"Saving the West from the Pope": Anti-Catholic Propaganda and the Settlement of the Mississippi River Valley

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Presidential addresses generally fall into one of two categories. They either focus on pedagogical or methodological issues of current interest within their disciplines or on the theme of the conference at which they are being delivered. As, in the past few years, at the national and regional levels, we have been treated to a number of excellent addresses of the first type, at the national level by scholars such as Linda Kerber and Allen Davis, and at the regional level, by MAASA's own Steven Watts, I have, wisely I hope, opted for the second.

Arthur M. Schlesinger, the elder, once told John Tracy Ellis, dean of the historians of American Catholicism, that he regarded prejudice against Roman Catholics to be "the deepest bias in the history of the American people." By this, he did not intend to suggest that it was the most violent, though at times it certainly was; or that it was the most consistent, as it tended to wax and wane throughout American history; but rather, that the roots of anti-Catholicism lay buried in the depths of the American consciousness, bearing fruit over time across the American cultural landscape. As Schlesinger offered this assessment several decades ago—prior to the awakening of our sensibilities to other forms of prejudice in America—it may be that he overstated the case, or, that if it was once accurate, it is no longer. What cannot be denied is that such prejudice once had its place in the United States.[1]

The ancient Athenian leader Solon compared the people to the sea and orators to the winds, without which the seas remain calm, but in response to which they swell and rage. Much has been the case with the American people and the winds of nativism that have blown periodically across this land. At no time have those winds been stronger or the seas more turbulent than in what has been termed the "classic" period of American nativism—those four decades prior to the Civil War—during which, not so coincidentally, the nation expanded into the Mississippi River Valley and settled the land upon which we now stand. Indeed, Missouri, St. Louis and St. Louis University are more than bit players in the drama that Ray Allen Billington over a half century ago titled, "Saving the West from the Pope."[2]

Anti-Catholicism was among those attitudes, or predispositions, that arrived in the first ships on the shores of British North America and that found expression in one of our first literary genres, the fascinating captivity tales of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century New England. The prejudices with which we concern ourselves tonight and the literature which gave it expression, would not likely have developed had not the American people been so steeped in anti-Catholic prejudice when they embarked upon their errand into the wilderness and cultivated those sentiments over the course of the next two centuries. The fires of intolerance—the flames of the Reformation—continued to burn brightly in both the Old and New World.

When, following a brief respite in the years after 1776, anti-Catholicism reappeared in the 1820s, it did so amidst the cross currents of nationalism and reform, enlightened secularism and dynamic evangelicalism, and the persecution of religious groups such as the Latter-day Saints, all of which were interrelated, but none of which, unfortunately, can be considered this evening. A nation had been born and out of this City on a Hill, this New Israel, this Protestant Empire, the fate of the civilized world would be determined. But, there were troubles in paradise—social, cultural and economic—especially in the urban areas of the East, and when those troubles grew worse rather than responding positively to the widespread reform movements of the time, threatening or at least delaying the arrival of the millennium, the source of those problems was found in the rapidly increasing immigration of Irish and German Catholics and in what many saw as the temporal, as well as ecclesiastical, leadership offered such immigrants from Rome.

Time prevents us from reconsidering the story of anti-Catholicism or "no popery" in the East, as Billington labeled it, or the nativist political movement it spawned, except to suggest that its eastern urban riots, lurid and scatological literature, nativist organization and political movements set the stage for, or, created the environment in which anti-Catholic propaganda dealing with the West was written and received. Those who, on the one hand, were sufficiently confident of their own merit in the eyes of God, or of their place in history, to espouse the cause of manifest destiny, were, at the same time sufficiently troubled by events that seemed to threaten that destiny to believe that the Pope, in concert

with the despotic nations of Europe, intended to extend his dominion into the heart of the American republic—the Mississippi River Valley—from which he would defeat republicanism in the United States and stem its tide worldwide.[3]

Between 1800 and 1840 the population of the United States increased from 5 to 17 million. Measured against a declining birth rate among native Americans of European descent, the increase can be attributed almost exclusively to immigrants—more than one million of whom were Roman Catholics. In 1776, one percent of the population of the United States that had any formal religious affiliation was Roman Catholic. By 1860, that figure reached 37 percent, and, by that measure, Roman Catholicism became the single largest denomination in the formerly Protestant empire.[4]

The great body of immigrants to the United States in that period landed at ports in, and settled in, the large cities of the East. A substantial number moved west, however, into the Mississippi River Valley, which by 1840 contained one-third of the population of the United States. An increasingly large number entered the Valley through the port of New Orleans, which by 1850 was second only to New York in the number of foreign arrivals. Reflecting the general pattern of immigration, the majority of new arrivals in the West settled in the upper Mississippi Valley. Unlike the pattern in the older South, however, many settled in the lower Valley as well. Indeed, two-thirds of the total number of immigrants who came to settle anywhere in the South in this period did so in Louisiana, Missouri and Kentucky—in that order of immigrant population.[5]

The alarm was sounded—Rome had not chosen New England (as had long been believed, at least by New Englanders) but the Mississippi River Valley as the grand theater of her operations and future power. Seminaries were being established in Europe specifically to train priests, especially Jesuits, and teachers to enter the Valley, and associations were being created to diffuse the religion of Rome in the United States through Catholic settlement in the West. Nativist editors soon set their sights on two European associations—the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, organized at Lyons, France, in 1822, and the Leopold (or Leopoldine) Association, established in 1829, in Vienna. Both were established for the purpose of furthering the growth of the Roman Catholic Church in Protestant and heathen countries, and, more specifically, of supporting Catholic missions in the United States. The Society for the Propagation of the Faith was by far the more influential, measured in terms of monetary contributions, but it did not attract as much attention as the Leopold Association, which was formed in response to the petitions of German Catholics in the Mississippi Valley.[6]

Conspicuous among those petitioners were the Germans of Missouri, who complained that despite their numbers, they had no church of their own. (By 1844, German Catholics numbered some 7000 of an estimated 14,000 Catholics in the state—of a total population of approximately 40,000.) Rather astutely, Bishop Peter Kenrick of St. Louis responded to such petitions with support rather than criticism, explaining that, if he had the money, he would be only too willing to build them a church. Within three years Kenrick reported having received

enough money to build five churches, including the first of several for the German Catholics of Missouri.[7]

Material aid from the Leopold Association was, nevertheless, comparatively small, and it might not have raised any significant opposition had it not been for the efforts of Samuel F. B. Morse. Morse, best known for his work on the telegraph, was the son of the orthodox Congregational minister Jedediah Morse of Charlestown, Massachusetts. Intending to follow in his father's footsteps, Samuel graduated from Yale and entered the Andover Seminary—established in reaction to the growing liberalism of Harvard—only to leave before completing his studies to pursue his first love, art. He joined his younger brothers in publishing the anti-Catholic New York *Observer*, but he soon journeyed abroad where, in Rome, in 1830, as the apocryphal story is told, he came to confront the power of the anti-Christ.

While watching a Papal procession passing through the streets of Rome, a soldier bayonetted Morse's hat to the ground. "In cases like this," he wrote in his journal that night, "there is no redress. The soldier receives his orders and the manner is left to his discretion . . . . The blames lies after all, not so much with the pitiful wretch who perpetrates this outrage, as it does with those who gave him such base and indiscriminate orders." What Morse had once admired as an artist—the pomp and ceremony of the papacy—he came to despise and to scoff at, both in the pages of his journal and in his public pronouncements.[8]

Upon his return to the United States, feeling that his European experience qualified him to speak with authority on the church and its association with the Leopold Association, Morse proceeded to write twelve letters, under the pen name Brutus, which the *Observer* published between August 30 and November 22, 1834. The letters were widely reprinted in a number of religious and nativist magazines, and, within the year, collected under the title *A Foreign Conspiracy against the Liberties of the United States*. In 1835, he published another series of letters on the same subject in the New York *Journal of Commerce*, which later appeared as *Imminent Dangers to the Free Institutions of the United States.*[9]

In his letters, Morse confirmed the suspicion that the Leopold Association was part of a conspiracy by the church and the Catholic despots of Europe against republican government, in general, and the American republic, in particular. He reported, for example, that Frederick Schlegel, an agent of the Austrian government, had given lectures in Vienna in 1828 in which monarchy and Catholicism were shown to be interdependent and equally opposed to republicanism. That the Leopold Association was formed in the following year was, to his mind, no coincidence. As Morse explained, if the monarchies of Europe were to survive, they must dam the stream of liberty at its source or be inundated by a flood of rebellion among their own people. He quoted Schlegel as having said: "The great nursery of the destructive principles [of republicanism], the great revolutionary school for France and the rest of Europe is North America." "We are the nest where is laid the egg of revolution for every despotic government in the world,"

the editor of *The National Protestant* would respond. "If the nest could only be destroyed, then tyrants might breathe free again."[10]

The Holy Alliance, established at the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, rather than being guided by the maxims of religion and being solicitous of peace, Morse reported, had been created to counter the forces of republicanism in Europe and America. As it was no military match for the "vigorous republic" of the United States, however, it had enlisted the aid of the other great foe of liberty, the Catholic Church, and, together, through Catholic missions to the American West, they intended to force their beliefs upon the American people until the West, and ultimately, the entire country had embraced the twin evils of popery and despotism.[11]

Deriding those who would find altruism in Catholic missionary activity in the West, Morse asked, "Is it credible that the manufacturers of chains for binding liberty in Europe have suddenly become benevolently concerned only for the religious welfare of this republican people? If this society [the Leopold Association] be solely for the propagation of the Catholic faith, one would think that Rome, and not Vienna, should be its headquarters! that the Pope, not the Emperor of Austria, should be its grand patron." Morse urged Protestants to abandon their religious differences and their competitive proselytizing and to unite in blocking Catholic advances in the West. They should begin by joining those who sought to stem the tide of immigration—Catholic and Protestant alike, interestingly enough, as the latter might very well be cleverly disguised agents of Rome—or slow the process of naturalization, as the newly arrived would provide the means by which the foreign conspiracy would be implemented. "We must first stop this leak in the ship," Morse wrote, "through which the muddy waters from without threaten to sink us."[12]

> Up! Up! I beseech you. Awake! To your posts! . . . . Fly to protect the vulnerable places of your Constitution and laws [which he felt in their liberality, were encouraging and protecting the very forces that were seeking to destroy them]. Place your guards . . . . Shut your gates . . . . Your enemies, in the guise of friends, by thousands, are at this moment rushing in to your ruin through the open portals of naturalization.[13]

Morse, by the way, continued his nativist activity into the next decade, before turning his sights almost exclusively on those areas of technology for which he is better known. He edited *The Proscribed German Student* (1836), in which Jesuits were branded as Vatican spies by a distraught immigrant German youth, who subsequently committed suicide. In 1837, Morse published *Confessions of a French Priest*, the motif of which, though focused on the threat of Roman Catholicism to the Mississippi River Valley, closely approximated, in its lurid sensationalism, that of Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures*, published the year before. In 1834, Morse helped to organize the nativist New York Protestant

Association and to set up the weekly *American Protestant Vindicator and Defender of Civil Religious Liberty against the Inroads of the Papacy*. In 1836, he ran for mayor of New York City on the Native American ticket, only to lose to a Whig candidate who appropriated the more moderate planks in his platform, while censuring the Democratic candidate for courting naturalized Roman Catholic votes. In 1841, he organized the American Protestant Union.

Another leader in the field of anti-Catholic propaganda on the settlement of the West—though less active—was the Reverend Lyman Beecher—father of Harriet, to most, but also the father of seven ministers as well as a battler for the old authority of New England versus the tide of modernism. Lyman Beecher's alarm at the potential for Catholic control of the Mississippi Valley dated back at least to 1830, when, in his private correspondence, he wrote of his desire to move to the West for the purpose of personally combating the forces of Rome. When, in the same year, he was offered the presidency of Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, the Yale graduate accepted, in large part for that very reason.[14]

Four years in Cincinnati only heightened Beecher's fears, or at least his rhetoric. In 1834 and 1835 he toured the East raising funds for the seminary and delivering a series of sermons that were to be published in 1835 as *A Plea for the West*. In those powerful sermons, Beecher substantiated Morse's conspiracy theory, reporting that the entire Mississippi Valley had been mapped out and surveyed for conquest by Rome and that immigrants served as a "train of powder between the enemy's camp and our own magazine, which, once ignited, would destroy the American republic."[15]

It was plain, to Beecher, that the destiny of the nation was to be decided in the West:

> There, is the territory, and there will soon be the population, the wealth, and the political power. The Atlantic commerce and manufacturers may confer always some peculiar advantage on the East, but the West is destined to be the great central power of the nation, and under heaven, must affect powerfully the cause of free institutions and the liberty of the world. The West is a young empire of mind, and power, and wealth, and free institutions, rushing up to a giant manhood, with a rapidity and power never before witnessed below the sun . . . . [If it is preserved] the experiment will be glorious—the joy of the nation—the joy of the whole earth, as [the West] rises in the majesty of [its] intelligence and benevolence, and enterprise, for the emancipation of the world.[16]

Much like Morse, Beecher's prominence assured him an audience. His position as educator provided him with the opportunity to suggest that the problem lay not only with immigration and naturalization, but also with the rapidly increasing number of Catholic schools. Building on fears already current

in the East, he argued that Catholic schools in the West would provide the means by which the Church would dominate the entire country. Beecher wrote that American "patriots" were looking toward the Atlantic with "great foreboding and failings of heart" for fear of what was coming upon them, and that he perceived, among them, a "spirit of impatience rising, and distrust in respect to the perpetuity of the republic." He agreed that such fears were well founded, and he was glad that they existed, as sounding the alarm was the necessary first step toward the solution of any problem. The danger in the West, however, Beecher suggested, came from the "uneducated mind," which was being daily augmented by the rapid influx of foreign immigrants, "unacquainted with our institutions, unaccustomed to self-government, inaccessible to education, and [therefore] easily accessible to prepossession, and inveterate credulity, and intrigue, easily embodied and wielded by sinister design."[17]

The United States had opened its doors to an ever increasing number of immigrants seeking to settle in the nation's unoccupied territories of the West, where, Beecher reported, they would soon equal and even outnumber the native population. What is to be done, but "to educate the millions" who were pouring in upon them. It was the case that Catholic schools were being established in the West, Morse noted, but they were not intended to educate Catholics. Rather, he revealed, they were intended to win Protestant converts:

> Do they not . . . tax their own people and supplicate the royal
> munificence of Catholic Europe to rear schools and colleges
> for the cheap and even gratuitous education of Protestant
> children, high and low—while thousands of Catholic children
> are utterly neglected and uncared for, and abandoned to vice?
> Is all this without design? [Clearly not!][18]

Beecher does not cite any Catholic educational institution in particular. He might have pointed to any of the more than 200 pre-collegiate church schools established in the first half century of the nation's existence, or to the many highly successful colleges and universities that opened their doors in the same period, including St. Louis University. Established as St. Louis Academy in 1818, as St. Louis College in 1820, and as a Jesuit institution in 1829, St. Louis University was chartered by the State of Missouri in 1832, and in the course of the next four years added a graduate school, a divinity school and a school of medicine. By 1836, St. Louis University was staffed by some ten Jesuit priests and brothers and the number increased steadily thereafter. By 1855, there were nearly 300 students at St. Louis University, and just as importantly—much as Beecher observed—the student body numbered among its ranks the children of the rich, famous and powerful—Catholic or Protestant—including the sons of Senator Thomas Hart Benton; the sons of Governor Alexander McNair; George Knapp, owner and publisher of the St. Louis *Republic*; and Wilson Prime, St. Louis judge and organizer of the city's first Board of Education.[19]

The growth of St. Louis University was viewed by non-Catholics with some concern, but it was the victim of only sporadic threats of violence. In 1844 and 1845, for example, the university was twice threatened by mobs, but no actual violence occurred. In the first instance the discovery of human body parts carelessly discarded on the college grounds by its medical school sparked rumors that the papal conspiracy, if not an American inquisition, had begun. In the second, rumors spread that the medical school was involved in grave robbing in order to secure cadavers. This might be compared to the bloody riots in New York City that followed passage of the Maclay Act in 1842, wherein the Protestant controlled, private, Public School Society (which was charged with distributing state funds to the city's public schools) was replaced by decentralized district boards of education, providing a measure of local control for Catholic neighborhoods; or, to the similarly bloody disturbances in Philadelphia in 1844 following passage of a city ordinance allowing the substitution of the Douay for the King James version of the Bible in the city's public schools.[20]

We might also recall the fate of a similarly successful school just outside Boston in 1834. Lyman Beecher was in town, delivering his plea for the West, described in one local account as "oratorical hell fire" on the "whoredom of Babylon" or the "foul beast of the papacy." On Sunday, August 10, Beecher delivered sermons in four separate churches, in which he told his listeners that Roman Catholics held "in darkness and bondage nearly half the civilized world." That it was "the most skillful, powerful, and dreadful system of corruption" in existence and that it had brought "desolation over the earth and the debasement of slavery to those who live[ed] under it." The Church, foreign leaders and even American political demagogues and liberal Protestant leaders had formed a "lurid alliance . . . riding the whirlpool of ignorance and prejudice, passion, irreligion and crime that threatened to destroy all American liberties." By way of example, he pointed to the Ursuline Convent in nearby Charlestown—where daughters of many of the area's wealthiest and most prominent Unitarian and liberal Episcopal Protestant families comprised more than half the student body. The next day, mobs burned it to the ground.[21]

Many missionaries matched Beecher's zeal in promoting Protestant education in the West. To cite just one, Edward Norris Kirk, in *The Church and the College* (1856), wrote:

> There, brethren, our great battle with the Jesuit, on western soil, is to be waged. We must build college against college. If the musty atmosphere of a Jesuit school suits the freeborn western youth; if the repetition of scholastic modes of discipline can captivate the child of the prairies, then we may fail in the contest. But all experience has confirmed our anticipation, that America is a field on which the open, manly, Christian discipline of a Protestant college must annihilate the rival system of Jesuitical instruction.[22]

In 1845, a speaker at a meeting of the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education in the West declared:

> The Jesuits are willing, nay, longing, nay plotting and toiling, to become the educators of America. Let them have the privilege of possessing the seats of education in the West, and of moulding the leading minds of the millions that are to inhabit there, and we may give up all our efforts to produce in the West what Puritanism has produced.[23]

Most agreed that Rome's best chance at undermining the republic was by shaping the minds that would someday govern it. Foreign gold was being directed in "untold sums"—$1 million in one decade to Cincinnati, alone, it was rumored—toward the building of Catholic schools. It could be countered only by associations dedicated to the promotion of Protestant education. Thus was born organizations such as the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West, the most influential of the associations dedicated to that purpose, in 1843 at Cincinnati, and the Ladies' Society for the Promotion of Education in the West, in Boston in 1847. The latter, which was intended to prevent the necessity of inhabitants of the West "patronizing papal seminaries," was unique for its time in its use of women Protestant educators in that region.[24]

Whether or not they subscribed to it, or regardless of the extent to which they believed it to be true, Protestant missionary societies used anti-Catholic alarmist literature to their advantage. Lending credence to tales of subversive Catholic activity in the West led to increased levels of contributions. With the exception of the annual meeting of 1850, each convention of the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS), the largest such association of its kind, devoted at least one speaker to the dangers of Romanism in the West and to the necessity of curbing its growth in order to protect the nation. In 1839 the AHMS in its monthly publication, the *Home Missionary*, typically announced that the religious fate of the world hung in the balance, and that the supremacy of Popery in the Mississippi Valley would ring the death kneel of Protestantism everywhere. The editor wrote:

> The cause is the cause of the west—for there the great battle is to be fought between truth and error, between law and anarchy— between Christianity, with her Sabbaths, her ministry and her schools, on the one hand, and the combined forces of infidelity and Popery on the other.[25]

AHMS agents in Missouri, were among the most vocal. In 1830 a Missouri agent of the AHMS wrote that, contrary to what some had reported elsewhere, it was by no means certain that the Jesuits were not to prevail "to a great extent" in the West. "Their priests are coming in upon us, and with a zeal that ought to make the Protestant Christian blush, they are establishing their schools and their

nunneries throughout the land." In 1847 another wrote, much as had Lyman Beecher, that Catholic churches and convents were being built at strategic points in the state, the purpose of which was only too clear—so clear they chose not to elaborate. That American Catholics professed ignorance of, and actually seemed not to know anything about such a plot, only proved that its design and ultimate control must have originated and remained abroad.[26]

Possibly the most interesting report, for us anyway, was made by delegates of the Missouri chapter of the AHMS at the society's national annual meeting in New York City in 1843:

> Popery, long since foresaw, that the principal city [St. Louis] of this state was to be the center—the commanding citadel of the West; and she has occupied it, and in all the chief places of concourse—on every bluff along the banks of the mighty rivers ... she has erected her banner, and bids defiance to Protestant-ism—to free intelligence, equal rights, and a pure evangelical piety.... Shall this fair land be abandoned, without a struggle, to the undisputed and perpetual dominion of the Man of Sin?[27]

Many more examples of anti-Catholic propaganda on the settlement of the West could be noted, but, as I would prefer to be brief, let me conclude by offering just a few of the many observations that could be made concerning this literature.

First, as has been said of other forms of nativist literature in the period, anti-Catholic propaganda dealing with the settlement of the Mississippi River Valley was both conservative and reformist. On the one hand, it sought to maintain the status quo. On the other, it was very much a part of the larger effort to mold society in an image that combined the mainstream idealization of the past and a vision of the future. It was a "Protestant frontier thesis." Therefore, though the more extreme proponents of anti-Catholic—or of anti-Mormon, anti-Shaker, and, even, anti-Mason, for that matter—sentiment never constituted more than a small minority of the population, they gathered disproportionate strength from the ranks of other, more moderate, individuals.[28]

What Ralph Waldo Emerson called the "demon of reform" was abroad in the land. Its participants—whether in education, temperance or penal reform—were sincere, middle class Americans, who were convinced that many, if not most, of the political, economic and social problems surfacing around them were some-how connected to the arrival of poor, unskilled, uncouth German and Irish Catholics. Such middle class Americans may have discounted the immorality tales of Maria Monk or Rebecca Reed, but were not the hospitals, jails and almshouses of cities such as St. Louis—where, by 1850, the foreign born outnumbered the native born and Catholics outnumbered Protestants—in the heart of the Mississippi River Valley, which was destined to be "the great central power of the nation," overflowing with the foreign born and the streets teeming with immigrant medicants. As David Brion Davis has written, such groups could

readily be used to explain the flaws that had so quickly appeared in the promised land, the growing discord between the ideal and the reality of American life.[29]

I would add, however, that the Catholic Church likely exacerbated such nativist sentiment by imposing on its members, as David O'Brien has put it, "with the authority of Christ himself," values and attitudes that ran counter to those required for the success of the American experience in self-government in a setting of religious and cultural pluralism. No, this is not "be kind to bigots week," but the Catholic Church and its members did not always represent themselves and their beliefs in such a way as to calm the waters troubled by nativist winds. Although some church leaders responded to nativists by trying to explain the tenets of their faith and the difference between a spiritual allegiance to Rome and a civic one to Washington, others only encouraged those who would denounce Catholics, or at least Church leaders, as "enemies of the liberties of the republic," or see them as "antitheses of American ideals," or as "an inverted image of Jacksonian democracy."[30]

There was the Catholic priest in Champlain, New York, who protested use of the King James version of the Bible in the public schools by publicly burning several of them. There was the St. Louis based Catholic newspaper, the *Shepherd of the Valley*, which, in 1848, announced that its object was to show that Protestantism was "effete, powerless, dying out though disturbed only by its proper gangrenes, and conscious that its last moment" would come when it was "fairly set, face to face, with Catholic truth." (Much the same, as was well known, was being taught in Catholic schools throughout the United States and included in the numerous devotional guides prepared for the Church community.) And, finally, there was Archbishop John Hughes of New York, who, in 1850, delivered a sermon at St. Patrick's Cathedral titled "The Decline of Protestantism and its Causes," in which he delivered the same message. That some had "discovered" the Church's intentions in the Mississippi River Valley, he added, however, is no discovery at all:

> There is no secret about this. The object we hope to accomplish in time, is to convert all pagan nations, and all Protestant nations. . . . It is the commission of God to his church. . . . Protestantism startles our eastern borders occasionally on the intention of the Pope with regard to the Valley of the Mississippi, and dreams that it has made a wonderful discovery. Not at all. Everybody should know that we have for our mission to convert the world—including the inhabitants of the United States—the people in the cities, and the people in the country, the officers of the navy and the marines, commanders of the army, the legislatures, the Senate, the Cabinet, the President, and all.[31]

Such words, though long since mitigated in their impact through dispassionate discourse and analysis, were uttered at a time when the Roman Catholic Church was attracting the passionate ridicule of Protestants in Europe, as well as in the United States, for its ultramontanism and its quest for a more fundamental Tridentine Catholicism and absolute magisterium. It proclaimed that the Roman Catholic Church was the "one perfect visible institution on earth," and that no one outside the church could be saved. In particular references to the United States, the magisterium ruled that where Protestants should open their doors to Catholics—in reference to offers by some Protestant leaders of reform associations to Catholics to join forces for the good of society—their company should be shunned as a clear and present danger to their faith. As Barbara Welter has suggested, the "popular delusions and the madness" of anti-Catholicism in the first half of the nineteenth century were not necessarily "hallucinatory in origin." They could be considered as the "expression of serious concern on the part of perfectly rational Americans."[32]

Still, despite the foreboding expressed by the missionary societies and the churches in regard to Catholicism in the Mississippi Valley, an undercurrent of optimism prevailed. Ray Allen Billington has written, "As staunch defenders of their faiths, it was inconceivable to Protestants that the Divine Plan included their eventual defeat at the hands of Rome." They believed that "God would one day rise in His wrath to wipe out Catholicism and thus create a pure and undefiled Christianity." They envisaged the Catholic settlement of the Mississippi Valley as part of the Divine Plan to convert the world to Protestantism:

> Why else . . . had God prevented the colonizing of North
> America by turning the Spanish adventurers to more fertile
> fields until the Reformation had given the true Bible to man?
> Why had He allowed the lowly savage to hold the first settlers
> on the seaboard until they had developed and strengthened
> their religion and religious institutions? Why had He permitted
> the influx of Catholic foreigners into the country only after
> these preparations have been completed for their arrival? The
> design was obvious. God had planned the entire settlement of
> America only as a means of luring Europe's priest-ridden
> peasants to a land where their conversion was possible.[33]

Finally, although there were sporadic incidents of violence in the West—the political riots of 1850 and 1854 in St. Louis and of 1855 in Louisville, for example, or that which accompanied papal nuncio Archbishop Gaetano Bedini's visit to Cincinnati in 1853—anti-Catholic activity was less pronounced and less violent in the West than in the East. Moreover, nearly all of the anti-Catholic propaganda on the settlement of the Mississippi River Valley was written by easterners, many of whom had never set foot in the West (Lyman Beecher being a notable exception)—men and women who were the closest of kin, and

occasionally one and the same, of the authors of other forms of nativist literature as well as of the formulations of manifest destiny.[34]

One theme is clear in this literature, namely that the battle to save the West from the Pope could not be entrusted to the westerner. As suggested by the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education in the West, quoted earlier, Eastern, more specifically New England morals, religion and culture—that by which the battle might be won—had not been successfully transplanted to the West by those who had moved there in the early years of the nineteenth century. Their growth had been choked by the noxious weeds of atheism and intemperance, which more naturally flourished on the frontier. As Edward Norris Kirk put it, those who had gone before them to the West had been seared by the "liquid fire" of the frontier, burning out their conscience and character. "Without some strong counteracting power from without . . . the degeneracy [of the West] would be rapid." Horace Bushnell, author of the widely read *Barbarism, the First Danger* (1847), wrote that conditions on the frontier were such that "there must, in every . . . case, be a relapse towards barbarism, more or less protracted, more or less complete." "Our first danger is barbarism," he warned, and only then, Romanism. The battle for the Mississippi Valley, though not necessarily in doubt, was made more difficult, not because of the strength of the opposition, but rather because of the weakness of those who were doing battle with it.[35]

Not surprisingly, eastern nativists, much like northern abolitionists, employed a bit of the jeremiad—communal testing and deliverance—in explaining the course of events. Ultimately, it was neither the strength of Roman Catholicism, nor America's liberal institutions with their tolerance of dissent, that was at fault, but, rather, a loss of common dedication to the noble cause and tradition of their forefathers. Though the nation had begun with the blessings of God and with the noblest institutions known to man, the people had somehow become selfish and complacent, divided by petty disputes, and insensitive to signs of disaster.

As the literature suggests, those in the East had atoned for their failings—their sins—and had justified themselves, once again, and had been sanctified, by rededicating themselves to the glorious crusade of wresting the nation from moral and social disintegration. Not so the people of the West. The battle for the West could only be entrusted to missionaries from the East and with all the moral sanction and imputed righteousness they could muster, Easterners embarked on a "glorious crusade," a second "errand into the wilderness," not only to save the Mississippi Valley from the Pope, but also to reclaim their place as the chosen people of God.

Notes

1. Quoted in John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism*, 2nd ed., revised (Chicago, 1969), 151.
2. Quoted in George M. Stephenson, "Nativism in the Forties, With Special Reference to the Mississippi Valley," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 9 (December 1922), 185; Ray Allen

Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York, 1938), 118.

3. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, 32; Ray Allen Billington, "Anti-Catholic Propaganda and the Home Missionary Movement, 1800-1860," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 22 (December 1935), 362.

4. For figures on denominational membership see Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America*, revised ed. (New York, 1976), *passim*. See also Ellis, *American Catholicism*, 50.

5. Arthur Cole, "Nativism in the Lower Mississippi Valley," *Mississippi Valley Historical Proceedings* (1913), 6, 259-260.

6. Billington, "Anti-Catholic Propaganda," 363.

7. John Rothensteiner, *History of the Archdiocese of St. Louis* (2 vols.: St. Louis, 1928), 1, 817-824.

8. Edward L. Morse, *Samuel F. B. Morse, His Life and Journals* (2 vols.: Boston, 1914), 1, 353.

9. Samuel F. B. Morse, *A Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States* (New York, 1834); *Imminent Dangers to the Free Institutions of the United States through Foreign Immigration* (orig. 1835; New York, 1969).

10. Morse, *Imminent Dangers*, 8; *The National Protestant* 3 (1945), 3.

11. Morse, *Imminent Dangers*, 7.

12. Morse, *Imminent Dangers*, 41-42, 64-68, 71-74, 106, 112-113, 143.

13. Morse, *Imminent Dangers*, 25.

14. "Lyman Beecher to Caroline Beecher," in Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography and Correspondence* (2 vols.: New York, 1865), 2, 224-225.

15. Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West* (Cincinnati, 1835), 115.

16. *Ibid.*, 11.

17. *Ibid.*, 11-12.

18. *Ibid.*, 99.

19. Walter H. Hill, *Historical Sketches of the St. Louis University* (St. Louis, 1879), 40-52; Rita G. Adams, *et al.*, *St. Louis, 150 Years* (St. Louis, 1968), 1-45.

20. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, 142-155, 220-231, 237 n. 52; Adams, *St. Louis*, 31.

21. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, 68-76. Beecher's sermons delivered during his tour of the East are in volume one of Lyman Beecher, *The Works of the Reverend Lyman Beecher* (2 vols.: Boston, 1852).

22. Edward Norris Kirk, *The Church and the College* (Boston, 1856), 29.

23. Billington, "Anti-Catholic Propaganda," 379.

24. Billington, "Anti-Catholic Propaganda," 378-379.

25. *Home Missionary* XII (August 1839), 73. See also American Home Missionary Society, *Sixth Annual Report* (New York, 1832); and Billington, "Anti-Catholic Propaganda," 375.

26. *Home Missionary* II (April 1830), 192; *Home Missionary* XX (December 1847), 177; *Home Missionary* XVI (August 1843), 84.

27. American Home Missionary Society, *Seventeenth Annual Report* (New York, 1843), 82.

28. Barbara Welter, "From Maria Monk to Paul Blanshard: A Century of Protestant Anti-Catholicism," in Robert N. Bellah and Frederick E. Greenspahn, eds., *Uncivil Religion: Interreligious Hostility in America*, (New York, 1987), 46.

29. Cole, "Nativism,"260; David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Countersubversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic and Anti-Mormon Literature," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47 (September 1960), 205.

30. David J. O'Brien, "Catholic Contentiousness: The Public Consequences of Denominational Disputes," in *Uncivil Religion*, 216. See, for example, the Fourth (Roman Catholic) Provincial Council of American Bishops of May 1840 and their disclaimer as to Church's intending any interference with its members' judgment in political affairs and free exercise of their constitutional rights. Ellis, *American Catholicism*, 74.

31. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, 157, 290, 291; Jay Dolan, "Catholic Attitudes Toward Protestants," in *Uncivil Religion*, 76-77.

32. Dolan, "Catholic Attitudes," 75-76, 80; Welter, "From Maria Monk," 44.

33. Billington, "Anti-Catholic Propaganda," 383.

34. For some discussion of the contrasting forms and varying degrees of nativism of the East and of the Mississippi River Valley, see Stephenson, "Nativism in the Forties," 196-197.

35. Edward Norris Kirk, *The Church Essential to the Republic. A Sermon in Behalf of the American Home Missionary Society* (New York, 1848), n.p.; Horace Bushnell, *Barbarism the First Danger: A Discourse for Home Missions* (New York, 1847), n.p. For some discussion of New England morals in nativist literature of the Mississippi River Valley, see Stephenson, "Nativism in the Forties," 193-194.