the three Abbott brothers also collaborated on two novels. The first, *Cone Cut Corners* (1855), showed the evils of intemperance, while the second, *Matthew Caraby* (1858), praised the Victorian themes of justice and virtue. In 1858, Abbott married his second cousin, Abby Frances Hamlin (a distant relative of Abraham Lincoln's vice-president Hannibal Hamlin), and the couple settled in Brooklyn. They would enjoy a long and happy marriage until Abby died from pneumonia in 1907. The Abbotts attended Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church irregularly during their first year of marriage, as Abbott's organ-playing ability was in constant demand across the city. Gradually, however, as Abbott absorbed Beecher's teaching and personality, and as he experienced the revival of 1858, he resolved to undertake a career in the ministry. In 1859 he sold his share in the law partnership, and returned once more to Farmington, where he trained himself in theological studies and

was licensed by the Congregationalist denomination in March 1860. The man who was arguably the greatest popularizer of liberal Protestantism never attended seminary.

Immediately following his ordination, Abbott, Abby, and his one year old son Lawrence packed up and left for Terre Haute, Indiana, where Abbott had been called to his first pastorate. From 1860 to 1865 he shepherded the Congregational church there, interweaving his views on the Civil War—which will be examined in Chapter One—with more spiritual matters. At the conclusion of the war, Abbott accepted the position of “executive secretary” with the American Union Commission, an organization designed to help displaced Southerners rebuild communities. The agency was renamed the American Freedman’s Union Commission the following year, and Abbott continued to work for it until 1869, when the organization disbanded. Out of a job, the erstwhile minister now relied solely on income he received from his work as editor at *Harper’s Magazine* (he had taken this position in 1868), where his wife read novels and Abbott wrote the reviews based upon her opinions. He also found time to write several books, which provided enough income to support his burgeoning family (three more children had been born by 1870). In 1871, Abbott accepted a position as editor for the *Illustrated Christian Weekly*, a religious newspaper published by the American Tract Society. He executed his duties there for five years, before joining Henry Ward Beecher’s *Christian Union* in 1876, where he would remain for the rest of his literary career.

Beecher had taken over the paper in 1869 in order to compete against Theodore Tilton’s *Independent* after Beecher and Tilton had had a political falling out. These bad feelings were exacerbated in 1875, when allegations that Beecher had committed adultery with Tilton’s wife surfaced, creating a national scandal. These events badly damaged the

*Christian Union*'s circulation and credibility, and when Abbott accepted the position of associate editor in 1876, its circulation was less than 15,000.<sup>26</sup> Although Beecher at first retained the nominal title of editor-in-chief, Abbott was left to make most decisions. Under his direction, the *Christian Union* addressed various aspects of life. Beecher wrote a column entitled "Lecture Room Talk," and his sermons were reprinted under the "Plymouth Pulpit" heading. An "Inquiring Friends" column addressed difficult theological questions. Beecher's wife wrote a column detailing recipes and household tips while Abby wrote to children under the pseudonym "Aunt Patience." Abbott himself wrote an "Outlook" section that commented on political affairs. Abbott hired Hamilton W. Mabie, who would remain with Abbott for the rest of his life, in 1879 to write on religious themes. Guest articles from Phillips Brooks, Edward Everett Hale, Sara Orne Jewett, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and John Greenleaf Whittier added variety to the publication and helped keep it financially solvent.

In 1887, following Beecher's death, Plymouth Church asked Abbott to fill the pulpit in addition to his editorial work. These years were especially fruitful for him. The *Christian Union* changed its name to the *Outlook* in 1893, and Abbott published two of his most important books. In 1892, *The Evolution of Christianity* appeared, which argued that religion itself had evolved from lower forms in the ancient world to its current state, exemplified by modernism. Abbott exuded a confident optimism about the future of the world in this book, writing that man's "spiritual nature" was "growing stronger" and his "animal and earthly nature more subjugated" thanks to the influence "of the divine

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<sup>26</sup> On the Beecher-Tilton scandal, see Richard Wightman Fox, *Trials of Intimacy: Love and Loss in the Beecher-Tilton Scandal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Debby Applegate, *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), and Robert Shaplen, *Free Love and Heavenly Sinners: The Story of the Great Henry Ward Beecher Scandal* (New York: Knopf, 1954).

spirit.”<sup>27</sup> Five years later, he finished another influential work, *The Theology of an Evolutionist* (1897), in which he reconciled LeContean evolution with Christian teaching. “Evolution,” he wrote, quoting philosopher John Fiske (1842-1901), was simply “God’s way of doing things.”<sup>28</sup> By the late 1890s, however, the strain of serving simultaneously as minister, editor, and author was taking its toll on the sixty-three year old Abbott. In 1899 he resigned his position at Plymouth, choosing to concentrate on his literary duties. In many ways, this was a wise career decision for Abbott. Under his leadership, the *Outlook* was nearing its peak of influence at the turn of the century, reaching around 100,000 paid subscribers as well as those who obtained a secondhand copy of the news magazine.<sup>29</sup> In addition, his books sold on average between five and ten thousand copies each. Moreover, the *Outlook* added a figure of considerable prestige to its editorial board in the spring of 1909. The previous year, Abbott and former president Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), long-time mutual admirers, drew up a contract in which Roosevelt agreed to write twelve articles a year for the *Outlook* at a rate of \$1,000 per article.

Abbott and Roosevelt were natural allies. Both advocated political progressivism, but eschewed the radical solution of socialism. Both adhered to a liberal Christianity, although religion played a much more central role in the life of Abbott than of Roosevelt.<sup>30</sup> Not coincidentally, both men also advocated a strong nationalism and were

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<sup>27</sup> Lyman Abbott, *The Evolution of Christianity* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), 255.

<sup>28</sup> Lyman Abbott, *The Theology of an Evolutionist* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1897), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Brown claims that the highest total circulation for the *Outlook* was 125,000 subscribers, but does not mention when this rate was reached. Brown, 168, 240.

<sup>30</sup> On Roosevelt’s religion, see Edmund Morris, *Colonel Roosevelt* (New York: Random House, 2010), 35-36.



early converts to the preparedness cause.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the alliance between the preacher and the politician was more than political. In 1909 Roosevelt granted Abbott's son Lawrence (who was also on the staff of the *Outlook*) the privilege of serving as his personal secretary on the former president's African safari. Moreover, Roosevelt thought enough of the Abbotts to invite them to the wedding of his daughter Ethel at Oyster Bay in April 1913. Perhaps Roosevelt believed he owed a debt to the *Outlook* editors, who had loyally bolted the Republican Party in 1912 to support his candidacy in the Progressive (or "Bull Moose") party.<sup>32</sup> In any case, Roosevelt's reputation enhanced that of the *Outlook* from 1909 to 1914, when their connection ended.

By 1915, in addition to his work on behalf of preparedness, the eighty-year old Abbott finished his memoirs, which he had serialized in the *Outlook*. Entitled *Reminiscences*, the autobiography contained a plethora of anecdotes from Abbott's days as student, pastor, and journalist.<sup>33</sup> It was written in a rather informal style, and usefully reprinted some of his earliest letters. By July 1918, the octogenarian's health was declining, and he limited his contributions to the *Outlook* as well as his public speaking engagements. Still, in 1921, he produced *Silhouettes of My Contemporaries*, which contained short, highly complimentary sketches of influential men whom Abbott had known, or, in some cases, merely known of. D.L. Moody (1837-1899), William Booth (1829-1912), and P.T. Barnum (1810-1891) were some of the more surprising figures to

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<sup>31</sup> To this cause Roosevelt contributed the unforgettably-titled *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (1914; New York: George H. Doran, 1916).

<sup>32</sup> Information on Roosevelt comes from Morris, 31, 275, 256.

<sup>33</sup> Lyman Abbott, *Reminiscences* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915).

make the table of contents.<sup>34</sup> The same year he also published *What Christianity Means to Me: A Spiritual Autobiography*, where he explained his religious philosophy to those who perhaps had not been faithful readers of the *Outlook* for the past decades.<sup>35</sup> On October 22, 1922, Abbott died in his New York apartment, having failed to recover completely from breathing trouble he had first encountered in 1916. All of his six children—four sons and two daughters—were with him at the end.

### *The Thesis*

Having now surveyed the historiographical terrain and summarized Abbott's life and work, we return again to his 1889 sermon at Plymouth. Abbott was nothing but consistent that evening when he elevated political participation to sacred status. As we will see, Abbott enthusiastically championed all of the American wars during his lifetime and invested them with sacred meaning. Ultimately, this thesis will argue that Abbott justified American warfare through rhetoric that refused to distinguish between sacred and secular categories. For the Brooklyn minister, each war was a holy cause, fought in the service of God. Particularly, Abbott combined sacred and secular categories in a variety of ways in his justification for war; American providentialism, Christian republicanism, the Social Gospel, and postmillennialism each surfaced to varying degrees in his writings concerning the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I.<sup>36</sup> Finally, this thesis will demonstrate that Abbott's use of conflated rhetoric to justify

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<sup>34</sup> Lyman Abbott, *Silhouettes of My Contemporaries* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, & Co., 1921). Although Billy Sunday was not featured in the book, Abbott also wrote kind words about the flamboyant fundamentalist (sentiments Sunday surely did not return). Brown, 231.

<sup>35</sup> Lyman Abbott, *What Christianity Means to Me: A Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1921).

<sup>36</sup> Each of these terms will be examined at greater length in the following pages.

warfare was a common feature of liberal Protestantism during the period. Although he exercised a great deal of influence during his life, Abbott and his political views have not received adequate scholarly treatment. This thesis thus seeks to rectify this oversight by thoroughly examining Abbott's rhetoric during the three wars of his lifetime.

## CHAPTER TWO

### This Sacred Warfare

*“In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:  
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,  
While God is marching on.”*

--Julia Ward Howe, “Battle Hymn of the Republic”<sup>1</sup>

#### *Introduction*

About one year into the Civil War, Philadelphia’s (Presbyterian) *Banner of the Covenant* remarked, “Religion has grown warlike. Men have discovered the Book of the Wars of the Lord, and congregations are chanting the war psalms now in all their majesty.”<sup>2</sup> Although twenty-first century readers might be startled at the prospect of bloodthirsty Presbyterians singing “war psalms” in church, in reality the actions of the Philadelphia congregation were thoroughly in keeping with the temper of the times. Historian James H. Moorhead has observed, for example, that during the 1860s, “Protestants hopelessly confused the weapons of the saints with the Union’s military power....”<sup>3</sup> Lyman Abbott exemplified this impulse especially well. During the Civil War, Abbott was the pastor of the Congregational church in Terre Haute, Indiana; after the war, he moved to New York to accept a position with the American Union Commission. This chapter will examine Abbott’s political ideas thoroughly, paying

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Ward Howe, “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” *Atlantic Monthly* 9 (Feb. 1862):145.

<sup>2</sup> *Banner of the Covenant*, May 31, 1862, quoted in Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the American Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006), 123.

<sup>3</sup> James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), x.

special attention to the ways in which he conflated sacred and secular categories in his writings about the South, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Far from representing an anomalous position among American clergy, it is apparent that Abbott's rhetoric was part and parcel of Northern Protestantism.<sup>4</sup> This chapter will ultimately argue that Abbott's conflated rhetoric stemmed chiefly from two factors: his belief in America's providential destiny, and his appropriation of what historian Mark Noll calls "Christian republicanism."

### *American Providentialism*

First, Abbott believed that the United States was a nation uniquely blessed and chosen by God to accomplish His purposes in history. As early as the fall of 1855, a prophetic nineteen-year-old Abbott could foresee the coming cataclysm. On November 6, Abbott wrote to his fiancée that his family had "all taken a strong interest in politics" and had "even done a very little electioneering." This political involvement was "unusual" for the Abbotts, he reported, but the stakes could hardly be higher: "America will either remain in God's service, an exponent of individual freedom, or it will go over to Satan's, and relapse into oligarchy and thence into monarchy." He feared that "we are

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<sup>4</sup> Southern ministers were often just as enthusiastic as their Northern counterparts in their use of conflated language. However, this paper will confine its analysis to Northern Protestantism. For the Southern religious scene, see Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 75-81; Eugene Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); and Willard Eugene Wight, *Churches in the Confederacy* (Ph.D. Diss., Emory University, 1958). For an excellent primary source, see Benjamin Morgan Palmer, "National Responsibility before God," in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 184-200. For a dissenting interpretation that highlights efforts by border state clergy to distinguish between sacred and secular, see Preston Graham, *A Kingdom Not of this World: Stuart Robinson's Struggle to Distinguish the Sacred from the Secular During the American Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002).

near where the two roads branch off.”<sup>5</sup> Clearly, Abbott believed that maintaining freedom was not simply a worthy goal; instead, it was a question of the United States remaining in God’s service or betraying His sacred trust.

Later in life, Abbott also explained his views about America’s place in the divine scheme. In 1911 he gave a series of lectures at Yale University on the topic of “America in the making.” At the outset of his first address, he announced his intention to consider the question of how Ellis Island could be transformed “into the celestial city” and how “democratic America” could become “the Kingdom of God.”<sup>6</sup> As he continued, Abbott adopted the theme of the New Israel, asserting that, because they both placed their hope in the future, “the American Nation in modern times is curiously like the Hebrew Nation in ancient times.”<sup>7</sup> Idealism, moreover, had always been characteristic of America, Abbott believed. The Civil War, in fact, had been fought in “consecration” to the idea that slavery was evil and true democracy should be established throughout the nation. But this idealism was more than secular romanticism; to Abbott, “it is a divine force working for a predestined end.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the United States was not simply a secular nation in Abbott’s mind; it was an integral part of an overarching divine framework.

This view of American exceptionalism helps to account for the prevalence of conflated language during the Civil War. According to historian Peter J. Parish, those who believed as Abbott did possessed a “widely held and deeply rooted belief in the

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<sup>5</sup> Lyman Abbott to Abby Frances Hamlin, New York, November 1855, quoted in Lyman Abbott, *Reminiscences* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), 99.

<sup>6</sup> Lyman Abbott, *America in the Making* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1911), 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

God-given mission of the United States—the confident assumption that the United States had been specially favored by God, in its resources, its liberties, and its opportunities, and that, in return, America would be required to play a unique role in the divine plan for the future of the world.”<sup>9</sup> Abbott expressed this perspective by arguing that Northern victories and the Reconstruction efforts were providential, by suggesting that the Civil War might help usher in the millennial age, and by demonizing the South.

In Abbott’s mind, Northern victories in the Civil War confirmed that God supported the Union. Abbott was explicit about this in an address to the American Home Missionary Society. In the spring of 1865, Abbott argued that “Through the smoke and carnage of the two Bull Runs, of Gettysburg and Antietam, of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, and the seven days in the Chickahominy, God led the army.”<sup>10</sup> That God had ordained the war was a theme with which he had concluded his most important Civil War article, “Southern Evangelization,” a year earlier. In a plea for Northern churches to assist in the effort of Reconstruction, Abbott argued, “Now the trumpet of God has been sounding through the land these three years...and the heretofore impregnable Jericho is impregnable no longer, and the voice of God speaks clear and loud above the din of battle to the American churches, ‘Go ye in and possess the land.’”<sup>11</sup> This use of Old Testament imagery served to reinforce the notion that the Northern cause was divinely ordained and that the South (Jericho) was nothing less than the habitation of God’s enemies.

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<sup>9</sup> Peter J. Parish, *The North and the Nation in the Era of the Civil War*, ed. Adam I.P. Smith and Susan-Mary Grant (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 172.

<sup>10</sup> Lyman Abbott, “The Ministry for the South,” *The Home Missionary* 38 (Nov. 1865): 158.

<sup>11</sup> Abbott, “Southern Evangelization,” *New Englander* 23 (Oct. 1864): 709.

During the years of Reconstruction, Abbott also continued to see his political activities as having divine sanction. In 1865 the Terre Haute minister accepted a position as the general secretary of the American Union Commission (AUC), an interdenominational association tasked with assisting in the rebuilding of the South. In October 1865, the organization released a pamphlet outlining its goals and cataloguing the support it was ostensibly receiving from Southerners. In this pamphlet, as in Abbott's speeches and writings, sacred and secular ideas were combined. The report reprinted with approval, for instance, excerpts from a "recent address" of George E. Grisham, who was campaigning for a seat in the Tennessee legislature. In this address, Grisham thanked "benign Providence" that "to day [*sic*], the eagle of liberty perches upon the banner of a free and independent Republic." Drawing upon biblical imagery and concepts, Grisham rejoiced that "Now we can begin to lift our eyes and behold, through the glorious sunlight of God's blessings, the handwriting on the wall—'Progress—Refinement—Education—Liberty—Success.'"<sup>12</sup> The author of the pamphlet (probably Abbott), reiterated these sentiments by concluding with the prayer that "God grant that America may prove equal to that task of restoration and re-building which His Providence has laid upon her."<sup>13</sup> In Grisham's speech as well as in Abbott's prayer, the work of Reconstruction had been commissioned by the Almighty.

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<sup>12</sup> Lyman Abbott [?], *The American Union Commission: Its Origins, Operations, and Purposes: Organized to Aid in the Restoration of the Union Upon the Basis of Freedom, Industry, Education, and Christian Morality* (New York: Sanford, Harroun & Co., 1865), 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 24. According to Abbott's biographer Ira V. Brown, Abbott wrote this pamphlet. Nothing in the pamphlet itself indicates this; however, we may be confident that even if Abbott did not write it, as general secretary he endorsed its contents. See Ira V. Brown, *Lyman Abbott, Christian Evolutionist: A Study in Religious Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 246.



Abbott repeated such ideas in an 1865 address to the Home Missionary society, in which he used military imagery to bolster his claim that Reconstruction was the work of the Lord. “God’s drum-beat summons us to an arduous campaign,” he argued, “the end of which was “this very work of Southern regeneration.” This work must be interdenominational, for “The different churches are only different regiments in Christ’s great army.” When “the trump of God calls us to the battle front,” he asserted, the churches must forget their doctrinal differences, choosing instead to “fight the conflict out under the one ensign, from whose folds there shines resplendent the cross of Christ, and underneath the motto: ‘In hoc signo vinces.’”<sup>14</sup> Just as “four years ago, God called on the nation to attest its patriotism,” God now required the churches to engage in “another and sublimer warfare.” No one was excused, because, “There is no post of peace so important but that the claims of this sacred warfare are more imperious.”<sup>15</sup> The Civil War and Reconstruction were not just good policies; for Abbott, they were nothing less than divine commands from a God who looked with special favor upon the United States.

At times Abbott even implied that the Civil War might result in the beginning of the millennial age. As a civil war appeared increasingly inevitable, Abbott began to speak from the pulpit about political issues. On December 9, 1860, he preached on the topic, “The Crisis—Its Cause and Cure.” Unsurprisingly, the Terre Haute minister portrayed the impending conflict in moral terms. Although he distanced himself from abolition—a position he would not embrace until the fall of 1862—Abbott noted that the

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<sup>14</sup> Abbott, “The Ministry for the South,” 162-63. This Latin tag is the message the Roman emperor Constantine saw in his vision preceding the Battle of Milvian Bridge (312 A.D.) Translated, it means, “In this sign conquer.”

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

slavery question was really a matter of “whether we that are strong shall use our strength to beat down or raise up the weak.”<sup>16</sup> Most significantly, as he reached the peroration of his address, Abbott identified the preservation of the Union with the coming millennial age. Although the United States was being tested, he maintained, current troubles were simply “the labor pains of the world which are to give birth to liberty, and love, and the Kingdom of God.”<sup>17</sup> Abbott’s uncle, John S.C. Abbott, also speculated on the eschatological significance of the Civil War. This elder Abbott wrote an account of the Civil War as it was being fought, with the first volume appearing in 1863. John Abbott, too, saw the conflict as divinely ordained. Although frustrated by the slow pace at which the war was being prosecuted, he argued that, “Still, it was evident to faith, that God was guiding the destinies of this great people.”<sup>18</sup> John Abbott framed the conflict in essentially the same terms as his nephew: the war would settle the question of whether freedom or despotism was to prevail in America. In the last line of the preface, though, John Abbott introduced a new element into his analysis, expressing the hope that the re-establishment of the Constitution “shall make the United States the pioneer nation in

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<sup>16</sup> Lyman Abbott, “The Crisis—Its Cause and Cure,” *Terre Haute Express*, December 19, 1860, quoted in Brown, 28. At first, Abbott held strictly to the position of the Republican Party—that slavery should not be allowed to expand in the territories, but that it should not be outlawed either. Henry Ward Beecher’s writings supporting emancipation probably influenced Abbott’s change of mind. See Brown, 30, and Lyman Abbott, *Reminiscences* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), 98. For Abbott’s changing views on civil rights for African-Americans after the Civil War, see Colin B. Chapell, “The Third Strand: Race, Gender, and Self-Government in the Mind of Lyman Abbott,” *Fides et Historia* 42 (Summer/Fall 2010): 27-54; Ronald C. White, *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877-1925)* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 25-26; and Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> John S.C. Abbott, *The History of the Civil War in America* (New York: Henry Bill, 1863), 238.

ushering in the dawn of millennial glory.”<sup>19</sup> Abbott and his family clearly tied the coming of the millennial age with the fate of the United States.<sup>20</sup>

If the Union was accomplishing the will of God from 1861-1865, logically the Confederacy was in rebellion against the divine order. Accordingly, Abbott demonized the South, especially its clergy. For example, in 1864 Abbott believed that the Southern clergy were being divinely judged for their failure to preach a “full and free gospel.” Abbott began his attack on the ministry by accusing Southern pastors of preaching an “emasculated gospel” from an “expurgated Bible.”<sup>21</sup> After relating that several prominent Tennessee clergymen had refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the United States after the fall of Nashville, Abbott jubilantly noted that they were “exiled” and their churches closed. He concluded by rejoicing that “everywhere throughout the South the priests of Pharaoh have perished with their masters beneath the Red Sea.”<sup>22</sup> Abbott’s use of Exodus 14 recalled God’s destruction of the slaveholding Egyptians, further undergirding the theme of divine judgment. Sustaining the military metaphor a year later in his Home Missionary Society address, Abbott continued to argue that God was behind the effort to expel the Southern clergy. He warned that the new battle would be a struggle of “thoughts, ideas, of truth against falsehood, of civilization against barbarism.” Even though “Lee has capitulated,” he declared, “the devil has not.” Accordingly, “There will be Lees, and Johnstons, and Jacksons in the Southern pulpits. And we must

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

<sup>20</sup> On this topic, see Moorhead, *American Apocalypse*, 1-244, and Moorhead, “Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800-1860,” *Journal of American History* 71:3 (Dec. 1984): 524-42.

<sup>21</sup> Abbott, “Southern Evangelization,” 704.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 704-05.

send there Grants, and Shermans, and Sheridans to wield our sword of God's truth."<sup>23</sup> In keeping with the confidence born of his providential framework, there was no question that the "sword of God's truth" was on the side of the North.

In his condemnation of Southern society—and especially its clergy—Abbott used the most loaded religious terminology available. Naming Virginia's Moses Drury Hoge (1818-1899) and New Orleans's Benjamin Morgan Palmer (1818-1902) specifically, Abbott warned, "We can not [*sic*] trust the cause of Christ to the Judas who betrayed it."<sup>24</sup> As if associating the clergy with the traitor Judas was not bad enough, Abbott upped the rhetorical ante by characterizing the antebellum South as the province of Satan. In calling for Northern volunteers to occupy the South, Abbott warned that "We have need to beware lest the devil, having been cast out of the South...return."<sup>25</sup> Repairing to the theme of divine judgment, Abbott reiterated the same idea in his Home Missionary Society Address: "Out of the Southern country God has cast the devil."<sup>26</sup> For Abbott, the South did not simply differ in its social and political views. Instead, its inhabitants were justly condemned by God because of their unlawful rebellion against the United States. In his celebration of American victories, speculation about the millennial age, and demonization of the Confederacy, Abbott demonstrated American providentialism and minimized distinctions between sacred and secular categories.

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<sup>23</sup> Abbott, "The Ministry for the South," 160.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Abbott, "Southern Evangelization," 705.

<sup>26</sup> Abbott, "The Ministry for the South," 162.

### *Christian Republicanism*

Abbott also supported the North using conflated rhetoric because he subscribed to the principles of Christian republicanism. Historian Mark A. Noll, in his monumental study *America's God* (2002), defined this term as “the patterns of thought...that joined Real Whig political thought to Protestant theology.”<sup>27</sup> That is to say, continental ideas concerning liberty, tyranny, and civic humanism became blended with inherited conceptions of the Christian faith.<sup>28</sup> The result was a uniquely American theology that was articulated most extensively by antebellum evangelicals.<sup>29</sup> In a later work, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (2006), Noll elucidated three implications of Christian republicanism, two of which are relevant here.<sup>30</sup> First, Americans influenced by Christian republicanism believed that they could reliably discern the cause-and-effect relationship between human behavior and divine actions. As Noll put it, “In keeping with Enlightenment confidence, they...assumed that human beings of the right sort possessed a nearly infallible ability to perceive clear-cut connections between moral causes and public effects.”<sup>31</sup> Second, the character of America's citizenry mattered: virtuous citizens would preserve the nation's liberty while vice would lead to tyranny. Finally, another implication of Christian republicanism (which Noll does not explicitly discuss at length)

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<sup>27</sup> Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 564.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>29</sup> Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 18. For an excellent illustration of Christian republicanism in a later period, see Woodrow Wilson, “The Bible and Progress,” in *Selected Literary and Political Papers and Addresses of Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1925, 1:341-56).

<sup>30</sup> The characteristic not mentioned is, in fact, the idea of America's covenantal relationship with God. I place more emphasis on this view than Noll does, which is why I have designated a separate section to discuss it.

<sup>31</sup> Noll, *Civil War*, 19.

is simply the notion that Protestant Christianity and political freedom are inseparably connected. In his writings concerning the Civil War and Reconstruction, Abbott advocated all three components of Christian republicanism.

First, as we have seen, Abbott expressed unbounded confidence in his ability to connect earthly concerns with divine favor or displeasure. Although Southern clergy spilled much ink in justifying slavery from the pages of the Bible, to Abbott in 1861, the slave system was “antagonistic to *the plainest principles of humanity and the simplest precepts of the Gospel...*”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the call for Reconstruction was not to be doubted because it came directly from God. “Again God speaks,” Abbott concluded in 1865. “He calls now upon the churches.”<sup>33</sup> Those who demurred on this question were evidently deaf to the divine voice. Abbott’s mentor Henry Ward Beecher could also write in 1863 concerning the issue of slavery, “Never before was there an issue so clear on both sides.”<sup>34</sup> Noll’s contention concerning the clergy’s confidence in their ability to read the mind of God is borne out in Abbott’s writings. Abbott placed confidence in the righteousness of the American cause because he believed the mind of God was nearly transparent.

Abbott also believed in Noll’s second characteristic of Christian republicanism: that immoral citizens could not maintain true freedom. Abbott was not willing to grant that Southerners were moral people who possessed incorrect views. They were, instead,

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<sup>32</sup> *Minutes of the General Association of Congregational Churches and Ministers of Indiana at its Meeting in Terre Haute, May 16, 1861* (Indianapolis: Congregational Churches [?], 1861), 4, quoted in Brown, 29, emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> Abbott, “The Ministry for the South,” 163.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Ward Beecher, *Freedom and War: Discourses on Topics Suggested by the Times* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1863), 439.

entirely disreputable. This is seen most clearly in a letter from a trip to Georgia that Abbott took on behalf of his brothers' law firm in 1856. In some detail, the twenty-year-old catalogued his impressions of Southerners in a letter to his fiancée. He reported first that "As we left Washington City I began to get into a rather dubious-looking company." This was evidenced by his companions' use of tobacco and their unwashed clothes. In addition, one Southerner, like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, casually killed a beautiful bird simply for sport, an incident that horrified Abbott. Southerners' foul language was also singled out for condemnation. "I scarcely talked with any one from the time I left New York who did not swear habitually," the future minister recorded.<sup>35</sup> After discussing Southerners' immoral habits, Abbott launched into an issue apparently related: their toleration of the "accursed system" of slavery.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to understand Abbott's reasons for listing at length the various aspects of Southerners' immorality if their personal sins were not, in his mind, connected to their acceptance of slave-trading and slavery. Here, Noll's second characteristic of Christian republicanism is at work: Southerners' personal immorality was related to their toleration of slavery (the antithesis of political freedom). In other words, Southerners' failure to promote virtue led to slavery and spoke condemnation on their society as a whole. Such conflated ideas made it easy for Abbott to support the North when the war began.

In addition to reflecting Noll's characteristics of Christian republicanism, Abbott also expounded a philosophy that, while not explicitly described by Noll, is surely an implication. This was simply the idea that Protestant Christianity and political freedom

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<sup>35</sup> Lyman Abbott to Abby Frances Hamlin, New York, 17 April 1856, quoted in *Reminiscences*, 100-01.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-02.

were inseparably connected. Accordingly, Abbott explicitly argued that Christianity was necessary for republicanism throughout his article on “Southern Evangelization.” “In truth,” Abbott asserted, “the principles of religion underlie republicanism. Religion teaches man that he is a son of God, and thus makes him unwilling to be a slave of man.” He scoffed at the notion that republican government could be maintained without Christianity, citing the collapse of Greece and Rome as examples. It was no coincidence that, prior to the diffusion of religious knowledge through the printing press, governments were oligarchical. Until a society had free churches, Abbott believed, it was not capable of free government:

Men fought for religious liberty first, for civil liberty afterwards. First came the battles of conscience, afterwards the battles of the States. The Reformation came before the civil war in the Netherlands, and the Revolution in England, and America. Protestantism paved the way for republicanism.<sup>37</sup>

In this scheme, because the North refused to permit slavery and held democracy as an ideal, Northerners must also be practicing true religion, because one inevitably led to the other.

On the other hand, Abbott demonized the South for failing to adhere to the Christian republican framework. First, in writing about the South, Abbott returned to the correlation between “true Christianity” and political freedom, and argued that the South lacked both. The thesis of “Southern Evangelization” was that military victory was not enough; rather, the victorious North must now teach the rebellious states to govern themselves correctly. “We have not only to conquer the South,” Abbott declared, “we have also to convert it. We have not only to occupy it by bayonets and bullets,--but also

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<sup>37</sup> Abbott, “Southern Evangelization,” 703.



by ideas and institutions.”<sup>38</sup> To do this, common schools and churches must be established.<sup>39</sup> Those who thought that the South was Christianized were mistaken; according to Abbott, the South was as desperately in need of missionaries as was the western frontier. The region was, in fact, Abbott argued, even more resistant to “a full and free gospel” than “Roman Catholic Italy, Mohammedan Turkey, heathen India, or barbaric Africa.”<sup>40</sup> Just as the South needed freedom, industry, and education, the AUC maintained in 1865, so it also needed “Christian morality.”<sup>41</sup>

This lack of a “full and free gospel” and “Christian morality,” naturally, had led to political oppression. Abbott argued that the Southern clergy had simply preached “doctrine without works,” by which he presumably meant that Southerners assented to correct belief but did not allow the spirit of the gospel to affect their society.<sup>42</sup> Slaveholding, most significantly, was permitted to remain. Consequently, if the South was going to be reformed in the aftermath of the war, true Christianity as well as political freedom must be preached.<sup>43</sup> In the context of the education of the newly freed slaves, Abbott once again elaborated this principle, thoroughly entangling sacred and secular categories: “The gospel of freedom must be followed by the more glorious gospel of Christ. Wherever we carry the proclamation of emancipation, we have need to carry the sublime proclamation of a more glorious emancipation from Him who has said, ‘If the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 701.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 704, 707-08.

<sup>41</sup> *American Union Commission*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Abbott, “Southern Evangelization,” 704.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 701.

Son shall make you free, ye shall be free, indeed.’”<sup>44</sup> The South’s acceptance of slavery unquestionably proved to Abbott that it could not be a Christian region. Thus, both evangelism and political tutoring were necessary to incorporate the states of the Confederacy back into the Union.

From this ideological vantage point, one statement of Abbott’s quoted earlier makes even more sense. When Abbott declared, “America will either remain in God’s service, an exponent of individual freedom, or it will go over to Satan’s, and relapse into oligarchy and thence into monarchy,” he was (as has been seen) emphasizing America’s divine origin.<sup>45</sup> But he was doing more than that. Using the language of Christian republicanism, Abbott was connecting Christianity with political freedom while he associated the undemocratic concentration of power (“oligarchy” and “monarchy”) with the forces of evil. Such a rubric sometimes made for strange historical bedfellows. For instance, in 1864, he compared the work of the Union Army to that of the Protestant Reformation: Martin Luther “wielded a battle-axe that clave asunder the doctrines and oppressions of the Church of Rome” while John Calvin’s ideas were “the world’s nursery of freedom in church and State”—exactly, in Abbott’s view, what Reconstruction was designed to accomplish.<sup>46</sup> What did the Protestant Reformers have in common with the Union army? Both fought “for liberty.”<sup>47</sup> While the North practiced true religion and maintained a free society, the South’s slaveholding system implied that its Christianity

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 705.

<sup>45</sup> Lyman Abbott to Abby Frances Hamlin, New York, November 1855, quoted in *Reminiscences*, 99.

<sup>46</sup> Abbott, “Southern Evangelization,” 700.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

was not legitimate. Southern society as a whole, therefore, stood condemned and was in need of spiritual as well as political Reconstruction. In this scheme, Abbott minimized any distinctions between true Christianity and political freedom. His use of Christian republicanism, therefore, was a major source of his conflated rhetoric during the Civil War.

### *Context of Northern Protestantism*

To what extent was Abbott typical of his generation in his comments concerning the war and Reconstruction and in his conflation of sacred and secular categories? To answer this question adequately, it is necessary to examine the broader context of mid-nineteenth century Northern Protestantism.<sup>48</sup> During the nineteenth century, clergymen possessed significant cultural power and influence. For the vast majority of Americans, ministers served as the cultural gatekeepers of society and, in a country that embraced a *de facto* Protestant establishment, exercised social authority in a way that clergymen do not today.<sup>49</sup> Thus, one historian considers Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) of Brooklyn's Plymouth Congregational Church to have been "the most famous man in America."<sup>50</sup> In addition to their celebrity status, American ministers were considered to

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<sup>48</sup> On Northern religion and the Civil War, see Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 259-98; George M. Fredrickson, "The Coming of the Lord: The Northern Protestant Clergy and the Civil War Crisis," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, eds. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 110-130; Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Penguin, 2006); Noll, *Civil War*; and Darrel E. Bigham, *American Christian Thinkers and the Function of War, 1861-1920* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Kansas, 1970), 43-113; and Paul Eugene Grosjean, *The Concept of American Nationhood: Theological Interpretation as Reflected by the Northern Mainline Protestant Preachers in the Late Civil War Period* (Ph.D. Diss., Drew University, 1977).

<sup>49</sup> William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 1-10.

<sup>50</sup> Debby Applegate, *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

be especially able commentators on social issues. One editorial in Abbott's local newspaper, the (Terre Haute, IN) *Weekly Wabash Express*, for instance, argued that "the greatest amount of genuine thinking done to [sic] the world is done by preachers." The writer went on to assert, perhaps somewhat extravagantly, that in the ministry one would find "the most splendid specimens of intellectual power which the world contains."<sup>51</sup> Because of this influence, many observers welcomed ministerial commentary on political matters. In the midst of the war, the editors of the *Weekly Wabash Express* dismissed criticism of certain Northern pastors who had preached emancipation. According to the editors, these ministers "would not be fulfilling their duties as Christians did they not, in these times, do all they can to encourage their brethren and imbue their minds with a spirit and feeling for the government."<sup>52</sup> Even before the outbreak of the war, Abbott questioned the motives of those ministers who refused to discuss political topics, enjoining them to ask themselves, "Why do I not preach against political sin? Is it because I desire truly to follow the example of Christ? Or is it because I fear to offend a portion of my congregation?"<sup>53</sup> Abbott, therefore, was not behaving unusually by discussing political matters.

In addition to simply commenting on the war, the Northern liberal clergy often combined the sacred and secular just as Abbott did.<sup>54</sup> According to historian Chester F. Dunham, who conducted a detailed study of the attitudes of Northern clergy during the

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<sup>51</sup> J.O. Holland, "Citizen, Go to Church," reprinted in *Weekly Wabash Express*, October 20, 1863.

<sup>52</sup> Editorial, *Weekly Wabash Express*, May 20, 1863.

<sup>53</sup> *Maine Evangelist* (Portland), August 2, 1856, quoted in Brown, 19-20.

<sup>54</sup> Distinctions between theological liberals and conservatives were less pronounced in this period than later in the century. Consequently, I have focused on two individuals with definite liberal affinities—Beecher and Bushnell—but have also quoted from other ministers who may not have self-identified as liberals.

Civil War, the “vast number of ministers...speedily allied themselves with the forces and factors of patriotism.”<sup>55</sup> Likewise, Mark Noll has argued that “it was almost instinctive for Americans in this era to see the divine rule over terrestrial matters...God was thought to be especially concerned about the fate of republican government.”<sup>56</sup> Consequently, because God was clearly on the side of the republican North, there was no shortage of extreme rhetoric among the Northern clergy. The minister of Park Street Congregational Church in Boston, A.L. Stone, for instance, maintained that “If war is a duty, it is a Christian duty, as sacred as prayer—as solemn as sacraments.”<sup>57</sup> Likewise, T.M. Clark, a bishop in the Protestant Episcopal Church in Rhode Island, expressed equal confidence in the nobility of the war: “It is a holy and righteous cause in which you are enlisted...God is with us...the Lord of Hosts is on our side.”<sup>58</sup>

Specifically, just as Abbott had done, other Northern liberals defended the principles of Christian republicanism. Liberal theologian Horace Bushnell, whose ideas will be investigated at greater length momentarily, maintained that “out of [the church] grew historically the notions of political equality in the state.” Bushnell argued that, historically, this had been most clearly developed not in the South but among “the New England people.” Thus, he implied, Northerners were the ablest practitioners of the Christian republican synthesis.<sup>59</sup> Abbott’s mentor Henry Ward Beecher also joined this

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<sup>55</sup> Chester F. Dunham, *The Attitude of the Northern Clergy Toward the South, 1860-1865* (1942; Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1974), 110.

<sup>56</sup> Noll, *Civil War*, 79.

<sup>57</sup> *Congregationalist* 13:62, 2, quoted in Dunham, 111.

<sup>58</sup> *Newport Mercury* (Rhode Island), 103:5351, 2, quoted in Dunham, 112.

<sup>59</sup> Horace Bushnell, *Reverses Needed: A Discourse Delivered on the Sunday after the Disaster at Bull Run, in the North Church, Hartford* (Hartford, CT: L.E. Hunt, 1861), 10.

chorus in a January 1863 sermon entitled, “The Southern Babylon.” Beecher argued that the current conflict pitted two forces against each other: “the spirit of Christian liberty and democracy, and the spirit of aristocratic oppression.” The war, therefore, was nothing less than “the last great battle of the Lord God Almighty on this continent between these two great forces.”<sup>60</sup> “You and I,” Beecher continued, “and your children and mine, are witnessing the illustrious parts of the conflict between the great cause of God in modern civilization and the cause of the Devil.”<sup>61</sup> In this sermon, Beecher explicitly identified the cause of republican government with that of God himself. In doing so, he not only exemplified Christian republican principles, but also implied divine sanction for the North.

Indeed, the conviction that America had a divine destiny to fulfill was shared even more universally by Northern Protestants. Methodist Episcopal bishop Matthew Simpson furnished one of the most extreme remarks of the war, telling his congregation, “If the world is to be raised to its proper place, I would say it with all reverence, God cannot do without America.”<sup>62</sup> Likewise, Andover Theological Seminary’s liberal professor Edwards A. Park stated bluntly in 1862, “the hope of the world is in the prosperity of this land.”<sup>63</sup> Rehearsing the familiar trope of America as the New Israel, Beecher provided a more thorough exposition of these themes. Two days after the attack on Fort Sumter, the Brooklyn pastor addressed his Plymouth Congregational Church congregation with a

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<sup>60</sup> Beecher, *Freedom and War*, 432.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

<sup>62</sup> George R. Crooks, *The Life of Bishop Matthew Simpson of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Harper, 1891), 382.

<sup>63</sup> Edwards A. Park, “The Imprecatory Psalms, Viewed in the Light of the Southern Rebellion,” in *Bibliotheca Sacra and Biblical Repository*, eds. Edwards A. Park and Samuel H. Taylor (Andover, MA: Warren F. Draper, 1862), 19:197.

sermon entitled, “The Battle Set in Array.” Using Exodus 14—the same chapter Abbott would cite three years later—as his text, Beecher noted that the Old Testament Israelites were expected “to do something and dare something for their liberty. No standing still, but going forward!”<sup>64</sup> Beecher drew a direct parallel between the Israelites’ situation and that of patriotic northerners: “And now our turn has come. Right before us lies the Red Sea of war. It is red indeed. There is blood in it. We have come to the very edge of it, and the Word of God to us to-day [*sic*] is, ‘Speak unto this people that they go forward!’”<sup>65</sup> Although he did not doubt the outcome of the war, Beecher allowed that its prosecution would require much sacrifice. Linking military service in the Union Army with religious persecution, he noted that “we shall be called to suffer for our faith,” but ultimately the conflict would result in “the salvation of this people.”<sup>66</sup> Martyrdom, he implied, was therefore possible not only for Christian saints but for all of the Union dead.<sup>67</sup> The Brooklyn divine made it clear that he hated traitors and would refuse to shelter them should they come to his house, but he discounted the notion that war would dehumanize Christians. “We can go into this conflict with a spirit just as truly Christian as any that ever inspired us in the performance of a Christian duty,” Beecher confidently believed. “Let the spirit of fury be far from us; but a spirit of earnestness, of willingness to do, to suffer, and to die, if need be...that may be a religious spirit. We may consecrate

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<sup>64</sup> Henry Ward Beecher, “The Battle Set in Array,” in *God’s New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Conrad Cherry (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 171.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>67</sup> On the prevalence of this idea, see Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 82-94.

it with prayer.”<sup>68</sup> Finally, Beecher ended the message by observing that “the trumpet of God has sounded,” and that Providence was overseeing the world-wide struggle for liberty. “We too,” Beecher concluded, “have a right to march in this grand procession of liberty.”<sup>69</sup> In this important sermon, Beecher epitomized the tendency among the clergy to identify sacred and secular entities through his assumption that God was providentially guiding the United States.

Another influential figure, the Congregationalist Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) also identified God with country. A pioneer of modernist theology heavily influenced by Romanticism, Bushnell might have been expected to provide a more learned, moderate voice to the public discourse concerning the war.<sup>70</sup> Yet, in two major addresses—one at the very beginning and the other at the very end of the war—Bushnell made use of theological language to interpret the meaning of the war, but in ways that only enflamed Northern pride and elevated the Union to sacred status.

On July 28, 1861, a few days after the first Battle of Bull Run, Bushnell preached a sermon entitled “Reverses Needed,” which would become one of the most prominent sermons of the war. The Union had suffered almost 3,000 casualties at Bull Run—a number that was shocking to those who had predicted a quick, decisive victory for the North.<sup>71</sup> Trying to make sense of the meaning of these losses, Bushnell told his Hartford,

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<sup>68</sup> Beecher, “The Battle Set in Array,” 181-82.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>70</sup> On Bushnell, see Howard A. Barnes, *Horace Bushnell and the Virtuous Republic* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1999); Lee J. Makowski, *Horace Bushnell on Christian Character Development* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999); Robert L. Edwards, *Of Singular Genius, Of Singular Grace: A Biography of Horace Bushnell* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1992); and Catherine L. Albanese, “Horace Bushnell among the Metaphysicians,” *Church History* 79 (September 2010): 614-53.

<sup>71</sup> Stout, 66-67.



Connecticut congregation that he would attempt to illuminate the deeper meaning of the war, especially its “moral and religious ideas.”<sup>72</sup> Bushnell began by laying the blame for the war at the feet of a surprising individual: Thomas Jefferson. In the Hartford minister’s analysis, the Founding Fathers, led by Jefferson, had succeeded in creating a government based purely on the idea of the social contract, with no reference to transcendent authority. Accordingly, secession was thinkable if the American government had no transcendent origin or purpose.<sup>73</sup> Thankfully, however, another strain of political theory—one that accepted God’s sovereignty over earthly governments—had also influenced American political developments. Under this principle of divine lordship, God was, in a sense, responsible for the beneficent character of the American political system. The Union was indeed “clothed with His divine sanction as the Founder and Protector of States.”<sup>74</sup> The war, then, could serve a purgative function by cleansing the United States of Jefferson’s irreverent, godless political theory. Unfortunately, this would entail “adversity,” “reverses,” and “long, weary, terrible sacrifices.” In a biblical phrase that Abbott would later put to good use in World War I, Bushnell reminded his congregation that “Without shedding of blood, there is no such grace prepared.” Ultimately, out of this “bloody baptism,” he argued, would emerge a nation that was “consecrated.”<sup>75</sup> This present civil war would purify God’s people, such that “victory, when it comes, will even be a kind of religious crowning of our nationality.”<sup>76</sup> Therein

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<sup>72</sup> Bushnell, *Reverses Needed*, 9.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-14; 18, 20.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 25. Bushnell particularly hoped (not uniquely) that after the war the states would amend the preamble to the Constitution in such a way that God’s authority would be recognized. *Ibid.*, 26.

lay the meaning not only of Bull Run, but of the entire war. Just as in the Old Testament, God was purifying his chosen people through the trials of war.

Unsurprisingly, then, when victory came four years later, Bushnell did not miss the opportunity to see God's hand of favor on the North and His divine judgment on the South. On July 26, 1865, almost four years to the day after he had preached "Reverses Needed," Bushnell gave an address at Yale University honoring the alumni of that institution who had died fighting in the Civil War. Complementing the view held by Abbott, Bushnell argued that the Southern insurrection was not simply a misguided effort predicated upon incorrect presuppositions; instead, it was a clear rebellion against God. Bushnell praised the fallen soldiers because they had died to "vindicate the law as [God's] ordinance."<sup>77</sup> For Bushnell, the American government was literally ordained by God; it was decidedly not a "merely human creation." Waxing poetic, the Congregationalist theologian rejoiced that the godless elements of the United States had finally been purged:

[National unity] will be no more thought of as a mere human impact, or composition, always to be debated by the letter, but it will be that bond of common life which God had touched with blood; a sacredly heroic, Providentially tragic unity, where God's cherubim stand guard over grudges and hates and remembered jealousies, and the sense of nationality becomes even a kind of religion....<sup>78</sup>

Again, Bushnell used the language of baptism and atonement to describe the Union sacrifice. Union soldiers, he claimed, had left "martyr testimonies"—and why not? As sacred heroes, they had "bled for us; and by this simple sacrifice of blood they have

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<sup>77</sup> Horace Bushnell, "Our Obligations to the Dead," in *God's New Israel*, 210.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-07.

opened for us a new great chapter of life.”<sup>79</sup> For Bushnell, who again foreshadowed Abbott’s language in the Great War, American sacrifices were akin to those of Christ’s upon the cross.<sup>80</sup> The dead Union soldiers had made effectual atonement for the sins of the nation. The war’s survivors, in turn, had been “baptized for the dead” and had been commissioned to begin the work of Reconstruction.<sup>81</sup> Clearly, for Bushnell, very little distinction existed between sacred and secular. The conflated language and ideas he used to justify the war, especially his elevation of the United States to sacred status, echoed those of Abbott and other Northern religious observers.

### *Conclusion*

Ultimately, in the mind of Abbott and his Northern clerical colleagues, the Confederacy was committing two unpardonable sins in its rebellion against the United States. It was challenging the divine status of the United States as the New Israel, and, through its immoral society and its encouragement of slavery, the South was attacking the Christian republican emphasis on political liberty and a democratic social order. Only by grasping the gravity of these concepts for Abbott and his generation can scholars begin to understand their frenzied response to the war. More than political arrangements were at stake for religious Northerners: the war was a struggle for the very soul of the nation. The conflated language of “sacred warfare” and the demonic South only make sense

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. Bushnell developed this idea at length in *The Vicarious Sacrifice, Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1866).

<sup>81</sup> Bushnell, “Obligations,” 214. The phrase “baptized for the dead” originally comes from 1 Corinthians 15:29.

when historians understand the twin ideas of American providential destiny and Christian republicanism.

Thankfully, all moderate voices were not quite drowned out by the vociferous rhetoric of the clerical partisans of the North and South. Although the nation's preachers painted the conflict in colors of black and white, its religiously unorthodox president succeeded in creating a lasting, transcendent interpretation of the war.<sup>82</sup> "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God," Abraham Lincoln reminded the country on March 4, 1865, acknowledging that "the prayers of both could not be answered." In a remarkable departure from Christian republicanism, Lincoln argued that God's will was not easily divined: "The Almighty has His own purposes." Also challenging American providentialism, the president asserted that both North and South were to blame for the war. The scourge of slavery merited divine wrath on both its Southern practitioners and its Northern enablers. Even if the war should continue indefinitely, the president maintained, "as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"<sup>83</sup> Through such rhetoric, Lincoln pierced the self-righteousness and confidence of both North and South. Ultimately, the ideas of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address—ideas of humility and divine mystery—found lasting expression in what would become part of American Scripture. Lincoln's interpretation has stood the test of time.

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<sup>82</sup> On Lincoln's religion, see Gary Scott Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 91-128; William J. Wolfe, *The Religion of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Seabury Press, 1963); Allen C. Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); and the essays in Hans J. Morgenthau and David Hein, *Essays on Lincoln's Faith and Politics*, ed. Kenneth W. Thompson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983).

<sup>83</sup> Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address," in *God's New Israel*, 201-02.

## CHAPTER THREE

### As Sacred as the Cross

*“The starry flag that summons us has never known a stain;  
We’ll follow it from isle to isle, and bear it back again;  
But ocean’s rolling waves shall be the sepulchre [sic] of Spain,--  
As we strike by land and sea.”*

--Rev. Theodore C. Williams, “The Song of the Volunteers,” (1898)<sup>1</sup>

#### *Introduction*

In November 1897, a veritable list of “Who’s who” among liberal Protestants descended upon Brooklyn, New York. These men, including Washington Gladden, George A. Gordon, William Jewett Tucker, and Charles A. Berry, were gathering to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Henry Ward Beecher’s Plymouth Congregational Church, whose pulpit was now occupied by one of their own, Lyman Abbott. Over the past decade Abbott had gained notoriety for his writings on evolution and Christianity, most notably in *The Evolution of Christianity* (1892) and *The Theology of an Evolutionist* (1897), and was considered to be “the champion popularizer” of theological modernism.<sup>2</sup> In addition to his work as Plymouth pastor, Abbott also edited a weekly journal called the *Outlook*, which would soon boast nearly 100,000 paid subscribers, making it “the country’s leading magazine of new comment.”<sup>3</sup> Although the clergymen attending the

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore C. Williams, “The Song of the Volunteers,” *Christian Register*, June 23, 1898, 701. The song was to be sung to the tune of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” The *Christian Register* was a Unitarian publication.

<sup>2</sup> William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 116.

<sup>3</sup> Ira V. Brown, *Lyman Abbott, Christian Evolutionist: A Study in Religious Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 168; Paul Toews, “The Imperialism of Righteousness,”

meeting discussed theological issues—celebrating what they perceived to be the death of Calvinism and expressing their wishes for greater ecumenical activity—they also made political and social concerns central to their anniversary addresses. Washington Gladden (1836-1918), for instance, spoke on “The Social Problems of the Future,” arguing that Americans must recognize and implement “Christ’s law” of the brotherhood of man if democracy was to flourish.<sup>4</sup> Abbott’s address was even more explicit about the nature of the relationship between religion and politics. After maintaining that true religion was totally in harmony with nature and reason, he espoused his preference for “a religion of the common life” and noted “the old definition between secular and religious we repudiate.” Religion, which entailed “right living,” was “to be carried out” into all aspects of life. Therefore, he reiterated, it was simply false to believe that “there are two departments of man, one religious and the other secular.”<sup>5</sup>

Far from representing the excesses of an anniversary celebration, these sentiments were at the heart of liberal Protestantism at the turn of the century. The progressive clergy in general, and Lyman Abbott in particular, found themselves with ample opportunity to speak about political issues in the coming year. Only three months after the Jubilee Celebration, the *U.S.S. Maine* exploded in Cuba’s Havana harbor, an event that helped to precipitate the Spanish-American War. From April to August of 1898 (the duration of the war), Abbott argued repeatedly that the war was a righteous one,

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in *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America*, ed. Ronald C. White, Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 119. I have used the terms “journal” and “magazine” interchangeably to describe the *Outlook*, because it contained elements of both types of periodicals.

<sup>4</sup> “The Plymouth Jubilee,” *New York Times*, November 12, 1897.

<sup>5</sup> Lyman Abbott, “The New Puritanism,” in Lyman Abbott, et al., *The New Puritanism* (New York: Fords, Howard & Hulbert, 1898): 62-64.

justifying it through rhetoric that made little distinction between sacred and secular categories. Accordingly, Abbott supported the war for four reasons: he believed the United States was a nation specially chosen by God; he subscribed wholeheartedly to the tenets of Christian republicanism; he saw in the war a chance to apply the Social Gospel to a foreign land; and he thought that the war was indicative of progress in history and could help usher in the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth.

### *Background*

Before explaining each of the factors that motivated Abbott's rhetoric during the war, it is necessary to examine the background to the Cuban crisis. By 1898, a substantial portion of the Cuban population had been dissatisfied for several decades with Spanish rule over the island. One rebellion had been quashed in 1878, and in 1895 Cuban insurgents tried again to throw off their European masters.<sup>6</sup> Spain was less successful this time in suppressing the rebellion and sent the notoriously brutal Valeriano Weyler (1838-1930) to restore order on the island. Weyler, in turn, ordered the entire population of certain key cities to relocate to camps near military headquarters, where they were held as virtual prisoners. By 1898, some observers thought that 400,000 Cubans had died in these camps.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time that the Spanish were gaining a reputation in the United States for brutality, an indiscreet letter from the Spanish minister Enrique Dupuy de Lome increased tensions between the two nations. On February 9, 1898, the *New York Journal* obtained and published a private letter from Dupuy de Lome, in which he referred to

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<sup>6</sup> David F. Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898* (New York: Macmillan, 1981), 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9. The actual figure was closer to 100,000, but this was not known at the time.

President William McKinley as “weak and a bidder for the admiration of the crowd, besides being a would-be politician.”<sup>8</sup> Dupuy de Lome’s immediate resignation was forthcoming, but the damage to the Spanish image in the United States had been done. Then, only a week later, the battleship *U.S.S. Maine* exploded in Havana harbor.

At first, Abbott urged caution and restraint as the yellow journals advocated an immediate declaration of war. He refused to blame the Spanish prematurely for the destruction of the *Maine*, arguing that the country must trust whatever conclusions were reached by the federal investigative committee.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the *Outlook* did not endorse immediate intervention in Cuba, but ran an editorial entitled, “Wait!”<sup>10</sup> Abbott’s irenic disposition gradually disappeared, however, after the Proctor report—which detailed the Spanish oppression of Cuban dissenters—was released in late March and war was declared a month later.<sup>11</sup> As the fighting got underway in May, Abbott supported the Spanish-American War with gusto equal to that of the most enthusiastic patriot. We will first examine several examples of his conflated wartime rhetoric and then proceed to an analysis of the four main reasons he used this language to justify the war.

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>9</sup> “Article One—No Title,” *Outlook*, February 26, 1898, 505.

<sup>10</sup> “Wait!” *Outlook*, March 5, 1898, 567-68. Abbott was not the only editor of the *Outlook*. Biographer Ira V. Brown summarizes the editorial procedures of the news magazine this way: “The magazine’s editorial policy was determined in a weekly staff conference, where all members were free to express their opinions. In 1913 these included Lyman Abbott and his two sons Lawrence and Ernest, Hamilton W. Mabie, R.D. Townsend, Harold T. Pulsifer, Elbert Baldwin, Gregory Mason, Harold Howland, and [Theodore] Roosevelt. After full discussion Abbott, the editor-in-chief, decided what was to be the paper’s position and assigned the particular editorial to someone who favored that view.” Brown, 213.

<sup>11</sup> The details of the Proctor report are discussed below.



Above all, the *Outlook* made clear in several editorials, this war was a righteous one.<sup>12</sup> Even before war was declared, Abbott was laying the foundation for the rhetoric he would use to justify it in the coming weeks. When issues of freedom and progress hung in the balance, he wrote on April 16, “the sword may become as sacred as the cross.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise, on May 7, Abbott labeled the war a “crusade” whose goal was the promotion of “universal humanity, liberty, and justice.” Consequently, the Spanish-American War was more righteous than even the American Revolution or the Civil War.<sup>14</sup> In some of his most extreme rhetoric, Abbott even connected American naval victories with Old Testament accounts of conquest. The ease with which the Americans took the cities of Santiago and Manila, Abbott thought, served as providential confirmation of the righteousness of the American cause. In July, he wrote, “The prophetic vision which saw God’s guardianship in Gideon’s warfare or in Israel’s emancipation may well believe that Manila and Santiago have emphasized divine approval of America’s mission by the preternatural victory of America’s arms.”<sup>15</sup> Clearly, in his eagerness to justify the war, Abbott abandoned any distinction between sacred and secular. Close study of Abbott’s wartime writings reveal at least four main explanations for his conflated rhetoric.

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<sup>12</sup> One editorial in particular addressed this specific question. “Is this a Righteous War?” *Outlook*, May 21, 1898, 159-62. The answer was affirmative.

<sup>13</sup> “The President’s Message,” *Outlook*, April 16, 1898, 953.

<sup>14</sup> “To the Front,” *Outlook*, May 7, 1898, 11.

<sup>15</sup> “Santiago,” *Outlook*, July 9, 1898, 610.

### *American Providentialism*

First, perhaps the most important motivation for Abbott's vociferous support of the Spanish-American war was his belief that the United States was a tool in the hand of God. At first glance, this opinion does not seem remarkable; after all, many religious leaders before and after Abbott's time believed that God used nations in history to accomplish His will. For Abbott, however, the United States was much more than a common nation that God might choose to use. Instead, espousing what historian Nicholas Guyatt calls "historical providentialism," Abbott argued that the United States was the New Israel, a nation chosen by God to accomplish certain purposes in history.<sup>16</sup> Abbott was most explicit about this view in a sermon he preached to his Plymouth congregation on May 15, 1898, about a month into the war. He began his message by recounting how God had chosen the Hebrews in the Old Testament to be his "favored people." God himself had protected and guided them, he said, and had given them productive land on which to live. Yet, "more even than the Hebrew people," Abbott thought, "have the American people been favored of God." He lauded the beautiful land of the United States and celebrated the population growth and accompanying "civilization" that made America the envy of the world. To account for the nation's remarkable success, Abbott turned to the Reformed concept of divine election. Although Abbott and his generation of liberal Protestants had long ago abandoned Calvinism's emphasis on predestination, here Abbott showed no hesitancy to employ the concept to describe the United States. "We are," Abbott said, speaking of Americans, "an elect people of God. We have received, pre-eminently, His blessing, His gifts, and shone with

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<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

His glory.” Just as God had chosen the Hebrew nation under the Old Covenant, Abbott believed, so He had now chosen the United States in these latter days to accomplish his purposes.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the *Outlook* would reiterate these sentiments three weeks later. As the journal outlined the rationale for the colonization of the Philippines, the author reflected upon “the great trust” that God placed upon the American people. After all, he believed, God had “called them from all nationalities” to accomplish His purposes.<sup>18</sup>

Abbott was also very confident that he knew the nature of these purposes. Most importantly, God had chosen the United States to be a beacon of freedom to the world. In his May 15 sermon, Abbott borrowed the language of the prophet Isaiah to describe what he considered to be America’s messianic mission: “He has elected us...to be a light to the nations of the world and a salvation for all humanity.” Since the nation’s founding, the United States had been nothing less than a city on a hill. “From the very beginning of the American Revolution,” said Abbott, echoing John Winthrop, “the eyes of the European nations have been turned hitherward.” After the Revolution the Old World continued to watch the United States, said this life-long Northerner, to see if freedom would be extended to the slave and the Southern rebellion suppressed. The successful history of the United States was a vindication of its role as the divine ambassador of freedom.<sup>19</sup> Now, Abbott believed that God was calling the nation to continue in its godly mission, this time spreading liberty and justice to other parts of the world. When President William McKinley proclaimed a day of Thanksgiving in June, Abbott rejoiced that “America is permitted to fight God’s battles for him.” He was especially exuberant

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<sup>17</sup> Lyman Abbott, “The Meaning of the War,” *Plymouth Morning Pulpit*, May 31, 1898, 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> “The New National Policy,” *Outlook*, June 18, 1898, 415.

<sup>19</sup> Abbott, “The Meaning of the War,” 3-4.

over what seemed to be providential victories at Santiago and Manila. The *Outlook* thanked God because He had “thought [America] worthy to execute his commission of justice and liberty.”<sup>20</sup> To Abbott, Commodore George Dewey’s victory was nothing less than a messianic call:

To this American nation, whose light of intelligence, of liberty, of humanity has been the distinguishing characteristic of its life...there comes to-day from the guns of Dewey’s fleet across the sea this prophetic call: “Arise, shine, for thy light has come, and nations shall come to thy light, and bring to the lightness of thy rising.”<sup>21</sup>

According to the *Outlook*, Commodore Dewey’s fleets had simply been on “God’s errands of justice and liberty.”<sup>22</sup>

Abbott’s use of the term “errand” to describe Dewey’s mission drew upon familiar imagery in American religious history. Historian Perry Miller, in an important address delivered in 1952, distinguished between two types of errands: those run for a superior, and those run for one’s own purposes.<sup>23</sup> Miller believed that the American Puritans such as John Winthrop saw themselves performing the first kind of errand: by establishing a godly commonwealth, they would provide an example to the European world of how to obey God’s regulations in the modern world.<sup>24</sup> Abbott also meant the term “errand” in this first, more primitive, sense. Since God (naturally) favored “justice and liberty,” the United States was truly fulfilling his commands when it helped to

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<sup>20</sup> “Thanksgiving for Victories,” *Outlook*, July 16, 1898, 666.

<sup>21</sup> Lyman Abbott, “The Duty and Destiny of America,” *Plymouth Morning Pulpit*, June 15, 1898, 20.

<sup>22</sup> “Thanksgiving for Victories,” 667.

<sup>23</sup> Perry Miller, “Errand into the Wilderness,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 10 (Jan. 1953): 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

establish these principles.<sup>25</sup> For Abbott, America was truly a nation chosen by God, founded in these latter days to carry out his decrees to the ends of the earth.

This conception of America, in turn, led to certain readings of the war. According to Abbott, the United States was not actually initiating the conflict; instead, God had ordained the war and was simply using America as His means to accomplish a predestined end. Even before the war began, Abbott assured his readers that “It is equally a Christian duty to accept the sword Excalibur, when divine providence puts it into our hands.”<sup>26</sup> After the decisive victory at Manila on May 1, the *Outlook* declared that nothing but victory was to be expected for the American troops; after all, “The Nation is simply the hand of Providence; its task was made for it by its history, and they who fall in the doing of that task fall in a noble cause.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Abbott frequently justified the war by claiming that Americans had no choice but to follow the directives of God, who asked them to intervene on behalf of helpless Cuba. For example, in late May Abbott announced that the time had come for the United States to shoulder the responsibilities for keeping the peace among the nations of the world. Because the United States had demonstrated its love of freedom through the Revolution and the Emancipation Proclamation, we “now have laid on us the responsibilities of freedom, in a call to take our place as a witness to and defender of freedom among the nations of the earth.” The “God of nations” had called, and America must not refuse.<sup>28</sup> God had,

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<sup>25</sup> “Thanksgiving for Victories,” 667.

<sup>26</sup> “The President’s Message,” 953.

<sup>27</sup> “The First Battle,” *Outlook*, May 7, 1898, 11-12.

<sup>28</sup> “The New Duties of the New Hour,” *Outlook*, May 28, 1898, 211.

simply, “taken us by the shoulders and thrust us into it.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, in contemplating what to do with Spain’s colonial possessions that the nation had acquired, Abbott dismissed the notion that the fate of the Philippines was of no concern to the United States. Additional “responsibilities,” he maintained, “have been laid upon the Nation, and cannot be escaped.”<sup>30</sup> Although America did not prosecute the war with Spain in order to take control of Cuba and the Philippines, Abbott acknowledged, God’s plans were greater than man’s, and, he implied, they would probably involve ensuring that a free government was established in those areas. Hamlet’s dictum was as true “of nations as of individuals... ‘there’s a divinity which shapes our ends, rough hew them as we may.’”<sup>31</sup> If historians are to make sense of Abbott’s justification of the Spanish-American war, they must first grapple with his sense of the United States as a divine nation. Abbott strongly believed that the United States was the nation chosen by God to accomplish His ends; consequently, he employed conflated rhetoric to justify the Spanish-American War.

Among American liberals, Abbott was hardly alone in these sentiments concerning the unique place of America in world history. As prominent an intellectual as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) thought that the United States was “a last effort of Divine Providence on behalf of the human race.”<sup>32</sup> Abbott’s Congregationalist colleague Josiah Strong (1847-1916) agreed with this sentiment. In an apology for a greater role in

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<sup>29</sup> Abbott, “The Duty and Destiny of America,” 17.

<sup>30</sup> “Peace—and After,” *Outlook*, July 16, 1898, 662.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 663.

<sup>32</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “American Civilization,” in *Miscellanies*, vol. 11 of *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903), 299.

the world for the United States, Strong rehearsed similar themes of chosen-ness. In his view, “God had winnowed Europe for the seeds of civil and religious liberty,” and then planted them in America.<sup>33</sup> Strong could thus speak confidently of “the place in the world which God has given us.”<sup>34</sup> Speaking directly about the Spanish-American War, the Baptist minister Robert Stuart MacArthur was equally clear that God had ordained the conflict and was superintending its results. In an address before the American Baptist Publication Society, MacArthur imagined “the voice of God” speaking to the hero of Manila, Commodore Dewey: “As I was with Moses, so shall I be with thee, O heroic Commodore Dewey. No Spanish ship shall long stand before thee, thou leader of victorious Americans, in this triumph of humanity, of liberty, and of true Christianity.”<sup>35</sup> Historian William Karraker, after conducting an exhaustive survey of the attitudes of American clergymen toward the Spanish-American War, concludes that American ministers “ground[ed] their zeal upon the conviction that America [had] a divinely-appointed mission to accomplish.”<sup>36</sup> Clearly, Abbott’s ideas concerning the divine role of the United States were not unusual or unique for his generation.

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<sup>33</sup> Josiah Strong, *Expansion under New World-Conditions* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1900), 271.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Stuart MacArthur, “The Hand of God in the Nation’s Conflict,” in American Baptist Publication Society, *The Seventy-fourth Anniversary, Held at Rochester, New York, May 21 and 23, 1898* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, [1898?]), 66, quoted in William A. Karraker, *The American Churches and the Spanish-American War* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 1940), 65.

<sup>36</sup> William A. Karraker, *The American Churches and the Spanish-American War* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 1940), 212.

## *Christian Republicanism*

Abbott also justified American participation in the Spanish-American War through an appeal to the time-honored tradition of Christian republicanism. One implication of Christian republicanism that Abbott extensively articulated was the assumption that political liberalism and true Christianity are connected.<sup>37</sup> As he had done in his writings during the Civil War, Abbott argued in July 1898 that a free religion (Protestantism) was a prerequisite for democracy. “The foundations of self-government,” the *Outlook* thought, “must first be laid in a free religion and a universal education.”<sup>38</sup> As the *Outlook* continued to weigh America’s options in governing the territories acquired in the war, Abbott’s journal reflected on the responsibilities of the church in this regard. To permit an established church in the Philippines was unthinkable; therefore, American Catholics would be useful missionaries there to show the Filipinos how to practice Roman Catholicism without the benefit of state control. Yet, “here, too,” Abbott argued, “is a field for Protestants, in no sectarian or polemical spirit, but as preachers of the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free. The Protestant sects ought to lay aside their sectarianism and unite in a common effort to teach the Gospel of liberty which they have inherited from Luther and from Paul.”<sup>39</sup> What exactly did Abbott mean by the phrase “Gospel of liberty?” Most likely he did not mean strictly a disestablished church (the appeal to Luther would not make sense in that reading). Instead, by “Gospel of liberty,”

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<sup>37</sup> By “political liberalism,” I do not mean the principles of the Democratic Party either in Abbott’s day or in ours. (Abbott, in fact, generally voted Republican.) I use “political liberalism” to signify the idea that individuals have rights and that their individual freedom is preferable to authoritarian government. See Mark Noll’s definition of “liberalism,” in *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 565.

<sup>38</sup> “The Issues Restated,” *Outlook*, July 23, 1898, 711.

<sup>39</sup> “The Responsibilities of Peace,” *Outlook*, August 20, 1898, 958.



it seems likely he meant simply the traditions of political freedom that, in his mind, inevitably grew out of a free, Protestant religion. For Abbott, there was a direct intellectual path from the Apostle Paul to the Magna Carta to Luther to the Founding Fathers. By discussing political liberty in the context of disestablishment and by using the term “Gospel,” Abbott, following the principles of Christian republicanism, blurred the boundaries between sacred and secular categories.

Another aspect of Christian republicanism, according to historian Mark Noll, is the belief that the character of a nation’s citizenry matters. Virtuous leaders and citizens will preserve the nation’s liberty while widespread vice will lead to tyranny.<sup>40</sup> In keeping with the Christian republican tradition, Abbott endeavored to show the moral corruption of the Spanish foes on a national and individual level while he beatified the character of the United States and its soldiers. First, he sought to associate the present Spanish government with the backward religious and political systems of pre-Reformation Europe. In a May 14 article entitled, “An Irrepressible Conflict,” the *Outlook* began by contrasting the achievements of the Anglo-Saxon nations with those of Spain. While the Anglo-Saxon countries had welcomed the Protestant Reformation, Spain had “stood for merciless and arbitrary suppression of freedom of faith, worship, action, and thought.” *Outlook* readers were reminded of the archetypal “implacable Spanish priest” and were told that Spain had spent most of its economic gain from its New World colonies in the “futile attempt to annihilate Protestantism” because Spaniards opposed “civil and religious liberty.” As if that were not enough, Abbott went on to accuse Spain (with some justification) of “systematic robbery” of Cuba, arguing that “history can show no

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<sup>40</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 19.

more appalling chapter of greed, cruelty, and incompetence than the government of Spain on this continent.”<sup>41</sup> Two months later, Abbott trotted out the memory of the Spanish Inquisition to demonize his modern-day foes.<sup>42</sup> He accused the Spanish government of inadequately educating its people, attributing American military success to the United States’s well-educated, disciplined fighting forces. “The conflict at Manila and that at Santiago,” he averred, “were between the Public School and the Inquisition; between a century which teaches the common people to think, and one which forbids them to think.”<sup>43</sup>

At the individual level, too, Abbott saw much vice among the Spanish enemy. He had it “on good authority,” for example, that Spanish privates were actually selling their weapons at a profit to their enemies, the Cuban insurgents. The soldiers’ apparent need for money, in turn, could be credited to the unbelievable levels of bribery and corruption among the Spanish military brass.<sup>44</sup> The moral debauchery of the Spanish soldiers also extended to their ostensible alcoholism. Abbott reported, somewhat credulously, that before the battle of Santiago, the Spanish soldiers had been “filled with liquor,” in consequence of which they had “fired so rapidly that they had neither the brains nor the time to take aim.”<sup>45</sup> The *Outlook*, slightly obsessed with this issue, produced another report the following week, which also discussed the Spanish dependence on intoxicating

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<sup>41</sup> “An Irrepressible Conflict,” *Outlook*, May 14, 1898, 113-14.

<sup>42</sup> “Santiago,” 610.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> “An Irrepressible Conflict,” 114.

<sup>45</sup> “Thanksgiving for Victories,” 667. For a perspective that highlights the Cuban role in the war—rather than American power, divine providence, or Spanish incompetence—see Louis A. Perez, “Incurring a Debt of Gratitude: 1898 and the Moral Sources of United States Hegemony in Cuba,” *American Historical Review* 104:2 (Apr. 1999): 356-98.

beverages. According to Abbott and his colleagues, the Spanish officers had mandated that “extra grog should be served to the sailors to fortify them” for battle.<sup>46</sup> The Spanish were not, and could not be, worthy opponents in Abbott’s Christian republican scheme; instead, they were moral degenerates in contrast to the virtuous Americans.

Indeed, the *Outlook* took great pains to chronicle the virtuousness of both the American nation and of particular individuals during its coverage of the war. The American military, for example, had long abandoned the practice of providing a daily alcohol ration to its soldiers, and the British were thought to be taking similar measures.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, the navy was treating its Spanish prisoners of war with remarkable humaneness. The *Outlook* reported that the P.O.W.’s received “excellent treatment” en route to the United States and that “every provision [would] be made for their comfort.”<sup>48</sup> In fact, in an article celebrating the Fourth of July, Abbott maintained that even the war itself was being prosecuted with remarkable virtue. “So far,” he wrote, “not a false note has been struck, not an ignoble deed done; at every point there has been unostentatious but splendid courage.”<sup>49</sup> In contrast to Spanish despotism, the United States was a virtuous republic.

Lest there be concern about individual deeds of vice, the *Outlook* happily reported on the promising spiritual state of the American military forces as well. On July 30, the *Outlook* recounted the work being done with American troops by the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). At Camp Alger, Virginia, for instance, 130 soldiers

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<sup>46</sup> “Liquor in the Army,” *Outlook*, July 23, 1898, 715.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 716.

<sup>48</sup> “Spanish Prisoners,” *Outlook*, July 16, 1898, 654.

<sup>49</sup> “The National Holiday,” *Outlook*, July 2, 1898, 59.

attended Bible classes while 2,686 attended “Gospel meetings,” and fifty-seven accepted Christ as their savior. The staff of the YMCA had even better success at Camp Lee, Virginia, where over one hundred soldiers professed Christ for the first time.<sup>50</sup> Lieutenant Richard Hobson, who had instantly become an American celebrity for his daring actions at Santiago harbor, Abbott’s journal proudly noted, was a member of the YMCA while at the Naval Academy and had even served as its chapter president in 1888.<sup>51</sup> By chronicling the virtue and piety of the American nation and its soldiers, Abbott upheld a key tenet of Christian republicanism. That philosophy, in turn, helped him support American participation in the war.

Other religious observers advocated the precepts of Christian republicanism as well. Although all nations had some incidents to be ashamed of, observed the Methodist *Christian Advocate*, “Spain unquestionably is the worst among those who use an alphabet of twenty-six letters.” Spain’s immorality, the *Advocate* thought, could be attributed to its Roman Catholicism. Whereas other nations such as Switzerland, England, and the United States had gradually made moral progress as a result of the Reformation, Spain was still mired in the bog of popish tyranny. Accordingly, it was not surprising that that nation exhibited sixteenth-century morality.<sup>52</sup> For his part, Washington Gladden was not surprised either that Spain was losing its grip on Cuba. Gladden ascribed Spain’s current woes to the legacy of the Inquisition, which he characterized as “an attempt to exterminate independent thought and rational leadership, and the history of Spanish

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<sup>50</sup> “Christian Work in the Army,” *Outlook*, July 30, 1898, 786.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> “Sundry War Notes,” *Christian Advocate* 73 (May 5, 1898): 718.

decay and misrule shows how deplorably successful the attempt has been.”<sup>53</sup> Expanding on this religious theme, Gladden also thought that Roman Catholicism had contributed to the inability of Cubans to create and maintain a free government. Distinguishing between American Catholics and Spanish Catholics, Gladden praised the former but argued that the latter “follow Spanish ideas, and the type of intellect and character which they are producing there is a very different thing” from the positive social contributions of American Catholics.<sup>54</sup> The stricter version of Catholicism practiced by the Spanish, Gladden implied, was inimical to the traditions of republicanism. Abbott, therefore, was not unique in his Christian republican ideas; other religious observers also denounced the moral corruption of the Spanish and freely made connections between political and religious liberty.

### *The Social Gospel*

A third belief that led Abbott to justify the Spanish-American War through conflated rhetoric was what was variously termed “the Social Gospel,” “social Christianity,” and “applied Christianity.” At its most basic level, this theology meant, in Abbott’s words, that Christians were to “carry religion into daily life, not to keep it for the closet and the church.”<sup>55</sup> Behind this rather basic evangelical principle, however, was the idea that, as Josiah Strong put it, Christians should construct “the organization of

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<sup>53</sup> Washington Gladden, *Our Nation and her Neighbors* (Columbus, OH: Quinius & Ridenour, 1898), 5-6.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>55</sup> Lyman Abbott, *An Illustrated Commentary on the Book of Matthew* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1875), 87.

society on a Christian basis.”<sup>56</sup> Social Gospelers, therefore, advocated a plethora of political measures such as greater rights for labor, city reform, and racial reform, all of which championed the cause of society’s downtrodden.<sup>57</sup>

At the very heart of social Christianity, then, was the notion that the strong should serve the weak. When Abbott talked about America’s special place in the divine plan, he emphasized that God had “elected us *for a service*.” It would be wrong “merely to enjoy wealth and culture and liberty for ourselves” when God was calling the United States to spread these values “to the nations of the world.”<sup>58</sup> In making the case for the war, Abbott called on his congregation to apply their Christian principles abroad:

And now a third question has been presented to us, by the providence of God: Are you a selfish nation? Do you care only for your own liberty? Do you care only for the freedom of men oppressed and enslaved within your borders, or have you ears that are open to the cry of oppressed humanity everywhere? Dare you hazard something; dare you endure something for a people for whom you have no national responsibility and with whose welfare your own is not intertangled?<sup>59</sup>

In addition, Abbott also employed the classic Social Gospel rhetoric of “the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man” to urge his readers to support the war. In a May 7 editorial entitled “To the Front,” the *Outlook* noted that the only factor that united Cuba and the United States was “a common humanity.” Indeed, the war was simply “a crusade of brotherhood. It is the answer of America to the question of its own conscience: ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’”<sup>60</sup> The mere fact that all men were brothers made America’s duty

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<sup>56</sup> Josiah Strong, “The Individual and Social Interpretation of Christianity,” in *First Year of the Sagamore Sociological Conference, Sagamore Beach, U.S.A., June 18, 19, 20, 1907* (Boston: Arakelyan Press, 1907), 7.

<sup>57</sup> The Social Gospel is discussed at greater length in Chapter One.

<sup>58</sup> Abbott, “The Meaning of the War,” 2. Emphasis added.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> “To the Front,” 11.

clear. The United States must answer the question of the Old Testament character Cain—“Am I my brother’s keeper?”—in the affirmative.<sup>61</sup> Not to do so would be to betray the most basic principles of the Social Gospel.

With this theological basis, Abbott insisted that the United States was fighting the war only for humanitarian, altruistic motives. In the wake of the destruction of the *Maine*, yellow journals such as William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal* demanded immediate revenge.<sup>62</sup> The *Outlook*, on the other hand, rejected the idea that the United States would engage in a war of vengeance, and maintained that, if war was to come at all, it would only be undertaken in the name of humanity.<sup>63</sup> The report of Senator Redfield Proctor (1831-1908), released on March 17, amplified these concerns for Abbott. The report drew public attention to what the *Outlook* called “the terrible barbarism of this civil war, and the indescribable suffering which has followed upon the policy pursued by the Spanish government.” Moreover, Proctor thought that nearly all of the Cubans (1.4 million) favored independence while only the Spanish military and creoles (approximately 200,000) wished to continue Spanish rule.<sup>64</sup> In short, the Proctor report helped solidify Abbott’s view that the rights of a majority were being tyrannically suppressed by a corrupt minority. Although as of March 26, he favored simple recognition of independence rather than immediate armed intervention, he recognized

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<sup>61</sup> For the biblical context, see Genesis 4:1-16.

<sup>62</sup> David R. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America’s Emergence as a World Power* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 144-51.

<sup>63</sup> “Article One,” *Outlook* 58 (February 26, 1898): 505-07; “Wait!,” 567-68; “Article One—No Title,” *Outlook* 58 (March 12, 1898): 651.

<sup>64</sup> “The Cuban Question,” *Outlook*, March 26, 1898, 759.

that the former policy could produce the latter result.<sup>65</sup> One month later Abbott reiterated that America would not seek revenge for the destruction of the *Maine*, but would fight only to relieve Cubans of a corrupt government and to put an end to Spanish barbarism. For the *Outlook*, if interference came, it would be because of “honor, conscience, and humanity.”<sup>66</sup>

Once war was actually declared, Abbott maintained his position that the Spanish-American war was a humanitarian one. In contrast to some Americans who hoped to gain strategic territory and economic advantage from the war, Abbott pleaded that such a policy would “both belie our public professions and convert a war which in its origin was one for humanity into one for National aggrandizement.”<sup>67</sup> One week later, in a sermon to his congregation, he reinforced the Social Gospel, humanitarian reasons for war. “A Christian nation,” he argued, “is one which seeks not its own glory, its own prestige and power, but seeks the welfare of the human race.”<sup>68</sup> As it became increasingly clear which side would win the war, Abbott and his *Outlook* colleagues emphasized that the United States had no long-term designs on Spain’s colonial possessions. The war had initially been undertaken for humanity, and it would conclude with that motivation as well. “We have fought in Cuba, Porto [*sic*] Rico, and the Philippines,” the *Outlook* stated, “not for what we can make out of the war, but for justice, liberty, and humanity.”<sup>69</sup> Yet, the journal’s editors recognized that the United States now bore some responsibility for the

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 760.

<sup>66</sup> “Why War?” *Outlook*, April 23, 1898, 1004.

<sup>67</sup> “Our Future Policy,” *Outlook*, May 21, 1898, 157-58.

<sup>68</sup> Abbott, “Duty and Destiny of America,” 2.

<sup>69</sup> “War for Profit,” *Outlook*, July 23, 1898, 712.



fate of its newly-captured territory. “We may have to govern the Philippines” after all, the *Outlook* admitted, “but, if so, it will be for the benefit of the inhabitants, not for our own.”<sup>70</sup>

This conclusion was an outgrowth of ideas that had been percolating in the *Outlook*'s pages for some weeks. In April, Abbott had characterized as “wholly admirable” the provisions of the Teller Amendment, which disclaimed any desire on the part of the United States for the annexation of Cuba.<sup>71</sup> After Dewey's victory at Manila, which gave the United States control of the Philippines, the problem of unwanted territory became more immediate. On May 14, the *Outlook* contemplated several possibilities that were open to the United States in its dealings with the Philippines. Returning the islands to Spain was unthinkable; in a metaphor that was repeated over and over in several permutations during the summer of 1898, it was thought that to do so would be to “give back the released maiden to the tiger.”<sup>72</sup> Annexation was dismissed as too dangerous. Giving voting rights to the Filipinos, Abbott feared, could make them the arbiters of closely contested national questions. The United States could colonize the Philippines, but that would seem to militate against the ostensible humanitarian motivation that the *Outlook* and the religious press in general had championed. The last solution, which the *Outlook* seemed to think was the best, entailed selling the Philippines to Great Britain. The British, then, would properly govern the Philippines and the United States could avoid a colonial policy not in keeping with its traditions.<sup>73</sup> The irony of the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> “The Action of Congress,” *Outlook*, April 23, 1898, 1005.

<sup>72</sup> “The Philippine Problem,” *Outlook*, May 14, 1898, 112.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

erstwhile Thirteen Colonies selling another colony to the British was apparently lost on the *Outlook* editors.

This proposal, however, did not long remain satisfactory to Abbott. As the summer progressed, the *Outlook* began to advocate a more ambitious policy for the United States—one that would entail American governance of the Philippines. In keeping with Abbott’s thinking in general, he also supported this proposal for quintessentially Social Gospel reasons. Perhaps his opinion began to shift in response to an article appearing in the June 4 edition of the *Outlook*. Written by a native of the Philippines, Ramon Reyes Lala, the article deftly told Abbott and his White Anglo-Saxon Protestant audience everything they wanted to hear. First, Lala recounted the familiar themes of Spanish brutality and corruption—the Inquisition was supposedly still in full swing in the Philippines, and “thousands” of Filipinos could trace their ancestry back to Spanish priests. Lala characterized one of the races in the Philippines as “dwarfish, ugly, feeble, stupid” and another as existing in a state of “semi-savagery.” The latter, though, he predicted, would be “splendid raw material for the refining influence of American civilization.” In fact, despite his vicious characterization of the natives, overall he found them to be a hospitable people who were “docile and easily led.” Moreover, their labor was cheap, and the island could produce cash crops such as sugar, hemp, and indigo. Lala concluded by noting, not very subtly, that “The American colonist will find there both a garden of Eden and a gold-mine.”<sup>74</sup> Although Abbott would never admit to being influenced by the pecuniary advantages of acquiring the Philippines, this article perhaps

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<sup>74</sup> Ramon Reyes Lala, “The Philippine Islands,” *Outlook*, June 4, 1898, 264-71. Lala, according to a brief biography included as a preface to his article, was educated in Britain. This education, no doubt, accounts for his elitist, Anglo-Saxon outlook. It is not clear if he was an actual Filipino or, as his Spanish name suggests, a creole.

made American possession of the islands conceivable for him. The White Man's Burden might be heavy, but it was a Christian duty to bring the trappings of Western civilization to this benighted area.

Abbott's sympathy for a more expansive role for the United States appeared first in the June 16 edition of the *Outlook*. He and his fellow editors thought that the recent war had created "substantially unanimous" agreement that America could no longer remain in isolation, but must embrace "fraternization." The editors expressed respect for the older policy of isolation, acknowledging that it was correct for its time, but argued that those policies "are wise no longer, and the *Outlook* no longer advocates them." Although Abbott stopped short of expressing a definite opinion on what the United States should do with the Philippines, he wrote portentously that "The new National policy requires, probably, the adoption of some method of colonial administration, or something akin thereto." America, he stated in his oft-repeated phrase, had responsibilities "laid upon it" and was now charged with seeing that the liberated Spanish islands had good government. American motivations were the opposite of selfish; indeed, he maintained, "the National motto must be, not, Americans for America, but, Americans for the world."<sup>75</sup> By accepting new colonial responsibilities and acting altruistically, America would be applying the Social Gospel to foreign lands.

One month later, Abbott lay out in concrete form what he believed ought to be the policy of the United States toward the captured colonies of Spain. First, America must establish "in every such colony... a government which will secure to the inhabitants justice, liberty, and popular education." The *Outlook* editor-in-chief believed the United

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<sup>75</sup> "The New National Policy," 413-15.

States must “create, and for a time control, educational systems in Cuba and the Philippines for their interests.” These goals could be accomplished through one of three ways: the establishment of territories, colonies, or protectorates. Abbott favored the last of these three options because the first two granted too much autonomy to the natives. A protectorate, on the other hand, would allow some freedom to the native population while American workers would have time to instill “the Anglo-Saxon spirit” in the islanders.<sup>76</sup>

Although many of Abbott’s attitudes seem insensitive and ethnocentric to modern readers (and for good reason), we must remember that he believed that Filipinos, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans needed the United States’s support and example in order to enjoy the blessings of liberty. Whether from our perspective he was correct in this view is not particularly relevant. Although economic factors undoubtedly played a small role here (the “gold-mine” promised by Lala would certainly have had some appeal), at the heart of Abbott’s support of imperialism and the war was his commitment to the Social Gospel emphasis on uplifting the oppressed around the world. As he himself put it in justifying the new imperialism, “A war begun in the spirit of philanthropy must be followed by a peace carried on in a spirit of philanthropy.”<sup>77</sup>

Other ministers also proclaimed the tenets of the Social Gospel in justifying the war. Washington Gladden supported the war for precisely this reason. In a guest editorial for the *Outlook*, Gladden asserted that fighting the war was simply another form of humanitarian aid for a downtrodden people. “We know that all men are children of the Father,” he wrote, “and the same impulse that prompts us to send food to the starving in

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<sup>76</sup> “Peace—and After,” 662-65.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 664.

India or China prompts us to smite the misgovernment that is starving to death hundreds of thousands of helpless Cubans.” Gladden went on, in classic Social Gospel language, to emphasize that faith was not merely an individual matter: “Nations as well as men have relations and obligations to others which they must own and fulfill in the fear of God.” Therefore, because the United States had a “responsibility” toward Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Filipinos, Americans “must invent” some form of “colonial machinery” to ensure that these helpless peoples were properly governed. Although Gladden disavowed “any Quixotic crusade for the righting of all human wrongs,” he foreshadowed John F. Kennedy’s 1960 inaugural address in his call for a vibrant internationalism: “Where they call we shall go; and if they bid us stay, we shall stay; not to burden or to blight the life of any people over whom that banner flies, but to lift them up and lead them on into larger liberty and more abundant life.”<sup>78</sup> Echoing these humanitarian sentiments in the *North American Review* was the Texas Episcopalian Edgar Gardner Murphy. Murphy called upon American clergymen to remind their congregants of the “real reasons” that America was fighting the war. Murphy wrote of the “considerations of humanity and those sentiments of international compassion which have moved us to intervene.” Yellow journals could not be relied upon to emphasize this motivation, so it fell to the clergy, among other institutions, to remind Americans that “this war is a war in the interest of peace.”<sup>79</sup> For Abbott and the other adherents of social Christianity, the world was their parish. Historian Richard M. Gamble’s description of the Social Gospelers on the eve of the Great War holds true for 1898: “Believing the Promised Land to be within reach, the

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<sup>78</sup> Washington Gladden, “The Issues of the War,” *Outlook*, July 16, 1898, 673-75.

<sup>79</sup> Edgar Gardner Murphy, “The Pulpit and the War,” *North American Review* 166 (June 1898): 751-52.

progressive clergy set out to redeem their churches, American society, and the world beyond through the power of an applied Christianity.”<sup>80</sup> Abbott and his like-minded colleagues justified this task through rhetoric that minimized distinctions between sacred and secular realities.

On the question of the Philippines, however, Abbott’s support for colonization met with stark opposition from some of his fellow Social Gospelers as well as from other prominent voices. Episcopalian bishop Henry Codman Potter (1834-1908), for instance, questioned the ability of the United States to effectively govern other races. Potter recounted white America’s historic treatment of blacks, Native Americans, and other oppressed groups, characterizing it as “one long record of cruelty, rapine, lust, and outrage.”<sup>81</sup> Potter was considerably less sanguine than Abbott about America’s aptitude for colonialism, and worked hard to oppose imperialism.<sup>82</sup> In the same vein, liberal New York Presbyterian Henry Van Dyke (1852-1933) argued that to adopt imperialism was to betray the founding principles of the United States. In a passionate Thanksgiving sermon entitled “The American Birthright and the Philippine Pottage,” Van Dyke denounced those, such as Abbott, who would “leave the counsels of Washington and Jefferson far behind us forever.” Unlike the *Outlook* editors, Van Dyke did not believe that colonization was a Social Gospel duty, and he criticized Americans who thought that the best thing to be done for the Filipinos was “to make them our vassals.” Instead, Van Dyke pointed out that Americans had enough social injustice at home on which to focus

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<sup>80</sup> Richard M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003), 47.

<sup>81</sup> Henry Codman Potter, “The Policy of Expansion,” *Harper’s Weekly*, November 5, 1898, 1075.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Bourgeois, *All Things Human: Henry Codman Potter and the Social Gospel in the Episcopal Church* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 136-38.

their attention, and ended by unblushingly asserting that the United States's motto ought to be, simply, "Americans for America."<sup>83</sup> Although Abbott encountered little or no opposition in his other reasons for justifying the war, his advocacy of imperialism touched a raw nerve among some fellow liberal Protestants who were wary of the implications of embarking upon empire.

Abbott's views also encountered opposition from satirists Mark Twain and Finley Peter Dunne, who took particular delight in using humor to puncture holes in the shield of American idealism. Dunne, writing in the voice of the Irish barkeeper Mr. Dooley, parodied the paternalistic language that emanated from imperial apologists such as Abbott: "We can't give ye anny votes, because we haven't more thin enough to go round now; but we'll threat ye th' way a father shud threat his childher if we have to break ivry bone in ye'er bodies."<sup>84</sup> Likewise, a few years after the conclusion of the war, Mark Twain penned his own version of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," which concluded with this priceless stanza:

In a sordid slime harmonious, Greed was born in yonder ditch,  
With a longing in his bosom—for others' goods an itch;  
As Christ died to make men holy, let men die to make us rich—  
Our god is marching on.<sup>85</sup>

The stridency with which Abbott advocated his views on the war and its aftermath is partially attributable to his desire to counteract the demoralizing effect on the American

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<sup>83</sup> Henry Van Dyke, "The American Birthright and the Philippine Pottage," *Independent*, December 1, 1898, 1581, 1583. This last statement was in direct contradiction to the *Outlook's* view, quoted above.

<sup>84</sup> Finley Peter Dunne, *Mr. Dooley in the Hearts of his Countrymen* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1899), 4.

<sup>85</sup> Philip S. Foner, *Mark Twain: Social Critic* (New York: International Publishers, 1958), 278.

public that Dunne and Twain were likely to have. Their criticism of the United States amounted to sacrilege in Abbott's view, and therefore needed to be strongly opposed.

*Whig Theory, Postmillennialism, and the Kingdom of God on Earth*

Finally, Abbott justified the Spanish-American War because of a whiggish and postmillennial view of history. The classic explanation of the Whig view of history was given by the British historian Herbert Butterfield (1900-1979) in 1931. Butterfield argued that historical writing was too often dominated by historians who took the side of Whigs and Protestants in historical struggles and who invariably classified the actions of these groups as "progress." He also criticized historians who, by providing misleading analogies, were forever seeing in the past seeds and germs of the present-day. "The whig historian," wrote Butterfield, "can draw lines through certain events, some such line as that which leads through Martin Luther and a long succession of whigs to modern liberty; and if he is not careful he begins to forget that this line is merely a mental trick of his."<sup>86</sup>

During his deliberations concerning the war with Spain, Abbott frequently employed a Whiggish interpretation of history to justify American involvement. On May 7, Abbott thought that Dewey's resounding victory at Manila, for instance, signaled that the war was simply "the final outcome of a great historic conflict; it is part of the struggle for freedom which has been going on in the world for centuries." Then, with a pointed historical reference, he continued, "it is the final act in the great drama which began when the Armada sailed from England."<sup>87</sup> Another editorial in the same edition expressed

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<sup>86</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931; repr. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1963), 5, 10-12. The Whigs were a political party in Great Britain that generally favored greater liberty and democracy. They were opposed by the Tories, whom they considered reactionary.

<sup>87</sup> "The First Battle," 11.



similar ideas. In accounting for the hostility of many European powers toward the United States, the *Outlook* observed that this antagonism was not surprising since European monarchs were naturally opposed to republican government. In fact, “the present struggle is only another phase of the historic fight between popular government and absolutism.” There was no doubt which side would, in the end, prevail. Even now, the *Outlook* argued, “the extraordinary success of this country...are [*sic*] steadily wearing away the bases of monarchy abroad.”<sup>88</sup>

Abbott gave this view its most coherent and full treatment the following week in an article titled, “The Irrepressible Conflict.” War was “inevitable,” he asserted, because Spain was “blind to the movement of modern history.” In a classic statement of Whig theory, Abbott asserted that “The war now being waged is the end of the campaign which began in the reign of Queen Elizabeth” and that “the fate of America hung in the balance when the Armada sailed.” This struggle between freedom and oppression, democracy and aristocracy, and Protestantism and Roman Catholicism had been going on since 1588, but now, Abbott rejoiced, “the civilization of repression succumbs to the civilization of freedom and progress.” “At last the irrepressible conflict is being fought out,” he concluded, “and when it is ended there will be a lasting peace.”<sup>89</sup> History was moving in a predestined direction, and Spanish forces of reaction were powerless to stop its advance. This, the essence of Whig theory, the *Outlook* consistently expounded during the war.

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<sup>88</sup> “Foreign Opinion,” *Outlook*, May 7, 1898, 14.

<sup>89</sup> “An Irrepressible Conflict,” 113-14.

At the back of this Whiggish view of history—and that which ultimately blurred the boundary between sacred and secular—was Abbott’s subscription to postmillennial eschatology. Although by this period strict postmillennialism was becoming increasingly old-fashioned<sup>90</sup>, the vestiges of this eschatology remained influential. Historian James H. Moorhead has helpfully summarized the postmillennial view as it was expressed in the nineteenth century: “Friends of modern progress, postmillennialists gloried in the advances of their age and expected greater triumphs to come...History would spiral upward by the orderly continuation of the same forces that had promoted revivals, made America a model Republic, and increased material prosperity.”<sup>91</sup> The Kingdom of God, therefore, would not come supernaturally and suddenly; rather, Christians had it in their power to transform society and gradually establish the Kingdom of God on Earth.<sup>92</sup> In 1911, Abbott could speak of “a predetermined end, a divine ideal” to which history was ultimately moving.<sup>93</sup> How was this to be accomplished? In 1901, at the diamond jubilee celebration of the Congregational Home Missionary Society, Abbott spoke on the theme of “The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.” He argued that “it is the function of the Christian Church to establish the Kingdom of God here and now on this earth...to save the world

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<sup>90</sup> James H. Moorhead, *World Without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 18. Other helpful discussions are found in George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 49-51, and Ernest Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and its Present Crisis* (1885; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 218. Some postmillennialists believed that after one thousand years (i.e., the millennium) of earthly bliss, Christ would return to earth. I am not certain whether or not Abbott in 1898 believed that Jesus would literally return to earth.

<sup>93</sup> Lyman Abbott, *America in the Making* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1911), v.

itself by transforming it, translating it, transfusing it with new life.”<sup>94</sup> Building on this theme, he argued that five Christian terms—revelation, redemption, regeneration, atonement, and sacrifice—which were normally seen as having individual connotations, could also be applied to the church’s work in society. He pleaded with his audience to act as though they really believed that Christ’s supplication in the Lord’s Prayer—“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven”—could actually come to pass in the world.<sup>95</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Abbott equated the promotion of the Kingdom of God with the march of freedom, democracy, and progress, terms that were practically interchangeable to the *Outlook* writers. Abbott placed historic and present conflicts between Anglo-Saxon civilization and Spanish civilization in the realm of sacred history: “The campaign revealed in the guns of Santiago began when Anglo-Saxon and Spanish civilizations parted company in the sixteenth century, one working toward the kingdom of God, the other blocking its progress.”<sup>96</sup> Similarly, in a May 29 sermon entitled, “The Duty and Destiny of America,” Abbott took as his text Revelation 11:15: “The kingdoms of this world are becoming the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever.” Although he acknowledged imperfections in the current social scheme, Abbott argued that America was the most Christian nation on earth and that it must continue to promote the Kingdom of God by winning the war. Ultimately, he proclaimed, the great Anglo-Saxon nations ought to unite to promote “conscience,”

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<sup>94</sup> Lyman Abbott, *The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth: A Sermon Preached at the Diamond Jubilee of the Congregational Home Missionary Society, Tremont Temple, Boston, Mass., May 14, 1901* (Boston: Congregational Home Missionary Society, 1901), 5.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-16.

<sup>96</sup> “Thanksgiving for Victories,” 667.

“justice,” “equal chance,” “universal education,” and “free religion.”<sup>97</sup> If they did so, they would have the privilege of standing for “the kingdom of God on earth” and of leading “the procession of nations down the future time till the end shall come.”<sup>98</sup> The blend of Abbott’s Whig theory of history and his postmillennial eschatology, expressed in extremely conflated language, allowed him to support the Spanish-American War. The march of political progress and freedom that the war was bringing would do nothing less than bring in the Kingdom of God.

With these ideas, as in the others, Abbott was saying little that was original or unusual. Samuel McComb, minister of Rutgers Riverside Presbyterian Church, also believed that the present conflict was between two different centuries. “Spain belongs to the sixteenth century,” he told his congregation on May 8, and is “corrupt, moribund, eaten through and through with fraud and chicanery.” The United States, on the other hand, “belongs to the nineteenth century, is the home of freedom and defender of right.” McComb thought that, in fighting the war, America was “ridding the Western hemisphere of the rotten tyranny that has too long cumbered the earth.”<sup>99</sup> These Whiggish sentiments were also echoed at New York’s Metropolitan Tabernacle, where on May 29 the modernist minister S. Parkes Cadman preached to approximately 500 soldiers at a special Sunday evening service. Cadman saw in American history a “Divine law leading up to the present conflict with Spain.” Throughout American history, he maintained, the

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<sup>97</sup> Abbott, “Duty and Destiny of America,” 19. See also, Lyman Abbott, “The Basis of an Anglo-American Understanding,” *North American Review* 166 (May 1898): 513-21. The idea of an Anglo-Saxon alliance between Great Britain and the United States was very popular at the time. See Bertha Ann Reuter, *Anglo-American Relations during the Spanish-American War* (New York: Macmillan, 1924).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>99</sup> “America’s Action Justified,” *New York Times*, May 9, 1898.

Anglo-Saxon spirit had been fighting with the Spanish and French spirit for cultural control of the United States. This conflict did not unduly trouble Cadman, however, for he saw a forthcoming alliance between the United States and Great Britain, which would result in their jointly ruling the world “for the enlightenment of all nations.”<sup>100</sup> For Cadman, McComb, and Abbott, the outcome of History was not in question. Divine forces were at work that made continual progress well-nigh inevitable.

### *Conclusion*

Reflecting on the war seventeen years after its conclusion, Abbott maintained that “I do not think that the history of the world records a nobler war.”<sup>101</sup> To understand the persistence of such thinking, historians must grapple with Abbott’s four reasons for supporting the conflict. First, the United States was God’s chosen nation to bring freedom to the world; moreover, Spain and the Spanish territories were lacking in political freedom and true Christianity (Christian republicanism), and it was therefore a Christian duty to bring these to them (the Social Gospel). Finally, this war for righteousness had to be fought because history was moving in a predestined direction which could, if proper measures were applied, ultimately culminate in the Kingdom of God on Earth. In each of these reasons, Abbott first blurred and then erased distinctions between sacred and secular categories.

The Spanish-American War truly was, in Secretary of State John Hay’s memorable phrase, a “splendid little war.” In fewer than four months the war was over,

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<sup>100</sup> “Metropolitan Tabernacle Filled,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1898.

<sup>101</sup> Lyman Abbott, *Reminiscences* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), 438.

with American battle deaths totaling only 385.<sup>102</sup> In this war America had impressively flexed its muscle on an international scale, an experience that would undoubtedly influence its involvement in another conflict twenty years later. Abbott would also wholeheartedly support the Great War for similarly conflated reasons. As the guns of August sounded in 1914, the *Outlook* would substitute the Kaiser for the Spanish monarchy as the force of evil in the world, and Belgium replaced Cuba as the helpless victim of demonic aggression. This was easily accomplished in Abbott's intellectual world, where every nation and action fit into a pre-arranged black-and-white framework. Christ's warning, "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth," might also have been Abbott's motto. The relative ease of victory in the Spanish-American War minimized the consequences of such thinking for the time being, but from 1917-1918 the casualties and consequences would be much greater.

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<sup>102</sup> Hannah Fischer, Kim Klarman, and Mari-Jana Oboroceanu, *American War and Military Operations Casualties: Lists and Statistics* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 2. Available online at [http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/crsreports/crsdocuments/RL32492\\_05142008.pdf](http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/crsreports/crsdocuments/RL32492_05142008.pdf)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Dying to Make Men Free

*“We have heard the cry of anguish  
From the victims of the Hun,  
And we know our country’s peril  
If the war lord’s will is done—  
We will fight for world-wide freedom  
Till the victory is won,  
For God is marching on.”*

--Henry Van Dyke (1918)<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction*

In the spring of 1910, a group of prominent civic leaders gathered, as they had for the past fifteen years, at the New York lodge of Quaker brothers Albert and Alfred Smiley. Concerned about a wide assortment of social problems, the Smileys annually assembled religious and educational progressives at their Lake Mohonk retreat to discuss possible solutions to such issues as race relations and international arbitration. This latter topic was the subject of the 1910 conference, as its members were concerned about the growing level of armaments among the great powers and hoped to see the establishment of an “International Court of Arbitral Justice.”<sup>2</sup> Speaking about the desirability of such a court, the seventy-four year old *Outlook* editor Lyman Abbott introduced a surprisingly militaristic tone to the proceedings of the conference. Abbott argued that Jesus Christ

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<sup>1</sup> “Adds to ‘Battle Hymn,’” *New York Times*, March 16, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup>, 1910* (Lake Mohonk, NY: Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, 1910), 8.

himself never absolutely forbade the use of force, but instead stood for “peace through righteousness.” Selfish force was to be avoided, Abbott thought, but governments had duties to protect their citizens from harm. Ultimately, Abbott stood for the principle of Peace Through Strength: “We can find nowhere among us any men who stand more positively, more vigorously and more effectively for that peace which is founded on righteousness than the brave and the eloquent representatives of the Army and Navy.”<sup>3</sup>

Abbott’s remarks at the 1910 peace conference foreshadowed his views concerning the Great War. Among American clergy, no one led the charge for preparedness more enthusiastically than the *Outlook* editor, and when the nation finally entered the war in April 1917, Abbott wholeheartedly supported the decision of Congress and President Woodrow Wilson. As he had done in the Civil War and Spanish-American War, Abbott justified the war using rhetoric that conflated sacred and secular categories. Most importantly, Abbott supported the conflict because he saw the United States as a Christ-like nation locked in an irrepressible conflict with demonic Germany over the fate of worldwide democracy. Defending democracy around the world, in turn, became a Social Gospel imperative. This chapter will demonstrate how Abbott conflated the United States and Christ, Germany and Satan, and religion and democracy, and will conclude by evaluating the extent to which Abbott was typical of his generation of liberal Protestants.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-35. I use the term “militarism” to indicate a posture that readily identifies the military actions of one’s country as righteous.



### *American Providentialism*

First, Abbott saw the United States as a messianic nation chosen by God to accomplish His purposes in the war. Drawing upon some of the same ideas he had expressed in the Civil War and Spanish-American War, Abbott made the case that America was nothing less than God's ally. He articulated this position most extensively in an important little volume entitled *The Twentieth Century Crusade* (1918). Comprised mostly of various articles he had written for the *Outlook*, this book laid out in greatest detail Abbott's rationale for the war. In a chapter on "Christ's Peace," Abbott argued that a difference existed between a nation asking God to be on its side in war, and for a nation to consciously fight on God's side. The first position Abbott dismissed as "faith in ourselves" combined with a desire for "a silent partner who will enable us to carry out our plan." Against this idea, Abbott posited the notion that "we want to be the ally of God" and rejoiced that "he wants us to fight his battles with him."<sup>4</sup> How did Abbott know that America was really on God's side? The answer lay in the fact that God had ordained the war and had commanded the United States to slay the powers of evil. At the end of the chapter on "Christ's Peace," Abbott cited Jesus's saying "all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword," and noted that those who drew the sword would be punished "not by pestilence, nor by thunder-bolt, nor by the act of God—but by the sword in the hands of man." Therefore, he concluded, "That sword has been given to us by our Master and we must not sheathe it until the Predatory Potsdam Gang has perished from the face of the earth."<sup>5</sup> This view was simply an updated expression of an idea the

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<sup>4</sup> Lyman Abbott, *The Twentieth Century Crusade* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 79-80.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

*Outlook* had championed a year before. In an article celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther's ninety-five theses, the *Outlook* reflected on the sorry state of German society in the twentieth century. The "docile" German people had been "drugged" by their ministers into believing that theirs was a superior nation. In order to liberate them, the *Outlook* thought, the United States must "take the sword thrust upon us and beat the madness of their masters out!"<sup>6</sup> In Abbott's view, then, the United States had not chosen to wage a war of aggression; instead, God had "thrust" a sword into the nation's hands and was using it to accomplish his purposes. America, accordingly, bore no responsibility for the consequences of the war because it was working as God's servant. It might destroy its enemies with impunity because it was a latter-day Israel, a people favored of God.

Indeed, as the war progressed, Abbott took the biblical framework several steps further by explicitly equating the United States with Christ himself. First, he identified the Allied army with Christ's incarnational mission of peace and deliverance. In an article written for Christmas 1917, the *Outlook* reflected on Mary's Magnificat found in Luke 1:46-56, noting its militant tone and characterizing it as "a song of victorious democracy." The *Outlook* did not believe that the Magnificat's message spoke only of the role of Jesus, however. "To-day who are they that are fulfilling the words of the song of Mary?" the *Outlook* inquired. The editors thought that they saw in the prosecution of the war the strong arm of the Lord smiting His foes and bringing peace to the earth, leading them to conclude that "the armies of the Allies" were the modern-day heirs of the

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<sup>6</sup> "Luther's Quadricentennial," *Outlook*, October 3, 1917, 162.

Mary's messianic prophecy.<sup>7</sup> Abbott and his fellow editors did not stop with this analogy, however, but proceeded to apply other prophecies about Christ's birth to America and its allies. Both "peace on earth" and "good will among men," such as were spoken of by the angels in Luke 2:14, were the mission and goals of the Allied armies. Switching the metaphor slightly but keeping the biblical theme, the *Outlook* also argued in the same article that the Allies were "fit successors" to the sacred heroes of Hebrews 11, who were martyred for their faith. Like the biblical saints, the Allies too "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness...waxed mighty in war, [and] turned to flight armies of aliens," making them "to-day the bearers of the message of Christmas."<sup>8</sup> Finally, the editors concluded the article by returning explicitly to the messianic theme. In their judgment, the Allies were helping to effect an era of world peace that surpassed even what Christ had wrought: "In their victories there is coming to pass that which was said of old: 'The people that walk in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.'"<sup>9</sup> Clearly, in this article, the *Outlook* editors conflated the Allied armies with Jesus's mission and merged sacred and secular concepts.

In addition to identifying the Allies with Christ's incarnation, Abbott and his colleagues connected the work of American and Allied soldiers with Christ's atonement. Not long after the United States declared war on Germany, Abbott took to the pages of the *Outlook* to encourage his fellow Americans in their sufferings. He noted that wartime required those on the home front to make material sacrifices, and he congratulated

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<sup>7</sup> "Bearers of the Message of Christmas," *Outlook*, December 19, 1917, 635.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 635-36.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 636.

children as well as adults for their willingness to forgo accustomed peacetime luxuries. Ultimately, the sacrifices Americans were making reminded Abbott of Christ's suffering on the cross. In a statement remarkable for its self-righteousness (though not for its uniqueness), the *Outlook* editor wrote, "We are learning by experience what it is to bear the sins of the world." Moreover, Abbott thought that sacrificial Americans were learning the "deeper meaning" behind the Apostle Paul's declaration in Colossians 1:24, "I rejoice in my sufferings and fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ."<sup>10</sup> In Abbott's typology, the United States was the innocent, Christ-like nation, suffering for the sins of its enemies.

In addition to bearing the sins of the world, the war reminded Abbott of Christ's propitiation because of American soldiers' willingness to die in the place of their fellowmen. Although Abbott had long before discounted the theory of Jesus's substitutionary atonement as formulated by Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), the idea was still potent enough in the early twentieth century for Abbott to make use of it in a secular context.<sup>11</sup> This idea was explicated most thoroughly in the *Outlook's* Easter reflections of 1918. The *Outlook* editors recounted how Christianity had grown cold throughout history—the Middle Ages had persecuted free thinkers, the eighteenth century Church of England had placed too little emphasis on the religion of the heart, and nineteenth century American evangelicalism was too doctrinally dogmatic. Yet, "to-day," the editors rejoiced, the Christian spirit could be found in abundance at the Western

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<sup>10</sup> Lyman Abbott, "The Great Sacrifice," *Outlook*, August 8, 1917, 540.

<sup>11</sup> Abbott's ideas concerning the atonement can be found in Brown, 145. Abbott's wartime writings may not reflect substitutionary atonement in ways that would satisfy a theologian, but he certainly saw American soldiers dying as substitutes for European victims. On substitutionary atonement, see Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo?* (1099; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1974).

front. With the approaching Good Friday in mind, the *Outlook* editors celebrated the “hundreds of thousands of Americans who, with their faces set toward their Passion, are marching steadfastly toward the field of battle to lay down their lives for their unknown brethren, while we who stay at home follow them with our unuttered prayer, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with them.’ Christ is risen.”<sup>12</sup>

Abbott and the *Outlook* offered similar expressions on other occasions. In *The Twentieth Century Crusade*, Abbott again conflated the sacrifices of Christ with those of American soldiers. Lauding the heroism of the “soldier boys in the trenches,” the aged minister combined several biblical images by querying, “Who of us has better met the tests of hard experience or furnished better evidence that by our mastery of the body by the spirit we have a claim to the tree of life? What is it to wash our robes in the blood of the Lamb but to share his spirit of sacrifice and give our life for the life of the world as he gave his life for the life of the world?”<sup>13</sup> Abbott drew on these images from the book of Revelation to argue that all Allied soldiers who perished in the great crusade would go to heaven when they died. Throwing aside all historic Christian teaching concerning salvation, Abbott acknowledged, “What the Beyond may have for [American soldiers] we do not know and cannot guess.” “But,” he affirmed, “we may be very sure that whatever may have been their faults or their transgressions here below, the righteous Father will not refuse these heroic cross-bearers the crown of righteousness.”<sup>14</sup> The Great War was not simply another war in the record of history’s many wars; instead,

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<sup>12</sup> “Easter,” *Outlook*, March 27, 1918, 476-77.

<sup>13</sup> Abbott, *Twentieth Century Crusade*, 106.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-107. For the prevalence of this view, see Jonathan H. Ebel, *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 95-104.

American doughboys were truly imitating Christ by laying down their lives in a cause that had cosmological significance.

So central was this notion of American soldiers imitating Christ on the cross that Abbott and the *Outlook* editors repeated it several more times in different contexts during the war's duration. When Captain Walton S. Danker, the chaplain of the 104<sup>th</sup> (Massachusetts) regiment, was killed in the line of duty on June 18, 1918, the *Outlook* eulogized him as a "shepherd who laid down his life."<sup>15</sup> This phrase, which would not have been lost on Abbott's biblically literate readers, echoed Jesus' description of himself in John 10:11. Danker could be equated with Christ not because of his religious work as a chaplain, but because of his willingness to serve at the front.

The concrete example of Danker fit very well with a key principle enunciated in the opening pages of the *The Twentieth Century Crusade*. Here, in some of the most conflated language of the war, Abbott used the imagery of atonement and set the stage for what followed in the rest of the book. He began the introduction by discussing the "three crosses" on the hill of Golgotha, in the biblical account of Christ's crucifixion. The first cross, he noted, contained a criminal "who to the end was defiant of God and man" and who possessed an "unrepentant conscience." The second cross held the repentant criminal, to whom Jesus promised forgiveness and the hope of paradise (Luke 23:43), while Christ himself was nailed to the third cross. Extending this image, Abbott maintained that "There are to-day in Europe three crosses and three groups of sufferers." The place of the first criminal was occupied by Germany, a nation that had "broken alike the laws of God and man," including several if not all of the Ten Commandments. The

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<sup>15</sup> "Gallant Captain Danker," *Outlook*, August 14, 1918, 575.

second criminal, in Abbott's modern-day reading, was represented by the Allies who were complicit in some of the evils of the nineteenth century but had since abandoned their sins and repented of them. Abbott included the United States in this category as well, although he spent more time justifying America's recent imperialist exploits and celebrating its social reforms than in condemning American social injustice. The third cross, then, was occupied by those who were not "sinless" but who, nevertheless, were "laying down their lives for crimes in which they had no share and which never had their approval." This class included hospital workers, but was mostly filled with those "sailing the sea and defying torpedo boats," "serving in the trenches," and "flying in the airplanes." These, Abbott wrote, "are laying down their lives for their fellow-men."<sup>16</sup> American soldiers, in this reading, were facing their own Calvary, even as Christ himself had done.

Finally, the language of atonement was used several times in specific reference to Hebrews 9:22: "And almost all things are by the Law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood there is no remission." In a letter to "X.Y.Z.," Abbott acknowledged that his generation of liberals "may have lost something in exact definitions of doctrine," but maintained that the church as a whole had gained the "faith, hope, and love" common to all religions. The war itself demonstrated, in fact, that the modern church had discovered "a wider and diviner meaning in the saying, 'Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.'"<sup>17</sup> The supernatural implications of Jesus's death were not to be taken literally in this interpretation; instead, Allied doughboys too could attain

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<sup>16</sup> Abbott, *Twentieth Century Crusade*, v-viii.

<sup>17</sup> Lyman Abbott, "Knoll Papers: To X.Y.Z.," *Outlook*, December 5, 1917, 554. For another use of the Hebrews imagery, see *The Twentieth Century Crusade*, 60.

messianic status through their sacrifices. Moreover, the sufferings of American soldiers would remit the sins of Germany, creating a spiritually reborn nation in the postwar period. Demonstrating this idea in *The Twentieth Century Crusade*, Abbott quoted Hebrews 9:22 and argued that only the deaths of innocent Americans could overthrow Germanic “falsehood,” “despotism,” and “injustice.”<sup>18</sup> Just as Horace Bushnell had rejoiced fifty years earlier over the baptism of blood provided by the Civil War, so Abbott also saw sacrificial death ultimately bringing life in the Great War. By suffering “for the sins they have never committed,” Abbott implied, the soldiers of the United States would help to create a reborn world.<sup>19</sup> In these paragraphs, all metaphors and analogies were broken down. Sacred and secular categories became so entangled as to be indistinguishable. God and country, the soldier and Christ, the cross and the trenches merged into one indissoluble whole. Ultimately, the Christ-like Americans were not the only group that could be thus amalgamated, however; as the war progressed, Germans would also be conflated with nearly every evil biblical character.

#### *Demonization of Germany*

Before examining this in detail, it is necessary to review the *Outlook's* perspective on the Central Powers. As the war progressed from 1914-18, the attitudes expressed by Abbott's magazine gradually changed from appreciation to hatred. For example, one month after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the *Outlook* was glad that the Austro-Hungarian Empire controlled Bosnia-Herzegovina, because “nowhere in Europe

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<sup>18</sup> Abbott, *Twentieth Century Crusade*, ix

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.



has there been a greater proportionate advance in civilization.”<sup>20</sup> A month later, the *Outlook* could praise the “liberty-loving” German people who had “developed political freedom to a high state.” The Kaiser, the religious journal thought, “sincerely desires to preserve peace in Europe.”<sup>21</sup> Clearly, during the summer of 1914, the *Outlook* expressed a considerable amount of respect for the nations of the Central Powers.

As the war progressed, however, these charitable expressions evaporated. Seven months after the United States entered the war, the *Outlook* printed an article by University of Wisconsin psychologist Joseph Jastrow (1863-1944) entitled “Mania Teutonica.” An industrious Polish immigrant to the United States, Jastrow was no intellectual lightweight. In addition to holding degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and Johns Hopkins University, Jastrow counted philosopher William James among his friends, conducted experiments with scientist Charles S. Peirce, and had even served as president of the American Psychological Association in 1900.<sup>22</sup> Given his intellectual status, then, his opinions were not to be taken lightly. Jastrow began his article by acknowledging that during the first years of the conflict, he had considered the Germans simply to be acting as should be expected in a time of war. However, as the war continued, he admitted, Germany’s position had “ceased to be intelligible to me in that light.” Instead, he had “come to consider the state of the German mind as a state of madness assuming a military form; the madness is far more significant than the military

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<sup>20</sup> “Bosnia’s History,” *Outlook*, July 11, 1914, 578.

<sup>21</sup> “The European War: An Analysis of the International Forces and Causes Involved,” *Outlook*, August 8, 1914, 841. Although he may have been thinking of Germany’s intellectual and theological life, it is not clear exactly why Abbott had this favorable view of the Kaiser and Germany at this point.

<sup>22</sup> William Stewart, *A Biographical Dictionary of Psychologists, Psychiatrists and Psychotherapists* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008), 161. On the experiment with Peirce, see C.S. Peirce and J. Jastrow, *On Small Differences of Sensation* (Washington: G.P.O., 1885).

expression.” Classifying this state of “war madness” as “*Mania Teutonica*,” Jastrow devoted the rest of the article to documenting the ways in which German society as a whole was demonstrating its insanity, and stated his position regarding how the United States ought to respond. A supporter of the war, Jastrow argued that “the patient must be overpowered to be cured.”<sup>23</sup>

Following Jastrow’s cue, similar views concerning Germany’s insanity were forthcoming in the pages of the *Outlook*. As the tide of the war turned in 1918, the *Outlook* editors turned their thoughts to the peace negotiations that would need to be conducted following Germany’s surrender. Only unconditional surrender was permissible, perhaps because the Allies were negotiating with a mentally unbalanced people. The *Outlook* quoted one observer as saying that all Germans were megalomaniacs, while the journal itself no longer distinguished—as it had for most of the war—between the Kaiser and the German people. At this juncture, the *Outlook* argued, “the entire German people are obsessed with the insane delusion that the German nation is divinely ordained to the rule the world.”<sup>24</sup> Remarkably, Jastrow and the *Outlook* editors considered the entire German nation to be literally insane.

Following from this premise of Germanic madness, the language of extermination was also used freely in the *Outlook*’s pages during the war. In August 1917, the *Outlook* again recounted Germany’s diabolical record in the war—its broken promises, its submarine warfare, and its destruction of the *Lusitania*. Illustrating well the mentality of “total war,” the *Outlook* argued that only one solution was possible: “A war with such a

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph Jastrow, “Mania Teutonica: A Psychological Study of the War,” *Outlook*, January 9, 1918, 58-60.

<sup>24</sup> “A Just Peace,” *Outlook*, September 11, 1918, 45.

nation means just one thing—the extermination of the government and the system and the national state of mind that have made such faithlessness possible.” Conditional surrender or negotiated peace terms were unthinkable: “Until that Power is destroyed—not merely subdued, but utterly done away with—there can be no peace.”<sup>25</sup> These sentiments were repeated a year later in even more explicit terms by Pamela Victor Pike, a writer to the *Outlook*. Her letter was brief, but pointed:

After this war there should be no Germany, no Germans. Allow every man and woman the right to become voluntarily any nationality preferred; legalize the right, and make it easy for any one to become French, Italian, British, American, *Hottentot*—anything! Then forever recognize them and their descendants by and according to that choice. I see no necessary embarrassment—to the loyalist.<sup>26</sup>

In this way of thinking, Germans were so evil that the nation itself must be completely destroyed and its national and ethnic identity erased.

Finally, Abbott himself expressed his disdain for Germany in an infamous article, “To Love is to Hate.” The *Outlook* editor was outraged that the Archbishop of York had encouraged his auditors at a Good Friday service to follow the example of Christ and forgive their enemies, who did not know what they were doing. On the contrary, Abbott argued, he might forgive the German masses, but he refused to forgive the Kaiser and the Predatory Potsdam Gang because “they do know what they do.” Because Christians are filled with the love of God, Abbott argued, they must necessarily hate God’s enemies. True, Christ commanded his followers to love their enemies, “but he nowhere commands us to love God’s enemies or those who treat his children with malignant cruelty.” Because Germany had not injured him personally, he was free to hate its rulers with a

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<sup>25</sup> “No Peace with a Hohenzollernized Germany,” *Outlook*, August 15, 1917, 575-76.

<sup>26</sup> Pamela Victor Pike, “Should Germany be Abolished?” *Outlook*, August 28, 1918, 639.

righteous hatred: “I hate it because it is a robber, a murderer, a destroyer of homes, a pillager of churches, a violator of women. I do well to hate it.” What devout Christians ought to pray for, Abbott maintained, was the defeat of the Central Powers so that Germans would “hate themselves as the civilized world now hates them.” Jesus, he reminded his readers, offered no words of hope to the unrepentant criminal on the cross.<sup>27</sup> In the language of insanity, extermination, and hatred, the vitriolic rhetoric expressed in the pages of the *Outlook* toward Germany in World War I surpassed even that expressed toward the South in the Civil War or the Spanish in the Spanish-American War.

What possibly could have accounted for this language of madness, extermination, and hatred? One explanation lies in the ways in which the *Outlook* conflated secular and religious categories in its depiction of the Kaiser and Germany. First, the German nation was identified with Satan. In January 1918, the *Outlook* printed a letter from “A Pastor of a City Congregation.” This writer began his letter by noting that “the German as I have known him in the church is not a spiritual-minded person.” Not ashamed of having thus stereotyped an entire ethnic group, the pastor went on to argue that the vast majority of his German-descended congregation was disloyal. Yet, this fiery parson reserved his most conflated rhetoric for the German nation itself: “Patriotism for a country such as ours I somehow cannot disassociate from my religion. My business is to fight the devil, and I have never met him so clearly in the open as in this war.”<sup>28</sup> Abbott himself also characterized Germany as Satanic. In a use of hellfire imagery that was remarkable for the normally irenic and liberal Abbott, the *Outlook* editor argued in *The Twentieth*

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<sup>27</sup> Lyman Abbott, “To Love is to Hate,” *Outlook*, May 15, 1918, 99-100.

<sup>28</sup> The Pastor of a City Congregation, “German Propaganda in the Church,” *Outlook*, January 30, 1918, 180-81.

*Century Crusade* that peace could not be attained in the world until the Kaiser and his ilk were “converted to a God of truth and goodness, or are utterly destroyed with unquenchable fire.” Abbott made the comparison even more explicit a few lines later. Discussing the prophecy recorded in Genesis 3, in which God promises that Christ shall crush the head of Satan, Abbott wrote, “Now the head of the serpent is erect, its forked tongue is running out, its eyes red with wrath, its breath is very poisonous. We have a difficult task to get our heel on the head but when we do we must grind it to powder.”<sup>29</sup> The Germans were in no way a worthy enemy; instead, they were the very incarnation of the devil himself.

Perhaps in such a biblically literate culture it was not surprising that other scriptural characters would also be conflated with Germany. A rapid-fire recounting of how this was done should suffice to demonstrate the prevalence of this practice. As the Allies began to make peace in the fall of 1918, the *Outlook* editors argued that Germany should not be permitted to become a member of the League of Nations. To do so, they argued, would be to construct “a league of Apostles with Caiaphas to promote Christianity.”<sup>30</sup> Abbott and his colleagues also applauded when S. De Lancey Townsend, the rector of the Protestant Episcopal Church of All Angels, New York City, connected that other Christ-killer, Pontius Pilate, with the Germans. In a Palm Sunday 1918 message, Townsend told his parishioners that Pilate was only impressed with military power. Pilate could not understand Jesus because “Pilate was a product of a military *Kultur*,” which only respected brute force. Lest his possibly drowsy congregation miss

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<sup>29</sup> Abbott, *Twentieth Century Crusade*, 90.

<sup>30</sup> “Justice to Germany,” *Outlook*, October 23, 1918, 284. On Caiaphas, see Matthew 26:2-4.

the point, Townsend repeated emphatically, "Pilate was a Prussian." "To the Prussian," Townsend insisted, "truth and goodness rest for their authority upon the power to 'crucify.'" To this message, the *Outlook* appended that "it is also what we would say" to those who doubted the efficacy of the war.<sup>31</sup> Abbott also compared the Germans to the Syrian civilization that had oppressed Israel in the Old Testament. "The civilization of the Syrians," the *Outlook* thought, was not much better than the civilization of the Germans." Drawing on themes of providentialism and chosen-ness, the editors then recounted a story found in 2 Kings 13:15-19 in which God helped Israel smite the Syrians but then rebuked the King of Israel for his lack of enthusiasm for the job. The editors commented, "We recommend this narrative to our ministerial readers. It furnishes an appropriate text for the times."<sup>32</sup>

In directly addressing the war's doubters and its "ministerial readers," perhaps the *Outlook* was responding to several vocal pacifists who were to be found among the liberal clergy. Congregationalist Charles E. Jefferson (1860-1937), for instance, refused to join the martial chorus, arguing that "The church cannot survive if militarism is to rule."<sup>33</sup> Likewise, the Unitarian John Haynes Holmes (1879-1964), praised the merits of pacifism from his pulpit at the Church of the Messiah in New York.<sup>34</sup> Even as respected

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<sup>31</sup> "In Hoc Signo Vincas," *Outlook*, April 10, 1918, 574.

<sup>32</sup> "A Just Peace," 45. It is possible that one *Outlook* correspondent, who went by the initials "C.L.W." even thought that Germany could be the beast mentioned in Daniel 7 and Revelation 13. In a statement that unfortunately has little context, the author wrote that American soldiers "have seen the beast's head raised again, and they know why they are in France." C.L.W., "The Beast's Head," *Outlook*, May 15, 1918, 102.

<sup>33</sup> Charles E. Jefferson, *Christianity and International Peace: Six Lectures at Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa, in February 1915, on the George A. Gates Memorial Foundation* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1915), 36.

<sup>34</sup> Richard M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003), 126. See John Haynes Holmes, *New*

a member of the Social Gospel clergy as Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) refused to support American participation in the war. “The Great War of 1914,” Rauschenbusch wrote, “has been the most extensive demonstration of the collapse of love which any of us wants to see.”<sup>35</sup> Although, as we will see, such perspectives never came close to gaining a majority of adherents among the liberal clergy, it is reasonable to attribute Abbott’s heated rhetoric in part to his desire to drown out the voices of the clerical pacifists.

Finally, Abbott and the *Outlook* frequently characterized the Germans as pagans. On May 2, 1917, Abbott editorialized on “The Duty of Christ’s Church Today.” One of the duties, Abbott thought, was to stand for Christian civilization against Germany’s paganism. To demonstrate that the Germans were not even Christians, Abbott reprinted a German poem (translated into English) that was “said to have enjoyed a large circulation in Germany.” This poem, entitled, “The German God,” claimed that the Germans worshipped Odin, a Norse war god: “Odin, the ancient vagabond of the clouds / the Odin of our fathers, it is he and no other.” Perhaps taking this poem a little too literally, Abbott stated that the present contest was one “between Christianity and paganism” and urged his readers to “transform” the “pagan world” into the Kingdom of God.<sup>36</sup> The *Outlook* reiterated this theme a month later, confidently declaring this time that “Odin is

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*Wars for Old: Being a Statement of Radical Pacifism in Terms of Force versus Non-Resistance, With Special Reference to the Problems and Facts of the Great War*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead, & co., 1917).

<sup>35</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Woman’s Press, 1917), 26.

<sup>36</sup> Lyman Abbott, “The Duty of Christ’s Church Today,” *Outlook*, May 2, 1917, 14.

no match for Christ.”<sup>37</sup> Once again implying that the Germans had completely renounced Christianity, the *Outlook* remarked that the only religion left for them was paganism: “[Prussianism] has endeavored to drive love from the pulpit, and for loyal love for a heavenly Father, God of love, it has sought to substitute abject fear of Odin, god of force.”<sup>38</sup> Only in the light of such conflated rhetoric does the language of insanity, extermination, and hatred make sense. Although one might settle for a draw with a worthy opponent, no self-respecting Christian nation could compromise with Satan, Pontius Pilate, or Odin. By identifying his opponents with the forces of evil, Abbott conflated sacred and secular categories.

### *Christian Republicanism*

Although at one level, Abbott and the *Outlook* simply wanted to demonize their opponents and beatify their nation, there was another layer to Abbott’s characterization of the Germans as pagans and the Americans as Christ-like. To understand this, we must look to Abbott’s acceptance of Christian republicanism. One implication of Christian republicanism that Abbott extensively articulated was the assumption that political liberalism and true Christianity are connected.<sup>39</sup> He gave this sentiment clearest voice in the May 1917 article, “The Duty of Christ’s Church To-day.” Abbott began by quoting the following passage from Matthew 20:25-28, identifying it as one of the cornerstones of the Kingdom of God:

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon

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<sup>37</sup> “Unseen Forces in the World War,” *Outlook*, June 6, 1917, 216.

<sup>38</sup> “The Latest Manifestation of Prussianism,” *Outlook*, June 5, 1918, 216.

<sup>39</sup> On political liberalism, see Chapter Three, n.37.



them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.<sup>40</sup>

For Abbott, this passage taught that democracy was the divinely ordained form of government.<sup>41</sup> After quoting these verses, Abbott argued, “In the Kingdom of God the rich serve the poor, the strong serve the weak, the wise serve the ignorant. This is the divine order; and the Son of God himself illustrates this order by his own life and death.”<sup>42</sup>

With this principle of Christian republicanism in mind, Abbott asserted repeatedly that Christianity and democracy were interchangeable terms. In September 1917, for instance, Abbott wrote simply, “[D]emocracy is political Christianity.”<sup>43</sup> In addition, although he disavowed the idea that the United States was perfectly Christian in all of its actions, Abbott maintained that “in so far as it has adopted in its industrial and political organizations the principle that the great men should be the servants of the common people, it is, however unconsciously, a disciple of Jesus Christ.”<sup>44</sup> Most explicitly, Abbott wrote tersely in the *The Twentieth Century Crusade*, “Democracy is not a mere form of government. It is a religious faith.”<sup>45</sup> With such precepts in mind, Abbott could

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<sup>40</sup> Abbott, “The Duty of Christ’s Church,” 13.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Lyman Abbott, “Knoll Papers: Some Commonplaces of Christianity,” *Outlook*, September 19, 1917, 92. Abbott had explicated these ideas more thoroughly in lectures given at the Lowell Institute, Boston and the Brooklyn Institute, New York, in 1901 and at Yale University in 1911. See *The Rights of Man: A Study in Twentieth Century Problems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1901), 336-370; and *America in the Making* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1911), 194-228.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>45</sup> Abbott, *Twentieth Century Crusade*, 64.

then instruct his fellow ministers during the war, in all seriousness, to “deliver patriotic addresses on Sunday, attach a text, and call them sermons.”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, if democracy was not substantively different from true religion, then the Gettysburg Address might be just as fitting as a biblical passage for a Sunday morning sermon.

These views could sometimes lead him to odd interpretations of history. The *Outlook* considered Martin Luther, for instance, to be “the unconscious herald of our democracy.” This analysis might have surprised Luther, whose greatest political loyalty was to the elector of Saxony. It should not surprise *us*, however, for Abbott saw in (what he perceived to be) Luther’s advocacy of every person’s right to interpret the Scriptures an “equalizing of the humblest with the highest” which, as we have seen, he equated with political democracy.<sup>47</sup> Even more idiosyncratic was the *Outlook’s* interpretation of the Old Testament. In a rather novel explanation of covenantal theology, the *Outlook* editors argued that “Jehovah was the king of the Jews, but he did not impose his authority upon the Jews. They elected him their king.” This interpretation had to be maintained because just a few lines earlier, the editors had insisted that God would not suddenly destroy the Germans because “He does not rule in that fashion. He is a democratic God.”<sup>48</sup> Clearly, through statements such as these, Abbott equated democracy with Christianity, radically merging sacred and secular categories.

A necessary corollary of this view was that paganism and autocracy were also connected. After quoting the Matthew 20 passage in “The Duty of Christ’s Church To-

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<sup>46</sup> Abbott, “The Duty of Christ’s Church,” 13.

<sup>47</sup> “Luther’s Quadricentennial,” 162.

<sup>48</sup> “If God Reigns,” *Outlook*, June 13, 1917, 251. Abbott had first advanced this idea in *The Evolution of Christianity* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), 178.

Day,” Abbott declared, “In paganism the poor serve the rich, the weak serve the strong, the ignorant serve the wise.” Thus, “The ideal of autocracy is organized paganism.”<sup>49</sup> Again, he explained in September 1917, “Autocracy is political paganism.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, in addition to its worship of Odin, the German military was “a pagan power” and its methods “characteristically pagan methods” because it did not provide democracy for its people. Those who denied voting rights to their people were not just mistaken but instead were willfully aligning themselves in opposition to “Christ’s ideal of government.”<sup>51</sup> Just as democracy and Christianity were inextricably bound together, so paganism and autocracy could not be disentangled. These Christian republican views make it even easier to understand how Abbott could justify equating Christ with the United States and paganism with Germany. In addition to its sacrificial imitation of Christ, the United States was unquestionably a democracy and Germany unquestionably an autocracy. American soldiers could, therefore, provide efficacious atonement for the sins of the world simply because they stood for political freedom. The fact that the Germans ostensibly worshipped Odin was only one reason they were demonized; the other was that the Kaiser ruled as an autocrat, oppressing his people. The latter, no less than the former, made him an enemy of Christianity.

### *The Social Gospel*

Liberating Germany and spreading democracy to war-torn Europe, then, became a Social Gospel imperative for Abbott and the *Outlook*. One of the theological

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<sup>49</sup> Abbott, “The Duty of Christ’s Church,” 13.

<sup>50</sup> Abbott, “Some Commonplaces of Christianity,” 92.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

assumptions that undergirded the program of social Christianity—and that was endlessly repeated by its adherents—was the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man. In his autobiography, *Reminiscences* (1915), Abbott celebrated the fact that the modern world had dispensed with the idea of “God as a King” and had replaced that notion with “God as a Father.” Moreover, he was glad to report, people no longer viewed salvation as “the rescue of the elect from a lost world”; instead, the modern age had accepted “the conception of the transformation of the world itself into a human Brotherhood.”<sup>52</sup> During the war, Abbott reiterated this principle, remarking that “Jesus Christ recognized the Fatherhood of God and...deduced from it, the Brotherhood of Man.”<sup>53</sup>

Another key tenet of the Social Gospel was that biblical principles should apply to social structures and nations as well as individuals. Accordingly, Abbott argued in the pages of the *Outlook* that Christ’s teachings on church discipline (see Matthew 18:15-17) should be applied to nations in matters of international arbitration. To those who objected that these teachings were intended only for individuals, Abbott had a ready answer: “the same principles apply to the settlement of disputes between organizations as between individuals.”<sup>54</sup> Similarly, in the *The Twentieth Century Crusade*, Abbott answered those who believed that even during wartime ministers should confine themselves to preaching “the Old Gospel.” This “Old Gospel” would presumably comprise a more traditionally evangelical reading of the Bible than the modernist ideas

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<sup>52</sup> Lyman Abbott, *Reminiscences* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), viii. The Social Gospel is defined more extensively in Chapter One, pages 5-8.

<sup>53</sup> Abbott, *The Twentieth Century Crusade*, 63.

<sup>54</sup> Lyman Abbott, “Knoll Papers: Christ’s League to Enforce Peace,” *Outlook*, September 26, 1917, 122-23. Reinhold Neibuhr would challenge this argument in *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932).

fashionable in the liberal pulpits. Although Abbott did not normally preach much of anything that could be regarded as “old,” he maintained that this “Old Gospel” was indeed relevant to world circumstances. Quoting Jesus’s description of his mission of deliverance (Luke 4:16-21), Abbott argued that Christians were called to imitate their Master in this duty as well. Therefore, when Belgium and France were victims of Germanic aggression, Christianity demanded that the United States act to liberate these latter-day captives. Referencing the poison gas developed by Germany, Abbott queried, “How can we allow that process to go on and pretend to fulfill our divine mission to give sight to the blind?”<sup>55</sup> In social Christianity, nations as well as individuals were called to imitate Christ.

With this theological rationale established, Abbott went on to argue that the war would bring social salvation to Europe. On the front page of the June 6, 1917 issue of the *Outlook*, the journal carried an editorial urging its readers to buy Liberty Bonds. The *Outlook* characterized the war as “the greatest philanthropic enterprise in the history of the world,” and promised that it would bring “salvation” to “nations and races.” Buying the bonds would help to ensure the success of this effort.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, in August, Abbott made one of his most emotional appeals of the war. In an editorial entitled, “The Call of the Nation,” the eighty-one year old editor described the present conflict as “the greatest task which has ever been given to men” and expressed the wish to “shoulder a rifle or fly an airplane” in the service of his country. In his praise of the soldiers who epitomized the “spirit of heroism and self-sacrifice,” Abbott brilliantly summarized the Social Gospel

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<sup>55</sup> Abbott, *The Twentieth Century Crusade*, 44-45.

<sup>56</sup> “Bondholders of Democracy,” *Outlook*, June 6, 1917, 209.

nature of the war. Because the war would ultimately end “in a world freedom and world peace,” he believed the lines of the Battle Hymn of the Republic were especially apropos: “As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free.”<sup>57</sup> In this reading of the war, the United States was not simply defending its own interests, but was actually helping to usher in a new era of world democracy—something God surely endorsed. To fight the war, therefore, was to imitate the Master and practice “applied Christianity.”

This warlike Social Gospel even had the power to save Germany. Abbott acknowledged that the war would cause “many German children” to become “orphans” and German wives, “widows.” However, the war would ultimately have a beneficent purpose even for Prussia: “It is also true that we are fighting to emancipate Germany no less than to emancipate Belgium, France and Italy. We are going to make the whole world safe for the Brotherhood of Man—Germany no less than the countries which German autocracy has attacked.”<sup>58</sup> To illustrate this view, Abbott recounted the biblical story in which Jesus exorcised a demon from a boy (Luke 9:37-43). After Jesus expelled the demon, but before the boy was completely restored, “the boy became as one dead; in so much that the more part said, He is dead.” Abbott wrote that the cleansing that would come to Germany as a result of the war might also involve pain, but would ultimately be salvific: “This war must not end until the demon of lawless self-conceit and self-will is driven out of the German nation, though the nation be left as one dead by the very act which saves its people from the madness which possesses them.”<sup>59</sup> Although salvation might be of a social or political nature rather than of a supernatural sort in Abbott’s

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<sup>57</sup> Lyman Abbott, “The Call of the Nation,” *Outlook*, August 1, 1917, 505.

<sup>58</sup> Abbott, *The Twentieth Century Crusade*, 86-87.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

Christian republican scheme, it was salvation nonetheless. Consequently, Abbott supported the war because the Social Gospel demanded that nations act to establish the Brotherhood of Man and spread freedom throughout the world. As we shall see, he was hardly alone in this mission.

### *Historiography*

The majority of American liberal Protestant clergy shared Abbott's enthusiasm for the war as well as his conflated language. Several important studies have helped to illuminate the roles of religious individuals in the Great War. In 1933, University of Pennsylvania sociologist Ray H. Abrams, who had lived through the war, published his groundbreaking study *Preachers Present Arms*. Abrams interpreted the churches' involvement in the war through the framework of sociology, arguing that the churches were both victims and agents of social control. That is, clergymen helped to stifle dissent about the war even as they themselves felt pressure from the federal government to do their part to ensure American victory.<sup>60</sup> Although Abrams's thesis is reductionist, modern historians are still indebted to this rich collection of quotations and documents. Fifty-two years after Abrams published *Preachers Present Arms*, historian John F. Piper, Jr. re-opened the question of American religion during World War I. Piper sought to revise Abrams's view by highlighting the positive and responsible role played by such organizations as the Federal Council of Churches and the National Catholic War Council. By staking out a middle ground between irresponsible militants and idealistic pacifists, Piper argued, mainstream Protestants and Catholics fulfilled their patriotic duty while

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<sup>60</sup> Ray H. Abrams, *Preachers Present Arms* (New York: Round Table Press, 1933), xvi.

maintaining the *gravitas* befitting churchmen.<sup>61</sup> In 2003, historian Richard M. Gamble conducted the most recent analysis of elite religious liberals and the war. Revising both Abrams and Piper, Gamble argued that Social Gospel Protestants such as Abbott embraced the war wholeheartedly because they saw in it a chance to implement the Kingdom of God—a vision for which they had been longing throughout the past decades. Their rhetoric, however, was neither moderate nor responsible, but represented the apotheosis of Victorian optimism, which would be ridiculed by the next generation of chastened neo-orthodox church leaders.<sup>62</sup>

The present study, in analyzing Abbott’s ideological motivations for the war, is most closely aligned with Gamble’s interpretation. Religious progressives such as Abbott embraced the war because they saw it as both a duty and an opportunity—not primarily, as Abrams would have it, because they felt the strong hand of the federal government bearing down on them. The *Outlook*, for one, frequently criticized President Woodrow Wilson and advocated preparedness long before the United States entered the war.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, when religious liberals supported the war, their rhetoric was far from moderate and responsible. Instead, just as Abbott did, they conflated sacred and secular

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<sup>61</sup> John F. Piper, Jr., *The American Churches in World War I* (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 1985). See also, Piper, “The American Churches in World War I,” *Journal of American Religion* 38 (June 1970): 147-55.

<sup>62</sup> See Gamble, 46-47, 251-52. For other studies of religion and the Great War, which do not focus on elite Protestants, see Michael Williams, *American Catholics in the War: National Catholic War Council, 1917-1921* (New York: Macmillan, 1921); and Jonathan H. Ebel, *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> For example, “The President on National Defense,” *Outlook*, December 16, 1914, 854; “What of the Navy?” *Outlook*, December 16, 1914, 854-55; Lindley M. Garrison, “America Unready,” *Outlook*, December 30, 1914, 997-99; “The Army for a Democracy,” *Outlook*, December 30, 1914, 986-88; “The Lusitania Massacre,” *Outlook*, May 19, 1915, 103-05; “The President and Germany,” *Outlook*, April 26, 1916, 931-32; “The Convention of the Navy League,” *Outlook*, April 26, 1916, 936-37; and “Congress and Universal Military Training,” *Outlook*, April 11, 1917, 638.



categories and scrambled to outdo each other in the vociferousness of their support for the war.

### *Response of Liberal Protestantism*

First, the progressive clergy as a whole pictured Christ garbed in American khaki. Harold Bell Wright, a novelist, Social Gospel advocate, and erstwhile minister in the Disciples of Christ denomination, argued that “a thirty-centimeter gun may voice the edict of God as truly as the notes of a cooing dove....The sword of America is the sword of Jesus.”<sup>64</sup> Unitarian editor Albert C. Dieffenbach provided an even more graphic description of Jesus at the front lines:

There is not an opportunity to deal death to the enemy that [Jesus] would shirk from or delay in seizing! He would take bayonet and grenade and bomb and rifle and do the work of deadliness against that which is the most deadly enemy of his Father’s kingdom in a thousand years....That is the inexorable truth about Jesus Christ and this war; and we rejoice to say it.<sup>65</sup>

Likewise, the Reverend John Elliott Wishart, of Xenia, Ohio, took to the pages of the liberal journal *Bibliotheca Sacra* to make the case for “The Christian Attitude Toward War.” Although Wishart admitted that “War is essentially an evil,” he believed that all wars could not be classified as un-Christian.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, in the present conflict, Wishart found nothing less than “the struggle of light against darkness...of the kingdom of God against the kingdom of this world, of Christ against Belial.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> H.B. Wright, “Sword of Jesus,” *American Magazine* 85 (Feb. 1918): 9.

<sup>65</sup> Albert C. Dieffenbach, “Christ the Combatant,” *Christian Register*, August 15, 1918, 775. Because he had such an obviously Germanic surname, one wonders the extent to which Dieffenbach felt pressure to make his loyalties clear.

<sup>66</sup> John Elliott Wishart, “The Christian Attitude Toward War,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 75 (April 1918): 194.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

In 1918, Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969), who would go on to become the liberal standard-bearer in the mid-twentieth century, lent his pen to the cause of the war and identified the allied struggle with Christ and the Kingdom of God. Although Fosdick would eventually become a pacifist, his *Challenge of the Present Crisis* (1918), written at the height of the war, was quite militaristic. Fosdick's conclusion to the book was most potent, calling all slackers and shirkers to their rightful duty. He recounted the story of a French mother who had written to one of her sons who was living abroad. The mother's other two sons had both been killed in the war, but nevertheless she pleaded with this remaining son to come to the aid of his beleaguered country, essentially threatening to disown him if he continued his cowardly course. Fosdick applied this story to Americans, accusing reluctant young men of possessing a "callous soul," which could not "hear a voice, whose call a man must answer, or else lose his soul." Fosdick concluded his book by identifying the Allies with Christ: "Your country needs *you*. The Kingdom of God on earth needs *you*. The Cause of Christ is hard bested and righteousness is having a heavy battle in the earth—they need *you*."<sup>68</sup>

Fosdick repeated some of these ideas in a 1919 article for the *Atlantic Monthly*. After making a visit to France, he reported on the spiritual state of the American troops as he had encountered them in the trenches. The popular Baptist minister acknowledged that religion was having a "hard struggle" at the front, and that nothing approaching a religious revival was occurring.<sup>69</sup> This did not unduly trouble Fosdick, however, for he found that the doughboys practiced a manly, self-sacrificing religion that was superior to

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<sup>68</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Challenge of the Present Crisis* (New York: Association Press, 1918), 98-99. Italics in the original.

<sup>69</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, "The Trenches and the Church at Home," *Atlantic Monthly* 123 (Jan. 1919): 22.

the old, doctrinally-centered variety that only taught people how to get to heaven. Fosdick pled with the American churches to discard their old denominational rivalries and doctrinal formulas in favor of this outwardly-focused faith. In doing so, he quoted with approval one American soldier who seemingly identified the war with Christ's cross: "‘I used to wonder at the Cross,’ an American soldier in France said to me; ‘not now! I think that Jesus was a lucky man to have a chance to die for a great cause.’"<sup>70</sup> This soldier (and Fosdick) evidently saw both Christ's death and the Great War simply as two examples of a "great cause." Through such rhetoric, Abbott's theological allies also conflated sacred and secular categories in their support for the war.

In addition to identifying America with Christ, the progressive clergy also demonized Germany just as Abbott did. The most notorious theologically liberal German-baiter of the era was in fact none other than Abbott's successor at Plymouth Church, the Congregationalist Newell Dwight Hillis (1858-1929). After touring Europe in July 1917, Hillis returned to the United States with a fierce hatred for Germany. Claiming to have verified ten thousand atrocities inflicted by Germans, Hillis asked, "Shall this foul creature that is in the German saddle, with hoofs of fire, trample down all the sweet growths in the garden of God[?]"<sup>71</sup> Hillis quickly followed up his book *German Atrocities* (1918) with another work, this one entitled *The Blot on the Kaiser's Scutcheon* (1918). Never one to mince words, Hillis provided his book with chapter titles such as "The Arch-Criminal," "The Judas among Nations," "The Black Soul of the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>71</sup> Gamble, 161-62; "Dr. Hillis Attacks Britain's Enemies," *New York Times*, September 24, 1917. On the atrocities, see Newell Dwight Hillis, *German Atrocities: Their Nature and Philosophy* (New York: Fleming H. Revel, 1918).

Hun,” and—most chillingly—“Must German Men Be Exterminated?”<sup>72</sup> Hillis couched his argument for German extermination by arguing that respectable citizens such as philanthropists, scholars, and statesmen were now considering this question. Just as previous cultures had conspired to abolish rattlesnakes, yellow fever, wolves, and the Black Plague, Hillis reasoned, modern civilization could no longer tolerate Germans.<sup>73</sup> Men as old as the Roman historian Tacitus had known that Germans were barbarians, and now it was becoming unmistakably clear that “The leopard has not changed its spots.”<sup>74</sup> Therefore, Hillis wrote, he was examining a plan—ostensibly being considered by surgeons—to forcibly sterilize “ten million German soldiers” and to segregate “their women” so that “this awful cancer” could be “cut clean out of the body of society.”<sup>75</sup> Hillis did not directly advocate this plan. He did not need to. His accounts of atrocities spoke for themselves and left no doubt where he stood on the question. In his view, German civilization was no more valuable than rattlesnakes or yellow fever; it undoubtedly must be abolished.

Once again, Hillis’s views might be explained by the way in which the liberal clergy conflated Germany with the devil and paganism. A letter to the liberal Methodist *Christian Advocate*, for instance, rehearsed the familiar trope of Germany as devilish. This letter writer, George D. Beattys from Westfield, New Jersey, was responding to an earlier editorial that advocated pacifism. Whereas the first writer had identified war with

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<sup>72</sup> Newell Dwight Hillis, *The Blot on the Kaiser’s ‘Scutcheon* (New York: Fleming H. Revel, 1918).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

“The Furies of the Pit...doing their diabolical work of desolation in all the world,” Beattys applied that characterization to the “arrogant, tyrannous, Prussian military autocracy.” The “Prussian war lords,” moreover, were “Godless” and practiced “unrighteousness.”<sup>76</sup> Beattys was not alone in thinking this way. Shailer Mathews (1863-1941), dean of the divinity school at the University of Chicago, was one of the most theologically learned supporters of the war. In May 1918, Mathews delivered a series of lectures at the University of North Carolina that were then published as *Patriotism and Religion*. In this work, Mathews argued that the German Kaiser and his cohorts prayed to someone different than the Christian God when they asked for divine aid.<sup>77</sup> Because Germans connected their God to an earthly “sovereign’s will” and the divine right of kings, the end result was inevitably “massacre, deportation, [and] terrorization.” Echoing the themes of German paganism expressed by the *Outlook*, Mathews asserted that “The continuity of history between the German God and the ancient tribal god is unbroken.” In a reference to an obscure biblical passage (2 Kings 19:1-37), Mathews again associated Germany with paganism: “German patriotism is as truly identified with official German religion as was the pride of Sennacherib with the praise of Marduk.”<sup>78</sup> Such conflated references dehumanized the German enemy and helped to make Hillis’s vision of a de-Germanized world thinkable.

That the war must be fought for Social Gospel reasons was also a common theme of liberal Protestantism during the war. First, Mathews sounded the note of social

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<sup>76</sup> George D. Beattys, “Letters to the Editor: ‘When Will the Christ be Born?’” *Christian Advocate*, January 3, 1918, 19.

<sup>77</sup> Shailer Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 16.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

Christianity in his support for the war effort. Confounding sacred and secular categories, Mathews argued in *Patriotism and Religion* that the nature of one's religion and the nature of one's patriotism were practically inseparable. Consequently, "two types of patriotism and two types of religion" were presently at war. On one side was arrayed "a religion which is the servant of the state" while on the other side was "a social order that is already finding its way into a religion that promises light and freedom for the human soul." What was ultimately at stake, Mathews insisted, was "a new future for democracy and a religion worthy of democracy." Victory would ensure the abolition of Germanic reactionary religion. In its place, a true religion, which worships "God who is a Father...rather than a God of battles and conquest" would be instituted.<sup>79</sup> Thus, the war became a Social Gospel imperative because it promised to bring both true freedom and true religion to Europe.

George Beattys, the writer to the *Christian Advocate*, agreed with Mathews's exposition of social Christianity. In his view, history had never produced such an extraordinary example of "men and women dedicated to the brotherhood of man." "Countless thousands," he exulted, "are sacrificing their lives for a really Christian ideal—that of human liberty and justice and the principles that Christ exemplifies."<sup>80</sup> Fosdick also took up similar themes in his *Atlantic Monthly* article. He rejoiced that American soldiers had not gone to France "to save their souls." Rather, "They forgot themselves, and went to France to save the world. They are learning that innermost salvation that never comes except through social sacrifice; they have found their lives by

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>80</sup> Beattys, 19.

losing them in a cause.”<sup>81</sup> For Fosdick, the war would bring redemption not only to Europe but to the lives of American soldiers as well. Perhaps V.G.A. Tressler, the president of the General Synod of the Lutheran Church in the U.S.A., put the sentiment most explicitly: “In this Liberty Loan we are in no small measure achieving the aspirations of this government and the commands of the Gospel.”<sup>82</sup> In the liberal Protestant mind as a whole, the Great War was achieving social salvation for all of Europe. The pacific voices of Charles Jefferson, John Haynes Holmes, and Walter Rauschenbusch were no match for the militant liberals. Overall, the theological modernists echoed Abbott’s characterization of American soldiers as Christ-like and freely demonized Germany. In doing so, they consistently conflated sacred and secular categories. Therefore, Abbott was not exceptional in his use of conflated rhetoric, but was part and parcel of early twentieth century liberal Protestantism.

### *Conclusion*

With the war over in November 1918, Abbott turned his attention to the question of how peace could best be secured. Although he disliked Woodrow Wilson and did not approve of the “undemocratic methods” that the president had used at the Paris Peace Conference, Abbott wrote in August 1919 that he supported the proposed League, with or without the reservations that Senate Republicans wished to attach.<sup>83</sup> After the Versailles treaty went down to defeat in the Senate in March 1920, he threw his support behind an

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<sup>81</sup> Fosdick, “The Trenches and the Church at Home,” 27.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Abrams, 86.

<sup>83</sup> Lyman Abbott, “The Guide of Nations,” *Outlook*, August 6, 1919, 531-32. On the League of Nations and the Paris Peace Conference, see Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2002).

alternative plan that would involve a world parliament and court, but that would possess no power of enforcing its decisions.<sup>84</sup> Still, the failures of the peace movement did not dim his enthusiasm for the war. In March 1922, the president of the French Republic saw fit to make Abbott “chevalier” of the Legion of Honor, in recognition of the editor’s outstanding service to the Allied cause during the war. In his acceptance speech, Abbott praised the ideals which the two countries shared and recounted the righteous war they had waged in defense of those ideals.<sup>85</sup> A few months before his death, Abbott wrote simply, “The World War was worth all that it cost.”<sup>86</sup>

Mirroring the patterns that he had adopted in the Civil War and the Spanish-American War, Abbott supported the Great War for conflated reasons. American providentialism, demonization of Germany, Christian republicanism, and the Social Gospel each diminished distinctions between the sacred and secular and motivated the aging editor to support the war. Abbott’s liberal Protestant colleagues mostly justified the war for these reasons as well. For these men, the war became a crusade that provided the focal point for the battle between good and evil in the modern world. While their support for the war undoubtedly boosted morale on the home front and contributed to Allied victory, the clergy also lost some of their prophetic status as they gave their blessing to American nationalism. Although modern readers may rightly judge the clergy for their unqualified support for the war, they should not consider the progressive clergy in the early twentieth century to be any worse than their predecessors. They were, after

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<sup>84</sup> Lyman Abbott, “Constancy is More Than Consistency,” *Outlook*, July 28, 1920, 559. See also, Abbott, “Two Paths to Peace,” *Outlook*, May 19, 1920, 108-09.

<sup>85</sup> Brown, 227.

<sup>86</sup> Lyman Abbott, “Not Peace But Justice,” *Outlook*, Apr. 26, 1922, 683.



all, simply continuing trends that had been adopted in the nation's earlier wars. The fault ultimately lies not with the World War I-era clergy then, but in cultural patterns deeply embedded in American society that easily identify God and country—patterns that continue to the present day.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion: The Mere Echo of the Warring Masses

On October 31, 1922, a crowd of mourners gathered in New York's Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church. They had assembled to pay their last respects to Lyman Abbott, who had died at his home in Cornwall-on-Hudson on October 22. Particularly, the aristocracy of New York's liberal Protestant establishment came out in full force that evening to honor one of their own. Union Theological Seminary, for instance, supplied the choir that sang the opening hymn, "For all the Saints who from their Labors Rest." The hymn's militant lyrics were fitting for a service honoring Abbott: "O may Thy Soldiers, faithful, true, and bold / Fight as the Saints who nobly fought of old / And win, with them, the victor's crown of gold / Alleluia." Karl Reiland of St. George's Episcopal Church, and the notorious Newell Dwight Hillis—Abbott's successor at Plymouth—gave addresses. In addition to these speeches, Henry Sloane Coffin (1877-1954), who was the pastor of the Madison Avenue church and a leading modernizer in the Presbyterian denomination, preached the memorial sermon. As Abbott's children and their families listened attentively in the front pew, Coffin declared that, if measured by his influence, their father was "unquestionably the greatest teacher of religion of this generation."<sup>1</sup>

As the news of Abbott's death was telegraphed across the country, tributes from both secular and religious institutions poured in during the following weeks. In its November 8 issue, the *Outlook* helpfully gathered and reprinted some of the most notable

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<sup>1</sup> "Many Honor Memory of Lyman Abbott," *New York Times*, November 1, 1922.

ones. University and seminary presidents, ministers, former senators, and wives of presidents cabled their messages of sympathy.<sup>2</sup> Newspapers also eulogized the late minister. The *New York Herald* labeled Abbott a “patriarch who had lingered because the people needed him.” Philadelphia’s *North American* highlighted his efforts in broad terms on behalf of “the emancipation of the mind from shackles of ignorance and superstition,” while Colorado’s *Daily Journal* spoke more concretely of his reconciliation of evolution and faith. One of the most perceptive interpretations came from the *Kansas City Star*. It labeled Abbott a “teacher of practical religion,” and called him, correctly, “one of the best-known interpreters of the new theology.” For him, the *Star* thought, “life rather than formal creed” was the test of true Christianity. In addition to these comments on Abbott’s theology, the *Star* also discussed his political attitudes. Although the *Star* favored Abbott’s views on the Great War, it noted that under his leadership, “The *Outlook* has been always progressive, but never visionary. It has stood for a sane Americanism.”<sup>3</sup> In the same vein, the *Outlook* also saw fit to republish a tribute written in 1905 by Theodore Roosevelt. The president had spoken approvingly of Abbott’s “flaming wrath against unrighteousness” and his “keen appreciation of all that is low, base, cruel, evil, and therefore mercilessly to be warred against in the present.”<sup>4</sup> Roosevelt noted perceptively that Abbott was scourge as well as minister.

Clearly, Abbott’s contemporary interpreters and associates recognized his commitment to the United States and his willingness to do battle in the cause of righteousness. Some historians have mentioned it as well. Winthrop Hudson observed

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<sup>2</sup> “Tributes from Friends,” *Outlook*, Nov. 8, 1922, 419-21.

<sup>3</sup> “Tributes from the Press,” *Outlook*, November 8, 1922, 417.

<sup>4</sup> “Lyman Abbott: A Tribute by Theodore Roosevelt,” *Outlook*, November 8, 1922, 415.

that Abbott “led the way” among those clergy who sought “pious justification” for the Spanish-American War.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Abbott’s biographer Ira V. Brown wrote in 1953 that Abbott’s intentions during World War I were to persuade religious people “that the Allied cause was the cause of Christ.”<sup>6</sup> Neither of these historians, however, analyzed in any detail the ways in which Abbott consistently justified American wars. By examining this topic, this thesis adds to the current historical literature on Abbott, liberal Protestantism, and American warfare.

As we have seen, Abbott defended American participation in warfare through rhetoric that did not distinguish between sacred and secular categories. Even more radically, he refused to acknowledge that such categories existed. We have seen how this was expressed in his advocacy of American providentialism, Christian republicanism, the Social Gospel, and postmillennialism. Yet, what were the theological underpinnings of his assumptions? Although a full study of this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis, a few observations are in order.

First, liberal Protestants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were greatly embarrassed by the supernatural claims they found in Scripture. Accounts of miracles, resurrections, and the virgin birth of Christ were each in turn discarded because they did not make sense in the world of the telegraph, the railroad, and the airplane.<sup>7</sup> Although Abbott continued to use traditional Christian language until the end of his life,

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<sup>5</sup> Winthrop S. Hudson, “Protestant Clergy Debate the Nation’s Vocation, 1898-1899.” *Church History* 42:1 (Mar. 1973): 114.

<sup>6</sup> Ira V. Brown, *Lyman Abbott, Christian Evolutionist: A Study in Religious Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 214.

<sup>7</sup> Barry Hankins, *Jesus and Gin: Evangelicalism, The Roaring Twenties, and Today’s Culture Wars* (New York: Macmillan, 2010), 65.

he too repudiated much of the miraculous or supernatural in Scripture.<sup>8</sup> Let us take the example of the atonement. When Abbott argued in the Great War that American soldiers were making atonement for the sins of the world, he did not believe that anything literally supernatural was occurring because he did not believe that anything supernatural had occurred at Calvary. Christ's atonement, for Abbott, had not occurred on a different plane from the rest of human actions. Jesus's sacrifice was an example (perhaps the supreme example) of self-sacrificing love, but it had in no sense appeased the Father's wrath, or made propitiation for sin in the spiritual realm.<sup>9</sup> In fact, there was no spiritual realm. Earth and heaven, the natural and the supernatural, the sacred and the secular were so thoroughly amalgamated in Abbott's theology as to make any distinction impossible. To some extent, Abbott's theological modernism, then, paved the way for his conflated rhetoric.

Additionally, Romanticism and Transcendentalism also undoubtedly played a role for liberals in eliminating distinctions between the sacred and the secular.<sup>10</sup> Liberal pioneer Horace Bushnell, for instance, was significantly influenced by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (1825).<sup>11</sup> Abbott also owed more to Transcendentalism than he cared to acknowledge. Following the Romanticism of Bushnell, Abbott stressed

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<sup>8</sup> It was men like Abbott whom J. Gresham Machen had in mind when he criticized theological modernists for holding on to traditional Christian language while repudiating traditional Christian theology. See *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Lyman Abbott, *What Christianity Means to Me: A Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 146.

<sup>10</sup> Historians David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper argue that American religious Romantics reacted against the ultra-rationalism of their Unitarian forbearers and sought in religion "a capacity for wonder and a sense of wholeness." David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper, *The American Intellectual Tradition, Vol. 1: 1630-1865*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 339.

<sup>11</sup> Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 158.

the immanence of God in creation. “I think of God not as one dwelling apart from nature,” he confessed in 1898, “but in nature—its indwelling force.”<sup>12</sup> As for Christ, He was not different in kind from man, but only in degree, Abbott argued. As the “supreme product of evolution in human history,” Jesus was “the supreme manifestation which history affords of the divine.” Therefore, “What Jesus was, humanity is becoming.”<sup>13</sup> This last statement sounds remarkably similar to the way one scholar summarizes the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Emerson believed that what Christ was, every man may become.”<sup>14</sup> Surely, following such principles, the distinction between natural and supernatural grew smaller and smaller until it was erased entirely. In fact, this is precisely what happened for Abbott. In an 1898 sermon to his Plymouth Congregation, he stated explicitly, “There is no longer a radical distinction between the natural and the supernatural: the natural is supernatural and the supernatural is natural.”<sup>15</sup> The influence of Romanticism and Transcendentalism coupled with Abbott’s modernist theology helps account for his conflated language during American wars.

With this perspective in mind, historians can appreciate and assess Abbott’s intellectual framework with more nuance. American providentialism, Christian republicanism, the Social Gospel, and postmillennial thought each make increasing sense in this paradigm. The Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I in this

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<sup>12</sup> “Evolution of the Church,” *New York Times*, May 23, 1898.

<sup>13</sup> Lyman Abbott, *The Theology of an Evolutionist* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1897), 74, 76.

<sup>14</sup> Floyd Stovall, *American Idealism* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943), 40.

<sup>15</sup> “Evolution of the Church.” See also Ira V. Brown, “Lyman Abbott, Christian Evolutionist,” *New England Quarterly* 23:2 (Jun. 1950): 226.

scheme were not simply worldly conflicts; they were spiritual battles being fought on earth.

Ironically, however, Abbott's eager embrace of the latest philosophical and theological ideas did little to make him an astute, self-aware observer of the world around him. Although he despised the Calvinism of his Puritan forbears and believed he had outgrown their obsolete theology, he clung to their easy identification of the Kingdom of God with a particular political entity. John Winthrop's idea that the Massachusetts Bay Colony would be a "city on a hill" found modern application in Abbott's conception of the United States. In the vision of both Winthrop and Abbott, the City of God and the City of Man were sliding closer and closer together until they ceased to be recognizable as separate places. Tragically, although Abbott readily discarded Puritanical theology, he retained Puritanism's least attractive aspects: an unhealthy pride in one's nation and a willingness to see one's own political community as having divine sanction to destroy its enemies.

Still, Abbott's too-ready identification of Christianity and the United States ultimately bore some spiritual fruit to liberal Protestantism in America. In 1928, Harry Emerson Fosdick looked with horror on the effects of the Great War and renounced warfare entirely.<sup>16</sup> In 1941, as another war raged, he insightfully deconstructed the Christian nationalism that he feared had plagued the nation in both world wars:

...but what war does to the Church is quite as tragic. The Church in wartime easily becomes the mere echo of the warring masses, with every distinctive quality of Christ's teaching well-nigh forgotten; it is tempted to lose its international, interracial, ecumenical nature, and to become only one more agency for hallowing and waging war; it is lured to accept a theology of escape, by which

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<sup>16</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, "What the War Did to My Mind," *Christian Century*, January 5, 1928, 11.

the ethical teachings of Christ are interpreted as inapplicable and unlivable; and in the end it too commonly divests itself of any function that differentiates it from a world gone mad with mutual hatred and suicidal strife.<sup>17</sup>

Fosdick recognized that wars could easily turn into an excuse for Americans to cloak militarism in the garb of faith. Moreover, the neo-orthodox movement, composed of liberals disgruntled with an overly optimistic anthropology, spurned the assumptions of inevitable spiritual and social progress that had fueled American messianism during the war.<sup>18</sup> The movement's most articulate American, Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), for one, lamented the spectacle of the wartime church "playing up to the nation, an ancient religion maintaining its waning life by skillfully compounding itself with the newer religion of nationalism."<sup>19</sup> Following the war, both Fosdick and Niebuhr expressed a clear reluctance to equate God with nation, a sentiment that would help to chasten liberal Protestantism during the rest of the century.

Unfortunately, close identification of the sacred and secular realms has been by no means absent from recent discourse. American providentialism in particular is still alive and well. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan maintained that the United States was a "shining city on a hill," and in 1987 identified American soldiers killed in the line of duty as "servants" of God.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, in 2001 President George W. Bush invoked

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<sup>17</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Living Under Tension: Sermons on Christianity Today* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), vii-viii.

<sup>18</sup> Richard M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003), 251-52.

<sup>19</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "What the War Did to My Mind," *Christian Century*, September 27, 1928, 1162.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Richard V. Pierard and Robert D. Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1988), 283, 257.



divine blessing for the War on Terror.<sup>21</sup> In addition to these relatively benign expressions of civil religion, more ominous signs have manifested themselves as well. Over the past several decades, for instance, a cottage industry of providential history-writing has sprung up among evangelicals and fundamentalists. Such writings urge a return to American's ostensibly Christian past and attempt to trace God's providential hand in the nation's founding and development.<sup>22</sup> As late as 2011, the evangelical organization Coral Ridge Ministries advertised on its website an "American Patriot's Bible" and boasted that "the history of the United States is inextricably linked to the teachings of the Bible."<sup>23</sup> Although these theological conservatives may not approve of it, Abbott and his generation of liberals would enthusiastically applaud their latter-day efforts to recover and ensconce religious meaning in the American project. Likewise, the early twentieth-century liberals would quickly recognize the Christian republican assumptions of their modern-day heirs. Does God still uniquely bless America? Is America still colonial New England writ large? Nearly a century after Versailles, in the age of Glenn Beck and John Hagee, the questions linger.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Wilfred M. McClay, "The Soul of a Nation," *The Public Interest* 155 (Spring 2004): 16.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1977); David Barton, *America's Godly Heritage* (Aledo, TX: WallBuilder Press, 1993); *The Bulletproof George Washington* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Aledo, TX: WallBuilder Press, 2002); Peter Lillback, *George Washington's Sacred Fire* (West Conshocken, PA: Providence Forum Press, 2006); D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What if America Were a Christian Nation Again?* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> "Item Detail," Coral Ridge Ministries, accessed February 18, 2011, <http://store.coralridge.org/ProductDetails.aspx?&pc=115603&ec=J2358&ga=1>

<sup>24</sup> Adapted from Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975), 387.

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