

University of North Carolina at Asheville

Antebellum Anti-Catholicism in North Carolina: 1840-1860.

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## Introduction

North Carolina Baptists claimed that "there was a division in the church in the third century—the corrupt part degenerated into what is now the Papal church; so that we were never in subjection to the church of Rome."<sup>1</sup> This is one of the simplest examples of anti-Catholicism in North Carolina during the antebellum period from 1840 to 1860. Anti-Catholicism existed in the United States from its founding and became prominent during the early nineteenth century. Because of the growth of anti-Catholicism in the nineteenth century, which paralleled the growth of nativist sentiment, anti-Catholicism, nativism, and immigration are often linked and are not completely separable.<sup>2</sup> But anti-Catholicism can be examined even in areas without a large immigrant population, such as North Carolina, demonstrating not just theological ramifications, but social ones as well. Mark Massa, in his work *Anti-Catholicism in America*, describes anti-Catholicism as "an irrational or unfair bias [...] based simply on characteristics of affiliation," noting that it carries a "connotation of both immorality and illegality."<sup>3</sup> This simple definition, while broad, is also a good one, giving a practical application instead of a theoretical one.

The long-held tradition of anti-Catholicism in Europe, especially in England, was carried to America with each new wave of immigration, including English settlers to North Carolina. The coexistence of various Protestant religions resulted in the perception that the United States was a Protestant country, and one prone to anti-Catholicism: "Both the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay and the Anglicans of Virginia, despite their many differences, shared the fear and hatred of Rome."<sup>4</sup> These different Protestant religions demonstrate the way a variety of Protestant

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<sup>1</sup> "Are Baptists Protestants?," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 24, no. 34 (18 August 1859).

<sup>2</sup> For a full description of the connections between anti-Catholicism and nativism, see Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938).

<sup>3</sup> Mark Massa, *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2003), 1.

<sup>4</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, quoted in Andrew M. Greeley, *An Ugly Little Secret: Anti-Catholicism in North America* (Mission, KS: Sheed Andrews & McMeel, 1977), 26.

religions cooperated and formed the backbone of the United States, a Protestant core united against Roman Catholics and their Church.

This perception of America as a Protestant country has largely obscured the tradition of anti-Catholicism, especially in the southern United States where immigrant and Catholic populations were not so large.<sup>5</sup> Methodists and Baptists, as the largest religions in the area, complained about the Catholic presence, regularly and often quite severely using aggressive attacks and subtle indoctrination against Catholic religious practices, ideas and lifestyles, all perceived threats to the Protestant, and thus "normal," way of life in North Carolina.

### **Historiography & Background**

The work already done on Catholicism in the United States does not focus on the South in much detail, instead focusing on Northern states. Philip Jenkins' *The Last Acceptable Prejudice*, Jay Dolan's *In Search of an American Catholicism* and *The American Catholic Experience*, Ray Billington's *The Protestant Crusade*, and Mark Massa's *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* focus mainly on the national trends of anti-Catholicism with emphasis on northeastern states, noting that anti-Catholicism has a long tradition in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

General histories of American Catholicism, like James Hennesey's *American Catholics*, trace the history of Catholicism while focusing on the northeastern states and the development there, largely ignoring the Southern culture until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Even Andrew Greeley, in

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<sup>5</sup> The 1850 census estimated 4 Roman Catholic churches in all of North Carolina, compared to 613 Baptist churches and 786 Methodist churches. By 1860, the census demonstrates a rise to 7 Catholic churches, and a jump to 741 Baptist churches and 966 Methodist churches. (Historical Census Browser, University of Virginia, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>)

<sup>6</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jay Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (New York: Image Books, 1985); Jay Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938); Mark Massa, *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> James Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

a sociological study, claimed that "anti-Catholicism is as American as blueberry pie," but failed to extend his citing of significant events to the southern part of the country, focusing on the northern states, the historical center of intellectual debate.<sup>8</sup> Samuel S. Hill examines some Southern religions, but does not examine the role Roman Catholicism plays in developing the South or its interplay with other local religions.<sup>9</sup> William Powers, in *Tar Heel Catholics*, is the only author who focuses exclusively on Catholicism in North Carolina, from its founding to modern developments.<sup>10</sup> Sources exist which give general histories of North Carolina, including William Powell's *North Carolina: A History* and *North Carolina through Four Centuries* and Milton Ready's *Tar Heel State*, which serve to illuminate the state and the culture within which anti-Catholicism developed.<sup>11</sup>

North Carolina's history allowed for the growth of anti-Catholicism within the Baptist and Methodist traditions from 1840-1860. William Powell argues that "most North Carolinians also have a strong attachment to church and to political party. For example, frequently the only reason for being a Presbyterian or a Democrat is that the family has 'always' been of those persuasions."<sup>12</sup> With such a tradition in place, Protestant North Carolinians would naturally have a strong attachment to their religious traditions and be wary of Catholics. Despite early explorers in the area being Spanish, English explorers settled and imported English traditions, such as the

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew M. Greeley, *An Ugly Little Secret: Anti-Catholicism in North America* (Mission, KS: Sheed Andrews & McMeel, 1977), 17.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel S. Hill, *One Name But Several Faces* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> William F. Powers, *Tar Heel Catholics: A History of Catholicism in North Carolina* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> William Powell, *North Carolina: A History* (Nashville, American Associate for State and Local History, 1977); William Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Milton Ready, *The Tar Heel State: a History of North Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> William Powell, *North Carolina: A History* (Nashville, American Associate for State and Local History, 1977), xiii.

mistrust of Catholicism. The population of North Carolina lent itself to a wariness of people who did not fit the "normal" mold. Powell noted that

in 1790, at the time of the first census, North Carolina ranked third in population. [...] Between 1800 and 1810 the state narrowly held fourth place, and by 1830 it had dropped to fifth. In 1820 there were only seven towns in the state with more than a thousand people, and five of them had more slaves than free people.<sup>13</sup>

The small numbers lent itself to a sense of homogeneity that Catholics seemed to violate, as people who did not fit the "normal" mold, creating the tensions that would lead to anti-Catholicism.

This "normal" mold was a part of the Southern nineteenth century history where citizens were "caught in the throes of modern changes—political, economic, social, and religious."<sup>14</sup> North Carolina, heading into the period of change had "few towns, little industry, limited capital, only three banks, and an inadequate system of public and private education."<sup>15</sup> Affecting the politics of the time was the creation of new counties in a political struggle between eastern and western counties for control.<sup>16</sup>

Religion in North Carolina during the early periods of settlement, George Raynor suggests, was of secondary concern because the lifestyle was harsh. He notes that "only in the tightly controlled church-state of Puritan New England was the condition of the soul a daily concern," demonstrating, like other authors, a preference for Northern states, even in a book about North Carolina.<sup>17</sup> But he also argues that "the light of religion was turned down low, not off," a

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<sup>13</sup> Powell, *North Carolina: A History*, 105.

<sup>14</sup> Hill, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Milton Ready, *The Tar Heel State: a History of North Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 164.

<sup>16</sup> Ready, 167.

<sup>17</sup> George Raynor, *Religion and Education in Piedmont Carolina* (Salisbury, NC: Salisbury Printing Co, Inc., 1991), 1.

condition which, through the Great Awakening, led to the rise of Baptists, Methodists and other Protestant denominations in North Carolina.<sup>18</sup>

Certainly the 1850 and 1860 censuses, which record religious information on a county basis in North Carolina, suggest that there was a rise of Baptists and Methodists between the periods. In 1860, Baptists and Methodists represented 60% of the population of North Carolina.<sup>19</sup> Baptist churches had available seating for 201,797 compared to the 1,400 the Roman Catholic churches offered. Even if multiplied by three to account for multiple Masses, if the number of seats offered reflects the church-attending population, Roman Catholics made up a significantly small percentage of North Carolinians.

With such a small Catholic population, the state constitution still kept Catholics out of the government until 1835.<sup>20</sup> A convention was called to examine the article in question, Article 32, which prevented Catholics from assuming government offices. William Gaston of New Bern was crucial to this change in favor of Catholics. Roman Catholic himself, Gaston was elected to the state Supreme Court and challenged the appointment on the basis that

I am bound as a Citizen, and am bound by oath, to support the Constitution of North Carolina. I am avowedly a believer in the doctrines of the Catholic Church. If that Constitution disqualifies a believer in those doctrines from holding public office, it would be dishonorable and wicked in me to accept it.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Raynor, 1.

<sup>19</sup> These numbers are pulled from the total population of North Carolina for each year surveyed and by using the aggregate accommodations (available seating) for both organizations as a figure. They may not represent an accurate percentage as Roman Catholic churches often held multiple masses to accommodate parishioners, and Protestant churches often built churches somewhat larger than necessary in hopes of filling them with converts and often lacked the multiple services present in the Roman Catholic Church. (Historical Census Browser, University of Virginia, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>)

<sup>20</sup> Powell, *North Carolina: A History*, 117.

<sup>21</sup> Powers, 91.

Gaston's qualifications for the job were not in question. He raised the question of his taking office, noting that "the article [preventing it] had always been ignored."<sup>22</sup> With such a progressive movement as changing the article to "substitute the word *Christian* for *Protestant*," North Carolina still demonstrated a notable amount of anti-Catholic sentiment, evident in counter-arguments.

James Smith of Orange [...] asked that the test be retained but used only "when necessary to defeat some deep laid scheme of ambition." From Martin County, Jesse Cooper [...] testified that "the Roman Catholic is the very offspring of a despot," espousing a "dangerous doctrine," and "should be excluded from holding office."<sup>23</sup>

Ultimately, the change to the article was approved, but it demonstrated the divided opinion about Catholics. The fear of Catholic corruption in the government was stronger than the reality of Catholic corruption, even in North Carolina.

### **Primary Sources**

Newspapers represented a large portion of North Carolinians during the 1840s, 50s, and 60s. With such a large percentage of the population professing either the Baptist or Methodist faiths, the beliefs of the adherents probably provide a cross-section of North Carolinians' political and social beliefs. If approximately one in every two citizens was Baptist or Methodist, the newspapers to which they subscribed, the *Biblical Recorder* and the *North Carolina Christian Advocate*, likely reflected the opinions held by the subscriber and the religious organizers. The *Biblical Recorder*, a Raleigh-based Baptist newspaper, was a source of both religious and political news for many. The *North Carolina Christian Advocate* was the Methodist paper, which informed its audience of both political and religious arguments and events. Articles present in

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<sup>22</sup> William Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 275.

<sup>23</sup> Ready, 173.

either paper regarding Catholics were concerned with their social, religious, and political status and questioned the threat generated by Catholicism toward their own religions.

The language of the articles that appear in the newspapers vary from article to article, but most of the references to Roman Catholics and the Catholic church, direct or indirect, are negative. This is especially true with the name-calling present in the articles. Rather than referring to Catholic practitioners as "Roman Catholic," the *Biblical Recorder* often chose more inflammatory terms. In choosing to utilize terms such as Papist, Papish, Popish or Popist, the newspaper emphasized the perceived foreignness of Catholicism. It suggested an air of un-Americanism, creating a tension of perceived anti-democracy through the reference as Catholics as worshippers of or owing political allegiance to the Pope in his role as a foreign leader. These emphasized the antagonistic position of Catholics to Protestants. Similarly, using a term such as Romanist or Romish emphasizes the location of the religion and reminded readers that the Pope, and thus the center of the Catholic religion, was in Rome and not in America. William Powers' example of a Massachusetts law, passed against "Jesuits and popish priests" which declared them "enemies of 'the true Christian religion' and sentenced to life imprisonment" is an example of the inflammatory nature of names other than Roman Catholic.<sup>24</sup> Billington's title itself, *The Protestant Crusade*, indicates the depth to which language, and the underlying sentiment, played a role in developing the attacks against Catholics present in the newspapers of the time.

These negative terms were generally considered rude, and reflective of the displeasure of the author. If several variations of these insults appeared, the author likely held strong anti-Catholic sentiments and was making a more aggressive attack on the religion. If only one or none appeared, the insult was usually more subtle and took issue with the structure of the church and

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<sup>24</sup> Powers, 99.

not with its ideals. The language, while important, is often less important than the subject of the attack.

### Wrong Ideas

Much of the antagonism between the religions in North Carolina stemmed from the opinion that other faiths held wrong ideas about religion and religious practices. Baptism by immersion, the core of Baptist practice, was at odds with Catholic baptism and the different generated much of the anti-Catholic sentiment. Baptists felt that Catholics did not perform baptism correctly, utilizing a sprinkling method rather than a full immersion, and they took great offense to the subject of infant baptism. The Baptists criticized the successful indoctrination of children by the Catholic Church: "The heathen mother takes her babe to the idol temple, and teaches it to clasp its little hands before its forehead, in the attitude of prayer, long before it can utter a word."<sup>25</sup> Baptists thought the problem with teaching the forms of prayer before a child could understand and speak about it was that they were unable to fully comprehend religious experiences. The *Biblical Recorder* makes mention of an infant baptism and inquires if the "baptism was an outward sign of an inward change?" or not.<sup>26</sup> This was the core of the issue taken by Baptists against the practice of infant baptism. Believing that infants should not be baptized before being taught about the religion, Baptists find no reason to baptize an infant. The same paper, in questioning a Methodist baptism, noted that the traditional system of granting baptism is: "*Go. Teach. Baptize.* This is Christ's arrangement [...] Who gave men the authority to alter Christ's arrangement" by baptizing infants who cannot teach others or first be taught themselves?<sup>27</sup> Backing up their beliefs with the Bible, Baptists note that the subject of infant baptism "cannot

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<sup>25</sup> "Conversion of Children," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 15, no. 8 (23 February 1850).

<sup>26</sup> "A Child Baptized after it was Dead," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 24, no. 39 (22 September 1859).

<sup>27</sup> "Pedobaptist Argumentation," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 23, no. 4 (21 January 1858).

be found in the Bible, until, [...] some one puts it in there!"<sup>28</sup> They concluded that Catholics must have misinterpreted the Bible to find mention of infant baptism. This change to the procedure of Baptism, combined with the "alteration" of the Bible, "in opposition to the cardinal, irreversible sentiment that the Bible [...] is to Christians the rule of faith and practice," creates an air of anti-Catholicism in the *Biblical Recorder*.<sup>29</sup>

The Methodists discuss infant baptism as well and their relation to it. Against Baptist accusations that they were not "one whit above Catholicism"<sup>30</sup> for their inclusion of young children in baptism, the *North Carolina Advocate* argued that Methodist ministers did not enforce infant baptism but did make attempts to "persuade men to dedicate their children to God in baptism."<sup>31</sup> This distinction, Methodists felt, invalidated the Baptist claim, noting that "infant Baptism [...] is more in accordance with the spirit of Romanism than of Christianity."<sup>32</sup> The presence of these articles in North Carolina newspapers is a statement of concern by the Baptists of the area. With few Catholics in the state, North Carolinians did not have much reason to fear a "takeover" by their enemies. The newspapers however, in publishing articles that encouraged anti-Catholicism, even when dealing with events not inside the state's borders, implied that Catholics threatened society and Protestants should be educated and aware of the threat so they would not fall prey to the evils of Catholics and Catholicism.

Protestant faiths, which supported the direct reading of the Bible in order to reach salvation, utilized a different Bible than Catholics did. The primary difference between the Bibles was the presence of seven books in the Old Testament of Catholic versions which Protestant versions did

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<sup>28</sup> "Nullity of Infant Baptism," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 23, no. 9 (25 February 1858).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> "A Child Baptized after it was Dead." *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 24, no. 39 (22 September 1859).

<sup>31</sup> "Infant Baptism," *North Carolina Christian Advocate* 2, no. 40 (1 October 1857).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

not recognize.<sup>33</sup> These differences led to tensions regarding the use of Bible in proselytizing. Additionally, many Catholics did not read the Bible directly due to various bulls<sup>34</sup> issued by the Pope which limited how to properly read the Bible. This trend was directly antagonistic to Protestants, who felt the Bible was a source of many of the necessary religious experiences to convert. Since the Bible was central to Protestantism, there was much fuss made about its prohibition. The *Biblical Recorder* published articles that went as far back as to criticize Queen Mary I of England, whose reign in 1553 saw the prohibition of the Bible until her death.<sup>35</sup> The Baptist argument against the use (or lack of) the Bible by Catholics centered on the Catholic idea that "Christ did not intend that mankind, in general, should learn his religion from a book."<sup>36</sup> Whether this was a widely held belief or just that of some Catholics, it fit the Baptist anti-Catholic obsession.

Americans held an idea that America, as a Protestant Bible-reading country, had advantages over the non-Bible reading Catholic countries. One *Biblical Recorder* writer elaborated on the differences between America and Mexico, as a Bible-reading and non-Bible reading country:

We talk much of Anglo Saxon blood. But why is that blood better than the blood of Aragon and Castile?—The blood of all our race is feculent and feeble until the religion of the Bible gives it purity and vigor.<sup>37</sup>

As noted, immigration tensions were prominent during the age. The Catholic officials of the era did not discourage the Protestant critique against Catholics not reading Bibles, if anything they encouraged it, by reinforcing that Catholics were not to read the Bible. The Pope had issued a bull "against the impious 'principle of the free interpretation of the Holy Scriptures by the right

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<sup>33</sup> New Advent, "Canon of the Old Testament," <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03267a.htm>

<sup>34</sup> A papal bull is an official document from the Pope, often regarding behaviour desired or policy changes and additions (New Advent, "Bulls and Briefs," <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03052b.htm>)

<sup>35</sup> "The Bible Prohibited," *The Biblical Recorder*, *Raleigh* 9, no. 14 (6 April 1844).

<sup>36</sup> "The Catholic Church and the Holy Scriptures," *The Biblical Recorder*, *Raleigh* 21, no. 11 (13 March 1856).

<sup>37</sup> "Bible or No Bible," *The Biblical Recorder*, *Raleigh* 12, no. 17 (1 May 1847).

of private judgment;' against [...] 'not hesitating to spread Holy Bibles in the vulgar tongue,' which the *Biblical Recorder* interpreted as an intention to encourage the priests' dominance and discourage laity from acquiring truth.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, the differences in Bibles acted as a gateway through which many of the other anti-Catholic attacks took place. Publishing discourses on the matter, the *Biblical Recorder*, and thus its Baptist readers in North Carolina, were voicing an idea of anti-Catholicism. Regardless of first-hand experience, these beliefs gained a strong hold with the newspaper's readers.

The belief in the erroneousness of the Catholic Bible also represented a larger belief, that of the Catholic as anti-Christian. At its most extreme, Catholics were deemed partners with Satan, at its best, they were simply misguided and needed to rediscover the Christian faith. The *Biblical Recorder* published the range of these anti-Christian opinions. One author wrote: "men think that Popery has but one face, one weapon, one attack. [...] It has as many as there are passions, appetite, and principles in human nature. Its name is Legion."<sup>39</sup> This view of Catholicism as the devil likely did not represent the view of every Southern American, as this was a time of the philosophical encouragement of rationality, but it certainly as a belief held by some. To a lesser extent, there was a clear distrust of Catholicism and calling it un-Christian was a way to discourage Catholic supporter while still having the potential to gain converts for fighting against the unrighteous. The *Biblical Recorder* asserted "the appointed epoch for the fall of that great enemy of Christianity [was] drawing near."<sup>40</sup> By referencing actions of Catholics, especially holy wars or religious conflict, Catholics could be cast as anti-Christian: "But away with light, down with liberty; let darkness return, and give [the Church] the power she once enjoyed, and the

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<sup>38</sup> "The Pope's Last 'Bull'," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 15, no. 19 (10 May 1850).

<sup>39</sup> "Popery," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 7, no. 13 (10 April 1841).

<sup>40</sup> "Popery in Europe," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 10, no. 2 (18 January 1845).

horrors of the valleys of Piedmont<sup>41</sup> will be enacted once more wherever it is deemed necessary to her interests."<sup>42</sup> This reminder of the violence Catholics were able to commit was to remind Baptist readers how anti-Christian murder was, further linking Catholics and anti-Christianity.

### **Hierarchical issues**

The Catholic Church, as with any long-standing organization, drew criticism from Protestants due to the perception or reality of corruption in the hierarchy and associated institutions. The prevalent ideas of corruption were financial corruption and spiritual corruption, particularly in the hierarchy, whose job it was to lead others. The argument usually followed a theory that when the priesthood was corrupt, so would the followers. The Baptists warned that Popery "takes from you the Bible, and sends you to the priest. Instead of sending you to God with the confession of your sins, it sends you to the priest. Your rule of faith is the church, and the priest tells you what the church teaches."<sup>43</sup> This is counter to the Protestant favoring of the Bible. The article implied that there was inherent corruption in using a hierarchical model instead of the direct path to the Bible. The *Biblical Recorder* went so far as to attack one of the Pope's edicts in which it was noted that a medical patient must be confessed and have proof in order for a Catholic physician to perform any diagnosis.<sup>44</sup> This, the Baptists felt, was beyond corruption and borderline anti-Christian, to deny aid to a fellow human simply on a religious basis.

The Baptist response to the idea of corruption was nearly always an aggressive one that utilized harsh language. They feared Catholic institutions that were "filled with the sons and daughters of [America,] silently and constantly imbibing the subtle poison of Romish

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<sup>41</sup> There was a massacre of Protestants by Catholics in the Piedmont region of Italy in 1655.

<sup>42</sup> "Roman Catholic Atrocities," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 23, no. 39 (23 October 1858).

<sup>43</sup> "Popery and Protestantism," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 15, no. 10 (9 March 1850).

<sup>44</sup> "Popish Edict to Physicians," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 10, no. 33 (16 August 1845).

falsehood."<sup>45</sup> They worried that the institutions would corrupt the next generation of Americans and that a further tainted America would be doomed. The North Carolina Baptists were greatly worried about corruption, mostly of the spiritual kind, given the frequency of articles appearing in the *Biblical Recorder* and the variety of subjects and people attacked for the corruption which threatened to spill from the Catholic church to Protestant religions as well.

The Pope was frequently under attack by Protestants as the visible head of the Catholic Church. He was regarded by Protestants as a foreign "king" and attacked both as a leader of political and religious power and on a personal level for inconsistencies between his personal life and office. As a person, he was often under attack for remarks or conduct made seemingly while forgetting that his conduct was always under inspection, both by Catholics looking to him as a role model and by Protestants hoping for the end of Catholicism. On sending 20,000 francs to Ireland to help with famine relief, the Pope was criticized by the *Biblical Recorder* that "it would seem from the sum contributed that the Pope is not very much straightened for funds."<sup>46</sup> Criticizing the wealth accumulated by the Catholic church, personified in the Pope, was a way for the Baptists to suggest their more Christian lifestyle, lived in more spiritual and less earthly way. Another attack against the Pope's personal actions, was against his treatment of women. "The Holy Father has been led into error," the newspaper notes, after insulting women who nursed Roman soldiers in hospitals after a defense of the city against the French.<sup>47</sup> This assessment of the Pope's manners is especially intriguing to find in a North Carolina newspaper, as the ideal of Christian goodwill was never far from the minds of many people and nursing would have been considered an embodiment of the concept. The *Christian Advocate*, traced a story of the Pope wherein a Protestant priest watched the Pope at prayer in Rome and "saw the

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<sup>45</sup> "The Decline of Protestantism," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 25, no. 50 (14 December 1859).

<sup>46</sup> "The Pope's Contribution to the Irish," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 14, no. 32 (11 August 1849).

Pope [...] apparently kneeling in prayer for mankind; but the legs that kneeled were artificial; he was in his chair."<sup>48</sup> This false appearance seemed justification to the Methodists of the falsity of Catholicism as well, as its leader and it's "mere ritualism and other formalism" did not allow for a true religious experience.<sup>49</sup>

One article, however, featured the Pope in a favorable light. A child's parents told him they could not afford the books for his education and told him the Pope would buy them for him. The child made his way to the Pope to ask for this favor and the Pope, being impressed that the boy actually did purchase his textbooks with the money he was given, "allotted a monthly sum for his education."<sup>50</sup> This rare article commenting on the generosity of the Pope is almost more noteworthy because of its publication in the *North Carolina Christian Advocate* where so many negative articles were published. The title of the article, "A Good Story of the Pope" draws attention to the article, emphasizing its unusual nature of being positive, in the wealth of negative articles.

The Pope presented a threat to Protestants because he was often viewed as a foreign ruler. In the 1840's and 1850's when a wave of American nationalism—the idea of a unified America where citizens were patriotic and democracy was privileged—dominated the country's ideology, Protestant Americans viewed foreign rulers as threats to their country's sovereignty. There was a pervasive fear that all Catholics were spies for and loyal to this foreign "king" who might turn against America if the Pope were to ask it. Protestants also tended toward the view of the Pope as a tyrant who ruled every aspect of his citizens' lives. This opinion of the Pope as tyrant often had the issue of imprisonment linked to it. "For ages the Papal government have not been slow to

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<sup>47</sup> "The Pope and the Roman Women," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 15, no. 8 (23 February 1850).

<sup>48</sup> "Artificial Religion," *North Carolina Christian Advocate* 12, no. 14 (23 January 1857).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> "A Good Story of the Pope," *North Carolina Christian Advocate* 2, no. 20 (14 May 1857).

imprison men for an expression of their opinions."<sup>51</sup> The Inquisition had not made it to the United States, but many worried that it could, and overseas travelers worried about their safety while in Europe. They worried over their rights, questioning the right of "a *foreign prince* to call [someone] to account and imprison him for it," passing on rumors about Protestants who disappeared after meetings with the Pope and were never heard from again.<sup>52</sup> The *Biblical Recorder* noted that "hard names, hard usage, and severe and exasperating periodicals, will never do much at converting Romanists, nor at depriving the Pope of his influence" encouraging fellow Baptists to convert Catholics and arguing that the Pope was central to the problem.<sup>53</sup>

The newspaper covered the political actions of the Pope, especially his meeting with Czar Nicholas, the head of the Orthodox Church in Russia. The *Biblical Recorder* believed that

these two Popes are indeed better agreed than is supposed perhaps. Both are despots. Both hold to persecuting heretics. Each is ready to use force against his adversaries. Each favors superstition and dreads the light of the gospel.<sup>54</sup>

The article goes on to state that "the Bishop of Rome is now no longer supreme master of kings and nations," judging by the greeting given to him by Nicholas, who did not worship the Pope as the decider of the future of Europe but merely kissed his ring and bowed.<sup>55</sup> Far from being the ruler of the other kings of Europe, the Roman Catholic Pope had fallen from power and had only his own people to rule, which he did, according to the Baptists, as a despot. Despite the remote location of the Pope to American Protestants, he still represented a threat in the era of American republicanism through his supposed control over Catholics. "Nativists, charged with

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<sup>51</sup> "The Pope's Prison," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 9, no. 41 (12 October 1844).

<sup>52</sup> "Imprisonment of Bishop Reze," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 10, no. 39 (27 September 1845).

<sup>53</sup> "The Pope's Letter," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 9, no. 32 (10 August 1844).

<sup>54</sup> "Meeting of the Two Popes," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 11, no. 18 (2 May 1846).

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

the Protestant evangelical fervor of the day, considered the immigrants minions of the Roman despot, dispatched here to subvert American institutions."<sup>56</sup>

Another attack against the Pope was in his role as the figurehead leader of the spiritual Church of Rome. The *Biblical Recorder* bluntly argued that "the Pope is but a relic," after his flight from Rome<sup>57</sup> during wartime, when they proclaimed that "the vitality of the Papacy has departed."<sup>58</sup> The Baptist argument against the Pope and Catholicism was that "the Papacy was an institution essentially belonging to the middle ages. [... When] spiritual authority was at its height with intellectual power was at its lowest point," and, the Baptists argued, education now is at its height.<sup>59</sup> The *Biblical Recorder* went even further, publishing an article that argued that St. Peter was an apostle, but not a Pope. "The Bishop of Rome rules over all other Bishops if he can, under pretext of his standing in the shoes of St. Peter, whom he consequently calls the first Pope. Now if Peter turns out to be no Pope, he can have no successors as such."<sup>60</sup> The *Biblical Recorder's* reason for this argument was to discredit the Catholic Church as a valid succession from Christ, and thus the "right" church. The hope was that by casting serious doubt on the validity of the Catholic Church, the Baptist church could gain more converts than the Methodists or other Protestant religions. By making Catholics doubt their church, they would, hopefully, defect to the Baptist religion.

As the largest faiths in the state, Baptists and Methodists desired converts. Despite the small numbers of Catholics, they wanted to recruit them in order to swell their numbers in competition for dominance within the state. With Methodists in the lead for the era in question, Baptists

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<sup>56</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 6.

<sup>57</sup> Pope Pius IX left Rome because he worried for his life. After promising a democratic lay ministry to Italian revolutionaries and not following through during an era of revolutions across Europe, threats against his rule forced him to leave Rome for his safety. (New Advent, "Pope Pius IX," <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12134b.htm>)

<sup>58</sup> "The Pope," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 14, no. 3 (20 January 1849).

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

desired converts and looked to the Catholics as a source.<sup>61</sup> If the Baptist Church could point out the faults of the Catholic Church and make people discontented enough to change traditions, they could make their numbers increase.

The *Christian Advocate* took a similar tact, trying to gain converts through discrediting other churches. They called into question the validity of the Church of England's "dogma of Apostolic succession" inquiring how they intended to "reconcile this claim with a separation from the Papal Church," whose dogma they had previously deemed wrong.<sup>62</sup> By linking the Church of England and the Catholic Church, Methodists hoped to gain members from those who defected upon realizing the truth of the Methodists' words. They go further in another article, mocking the Church of England's dogma, noting they "boldly process all Roman doctrine except the Papal supremacy."<sup>63</sup> The *Christian Advocate* continued to denounce the Catholic Church through accusations of corruption. They claimed that corruption of church leaders continued even up to the highest levels, to the Pope himself. Noting that "the Pope received a sum of between ten thousand and twenty thousand pounds from the king of Naples" to canonize a as a saint, what other conclusion could the Protestant critics draw except that the Pope was corrupt?<sup>64</sup> By drawing attention to corruption the Methodists hoped to gain members for their Church.

The Pope's corruption and tyranny trickled down through the ranks, even to the secular governors of a variety of countries. The *Biblical Recorder* criticizes one Catholic governor that "the *Popish* representative of [the English] *Protestant* Queen has a master of whom he seems more afraid than the Government he represents."<sup>65</sup> This perceived threat to the day-to-day life of

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<sup>60</sup> "Peter an Apostle, but not a Pope," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 9, no. 7 (17 February 1844).

<sup>61</sup> Historical Census Browser, University of Virginia,  
<http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>

<sup>62</sup> "The Church and the Sects," *North Carolina Christian Advocate* 2, no. 44 (29 October 1857).

<sup>63</sup> "Church of England and Romanism," *North Carolina Christian Advocate* 2, no. 51 (17 December 1857).

<sup>64</sup> "Popery in Europe," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 10, no. 2 (18 January 1845).

<sup>65</sup> "A Popish Governor," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 14, no. 42 (20 October 1849).

Protestants led to the increase in anti-Catholicism in many areas, including North Carolina, where elections for a representative government did not necessarily guarantee that Catholics (like William Gaston) would not be in positions of power where they could demonstrate their allegiance to the Pope over the American government.

### **Worship**

The most visible difference between the Baptist and Catholic religions is that of the style of worship and the ideas encapsulated by the ritual involved. The differences between the two were the center of much of the anti-Catholicism in the North Carolina newspapers. One of the greatest protestations to Catholic practices was that of the aura of mysticism around it, including relics and "saint-worship." A monk wrote of "a strange act of devotion" which the *Biblical Recorder* elaborated on, which was enacted "when the saints did not readily comply with the prayers."<sup>66</sup> Monks then "flogged the relics with rods, in a spirit of impatience," presumably hoping that the relic would act as an intermediary to the saints.<sup>67</sup> This practice of praying to saints such as "the Virgin Mary and St. Francis to intercede with the Father and Son" had gained popularity in the antebellum period and was contrary to Baptist beliefs.<sup>68</sup> Baptists, and many other Protestant groups, believed that if a person "would but leave the Virgin Mary and St. Francis [...] and just go direct to the Lord Jesus himself and pray to him for what you need, he will hear you and grant the desires of your heart" and that all would be well.<sup>69</sup> The objection to veneration of the saints was that it was indirect and the physical aspects of the worship were often construed as idol worship, "as objects of religious adoration."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> "Popish Miracles, Mysteries, Relics, Ceremonies, &c.," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 7, no. 40 (16 October 1841).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> "Donald and a Catholic Nobleman," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 9, no. 16 (20 April 1844).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> "Moral Tendency of the Fine Arts," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 10, no. 49 (6 December 1845).

Another clear difference in religious doctrine appears in the *Christian Advocate*. The Methodist paper published a poem called "Transubstantiation," in which they argue against the Catholic doctrine which says the consecrated communion was in actuality Christ's body.<sup>71</sup> The Protestant faiths rejected this doctrine and took instead one that believed the communion to be a representation, not the literal body of Christ. Baptists worried that "the mass of the population is now [irresistibly] travelling to two extreme points, viz.—fanaticism and infidelity— [...] by the excessive corruption of the church, now no longer Catholic, but Roman," focusing on the Pope and Catholic styles of worship to make their point.<sup>72</sup> The issue of fanaticism and contradiction appeared to the Baptists to work from both sides. While Protestants were becoming fanatic about the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, the Catholic Church was also dealing with new aesthetic problems with the Protestant church. While there was an "increase of formality and ceremonials amongst the Protestant sects," the *Biblical Recorder* claimed Catholics were not displeased, suggesting they felt the visible changes might indicate a return to Catholic values, but that they also lamented the new style as "calculated in some cases, to mislead 'good Catholics.'"<sup>73</sup>

Nationally important to Protestants was the conversion of Roman Catholics. The *Biblical Recorder* carried articles on the subject, perhaps as encouragement to North Carolinians to help the national movement, in line with the nationalist spirit of the era. Converts from Catholicism needed to go through a process in which they renounced "the dogmas of Popery—such as the supremacy of the Pope—transmission of grace by ordination, the mass, confessional, celibacy of the clergy, and other superstitions," which did not have any place, Protestants felt, in their religion.<sup>74</sup> The *Christian Advocate* argued that the "veil [of Romanism] must be penetrated and

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<sup>71</sup> "Transubstantiation," *North Carolina Christian Advocate* 2, no. 9 (23 February 1857).

<sup>72</sup> "The Papal State," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 11, no. 4 (24 January 1846).

<sup>73</sup> "Protestant Show Worship," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 11, no. 42 (17 October 1846).

<sup>74</sup> "The Reformation in Progress," *The Biblical Recorder, Raleigh* 12, no. 1 (2 January 1847).

the bats and owls of superstition and intolerance made to see sunshine, whether they like it or not."<sup>75</sup>

The antebellum period saw the growth of stories of conversion among Catholics to Protestant faiths. As anti-Catholicism grew, each conversion was viewed as a triumph, and many were noted in the *Biblical Recorder*. The newspaper claimed the reason for the surge was that "never have the Roman Catholic people been more disgusted with the superstitions of their Church, and the avarice of their priests, than at present; and never has there been a more favorable opportunity of preaching the gospel to them," and that the gospel was the best way to urge conversion because it was self-evident truth.<sup>76</sup> While the preferred method of conversion utilized the Bible, other methods were used. One editorial to the *Biblical Recorder* noted that prayer was utilized for the conversion of many other groups, but not Catholics. "Why not pray for the Romanist?" the author queried, "Do we love him so little that we do not desire his salvation? Then let our fears move us to pray for his conversion."<sup>77</sup>

While Protestants desired Catholic converts, so too did Catholics desire Protestant converts. Examples of aggressive tactics and passive ones both existed but, in the manner of anti-Catholicism of the time, the aggressive tactics were usually linked to Catholic-to-Protestant conversions. The Baptists utilizing the anti-Catholicism evident in the aggressive attack tactics of the newspaper articles asserted that Catholic "opposition to the gospel may become the most effectual means of spreading it."<sup>78</sup>

This trend of the saving power of the Bible was a regular theme in conversion stories found in the *Biblical Recorder*. The *Biblical Recorder* often rejoiced at converting Catholic priests

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<sup>75</sup> "Romish Intolerance," *North Carolina Christian Advocate* 3, no. 1 (7 January 1858).

<sup>76</sup> "Protestant Churches Among the Roman Catholics Of France," *The Biblical Recorder*, *Raleigh* 10, no. 33 (16 August 1845).

<sup>77</sup> "Prayer for Romanists," *The Biblical Recorder*, *Raleigh* 11, no. 18 (2 May 1846).

because it was destroying the power hierarchy of the Catholic Church as well as removing people from the supposed evils thereof. One priest who converted to the Baptist faith became convinced "by an investigation of the Scriptures, of the fallibility of the dogmas of the Church of Rome," before he renounced his orders.<sup>79</sup> The surety of the Bible's power is noted as the most powerful because it "originally turned the heathen Roman from his idols, [and thus] will not be found incompetent to do the same thing for the descendents of St. Peter."<sup>80</sup> Baptists truly believed that "the Bible, faithfully translated, and freely distributed [...] will eventually work wonders. The priests may rage, and arm their dwellings and their churches, and the Pope and Cardinals may thunder in the Vatican, but if the gospel can be allowed to speak to the people, its ultimate triumph is certain."<sup>81</sup> They attributed all significant growth of the Protestant religion both domestically and in foreign countries to the "labors of a poor and simple-minded class of men, called *colporteurs*, who traverse the country, selling copies of the Old and New Testaments at a cheap rate," doing God's work spreading the Bible to those who, with Bible in possession, would convert and forsake their Catholic ways.<sup>82</sup>

### **Wrong Actions**

Outside of a religious context, Protestants were still wary of Catholics. It was argued that their church teachings affected their daily way of life, thus that corrupt teachings made for immoral actions by Catholic neighbors. The *Biblical Recorder* blamed Catholicism for destroying "the social principles of man by eradicating domesticities" through vice and general impurity.<sup>83</sup> Critics of this degenerate way of life lived by Roman Catholics (both domestic and foreign) noted the immoral tendency of the fine arts; "if you walked through the galleries [...]"

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<sup>78</sup> "Conversion of Roman Catholics," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 15, no. 6 (9 January 1850).

<sup>79</sup> "Baptism of a Former Catholic Priest," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 21, no. 19 (8 May 1856).

<sup>80</sup> "The Pope's Letter," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 9, no. 32 (10 August 1844).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

you would not be surprised at the general want of purity" due to the art taken directly from "naked living subjects" whom were "expressly licensed, or *dispensed*, in papal language, for this business."<sup>84</sup> This artistic immorality, it was reasoned, must spread itself through a city as people viewed the artwork and the resulting emotions brought even more immorality to the city. The *Biblical Recorder* did publish one critique that was favorable to Catholics, citing the police force as the immoral actors of the story. The article goes on to tell of "a few evidently kind-hearted and charitable men, who stint their own families, perhaps, to buy a cow 'for the benefit of a poor widow'" and are "fined \$10 each and costs" by the police for gambling on the Sabbath.<sup>85</sup> But other than that favorable note, the *Biblical Recorder* was less forgiving of the immorality brought down upon America by Catholics and their wrong ideals spurred on by wrong actions.

One of the central reasons for the degeneration of America, according to Protestants, was the immigration of Catholics. As noted, the tension that came with combining two different ways of life was often linked to the difference of religion rather than the difference of culture. One writer for the *Biblical Recorder* argued that "the vast tide of human beings that [have flowed] into our country [... have] mingled with our population many thousands, who grew up with the blighting influences of Popery."<sup>86</sup> This was the reason for many of the social problems that arose, according to the author. The "influences of Popery" combined with the reality was dangerous.<sup>87</sup>

The ultimate insult against American Catholics by Protestants was to call them un-American or un-republican. These sentiments clearly stood against everything Americans and that America stood for and made the holders of such beliefs, Catholics supposedly, the ultimate anti-American group. There was fear over the supposed allegiance to the Pope that Protestants worried would

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<sup>82</sup> "Progress of Protestantism in France," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 10, no. 24 (14 June 1845)

<sup>83</sup> "Popery," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 7, no. 13 (10 April 1841).

<sup>84</sup> "Moral Tendency of the Fine Arts," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 10, no. 49 (6 December 1845).

<sup>85</sup> "Roman Catholic Morality," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 20, no. 9 (1 March 1855).

interfere with the allegiance to the American political system. The *Biblical Recorder* noted that Catholicism, historically, could "adapt itself to every form of society [...] courting democracy one day, and despotism the next—now arming kings with a rod of iron, and now blowing the trumpet of rebellion, now defying its rulers" arguing that as society changed, Catholicism did too.<sup>88</sup> The newspaper argued for conversion and education of Catholics so that American values would be secured in the future. "The proportion of the uninstructed will inevitably and vastly increase without earnest and self-sacrificing labour on the part of the patriot and the Christian," the *Biblical Recorder* argued, noting that patriotism and Christianity, neither of which Catholics apparently valued, were the core values of Americanism.<sup>89</sup>

The patriot beliefs begged the question that "if the papacy is favorable to republicanism, why have the papal States in Italy never become republican" as the American culture did?<sup>90</sup> This question of Catholics supporting republican values was at the core for Protestants in feeling insecure about their Catholic neighbors. The Protestant fear that Catholic would hold dual allegiance to the Pope and to the American government and would yield to the Pope's commands when pressed served as the base for the conspiracy theories that abounded. American Protestants argued that "the people of this country will not readily yield to a foreign foe [the Pope] their dearest rights" and that the Catholic conspiracy to turn America over to the Pope's rule as a foreign prince would ultimately fail.<sup>91</sup> The anti-Catholicism held by Protestant North Carolinians ensured that Catholics, under fear of a political coup for the Pope, would never take political office because of their "inherent" anti-American, un-republican beliefs.

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<sup>86</sup> "The Gospel among the German Catholics," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 13, no. 26 (1 July 1848).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> "Popery," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 7, no. 13 (10 April 1841).

<sup>89</sup> "Future Generations of the United States," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 10, no. 43 (26 October 1845).

<sup>90</sup> "Interpretation of the Pope's Commission," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 10, no. 45 (8 November 1845).

<sup>91</sup> "The Decline of Protestantism," *The Biblical Recorder*, Raleigh 25, no. 50 (14 December 1859).

## Conclusion

From political fears to Bibles, Protestant North Carolina presented a varied but predominantly negative attitude against Roman Catholics. This prejudice "based on characteristics of affiliation" is a clear example of anti-Catholicism in North Carolina.<sup>92</sup> In the antebellum era, the *Biblical Recorder* and *Christian Advocate* present prevalent examples of anti-Catholicism. This contrasts with the existing research that focused on northeastern states for the development of national anti-Catholicism, by demonstrating that anti-Catholicism existed in southern states as well. Despite the insignificant number of Catholics compared to Methodists or Baptists, the Catholic Church drew attention from North Carolinians who worried about a Catholic political takeover or immoral social influence. The articles found in the *Biblical Recorder* and *Christian Advocate* attacked the styles of worship, the political position and personal habits of the Pope, corruption of the Church leaders, the Catholic use of the Bible, all used to demonstrate the need for Protestants to worry about the Catholic menace. The regularity of the articles suggests that the Protestant religious newspapers felt a need to impress anti-Catholicism upon their readers to ensure the continuity of the Protestant "normal" lifestyle and values in North Carolina.

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<sup>92</sup> Mark Massa, *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2003), 1.

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