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Religion in the far West: Oregon's Willamette Valley, 1830–1850

Thomas, David Charles, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1993

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RELIGION IN THE FAR WEST:
OREGON'S WILLAMETTE VALLEY, 1230-1850

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

David Charles Thomas, B.S., M.S., M.A.

The Ohio State University
1993

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1993
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most intimately supportive have been my family and friends. My wife and children, my parents, sister, and brother, and members of my extended family have given personal and intellectual encouragement, readings, commentary, and love. Few prevent obsession and provide perspective like six- and three-year old boys riding their bicycles in a snowstorm. To a small girl bouncing up and down and giggling history is measured in seconds, a wonderful point-of-view.

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Todd Shaeffer at the Oregon Historical Society provided valuable assistance with that library's holdings. Virginia Renner, and The Huntington Library as a whole, gave an eye-opening demonstration of a pinnacle of library facilities. I also found The Bancroft Library helpful. Libraries closer to home I used more regularly. The Pontifical College Josephinum I visited periodically. Week in and week out The Ohio State University Library and the Ohio Historical Society Library testified to academic strength in central Ohio.

My subjects are worth a note here, as well. Crabbed and two-faced though they sometimes were, some of them inspired my affection. They left behind intimate, beautiful, funny, and sometimes sad thoughts of themselves and of God. More simply put,
I like some of these people I studied and I admire their appreciation of the lives which they had.
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INTRODUCTION

Historians have created a substantial family of religious histories of the United States in an effort to understand the spiritual pursuits of Americans. Most of this work emphasizes strong religious expression east of the Mississippi: groups such as the Puritans, events such as the Awakenings, and leaders like Jonathan Edwards and Billy Graham. One well-respected recent survey, Edwin Gaustad's *A Religious History of the American People* (1990), devotes two out of five sections—over one hundred pages—to colonial religion east of the Mississippi, yet but one chapter—eighteen pages—to religion during the early settlement of Louisiana Territory, Hawaii, Alaska, and the Far West. Another recent history, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark's *The Churching of America* (1992), casually dismisses everything west of the Mississippi in 1850. The hundred thousand people in California and Oregon Territory—about 0.5% of the population in 1850—were statistically insignificant. Other new volumes of religious history, such as Nathan Hatch's *The Democratization of American Christianity* and Jon Butler's *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, renew attention on periods and ideas which have received only moderate attention, but these too, like most religious histories, concentrate on Easterners of intense and acknowledged religious experience.¹

Although histories of the west abound, they rarely confront religious practice or faith. The only well-developed exceptions to this are bodies of literature on Mormonism and Christian missions. Recent western surveys, such as Patricia Limerick’s *The Legacy of Conquest* (1987), remain limited by the perception of western apathy towards the transcendent, focusing instead on the dominant historiographic themes of exploration, exploitation, development, land distribution, and Indian conflict. William A. Bowen’s study, *The Willamette Valley* (1978), maps out a great variety of detailed, valuable information on migration and settlement, but contains little mention of churches or religious demographics. The 1993 Annual Conference of the Western History Association—the premier organization of western historians in the country—featured nothing on religious history, except for a one-paper session on Mormonism and a paper on Mennonite pacifism. Similarly revealing is Michael Malone’s edited collection of historiographic essays, *Historians and the American West* (1983). It contains only very brief historiographic discussion of religion, except for Mormonism, because so few regional interpretations have been framed. Just as the West does not fully participate in our histories of religion, religious faith and expression are usually not part of the West as historians imagine it.¹

“...” of course, is huge. Turner made the Atlantic Coast the first “West,” perhaps we are all Western historians. Even the more common and smaller “West,” the trans-Mississippi West, does not readily submit to plans for its organization. Carl Guarneri and David Alvarez’s *Religion and Society in the American West* (1987) is a useful set of essays which reflects this difficulty. The editors juxtapose topics ranging from Mexican Catholicism to the Unification Church, giving each of twenty pieces equal

weight; connections between the essays are not straightforward. The book reveals the heterogeneity and fragmentation inherent to any region so vast.3

Other scholars have fastened upon state borders to define the limits of their study. Carlos A. Schwantes's *The Pacific Northwest* (1989) examines Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, while Gordon B. Dodds's *The American Northwest* (1986) excludes Idaho. State boundaries seem appropriate for time periods in which society has had time to adjust to the political and material organization established by state lines. Those who migrate to a state live within a tightly ordered political framework and often choose places to live based partly on boundaries defined by tax laws, zoning laws, or school systems. For frontier regions, though, or for questions about the development of a culture, other forms of organization can be more valuable. To the initial settlers, environmental characteristics such as geology, climate, or land quality were more important.

Scholarship reflects this importance. Donald Meinig focused on the Columbia Plain, while Wilbur Zelinsky, William A. Bowen, and others have studied Puget Sound and the Willamette Valley as geographically defined regions in the Northwest. I have chosen to work with the Willamette Valley, one of the earliest identifiable regions of American settlement in the Far West and today the most settled and most culturally prominent region of Oregon.4

Extant histories of religion in early Oregon, like most religious histories of the trans-Mississippi West, tend to be denominational or mission histories. Albert W. Wardin, Jr. and Clifford R. Miller have contributed histories of the Baptists, building on

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the older work of C. H. Mattoon. Jay Dolan's study of the Catholic parish devotes
volume two to the West and Midwest. Mary Dominica McNamee, Letitia Lyons, Wilfred
P. Schoenberg have worked with Catholic history in smaller units. The Methodists,
Congregationalists and others each have their own histories, as do a few individual
churches. A number of scholars have written in a second major category, the mission field.
Charles Drury's numerous books about missions in the Pacific Northwest remain valuable.
while Robert J. Loewenberg and Wilfred P. Schoenberg have contributed new accounts of
the Methodist and Jesuit missions. The Methodist Board of Missions has published a
multi-volume series entitled History of Methodist Missions; the Oregon Mission receives
detailed treatment. Other histories of missions or missionaries could be listed; clearly
this topic has fascinated many who have been interested in the early history of Oregon.
The strength of these books is their intimate, detailed connection to a denomination or a
mission. They often supply useful biographical material. However, integrative regional
work is hard to find.5

This study is deliberately regional, inter-denominational, and inclusive, for such
were the perceived needs at its inception. Within the Willamette Valley from 1830 to
1850—or roughly from the first white settlement to the gold rush—several forms of

5Albert W. Wardin, Jr., Baptists in Oregon (Portland: Judson Baptist College,
Convention, 1967). C. H. Mattoon, Baptist Annals of Oregon 1844 to 1900 (McMinnville,
American Catholic Parish: A History from 1850 to the Present, Volume 2: Pacific States,
Intermountain West, and Midwest States (New York: Paulist Press, 1987). Mary
Letitia M. Lyons, Francis Norbert Blanchet and the Founding of the Oregon Mission, 1835-
1848 (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1940). Wilfred P.

Clifford Merrill Drury, Henry Harmon Spalding (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton
Printers, Ltd, 1936). Robert J. Loewenberg, Equality on the Oregon Frontier: Jason Lee and
Wilfred P. Schoenberg, Paths to the Northwest: A Jesuit History of the Oregon Province
(Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1982).
Christianity found expression. Methodists and Catholics dominated institutionally, but a number of smaller denominations gained adherents and built churches. Strong competition from denominationally-based Home Mission societies gave the area a large number of clergy; these, in turn, gathered settlers into churches. Ancillary practices—tract and temperance societies, for instance, and domestic practices of piety—were less successful but were present despite the difficulties of organizing and paying for them, and despite the shortage of women. Religious practices which operated outside of an institutional framework—fortune telling, omens, and so forth—coexisted with the more orthodox expressions of faith.

To all these practices and faiths, a great variety of responses were possible. The many pastors who settled the region were openly welcomed. Rates of conversion and church membership paralleled rates for the Midwest, from which many settlers had come. Other residents doubted religious authorities or shunted aside proclamations of transcendent truth through humorous dismissals and common sense explanations. Overt hostility to religion was limited, though; even anti-Catholicism was not prominent. By crossing the boundaries of denomination and orthodoxy, exploring a reasonably well-defined cultural region, including a broad range of responses to religion, and covering a span of years which includes the missionary and the settler, I hope to construct an interpretation more regionally and religiously integrative than its predecessors.

Jon Butler, borrowing from anthropologist Melford Spiro, defines religion as "belief in and resort to superhuman powers, sometimes beings, that determine the course of natural and human events." Those who believe that supernatural events and beings affect human life are considered to be religious; those who do not, are not. His working

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definition is more Christian than the words allow; after all, his book is subtitled
"Christianizing the American people," but such a definition does no damage to the study
of Christian faith, recognizes the vast diversity included within Christianity, and
easily allows inclusion of the unorthodox faiths which so often commingled with
Christians' beliefs. I have adopted a similarly broad, substantive conception of religion-
what religion is--rather than a functional conception--what religion does.

I have also found my thinking influenced by those who attempt to separate faith
from religion. Probably Bonhoeffer, Barth, and Ellul first drew my attention to such a
thing as "religionless Christianity," although within Christianity there is a long
tradition of tension between the two. W. Cantwell Smith argues that religion is a
combination of "cumulative tradition" and "faith." Smith was reluctant to define faith
for, in his words, an individual's "faith lies beyond that sector of their religious life that
can be imparted to an outsider for his inspection." A student of his, James Fowler, was
less reluctant, defining faith as "the person's or group's way of responding to transcendent
value and power as perceived and grasped through the forms of the cumulative tradition"
and as "the relation of trust in and loyalty to the transcendent about which concepts or
propositions--beliefs--are fashioned." Cumulative tradition, according to Smith,
expresses and elicits faith through various mundane manifestations: law, scripture,
ritual, architecture, theology, music, and so forth. The two complement each other,
finding mutual expression in the person and the community, and change as one generation
gives way to the next. Smith's work draws upon several of the major religions of the
world to form this distinction between faith and cumulative tradition, and to define faith
in terms of loyalty and trust. This I consider a strength; it allows, at the least, for greater

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continuity between faith which is obviously Christian and the faiths which are not obviously Christian yet which are embraced by Christians nonetheless. This approach also allows for a more fully human, less institutional study of religion. Furthermore, because Smith’s understanding comes from such a broad base, it seems to me that this is a concept of faith useful not only in studying nineteenth-century Americans, but also in connecting them to other ages and religions.

For those who held fast to a Christian orthodoxy, the language is clear and not difficult to exemplify. Margaret Bailey trusted Jesus to save her from death and from her persecutors. She expressed this trust in a variety of feelings, thoughts, spontaneous behaviors, and rituals. "Trust," naturally, was never unadulterated; fear, the will to power, and other responses to God intermixed. Additionally, Bailey’s confidence in the foretelling value of signs and omens took shape in a folk tradition somewhat alien to Christianity. Quite clearly she was a Christian by profession, baptism, and lifestyle, but both her faith and her cumulative traditions—her expressions of faith—included features of doubtful relevance or connection to Christian orthodoxy.

Of course, contemporaries did not separate the two with the precision that scholars try to. Throughout much of this work, my word choice reflects the more inclusive terminology of nineteenth-century believers. They used “religion" to mean all sorts of things: rituals of worship, personal piety, the experience of conversion, everything remotely connected to the church, and so forth. For the sake of simplicity, I have usually done the same. At times, though, I have made more precise distinctions. I hope I have made these occasions clear in the text. To muddy the issue further, I partly disagree with Smith and Fowler and others who distinguish carefully between faith and religion. From the perspective of the faithful, the distinction becomes vanishingly small; this is amplified in the last few pages of the conclusion. Nonetheless, despite the difficulties of defining faith, I have relied on these various scholars for speaking of a distinction between faith and religion.
The chapters are organized chronologically around demographic changes. The first two chapters analyze the religious convictions of the three main groups to converge on the valley in the 1830s. During this decade, up until the first large immigrations, the Valley was settled by retired French Canadian Catholic fur traders (joined eventually by priests), by Methodists missionaries led by Jason Lee, and by assorted Americans, mostly fur traders, who expressed a mixed but often cool response to Christianity. These three traditions were molded by their confrontations with each other and with the physical environment. Despite the strongly conservative tendencies of these groups, none remained religiously static.

Chapter Three is a case study of Margaret Jewett Bailey, a women who came west as part of the Methodist mission. Although she began her career as a missionary, she later turned her hand to writing, eventually producing a small quantity of poetry, a series of newspaper columns, a short story, and an autobiographical novel. Her book, The Grains, was written primarily as a literary attempt to clear her reputation, soiled as it was by poor relationships at the mission and an abusive husband. In many ways a bitter, antagonistic story, Bailey’s novel also expressed great faith in the value of literature and in the power of God to vindicate her. I focus on the interaction between her developing ideas about women’s rights, her belief in the power of literature, and her Christian faith.

Chapters Four through Six pick up the narrative in the 1840s, when the immigration of thousands of Americans transformed the religious practices of the Willamette Valley. Chapter Four examines the changes within the Catholic and Methodist missions and the development by several denominations of churches and camp-meetings. These were the core institutions in which the central expressions of faith—conversion and worship—were displayed. Chapter Five outlines attempts by lay and clerical authorities to promote religious activity in other areas, including temperance and other voluntary societies, schools, and domestic piety. These were largely secondary
institutions whose primary purpose was to help the churches form a civil, Christian society. Finally, Chapter Six analyzes non-institutional expressions of faith: doubt, humor, common sense, and superstition. Some of these practices were included in a Christian framework; some were not Christian but happily intermixed with various orthodoxies; and some had nothing to do with any orthodoxy.⁹

The Gold Rush redirected the westering movement in 1849, drew thousands of people out of Oregon, and changed the economy substantially, so I broke off the analysis at that point. The end of the decade is a convenient religious demarcation, as well. Within a year or two on either side of 1850 most denominations had grown to the point where they had several churches. At that point, they needed and created some larger institution—presbytery or ecclesiastical province, for instance—to govern or counsel their churches. Growth of religious institutions from that point took place with less direct input from Eastern governing bodies.

Finally, Chapter Seven attempts to place religion in Oregon in the context of the historiography of religion and the American West, and of the development of Christianity in America.

I have not devoted time or space to the people who lived in or visited the region before the first European and American settlers. European knowledge of the Pacific Northwest stretches back perhaps as far as 1579, when Sir Francis Drake sailed up the

⁹It could undoubtedly be argued that the order of these three chapters should be reversed, that the most prevalent faiths should be called “dominant” and the least prevalent—church membership—should not be called “central.” I have organized it though, not on the basis of majority rule, but around the attitudes of mid-nineteenth-century Americans. Church membership, they believed, was primarily about religion and was reserved for those people who were considered to be pious, converted believers. Temperance membership could be motivated by religion and usually included pious people, but did not include what people generally thought of as “religious experiences.” Omens, doubts, and even common sense were on the fringe: thought about and partly believed, but not regarded as finally authoritative or even religious. This being a study of Christian religion, it only makes sense to emphasize the central faiths and practices of mid-nineteenth-century Christianity.
Pacific Coast, possibly as far as Oregon. Spanish and Russian explorers passed along the coast in the mid-1700s and at least dabbled in furs, although extent of the Russian fur trade is not clear. Captain James Cook's voyage in the late 1770s was perhaps the most important of the early voyages; in addition to describing methodically the coast and the natural resources, he discovered for the British the economic value of sea otter pelts. Even before the publication of Cook's reports in 1784, news of the fur resources had generated commercial interest in Europe. Twenty years later, Lewis and Clark also "spurred the commerce in furs." John Jacob Astor briefly competed with the British for furs in the early 1810s, setting up a trading post at the mouth of the Columbia River. Spain retreated South shortly after that and the Russians headed North in the 1820s, leaving America and Great Britain alone in the competition. The Honorable Hudson's Bay Company dominated the fur trade and all other forms of commerce from then until the Americans arrived in force in the early 1840s. However, the national boundaries were left undecided by treaties of 1818 and 1827. Joint occupation of the Pacific Northwest was agreed upon, thus allowing American traders and missionaries to establish American settlements in the Valley in the 1830s.10

Various Indian groups lived in the Pacific Northwest at this time, numbering perhaps one to three hundred thousand. Extensive contact with Europeans, brought by the expanding fur trade, introduced new and devastating diseases to the Indians, especially after the 1770s. Residents of the Valley—primarily the nine subgroups of Calapuyans, but also some of the Clackamas and the Yoncalla—seem to have escaped the smallpox which traveled along the coast during the late eighteenth-century. Lewis and Clark estimated that four to five thousand Natives lived in Valley (both above and below the Willamette Falls) and that several thousand more resided in the Valley for part of the year. The Hudson's Bay Company set up an interior post, Fort Vancouver, in 1825, and it

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10Schwantes, 19-66.
was not long before close contact with whites introduced fatal disease. Epidemics of malaria from 1830 to 1833 started at Fort Vancouver, spread up and down the Columbia and up the Willamette. Perhaps seventy-five percent of the Indians in the Valley were killed. Geographers Samuel N. Dicken and Emily F. Dicken concluded that "these Indians were so devastated by disease before the settlers arrived that very little is known of them," although knowledge of other Indians is extensive. At the time when British and Americans started to settle the Valley, the Calapuyans and other Natives were sickly, demoralized, and few in number. By 1841, after a decade of sporadic settlement, Charles Wilkes estimated their population to be between four and five hundred; Calapuyan life in the Valley had been nearly entirely destroyed well before the large migrations of Americans.  

The religious interaction between Americans, Canadians, and Calapuyans or other Natives was negligible. Indian influence upon the religion of whites was practically non-existent. Christians believed Indians to be uncivilized heathens and the Indians did not disappoint those preconceptions; I have found nothing of religious value which Americans or Canadians who had settled in the Valley adopted from Indians, with the possible exception of French Canadians with Native wives. White influence among the religious practices of the Indians was similarly small, especially in the Valley. Protestant, but especially Catholic, missions were more successful up the Columbia River and in the mountains, where the Indians were more numerous and healthier. In the Valley both Catholics and Methodists struggled to make permanent impression, with little success. Robert Berkhofer concluded that the Oregon mission was

not among the most important missionary efforts of the nineteenth century. Judging from the utter lack of Indian conversion, it's hard to disagree with him.

However, my primary agenda has not been to tell the story of the missions to the Indians. Others have done that at length. Nor have I cared to follow one denomination to the exclusion of others. Two agendas drive this study: to continue the interpretation of religious history in the American West, but on a regional rather than a denominational basis; and to identify more fully the dialogue between individual faith and institutional expression.

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CHAPTER I
RELIGION IN THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY, 1830-1841

Oregon’s Willamette River dominates the land between the Coastal Range and the Cascade Mountains, emptying into the Columbia River after a northward journey through a basin roughly one hundred fifty miles long. Today the valley contains the most populous and economically productive part of Oregon, including the city of Portland in the north, Oregon’s capital city Salem, roughly halfway down, and Eugene further south. In the 1840s, when Americans—primarily from Missouri and the Midwest—started the long walk to Oregon, it was this valley which they imagined, this valley to which they drove their cattle and carried their seed. A coveted mixture of plains and forest and water, the valley was exceptionally well-suited for the agriculture of the day and attracted thousands of immigrants before the California gold discoveries of 1848 redirected the westering movement. However, prior to the great migrations of the 1840s, the valley had been settled by British and American pioneers; indeed, the stories told and praises given by the missionaries and mountain men of the 1830s catalyzed the migration which began in 1842.¹

Three distinct groups of British and Americans settled the Willamette Valley in the 1830s. French Canadian fur trappers and traders—usually Catholic—arrived earliest. Methodist missionaries settled in 1834 and enjoyed periodic reinforcements. American fur traders and assorted others—often antagonistic to religion—trickled in throughout the decade in increasing numbers as the fur business shifted away from beaver and news of the valley spread. Each group brought religious expectations, ideals, and doubts, forming together an eclectic religious environment. The presence of three strong eastern traditions combined with a formidable physical environment, in which aid was both a necessity and a sign of respect, to effect change in the religious values of the settlers. Some who arrived with little religious interest returned to the faith of their childhood; others, arriving with a strong denominational orientation, found increased importance in tolerance and pluralism.

The three groups named above totaled perhaps sixty families in 1841. The two dozen or so families of French Canadians had been employed by the Hudson's Bay Company (H. B. C.), led by chief factor Dr. John McLoughlin. Primarily Catholic, many had not seen a priest for a decade or more, some not for their entire adult life. They often

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2LeRoy R. Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*, I (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1972), 174-175. The silk hat became fashionable in the early 1830s; at the same time beaver had become overtrapped, hard to find, and therefore expensive. During the 1830s the fur trade shifted from primarily beaver to primarily buffalo; the last rendezvous was held in 1840.


4As Chief Factor of the Columbia District, McLoughlin was responsible for a region roughly enclosed by the watershed of the Columbia River: most of the present states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, southern British Columbia, western Montana, and the northwest corner of Utah. His immediate superiors were the Governor (Sir George Simpson) and committee of the H. B. C. W. Kaye Lamb, "Introduction," *Hudson’s Bay Company Series, IV* (E. E. Rich, ed., *The Letters of John McLoughlin from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee. First Series, 1825-1838* [Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1941]), xii.
married—or merely lived with, depending on the point of view—Indian women; many fathered numerous children. The earliest, Etienne Lucier, settled in the Valley in 1830. Joseph Gervais and Louis La Bone followed Lucier the next year. Several others acted in the same manner in the next few years, receiving seed, supplies, and aid from McLoughlin. Together they formed a settlement on what came to be called French Prairie, a broad stretch of grassland and forest on the east bank of the Willamette between the Willamette and one of its tributaries, the Pudding River. In 1834 and again in 1835 they petitioned the Bishop of Juliopolis for the services of a priest. Initially passage on H.B.C. boats was denied by H.B.C. leaders in London, who feared the potential for conflict between Protestants and Catholics. After urging from the bishop and from McLoughlin, though, the governor and committee relented and in 1836 gave permission for the use of H.B.C. boats. The delays increased the anxiety of the Canadians in the Valley, by this time feeling pressure from the Methodist missionaries; twice more they reminded the Bishop of their need. Finally in 1838, four years after the original petition, Fathers Francis Norbert Blanchet and Modeste Demers arrived in the Oregon Territory.

The Methodist missionaries, led by Reverend Jason Lee, first organized in response to a widely-publicized request for missionaries by a delegation of western Indians. To answer the call, Lee and four companions went west in 1834, the same year

5These three came west in connection with Astoria, John Jacob Astor’s attempt to set up a fur trade base at the mouth of the Columbia just prior to the war of 1812. Blanchet, 78, 148n25.

6Joseph Norbert Provencher was ordained in 1811 and in 1816 went to Red River, in what is now southeast Manitoba. He was named Bishop of Juliopolis and vicar apostolic of the Northwest in 1820 and consecrated in 1822. New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967 ed., s. v. “Provencher, Joseph Norbert.”


8The call was first publicized in the Christian Advocate and Journal, New York, March 1833. Daniel Lee called this “the most important periodical in the Methodist Episcopal Church.” D. Lee and J. H. Frost, Ten Years in Oregon (New York: J. Collard, 1844), 110.
that the Catholics petitioned for a priest. Catholics and Protestants disagree on why Lee did not pursue the original mission, but Lee and his companions, with some advice from McLoughlin, decided to set up a permanent station in the Willamette Valley from which to itinerate and reach the several native groups in the area. The original mission house was located a few miles south of French Prairie, on the same side of the river as their Canadian neighbors. Reinforcements arrived from the States in May 1837, September 1837, and June 1840. They swelled the ranks of the mission to over seventy.

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9 This first group was composed of Reverend Jason Lee, his nephew Reverend Daniel Lee, lay members Cyrus Shepard and Philip L. Edwards, and "non-professor" Courtney M. Walker. The Lees were both ordained as both Elder and Deacon, which qualified them to distribute the sacraments, among other church functions. Shepard was appointed teacher by the Missionary Society of the M.E. Church. Edwards and Walker were hired in Missouri, rather than being commissioned by the Methodist Board.

The connection between the arrival of the Methodists and the sending of the French Canadians' petition is unknown to me. The first Catholic petition was dated July 3, 1834 (Blanchet, 43). Lee's party left Missouri in April of 1834 and arrived at Fort Vancouver (H. B. C. headquarters) on September 15, 1834. They first met Gervais and the other Canadians some days after that. (Lee and Frost, 124-125). Obviously, direct contact with the Methodists did not inspire the request for a priest, but it is possible that the news of Methodist missionaries preceded their arrival by a few months. I have not found records to either confirm or deny that possibility.

10 According to Catholic sources, once the Methodists arrived, they found they were not what the Indians had requested. Having heard from the Iroquois and fur trappers about Catholicism, the Flatheads wanted nothing to do with these married missionaries who wore regular clothes, carried no crucifix, and did not say Mass. Wilfred P. Schoenberg, Paths to the Northwest: A Jesuit History of the Oregon Province (Chicago: Loyola University Press), 2-4. Daniel Lee, nephew to Jason and a member of this first trip, told it differently. According to Lee, not only was the original published call for missionaries "incorrect" and "unfounded," but the Flatheads were few in number due to depredations of the Blackfeet and the means of subsistence in the area were "very doubtful." Lee and Frost, 111, 127. This account has other tellers and variations.

led to the construction of a new mission upstream (south) of the original, and allowed other missions to be started outside of the Willamette Valley.14

The third group was composed of Americans not attached to large external organizations such as the H. B. C, the Methodist Episcopal Church, or the Catholic Church. These were primarily trappers and traders who, in the wake of the declining fur trade, settled in the valley to farm. The first American to reside in the valley was John Ball, who came with Nathaniel J. Wyeth in 1832 on a trading and exploring expedition; Ball and Calvin Tibbets established a farm that year.15 More arrived when Wyeth led the Lee party to the valley in 1834. Ewing Young and Hall Jackson Kelley came up from California in October 1834 with about ten companions, seventy or eighty horses, and a reputation that those horses had not been fairly purchased.16 Others, like William J.

12 This reinforcement included David Leslie, his wife Mary and three children, Margaret Jewett Smith, and H. K. W. Perkins. Leslie and Perkins were both preachers; Smith was a teacher and later married William Bailey. Lee and Frost, 150.

13 Ibid., 217, 225. This reinforcement numbered 52 persons, including Jason Lee’s new wife Lucy Thompson Lee. Lee and Thompson were married July 28 1839, slightly more than a year after the death of Lee’s first wife. Anna Pittman Lee.

14 The most important of these was at The Dalles. Others were at Nisqually (Puget Sound), Umpqua (southern Oregon), Willamette Falls, and the mouth of the Columbia.

15 In 1832, when Wyeth started overland with a few more than twenty men, the Willamette Valley was free of Americans, except for a few who had found employ with the Hudson’s Bay Company. Wyeth, initially attracted to Hall Jackson Kelley’s plan to settle, broke with Kelley in 1831 to form his own expedition, primarily to trade, secondarily to judge if settlement was possible. His trip out in 1832 was difficult but not disillusioning; all Wyeth’s men deserted him before the return trip from Fort Vancouver and he did not make a profit but he was ready to go again in 1834 with a new group. That year, Wyeth sent the brig May Dacre, filled with supplies, to meet him at Wapato Island, just below the intersection of the Willamette and the Columbia. He there built Fort William to establish American trade, but by 1836 had to sell out in the face of H. B. C. economic strength. He returned to a profitable ice business in Massachusetts. Nathaniel J. Wyeth, The Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831-67, ed., F. G. Young (Eugene, Oregon: University Press 1899).

16 Bancroft, XXIX, 89-91. Lee and Frost, 129. Kelley was one of the most important advocates of Oregon settlement; he helped spark Wyeth’s interest in Oregon, created his own emigration attempts, and prompted discussion on the Senate floor. His plans and ideas generated more interest in Oregon than those of perhaps any other individual.
Bailey, called by Susan Shepard "the vilest wretch in the country" but later an important civic figure, trickled in in ones and twos; Bailey and three companions arrived in the summer of 1835. Joseph Meek and Robert Newell and their families arrived in the Willamette Valley in December 1840, unwelcomed and turned away by the Methodists. Other fur men followed, some of whom had stayed behind from the Astoria expeditions and worked for the H. B. C., to settle with them on the Tualatin Plains.

They were joined by four independent missionaries in 1841. Reverend J. S. Griffin, from the North Litchfield Association of Connecticut, came over in 1839, wintered at the Presbyterian mission at Lapwai and spent a difficult year in the Snake country before settling down to farm on Tualatin Plains, on the west bank of the Willamette, in 1841. Presbyterians Reverend Harvey Clark, A. T. Smith, and P. B. Littlejohn came out in 1840. Like Griffin, a year of mission work convinced them of the value of farming; they too settled on Tualatin Plains in 1841.

More could be listed; to summarize, though, the American presence was added to intermittently by free American trappers and assorted others. They enjoyed no religious

Young had been a trapper in the Southwest, meeting Kelley in San Diego. Although Kelley shortly left Oregon, Young remained and was instrumental in obtaining cattle and furthering settlement.


18 Hafen, I, 324. Bancroft, XXIX, 241-244.

19 Ibid., 238-240. Bowen, 12, states that McLoughlin persuaded the four missionaries to settle at Tualatin Plains to serve as a moderating force amongst the disreputable American trappers.

20 Bancroft, XXIX, 244. One who was not an American but is worth a brief mention is the Reverend Herbert Beaver. He was an Anglican chaplain who arrived at Vancouver in 1836, served an ineffective two years, and left three weeks before the priests arrived in 1838. He seems to fall into the general pattern of missionaries, i.e. he came out with a conservative agenda to recreate life and faith as it was, in this case in a quiet English parish. Unlike the Methodists and the Catholics, though, he could not accept the culture, gained a reputation as an arrogant prig, and left as soon as he could. Herbert Beaver, Reports and Letters of Herbert Beaver, 1836-1838, Chaplain to the Hudson's Bay Co., and Missionary to the Indians at Ft. Vancouver, ed., Thomas E. Jessett, S. T. D. (Portland: Champoeg Press, 1959).
commonalty as did the missionaries and the Canadians. Several had shown themselves at odds not only with the Methodists and the Catholics, but with religious belief in general. However, at least one or two held religious views zealously. Asahel Munger, for instance, who came with Griffin, apparently was so convinced that Christ would work a miracle to save the Indians that he suspended himself over his fire. He died three days later, repentant. Arriving independently and lacking the strong community orientation of the Canadians and the Methodists, they did not settle as a group. However, they concentrated on the west side of the river, north of the other settlers, in a region called Tualatin Plains.

Brought together in the same valley, these diverse groups could hardly be expected to avoid conflict over things transcendent. Fur trapping did not readily mix with New England Methodism; neither did Catholicism. To tell one of the lighter tales, Daniel Lee once found himself deceived at a meeting by a French-speaking trapper named Jandreau. Lee and other preachers praised the power of God as the trapper, apparently filled with remorse over his irresolute life, pretended to repent. The muffled laughter of the French-speaking portion of his audience was Lee's first clue that the man was in fact regaling his French listeners with one of his favorite camp fire tales. But while Lee did not appreciate the vulgarity of the fur men, and abhorred the sexual promiscuity of some, his own Protestant values were disdained by Fathers Blanchet and Demers. Lee and Demers were preaching to the same tribe of Chinook in 1840, when news came that the ship had arrived which bore Methodist reinforcements, including several young women. Blanchet caustically noted that Lee immediately abandoned the Indians, "being

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21 Lee and Frost, 211.

22 Bowen, 12.

23 Bancroft, XXIX, 242-243. The trappers came seeking food and shelter. This event took place at The Dalles, not in the valley, but the larger point is not affected.
in a hurry, no doubt, to visit the ship in order to have the first choice for a wife. "24 Less than two weeks later he married one of those newly arrived, Maria T. Ware.

Wedged in the modest humor of such anecdotes, though, are the germs of a larger point about religious culture in the Willamette Valley. First, neither the Catholics, the Methodists, nor the fur traders had coercive religious power over each other; three more or less evenly matched traditions were present. If the trappers laughed at the Methodists, neither side could do much to change the other. Catholic and Protestant clergy competed for an audience, although before the priests arrived, cooperation between Catholic and Protestant was the norm. Second, the story by the camp fire directly rivalled the story of the Christ. Jandreau’s adventures went head-to-head with Lee’s preaching. In tales which captured the imagination and in daily living, the physical experience of the frontier challenged Christianity and often took both precedence and audience.

Jandreau was not unique; many mountain men rejected Christianity and were hostile to the faith. They spoke against the missionaries with bitterness and anger and told the Indians that there was no God, that the missionaries were liars. Some hostility may have arisen from fear that the missionaries would disrupt the trade, but others cursed Christianity for more direct reasons. John Ball, travelling with Nathaniel Wyeth in 1832, wrote down the origins of his distrust for religious expression. During Ball’s childhood, a Methodist preacher had come to his New Hampshire town. Apparently only four who attended were not converted, of which he was one. Rather than convert, he began to wonder if it were not all “emotion, sympathy, and delusion.” 25

24 Blanchet, 100. The Lausanne arrived at Vancouver on the first of June; Daniel Lee and Maria T. Ware were married on the eleventh. Quick marriages like this seem to have been the norm for the missionaries. Lee and Frost, 226. Theresa Gay, Life and Letters of Mrs. Jason Lee (Portland: Metropolitan Press, 1936), 160-161.

For some, an inability to participate in Christian tradition may have been a motivation to leave settled society behind. Nathaniel Wyeth, explaining his first westward excursion, wrote:

I should not much regret leaving the land of religious freedom as you call it but it is not so to me finding in it none of that freedom of religious opinion of which you speak, by freedom of opinion I mean the exercise and avowal of ones ideas without harm accruing therefrom... Have I not been told that those who believed not in the bible were not fit to be argued with and that too by men who hold themselves especially called to preach forth the religion of love and charity to all men.26

Wyeth, angry and insulted by the religious discrimination he experienced, felt unwelcome in his native New England and scoffed at the providential explanations of events offered by the "righteous people of New England." In a journal entry of 5 May 1833, Wyeth acerbically described how an Indian leader had started to advocate a new religion, first by gaining the following of "fools women and children." Although sensible men initially thought no harm would come of it, eventually they would be outnumbered by the fools, said Wyeth, and "with a bad grace they will have to yield. These things make me think of the new lights and revivals of New England."27

Fur traders and trappers, generally, acquired a reputation among contemporaries as an impious lot. Part of the evidence for this generalization comes from those who travelled with them, such as Ball, the Lees, Cyrus Shepard, Blanchet, and others. Visitors to Dr. McLoughlin at Fort Vancouver were surprised and delighted to be met with

26 Wyeth, 44.

27 Ibid., 149. This letter was dated 3 April 1835. See also Ibid., 43-44. Ibid., 194.
such chivalrous, gentlemanly company, a well-stocked larder, and Sunday services. More support might be found in the Chinook dialect which aided communication between whites (who had two primary languages) and Indians (who had many); while adequate for trade, it barely sufficed for religion. Ball listed a vocabulary of this language which contained nothing pertaining to Spirit, God, or anything transcendent. Ball, as mentioned above, cared little about religion, and so might be expected not to include religious vocabulary. But the Reverend Samuel Parker's vocabulary was similarly sparse and included only very simple words, such as God, Heaven, Hell, Evil Spirit. Finally, when Father Blanchet first arrived at the French settlement on the Willamette, he noted that the men remembered their prayers surprisingly well and received him with glad and open hearts. Without a trace of irony in his written voice, though, he also noted that they often had to go to confession more than once.

However, the former trappers—French Canadians especially—were not necessarily hostile towards religion; some were interested, and a few responded positively to Christianity. When H. B. C. employee Thomas McKay asked Jason Lee to preach one Sabbath during Lee's first trip out in 1834, Lee had an audience of perhaps thirty Indians, and thirty more Americans and French Canadians (who would have been mostly Catholic). McKay suggested the idea, not Lee, and his brigade apparently


29 Blanchet, 81.
listened with "profound and respectful attention."^30 Robert Shortess was raised in a pious family, as was John Ball. Also like Ball, his life on the frontier was one of skepticism, doubt, and "enmity against God" until he converted to Methodism in 1840.^31

Although the fur traders usually moved outside of the normal circles of established religion, exposure to Christianity occurred with regularity. For those traders who maintained literary pursuits, the Hudson's Bay Company provided books, including the Bible, Clark's commentary on the Bible, and treatises on philosophy. Noted authors such as Shakespeare, Byron, and Scott were part of the H. B. C. collection, as were scientific works on geology and chemistry.^32 LeRoy Hafen describes Joseph Meek as intellectually curious, reading when possible and sprinkling his speech with literary quotes. Osborne Russell, as well, was "always studious and seldom without books."^33 Such an environment apparently led to Russell's conversion. On one expedition, having read everything else, Russell took up a Bible, felt it condemned him and yet offered forgiveness and hope. His conversion contributed to his exit from the fur trade and he settled in the Willamette Valley in 1842.^34

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31Lee and Frost, 262. The authors here reprinted a letter from Shortess to Daniel Lee. It is also found in manuscript form. Robert Shortess, to Daniel Lee, 12 January 1841, Mss 1211, Oregon Historical Society, Oregon.

32Hafen, I, 325. Osborne Russell, Journal of a Trapper, ed., Aubrey L. Haines (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1965), 109. Hafen, X, 10, notes that "where the information was available, the majority [of mountain men] could at least read and write." John Ball's disparaging comments about the illiteracy of Wyeth's men on the 1832 trip may have been an exaggeration. Some of the French Canadians undoubtedly knew a few languages: French, English, the Chinook dialect, and perhaps the language of one or more native peoples.

33Hafen, I, 325-326, 313.

Hafen also notes that Meek had missionaries in and out of his life. He met Parker and Whitman at rendezvous in 1835, the Whitman party again at rendezvous in 1836 (both were at Green River), Jason Lee and William Gray and their two parties in 1838 (rendezvous at Wind River). In 1840 he visited the Whitman mission on his way to settle in the Willamette Valley. Despite his rejection by the Methodist missionaries that year, in 1843 he converted to Methodism at a camp meeting.

In short, the fur traders and trappers, like most Americans, were exposed to Christianity in childhood and in adult life, even in the mountains. Some were bitterly antagonistic toward the church and some always ready to laugh, but others were willing to participate. Revivals early in 1839 and 1840, precipitated by crises in the Methodist community, led to the conversion of several fur traders, numerous Indians, the children of some of the missionaries, and others, such as William Bailey. The Catholic renewal of 1838 indicates a similar willingness to profess faith on the part of former fur traders.

Methodist missionaries returned the ambivalence of the fur men with an ambivalence of their own. A great deal of the fur culture antagonized the Methodists. They deplored the shooting of antelope and buffalo for sport, the occasional but well-planned drinking sprees, traveling and working on the Sabbath, the profanity and lack of piety. All this was part of the overland journey (which was made in the company of large parties of trappers) and, to a lesser extent, the settled lives of the fur men. The missionaries did not write much about the cynicism and doubt to which they were exposed, but this must have chafed them as well. Sometimes they returned the mocking...
with stories of their own. Lee and Frost recounted with sardonic wit an attempt to distill some alcohol in the late 1830s. The distillery was poor and "young Alcohol . . . through some mistake, imbibed too much water." The distillers nonetheless "resolved to send him to destruction . . . in their several stomachs, where it was hoped he might be so dissipated as to take refuge in the head, as on former occasions." Poor alcohol, though, "was unable to upset their sobriety" and the distillers "were compelled to be sober, or at least nearly so."^37

Despite such mutual antagonism, contact between the two groups led to a convergence of their behavior. When confronted with the physical challenges of the frontier and the values of the trappers, spiritual change for the Protestant missionaries came not far behind. It took less than a month on the overland trail for Cyrus Shepard to drop his pious tone considerably and pick up the more standard overlander language. Initially he used his journal to praise God and record his daily introspections which judged his behavior against God's will. As time passed, he wrote more and more about water levels and numbers of buffalo and the thievery of Indians. He lamented this, of course, and strove to correct it, but during his first year in the valley his journal diminished to a string of one-line notations identifying sermon verses; by year's end it stopped altogether.^38

Other diarists recorded similar responses to the physical requirements of the frontier. Maria T. Ware sailed to Oregon in June of 1840; she married Daniel Lee immediately and kept a journal of her early married years. As a new arrival, she was full of piety and energy. But after a intimate, introspective account of the growth of a loving marriage, she ended her diary on a note of despair, unsure how much longer her faith would tolerate the neglect occasioned by unending physical labor. During one

^37Lee and Frost, 141-142.

^38Shepard, "Diary."
period of relaxation she wrote: "I found it good to be released from care and labour for a
time and to confine my thoughts more particularly to the salvation of my soul."39

Margaret Jewett Bailey also recorded her intense piety in New England and
during her first months in Oregon. Her thoughts and feelings deteriorated from that high
point, though, to loneliness, bitter resignation, and brief comments about company and the
natural surroundings. Granted, her comments about nature included the finding of the
Trinity in the arrangement of flower petals—she never forgot her faith. However, at one
point she went for several years without visiting the Lord's table, partly because she
lived too far from the nearest church.40

Bailey's absence from the sacraments was a special exception. But Cyrus
Shepard, literally a model of piety, also observed that of the forty-five Sabbaths since
he left Massachusetts, he had heard not more than ten sermons.41 For him, the initial
shock to the Sabbath came on the overland trail; the main party of trappers travelled on
Sunday and, for reasons of safety, the missionaries had to keep up. Following that
experience, the missionaries became more willing to find Sabbath rest while working in
the valley as well. The Sabbath continued to be the central day of worship. One
preacher or another led meeting on the Sabbath steadily during this time and other
events, such as the refusal to receive guests on Sunday,42 indicate that Sabbath

39Maria T. Lee, "A Private Journal," 33, Mss 1211, Oregon Historical Society,
Oregon.

40Bailey, 191, 194, 231, 232. Margaret Smith was accused of having intimate
relations with William H. Willson in the winter of 1838-39. At first adamantly rejecting
the accusation, she finally gave in to great pressure by mission leaders and confessed. She
married William J. Bailey, left the mission, and, for reasons which may go beyond the
accusation of sexual impropriety, was socially ostracized. Thus her extreme absence from
communion was more complicated than, for instance, Cyrus Shepard's neglect.

41Cyrus Shepard, Williamette, to the Corresponding Secretary of the Missionary
Society of the M. E. Church, 28 September 1835, 7, Mss 1219, Oregon Historical Society,
Oregon.

42Bancroft, XXIX, 242-243. John Minto, "Early Days of Oregon" (Salem, 1878), 26,
Oregon Manuscripts P-A 50, Microfilm, The Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California.
observance remained more regular than introspection or journaling. Nonetheless, the 1840 arrival—the "great reinforcement"—not only prompted further decline in religious services but also led “many to neglect to hear even when an opportunity was enjoyed.”

While the Americans converged around a compromise between Methodism, the physical demands of frontier life, and the mountain men's open disregard for religion, the Catholic French Canadians took a different route. Initially, the Catholics gathered for spiritual leading around the Methodist mission; it was, after all, the closest place for religious instruction. As in so many frontier regions, the presence of a religious leader was more important than his denomination. When the first Methodist party arrived in 1834, they were welcomed by, among others, Joseph Gervais, who invited them to tent in his garden. A sound relationship must have been established, for Gervais also offered his house as a church until the mission could be built. The Methodists met in Gervais's residence every Sunday, from the Fall of 1834 to 1837. Other French Canadians also attended meeting and their children participated in Sabbath School; perhaps thirty to forty attended the sermons. After services moved to the new location at the mission, the Catholics continued to participate in Methodist services on Sunday and continued to have their children educated there. Several were married by the Methodists and had their children baptized.

At the same time, Gervais and the others petitioned the Bishop of Juliopolis for a priest. Gervais and eighteen or so other signers mentioned the great need for a priest for themselves and for their children, stated that they did not want their children to grow up to be Methodists, and concluded with the comment that "oure prayers will be for his

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43 Lee and Frost, 252.
44 Cyrus Shepard, Willamette, to the Corresponding Secretary of the Missionary Society of the M. E. Church, 28 September 1835, 7, Mss 1219, Oregon Historical Society, Oregon.
45 Lee and Frost, 132.
safe Arivele. As soon as word arrived that a priest would come, Gervais and the others had started to build a church. They badly wanted a priest.

When finally the Fathers were expected to arrive, almost the entire settlement canoed sixty miles down the Willamette River to meet them. The priests were two and a half weeks late, so many Canadians returned to their farms before they arrived, but three—Gervais, Lucier, and Pierre Beleque—remained at Fort Vancouver to welcome Blanchet and Demers. Soon after their arrival, Blanchet travelled up the Willamette to the French settlement. Blanchet blessed their unfinished church on 6 January 1839, under the name of St. Paul. French Canadians filled the churchyard; those who lived far away tented in the yard so that they could hear the Mass and be taught by the Father. Those who lived closer came for the day and returned home at night. After several days those living at a distance had to leave to take care of their crops, but nearby residents continued to come, to listen to Blanchet all day, and to return to work their fields in the early evening. The arrival of the priests brought forth from the French Canadians an enormous outpouring of respect and religious desire.

Fathers Blanchet and Demers brought, as had the Methodists, a driving faith, a will for enormous industry, pity towards the deluded savages, conservative attitudes towards civilization, and, perhaps more so than the Methodists, a commitment to purity of faith. Upon his arrival in the Willamette, Blanchet immediately worked to protect

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46 Joseph Gervais, et. al., Willamette, to the Bishop of Juliopolis, Red River, 22 March 1836, Mss 83, Oregon Historical Society, Oregon. Another letter, dated 8 March 1837, runs in much the same current, emphasizing community and family needs. Both note the presence of Methodists, but express no hostility, unlike the priests.

47 The construction of St. Paul's was started in 1836; it was completed in 1840.

48 Blanchet, 63.

49 Ibid., 79-81.
and instruct his flock. He told the Canadians that if they attended the Methodist meetings they would go to hell. He ordered them to abstain from sexual intimacy until their common-law marriages had been blessed by the church, and instructed them in chants, the Sign of the Cross, the catechism, and some prayers. He blessed twenty-five marriages (some of which already had the Methodist blessing), baptized all the wives in those unions (some of whom had been baptized by the Methodists), and baptized forty-seven children. Blanchet ordered the separation of a couple who had been married by the Methodist Reverend David Leslie; apparently the husband had no evidence of the death of the wife he had left behind in Canada. Although Blanchet was very pleased with their interest, he noted that many men had forgotten the prayers and principles of their youth. Their wives were pagans or baptized in ignorance; their children were being raised in equal ignorance. Working all day and into the night, Blanchet had good reason to assert: "By all this it may be seen that the two priests were far from being idle."

Blanchet's order to avoid Protestant gatherings had its desired effect. Methodists complained in their letters that they rarely saw the Canadians anymore, except when they wanted a good meal. Their neighbors no longer came to church. They avoided Sabbath School and prayer meetings, and withdrew from the temperance

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50 During Blanchet's thirty-four day visit to the Willamette church, named St. Paul, Father Demers was visiting a different group not in the valley.


52 Blanchet, 81.

53 Ibid., 75; he, like Lee, had superiors who wished to see results.

54 Susan Downing Shepard, Willamette, to Ann (Mrs. Joseph A.) Lloyd, 15 September 1839, Mss 1219, Oregon Historical Society, Oregon.
The Methodists helped drive the Catholics away by circulating Maria Monk's book slandering convent life. Presumably they hoped that the Catholic laity would be shocked into leaving Catholicism. The scheme backfired; confused and angry, the French Canadians queried Father Blanchet, who in turn strengthened the anger of the Canadians and their inclination to avoid the Protestants. Indeed, the Catholic laity seemed delighted to have a priest. Blanchet left after a month in the Willamette "well pleased with the earnest piety of the congregation of St. Paul."

The French, establishing homes and farms for the first time in years, found that settling encouraged values which they had established before their entrance into the fur trade; the value of Catholicism, learned in eastern Canada, was reaffirmed. For those new to the frontier, such as the novice traders and the Methodists, the physical environment acted upon the new settlers in much the same way; it confirmed values rather than challenged them. Wyeth, a thoughtful, well-read man who had little patience with religious bigotry, found the Willamette Valley to provide fine soil, a mild climate, indeed, "all that a man ought to have." Yet his religious bias remained: "one is tempted to exclaim 'Oh solitude, where are the charms that philosophers have seen in Thy face?'" Gustavus Hines, missionary to the Wascopam, responded similarly to the solitude. Seating himself by the Columbia, he thought of his parents, his church, the piety and prayers of the "bustling cities" and "smiling villages" of his home. Perhaps he dozed a bit, for he wrote:

55Blanchet, 86.
57Blanchet, 87. Margaret Bailey explained that Blanchet told the French Canadians that "the story had been forged at the instigation of a methodist minister who had seduced [the author]." Bailey, *The Grains*, 190.
58Blanchet, 87-88.
59Wyeth, 147.
starting up I found myself surrounded with the stillness of death, save the murmuring of the turbid waters of the Columbia that rolled beneath where I sat. Contrasting the land which had passed before my mental vision with that in which I felt myself a voluntary exile, I exclaimed, how changed the scene! This, though I, is truly a land of darkness. Amidst the solitudes of these forests and plains the gospel is never heard except perchance the missionary of the cross may be passing through the land, and then to but here and there a small group of wretched Indians, who are alternately shivering with ague, and burning with fever, upon the brink of death. I was led to inquire, when shall this state of things give way to civilization and Christianity?

New experiences of the western environment did not at once prompt a shift in values. A shift in practices, for some, occurred, but not quickly a shift in values. Missionaries still wished to recreate the gospel in Quebec or Boston; sceptics found new reinforcement for skepticism.

Thus, through the 1830s, three primary religious traditions were established in the Willamette Valley. American Methodism dominated, with its emphasis on individual conversion experience, a disciplined lifestyle, and individual and corporate sanctification. In the 1840s, the Methodists tried to turn their religious strength into political control, with mixed results. But in the 1830s, the Methodist Mission was the most important religious feature of the Valley. Blanchet itinerated between a variety of white and Indian groups. His initial base was north of the Columbia, not in the Willamette Valley, and he visited St. Paul's only occasionally. The American mountain men settled at some distance from both St. Paul's and the mission. All three groups gained in numerical strength through this period. Methodists gained missionaries from the East and a few converts among the other Americans. Catholics grew, likewise, from new settlement and the occasional convert. But while the piety of the Catholics seemed at least stable, the piety of the Methodists seemed to diminish with increasing numbers, especially after the 1840 reinforcement. As one put it:

I detect in myself a great want of fervour and spirituality the year past yet perhaps I feel less guilty in this than I should under different circumstances. God alone knows how far Physical influence is exerted upon the mind. Not withstanding I plead guilty and pray for forgiveness.51

"Physical influence:" the rivers and the wolves were not to be trifled with; losing oneself in the forest could easily mean starvation; the cattle were half wild; and already difficult things such as childbirth were made more trying by the thinness of the supporting community. Confrontation with this difficult environment and with religiously distinct traditions effected change within the Christianity practiced by the settlers to the Willamette. The Catholic laity temporarily abandoned hostilities with the Protestants in favor of cooperation. Protestants experienced a decline of sacred privileges and practices, including a reduction in Sabbath rest, a great reduction in introspection and journal writing, and a loss of the pious support and companionship which they had previously taken from the Christian communities in which they lived. For the fur traders, who moved towards "civilization" instead of away from it, a reimmersion in Christian tradition led many French Canadians and several Americans to return to a faith they had earlier experienced. The Willamette settlers of the 1830s encompassed a mixture of reactions to Christianity: irreverence, indifference, temporary estrangement, and commitment. Their religious practices, though, did not remain static; modification of faith and religious expression was common. Perhaps most importantly, the presence of strong religious leaders and pious communities promoted serious interest in the transcendent for both Catholic and Protestant, and the presence of multiple traditions prevented domination by any one group.

CHAPTER II
REESTABLISHING EASTERN MODELS
OF CIVILIZATION AND CHRISTIANITY

By removing the Catholic laity from Methodist influence and reeducating his flock in Catholic principles, Blanchet moved the religious culture of the Willamette Valley closer to the practice of French Canada. As the Methodists increased their population from three zealous but often sick men (the Lees and Shepard) to over seventy, the more they looked towards New England as a model for their community. Both groups strongly associated Christian faith with the creation of a civil society. For Catholics and Protestants alike, as religious expression developed in accordance with denominational intent, Christianity in Oregon increasingly resembled Christianity in New England and Quebec. Always the model was Eastern and conservative; not until late in the century did radicals arrive in the Pacific Northwest to set up utopian communities.¹ From the start, Oregon settlers intended to replicate as much as possible the civilization and Christianity which they knew and liked.

One example of this has already been introduced. The French Canadians, long apathetic to Catholicism, found the need to rejuvenate their Catholic practice once they settled and tried to raise their children. While engaged in the fur trade, the French did

without Catholic practices for substantial periods of time.\(^2\) When they reverted to a settled lifestyle, they returned to the faith of their home culture. The American fur traders, also, had usually been exposed to some form of Christianity; those who did convert often came from pious families or had some other religious influence in their background. Webley Hauxhurst, for instance, was raised a Quaker before he converted to Methodism in Oregon. John McLoughlin was sympathetic to Anglicanism for many years until he responded to Blanchet’s presence and converted to Catholicism. As with others in the trade, his was less a conversion than a reawakening, for McLoughlin had been baptized a Catholic as a child.\(^3\)

Robert Loewenberg has thoroughly developed one aspect of the interplay between civilization and Christianity in his study of the Methodist Mission. Loewenberg concludes that while the Methodist ideal always placed conversion in first priority, in practice the missionaries strove to construct a civil base from which to go out and gather Indians around the cross. Civilization was an increasing hindrance; as reinforcements periodically arrived at the mission to provide secular support, preachers increasingly needed to supervise their supporters. Correspondingly, they spent less time moving among and preaching to the Indians. By the early 1840s, the construction of civilization overwhelmed the religious goals of the mission. Loewenberg’s interpretation is highly


focused on the evangelistic agenda of the Methodist Mission, but similar interactions between civil and spiritual goals can be found throughout early Oregon society.4

The strongly civic orientation of Christianity was one of the major features of nineteenth-century American religion. Indeed, the phrase “civilization and Christianity” is ubiquitous in the Christian literature of the day. Writers of all types—missionaries, laity, fur traders, Catholics, Protestants, women, men—sprinkled this phrase in one form or another through their books, their private journals, and their letters. Conflation of the two progressed until civilization became sacred, holy:

The fires of civilization and the lights of Christianity shall everywhere illuminate the shores of the Pacific Ocean and reflect their holy beamings until the darkness of heathenism shall be driven from that portion of our western continent.5

It was not merely a phrase; the words reflected and elicited belief and action.

One of the first things the Lees did was invest immense labor in fencing, plowing, and building. Jason Lee believed he worked so hard on the farm—as preparation for evangelism—that he became ill:

I know full well that the main object I have kept in view has been the glory of God in the salvation of souls, and having judged it expedient under existing circumstances to employ much of my time in manual labor, I pursued it with that diligence and energy for the first twelve months which I have reason to believe superinduced the intermittent fever.6

The men seem to have reveled in the physical challenges required to take possession of the land in the name of Christ, as if the process of civilizing was part of their expression of faith. When Daniel Lee proclaimed, not unlike Father Blanchet, “Men never worked


harder and performed less," he wrote with the quiet humor of one who looks back with satisfaction on his triumph over adversity. There is something of the martyr's attitude in parts of his writing, an eagerness to suffer for a great cause. He was as pleased with the raising of a house as he was in delivering communion or witnessing conversion. The construction of a farm was as much a part of his faith as the construction of a church. Like marriage, it was an evangelistic device, a way to communicate the benefits of settled, Christian life.

The need to conquer the wilderness heightened the importance of civilizing work. Lee's book about the mission, Ten Years in Oregon, has a bipolar feel to it; the fight against the raw physical environment and the progress of Christianity occupied his attention most of all. Conflict with the Catholics, the Indians, or with other missionaries he barely mentioned. The morning prayer—the missionaries prayed regularly if not daily—was not held up as an example of piety for future generations or even for the Methodist Board. His book was not a work of introspection, theology, spiritual enlightenment, or devotion; it told the story of efforts made to live a civil and Christian life in the midst of barbarous pagans and a threatening wilderness. Adventure, ordeal, and conquest commingled with piety, repentance, and conversion. At one point, Lee expressed his thanks that in the past five years he had travelled four thousand miles in a canoe along rivers that in the same period had taken more than thirty lives. Paraphrasing the apostle Paul, Lee wrote: "If any one has reason to be thankful, [the author] has more; and would here mark, and acknowledge the hand of God in his preservation."

Safe, bodily passage through deadly waters was a sign of God's presence

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7D. Lee and J. H. Frost, Ten Years in Oregon (New York: J. Collard, 1844), 128. Blanchet made similar comments about his own hard work; this is discussed in Chapter One.

8Ibid., 261. Paul's words come from Philippians 3:4: "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more."
and mercy. To conquer the wilderness was to win, indirectly, a spiritual victory as well as a victory for civilized people. In his close juxtaposition of the spiritual, the physical, and the civic Lee seems the norm, rather than the exception.

Margaret Bailey excoriated Methodist leaders for their emphasis on creating a civil society. She had a bitter, articulate tongue and keen insight for contradictory motives. She realized before many of her Methodist superiors did that the Indians, under such a plan, must no longer be Indians. Bailey advocated a different model:

If the truly devoted missionary would enter the forests occupied by none but the red men, and teach them salvation by the way of the cross—trusting for safety on the arm of Omnipotence—being willing to live as did Brainerd, if it were necessary—we believe that the songs of the redeemed world would be heard there; and if these people preferred to depend on the chase rather than the cultivation of the soil, for support, let them do so. Suffer them to remain Indians, as they were born, and, with the blessing of God, they will become good Indians, and then they are good enough.

Bailey's respect and compassion for the Indians was unusual, though not unique. Most Methodist actions were intended to bring civility and faith concurrently to the barbaric pagans, or to remove their barbarity first and then expect the blessings of Christianity to become obvious. Settled, agrarian, American communities were one of the good fruits of Christian faith. Once the Indians had seen the fruits of Christian faith they would hasten to seek the source, Jesus himself.

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10 Ibid., 180. Perhaps Bailey was referring to David Brainerd, a Presbyterian missionary in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. A New Light leader at Yale in the early 1740s, he led a revival among the Delaware Indians in 1745-1746. The story was published in his Journal in 1746. After Brainerd's death in 1747, Jonathan Edwards edited his diary of life among the Indians and published it in 1749, for the continuing edification of missionaries. Dictionary of Christianity in America, 1990 ed., s. v. "Brainerd, David (1718-1747)."

11 Robert Loewenberg has arrived at a similar, more detailed conclusion for this aspect of Oregon's religious history. "On the Methodist home front, no one demonstrated more clearly than Wilbur Fisk, the father of the Oregon mission, how completely reality
American women were less interested in the physical environment. The labor of fencing out the wilderness was not an object of celebration for them. However, they were just as concerned with the formation of a civil, Christian society. Women were more likely to record the emotional ache of isolation from their familiar Christian communities and the longing for companionship. They were also more likely than the men to find solace in mystical union with God. The absence of loving friends, concerts of prayer, and pious family weighed heavily on women such as Maria Lee, Anna Lee, Susan Shepard, and Margaret Bailey. "Will you not write or will you forget me because I am absent?" wrote Anna Maria Pittman, and then continued, moving quickly in her thoughts from friends in Christ to Jesus himself:

oh, no you will not, I believe I am remembered in your daily prayers and it is a great comfort to have such an assurance. I feel the loss of privileges once favored with much, but I can look to Jesus and commune with him and hold sweet intercourse with the lost friend, blessed be God there is a reality in the religion of the cross—oh what unspeakable pleasure may be derived in believing with a strong faith in God.\^\footnote{Anna Maria Pittman, Oregon Mission, Williamate R.r, to Her Parents, 5 June 1837, in Theressa Gay, \textit{Life and Letters of Mrs. Jason Lee} (Portland: Metropolitan Press, 1936), 159}

The extreme separation, whether measured in time between mail delivery or space overland, was as much an emotional and social challenge as a physical one.

Other historians have commented that Jason Lee used marriage as an evangelistic means to demonstrate Christian living.\footnote{Loewenberg, 113.} To some extent, women agreed with Lee. Women were not interested in remaining single on the frontier and knew they were expected to marry. Margaret Smith, prior to her marriage to William Bailey, lamented several times that she was the only single white women in Oregon. The match between

and the ideal were susceptible of rationalization and compartmentalization. So completely did Fisk fuse the goals of civilization and Christianity that he was able to accept as wholly reasonable the Methodists' demand that salvation precede the introduction of arts and the civilized virtues, while at the same time supporting a program for doing exactly the opposite." Loewenberg, 102.

\footnote{Loewenberg, 113.}
Anna Pittman and Jason Lee was designed by the Missionary Society which sent Anna. The presumption of marriage pervaded Pittman's trip; when Henry Spaulding purchased mattresses for the trip he initially bought a double-bed size for Pittman. She insisted that he return it.\textsuperscript{14} The first meeting between Pittman and Lee was charged with tension and expectation; even outsiders found humor in the awkward situation and teased Pittman. Both Lee and Pittman seemed pleased by their first meeting, although uncomfortable with all the attention. A sixty-mile canoe trip from Vancouver to the Mission awaited them, though. To the further embarrassment of Lee and Pittman and amusement of everyone else, the officer in charge of the canoes so arranged the seating that they were placed in a canoe with no other English-speakers.\textsuperscript{15}

Although women believed with Lee that marriage could be evangelistic,\textsuperscript{16} their motives did not necessarily conform fully to his. A strong but more personal motive to marry was a desire to recreate home life—including its piety—which they had known back east. One of the first things Bailey attempted as a new wife was daily morning prayer with her husband. This lasted two days, leaving her with no devotional companion at all, but her emphatic mention of this indicates its importance. Anna Lee loved her husband dearly; her letters reveal great joy in being married to Jason, creating a home for the two of them, and praying together.\textsuperscript{17} It wasn't just the pious home, though, which women wanted to create, but also the pious community. Susan Shepard commented

\begin{itemize}
  \item Anna Maria Pittman, Boston, to Her Parents, 17 July 1836, in Gay, 121.
  \item See for example, Pittman's letter to her parents of 5 June 1937. If she married Lee, she agreed, "all eyes will be placed on me for an example." Pittman, Oregon Mission, to Her Parent, 5 June 1837, in Gay, 158.
  \item Ibid., 156; Anna Maria Lee, Mission House, Willamette, to her brother George Pittman, 26 October 1837, in Ibid., 162; Anna M. Lee, Mission House, to Jason Lee, 14 April 1838, in Ibid., 179.
\end{itemize}
that the mission prayer circles might be more rightly called conference meetings, "as most of the time is spent in conversation." Shepard was a kind person with a ready laugh, quick to pray and quick to forgive. She had little critique of the mission itself or the men; the difficulties which concerned her were with the community of women. One of the few negative comments she had was for another woman, Margaret Bailey. Forming a devout home and a community of pious women were important goals, but ones difficult to attain.

The language of parting and rejoining was a particularly potent expression of the high value the missionary women placed on women of similar faith. Time and again they wrote telling of how brave or how sorrowful they were upon saying good-bye. Wrote Pittman just before her departure in 1836: "As the hour approaches for my departure, I still remain firm and undaunted; I have nothing to fear, God had promised to be with me even to the end of the world." In the same vein were the final hymns that were sung when the missionaries on shipboard parted from their friends on the pilot boat:

Bearing on, thou restless ocean;  
Let the winds my canvass swell—  
Heaven my heart with warm emotion,  
While I go far hence to dwell.  
Glad I bid thee,  
Native land!—FAREWELL—FAREWELL;  

The element of fear must have been strong for those about to journey twenty-two thousand miles or so overseas. "I have nothing to fear," wrote Pittman; and others, especially women, joined in. They spoke of the courage which God provided and, lacking courage, spoke of the ultimate indifference of the location of their death. "Yes Mother."

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19Anna Maria Pittman, New York, to her brother George W. Pittman, 9 June 1836, in Gay, 102.

20Gay, 37.
wrote Pittman, "it will be just as easy to go to Heaven from Oregon or the Ocean as among my kindred. Jesus can make a dying bed soft any where."\textsuperscript{21}

Importantly, though, women closed these passages with the expectation of rejoining loved ones. "Dear Francis farewell," wrote Pittman, "if we meet no more on earth meet me in Heaven."\textsuperscript{22} An illustrative contrast can be found in two letters sent to George and Mary Pittman upon the death of their daughter Anna. Elvira Perkins expressed her deep sorrow over Anna's death, regret and surprise over the parting and separation. She spoke of the comfort offered by "Him who was the Resurrection" and encouraged the Pittmans to look forward to a "happy meeting" with their daughter. Then she continued, perhaps well beyond the purpose of the letter, to include herself and the entire family: "There [in Heaven] I trust we shall meet--There I hope to meet you, my dear friends and your whole family."\textsuperscript{23} Perkins moved easily from consoling the bereaved parents with the hope of rejoining their daughter in heaven to picturing something entirely different: her own meeting of friends in a sanctified, heavenly community.

Nathan Bangs, secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society, wrote a letter as well, less passionate, less pious, less interested in parting and rejoining. "I though it best to communicate this sad news to you, before bro. Lee shall arive. All I can say is that I pray God to support & comfort you under this heavy bereavement."\textsuperscript{24} Bangs suffers by comparison; he appears cold. In fairness to Bangs, he was in New York through the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{21}Anna Maria Pittman, Boston, to her Mother, 12 July 1836, in Gay, 105.
\textsuperscript{22}Anna Maria Pittman, Boston, to her brother Francis Pittman, July 1836, in Ibid., 112.
\textsuperscript{23}Elvira Perkins, Wascopum, Columbia River, to Mr. and Mrs. George W. Pittman, 5 July 1838, in Ibid., 185.
\textsuperscript{24}N. Bangs, New York, to Mr. and Mrs. George W. Pittman, 9 October 1838, in Ibid., 186. \textit{Dictionary of Christianity in America}, 1990 ed., s. v. "Bangs, Nathan."
\end{footnotesize}
ordeal, while Perkins had worked with Lee on the mission. Perkins, though, was not present at Lee's death and heard the news through a letter, in the same way that Bangs did. She was removed, as was Bangs, from the immediate trials of Lee. The different details make extensive comparison between the two unfair to both. Nonetheless, the differences in their speech are emblematic of gender differences in religious expression.

That a primary religious concern of women was expressed in social terms should not distract from the trying physical labor which the women faced. The usual domestic duties, considerable enough already, were made more burdensome when the reinforcements arrived. The newcomers had no place to sleep, eat, and store material except in the existing buildings. While the men constructed new housing, the old houses were packed full with extra people and supplies. Furthermore, women sometimes found themselves taking over some aspects of men's work. When the husband was sick or absent the fences still had to be made and crops still put in. Men, of course, did the same, working hard to accommodate newcomers and doing domestic work such as cooking before the women got there and when they got sick. However, domestic physical labor, whether performed by men or by women, rarely emerged as an important religious symbol, except in the negative, as a distraction from true spirituality. Male missionaries could find spiritual excitement in their work more easily, while the women were more likely to find such renewal in the community of believers.

Catholic missionary priests responded to the cultural environment in a way similar to the Methodist preachers. Father Blanchet scorned the Methodists for dirtying their hands with such secular occupations as farming. These Americans, these “tourists,” he fumed, were hallucinating when they imagined they had been called to preach to the Indians. They were no missionaries at all, but “land-sharks and horse-jockeys.”

\[25\] Blanchet, 37-40.
unencumbered by the claims of civilization. This he did with great zeal and energy. His days were most often spent teaching canticles, catechizing, baptizing, or traveling to the next group who needed his care. Blanchet worked indefatigably and with some success.

Blanchet's hands were fairly free of the need to work outside of a strictly religious role largely because of H. B. C. support. The H.B.C. had already established a cultural context into which Christianity fit rather smoothly. Various H. B. C. leaders promoted religion—Anglican and Catholic—as a service to their employees and out of personal interest. Whereas the Methodists openly attempted to bring both civilization and Christianity, Blanchet had the luxury of moving into a relatively cosmopolitan environment (the H. B. C.) in which aid was available; he did not need to work nearly as hard to plow, build, or harvest.

Despite his desire to claim for himself a single-minded spiritual role, though, he could not avoid behavior similar to the Methodists. He lent peas and potatoes to the Indians to sow, encouraging them in the physical benefits of settled, agrarian, civilized lifestyle. If he expressed outrage at the Protestant corruption of the gospel through the conflation of civilization and Christianity, he was equally outraged over the depredations wrought upon French place names by the Americans; his sense of the important features of civilization differed from the Americans, but existed, nonetheless. Blanchet also accepted the idea that others should build and plow while the missionary preached and catechized. An H. B. C. employee, Augustin Rochon, did just that, building a house, plowing fields, and otherwise serving, giving the Blanchet and Demers more time to work and providing security for the stomach. Blanchet assailed the Methodists for leaving the Flatheads without the gospel because the terrain was inhospitable; yet he, like they, greatly valued having a source of food which was reliable in his sense of the word—fenced fields planted in peas and potatoes.

While Blanchet did not farm nearly as much as the Methodists did, like the Methodists he thrilled to the confrontation with the land and viewed it as a challenge to
the spirit. Importantly, though, he imagined and lived out this conflict in the context of Christian pilgrimage, not civic progress. The anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner describe several features common to pilgrimage. Pilgrims voluntarily separate themselves from mundane society in order to participate more fully in their religion. The pilgrim exteriorizes the salvific journey, moving from sacred spot to sacred spot, participating in religious rituals at each stop, until the ultimate spiritual location and spiritual experience is reached. Additionally, a distinct literature develops; the Turners have described pilgrimage accounts thusly:

When the pilgrim advances toward his ultimate sacred goal, he tends to stop at every major way station, there to do penance, pay his devotion, and prepare for the holy climax at the central shrine. When he returns, so travelers' accounts repeatedly inform us, his aim is to reach home as swiftly as he can, and his attitude is now that of a tourist rather than a devotee... The road is thus two roads; the apt metaphor is an ellipse, not a straight line.

Pilgrimage requires affliction, yet upon completion of the pilgrimage and the resumption of mundane life, a new status is achieved within the social and religious structure.

As Blanchet and Demers travelled down the rivers and portages from eastern Canada they planted crosses at important locations: portages, prominent outcroppings, burial sites, camps, and the like. All along the way they spoke to hundreds of Indians and Canadians, baptizing, marrying, and even burying a few. Clearly separate from the other French and from the Indian, Blanchet chose clothing to wear which emphasized that separateness. Noticing that the Indians responded to his soutane, his black cassock, he decided that he and Demers should always wear those robes as a mark

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27The Indians were much more willing to be baptized and preached to than buried by the whites. Even when interrupted by white missionaries who had previously baptized the deceased, the Indians were very reluctant or refused to have the dead person buried by anyone but themselves. Blanchet, 94. Up to March 1, 1839, Blanchet baptized a total of 309 people, performed 61 marriages and buried 9. Ibid., 77.
of their holy mission. They named places which had not been named, and renamed others in French which had Indian names—an important act of possession. At the first sight of the Rockies, they consecrated the mountains to their Author. The end of their trip—arrival in Oregon—was indeed a spiritual climax. The two priests fell on their knees to worship God, consecrate themselves, and bless the soil of Oregon. To call the physical conquest an act of worship on the part of the Methodists may be an exaggeration; I do not think it is for the Catholic priests.²⁸

Pilgrimage is perhaps more elusive among Protestants, but it is a useful term, if not entirely valid. For the Protestant missionaries who crossed the plains and the oceans on the way to Oregon in the 1830s, the experience strongly resembles pilgrimage, not to a more intense form of Methodism, but to civic religion.²⁹

Civic religion makes sacred a particular political system or nation. The nation becomes a source of ultimate meaning and around it develop rituals, symbols, and values which communicate this meaning to the citizens and elicit responses of trust and loyalty. The mid-nineteenth-century was a particularly important time of development for civic religion in the United States. According to historian Catherine Albanese, who examines civic religion in her book Sons of the Fathers, the revolution did not merely enlist the support of religion, it was “in itself a religious experience.”³⁰ Although some religious symbols (such as the Liberty Tree) were prominent during the Revolution itself, other

²⁸The soutane represented the seamless rope of Christ and His Church and was the habit Blanchet used in Canada. It was a unique form of dress, very recognizable; Indians often called the men who wore them “blackgowns” or “blackrobes.” Ibid., 48, 54, 57. For an intriguing discussion on the role of space in religion—the God of places rather than the God of times—see Belden C. Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

²⁹Many of the missionaries left diaries or travelers accounts, including Lee and Frost, Jason Lee, Cyrus Shepard, Philip Leget Edwards, Francis Norbert Blanchet, and others.

developed after the Revolution. Albanese argues that the sacramental power of the Declaration and Constitution was not immediate, but became important during the first half of the nineteenth-century, contemporaneous to the movement to Oregon.

For Methodist missionaries, the trip to Oregon contained many elements common to pilgrimage. Although missionary writers at first focused exclusively on topics germane to evangelical Christianity, their emphasis soon shifted to the various rites and sights of passage: learning to live with each other, the initial and fearful contact with Indians, the first buffalo kill, Rendezvous, South Pass, the Dalles, Fort Vancouver, and finally the Valley itself. Introspective observations about the soul’s state were replaced by comments about places crucial to the American (national) development of the western territories. Thinking about the trip was elliptical, not linear; return trips (Jason Lee, Daniel Lee, Samuel Parker, and Elijah White were among those who returned to the States) were described very briefly, if at all. The trip separated Westerners from Easterners and gave to Westerners a heightened status; those who returned East were greeted with reverence and enjoyed the bestowment of honors, as men who had been set apart. And always, the greatness of the American nation was a high priority.

The trip also contributed to a noticeably specific literature. The literature of pilgrimage is distinct from, say, the women’s literature of Susan Warner or the enlightened republican writings of Ben Franklin. Both genres came to Oregon early; the former in the writings of Margaret Bailey, the latter in Peter Burnett’s books. Burnett traveled to Oregon in the mid-1840s and like so many men, left to find his fortune in gold later in the decade. Thirty years later he recorded his biography, using a style which strongly resembles that of Franklin or Andrew Carnegie. Burnett wrote as an older, accomplished man who modestly wished to share his experience so others would be encouraged and not make the same mistakes he did. His tales often concluded with instructive morals for younger men. His encouragement consisted largely of his own success story. Beginning with his humble origins, through industry, frugality, honesty
especially with regard to debt), moderation, and "natural" intellect, he became a successful lawyer and governor of California. Parts of Burnett's book are travel literature, but none of it would be called the writings of a pilgrim. Pilgrimage literature is distinct from other forms of nineteenth-century writings.

A description of the Methodist trips as pilgrimage is not without its problems. Conscious decision usually precedes religious pilgrimage, or at least the sojourners commonly become aware at some point that their trials and travels can be thought of as pilgrimage. The Methodists certainly did not conceive of themselves as making a pilgrimage to a shrine of national development. However, such self-consciousness is a problem common to all facets of civil religion. Certainly those who built and visited the monuments which house and protect the Declaration and Constitution did not and do not usually think of the monuments as shrines used to express a national piety. Civic religion is plagued with institutional and theological vagueness, but its generality and inclusiveness are what lend it the power to involve an entire nation.

In further support of the idea of civic pilgrimage, during the decade of mission work, 1834-1844, politics became an increasingly important priority for the Methodists. Bancroft argued that Jason Lee's first priority shifted from religion to politics upon his return to the United States in 1838, although Loewenberg strongly challenges that interpretation. All accounts agree, though, that by 1841 the mission was experiencing organizational failure, a decline in religious commitment, and an increase in political activity. Commitment and organization being two hallmarks of Methodism, it seems no wonder that many missionaries left the mission in the next few years in the confusion over the agenda. Those who remained were relieved when Lee's replacement sold much of the mission lands—thus defusing a substantial political conflict—and reduced the number of employees considerably.

This correction by Lee's successor, Reverend George Gary, reminded the missionaries of their primary agenda and was intended to restore to the mission some of
the hunger for evangelism deadened by the trip, political aspirations, and Oregon's religious environment. The Methodist missionaries had overflowed with Christian piety as they set out from Boston and traveled down the Ohio or across the ocean. Various farewell worship services were held; encouraging notes from those staying behind were hidden in luggage; the plate was passed; prayers were uttered aloud or silently. But from that time forth, during the trip itself or after much time in the valley, their pious introspection and commitment to various religious rituals waned. The Methodists who travelled to the Willamette Valley found hard work and loneliness. They failed to attend church when they might have, stopped writing in their journals, and seem to have neglected other aspects of their religion. Not all at once, of course, and not all together; the Methodists did not apostatize. Nonetheless, the Methodists never fully returned to their Christian disciplines of prayer, Scripture reading, and community worship.

Without exception, the Methodists experienced a decline in outward manifestations of piety noticeable both to the historian and to themselves. The pilgrimage—whether seen as civic progress, as Christian secularization, or as part of the mutual interaction between civilization and Christianity—forced from their lives contemplative habits which were never reestablished to the same extent in the Willamette Valley. For their Christian faith, in contrast to their civic trust, the trip across the plains and the early years in the Valley resembled an anti-pilgrimage.

It seems reasonable to ask why this did not happen to the priests; a number of possibilities suggest themselves. The priests were more effective at returning to mundane disciplines, perhaps, because they had learned from their Catholic predecessors more fully and self-consciously what pilgrimage entailed. Upon arrival, they did not neglect prayer or turn their energies to creating a new state. Blanchet purposefully declined opportunities to influence the political environment and angrily denounced accusations that he was in league with the British government in an attempt to determine the territorial possession in Britain's favor. Finally and most importantly, the pilgrimage
itself was for the Catholics a profoundly uplifting Christian experience. For the
Methodists this was not the case. The Methodists began in dual celebration of
Christianity and civilization, consistently turned towards a less-disciplined Christian
lifestyle, and failed to return to mundane practices of transcendent faith at the end. It
seems no surprise that Daniel Lee would express his Christian faith in such civic,
physical terms as building a farm. Faithful work was acceptable form of religious
expression, yet it mingled readily with the need for food, the excitement of breaking new
ground, and the dream of personal success in the midst of national movement.31

Father Blanchet worked hard to maintain the separateness of Christian faith;
Brother Lee worked hard to emphasis that civilization and Christianity were
complementary. Even their titles reinforce that. However, the meeting place of
civilization and Christianity is marshy, a shifting slough between land and sea in which
the observer must keep moving to avoid sinking. The Catholics were more successful at
retaining the separateness of their faith, but the reasons for this are not necessarily
religious. The piety and protection of Father Blanchet contributed to the French
Canadian isolation, but so did their relative poverty and perhaps the ambivalent social
status of their Indian wives. Furthermore, as French in a British land, the Catholics
were used to living under a government which was distinct from their own culture; as
Canadians, they were not predisposed to appreciate Americans.32 For Protestants, the
conflation which led to calling civilization holy also secularized religion. The
Methodists became pillars of civilized society at the same time that their missionary

31 O. E. Rolvaag, *Giants in the Earth* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927, 1929). In his novel of late nineteenth-century Norwegian immigrants, Rolvaag describes the exquisite joy of breaking sod in South Dakota and dreaming of the kingdom which will be raised from the soil. Other parallels of faith and practice can be found in the novel, as well.

goals crumbled. Such a statement, of course, is too reductive. The collapse of the mission in 1844 had as much to do with financial limits and shifting interests among Board members in New England as with any activity in Oregon. Additionally, idealistic agitators like Bailey complicate the scenario with ideas which might be called prophetic; they challenged the declension of religious leaders and called for a piety more reflective of the radical claims of Christ. Nonetheless, by 1841, Methodists had revealed strong nationally-oriented ambition and strong personal ambitions, both of which pressed more closely upon the group and progressively interfered with not only the mission but also with their individual and corporate Christian faith. The conflation of Christianity and civilization proved slippery and in its zealous, evangelistic form, unsustainable. By the mid-1840s the Methodist mission was forced to repudiate the marriage, firing staff, selling land, and reassuring contributors that their money had not been wasted nor their prayers offered in vain.

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33Loewenberg, 80.
CHAPTER III
AGAINST THE GRAINS: MARGARET JEWETT BAILEY'S SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL
INDEPENDENCE, OREGON, 1837-1854

Literature, Christianity, and the women's rights movement converged upon one another in America during the nineteenth century. As is apparent from the scholarship of David Reynolds, Nina Baym and others, Christian faith found a new and potent form of expression in fictional literature. Similarly, women who sought to gain the opportunities and rights reserved for men also found fictional writing suitable for articulating their ideas. Although these three--fiction, feminism, and Christianity--found their strongest voices in the East and developing Midwest, immigrants to the Far West participated also. One of the earliest to do so was Margaret Jewett Bailey, a Methodist missionary, teacher, and author.

Bailey, born Margaret Jewett Smith, sailed from Boston in January 1837 with a small group of Methodist missionaries travelling to the Willamette Valley to convert the Natives.1 She left for Oregon having assumed great risk; she had not been hired for work at the Mission, yet she could not go home either, for her departure had so angered her father that he had disowned her. In Oregon she acted with similar independence. At the mission she boarded with a single man; later she married William Bailey, a new convert to Methodism who had a long reputation for impiety and rash behavior. During a brief stint as a newspaper columnist, she did not restrict herself to accepted moralisms

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1 I usually refer to her by her first married name, Bailey. However, for her single years I use her maiden name, Smith. Where there is potential confusion over the name “Bailey,” I use first names, William and Margaret.
about child rearing and domestic life, but also defended women's rights. For all of these actions she paid a stiff price in social rejection, loneliness, and sometimes physical abuse. For much of her adult life she lived at the fringe of society, aware of social norms but never fully willing to conform to them. Margaret Bailey was a risk-taker in a society which ostracized such women.

An intensely devout woman who frequently recounted mystical experiences of God's presence, Bailey's social troubles and profound worship had similar origins and were mutually strengthening. Her difficulties emerged partly from her independent and sometimes combative personality. Her strong convictions about Christian faith contributed to her independence by providing motivation and justification for socially unacceptable behavior, and her devotional piety provided sanctuary from the loneliness which followed. In 1854 she published a book explaining her origins, her faith, her sexual conduct at the mission, the conduct of other missionaries, and her divorce. By exposing the truth she hoped—expected—to clear her name and restore her reputation as a woman of piety, indeed, as a zealous disciple. It did not work; the book was not well received and a scandal to some; apparently she never published again. Nonetheless, her writing marks the entrance of a vocal feminism into Oregon and illuminates important connections between religious experience and social position.

Literary culture in Oregon was not new in 1854, but publishing for local audiences was. Many stories, travelogues, reports, letters, and other accounts of life in the Pacific Northwest had been written prior to that date, but these were published in the States or in London and were intended for eastern readers. Oregon citizens started their first newspaper, the Oregon Spectator, in 1846, only eight years before Bailey published.

Sidney Walter Moss wrote his Prairie Flower in Oregon in the mid-1840s (although he

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sent it to Cincinnati to be published) and William Lysander Adams published a satirical drama in the early 1850s. The primary outlets for writing, though, were the newspapers; a few besides the Spectator formed, to which residents contributed poetry, stories, letters, and articles. The history of Oregon literature places Bailey among the earliest writers who published in the Pacific Northwest.3

Bailey's book, The Grains, was reissued in 1986, having been reconstructed from the three surviving volumes.4 Evelyn Leasher and Robert J. Frank, who edited the reissue, called the work a "thimble disguised autobiography." Edwin R. Bingham labeled it an "autobiographical novel;" both are appropriate descriptions.5 The autobiographical nature is unmistakable. Much of the detail can be corroborated by other sources pertaining to the Methodist Mission in Oregon. Although the scholarly work surrounding her is small, historians have repeatedly credited Bailey with an insightful, penetrating mind. Her critique of the Lee mission in Oregon's Willamette Valley judged with blunt precision Mission Superintendent Jason Lee and the Methodist organization of which she was a part.6 If Bailey sometimes sounds eccentric and shrill, her book, nonetheless, is most commonly treated by historians as a generally accurate and analytical commentary on the mission.7


However, Bailey set out to write neither her life story nor a history of the mission. Her fundamental aim was to clear her name and re-establish her reputation as a pious Christian, obedient to God and reasonable in her dealings with people. The book is an apologetic as much as an autobiography, a defense of self and a repudiation of enemies. Additionally, though, it was written using fictional conventions. Bailey was well-read. "Excessively fond of her books," she was sometimes accused of reading novels on the Sabbath instead of attending meeting. At ease in the fictional genre, she renamed all the people involved, taking for herself the name "Ruth Rover," and organized the text to lead up to a turning-point crisis in the middle and a climax of tension at the end. She cast her story in some of the important literary and cultural themes of the day: an expanding vision of women's abilities, the necessity of temperance, the shortcomings of men's piety, the naivety of women outside the home, and the power of faith, to name a few. An "autobiographical novel" it is, a life-story of hardship and of faith retold in the context of literary convention.

Margaret Smith was a venturesome person. She enjoyed, or at least sought out, the fringes of society, the decisions which rocked convention or expectation, and rigorous attention to the claims of the gospel. More than a decade before the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 displayed as kindred the plight of the Colonies under British tyranny and the subservience of women to men, Smith regularly and consistently asserted her personal independence. Wooed by suitors in Massachusetts, she painfully turned them down, once to become a missionary, another time because they differed in doctrine, a third time because she did not sense "the approbation of heaven."9 Resolved to become a missionary teacher, she pursued that goal single-mindedly, despite the great conflict involved. Her father, near death, wanted his daughter near. He refused to pay for her

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8 Bailey, The Grains, 28, 83-84.

9 Ibid., 32, 46, 38.
education and threatened to disown her if she left. Although the rest of her family was more sympathetic, they also disapproved. Hoping to mollify her family with the assurance that she would be at a mission only a few years, Smith decided to attend the Wilbraham Academy and completed the required work quickly, supported financially by the Missionary Education Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Ten days before a ship was to set sail for Oregon carrying Reverend David Leslie and family to the Mission, an invitation was made to Smith to travel with Leslie as a domestic. She insisted that she go as a teacher, which would require petitioning the Methodist Board of Missions in New York. Short of time, several pastors agreed to petition the Board on her behalf and support her themselves if the Board would not appoint her.

She took ship under the protection of Leslie: a single woman without employment from the Board, firmly committed to teaching the Indians, yet under the guardianship of a man whose expectations of her included domestic care and companionship for his wife. It was a delicate situation to be in, but Smith was highly independent and Leslie was demanding and shrewish; neither was conversant with delicacy. Even before they left Boston, Leslie had asked Smith to wait on and take care of his children; already, she had refused to do so. During the trip, Leslie did not attend to her needs for warm clothes, but had them stowed under the hatches; during shore visits, he did not arrange for her sleeping quarters. By voyage's end, they were not speaking to each other, but communicated only by letter, and Leslie had refused to visit the communion table with

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10 Ibid., 42-52.

11 Ibid., 58-59.

12 In the mid-1840s, Reverend George Gary, Mission Supervisor from 1844 to 1847, was astounded that the "scold" of Leslie's house was not Leslie's wife but Leslie himself. George Gary, "Diary of Reverend George Gary," ed. Charles H. Carey, Oregon Historical Quarterly, XXIV (1923): 279-280, 283.
Smith. When Leslie offered to acknowledge his sins and rejoin the broken bonds of fellowship, Smith refused to discuss the matter further until they reached Oregon.  

At the mission, Smith's independence created further problems. Leslie represented her to Jason Lee as a servant of his family, without an appointment and with no announced future plans. Leslie's introduction angered Smith considerably; she thought of herself as a missionary teacher who had sacrificed suitors and family to come teach Indians. Lee, though, had no teaching assignments for her; he had too many women already and more Indians than he could feed. Without the financial backing of the Board, he could not hire her as a teacher. He offered her domestic work aiding his wife, Anna, in the kitchen. Smith was eventually given charge of the girls' education, but in a move which must have exasperated mission leaders, became so distraught over the conflict with Leslie that she resigned the school by December 1837. Lee, better suited for entrepreneurial work than management, was unable to mediate between Smith and Leslie. The conflict escalated to the point where Smith left the mission and resided temporarily at Fort Vancouver until Leslie and Cyrus Shepard personally asked her to return as a teacher. 

Shortly after her return to the mission, though, Smith again placed herself in a highly vulnerable position; she boarded alone with a single man, William Willson. Here, indeed, was a woman who lived life on the edge. Willson had pursued her in marriage since she had arrived in September 1837. Smith refused; Willson persisted. Finally, in June 1838, Smith agreed, but by that time Willson had given up and had mailed a proposal to someone on the east coast. Both knew that the mail could be

14 Ibid., 88-90.
15 Ibid., 115-120.
16 Chloe Aurelia Clark, who later married Willson.
overtaken within a month and the letter returned by September of that year, so they sent after the courier and waited. September went by and the letter did not return. According to Smith, they spent a very pleasant winter together as an engaged couple and grew quite close, but December came, with no letter. Finally, in an effort to hasten the marriage, Willson proposed that they become sexually intimate; surely the church would readily marry them if such were the case. Smith, outraged, adamantly refused ever to marry him. Willson, now equally irate, went to the Reverend Leslie to confess that he and Smith had committed sin together and should at once be married. Leslie believed Willson, refused to accept Smith's furious denials of wrong doing, and threatened to expel her from the mission for the crime and for such an unrepentant attitude. Under great pressure and amid promises that the confession would not leave the mission, Smith signed a confession admitting her sin.

Three months later she married William Bailey, for reasons which she did not record. Her decision to marry resembles her decision to sail to Oregon, a parallel which appears to be an intentional part of the plot structure. Each decision marks the beginning of one of the two major sections of narrative; each contains within it the problem which eventually leads to a tragic climax; each is later considered to be naive. Both decisions contain significant false hopes about her missions career, as well. The choice to go to Oregon included the anticipation that an appointment would be mailed to her. The choice to marry contained the hope that her husband would be hired by the mission as a doctor.

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17 Leslie had the power to do so because Jason Lee was in the States at the time recruiting support and personnel and had left Leslie in charge. D. Lee and J. H. Frost, Ten Years in Oregon (New York: J. Collord, 1844), 166.


19 They were married 4 March 1839. Ibid., 159.

20 Ibid., 183, 184, 194.
Just as the appointment was never received, William was never hired, so Margaret, to her dismay, discovered that she had married herself off the mission. Charles Wilkes, visiting the Baileys in 1841, heard a slightly differently account for her exit. Apparently he was told that she left because there was no work for her to do there as a teacher and because of her frustration that the "great missionary field to the north" had been neglected. Regardless of the reasons, she left and, having never received an appointment, she may have left with no pay for her nearly two years work.

Described by Margaret as reckless and violent and by another woman as a "mad dog," William arrived on the west coast in the mid-1830s by jumping ship in San Francisco. After evading pursuit by the ship's officers, he joined a party of trappers bound for Oregon. Indians attacked them, killing several and splitting William's chin and upper jaw. Thus, in the summer of 1835, after several days' walk through southern Oregon, he staggered into the mission, weak from hunger, his chin and upper jaw crudely held together with his shirt. An extended period of seeking religion led to his conversion early in 1839, in the midst of the revival which followed Willson's tearful confession of sin. Thereafter, apparently, he made some progress in the faith. However, new converts often did not remain converted, as Margaret knew, or were not steadfast in their faith. The second day of their marriage, after morning prayers, William announced that he would no longer pray with her; as Margaret pressed him, he further declared that he would never go to church again.

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21 Charles Wilkes, Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, IV (Philadelphia: Lee & Blanchard, 1845), 362. I see no inherent conflict between these two explanations; both could be true.

22 Bailey, The Grains, 136. Commonly the Mission and the employee settled accounts at the end of employment; Bailey mentioned no such settlement. Elsewhere she mentioned being trapped in Oregon, having no money to pay ship's passage home.

William was often violent with his wife, kicking, throttling, and beating her. At one point Margaret was made lame by his abuse. He humiliated her by fighting with her and deriding her in public places, by secretly confiding to others that his wife was a harlot, by locking her out of the house and denying her credit at all the stores. He shot his own pigs and cows, broke his furniture, and gambled away much of the money he made. The two agreed, at times, that his behavior was wrong; both agreed that alcohol was principally to blame. A cycle emerged of abuse, repentance and promises of abstinence, followed by a return to drinking and further abuse. More than once Margaret thought of divorce; more than once she came to the conclusion that she was trapped, unable to afford the trip back to Massachusetts.

Yet life was not simply miserable for Margaret. Indeed, for the decade of the 1840s she records times that were as pleasant and peaceful as she ever had. When her husband was absent, she was often lonely and missed his companionship, the warmth of his body in bed, and the security he offered, especially at night. She repeatedly expressed her love for her husband and her belief that he loved her as well. One visitor recorded that the Bailey household was very pleasant, William a "worthy host" and his wife "amiable." "The latter had come from the States, a member of the Methodist Episcopal Mission," stated Thomas Farnham, "and had consented to share the bliss and ills of life with the adventurous Gael; and a happy little family they were."

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24 Mission Superintendent George Gary agreed that alcohol was a problem; commenting on an election, he wrote: "The friends of Alcohol, voted, I suppose, for Wm. Bailey." Gary, "Diary," 280.

25 Bailey devotes the final fifth of her book to the divorce and the incidents leading up it, Bailey, The Grains, 241-309. The examples listed here come from Ibid., 197, 242, 244, 250, 254-255, 257, 260, 280-281, and 292.

26 Ibid., 188.

27 Thomas J. Farnham, Travels in the Great Western Prairies (London: Richard Bentley, 1843), reprinted in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., Early Western Travels 1748-1846, XXIX (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906), 19. Farnham was an uncritical commentator; by his account, the Mission was all sweetness and light.
Charles Wilkes indicated that Margaret worked very industriously in her garden, keeping it "exceedingly well." She often was alone, as her husband was gone with governmental and medical duties. She worked the fields, visited Indians, entertained guests, cared for the dying, and aided immigrants as her husband traversed the Willamette Valley. Although sometimes this became odious, especially when her husband showed no gratitude, she also received pleasure from her efforts and was able to laugh at her mistakes and be pleased with her accomplishments.

She rarely attended church. Early in their marriage she did not visit the Mission, although every now and then meeting was held at their house. In 1840, shortly after their marriage, the Mission moved south, to the location of the current state capital, Salem. By her reckoning, this placed the Bailey residence about twenty-five miles from each of the two growing towns in their vicinity, Salem and Oregon City. For a long time she could not travel, either because she was lame, her hip having been injured by her husband, or because of "pulmonary consumption." When she was able to ride, though, the distance was far enough to keep her home. At one point six years passed during which she attended only one meeting and never visited the Lord's Table.

However, her absence from church bothered her less and less as the years rolled by. The common evangelical speech continued to be a part of her vocabulary: a "sweet influence" came over her one evening mysteriously in January 1850, until she remembered that in the States it was the time of the monthly concert of prayer. She concluded that "Perhaps some one was remembering unworthy me at the Throne of Grace, and I was receiving the benefit." There were times, also, when she wept for the loss of church

28 Wilkes, 361-362.
30 Ibid., 237.
privileges. Often, though, she found expression for her faith in less conventional terms. Freed from the tensions which accompanied life within a believing community and surrounded by land of surpassing beauty, she found new opportunities to worship God. "In groves of my own choosing I have passed many an hour in meditation, prayer and praise, and the reflection afforded me that in them I was quite alone with nature, and with God, was an irresistible charm." In such a setting the beauty of God's creation became as important to her as his promise of redemption. Her poems changed accordingly. Earlier efforts had been filled with the sad heroics of the pious life or the sorrows of marriage; during the 1840s some of her poetry became pleasant and calm and reveals a clear joy which she found in the natural world.

Blessed clouds, O, how I love ye,
Dropping down your gentle rain;
Lovely clouds, not far above me,
Here ye have returned again.

In the region where ye travel
God is seen, and everywhere;
Sinners here, how great the marvel!
Still receive His sovereign care. . .

It was probably during this time that she read Byron's poetry; all of it, she supposed. Byron was distasteful to other evangelicals and Bailey's friends were a bit shocked when she expressed her appreciation. Several years earlier, Jason Lee had read Byron's "Sarda napalus" only to conclude that the author must be "if not infidel in principle (which is most probable) a total stranger to all vital experimental religion."%31

%31Ibid., 221.

%32Ibid., 223.

%33Ibid., 240. Another poetic example can be found in Ibid., 195-197; in a prose selection, a particular flower came to represent for her the passion of Christ's crucifixion, Ibid., 231.

%34Jason Lee, "Diary of Reverend Jason Lee," Oregon Historical Quarterly XVII (September 1916): 254. The title, according to one contemporary publication, is one word, "Sardanapalus." George Gordon, Lord Byron, The Works of Lord Byron in verse and prose, compiled by Fitz Green Halleck (Hartford: Silas Andrus & Son, 1849).
Bailey found him an attractive poet and apparently was able to quote him with ease. His sorrows and scandals, his sense of the heroic and perhaps the “incalculable, defiant, and reckless” aspects of his poetry enabled Bailey to identify with him; these, after all, were all part of her own life. Byron’s awareness that he had caused his own pain stood out in her mind and she pitied him for the pain which she knew that awareness caused.

“Poor, suffering, Byron! Sensitive tenderness like thine, could not have come from a heart altogether depraved.”

The Baileys lived in French Prairie, “in about the centre of the catholic village” and so became quite familiar with people of a faith which she regarded as heretical. Although she found cause to doubt their integrity—their horse racing, gambling, and working on the Sabbath offended her—she also found friends. At times she nurtured neighbors who were sick. Her Catholic neighbors, in turn, sheltered her from her husband, sometimes for days at a time. Once she welcomed Father Blanchet into her home and enjoyed a pleasant visit; he “very kindly” invited her to visit him at the falls and “spend a week with his niece.” This was unusual cordiality for a Catholic priest and a former Protestant missionary. In contrast, a leading Oregon minister of the day, Reverend George Atkinson, could not bring himself even to record the names of the priests, let alone contemplate a visit. Bailey’s faith entered an expansive time during the 1840s, appreciating Byron, gaining friends among the Catholics, and finding new, more peaceful expression amidst the groves of great trees surrounding her farm.

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36 My speculation that she read Byron at this time is based on the fact that she did not mention him until these years. Bailey, The Grains, 215, 234.

37 Ibid., 198, 232, 222, 235, 244.

This was part of a familiar pattern, though. Alone with her books and her God she often was happy. Within society, she repeatedly was not. The Grains, organized more thematically than chronologically, often separates the two. They belong together, though, for because she could not escape her husband, distasteful company, or her memories, her pleasures were often interrupted. Margaret might visit the neighbor's for a few days or "retire for a few hours or a day to the grove, and endeavor by relaxation, to forget the keenness of her sorrows; but although they might be overcome for that time--yet the cause being not removed--she had to realize their renewal, and each time find herself driven nearer and nearer to despair."39 In 1854, after fifteen years of marriage, the Baileys were divorced, out of which Margaret received virtually no material recompense for her years of farm and domestic labor: personal effects and clothing, a piano, one hundred dollars, and some real estate in Butteville.40

Once divorced, she settled in Salem, supporting herself by writing, teaching, sewing, and keeping boarders. Probably she lived off the small savings she had accumulated in the States, as well, for in later years she was quite poor.41 Most likely writing was for her a job, not a leisure pursuit. She contributed a short-lived column to the Oregon Spectator and wrote The Grains. Both were controversial and brought conflict with editors and reviewers. Although she won praise as a "chaste and elegant" writer for her work at the newspaper, the book was not well-received by reviewers or by the public.42 After a brief, publicized scuffle with reviewers, Bailey disappeared from

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39Bailey, The Grains, 244.


41Leasher and Frank state that she had one thousand dollars on interest in the States, but the origins of this they do not record.

42Oregon Spectator, 16 June 1854.
literary circles. She suffered through two more marriages, appears in the land records and a census, apparently never published again, and died impoverished in 1882.

Discerning readers' responses to The Grains remains a difficulty. Janice K. Duncan stated that the reaction against The Grains continued until Bailey "had fled north to Washington Territory and all but two copies of The Grains had been destroyed by outraged citizens of the Willamette Valley." Leasher and Frank reiterated her comment in their "Introduction" to the 1986 reissue, but did not elaborate on it. Duncan's statement is tantalizingly brief, leaving open for question who these residents were and why they were so angry with Bailey. It is also problematic. Bailey lived in Salem, married, divorced, bought and sold land, and built "brick stores" through the 1850s and up into the early 1870s; she didn't leave for Washington until perhaps the mid-1870s, twenty years after the publication of her book. At that late date, it seems unlikely that she fled in fear.

This disparity leaves open to question Duncan's second point, that nearly all the books were destroyed. It seems that the book was remembered. Bailey's obituary, a marriage notice, and other public notices refer parenthetically to "Ruth Rover," sometimes as Bailey's pen name and sometimes as the book itself, to help readers identify her. Thus, the books must have been sold. Once scattered, though, it would have been difficult to destroy all but three volumes. Conversely, it would have been easy to

43 For biographical information after her divorce, I have relied on Leasher and Frank, "Introduction," 9-18. A more detailed history of her life is available there, including a description of her other publications, mostly letters and poetry.

44 Duncan, 240. For her source, Duncan footnoted an oral interview with Malcolm H. Clark, Jr.


46 Duncan states that two copies survived, without stating which parts of two copies. Leasher and Frank state that one copy of volume 1 and two copies of volume 2 survived, thus a total of three volumes. Duncan could have counted the same books as two copies.
destroy the books before they circulated, but were that the case "Ruth Rover" probably would not have become such a useful point of reference.

Finally, Duncan does not make clear who would have been motivated to destroy them. The "outraged citizens of the Willamette Valley" conjures up images exceeding the importance of the publication, as if the publication of The Grains were akin to the Whitman murders. It seems unlikely that the citizens as whole would defend the long-defunct Mission with great intensity. Many of the original missionaries had died or gone back to the States, and for many of the immigrants the Mission had a bad reputation. There was nothing blasphemous about the book; although the morality of it was brought into question by a reviewer, Bailey's insistence upon sexual purity and Methodist piety would not cause them—whoever they were—to destroy the books and run Bailey out of town. If Duncan is correct that the books were destroyed, Margaret's former husband is most likely to have been responsible. He was a well-known, highly traveled doctor with political influence and ambitions. In 1848 he gained a seat in the Territorial legislature; in 1855, the year following publication of The Grains, he ran for the governor's office and was defeated. Perhaps he believed that his political career was threatened and that he could not afford to have his ex-wife spilling stories of his drunkenness, promiscuity, and domestic violence. Already accustomed to treating Margaret with violence, including attempts to steal or burn her papers, William might have destroyed the books, perhaps aided by the friends who supported him during the divorce trial. However, this scenario changes the emphasis. In place of a valley in uproar, it seems more likely that some readers in the town of Salem and surrounding areas might have been shocked, particularly those formerly associated with the Mission, but they probably would not have stirred much from their farms and businesses. Only a handful, perhaps only her ex-husband, William Bailey, would have cared enough to destroy the books. Even so, it seems more likely that the copies of The Grains passed the way of most books, i.e., they were broken down through use and humidity and eventually thrown away.
Despite the open questions regarding response to *The Grains*, people often did not respond positively to the author. Bailey repeatedly pushed against the limits of women's authority and status, often rejecting male authority (and female decorum) without compromise. Some authority figures—such as her father—he turned from firmly, yet with gentleness and compassion. Others she renounced with a startling fierceness. Her second suitor she apparently loved dearly, until she learned that he was pursuing other young women besides herself. After she broke off the relationship, her memory of him was "as of a grave with a poison flag growing above it and contaminating the air with its noxious breath." Some authority figures she merely tolerated, as when men commented that she worked too hard on the farm. Others she ignored; she freely gave away clothes to the Indians against Jason Lee's wishes. Sometimes her rejection of men came only after great pain. From her first husband she endured drunkenness, infidelity, deceit, and physical abuse, yet she remained with him for fifteen years. Rarely did she conflict with women; rarely did she enjoy close and kind relationships with men. Such relationships existed for her, but in this book, at least, they did not occupy center stage.

In her newspaper writing she portrayed herself in more ambivalent terms. Early in 1854 she started a newspaper column in the *Oregon Spectator.* Through it she hoped to serve women, contribute to the literary arts in the new Territory, and promote "piety,

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48 Ibid., 228.

49 For instances, she had fond and respectful memories of Reverend Miner Raymond, a theologian and teacher at Wilbraham, and Reverend A. D. Merrill. Ibid., 56, 34, 316n1. She also had severe conflicts with Susan Shepard.
morality, usefulness and refinement. Her first column for the "Ladies Department" included the pronouncement that within this space would be defended women's rights, with the assurance that the columnist did not support women who strove to take the proper place of men. Yet in a cautious, roundabout way, Bailey wondered: since woman is limited to the nursery, the kitchen, and the parlor, and since woman is "restless, confined, shackled and retarded in the delightful exercise of her mental capacities," if she should try to expand her range of pursuits, there is no telling if she should fail or not. Writing more directly and more strongly, Bailey stated that it was no wonder at all that a woman "should find herself uneasy, undetermined, insufficient, and unengaging." The recurrent duties of singing lullabies and putting up viands fully explained such unease. She concluded with a promise to clarify her views in a forthcoming issue.

But when that issue appeared, five weeks later, her hesitancy remained. Advocacy of women's political rights was out the question for her. "Man is formed to rule and woman to depend." Yet she recognized the evils which resulted from bad marriages, defined not as those which were abusive but those in which the woman had no influence over her husband, and hinted at strengthening divorce laws. But her hints were vague:

this brings us vis-a-vis in view of the most glaring and formidable evil which exists in society, viz.: unsuitable marriages, and which suggests many thoughts which might be treated separately, and which, in connection with the subject of education, would cover about the whole arena of her position in society.

Bailey sat on an uncomfortable fence. She supported women's rights conceptually; her column was to be, in part, a forum for discussion on the topic. Yet, when commenting on specific political agendas or social roles, she became uncomfortable and non-committal.

50 M. J. Bailey, Oregon Spectator, 12 May 1854.

51 Ibid. In The Grains, 265-6, Bailey made similar comments speculating confidently on women's abilities should they ever receive a chance.

52 Bailey, Oregon Spectator, 16 June 1854
Politics was a man's arena. Entering it through rational argument in the newspaper was difficult; calling for the inclusion of women, impossible.

She was far more comfortable expressing herself through the conventions of fictional literature. Her literary bent, education, and substantial reading led her naturally to one of the most popular forms of women's expression of the day—the novel. Nina Baym's study, Women's Fiction, describes in detail a plot found in much fiction written by women in the mid-nineteenth-century. Baym summarized it concisely:

The many novels all tell, with variations, a single tale. In essence, it is the story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world.

According to Baym, women's fiction gained its power precisely through its repetition; the conventional plots, stereotyped characterization, and perhaps most importantly, the common foundation of expected piety and religious belief all gave the women's novel the ability to communicate vividly with other women. David Reynolds has taken issue with the idea that one type of fictional writing can be called "women's fiction," but Baym's description holds for Bailey's book. As Bailey portrayed herself, she was a woman abandoned by father, suitors, church leaders, and husband. Men abandoned her, though, not because there was something wrong with her, but because their piety was deficient. Her mother, not her father, was the pious parent. A suitor was found wanting in doctrine. Leslie was unrepentant of his selfishness. Willson suggested that they tell the


church they had been sinfully intimate. Her first husband was unregenerate and from that followed naturally intemperance, infidelity, and deceit. On occasion she did wonder at the naivety of her youth, the simplicity of her earlier thinking, or the obstinacy of which she was capable, but very consistently she described herself as being pious, upright, moral, and Christian. In her perception, she was abandoned not because she had done any wrong, but because the men in her life—the main supports for women—were themselves unsupported by true Christian faith. She did not reject men in general or the concept of male authority, but men who had forsaken their claim upon her submission by themselves abandoning full submission to Christ.

Her short story, "Horace Penley," follows that theme directly. Horace is a refined attorney on his way up. He loves Amy Derby, a tradesman's daughter, with "a pure and ardent love," yet feels he can not marry someone beneath his station, for that would ruin his business and political aspirations. One night he paces the floor considering Congress, the Senate, maybe even the White House. Finally, with great frustration, he decides to thrust Amy from his mind and heart. Amy loves Horace, as well, and realizes that he is too far above her to hope to marry him. Her response is tearful prayer. After hours seeking God rather than considering Mammon, she, too, finds resolution, but hers is "tranquil, resigned, and happy."^58

Shortly after their mutual resolve, Horace is elected to Congress and heads off to Washington, never more to see Amy. He marries a beauty and keeps her as a lady, "an ornament of my parlour and a charmer for myself." Unfortunately, their marriage is not a happy one. Amy marries another man, Henry Dean. Henry is industrious, upright, exceedingly wealthy. In their home is perfect love, "where neither sought the honors of the world in preference to domestic felicity." Here, then, was a variation on Baym's

^57 For examples, see Ibid., 49, 88.

^58 Ruth Rover [Margaret Jewett Bailey], Oregon Spectator, 26 May 1854.
"overplot": an unreliable man abandons true love for the sake of status while the pious woman finds in God alone strength to retain her independence from the status-seekers until, in a triumph both spiritual and social, she marries an ideal man, one who values the contribution of his partner.59

Reynolds suggested an alternative typology to Baym's overplot in which he described seven different categories of female characters, some with sub-categories. Reynolds outlined the "moral exemplar," the "adventure feminist," and a large grouping of types within "the literature of women's wrongs."60 Bailey, familiar with literature as she was, wove many of these types into The Grains. Certainly she portrayed herself as the "moral exemplar," pious, active, willing to judge men according to a higher law. Certainly she was the "adventure feminist," voyaging half-way around the world, building fence, keeping farm, and visiting savages, all done with little assistance and accompanied by occasional praise from men that she worked as hard as a man. Bailey was the "victim," a drunkard's wife; she was the oppressed "working woman," performing domestic labor and farm work for neither appreciation nor pay. She was the "feminist criminal," breaking into her own house after her husband locked her out, in order to recover the property she brought to the marriage.61 She was the "sensual woman," but with a moral twist, rejecting suitors whom she ardently loved, confessing to sexual intimacy which she denied, pursuing her Lord with passionate yearning.

Unlike the story, "Horace Penley," The Grains is an intensely human book, more concerned with thematic portrayal of the past than with the construction of main characters in stereotypical and therefore inhuman roles. The result is a set of characters—especially Bailey herself—presented with the edges sharp, the contradictions intact.

59Ibid., 2 June 1854.
60Reynolds, Beneath the American Renaissance, 338-367.
Such diversity of claims and roles contributes to the book’s fragmentation, but also makes it more interesting and more important than her predictable short story.

In nearly all of these roles, Bailey defended her nonconformity with religious arguments, not with feminism. She was unable to wait for her father’s death, for instance, because while she waited countless savages would die without hope. The rejection of one suitor occurred because she found it important to be “closing, resolutely, her ears to every enticement of an earthly nature.” Her willingness to board with a single man she defended with claims to faithful chastity. Her resistance to domestic labor emerged because she had travelled to Oregon to teach Natives the gospel. In all her challenges to the prevailing authority and wisdom, and in response to the social stigma which resulted from a life of challenge, she took refuge in spiritual truths which defended her behavior.

She also looked to the spirit for refuge from the pain and loneliness which were the consequences of nonconformity. Religious ecstasy was not uncommon to Methodists in 1840. Pastors tried to create powerful feelings in their audiences and hearers sought such a response. To experience the overwhelming tension and fear of guilt before the judging God and then to be ravished by feelings of forgiveness and release, this was a hoped-for sign of salvation and, after conversion, of God’s presence. Bailey cultivated that cycle more than any of her compatriots at the Oregon Mission. The most lonely of the missionaries, she also turned the most toward mystical union with Christ. Over and over again Bailey described herself as fleeing to Jesus from pain, suffering, loneliness, and sorrow. There she found relief from her trials, acceptance, and renewed energy to pursue truth and speak the gospel to the Indians.

After many days of intense mental anguish, I was last eve enabled to realize a blessing from God which yielded peace, faith and consolation to my wounded spirit. I do not remember to have ever realized the Saviour

62 Ibid., 39.
of sinners so near me. The same Son of David who walked about Galilee... seemed to be present in my little stateroom... Baym has described "women's fiction" as stories of "trial and triumph," in which the abandoned woman finds within herself the skill, intelligence and perseverance to triumph over adversity. Bailey experienced no such final triumph; indeed, her life was tragic. Nevertheless, *The Grains* is infused with triumphant colors. Despite her repeated experience of separation and loss, Bailey doggedly sought and expected victory over falsehood. Her last printed works were responses to cruel reviews of her book (one read, "who the dickens cares, about the existence of a fly, or in whose pan of molasses the insect disappeared"). Even at this point, though, she was still hurling challenges and expecting to win. To one reviewer she responded: "Harness on your scales of scurrility, and in your right hand take the spear of a corrupted press... Come on to combat, and, with the help of Omnipotence, we defy you!" As she stretched convention, defended herself, and took comfort from God, the doctrines of spiritual triumph and sanctification sustained her. However, they also betrayed her. Supported by an unshakeable belief in the power and ultimate victory of truth, she had difficulty adjusting for the power of those whom she strove against. More than once she appears to have been unaware that her power to succeed in defiance of cultural norms was far less than the promised power of spiritual triumph. More than once she was surprised to find that sanctified behavior, the victory of the Spirit, was too much to expect of others. As she wrote about her arrival at the mission:

Ruth Rover is now on mission ground—that *holy* place where she had so long desired to be, and among those devoted servants of God with whom she had most ardently wished to associate—that people who had *left all* to follow Christ—among whom she had expected to find "fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers." But alas! she is still on earth—in the

63 Ibid., 213. This quote is typical; the experience dates from 1843.
64 Ibid., 18.
65 Ibid., 310-311.
kingdom of this world. Men may have changed the place, but they have kept their nature. They find the same hearts with them on mission ground, as they had to mourn over in their native land.66

Bailey's final triumph was not over men or male authority, nor over her worldly naivety, nor even over some recurrent sin, but over the constant temptation to be less faithful. The great success she portrayed was steadfast faith; the victory she anticipated was to be won through the Spirit.

Bailey's book was autobiographical; she intended to defend her name from those who betrayed, ostracized, and libeled her. To do so, she cast her work in the genre of the fiction of her peers. She was familiar with that literature and comfortable using it to articulate important beliefs about Christian faith and women's rights which were more difficult to express outside of the conventions of fiction. Three themes pervade the novel: the unreliability of men and Bailey's consequent need to succeed on her own; the necessity and difficulty of taking up the Cross of Christ in a fallen world; and the sanctuary offered by God for refuge from suffering. These are common nineteenth-century themes of literature and culture; they give the book its shape as a novel, as Bailey drew them out in the form of her conflicts with David Leslie, William Willson, and William Bailey.

However, she also moved beyond the conventions to include an expanding understanding of piety. Her Catholic friends, her appreciation of Byron, and her acute awareness of revelation in nature are part of the religious vitality of the nineteenth-century and further illustrate her willingness to flaunt convention. Conformity and non-conformity were tightly linked. Her willingness to take risks in defiance of both men and women reinforced a powerful and individualistic mysticism just as her faith supported and helped to justify her nonconformity. Nina Baym has argued that themes such as these were intended to articulate the lines of true power in the world and shape the social

66Ibid., 77.
structure around that reality; Bailey used them as if they had the power to clear her name and restore her reputation.
CHAPTER IV

IMMIGRANT RESPONSE TO CHURCH, CAMP MEETING
AND MISSION IN THE 1840S

During the 1840s people arrived from Missouri and the Midwest by the thousands. Most immigrants were unconnected to any church; of those who professed, most were Protestants. This did not hinder the Catholic mission greatly; it grew substantially in population and reputation. In 1846 Oregon City became the seat of the third Archdiocese in North America, behind Baltimore and Quebec, placing it temporarily on the leading edge of rapid Catholic expansion in the United States.¹ Neither did the major influx of Protestants and those who might be considered nominally Protestant help the Methodist Mission, which collapsed due to internal decay, political and economic pressure from the immigrants, and changing commitments of the Mission Board.² However, a new element was added by the immigrants—stable denominational churches. The settlers brought with them their religious traditions, biases, and requirements; they founded churches, called pastors to lead them, and held camp-meetings to bring in the spiritual harvest. By the time of the next major demographic shift, the gold rush of 1848 (1849 for the States),

¹ Quebec was established as a diocese in 1674, Baltimore in 1789. Baltimore, though was elevated to archdiocese first, in 1808; Quebec followed in 1844. The diocese of Mexico preceded both; it was established as a diocese in 1530 and raised to an archdiocese in 1546. Although Oregon City was the second archdiocese in the United States, St. Louis became the third a year later, and New York, New Orleans, and Cincinnati were all erected as Provinces in 1850. Oregon City was at the front edge of increased attention to the expanding United States. New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967 ed., s. v. "Baltimore, Archdiocese of," "Mexico, Archdiocese of," "Quebec, Archdiocese of."

the religious environment had been transformed. No longer was the Methodist Mission "the life and soul of the Settlement" in the Willamette as Chief Factor James Douglas had called it in 1838. Replacing the relatively limited range of religious expression—Methodists, Catholics, and non-professors—was a religious diversity and strength which resembled that of the Midwest. By 1850 the major institutions of worship—church and camp-meeting—had largely replaced the formerly dominant missions as the locus of religious expression.

Several features combine to make the early 1840s a convenient dividing line in the history of early Oregon. The need for government had been growing through the 1830s as the population grew; meetings held in the early 1840s culminated in the formation of a Provisional Government in 1843. By 1840 the Methodist mission had grown beyond the ability of Jason Lee to manage and had started to disintegrate. Also during this time the Catholic Mission entered a period of growth; reinforcements came in 1842 and succeeding years. Robert Newell took the first wagon from the Missouri to the valley in 1842, paving the way, as it were, for future such transportation. Later in 1842 the first wagon train arrived from the east. Although small compared to those which followed—only eighteen wagons with perhaps one hundred twenty-five people—it signaled the beginning of substantial immigration for the next several years.

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The demographic change which followed drove all other substantial changes in the Willamette Valley in the mid-1840s. Douglas estimated that roughly fifty adult male British and Americans inhabited the Valley in October 1838. At this time, the Americans dominated slightly in numbers. The following month Francis Blanchet and Modeste Demers arrived, quickly and decisively ending religious cooperation between Catholics and Methodists. By the Fall of 1841, the male population had perhaps doubled, to one hundred twenty or thirty, while the total population had grown to roughly five hundred. Americans and British were again represented in roughly equal numbers, with the Americans enjoying a growing advantage. In 1842, though, roughly one hundred twenty five immigrants arrived under the leadership of Dr. Elijah White, formerly of the Methodist mission. The following year any semblance of parity between Americans and Canadians broke, when several hundred to one thousand Americans arrived, dwarfing the Canadians as a political force and religious body. In 1844, another fifteen hundred Americans came. Another two or three thousand came in 1845, a

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6W. Kaye Lamb, "Introduction," in Hudson's Bay Company Series. VII, ed., E. E. Rich, The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Third Series, 1844-46 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1944), xxxiv. Lamb’s information comes from the report following Sir George Simpson’s visit in 1841. Simpson, the Governor of the H. B. C., concluded that there were sixty-five American men and sixty-one Canadian men. His statement is not perfectly clear; this number may or may not have included the missionaries.


8This number comes from McLoughlin, through Bancroft. Bancroft, XXIX, 448.
thousand more or perhaps fifteen hundred in 1846. The 1849 census, taken after the gold rush had drawn hundreds to California and before the Fall immigration, counted 8,779 persons living south of the Columbia River. The Federal census of 1850 counted the population of the entire Oregon Territory at 13,294; historian William A. Bowen, citing a "detailed examination of the manuscript census," concluded that 11,873 persons lived south of the Columbia River.

Few of these migrants came for primarily religious reasons. Peter Burnett's goals seem typical: to help found "a great American community" out west, to improve Mrs. Burnett's health, and to pay off his debts more rapidly than he could in the States. Historian John Faragher concluded that one-fourth of the overland travelers went west exclusively for new and better farmland. Once in Oregon, regular religious pursuits remained marginal for many. The primary occupation for most settlers during their first year was establishing a land claim and getting a crop in the ground. During this time they were often disgruntled, underfed, and embarrassed by their destitution; few had been able to bring enough supplies for the long overland trip. Unused to such conditions and unattached to a congregation which would enforce religious activities, church attendance seems to have been well-removed from the thoughts of most. After the first year, though, many had adapted well; crops soon produced enough food and livestock thrive.

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9 Bowen, 13, goes with the lower numbers of 2000 and 1000. Bancroft, XXIX, 508 and 553n11, picks 3000 and 1500, and explains with care the range of estimates and the authority of various sources.


11 Burnett, Recollections, 252.


13 Burnett, Recollections, 175.
Politics and economics claimed the public arena. Settlers devoted a great deal of time to the establishment of local government, providing for laws, a judiciary, and elected officials. The extension of Federal authority to Oregon was no less important.

The *Oregon Spectator*, an early newspaper, commonly included articles on the Mexican War, the Cayuse War, Polk's election, local elections, and the Oregon boundary dispute. Similarly prominent were economic assessments and endeavors. The ability of the Americans to exploit economic opportunities had seemed remarkable to James Douglas a few years before the great migrations; "the restless Americans are brooding over a thousand projects" he wrote in 1838, when he counted only thirty American men in the Valley. Certainly there was no lessening as the population grew.

Additionally, the 1840s were exciting years for literary and scientific pursuits. Enough leisure time existed to admit the formation of the "Pioneer Lyceum and Literary Club" by immigrants in 1843. Members met to discuss literature, science and politics. The list of members which is impressive; it runs to nearly forty people—far larger than most Oregon churches during this decade—and includes several civic leaders. The Multnomah Circulating Library formed at the same time, in January 1844. The *Oregon Spectator* often ran articles about Faraday, Morse, and topics of scientific and technological interest.

Missionary Father J. B. Z. Bolduc was surprised at the interest in science he found at Fort Vancouver in the mid-1840s. A galvanic battery, a galvanic cell, an "electrical machine," and other scientific equipment had been brought to Vancouver; Bolduc found himself required to explain their use to the residents.

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opportunities, and literary and scientific pursuits competed with the building of churches and participation in religious ritual.

In this environment churches formed, not rapidly at first, but in increasing numbers towards the end of the decade. Sometimes churches gathered without a minister and either invited a minister of a different denomination to preach or did without preaching. Usually, however, ministers were the organizers. Newly immigrated ministers commonly did not start churches immediately upon arrival; often several months to a few years passed before the minister was sufficiently established to start a church. At that time a group of four to seven gathered in a more-or-less convenient location for monthly or sometimes weekly services. They started a Sunday School, which often attracted more students than the pastor had hearers, and a weekly or monthly prayer meeting. Often the pastor itinerated. For some, this meant preaching to different groups on alternate Sundays; others preached at one place in the morning, a second place in the afternoon or evening, and possibly a third place at night. If enough ministers were available and willing, they held camp meetings in strategic places. After a few years, commonly, enough pastors of one denomination had arrived so that the ministers could organize themselves into an association, a convention, or a presbytery.

Baptist development was typical. Although a few of the earliest settlers had been raised as Baptists, the first church—West Union Baptist—did not hold monthly meetings until the Spring of 1844. Weekly gatherings could not be expected; only two

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17One source lists Allen J. David, George W. Ebberts, Caleb Wilkins, and Osborne Russell as perhaps the earliest four. Ebberts, Wilkins, and Russell left the fur business to settle in the Valley in the early 40s; David arrived with Elijah White in 1842. Clifford R. Miller, Baptists and the Oregon Frontier (Portland: Oregon Baptist Convention, 1967), 22-24. Miller ascribes to these four greater value as Americans than as believers. He acknowledges that "a great deal can not be claimed for these men as Baptists," yet they played an important national role as settlers. Ibid., 24.
members lived within twenty-five miles of the meeting house. Reverend Vincent Snelling arrived late in 1844 and brought Baptist preaching and communion to the seven members early in 1845. David Lenox and Henry Sewell alternated as Sunday School Superintendent. Additional ministers arrived late in 1845: Reverends Hezekiah Johnson and Ezra Fisher, missionaries with the Baptist Home Missions Society. New churches formed. Snelling organized Lacreole Baptist and Yamhill Baptist in 1846, raising the Baptist membership rolls to fifteen. Professing Baptists were allowed to join these churches on their word; few if any brought to the Valley letters confirming membership in a prior church, for they did not expect to find a Baptist church in Oregon. In 1847 a revival brought fifteen or twenty more into the Baptist fold and more clergy arrived: ministers Richard Miller and William Porter, and licentiate James Bond. Snelling and Lenox gathered the First Baptist Church of Oregon City in 1847 and the Clatsop Plains Baptist Church in 1848, under Fisher's leadership. That summer, the Baptists formed the Willamette Baptist Association. One more church—Santiam Baptist—formed before 1850; by that time eight ministers were serving the six churches and one hundred four members.¹⁸

Congregationalist development (which at first included the Presbyterians) was similar. Harvey Clark preached to a handful of people at the First Presbyterian Church of Willamette Falls beginning the early 1840s. Old School Presbyterian Lewis Thompson led the equally small Presbyterian Church at Clatsop Plains. Elkanah Walker and Cushing Eells, missionaries to the Spokane since the late 1830s, arrived in the Valley in 1848. George H. Atkinson arrived the same year and took over Clark's

church, relieving Clark of his thirty mile trip to the Falls. With five preachers in the area, a Congregational Association was agreed upon and formed.19

Other denominations followed this pattern, as well. Josephus Adamson Cornwall, a minister of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, arrived in 1846; two years later the first church formed, in Rickreall. In succeeding years a small handful of churches emerged, enough so that in 1851 the Oregon Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, under the authority of the Synod of Missouri, had organized with four ministers and five congregations.20 The Disciples of Christ, or Campbellites, organized a church in 1846, they, too, had a half-dozen churches by the early 1850s and seven or eight preachers.

Methodists had an advantage over other denominations due to the presence of missionaries and the size of the church in the States. At one point, for instance, they had four ministers and one licentiate in their largest circuit, Salem. On the Sabbath each minister traveled to different locations in hopes of serving as wide a population as possible. Baptists, by contrast, had only one preacher in Salem. The Methodists dominated the area, but despite their early start and comparatively high membership Methodist institutional growth followed essentially the same timing as other denominations. The Oregon and California Mission Conference was organized late in the decade, in September 1849, with seven circuits in Oregon.21

Difficulties encountered by the Methodists paralleled those of less popular denominations, also. "This is the day of small things," noted Reverend George Gary when

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eighty people came to a camp meeting and again when twenty or so came to Sunday meeting. Gary's congregations in 1844 were a dozen, twenty, and on good days when immigrants did show up, as many as thirty or thirty-five. By 1845, sixty came occasionally, but church attendance stabilized at thirty to forty, where it remained until his exit in 1847. This was for him a sharp contrast to his experience in New York; there he was well known regionally as a preacher and had attracted much larger crowds.

Harvey Clark's First Presbyterian Church was similarly discouraging. It started with a handful of settlers early in 1844, but when Atkinson took over four years later the church still had only seven members and received preaching roughly once per month.

Pastors were often disappointed by the small numbers of people who attended church and longed for the large, attentive congregations of the East or Midwest.

However, Oregon in 1850 was still a lightly populated area. A comparison between Methodist membership in Oregon and the Midwest indicates that Oregon churches were not failures at all; rather, they enjoyed modest success. When Gary arrived in 1844 to reorganize the Methodist Mission, he counted a total of fifty-seven Methodist church members in the Valley, served by three preachers. He noted this in July, before the migration, so the total population in the Valley was perhaps fourteen hundred people. Membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church thus included roughly 4% of the total population. A day of small things, perhaps, but not ridiculously small. By 1849 they had 444 members and the population had grown, according to the Territorial Census, to 8,779 people. Thus, Methodist membership was in the neighborhood of 5% of the population and was keeping pace with immigration. This was substantially higher than

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23Ibid., 181-185.


membership in Missouri, where less than 1% of the population were members, and at or just slightly below the levels of the upper Midwest: 5.6% in Illinois; 7.0% in Indiana; and 5.0% in Ohio. (See Appendix A for the complete listing of numbers.)

These figures do not include membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, a separate body since 1844, and this may help account for Missouri’s low numbers. The M. E. Church, South, was not established in Oregon until 1858; since many immigrants came from Missouri and Kentucky, a bias against the northern church may have lowered membership in Oregon. Although the Territorial Census is of questionable accuracy, it is close enough to support the general conclusion that M. E. Church membership in Oregon was quite comparable to membership in the upper Midwest. This is a worthwhile comparison; Illinois, Ohio, and Indiana combined to account for the origin of over 21% of Oregon’s citizenry in 1850. Oregon and Missouri each contributed slightly less than twenty percent of the 1850 population (Oregon, 18.45%; Missouri, 18.5%). In short, even during this period of upheaval and transition, church membership remained important.

Oregon also supported large numbers of clergy compared to the Midwest. Methodist records indicate that in 1849 Oregon had fourteen Methodist local preachers, or one clergyman for every six hundred twenty-seven people, a ratio substantially larger than in Illinois, Ohio, or Missouri. Missouri’s 1850 ratio parallels its low church membership, 1:7750, but even Illinois (1:1196) and Ohio (1:2472) trailed Oregon. (See Appendix A.) Oregon’s high level of clergy was apparent even when clergy of all denominations are included. The Seventh Census indicates that in 1850 Oregon had more employed clergy, as a percentage of the population, than any state in the upper Midwest. Oregon had twenty nine employed clergy, a ratio of clergy to population of 1:458. Midwest states did not approach that ratio; the nearest, Ohio, had a ratio of 1:812.

26 The History of American Methodism, II: 449.

27 Bowen, 25. Kentucky contributed nearly six percent, while Tennessee only slightly more than three percent.
Missouri, again, had the lowest ratio, 1:1111. (See Appendix B). Some clergy were sent to Oregon by Home Mission Societies and thus enjoyed a small, externally-supplied salary. However, even the Home Missionaries depended on the local population for a portion of their support, especially for room and board when they itinerated. Oregon residents were apparently willing to support these ministers; such support further indicates a steady interest in religion.

Oregon had a relative abundance of clergy, most of whom itinerated to homes and settlements. Each year pastors of various denominations arrived, to plant and build and eventually, to start churches. Some, like Abraham Garrison, came for the common reasons, to make money, build the nation, and improve family health. Others, like Hezekiah Johnson and Ezra Fisher, were sent by their denominations as part of their Home Missions program. Among the later, in particular, competition for members was noticeable. "Other denominations are making vigorous exertions to take the ground," mentioned Johnson. Atkinson, a representative of the American Home Missionary Society (a Congregational and New School Presbyterian organization), noticed that the Methodists had done well to bring their people into churches and that the Presbyterians might benefit by doing the same.

Perhaps as a result of the competition and the high numbers of clergy, for Christian churches in Oregon the 1840s were a decade of sudden growth from non-existence (or small size) to modest strength. During this decade, believers established churches of


29Atkinson, "Diary," XL: 275. Congregationalists and Presbyterians had attempted to cooperate, especially in missions, since the 1801 Plan of Union. The AHMS was formed in 1826 to help organize the various local mission societies of Congregational and Presbyterian churches. In 1839, the Presbyterians split into Old School and New School; Old School churches left the AHMS. New School churches continued to work with Congregationalists until 1861, at which point the AHMS became solely a Congregationalist organization. The name was changed to Congregationalist Home Missionary Society in 1893. Dictionary of Christianity in America, 1990 ed., s. v. "American Home Missionary Society."
various persuasions, at least twenty-five in total. By the start of 1850 the Methodists had seven circuits; the various Presbyterians and Congregationalists had between them six churches; the Catholics had three churches; the Baptists had six; and the Disciples of Christ had four. Such church building was an important initial activity and was followed, during the final years of the decade, by a second stage. Within a year or two on either side of 1850 all the major denominations constructed some form of larger organization—presbytery or association or locally-based ecclesiastical province—to govern or aid individual churches.

Occasionally denominations cooperated. The First Presbyterian Church of Willamette Falls organized around a core which included Robert Moore, a Presbyterian, Osborne Russell, who had been raised a Baptist, and pastor Harvey Clark, a Congregationalist. Moore was apparently a valued presence, or at least an insistent one. Perhaps the sole Presbyterian in the church, after he left it became the First Congregational Church of Oregon City. Presbyterians and Baptists shared the building and Peter Hatch, a Presbyterian elder, also superintended a Sabbath School for the Baptists. On hand to dedicate the new building in 1850 were ministers from the Methodist Episcopal church, the Baptist church, and the Episcopal church.  

More than a dozen denominations were represented by laity in Oregon and denominational switching was not uncommon. Peter Burnett, an immigrant of 1843, called himself a deist before converting to the Disciples in Missouri; in Oregon he became a Catholic. Atkinson noted in 1847 that the Methodists were the most numerous, but that the area also contained numerous Campbellites, Catholics, Congregationalists, Presbyterians old school, new school, Scotch, and Cumberland, Baptists, Freewill Baptists, Quakers, Seceders, a Moravian (who had temporarily joined the Methodists), a

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30 Several churches were started during the year of 1850; I did not count these.
31 Eels, 84-85.
Methodist who had been a Baptist, Methodists who had been Presbyterians, and a Methodist who had been a Baptist after being educated a Presbyterian.\textsuperscript{32}

Similar mixing occurred at camp-meetings. At one—also called a “union meeting” because many denominations were united at one place—preachers from five denominations spoke: Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregationalist, Cumberland Presbyterian, and Methodist. In such a setting denominational differences were not always noticeable. Atkinson, for instance, noticed that the “Cumberland Presb. brethren . . . preach and pray and conduct very much like the Methodists. There is the same responding, &c.”\textsuperscript{33} If Atkinson, a professional clergyman, did not draw strong lines of distinction, there is little chance that the brethren did.

Camp-meetings often started on a Wednesday, attended by a few tens or perhaps as many as a one to two hundred people. Observers described the week-day audiences as diverse: mothers with babies, young men, boys, and girls. Preaching, singing, and praying were the staples; the Methodists delivered four sermons a day, at 8 am, 10 am, 2 pm, and 7 pm, buttressed on either side with times of song and prayer. Attendance built through the week, peaking on Sunday morning when anywhere from one hundred to four hundred people would gather to worship, pray, sing, and listen to a sermon or two. A large fraction—perhaps thirty to eighty—would receive communion. A few handfuls—five to twenty—would “experience religion.” Preaching continued on Sunday afternoon and evening, but to smaller audiences. Monday morning, usually, they would close with prayer. While the remaining laity returned home, the ministers would evaluate the success of the meeting and assess the hope for the future.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32}Atkinson, XL: 269, 347-356.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., 271.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., 270-272.
Often ministers left camp-meetings hopeful for the piety of the region. Seeing the same small groups Sunday after Sunday could be wearing; camp-meetings were rejuvenating for the clergy. Many had come from places where they had been received by much larger numbers of people. They were new to Oregon, were not convinced of their effectiveness as ministers, and valued the reassurance of the camp-meeting. After one of the larger gatherings, Atkinson rightly concluded that "the habits of the people favor this kind of meeting." Buoyed by the responsive laity, the pastors met and decided to continue by holding "protracted meetings of two or three days at different places." Five were tentatively planned for that Autumn 1848, at the Falls (Oregon City), Brother Clark's (Forest Grove); one or two "up the country," and one at Portland, perhaps. Atkinson later refers to holding "Monthly Concerts" in November and December; he did not make clear whether these were the planned camp meetings or newly planned and heretofore unmentioned concerts of prayer. Nonetheless, they, as well, attracted large crowds and were apparently a more popular form of worship than weekly Sabbath gathering. The two complemented each other; the small churches and itinerants provided stability and routine, while the camp-meeting provided a more intense and emotional period of worship and social gathering. Both supplied important opportunities to worship, renew commitment, and socialize.

The success of these cooperative efforts does not mean that the Protestant population merely acquiesced before the sheer inability to act without incorporating other denominations. Limits on cooperation existed and were defended; by no means did people reject denominationalism. The core of the First Congregational Church of Oregon City was a mixture of Presbyterians and Congregationalists; Baptists—rather nominal Baptists, at that—held only a supporting role and Episcopalians showed up only to put on

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35bid., 345.

36bid., XLI: 7.
a good ceremony. Robert Moore, while willing to join with Congregationalists in that church, was pleased to leave it when an opportunity arose to join the Presbyterian Church in Linn City. Methodist Alvan Waller preached several times at a Baptist Church which wanted an ordained man to speak, but he did no more than that; when once he attempted to baptize an infant, he was asked, rather vigorously, to leave. Even the popular union meeting earned the disapproval of some who were less willing to join with other denominations. In general, though, believers accepted diversity and plurality with little acrimony; exceptions to this were almost invariably ministers or, occasionally, leading laity. To be more precise, the theological and creedal rigor which separated denominations did not prevent those willing to profess faith from switching churches or cooperating with other denominations.

Perhaps the greatest source of tension among Protestants was neither church nor camp-meeting, but the Methodist mission. The Mission began to break down soon after the the great reinforcement—over fifty people—arrived in 1840. While this group strengthened the economic and numeric power to the Mission, it overwhelmed the ability of the Superintendent to administrate and quickened the moral, religious, and economic collapse of the mission. Some writings of the missionaries convey this directly; by the mid-1840s disheartening reports from several mission employees had returned to the Methodist Board, as had inordinately large bills. A more graphic illustration comes from Daniel Lee and John H. Frost's book about the mission, Ten Years in Oregon. Initially the book conveys purpose and zeal; by the end, much of the vision and energy has faded.

37Ibid., XL: 357-358; XLI: 7.

38Miller, 26. David Lenox, a founding member, put a halt to the baptism.


Frost, the primary author for later portions of the book, was then at Astoria, near the mouth of the Columbia River. At this location he was unable to communicate with the Indians because he could not speak their language. He was equally unable to hold a moral influence over the growing American population in the Valley, for at Astoria he had no white audience save his family and one other person. The physical shift of the author away from the center of activity, the utter futility of missions work without the use of language, and the absence of an American audience combined to strip away the galvanized ambitions of the missionaries. The authors, by the end, lost the thread of salvific drama and the book diminished to a recitation of events; they wished simply to get it over with.\textsuperscript{41}

By 1844, when Reverend George Gary arrived to replace Lee, the Oregon Mission—once one of the most popular and well-supported missions in the country—was an embarrassment. Among the many newcomers to the Valley, the reputation of the Methodists was mixed. The missionaries had refused help to many immigrants, most of whom desperately needed food, clothing, and shelter. Interestingly, their insistence on maintaining the Sabbath created problems; worship on the Sabbath conflicted with Christian compassion more than once. When William Bailey and his companions arrived from southern Oregon in 1835, hungry and badly wounded from a fight with Indians, the Lees and Cyrus Shepard apparently left them at the mission—without feeding them or binding their wounds—to hold meetings in the settlement. Cursing the missionaries, Bailey and the others left and found succor at a Frenchman’s house.\textsuperscript{42} Five years later the missionaries suffered through an open mocking at meeting, delivered when the Methodists refused to feed some mountain men because it was time for the Sabbath

\textsuperscript{41} D. Lee and J. H. Frost, \textit{Ten Years in Oregon} (New York: J. Collord, 1844).

service. John Minto told a similar story; his party arrived at the Dalles on a Sunday afternoon in the mid-1840s and camped near enough to hear the preacher speak to the Indians in Chinook. "But the mission people kept their doors shut," he stated, and "passed and repassed without inquiry as to whence we came or whether we needed anything." When viewed next to McLoughlin's cordiality and cooperation—he provided thousands of dollars of credit to immigrants—the Methodists appeared hostile and stingy.

Other incidents contributed to the poor reputation of the mission. When Reverend Alvin Waller jumped McLoughlin's land claim in the early 1840s and tried at length to wrest the land from McLoughlin, many in the resident population responded to Waller's protracted lack of ethics by siding with the Chief Factor. According to McLoughlin, "many members of the Methodist Church were so much disgusted with Mr. Waller's conduct that they would not go to hear him preach, and several went the length of withdrawing their names entirely from that Church." Mission leaders continued to alienate those around them. At least one party of immigrants was greeted by missionaries who proclaimed that "the Mission had always ruled the country, and if there were any person in the emigration that did not like to be ruled by the mission they might find a country elsewhere to go to." News of comments spread quickly, to the further deterioration of public opinion about the mission. Father Bolduc observed that

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43This story has been told in greater detail in Chapter I.


45Gary, 81.


47Daniel Waldo, "Critiques" (Salem, 1878), Oregon Manuscripts P-A 74, microfilm, The Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California, 16.
"the American emigrants who came this year from St. Louis do not want to see them, they detest them so much."^{48}

To be sure, this reputation was not fully deserved. The immigrants arrived in such a state of decrepitude that virtually all were embarrassed about something. The Mission did hire many immigrants for short periods of time, but it could not feed or employ thousands of people; it became a scapegoat, unjustly blamed for problems over which it had little control. However, unlike McLoughlin, the mission leaders did little to relieve that reputation. Faced with immigrants wanting land, they insisted upon retaining their land claims—thirty-six square miles of good land—mostly unimproved and unused. Feelings about unused claims ran high; one immigrant pastor, Reverend Abraham L. Garrison, faced with similar speculative claiming by some single men, beat a claim-holder to unconsciousness. To the immigrants of 1843, it appeared that the Methodists were striving to maintain an economic monopoly on the land, a conclusion which drew ire as fully as did the monopoly given to the H. B. C. The laws of 1843, written before the major immigration of that year, protected the six miles square of Mission land; the revised version of 1844 did not.^{49}

Undergirding these specific complaints with the Methodist mission was a widespread distrust of missionaries. Missions to the Indians were perceived by many Americans as being useless, peopled by overzealous fanatics, and counter to good sense and good business. Margaret Bailey's brother attempted to dissuade her from missions work; missions to the Indians, he wrote in 1835, "are altogether uncalled for, and are senseless squandering and waste of life and treasure."^{50} S. Owens expressed his resentment for the

^{48}Bolduc, 121.


^{50}Bailey, 52.
missionaries' role in the Cayuse War in a fourth-of-July toast: "Missionaries: May they never establish a mission in a savage country, unless they are able to protect it without calling up the country." Similar disdain had been expressed by the fur traders a number of years earlier; their dislike of missionaries is well-known, but represents only part of a wide-spread distrust of mission goals and missionaries. Even some of the more pious quotes printed in the Oregon Spectator echoed this, calling for common sense in favor of zeal. One contribution from "Quesenberry" entitled "The Rigidly Righteous" argued that "If more virtue were practiced and less professed the world would be better." At the least, a strong component of American public opinion gravitated away from missionary work. Contributing to the poor reputation of the Methodist Mission in the Valley were ethical disputes over such things as the failure to aid the wounded, feed the hungry, and release claims to excessive amounts of land.

This general distrust and dislike could be overcome by individuals. Daniel Waldo, one of the more vocal opponents of Mission, stated that the missionaries "done no good here, not a bit. . . . the country would have settled just as well without them, probably better." But when he mentioned specific people, his opinions were far more favorable. He thought highly of "Old Lee" (probably Daniel), despite Lee's claim that the mission ran the country. He also thought well of Alvan Waller, Henry Brewer, William Willson, and Alanson Beers. Waldo's distrust of missionaries as a whole could be overcome by individuals, but this did not sway his general reaction. Despite his favorable impressions of several missionaries, Waldo continued to think that most "were a bad set before they left home."  

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51 Oregon Spectator, 24 August 1848.  
52 Oregon Spectator, 4 March 1846.  
53 Waldo, 15-20.
Internally, as well, the Mission had serious problems. The Indian Manual Labor School deeply shamed Gary when he arrived. The number of children being educated at one time was small, usually in the twenties and never more than the low forties. On occasion the parents had been paid to consent to have their children enter the school. Absence reports for twenty-seven students indicate that they were absent, on the average, almost half the time. Runaways were chained, severely whipped, and imprisoned within a high enclosure. Almost all the twenty-three children present when Gary arrived were sick, some with venereal disease. Sexual activity among the children further embarrassed Gary and rumors hinted—stated more openly by opponents of the mission—that one of the Methodists had been sexually involved with one of the Indian girls. What started as a "noble charity" to educate Indian boys and girls "so that they may rise in intelligence and virtue" became "one of the most difficult and embarrassing subjects" that Gary had encountered.  

The School was most troubling, but other problems plagued the Mission. Costs were high, yet the buildings were run down and decaying. Labor was disorganized and laborers unmotivated or moved largely by personal agendas. The personnel argued upon little provocation, leading Gary to conclude that Lee had had a difficult group to deal with: Susan Shepard and Margaret Bailey agreed that the Board should have chosen the staff more carefully. Accounting was careless or nonexistent. Supplies were given to the Indians indiscriminately, stated Gary, "as though he who gave away the most was the best fellow." Worse, there were few converts. Several Indians had experienced grace and been converted before they died. This was not a trivial accomplishment, since that included the hope of eternal salvation for those few. Gary believed, though, that

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56 Gary, 91.
this was the sole benefit of the Mission, a far smaller success than had been hoped for. In the Willamette Valley in 1844 no adult Protestant Indians could be found. As an effort to bring Christianity to the Natives, the Mission was nearly a total failure.57

Gary's response was rapid, vital, authoritative. The work day following his arrival he gathered the leaders together, announced the Board's concerns and agendas, and requested information. We may draw five thousand dollars, he announced; "now we must cut our garment according to the cloth." Within a week he had sold the farm at Clatsop. Less than three weeks later he announced his decision to close the Indian Manual Labor School and offered to sell the building, mills, and lands to the Trustees of the Oregon Institute. By the end of the year he had dismissed and paid off all but one of laity (Henry Brewer, the farmer at the Dalles), disposed of the land, the harvest, the stock, the mills, the tools and other supplies, the debts, and the buildings (except for the parsonage), and he had provided families for the Indian children in the school. Of the once expansive and populous mission, little remained: Gary held on to the parsonage and four preachers—himself, David Leslie, Alvin Waller, and Gustavus Hines.58 Waller was assigned to the Dalles and Leslie went to the upper Willamette (Salem), leaving Gary and Hines at the Falls and Tualatin Plains.

Few people liked the change; a major institution was being destroyed. Despite the recognition by all that the Mission could not continue, only one, said Gary, accepted his dismissal positively, and that most likely because he wished to retain the face of a gentleman. Perversely, even some quarters of the general public were angered by the dismantling of the mission. Under Lee, the mission had been disliked because of its economic dominance and its claim to so much good land; as Gary concluded, it was "a speculative and monopolizing institution." However, the mission also had employed a

57Ibid., 83-91, 283. Bailey, 137-144.
number of immigrants and represented a steady source of jobs and supplies. After Gary
replaced Lee, many came to the mission looking for work and went away "seriously
disappointed" to find no work available. According to one angered immigrant speaking at
the Lyceum, dismantling the mission was ruining the country and Gary's tenure was like
"nine-months cholera."^59

Avoiding such hostility, though, could hardly have been possible. The
Methodist Church had spent perhaps a quarter-million dollars on the Mission over the
course of a decade.60 Gary's job was damage control; he had to stop the financial leaks
which drained so much money from other, more productive missions and to shut down the
secular activities which gave the mission a poor reputation. He had no friends or peers to
help him and his subordinates were of uncertain reliability. Debts he sold reduced in
value by one-third, simply to be rid of them. Personal motives and integrity, property
values, and arguments he evaluated rapidly; sometimes his assessment changed as the
months moved by. In such an environment he could not avoid making errors and enemies.

These were difficult days for Gary, but not without reward. He read endlessly:
Charles Wesley's Memoirs, a collection of Wesley's sermons, Squire Chase's book on
Roman Catholic indulgences (which he thought unnecessary), Washington Irving's
Oliver Goldsmith, and others. He received letters with great delight and read them
over and over. He consumed the Bible, at one point reading it through four times in
fourteen months.61 Gary was an able administrator, quick to size up people, honest in his

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59Gary, 176, 185.

60Bancroft, XXIX, 224. Bailey, 136-137, describes in fine detail the great
popularity of the Mission and how diffuse its support.

61Gary, 156-158, 170, 177, 180-181, 270. Gary's reference to Wesley's Memoirs is
confusing. The National Union Catalogue lists the earliest publication of his memoirs as
his comment before 1849. The NUC did list a life of Wesley published earlier which was
collected from Wesley's journals, perhaps this is what Gary was referring to. John
Whitehead, The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M. A. late student of Christ-church,
Oxford, collected from his private journals, 2d ed., improved (Dublin: J. Jones, 1805).
business relations, secure in his ability to make sound decisions. While he felt the anger directed towards him, the absence of friends, and the difficulty of the decisions, these did not destabilize him. Margaret Bailey was often reduced to tears by her loneliness. When H. K. W. Perkins tried to decide whether or not to remain a missionary, anxiety so consumed him that Gary wondered about his sanity. Spaulding's response to the Whitman murders led Bancroft to question his sanity. Gary, though, was less of a missionary and more of an administrator; he moved through his tasks with dispatch and confidence, expressing great relief when his first month was over and concluding, "I feel as though I was never serving the church to greater benefit than in my visit to this Mission."^{64}

While Reverend Gary served the church by dismantling the Methodist Mission, Father Blanchet served it by substantially building the Catholic Mission. Through the 1840s Blanchet gathered to the Willamette Valley several priests, nuns, and lay brothers. By the Fall of 1847, Blanchet—then Archbishop—had under his authority three sees: Vancouver Island, Oregon City, and Walla Walla. At the See of Oregon City (which included the Willamette Valley) were ten secular priests, two Jesuits, thirteen


^62^ McLoughlin, although angered by the prices which Gary charged him for land which McLoughlin thought was rightfully his, also appreciated that Gary regretted the entire mess and thought of him with greater respect than others, especially Waller. *HBCS*, VII, 219.

^63^ Bancroft, XXIX, 665n46. Clifford Drury's assessment of Spalding is more gentle than Bancroft's, but not fundamentally different. Drury describes Spalding as "obsessed with the idea that he was being persecuted" and similarly driven in opposition to Catholicism. Clifford Merrill Drury, *Henry Harmon Spalding* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, 1936), 350, 357.

^64^ Gary, 93.
Sisters, and two schools. Several prominent residents had converted to Catholicism and the populace appears to have been conciliatory. Five missions in "lower Oregon" had been started and five churches and chapels had been built there as well. For the Catholic Mission, as for the Protestant churches, the 1840s were a period of important growth.

Four years after Blanchet and Demers started the mission, in September 1842, their first reinforcements arrived: Reverends Anthony Langlois and John Baptist Zachary Bolduc from Quebec. Bolduc was assigned mission work at Colville, on the upper Columbia. Langlois remained in the Valley and started a boys' boarding school, St. Joseph's College, the Autumn following his arrival. The thirty boarders were taught English, French, and arithmetic. Two years later, in August 1844, Jesuit Father Peter John De Smet arrived from Europe with four priests, one lay brother and six nuns, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Some of the priests, led by De Smet, soon headed for the Catholic missions in the Rocky Mountains, but the Sisters, joined by Father Peter De...

65 For an unusual mix of scholarship and captivating narrative about the Sisters, see Mary Dominica McNamee, Willamette Interlude (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1959). The style is old, in the sense that the story is heroic and emphasizes the founders of the convent, but the citations, bibliography, and knowledge reveal sound scholarship. This is a story which could be profitably re-written, particularly now that so much has been added to the knowledge and value of women's history.

66 Blanchet, 124, 130, 151n57. The five missions included Vancouver, Clackamas, Willamette Falls and two not in the Valley, Cascades and Nisqually. "Lower Oregon" was distinguished from Caledonia and the Rocky Mountains.

67 Fort Colville was an H. B. C. post on the upper Columbia, in what is now the northeast corner of Washington. Very near to it was the site of a Jesuit mission, St Paul's.

68 The college was blessed 17 October 1843. Mr. King was principal and teacher of English. Mr. Bilodeau taught French. Plans were to include the teaching of history and geography. Blanchet, 114. Bolduc, 120.

69 The arrivals included Jesuit Fathers Anthony Ravalli, Michael Accolti, John Nobili, and Louis Vercruyssse, Brother Francis Huybrechts (a mechanic and carpenter) and Sisters Marie Catherine, Loyola, Mary Cornelia, Mary Aloysia, Norbertine, and Mary Albine. Blanchet, 118. Wilfred P. Schoenberg, Paths to the Northwest: A Jesuit History of the Oregon Province (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1982), 33-34.
Vos entered their convent, St. Mary's, in October 1844. St. Mary's was located near St. Paul's Church and the new St. Joseph's, as part of the settlement on French Prairie. As with the first reinforcements, the nuns quickly started a school. By October 1845, the nuns had charge of forty-two girls, primarily "daughters of the Canadian farmers," and were building a chapel. Three years later, after additional nuns arrived, they started a second school, in Oregon City, primarily for Americans. As a whole, the Catholic clergy in the Valley concentrated on the church and schools at the French settlement (St. Paul's, St. Joseph's, and St. Mary's), on Oregon City (the seat of the ecclesiastical province), and on Fort Vancouver.

Internationally, the Mission earned considerable recognition. Blanchet was consecrated Bishop of Drasa in July 1845. Following his elevation to bishop, he travelled to Rome, meeting a number of times with Pope Gregory XVI and successfully petitioning for the creation of an ecclesiastical province. He also toured Europe, gathering nuns, Jesuits, secular priests, and others who returned to the Oregon mission with him. The King and Queen of Belgium entertained him, as did the King of Bavaria, Louis Philippe King of France, Archduke Louis of Austria, and "their I. M. the Emperor and Empress Mother." From France alone he received a gift of nearly 18,000 francs. It was a triumphant Archbishop Blanchet who returned to Oregon with new authority, new

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70De Vos, a Belgian by birth, was recruited to the Rocky Mountain missions by De Smet. Ibid., 27-8


72The territory covered by the province ran from Mexican California to Russian Alaska and from the Pacific to the Rocky Mountains. It included a number of northern missions, Cowlitz, Colville, Whidbey Island, Vancouver Island, and other locations. Jesuits started several missions in the Rocky Mountains, as well. Schoenberg, 38-39.

73Twenty-one people returned to Oregon with Blanchet: seven Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, three Jesuits, three lay brothers, five secular priests, two deacons, and one cleric.

74Blanchet, 115, 125-127.
personnel, European support and money, and relics from four holy bodies of martyrs in the catacombs at Rome.\textsuperscript{75}

Missions work in the Valley, after initial successes, resembled Protestant efforts. Blanchet counted the hundreds who had been baptized, but also cautioned that the "first demonstrations of the Indians" were not to be relied upon.\textsuperscript{76} Bolduc was similarly disheartened by the unwillingness of the Indians to embrace more than a surficial Catholicism. The Father also gave a blunt assessment of the French Canadians at St. Paul's in the Valley:

The priest will always have some trouble with his parishioners who are not very fervent and have little zeal for his support; they have not deigned to build a little rectory for him. The mingling of the Americans with the Canadians is still harmful to good order. Many children of the Canadians are yet infidels and do not wish to give up their disorderly life to prepare for baptism.\textsuperscript{77}

Margaret Bailey seconded his opinion with her observance that the French Sabbath rarely resembled a day of worshipful rest.\textsuperscript{78}

As Americans rapidly outnumbered Indians and Canadians, priestly emphasis shifted to include the new residents. Americans, along with some non-Catholic British, responded; a number of Protestants converted to Catholicism, and, so it appears, the Catholic church proved attractive to many others. John McLoughlin joined the Catholic Church in November 1842, after reading John Milner's \textit{The end of religious controversy}.\textsuperscript{79} Walter Pomeroy converted a year later and in 1845 led the construction of the Cathedral

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[75] Ibid., 126-128. Blanchet's vicariate was erected into an ecclesiastical province 24 July 1846.
\item[76] Ibid., 93
\item[77] Bolduc, 91a.
\item[78] Bailey, 198.
\item[79] Blanchet, 75-76, 111. The full title is \textit{The end of religious controversy, in a friendly correspondence between a religious society of Protestants, and a Catholic divine}. The title varies slightly for different editions.
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in Oregon City.®^ Peter Burnett, a prominent lawyer and later the first governor of California, was greatly moved by the Christmas midnight mass in 1843. Like McLoughlin, Burnett spent considerable time reading and deciding for himself whether Protestants or Catholics had the better claim to truth; in 1846 he converted.®^ G. W. LeBreton converted to Catholicism, as well, apparently in pursuit of a woman. That relationship failed—Blanchet stated that she remained unavailable and Bolduc stated that she died soon after their marriage—and despite his new profession, LeBreton left the Church and "died a Protestant."®^ Blanchet names eight other converts in 1845 and 1846.®

This positive response among some converts was echoed in the decisions American parents made about their daughters’ education. The convent school for girls in Oregon City, opened in September 1848, was just as successful as that serving the French. The school attracted considerable attention; soon it had thirty or more enrolled and was receiving applications regularly. Protestant or non-religious alternatives were limited; the few Protestant teachers in the area were not highly qualified and the leading Protestant school, the Oregon Institute, was in Salem and thus was too distant to draw students from Oregon City.®^ Furthermore, the nuns were good teachers. As a result, a number of Protestant girls attended; this troubled Atkinson. It is of "vast importance" to

80Ibid., 113.
81Ibid., 76, 115, 123.
82Ibid., 116. Bolduc, 121. Bolduc did not name the person to whom he referred, but the story is so similar to Blanchet's that LeBreton was most likely the person involved.
83John Edward Long, his wife, Miss Cason, Miss Walter Rogers, Maria E. McLoughlin, Fendell Car Cason, W. Wood, and Mr. Johnson. Blanchet, 123-124, 151n54.
send teachers of high quality, he wrote to Mary Hale in 1849, "send all you can."85 Numerous Protestant girls were learning popery, music, French, and needlework from Catholic teachers and were "delighted with their kindness."86 Worse yet, in Atkinson's mind, their parents were quite happy with the arrangement and saw no potential problems.87 No evidence points to the piety of these parents, so perhaps some of those whom Atkinson labels "Protestant" might better be described as non-professors, but at any rate, Atkinson worried over and worked against a Catholic menace that was considerably less menacing to the laity. Atkinson, later one of the premier educators in Oregon, successfully raised money for a school to counter the Catholics, but doing so was difficult.88

What was true for education was more generally true; hostility between Catholics and Protestants, traditionally a source of social discontent and sometimes violence, was limited. Few conflicts arose and those which did were primarily arguments among leaders: Blanchet and Demers against the Lees, Shepard, Perkins, Waller, and others. Sometimes these disputes touched emotional and symbolic extremes; pastor Waller earned Blanchet's burning resentment for cutting down a cross planted by the Catholics. The Father was beside himself:

Yes, the cross which shows the excess of the love of the Son of God for man . . . . that cross is a scandal to the Methodist minister, Waller; he has it in

85George H. Atkinson, Oregon City, to Mary L. Hale, 24-25 July 1849, George Atkinson Letters, 1841-1851, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Hale was an officer in the Boston Society for Promoting Education.


horror, as the devils, he can not bear the sight of it; he ordered it to be cut down... 89

Atkinson, a gentler, more tolerant man than Waller, nonetheless shied away from the Catholics. In his diary he passed over the Catholic Church as if he were writing about a house of death; he quickly moved on to other topics, mentioning only that the building was capacious. Although he recorded the names and denominations of dozens of people, he never mentioned the priests' names. Instead, he reported that "Catholic priests are around us," implying that he feared such a condition. Fear, distrust, and a complete absence of communication seem to have prevailed, despite his moderate stance following the Whitman murders and despite his warm friendships with Catholics. 90

Indeed, that is the interesting part; Atkinson had Catholic friends. Margaret Bailey cultivated friendships among the professedly-Catholic Indian wives of the French Canadians. 91 Peter Burnett received criticism following his conversion to Catholicism from the Disciples and apparently felt the need to publish a lengthy explanation of his reasoning. 92 Nonetheless, he did not mention being discriminated against for his faith and went on to be the first governor of California. Additionally, he knew Marcus Whitman well—the two visited each other off and on through the early forties—and Burnett's conversion did not alter his respect for the Protestant missionary. 93

Friendships and business relationships which crossed Catholic/Protestant lines seem to have been an accepted behavior. Bancroft echoes this: "In the matter of religious differences, when the Methodist Mission was dissolved, the chief cause of irritation was

89 Blanchet, 113.  
91 Bailey, 232, 244.  
92 Peter H. Burnett, The Path which led a Protestant Lawyer to the Catholic Church (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1860).  
93 Burnett, Recollections, 249.
removed, and Protestant and Catholic labored side by side with similar if not coincident aims, and without seriously interfering with one another.\textsuperscript{94} Sometimes the coincident aims had more to do with business than with the mysteries of faith. The Catholics “deal out their cash with a liberal hand,” stated Chief Factor James Douglas. “We lost some good customers by the winding up of the Methodist Mission, and we hope the Jesuits, will richly supply the blank.”\textsuperscript{95} However, religious interest in Catholicism was notable. On a Sunday in February 1846, the church at Oregon City was blessed and opened “in the presence of a large concourse of Catholics and Protestants.”\textsuperscript{96} There were only a few Catholic families in Oregon City and most of the French worshipped at St. Paul’s (or did not attend church regularly) yet it remained full Sunday after Sunday, according to Blanchet. When Blanchet returned from Europe as an archbishop Catholics and Protestants alike turned out to witness the event. An event it was for frontier Oregon, to have an archbishop vested with episcopal robe, mosetta, crosier, and miter.

The presence of the Archbishop in the Church, on his throne, with episcopal insignia, surrounded by numerous clergy, the beauty of the chant, music and solemnity of the service, were drawing the faithful who could not be weary of contemplating the beauties of the house of God.\textsuperscript{97}

The Catholic success stalled abruptly at the end of the decade. Three months later, in November, A.B.C.F.M. missionaries Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and several other Americans were killed by Cayuse at Wailatpu, the location of a Protestant mission in what is now southeastern Washington. Tensions and hostilities between Cayuse and Americans had been building for years, especially since the large migrations had started.

\textsuperscript{94}Bancroft, XXIX, 329.


\textsuperscript{96}Blanchet, 128.

\textsuperscript{97}Blanchet, 129.
The Indians feared that the Americans moving through the country on their way to Oregon would eventually stay and steal their land, and they were angry with the Whitmans for helping these newcomers. That fall measles hit Americans and Cayuse together at the Whitman station. Many Americans recovered; the Cayuse often died. Blaming Dr. Whitman for the disparity, retributive justice followed.\(^{98}\)

The Whitman murders raised the fear of further attack among the missionaries. The other Protestant missionaries left their posts in the mountains and moved to the Valley. Eells and Walker had been missionaries to the Spokane since 1838. They left under escort, never to return. Spaulding had been at Lapwai for over a decade, among the Nez Perce on the Clearwater River in what is now Idaho. He fled for his life, with timely assistance from Father Brouillet, and was almost killed along with the Whitmans. Catholic missionaries, as well, left the Indians whom they had been among. Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet, Vicar General Brouillet, Fathers Chirouze, Pandosy, and others all left their posts and returned to St. Paul's. Unlike the Protestants, who never returned to their missions, the Catholics returned in few months. By June of 1848, A. M. A. Blanchet travelled up the Columbia to visit the Cayuse at Umatilla. He was stopped at the Dalles by the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, so he built a new mission, St. Peter's, at the Dalles. The Oblate Fathers exited the Valley to go back to their Yakima Mission at roughly the same time. The Jesuits remained "safe and quiet" in the Rocky Mountains; they seem to have felt little effect from the ordeal.\(^{99}\)

The attack on the Whitman's temporarily raised nativist fears in the Valley. Spaulding in particular exhibited the ingratitude and hostile zealotry characteristic of Protestant missions leaders in Oregon. Rather than express appreciation to Brouillet for saving his life, Spaulding accused the Catholics, along with the H. B. C., of stirring up

\(^{98}\text{Ibid., 132. Bancroft, XXIX, 642-663.}\)

\(^{99}\text{Blanchet, 135-139.}\)
the Indians and instigating the murders.\textsuperscript{100} Public outrage over the murders lent Spaulding an audience.\textsuperscript{101} For several months, according to Blanchet, the Catholic churches and other buildings were in danger of being burned by mobs.\textsuperscript{102} But eventually the anger of Spaulding and his supporters was softened by other reports of the massacre, the gold rush, the Cayuse War, and the hangings of some Indians who, it had been concluded, were responsible for the murders. Two important Catholics—Burnett and Blanchet—dismissed Spaulding’s rage. Blanchet concluded that most residents rejected the bile of a few in favor of more convincing explanations; his observations parallel the conclusion that many Protestants and non-professors doubted missionary zeal in the first place.\textsuperscript{103}

Indeed, the Whitman murders, despite the uproar, petitions, threats and general commotion, did not do great harm to the Catholic church in the Valley. The Sisters arrived in September 1848 and opened a new school. Two new clergy arrived, Father Honoré Lampfrit, O. M. I., and Father Louis Joseph Lionet. Deacon Leclaire was raised to the priesthood. Other than the temporary public anger and the longer problem of dealing with Spaulding, Blanchet’s attention was on normal activities such as these. The Catholics seem to have continued through this period without much loss.

Of far greater importance to the Catholics was the gold rush. In January 1849, Father Langlois left for California; in May Father Delorme left, accompanying a large group of French. By June of that year so many French had left for the mines that St.

\textsuperscript{100}A pamphlet war ensued, lively for a while, then picked up sporadically in eastern states in the years to come. Spalding published his report in the \textit{Oregon American} in 1848. Brouillet responded in pamphlet published by \textit{Freeman’s Journal} in 1853 and \textit{Catholic Sentinel} in 1869. Also in 1869 seven Protestant associations in Oregon and three in eastern states attacked Brouillet’s pamphlet and defended Spaulding. Blanchet, 136, 137.

\textsuperscript{101}Burnett, 251; also Blanchet, 136.

\textsuperscript{102}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{103}Ibid., 136, 137.
Joseph College closed. By 1850, all the Catholic schools were closed, all the religious had left, clergy in the province was reduced from nineteen to seven, the missions were unattended, and all other aspects of religious pursuits were in decay. Although many of the French eventually returned, the work of a decade and a half was nearly overthrown in just a year.\textsuperscript{104}

Prior to that point, though, French Canadians had lived quiet, relatively prosperous lives as farmers. Catholicism remained a traditional part of their lives and an important aspect of religious expression in the Valley. American immigrants were similarly traditional. They retained laws they were familiar with—at first simply adopting with slight modifications the laws of Iowa—and cared passionately about their country. They read the same books as their compatriots in the States and published similar newspapers. The immigrants also retained religious expressions with which they were familiar. Financial support for clergy in Oregon was solid and respect for clergy was as high as in Midwestern states; when the itinerants preached, people attended camp-meetings, formed churches, and hired pastors. Traditional religious expression was similar in strength to the Midwest, the former home of many immigrants. Churches formed in numbers nearly identical to those in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Oregon also possessed a similar religious diversity. Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, Congregationalists, Disciples, and Presbyterians maintained the dominance which they enjoyed in the rest of the country.\textsuperscript{105} Primary religious authority remained with the preacher, denominational traditions, and the Bible. In short, declension was not part of Oregon's religious history during the 1840s; traditional expressions of faith appear to have been as strong or stronger than in the places from which most immigrants came.

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CHAPTER V
SHORING UP THE ESSENTIALS:
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ANCILLARY RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

During the fifteen years of immigrant settlement prior to the gold rush, numerous
and active clergy started churches and held camp-meetings to such an extent that they
were able, by-and-large, to perpetuate the solid core of institutional religious practice
which Americans enjoyed in the States. Peter Burnett looked back on his part in that era
(1843-1848) with fondness:

I never saw so fine a population, as a whole community, as I saw in Oregon
most of the time while I was there. There were all honest, because there
was nothing to steal; there were all sober, because there was no liquor to
drink; there were no misers, because there was no money to hoard; and
they were all industrious, because it was work or starve.¹

Hezekiah Johnson thought differently about the same region, at the same time (1847):

The moral condition of the country is bad. Schools are few, books are
scarce, and religious congregations are small.—Oregon City is one of the
most wicked towns that I ever knew. Intemperance, gambling, and other
vices prevail to an alarming extent.²

Both men were interested, intelligent observers and thoughtfully committed believers,
but religious development in Oregon was neither as fully civil and faithful as Burnett
remembered nor as degenerate as Johnson’s first impression. Burnett was hindered by
distance and a didactic agenda not unlike Franklin’s Autobiography; he wrote this in the

¹Peter H. Burnett, Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer (New York: D.
Appleton and Company, 1880), 181.

²Hezekiah Johnson, Oregon City, to the Editors [Western Christian Journal],
Columbus, Ohio, 10 September 1847, in J. Orin Oliphant, ed., “Letters of Hezekiah
1870s after a long and successful career in politics, law, and business. Johnson was conversely hindered; he had just crossed the plains, was sick, and, like many other missionary pastors used to the comparatively large churches of the Midwest, was shocked by the new experiences. In the dusty span between their two extremes, between Burnett’s ideal community and Johnson’s degenerate one, was a people who struggled with partial success to create strong religious practices. Settlers who were committed to the central religious practices of conversion and worship and supportive of the professional clergy were nonetheless slow to develop more burdensome, but equally traditional, religious obligations.

Nineteenth-century Christianity often included religious commitments which went beyond church membership. The assumption of religious leadership in the home, work in temperance and bible societies, religious reading, and similar practices were all valuable expressions of faith which served as adjuncts and buttresses to conversion and worship. To some extent, believers in Oregon adopted those responsibilities just as they had before they travelled west. However, some features of life in the Valley hindered the development of these ancillary practices. Demographic limits contributed; there was a much lower proportion of women in Oregon than in the States. Although the shortage of women did not lower religious participation in direct proportion to their numbers, it interfered with practices in which women took strong roles in the States. Additionally, Oregon communities suffered from low stability. Those who settled Oregon commonly had a history of moving to solve problems of health or economics. The first gold rush (1848) and subsequent ore strikes revealed the instability inherent in these new communities. People moved out of the region, left temporarily and returned, or simply moved to a different farm with a regularity distressing to those trying to build churches around a stanchion of committed laity. Geographical mobility along with the gender imbalance combined to hinder the growth of those religious pursuits which were tangential to and yet highly supportive of churches. Although churches had made a solid beginning by
1850, their future success was hoped for by religious leaders with some anxiety; communities which were needed to support religious agendas proved difficult to form.

Two of the strongest ancillary practices in Oregon were the reading of religious literature and temperance. Reading was an important adjunct to church and camp-meeting and settlers of Oregon seem to have been voracious readers, absorbing anything available. Bibles were particularly well-received. Wrote Reverend Gary, "The bibles and testaments from the American Bible Society are in good season, as many of the emigrants have lost their bibles on their journey and now receive a bible with great delight and gratitude." Baptist minister Ezra Fisher observed a similar response to religious pamphlets: "The tracts have been earnestly sought and read with much interest, both by parents and children." Buoyed by such interest, pastors endlessly requested more religious writing be sent from the States: bibles, tracts, newspapers, and journals. To aid the flow of material, Methodist minister William Roberts organized the Oregon Bible Society late in the 1840s, as an auxiliary to the American Bible Society, while George Atkinson and other ministers formed a Tract Society auxiliary to the American Tract Society.

Temperance was strong in Oregon, as well. John McLoughlin began a distillery in 1833, but found the effects to be so disruptive to business that he gave it up three years later. Jason Lee formed a Temperance Society in February 1836 and gained quick, if

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infirm, success. Early in 1837 a coalition of Methodist missionaries, American settlers, and French-Canadians, with crucial support from McLoughlin (who held influence with his former employees, the French-Canadians), shut down a distillery made by Ewing Young and Lawrence Carmichael. According to Daniel Lee, "nearly every man in the settlement" signed the petition asking for Young and Carmichael to desist; at the least, "all segments of the community" participated in the petition.7 Young and Carmichael complied and the Valley was temporarily dry, or perhaps, drier.

Even after the large immigrations started, temperance had substantial backing. In 1844, when the political influence of the Methodist Mission was still strong, citizens passed a law prohibiting the making, selling, or importing of alcohol. One year later, they elected a pro-temperance governor, George Abermethy. Temperance meetings at the Methodist meeting-house attracted as many people as the camp-meetings.8 Numerous long articles and short quips in the Oregon Spectator condemned alcohol and extolled the virtues of a temperate life. The argument over temperance, though, intensified as the population grew. Some men obtained molasses from the Sandwich Islands and distilled it into rum; others used various local grains to brew or distill other demons, especially whisky. Religious leaders, led in particular by Dr. Elijah White and Peter H. Hatch, destroyed some of these distilleries.9 Dr. White, observed one, "was terribly down on


8Gary, 304.

making liquor.\textsuperscript{10} John Minto concluded that the law was enforced "pretty well" and remembered that one former mountain man even moved out of the Valley "to get clear of the consequences of distilling some liquor near Oregon City."\textsuperscript{11}

However, several distilleries went undetected and importation of alcohol was not difficult.\textsuperscript{12} Apparently the French Canadians—who signed the petition against Young and Carmichael—were fond of cognac, which was imported from Scotland in thick, stoneware bottles. Harriet D. Munnick states that "the quantity of liquor bottles they left is prodigious."\textsuperscript{13} Further, the influence of the Methodist Mission waned as the population grew. Late in 1846 the cause was finally lost, when two-thirds of the legislature voted to overturn the governor's veto of a bill legalizing alcohol.

Nonetheless, temperance continued to make a strong showing in Oregon; the Presbyterian Church was filled to overflowing for some meetings and Reverend Hezekiah Johnson, who had been so struck by the wickedness of Oregon City in 1847, concluded in 1849: "the temperance cause is prospering."\textsuperscript{14}

Schools, however, were almost universally missed. The Common School Movement, an attempt to provide free elementary education for the public, was in full swing in the East by the 1840s. Teachers in common schools worked to develop not gentlemen's sons knowledgeable in the classics, but literate citizens of moral, temperate


\textsuperscript{11}John Minto, "Early Days of Oregon," Salem, 1878, 9, 18, Oregon Manuscripts P-A 50, Microfilm, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California.

\textsuperscript{12}Moss, 53-56.


\textsuperscript{14}Oregon Spectator, 28 December 1848. Hezekiah Johnson, Oregon City, to the Editor of the Western Christian Journal, [Columbus, Ohio], 25 January 1849, in Oliphant, 30.
behavior. Public schools in Oregon, though, were a luxury could neither be organized (lacking a territorial government until 1849) nor well-funded.\textsuperscript{15} The first public school was not formed until 1851, in Portland. As was common to other frontiers, thousands of children did without any formal education at all. What education existed was initiated by churches. Several schools were started, almost always by religious leaders, although never enough to keep pace with immigration. Parents who could afford the private, church-based education were often eager to enroll their children. Nuns started a pair of schools. Methodists transformed their Indian School into the Oregon Institute, a school for whites. Margaret Bailey attempted to start a school, apparently a few times. George Atkinson, the foremost educator of his day in Oregon, labored for years to improve area schools. Atkinson brought the first school books to Oregon, helped plan what is now Pacific University, assisted in the formation of the Clackamas County Female Seminary, wrote the first public school law on the request of Governor Lane, eventually established eighty-eight schools, and in other ways promoted education.\textsuperscript{16} Other religious leaders, such as Ezra Fisher, exerted themselves similarly. The connection between education and religion is impressive. Religious leaders, regardless of their denomination, realized the gulf which existed between their own sophisticated religious education in the East and the utter lack of education in Oregon. Development of a pious, civil community of Christians depended on the development of good education; clergy went at the task with devotion.

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One of the more striking features of the religious community in the Valley was the predominance of men. For religious history in particular, this was a noteworthy difference from the States. American women in the States were key figures in revivals, prayer meetings, church attendance, and church growth. Mary P. Ryan observed that women in the Utica, New York, revivals usually preceded their male kin in conversion and tentatively concluded that women were instrumental in the conversion of their male relatives. Nancy F. Cott determined that female converts in New England revivals outnumbered male 3:2. According to Cott, the presence of women increased the participation of men. Furthermore, she found gender differences not only in conversion, but also in voluntary societies. The organizations in which women had substantial commitments—prayer groups, charities, missionary societies, bible societies, tract societies, and moral reform groups—were "all allied with the church" (Cott's emphasis.) Men's organizations included variation into "secular civic, political, and vocational concerns." In short, the growth of community piety was often more dependent on the active participation of women than it was on men.

Oregon demographics did not favor the development of religious practices. Census statistics compiled by William Bowen indicate that 60% of the population of Oregon was male in 1845. The greatest imbalance in gender, according to Bowen, was for those over age eighteen, i.e., adults who might be expected to participate in church leadership or voluntary societies. Between ages eighteen and forty-five, men accounted


20 "Adult" is not necessarily a precise term. Some women considered themselves "grown" at age fourteen; others saw themselves as girls at that age. Fred Lockley,
for 66% of the population; among those over forty-five, men accounted for 72%. Nor did this improve with immigration; five years later the numbers were much the same. The Territorial Census of 1849 recorded that 59% of the total population was male, while the Seventh [Federal] Census indicated that in 1850, 71% of the population between the ages of 20 and 49 was male.\(^2\)

The shortage of women in Oregon affected various public religious practices, but not in a uniform fashion. Religious institutions of central importance did not disappear or, apparently, suffer. The two most important demonstrations of this surfaced in an earlier chapter: Methodist church attendance was nearly identical in Oregon and in the Upper Midwest; and high numbers of clergy found support and audiences in Oregon, compared to the Upper Midwest and the nation as a whole. Midwestern and Eastern churches had for decades experienced higher attendance by women than by men; however, in the absence of women, men in Oregon did not scorn to participate.

Attendance at camp-meetings is more difficult to quantify, but evidence indicates that these were well-received, despite the gender disparity. Where numbers were recorded, camp-meetings attracted audiences in proportion to gender ratios of the population as a whole, rather than attracting an inordinately high number of women. One-third of a total audience of one hundred eighty people, observed Reverend George Conversations with Pioneer Women, comp. and ed., Mike Helm (Eugene: Rainy Day Press, 1981), 12, 65. Nor did the law clarify this. Men over age sixteen could marry; women could marry if they were over age fourteen. Horace S. Lyman, History of Oregon, III (New York: The North Pacific Publishing Society, 1903), 374. The Seventh Census categorized people by “Infancy,” (under age 5), “Youth,” (age 5 to 20), “Maturity,” (20-49), “Old Age,” (50-100), and “Extreme Old Age,” (100 and upwards). The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850 (Washington, Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853; reprint, Arno Press, 1976), Ixxxvi.

\(^2\)William A. Bowen, The Willamette Valley: Migration and Settlement on the Oregon Frontier (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), 13-15. Seventh Census, Ixxxvi. For every hundred males in the corresponding age brackets, the Census states that there were 33.77 females age 20-29, 40.65 females age 30-39, and 47 females age 40-49. The ratio of 121.42 women for every 300 men leads the conclusion that 71% of the population from age 20-49 was male. For those under age 15, 49% were female, 51% were male.
Gary, were women. This parallels a large Sabbath meeting which attracted eighty people, of whom twenty were women. Ministers often concluded that camp-meetings were beneficial, encouraging, and resulted in conversions. As sensitive as they were to the "day of small things," the ministers' pleased response to camp-meetings suggests that the population, men and women, used camp-meetings to worship and pursue God.

Bowen had not the space to investigate the effect of gender imbalance on domestic religion, but he did hint at some of the ramifications: "even if one half of the girls between twelve and eighteen years had been considered to be of marriageable age—which they were not—42 percent of all adult males in Oregon were forced by demographic exigencies to remain single." For both genders, married life was often associated with religious commitments; marriage, child-rearing, church membership, and civic participation were often bound together as part of a mature, adult life. As Colleen McDannell has concluded, Catholics and Protestants alike "saw family religious activities as crucial to the production of a strong family, nation, and church." However, religious commitments within the home were particularly important for women. Women held sway over the moral and religious upbringing of the children and often encouraged the faith of husbands, older sons, and other men in the home. The home was not merely an adjunct to the church for some, especially Protestants; it could also become a center for religious activity which paralleled or even competed with the church. Although domestic piety functioned well with either paternal or maternal leadership, the home was the woman's province and, in the minds of many nineteenth-century believers, God had given greater religious strength to women.

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22Gary, 326, 396.

23Bowen, 13.

Ascertaining the strength of domestic piety in mid-century Oregon remains a substantial problem. Church leaders often recorded their thoughts, but said little about the family life of others, even when their itinerancy brought into their view the domestic piety of others. Single men rarely kept diaries. Although single women kept diaries occasionally, these rapidly diminish in quality soon after marriage; the work of raising a family drove off the time needed to keep a diary. Even those most likely to record their thoughts about domestic piety—missionaries such as Susan Shepard, Maria Lee, Anna Lee, and Margaret Bailey—did not reveal a great deal. Occasionally converts mentioned that inspiration came to them from a domestic source. Webley Hauxhurst, for instance, in a letter describing his conversion, wrote that never in his thirty-one years had he prayed for his soul, but when he saw the Indian children praying, he thought his own time to pray had come. Such comments, though rare. For most homes, in which roughly two-fifths of the adult men remained single, the shortage of women must have created a substantial gap in religious practice. Most of these young single men, whether believers or not, probably did not spend time morning and evening in prayer, psalm singing, and bible reading; too many mid-century diaries and letters attest to the religious apathy or antipathy of this demographic group. It is probably safe to assume that among most such households domestic religion foundered.

Stronger evidence which supports the close connection between domesticity and piety can be gathered for the Catholic communities. The French-Canadians called for the services of a priest only after they left trapping and settled down with their wives and children. Some had been married for many years by Indian custom and ritual; their attempt to establish a permanent domicile in civilized society, though, prompted the return to Catholicism. While this was not always accompanied by strict adherence to Catholic practices, the connection between domestic life and piety was present. One of

Lee and Frost, 143.
their chief fears was to have their children—important participants in domestic religion—grow up to be Methodists.

Catholic women—at least, those of European descent—associated domesticity with piety in a way similar to the Americans. The Sisters who arrived from Belgium in the 1840s to aid Father Blanchet were far more domestic than the priests. An important Catholic understanding of domesticity rested upon the Holy Family: Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. The relationship between chaste father, virgin mother and sacred child was an appropriate model for the relationships between the priests, the nuns and their small Indian companions. Appalled at the living conditions of the Fathers, the Sisters immediately took it upon themselves to clean and organize. They swept and scrubbed and warred against lice and fleas; they decorated the sanctuary with flowers and greens. They washed the priests’ old clothes and made new garments for the priests and for the Indian alter boys. In school, the nuns taught their charges household duties as well as the catechism, believing that the piety they showed at their domestic labor might be as influential as their verbal instruction. In their behavior, the Sisters echoed what the Methodist missionary Anna Maria Pittman had written down a decade earlier: “We found things in old bachelor style. We females soon made a different appearance in the house.”

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26 Many of the wives of the French-Canadians were Indians who had been baptized as Catholics and partook of the Eucharist. However, their domestic values were not necessarily the same as those women of American or European descent who grew up amidst Western values of domesticity.

27 McDannell, 1, 127.


Not surprisingly in this highly male environment, masculine aspects of Christian faith dominated religious expression. David S. Reynolds argues that expressions of faith emerged in America which can be stereotyped along gender lines. According to Reynolds, a more tractable, more feminine and forgiving form of Christianity paralleled a faith which threw up the specter of damnation and called people to the narrow gate of salvation in Christ. Muscular Christianity, concludes Reynolds, grew proportionately with sentimental faith; the two must be seen together, at times complementary and at times in tension. All such general conclusions about America have regional variations; in mid-century Oregon, whose communities were disproportionately male, the masculine characteristics of faith spoke with unusual dominance.

Sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark have summarized several aspects of those denominations which were most successful at gaining converts. One of the more important features was a set of clergy who preached salvation-oriented, other-worldly sermons and who were willing to sacrifice themselves, their comfort, their social refinement and their education. With few exceptions, Oregon clergy were of this sort; they were aggressive representatives of muscular faith. Certainly Francis Blanchet was among this group. As soon as he arrived, in 1838, he told the French Canadians that they would go to hell if they continued to associate with the Methodists. His message took its desired effect and they left off nearly all fellowship with Methodists. After a decade among the Indians, fur traders, and settled communities of Oregon, he was still tough-minded. In a Pastoral Letter from Archbishop Blanchet published in the Oregon Spectator, the priest urged upon all citizens reformation at home to stay the hand of an angry God. Citing profanation of the Sabbath, divorce, immorality, disregard for


31One good explanation can be found in Finke and Stark, 71-108, although this theme recurs throughout the book.
salvation, love of this world, gambling, and debauchery as prominent sins, he besought the residents to return to God with tears, fasting, and a contrite heart. "No doubt of it, God is irritated against us," stated Blanchet, and the anger and fear roused by the recent Whitman murders gave his words added heat. The message was not lost on at least one reader, who replied in a searing letter to the Editor that God did not punish his people and that the paper had no business publishing Popish superstitions.32

Similarly tough-minded sermons could be found among Protestant ministers. Preachers at camp-meetings delivered messages on depravity, awakening, the judgement seat of Christ, the singular way of salvation, and Christian living.33 The primary correctives offered by Reverend Gary to the Methodist Mission were just what Finke and Stark concluded were required to build Methodist audiences: preachers who called people to God's salvation; severe limitations on secular activities; itinerancy; a reduction in external financial support; and renewed dependence on local (unordained) preachers. Reverend Herbert Beaver, the most prominent failure among clergy, is a fitting contrast. He desired a traditional English chaplaincy, complete with buildings, authority over schools and churches, deference, and plenty of good wine. Disappointed and angry with conditions in Oregon, he left after less than two years residence.34

Ministers were also aggressive in less religious ways. Reverend John Smith Griffin was not only the Secretary of the Board of Trustees for education at Tualatin

32Oregon Spectator, 9 March 1848, 4 May 1848. Despite the anger of the reader, Blanchet's letter was written so as to speak to Christians regardless of denomination. Only one overt statement of Catholic faith was present, his proclamation that "the Litany of the sacred name of Jesus shall be recited immediately after Mass 'till further orders be given."

33Pastors recorded some topics specifically; at other times they recorded Bible verses, from which I have inferred the topic. Atkinson, "Diary," XL, 270; Gary, "Diary," 284.

Plains—a position a minister might be expected to have—he was also the Secretary of a Tualatin Plains farmer’s organization which gathered to protest the exorbitant freighting prices levied upon them by shippers. Reverend David Leslie committed himself in a similar way. He became the chair of a committee to form a “public exporting company” to relieve farmers and laborers of the “grinding oppression and extortion” subjected by the merchants and commercial classes. One story about Jason Lee recounts his courage on the Oregon Trail; troubled with a cow that needed milking, Lee refused to abandon his cow even as unknown and apparently threatening Indians galloped towards him. Lee also felt no hesitation confronting fur traders who did not like missionaries and planned to make trouble for him. Although Bancroft emphasized Lee’s heroism in such anecdotes, his adventures seem very similar to the less-famous, but equally assertive activities of other preachers. Reverend Abraham Garrison’s eagerness to enlist with and preach to the Oregon volunteers in the Cayuse War is a result, partially, of the active, aggressive, masculine faith of early Oregon, as is David Lenox’s willingness to throw Reverend Waller out of church for attempting to baptize an infant.

Furthermore, at least some of the women who came to Oregon strongly possessed what could be called “masculine” characteristics. On their trip out to Oregon, the Sisters of Notre Dame noticed the great need for education and renewal in the South American port cities that they visited. The churches were magnificent, the need for teachers was obvious, and they were invited to stay. Nonetheless, the temptation to remain was small, for they did not desire to work within an established community. Rather, they preferred to live in the wilds of Oregon with their still-imagined “savages.”

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35Oregon Spectator, 4 March 1847.
36Oregon Spectator, 18 March 1847.
37Bancroft, XXIX, 62.
38McNamee, 82-85, 88-92.
This group was not the first band of Sisters of Notre Dame to come to the United States. In 1840, other nuns from Namur, under the leadership of Sister Louis de Gonzague, had been sent on a similar mission to the West, which at that time meant Cincinnati. Disappointed with being placed in an established town when they had expected the wild frontier, they petitioned their superior, pleading with her to send them further west, over the Rocky Mountains, to the fabled land of Oregon. Their request was denied; those who went to Oregon came straight from Europe. The two groups, though, shared the desire to move beyond the settled lands into the wilderness.

Sisters arrived in Oregon in 1844 and established their convent and a school near St. Paul's. Reinforced by others from Europe in 1847, they started a second school in Oregon City. The convent schools were apparently successful establishments, earning the appreciation of students and the respect of the community; clearly they were bent on doing womanly things. However, the Sisters also worked on tasks usually reserved for men. They cleared the land of brush and trees, planted crops and apple trees, performed other farming duties, and built structures. They sawed wood for floors and planed it smooth, constructed door and window frames and installed the glass. Then, in 1849, the nuns uprooted, leaving behind their work and going to California like thousands of other people. Their exit, according to one historian, was not due to discontent with Oregon. Rather, that former desire emerged again, to be in new and exciting places where the gospel was needed. These were motives and actions stereotypically claimed for men, but they applied equally well to the Sisters.

Taken together, these highly disciplined groups of Belgian nuns exhibited such a mixture of gender stereotypes that separating masculine from feminine is difficult. Their emphasis on submission to priestly authority, on education, and on creating a pleasant and

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39Ibid., 30-36.

40Ibid., 149, 153-154, 164.
pious domestic environment mixed easily with a host of characteristics usually called male. A hunger for movement, preferably westward movement to new and unsettled area, restlessness, abandon, aggressiveness, and work such as clearing land, farming, and building—these were all stereotypically masculine forms of expression, yet they were part of the religious expression of these distinctly non-feminist women.

The nuns' willingness to uproot was not unusual. Community development of religious expression was hindered by a general lack of commitment to a permanent or even long-term religious community. Gary recorded steady congregations of thirty to forty prior to the gold rush. Atkinson noted similar growth for the Congregationalists. By the late 1840s, his congregation had increased substantially and several prominent members of society came regularly, whereas earlier they had not. There was even some discussion of building him a church. Unfortunately for Atkinson, the "rage for wealth" which followed the gold rush hindered these plans. Labor became short; mills and stores shut; the crop was poor. After the Fall of 1848, Atkinson found it impossible to guess who would stay in church a year or more. Those who came, came sporadically and felt little obligation to return week after week on a regular basis; pastors had little idea whether to expect twenty or forty in a given meeting.\(^{41}\) Worse, those who assumed responsibility within the church often left, as he said, "not from unwillingness perhaps so much as from an unsettled purpose of remaining."\(^{42}\) Some of the smaller churches disappeared entirely as the congregation and pastor traveled south to the mines. Some of those who were leaving promised to keep the Sabbath, read the Bible, be temperate, and avoid profanity, but Atkinson put little faith in such promises. "They will need much moral

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\(^{42}\) G. H. Atkinson, Oregon City, to Josiah Little, 20 October 1851, George Atkinson Letters, 1841-1851, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
courage at the Mines," he thought. Congregations at that time usually met in houses; as the population shifted, the church meeting place moved from house to house in an unpredictable way, noted Atkinson with some frustration, "at the will or caprice of the proprietors."

Community stability was not enhanced by the high proportion of single, restless men trying to improve their lives. However, John Mack Faragher has concluded that most settlers came out not as individuals, but as families, extended families, and neighborhoods. Word-of-mouth was the form of communication most likely to induce people to travel; neighbors who could talk face-to-face about moving west were most likely to travel together. Those who arrived in families, though, were not necessarily more interested in stability than the single men. Usually the families had moved more than once, following the frontier as it moved west, and thus had established a tradition of rather modest community commitment. And almost immediately upon arrival in Oregon, the neighborhoods which had travelled together split up, again demonstrating a willingness to live independent of former community ties. On several different scales of size, then, from the individual to the neighborhood, the high mobility of the settlers contributed to the difficulty in forming communities whose residents valued long-term commitments to local institutions. Those who moved to Oregon were, to a large extent, people who were willing to move again.

This is not to emphasize the individualism of the frontier, for new networks of communication, mutual aid, and social and religious expression were formed in Oregon. Often these networks formed around the structural shell of the old; membership in one


Methodist church allowed almost immediate acceptance at another. Baptist immigrants did not even need papers testifying to prior membership; their word was sufficient for them to join the church. Rather than pointing to individualism, such easy abandonment of community networks indicates, more simply, that maintaining old networks was not a high priority. Once communities had formed in Oregon, leaving them was made easier by the fact that many residents had left three to five communities already. This was equally true for those who had moved so much they were ready to stay put. Reverend J. L. Parrish and John Minto observed that the mountain men were among the most public-spirited of any of the settlers. Although as traders and trappers they travelled vast distances, once they left the fur business, they "were wonderfully taken up with settling down and raising their families in civilized life." Even these enthusiasts of the settled life—many of whom became Methodists—were only too happy to leave in search of gold.

Some factors partially counteracted this abandon. Central religious rituals worked to strengthen commitment to the religious community. Camp meetings, for instance, not only brought in the "spiritual harvest," they also bridged denominational gaps better than anything else except perhaps anti-Catholicism. By the 1840s the camp-meeting had spread widely through the country and was recognized in New England, the Midwest, and the South. If New England Congregationalist and Southern Baptist would meet together anywhere to worship, the camp-meeting would be the most likely place. Catholics were similarly united by the Mass, a ritual which bound together disparate branches and members of a large and complicated tradition. Belgian nuns and Jesuits, Canadian priests and trappers, Indian and American converts can all be counted in the mix. Camp-meeting and Mass allowed the believer to meet with God in the most

46 Thomas Bender, Community and Social Change in America (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 96-97.

intimate ways Christianity offered: Protestants through the indwelling Spirit, Catholics through the Body and Blood of the Son. Additionally, each ritual was strengthened by a variety of widely-recognized authorities: long tradition; personal experience; biblical or papal voice.

French-Canadian Catholics had additional factors motivating them to create a distinct French Canadian community. When they settled in the Valley, national, corporate, and linguistic features all contributed to create a community rather isolated from the Americans. As McLoughlin pointed out, Americans disliked the Hudson’s Bay Company for at least three reasons: its British origins; its economic monopoly; and the Catholicism of its Canadian employees. Furthermore, French Canadian culture had struggled to maintain its identity under British authority since 1763, when Britain assumed control of French Canada. To encyst themselves by following their priest in the creation of a culture separate from the culture in power would have been a familiar activity. Historian Mason Wade describes French Canadian history as "the ceaseless struggle of a minority group to maintain its cultural identity in the face of all manner of conscious and unconscious pressures to conform to the dominant civilization of other ethnic groups and another culture." F. X. Matthieu, a refugee from the Canadian rebellion of 1837, was relieved to hear that a community of French-Canadians had located in Oregon, for he felt assured of a welcome: "I knew there were lots of French there and that I would be all right."*

Despite these features which tended to strengthen communities around forms of religious expression, church leaders were unable to form strong, long-lasting communities, complete with commitments and responsibilities. Overworked pastors strained simply to

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shore up the essentials—church and camp-meeting—without the help which they enjoyed elsewhere. With only limited voluntarism, the endless detail of running a church became nearly the sole responsibility of the pastor. Church members “act as trustees in meetings,” lamented Atkinson, and give of their money, yet they do not give their time. He continued: “It is true of many western churches, that if the pastor were to leave, they would break up.” Other forms of religious expression which were more dependent on a participatory laity either limped along or did not exist. Temperance was an exception, for alcohol restriction was very important to pastors and others. Schools, though, remained weak for years. Only one bible society and one tract society formed and they remained dependent on expensive importation. Domestic piety faced a stiff challenge from the large population of single men.

Frontier Oregon was a place of such uprootedness that the religious community was effectively limited to church, camp-meeting, and a smattering of additional activities. It was not that the physical strains of frontier life stripped the effete Easterners of an unnecessary piety, as if faith was not part of the rough life of the West. Rather, for the Oregon settlers, the Eastern social bonds and material strength which permitted piety to be developed and expressed through a great diversity of means and persons—domesticity, temperance societies, missionary societies, charities, prayer groups, and so forth—were broken to the point that only those which were tightly connected to energetic pastors and did not require much money were able to continue with strength. It was not simply the exit from Midwestern or Eastern relationships that contributed to uprootedness, but also the difficulty in resettling caused by the shortage of material resources, the shortage of women available to be wives, volunteers and teachers, and new opportunities offered by gold. Churches in Oregon, already hindered by being founded amidst a traditionally transient population with a large male sector, had little chance to

grow or expand into related institutional expressions when faced with competition from 128 one of the most important reasons for transience—the promise of wealth.
Prior to his trip to Oregon, Congregationalist pastor George Atkinson argued in a letter with his Uncle Josiah about Josiah’s salvation. Atkinson recognized his uncle’s moral life, his generous financial support of the church, education, and temperance, and his opposition to everything which hindered virtue. But one thing remained: his destiny. Was he a man of prayer? Had he taken up the cross of Christ? Had his heart been changed? Faith and religion were not the same; for Atkinson to rest content about his uncle’s soul, he needed to know that these moral virtues sprang from a faithful, converted heart, not from social conformity under the guise of religion. If things religious could be done without faith, as Atkinson knew was possible and feared in his uncle, the converse was equally true: things of faith could be done without religion. Or, to soften the statement a little, faith found diverse and important expression outside or on the fringes of the institutional church. Loyalty to God was often expressed in the traditional forms of denominational orthodoxy—preaching, singing, praying, confessing, reading, thinking, participating in the sacraments, and so forth. However, beliefs about transcendent reality were rarely fully contained in such forms. Superstitions, doubts, and omens were all part of the overflow of faith among people who believed with certainty that powers beyond them were active, yet who doubted their ability or anybody’s ability to control or

describe that transcendence. The church was not able to direct such belief any more than the individual at camp-meeting could control the jerks.

Faith and doubt traveled together to Oregon in the 1830s and 1840s. Belief in the existence of God was not seriously challenged. Historian James Turner concluded that "modern unbelief burst into full blossom in American culture rather suddenly, in a few decades after 1850." Evidence from Oregon supports him. Except for a few brief and ambiguous statements from pastors and fur traders who mentioned the unbelief of the residents, no sources address the possibility that atheism and agnosticism were livable options. One ex-trader mentioned his religious "infidelity" in a letter and hoped his reader would excuse him for it, but his admission was unusual and occurred at a late date, 1874.

Doubt of God or other transcendent matters, however, was distinct from mistrust of the clergy and from what people said about the transcendent. Detailed descriptions of God as either Trinity, Unity, or Universally Immanent were regularly put aside, or partly believed and partly dismissed. Church doctrines—particularly difficult doctrines about hell—were often treated similarly. This did not mean that the unorthodox "folk religion," was trusted wholeheartedly. People expressed skepticism about those who spoke with conviction about omens, "firsts," and devils. It was far easier to trust one's own doubt than another's certainty.

Even personal experience was not fully to be relied on. It was one thing to hear a preacher speak about hell and grace; it was another to be overpowered by grace and "experience religion" at a camp-meeting. When ex-fur trader Joseph Meek proclaimed "Tell everybody you see that Joseph Meek, that old Rocky Mountain sinner, has turned to

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3Courtney Meade Walker, Nestucca, Oregon, to Georgiana, 27 November 1877, in Mss 249, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
the Lord," he was responding to his own experience, after denying preachers for years. Yet the frequency of backsliding indicates that the confidence which came with conversion often did not last long. Similarly, omens might be found easily, but testimonies to the truth of omens and even experiences of omens proving true were easily discarded. Trust—faith—loyalty to a set of ideas and experiences about the transcendent—was hard to come by, never complete, and directed towards a host of different and arguably incompatible authorities.

No-holds-barred, antagonistic rejection of God, church, or anything religious was rare. Furthermore, those who rejected the church were not necessarily consistent in their opinions. Pastors bemoaned the drunkenness which followed the legalization of alcohol; alcohol was the object of their strongest attacks and they put forth great energy and powerful rhetoric to combat it. They often faced disdain and anger in doing so. However, it is certain that some of those drunken rowdies—despite their hostility to the church on the issue of temperance—appeared in church on following Sabbaths.

A deistic slogan of the Oregon Spectator was similarly moderated by the contents of the newspaper. The original slogan was conventionally nationalistic: "Westward the Star of Empire takes its way." In the early fifties, it was changed to another conventional phrase: "Our Hope is in the Future, and Success our Firm Determination." Neither of these two has enough religious content to argue over. But the third slogan, under a new editor, was a startling perversion of a biblical text: "The agitation of thought is the beginning of wisdom." Replacing "The fear of the Lord" with "The agitation of thought" in a newspaper banner was a bold, public display of faith in the

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4 Methodist Episcopal Mission, "Methodist Annual Reports Relating to the Willamette Mission (1834-1848)," ed. Charles Henry Carey, Oregon Historical Quarterly XXIII (December 1922): 327. This occurred at a camp meeting on Tualatin Plains in July 1843.

ability of people to think out and solve their own problems and an open repudiation of a well-known, esteemed proverb. This disdain for biblical authority, though, was rare and mixed with religious support; the paper commonly endorsed Christianity in a surprisingly nonsectarian way.⁶

Even those most practiced at cursing missionaries, the fur traders, did not do without faith itself. Rather, they despised the theology which excluded them. Jason Lee concluded they were Universalists:

They know that if future rewards and punishments await mankind that the scenes which await them as individuals unless their characters are changed (of which they see little prospect) are appalling indeed and ardently and vehemently desiring that it may not be so they by the assistance of Satan easily persuade themselves that a compassionate God will make some more merciful disposition of man than to punish him forever though he may have done wrong.⁷

The traders' vehement desires might indicate more fear or anger than trust in a compassionate God; nonetheless, their notorious blasphemy and dislike of orthodoxy did not include a complete disregard for the transcendent. In addition to their Universalism, Lee noted their inversion of the Sabbath. Many Christians disliked having to travel on the Sabbath and mentioned this in their diaries.⁸ Traders, according to Lee, preferred to start the trip on a Sunday, arguing that "the better day, the better luck."⁹ Lee concluded that traders had no respect for the Sabbath; but while this is certainly true according to biblical and traditional authority, traders maintained their own respect for the Sabbath. They did not ignore the Sabbath entirely, nor did they desecrate it purposefully; they

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⁶Oregon Spectator, 5 February 1846; 19 August 1853; 4 March 1854.


⁸A nice discussion of this can be found in John Mack Faragher, Women and Men on the Overland Trail (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 95.

⁹Lee, 430.
treated it as part of that ungovernable, unknowable power which they hoped was on their side.

Other sources agree that the fur traders had a safety-first approach to religion. Father Blanchet celebrated the faith of the French-Canadian voyageurs. "Amidst all the scenes of savage life through which they passed, they never forgot their faith, but on every occasion when danger threatened them they sought the God of salvation in prayer." Blanchet revealed a limitation of frontier Catholicism unintentionally; French Canadian loyalty to Catholicism was sporadic.

After leaving the fur business and starting farms in the Willamette Valley, the French Canadians called urgently for priests and renewed their Catholic practice in order to raise their families in the Catholic faith. They relearned prayers, had their marriages blessed, and had their wives and children instructed in the catechism, the chants, and so forth. American mountain men likewise participated in revivals. Many of them converted upon settling in the Valley and rejoining American society.

It is not surprising that a few years of living among evangelistic Methodist missionaries would bring a dozen or two American fur traders to experience religion and become Methodists. As Lesslie Newbigin has noted, association with a particular group is an important feature governing religious practice. However, these men were not hypocrites who faithlessly exploited religion for its cultural and financial benefits; at least, I have no evidence that they were. The Catholic revival of 1838 was primarily a religious event; the French Canadians were interested in pursuing for themselves and


12Better to give them the benefit of the doubt and agree that when they said they sought God, they meant it.
their children the Catholic religion. Similarly, the Methodist revivals of 1839 and 1840 were religious events in which people made commitments to God. Cultural continuity was always a part of that interest, but such should be expected; religious expression always takes place within the context of a particular culture. The point, though, is that the French Canadians asked for a priest, not for government officials. Their primary concern was religious, even though their religion was accepted only within the safety of a group with a similar identity and then only with reservation.

The traders sometimes turned to the sacred for luck or fortune; others plied the sacred for news of the future. One common practice was to read Scripture on special days, especially first days. "And they shall fight against thee" read Margaret Bailey one New Year's Day. A pious and devout Christian, Bailey nonetheless held the half-belief that the first verse read on the first day of the year would indicate one's future. Although she didn't fully approve of the practice, she thought enough of the text to incorporate it early in her book as a foreshadowing of fights to come.13

Signs such as these were plentiful. At Bailey's wedding (the first day of her married life), "all the old woman's bad omens" came to pass. It rained. Pigs and chickens crossed her path. The ceremony was performed with the positions of the parties reversed. Dogs barked on her entering and leaving. Worst of all, she had "accidentally" read Scriptural verses foretelling her shame and divorce.14 Fifteen years later, just after the divorce, Margaret returned home, opened her bible and was surprised to find the first line she read to be the fulfillment of the threat which William Willson had delivered

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13Margaret Jewett Bailey, The Grains, or passages in the life of Ruth Rover, with occasional pictures of Oregon, natural and moral (1854; reconstructed reprint, eds. Evelyn Leasher and Robert J. Frank, Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1986), 48. On that particular New Year's Day, she was still unmarried, so her name was Smith. I have called her by her married name to minimize confusion.

14Ibid., 185.
to her after she promised she would never marry him: "Thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling and wrung them out."\(^{15}\)

Others who were less concerned with orthodoxy found omens surrounding them as well. A coffee cup functioned as well as Scripture for this; having been drunk to the dregs, the cup would be placed mouth down for a short time. Then the drinker would look into it, searching the patterns of the coffee grounds "for pictures of future success." Jesse Applegate mentioned that this was often done while he was in Missouri, planning the trip to Oregon: "we thought we could see covered wagons and Indians scalping women and children." Although no one in his party was scalped, another omen proved true. A few days before the Applegates reached the Columbia, a raven flew over their camp. Jesse's aunt Cynthia predicted death would soon visit; her "contenance, gesture, and tone of voice, bespoke alarm and distress." A few days later some of their party drowned in the Columbia. Applegate partly accepted his aunt's prophecy, but he also distanced himself from the event (and testified to the prevalence of such beliefs) by stating that the people with whom he associated "were unusually free from superstitious whims."\(^{16}\)

Almost invariably such omens were directed against whoever saw them. Death and violence were common; omens seem to have been directed most specifically at the evil to come, rather than the good. People looked less for gracious gifts from God than for trouble which might be avoided with prompt action. Amidst the evil omens, references to the devil were not common, although they were certainly part of the structure of belief. Applegate's mother bribed him with plums to attend school, where the teacher occasionally played a fiddle. The boy asked where the noise came from and was told that the devil made the noise. "Frightened almost into fits," Applegate ran from the school house, hid in a cave, and did not return until others reassured him that the devil

\[^{15}\text{Ibid., 309.}\]

was gone, not non-existent, but gone. More common were mundane, rather than demonic evils: deaths, bad marriages, the loss of money, social conflicts, or wars. When Margaret Bailey's husband prepared to leave for California he dumped his coffee into a bag, only to find that the bottom had not been properly sewn and all the coffee ran out. Margaret thought it "ominous of the way his money will go." Everyday misfortune was the concern when signs and omens appeared.

The extent of belief in omens is difficult to ascertain. A few, like Applegate and Bailey, testify to widespread belief in omens. Bailey's long list of bad signs at her wedding indicates that ideas about omens were well-developed, at least among some people. Applegate's comment that many others were more superstitious than his group points to a populace in which signs and wonders were regularly observed. Put the two together and it is possible to imagine that an extensive system of belief about omens spread throughout the land. Historian Jon Butler has concluded this about mid-century Americans more generally, calling early national and nineteenth-century America a "spiritual hothouse." Butler found that "religious syncretism and creativity extended across antebellum society and easily rivaled the American ingenuity and adaptability evident in exploration, politics, and technology." Faragher also concluded that folk beliefs were "the stock-in-trade of midwestern life."

The evidence from Oregon does not confirm Butler's and Faragher's conclusions. The number of sources for Oregon which make no mention whatsoever about omens, signs, dreams, cures, or occult practices is vastly larger than those which do. Decisions innumerable were recorded with no mention of any omens guiding the decision or

17 Ibid., 9
18 Bailey, 230.
20 Faragher, 47.
foretelling the outcome. The same can be said for dozens of marriages, funerals, and readings of Scripture on any number of first days. The loquacious pastors—Atkinson, Blanchet, Fisher, Gary, Daniel Lee, Roberts—say virtually nothing about the superstitions of whites, whereas Butler places other similarly vocal pastors in the forefront of battles against unorthodox practices. Fur trade narratives and Overland Trail diaries are similar; references to superstitions among whites are the exception. Of course, the absence of record does not mean that these beliefs did not exist. However, religious commentary and criticism were common; had such superstitions been widespread, they would have been more visible, even if only in stories meant to criticize another person, in parodies in the newspaper, or in lists of sins enumerated by concerned ministers. Those who disliked the Methodist missionaries, and there were plenty, said nothing about heretical superstitions of the Methodists. Their complaints were almost entirely ethical. Although the statements of a few (like Applegate) indicate that "superstitious whims" were widespread, 'folk beliefs' are simply not found in the primary sources, except in small, dense pockets.

Butler notes that in the enormous religious diversity of the age, some groups were more conservative that others. In particular, Butler concludes that for Methodists the importance of dreams had faded by the 1830s. It may well be that Oregon residents—and among them Methodists dominated—were noted for their conservative religious stance, as they were conservative in other features of their society.

One thing can be said with certainty about omens: use of them, however widespread, was not accompanied by a widespread faith in their validity or usefulness. Doubt and distrust of transcendent power extended to folk beliefs as much as, or to a

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21Butler, 253.


greater extent than, to more orthodox Christian beliefs. Commitment to anything transcendent was uncomfortable, but the more particular or certain the belief, the more difficult it was to stand behind it and agree to its authority. That God was compassionate, for instance, could be agreed upon by the Universalist fur trader and the hell-fearing missionary alike. Faragher has concluded that many folk beliefs, usually more specific than a vague reference to compassion, were pulled out only for appropriate times and sometimes then in a “half-embarrassed” way. The description is appropriate; Applegate looked back on coffee cup fortune telling with a wry, ironic tone. He obviously met others who were absorbed with such things and, like him, were a little embarrassed by them.

Quiet embarrassment was not a sufficient response to the highly specific, exclusive theology preached by professional clergy. Protestant and Catholic preaching generated extraordinary tension in the lives of those who confronted the possibility that the preachers were right and that they faced exclusion from heaven. Many unconverted people believed their message, in other words, and feared the consequences of doubt, but didn’t believe enough to convert. Catholic and Protestant missionaries recorded one response to this among the fur traders—outright and angry rejection of God, missionaries, and the church. However, a more usual response was to reduce the seriousness and the tension through humor or through common sense explanations of God, salvation, and current needs.

Humor, with rare exceptions, was on the side of the respectful, interested person of moderate faith and moderate skepticism. At one point on the trip out to Oregon, Applegate’s party guided their wagons over a formation called the Devil’s Backbone, a narrow ridge with a gorge on the left and precipice on the right leading down into the Snake River. Applegate described it using common biblical imagery:

24Faragher, 46.
It is said in the Bible, 'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.' 'But wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.' But this Devil's Backbone was worse than either, for it was both narrow and crooked, and it was hard to tell what it might lead to.\textsuperscript{25}

Applegate's humor was based on assumed knowledge not only of the biblical text, but of how the text was used by preachers. By adding levity to the well-known call to repentance and conversion, Applegate diminished its urgency. Nonetheless, his comments did not dismiss biblical or clerical authority; the Devil's Backbone was the worst because it had an uncertain end, while Applegate and his readers alike knew what end awaited those who chose either of the two biblical paths. The pressure to repent and be saved was reduced, without repudiating the clerical claim that heaven and hell were important.

Shortly after that trial was passed, the author's father pulled their wagon out of the train, a common enough experience on the overland trail.\textsuperscript{26} Applegate again turned to biblical imagery for his humor and explained the split: "I think there had been a dispersion and confusion of tongues soon after passing the Devil's backbone."\textsuperscript{27}

The \textit{Oregon Spectator} ran the following column in 1854:

\textbf{Why did Jacob weep?}

"Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept."--Scripture.

If Rachel was a pretty girl and kept her face clean we cannot see that Jacob had much to cry about.--N. Y. Globe.

How do you know but she slapped his face for him.—N. O. Delta.

Gentlemen, hold your tongues. The cause of Jacob's weeping was the refusal of Rachel to let him kiss her again.—Flag.

It is our opinion that Jacob wept because he hadn't kissed Rachel before, and regreted the time he had lost.—Age.

\textsuperscript{25}Applegate, 27.

\textsuperscript{26}Faragher, 30.

\textsuperscript{27}Applegate, 27.
Green, verdant, every one of ye. The fellow boohooed because she did not kiss him in return.—Manch. Adv.

... Jacob was a man who labored in the field. When he kissed Rachel he had just returned from his work, and had not washed his lips. After he had soiled her cheek, he wept for fear she might think him a "free soiler."—Det. Press.

Respect for the Word of God this was not, but neither was it contempt. This appeared in the same newspaper which ran the Pastoral Letter of Father Blanchet and later defended that printing, which supported Christian faith and morality in innumerable one-line quotes and short articles about virtue, church-going and temperance, and which provided column space for the former Methodist missionary Margaret Jewett Bailey. Like other attempts at humor, these pokes at Jacob reduced the seriousness of religion, without discarding it.

"Common sense" was used in more serious attempts to respond to religious authority without committed agreement. Burnett, for instance, used such an argument to explain why lawyers were so rarely church members. It was not that they didn't have access to the truth, or the ability to sift the evidence and eventually see the truth. The problem, according to Burnett, was that they were so busy working that they had not time to investigate. Investigation being a primary characteristic of their profession, it was only natural that they were unwilling to believe without first scrutinizing the evidence. Unable to examine religious authorities because of time pressures, lawyers often wound up not believing or going to church. As Robert Shortess, a local political leader, put it: "Although weary of skepticism, I felt no disposition to believe in God, or in his word; at least, not until I had again investigated the whole subject." Apparently Shortess had

28Oregon Spectator, 7 April 1854.
looked into religion earlier and had come away happy neither with doubt nor with Christianity. Eventually Burnett answered this problem; he decided to take the time to probe religious claims impartially. A Protestant, Burnett began reading all the Catholic and Protestant works he could procure, "alternately, side by side." At the end of a year and a half of "impartial and calm investigation," he was convinced that the Catholics had the better argument and went off to find a priest.31

One of Jesse Applegate's teachers, who was working on the reading skills of his students, required the children to read religious tracts which emphasized sinfulness and the danger of hell. As Applegate quipped: "These tracts were alarming, more alarming and most alarming. They were our first, second and third readers." One reading kept young Applegate up one night, struggling between sleep and fear; a story that day had been of a little boy who died in his sleep, unrepentant, and who had gone to hell. His mother, aware of his restlessness, arose, listened to Applegate's fears and comforted him. Only the wicked were punished, she said; he was a good boy and had done nothing deserving punishment. "What she said," concluded Applegate, "was common sense. I went to bed and to sleep immediately."32 His father also applied common sense to the tracts, a great quantity of which had been left behind at the original Methodist mission when the mission moved to Salem. The elder Applegate used them to caulk the cracks in a ferry he was building prior to covering the whole with hot pitch.33 Common sense acted like humor to reduce the pressure imposed by a difficult theology of hell and salvation. Nonetheless, both included agreement that the wicked were punished and should be: neither dismissed Christian transcendence.

32Applegate, 62-63.
33Ibid., 61.
Humor and common sense—both common responses to religious authority—contained strong elements of doubt and faith: doubt in the availability of certainty and in those who proclaimed absolutes; faith that God is good, compassionate and just; and an unwillingness to scoff or to endorse. Importantly, writers were comfortable presenting this ambivalence. Burnett did not shy away from talking about work; he worked very hard and was proud of his industry. Neither did the Spectator apologize for its column about Jacob, or for any of its similar articles. The easy, unselfconscious manner of explanation and joking points to forms of expression which were common and readily accepted. There was an audience for these viewpoints, an audience which understood the reluctance to adopt wholeheartedly the teaching of the church, yet which realized that behind the tensions lay a valued faith. These responses were distinct from scoffing, for they implicitly recognized the validity of Christianity. They emerged from a position more fully within the rather nebulous boundaries of nineteenth-century Christian faith.

One did not need to be on the fringe of the church like Applegate or the fur-traders to have misgivings. Within orthodox Methodists, there was room for doubt and fear, as well; clergy faced insecurities like everyone else. Missionaries and church leaders, however, found humor more difficult to accept or use. Except for an occasional reference to seasickness or to a home brew which failed to inebriate, Lee and Frost's account of the Oregon Mission is utterly humorless. George Gary often expressed his anxiety by stating that “this was the day of small things,” presumably remembering the biblical passage, “Who despises the day of small things?” and its context, the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. On one occasion the things got so small he had to laugh at

34For another example of the lack of humor among intensely religious people, see Burnett, Recollections, 80.

35Zechariah 4:10.
himself, in a rare display of self-deprecating humor: "I try to preach to four hearers; two of them I think are considerably refreshed by sleep. This is the day of small things." Humor was unusual; doubts among missionaries turned more often into anxious tears before God, or even to despair. Maria Ware is a particularly poignant source; her early writing reflected on her love for her husband and her need to find God's will. She carefully examined incidents for refreshment from the Lord, or for signs of God's absence or displeasure and the need for repentance. Yet life in Oregon was so difficult that she grew sad, guilty, and depressed. Eventually she despaired of her ability to continue: "It seems to me we must make ourselves more secure and use restraint or we cannot long sustain ourselves as missionaries." Her diary ends in darkness: "This day I have been very stupid I have tried to pray b[ut] could not . . . . This eve my mind is more clear I can think and read with more ease Lord save me." "Stupid" in this context was not a term of intellectual incompetence, but of spiritual inadequacy.

Misgivings among the men rarely took such an emotional turn. Cyrus Shepard was reduced to tears on the Oregon Trail because he felt so distant from God, but he was an exception. Clergy were more likely to worry about the state of their activities than the state of their souls. The progress of temperance, the finances of the Mission, the quality of the preachers, and the wickedness of the towns were among the vocal concerns of the clergy. Doubts among clergy also focused on the piety of others and hence the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of their work on behalf of the Kingdom of God. If many laity failed to accept fully the other-worldly preaching of the clergy, the clergy returned

36Gary, 314. At the time he was in the vicinity of the Dalles, where the population was much lower than in the Valley.

37This entry in her diary is dated July 1842. Maria T. Lee, "A Private Journal," 45-50, in Mss 1211, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon

38Cyrus Shepard, "Diary, 1834-1835," 37, Mss 1219, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.
the favor and failed to accept the mixture of faith, doubt, and reticence common among those whom the clergy sought to convert.

Ministers were particularly concerned by the prevalence of doubt among recent converts. Observers noted that although converts professed the best of intentions, often only a few months or years passed before many turned aside from their conversion and the church. "There have been perhaps fifteen men or more, Americans and Europeans, who have professed religion in the settlement," wrote L. H. Judson in 1842, "but out of that number perhaps not more than six can be found who maintain even the form of godliness." In such circumstances, clergy seemed to envision themselves as part of a small remnant that the Lord had called to be faithful in an otherwise desperate land.

Missionaries especially thought of themselves as a remnant. For these people who sacrificed so much to bring civilization and Christianity to the Indians, two ideals repeatedly came into conflict. The decision to leave a settled Christian community was difficult and had to be justified with care. Who should go? asked George Atkinson, prior to becoming a missionary, "Who has no great obstacle but the sacrifice of country, loves and friends forever?" Anna Pittman described her internal conflict over the location of her own death:

I shall dwell in a land of darkness but God is my light and salvation—and if he pleases to call my spirit from this tenement of earth from a savage hut I shall be as happy as if it should take its flight from a palace yes happier. I shall have the pleasing consolation that my life was laid upon the missionary altar that I might snatch some soul from death.

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The passage contains two opposing visions of Christian practice. One ideal was to remain within the realms of civilization and Christianity; the "savage hut" was not pleasant, not Christian, not a place where most Christians wished to spend their days or worship God. From oft-preached injunctions they knew that associating with sinners could stain one's own faith. The other vision was to sacrifice life and renounce civilized life for the sake of another human being, to "snatch some soul from death," or, in essence, to be like Christ.

Missionaries often used the contrast between the two as a spur to move otherwise comfortable Christians to support missions. Indeed, those who answered the call of the mission sometimes thought that non-missionaries had made the wrong choice. Lee and Frost complained:

[Those who are ready to chant the glories of their imaginary millennial mom, and others who are anxiously waiting to join the grand choir that shall attend the Messiah at his second advent, may as well hang their harps upon the willows, so long as the devil sends ten of his missionaries to the heathen world, while the church sends but one in the name of the Lord.]

But despite the undisguised anger some missionaries held for non-missionaries and their apparent certainty that missions work was the highest calling of the Christian, the conflict in ideals contributed uncertainties to their faith. The tension in Pittman's words is unmistakable; to be like Christ would be thrilling and exalted, but to be back in New England! There she would be unafraid, amid warm friends and true worship. She convinced herself, more-or-less successfully, as did others. But certainty was hard to come by, even for those who focused more intently upon religion than any other group in society.

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42 Lee and Frost, 320. This passage urged those who remained in civilized society to evangelize at home, for too many landsmen and seamen were arriving on the frontier no more Christian than the Natives. In short, Lee and Frost believed that too many Christians failed to take seriously the need for all the faithful to be missionaries in one way or another.
The Devil's Backbone, wrote Applegate, "was both narrow and crooked, and it was hard to tell what it might lead to."\(^{43}\) The lines exemplify the mixture of doubt, hope and fear of Oregon residents in the mid-nineteenth-century. Certainty, or even confidence, was elusive for those walking the narrow and crooked roads of experience. The daily life of most Oregon residents probably incorporated a faith in some form of transcendent power and reality, most often a variant of Christianity or in some way derived from a Christian worldview. For all the confidence about national affairs and American destiny, though, this was not a day of spiritual optimism. Ungovernable forces were against them; if the omens did not foretell death or a poor marriage, the preacher warned against hell. In the same breath, though, the sources of fear offered hope. If the omen was taken seriously, perhaps the consequences could be avoided; if the minister was right, heaven was possible. And yet, these authorities on the transcendent were by no means entirely trustworthy. Indeed, doubt was more prevalent than conviction. The presence of doubt in early Oregon seems almost overwhelming, so extensive as to be easily missed, as most migrants missed the geology of the land due to their concentration on the contours.\(^{44}\) The commingling of fear, hope, and doubt created an atmosphere of high religious tension. For those who could respond to the preachers and traditional beliefs, camp-meetings and private seasons of prayer became places of explosive release. Relief from the fear of the many unknowable and untamed evils—the worst and most distant of which was hell—was the direct result for many converts. Perhaps just as soothing was the relief gained from no longer being unsure about one's ultimate destiny. Most did not convert, though, and sought to lower the tension through non-institutional means. Those who were more tightly bound to Protestantism or Catholicism appealed to humor and

\(^{43}\)Applegate, 27.

\(^{44}\)Samuel Parker, *Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains*, 5th ed. (Auburn: J. C. Derby, 1846). Parker was one who did not miss the geology; his scientific observations are as interesting as his religious notes.
common sense, or else buried their anxiety beneath work. They adopted Christian faith and religious practices in varying degrees, although some rejected with antagonism religious authorities. Religious faith in Oregon, like that in the Midwest, was a stew of Christian orthodoxies, superstitions, and common sense moderated by vivid emotional responses, among them fear, doubt, hope, and occasionally anger. Although institutional church-going puttered along at roughly the national average, faith in a transcendent, mostly Christian reality strained toward God, while doubt ran lightly alongside.
"Novelty was no sin, tradition no burden," wrote Edwin Gaustad of frontier churches. Gaustad wrote that in the mid-1950s. His primary topic was the trans-Appalachian frontier, but his perspective has become neither outdated nor restricted to that locale. Thirty years later Jon Butler expanded on Gaustad's theme in fascinating detail, including not only American churches but the vast repertoire of non-institutional religious practices, as well. Stephen Marini argued that the historian does not have to look very far west at all, nor into the nineteenth-century, to find striking freedom from religious authority and tradition; his work is on the radical sects in New England at the time of the Revolution. Mechel Sobel, working in the South, analyzed the mixture of African with American beliefs which created new forms of religious expression among American slaves. From diverse sections of the country—New England, the Midwest, and the South—similar patterns emerged. New denominations, new voluntary societies, new hymns, new architectures, new standards of membership, new predictions about when and where the Messiah would descend, new predictions of evil fortune derived from newly invented occult means—these novelties and more could all be found in America, and especially on the Western frontiers, after the Revolution. American religion during the nineteenth-century was expansive and ever-changing; it was dynamic, disorderly, and growing fast.1

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An opposing viewpoint is not hard to find. "The frontier experience in Oregon," concluded William Bowen, "was not one that broke down existing social structures. If anything, it tended to strengthen them." American religious expression in 1850 was dominated by just a handful of traditions. Nearly ninety percent of American church members at that time belonged to one of six denominations: Baptist, Catholic, Congregationalist, Episcopalian, Methodist, and Presbyterian. T. Scott Miyakawa concluded that Protestant churches in the early nineteenth-century West were conformist and regulatory and attempted to impose standards "which were essentially uniform for each denomination throughout the country." Alice Cowan Cochran, studying the mid-century Colorado mining frontier, likewise found that the churches were fundamentally conservative. In frontier Oregon, the continuity of centralized power was a key element, according to Robert Loewenberg. Crucial forces driving the history of that territory were located in New York and London—the Methodist Missionary Society and the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company—not in the Willamette Valley. In short, churches and denominations contributed to the ordering of society, not its disorder, and to the continuity of established faith, not its discontinuity. Morality, law, economic growth, material prosperity, social cohesion and direction—all those things which made a town possible on the frontier—were supported by the traditions and disciplines of the churches.²


During its first two decades of American settlement, people from several widely divergent religious persuasions settled in the Willamette Valley. From the start, religion in the Valley was eclectic; the Valley was settled in the 1830s by Methodist missionaries, Catholic French Canadians, and American fur traders notably ambivalent about religion. With the immigrations of the 1840s, Protestants quickly gained numerical dominance among institutional expressions of faith. Methodists were particularly strong, while Baptists, Congregationalists, Disciples, Presbyterians, and others also competed for followers. Protestant churches and camp-meetings generated such a positive response that church membership rates paralleled those of the Upper Midwest. Although Catholicism was prominent—Oregon City was the second American archdiocese—anti-Catholicism was not. Except for some of the more vocal Protestant missionaries and a brief flare following the Whitman crisis, opposition to Catholicism was not an important feature of the religious landscape. Belgian nuns and Jesuits, Canadian priests and settlers, and American Catholics seem to have lived in comparative harmony with their Protestant neighbors. The nuns were particularly appreciated for their gentle approach to education.

Amidst this sometimes startling diversity, conservative faith and practice was one of the most noteworthy features. All the leading ministers of the 1830s and 1840s—George Atkinson, Francis Blanchet, Ezra Fisher, George Gary, Hezekiah Johnson, Jason Lee, William Roberts—were sent and partly paid by a denomination headquartered on the East Coast or in Europe. The Methodist Mission cost perhaps as much as a quarter-million dollars over the course of a decade. Father Blanchet returned from Europe in 1848 with 17,800 francs from France alone; other countries made smaller gifts. Only major denominations with substantial budgets could afford a ministry which crossed and recrossed continents and oceans.

Ministers carried with them the agenda of these large institutions. Blanchet’s instructions were explicit. Joseph Signay, Bishop of Quebec, informed Blanchet that his first object was "to withdraw from barbarity and the disorders which it produces, the Indians scattered in that country" and his second goal was "to tender your services to the wicked Christians who have adopted there the vices of Indians."³ Signay provided additional instructions about baptizing the Native wives of the French, writing a grammar, and other things. Similarly, George Gary arrived in Oregon with a list of five or six instructions stating clearly what his job was. Those who were supported by Home Mission organizations, such as Atkinson or Fisher, were aware of their responsibility to the organization and tried to fulfill what was expected to the best of their ability. Ministers periodically reported back to their superiors, or were supposed to. Ezra Fisher took this particularly seriously and corresponded regularly with his sending organization, the American Baptist Home Mission Society.

These Eastern agendas remained within the traditional framework which expected that civilization and Christianity worked together. Blanchet’s first instruction, for instance, was not to convert the Indians, but to civilize them, to remove them from barbarity, to bring a pattern to their lives which resembled the patterns of French Canada. Jason Lee had a similar approach; through civility the benefits of the gospel would become evident. Attempts to civilize the Indians were a considerable obstruction to their conversion, but ten years of effort did not lead the Methodists to any more fruitful or innovative missions strategies.

The clergy and their leading lay supporters did all they could to remake churches and camp-meetings based on the patterns they already knew. Successful Midwestern and Eastern ministers employed the same style in Oregon that they did in the States. They

were aggressive, itinerant preachers of simple theology who aimed for conversion and the formation of churches. They preached of heaven and hell and of salvation through Christ. They preached of living a Christian life—temperate, industrious, honest, and prayerful—which was distinct from the degeneracy which surrounded them. They worked endlessly to organize the scattered laity into churches and keep them there. Finke and Stark indirectly attest to the continuity between Oregon and the East and Midwest; they described Oregon preachers well, despite their unabashed dismissal of the Far West in 1850. As Gordon Dodds observed, no new forms of church polity, worship, or theology came from frontier Oregon.4

Continuity among laity was equally prevalent. Some pastors found the diversity of their congregations disturbing. Atkinson grumbled that doctrine and degrees of knowledge were “as various as the persons who hear.” This variation, though, was not innovation, it was conservative retention of past practices. Laity converted and joined churches at rates very similar to the Upper Midwest; they retained their faith and their practices as much as they could. They also kept many of characteristics of their place of origin. Sectional or national religious differences became religious differences in Oregon. Belgian nuns created Belgian-style schools. New Englanders were most likely to settle in towns and be Congregationalists or Presbyterians. Midwesterners settled primarily in rural areas and were usually Baptist or Methodist. Amid his diverse audience, George Atkinson, a New England Congregationalist minister, found it impossible to avoid angering some hearers and losing the trust of others. Sermons, he discovered, were judged and often found lacking. Some, he found, “don’t call it a sermon if read” while others despised extemporaneous preaching as being too emotional. In short, religious diversity in Oregon came complete with sectional variations, traditions, missionary and bible societies, denominations, seminaries, and an entire ensemble of structure which allowed

for and even demanded perpetuation rather than innovation. Doctrines, beliefs, rituals, and rhetoric were very much part of the religious expression; past faith and practice were valued and clung to.5

And yet, tradition was not a burden. Conservative laity compelled Atkinson to try more innovative practices. He itinerated endlessly—something Congregationalists normally did not do. He also reached a compromise between his academic training, New England habits of ritual, and the needs of his various audiences. Atkinson often preached from a written sermon on Sunday mornings, spoke at different houses on alternate Sundays in mid-afternoon, and preached extemporaneously in the evening at church. Baptists, too, were flexible. They waived one requirement for church membership and allowed people to join a Baptist church in Oregon without written proof that they had ever been Baptist. One’s word was sufficient; the paperwork could come later. Margaret Bailey recognized that the traditional approach to missions was not working and wanted mission leaders to abandon attempts to civilize the Indians. If they could be Christian Indians, she thought, that would be enough.

Laity were innovative, as well. Even though the lack of women snuffed out much of the potential for domestic religious devotions, the gender imbalance did not prevent churches from growing or men from converting. Men joined churches even without women to encourage them, an important deviation from the established patterns of behavior in the East. Most of the innovative practices tended towards pluralism. French Canadian Catholics attended the Methodist church and Sabbath School for four years. Protestants sent their daughters to be educated at the convent. Other Protestants converted to Catholicism and seemed to fear no reprisal. Baptists and Presbyterians shared a building. Various Protestant churches regularly invited preachers of another

denomination to preach on a Sabbath. Methodists preached to Baptists; Baptists to Congregationalists; Congregationalists to Methodists. One of the most striking features of this period is the willingness of congregations to be pluralist—to welcome into their midst a speaker or an entire church from a different religious tradition. One of the greatest challenges to traditional religious expression—and one of the strongest prods to innovation—was another tradition.

Set within the framework of innovation and tradition in which faith prospered and churches grew, were two features which hindered religious expression: economic limits and the physical environment. Material poverty was perhaps just as important as the conservative predilections and the energetic, internal innovation of several diverse traditions. The settlers found they could not return to religion as they had known it in the States quite simply because they could not afford it. They could found churches and convert to Christianity at camp-meetings. They could call for priests and establish convents. They could hold temperance meetings. They could elect conservative governors, destroy stills, and engage in political battles over temperance. Schools were hard to establish, though, which worried many. Other institutions related to the churches, such as voluntary societies, were also slower to form than churches. Books, religious tracts, and other reading materials were in short supply. Bibles were uncommon. In a country where debts were paid with wheat, paying the ministers was difficult, let alone generating capital and volunteers for ancillary projects such as voluntary societies. Ezra Fisher observed that this was common to the frontier. Time and again, as he moved with the frontier to Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and then Oregon, he found to his dismay that his salary was not nearly enough to live on and that no money was given in support of benevolent organizations.

The physical influence of the frontier complicated the interaction of tradition and innovation by amplifying doubt and despair. For some, particularly men, the opposite was true; the physical conquest of the frontier was exhilarating, not deadening.
and supported their religious convictions. Daniel Lee and Francis Blanchet were caught up by the energetic life of the frontier and transposed that into religious thoughts and attitudes. Margaret Bailey also found the forest a supporting place. She retired to her groves in search of divine peace. These people were exceptions, though; for many the environment was a drag on their faith. Confrontation between Western environment and Eastern culture was not directly religious; it was not the "howling wilderness" of William Bradford with its moral and spiritual threat. However, the social isolation was discouraging. People as diverse as Nathaniel Wyeth and Gustavus Hines stared at the wilderness in dismay, wondering what possible religious benefit could come from such a wasteland.

The distances involved—twenty-four hundred miles by land and nearly ten times that by sea—were particularly difficult to accept. The isolation from friends and Eastern society, and the sometimes overwhelming presence of the wilderness affected the confidence which some had in God. Cyrus Shepard's struggles in tearful prayer as he marked miles on the overland trail are similar to Anna Lee's anxieties as her new husband left for a long trip to the States. Both were aware of the endless distance separating them from a communal piety which they coveted. Women were particularly reminded of their isolation when it came time to be delivered. Childbirth was not only difficult for the individual, but the possibility of death was never far removed and brought renewed desire for sisters in faith. Delays in the mail measured in months heightened the separation; letters and papers from the East were read and re-read until they wore out. Peter Burnett's memory of a funeral service on the prairie gained its intensity by the loneliness of the place, in the midst of those "wild, shelterless plains" hundreds of miles from any church or graveyard, with naught but the wind to mark the site. Similar religious fear arising from a sense of distance emerged in Western fiction.

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Beret, the leading woman in O. E. Rolvaag's novel *Giants in the Earth*, was panicked by the thought that she might be buried all alone on the prairie, far from the consecrated graves of friends and family in Norway. With fear bordering on insanity, she insisted that she be buried in her great-grandfather's old chest, brought from the homeland.\(^7\)

None of these (except the funeral) were directly religious events. None led to conversion, apostasy, or innovative practices. None were immediately recognized by pastors as of central importance. Yet each contributed to feelings of despair and longing; taken together they had a profound effect on the religious confidence of some settlers. Surely we are not distant from God! Surely if we died here God would remember us! Surely we will rejoin our families in Heaven! Reminders such as this come thick in some accounts; they point to religious uncertainty and doubt brought on by physical hardship and by the vast distance—in reality and in imagination—from a supportive religious community. They also point—like the formation of voluntary societies and churches—to persistent and sometimes rejuvenating hope.

In addition to those hopes and practices commonly recognized to be within the sphere of Christian religion was another set of traditions, which, though intermixed with a Christian worldview, was never as legitimate. The central Christian experiences were conversion and worship, which took place, generally, at the core institutions, the church and the camp-meeting. Ancillary practices of faith included voluntary societies and the formation of schools. Intermixed with these practices and yet separate were what one contemporary referred to as "superstitious whims," although I suspect they were more than that for some. The ravens foreboded death. When dogs barked at a wedding evil was to come. The arrangement of coffee grounds foretold scalping Indians.

\(^7\)O. E. Rolvaag, *Giants in the Earth* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927, 1929), 229-239. For an interesting description of the converse situation—a lack of space—see Langdon Gilkey, *Shantung Compound* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), especially chapter five. Describing the intense conflicts over mere inches of space in a World War II internment camp, Gilkey concludes that "to exist with no place is to fail to exist altogether" (80).
Omens were often found in commonplace events and were most often regarded as a warning of evil to come. Although the extent of these practices is not clear, at least some settlers feared their world, with its terrifying potential for disaster, were unable to find solace in traditional religious explanations, and directed their hopes for knowledge to omens and superstitions.

Every variant of orthodoxy was, to one extent or another, lacking in comprehensive explanation of the world and authoritative comfort from its evils. Just as importantly, though, individuals repeatedly and persistently sought to fill the lack. Few were prepared to accept mystery and rest quiescent. Although laity often rejected the filigreed theologies of divine character and human need hammered out by intellectuals, they pounded away at similar mysteries. Some turned to omens, others to a "common sense" acceptance of God's benevolence. Laity used fear and hope and experience more often than what passes for rational thought, and humor when the tension became to great, but their search for comfort and for knowledge of the transcendent was not the less religious.

Finally, many people—I would argue a majority—were unwilling to participate in institutional religion. They didn't convert. They didn't join a church. They didn't even attend church. Equal reticence was the response to supernatural signs or omens. Perhaps incurious about religion, these people were unwilling to commit either for or against any certainty about transcendence, except its existence. Willing to trust the benevolence of God and unwilling to promote anything radically challenging, these people were more interested in helping people get along together with a minimum of conflict than in

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8It seems open for debate whether contemporaries accepted these beliefs and behaviors as "religious." I have included them as part of religious expression because they expressed faith in transcendence. That these beliefs include doubt in traditional religious explanation of transcendence does not bar them from a discussion of religion, rather, it makes the discussion more interesting. Whether this non-institutional religion and the faiths it represents remained unchanged or became more diversified by the movement west is beyond any evidence which I have.
pursuing truth to an exclusive end. Only wicked people get punished, said Applegate's mother, and young Applegate believed her. Rachel thought Jacob a Free-Soiler, joked the Spectator, and undoubtedly readers laughed along with the editor.

Reliance on common sense and humor was connected to wariness about religious authority. Doubts about authority did not take shape around theology; doctrinal issues were not important to those outside the church. Whether the Baptists or the Congregationalists were right, for instance, was irrelevant; few were schooled in or cared about denominational doctrines. Neither was skepticism based on a logical, composed argument. Those, like Peter Burnett, who devoted the time and worked out the rational strains of thought were inclined to bring the argument to a conclusion and commitment. Doubt was more personal than this. The unwillingness either to trust church leaders or to trust seers was based on a mistrust of claims to know about an altogether mysterious transcendence and on a dislike for those people whose claims were exclusive and divisive.

Belief in God was valued; as James Turner has pointed out, one could hardly do without it in 1850. Things the ministers valued were recognized by the reticent to be important—God, the devil, life after death, and so forth. But explicit knowledge of God was another thing entirely. The authority of those who claimed transcendent knowledge was not sufficient to overcome the doubts laid in place by common sense, personal experience, and other more immediate forms of knowledge. Nor were the religious authorities trusted enough to overcome the dislike of the social conflict which their proclamations, if followed, would lead to. People were far more willing to trust their own experience than another person's vision.

The questionable reputation of clergy as a professional class only added to the skepticism. This was introduced earlier with specific reference to missionaries, but the ambivalent feelings laity had towards missionaries extended to clergy as well. In his

\[\text{Loewenberg emphasizes this as a feature of antebellum America. Loewenberg, 46-48.}\]
study of nineteenth-century literature, David Reynolds concluded that authors almost
always placed clergy in a role which showed them to be untrustworthy hypocrites.
"Stories of reverend rakes ensured a good sale for newspapers and crime pamphlets, while
the more traditional virtuous preacher was considered too dull to sell copy." And true
stories of fallen preachers were outnumbered by the false. "In antebellum popular fiction,
a good minister is hard to find." Catholics did not escape; Maria Monk's Awful
Disclosures (1836) sold well. Those who were the most religious were often portrayed—in
the news and in fiction—as being the least faithful. This was true in Oregon, as well.
Even in Margaret Bailey's book, the work of a Methodist missionary, one of the primary
antagonists was a minister, Reverend David Leslie.

This distinction between faith and religion never worked to the advantage of the
faithful. Valid only as a partial contrast, at best, the separation of faith from religion
was most effective as an exclusive thought. It separated by negation, by branding some as
hypocrites or as somehow less faithful, rather than by affirmation, or by assuring people
that their particular faith was worthwhile regardless of their religious practices. The
avid participant of religion may or may not be faithful, the argument went; he may be
grasping at social prestige, courting some beloved, or simply trying to fit in. Naturally,
the person who disdained religion was assumed to care nothing about transcendence.
Thus, when faith and religion were considered separately, religion was used as the
standard by which to judge faith. And almost regardless of the religious practices, faith
was denigrated or discounted. The religious people were hypocrites; the irreligious were
unbelievers. Either way, faith was not considered seriously.

To some extent I have exaggerated my point. It was, after all, the act of going to
church which made pastors hopeful for their congregations. Increased interest in religion

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10David Reynolds, Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive
Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 260-
261.
on the part of laity was believed by ministers to be a sign of increased faith. The crowds who came to camp meetings didn't come because they wanted to see hypocrites on stage; they wanted to hear about God, to be entertained, and to have some relief from their work. Church-going often included signs of social status; it was not a stigma. From 1800 to about 1970 church attendance in America steadily increased. Nonetheless, when judgement was made—and it was—faith was judged through religious practices. The two stood distinct and separate, and were viewed from the point of view of religion.

Using the distinction in converse, though, is less valid. From the point-of-view of those who professed to trust God, faith and religion are less easily separated. Or, to be more concrete, religious people may or may not have been faithful, but people of faith craved religion. People of avid faith in mid-century Oregon wanted to be in church, believed they needed to be in church, and claimed their denomination's doctrines as their own. Living a Christian life was the result of Christian faith and to proclaim faith without conforming to the lifestyle was difficult and rare. To separate faith from religion among those who ardently believed defies their utter inability to separate the two. Within the religious community their faith was most secure and most fully expressed. To be separated from the community was something fearful, for separation exposed faith to erosion. For those who had committed themselves a particular understanding of transcendence, religious practice—church attendance, baptism, Mass—was essential to and inseparable from faith.

Personal convictions, of course, were celebrated by Christians, particularly Methodists and Baptists. The calls to commitment, the anxious bench, the oft-repeated reminders that one stood alone before God and must choose life all emphasized the individual and personal choice. Nonetheless, retaining those choices was difficult for Protestants who felt themselves to be excluded from the community of the faithful, i.e. who were unable, for whatever reason, to be religious. Conversion was more common than regular church-attendance; dealing with the back sliders was accepted as part of a
pastor's job. Many of the missionaries and overlanders worried about their inability to celebrate the Sabbath on the trail, the loss of the family Bible, the absence of religious literature or schools, or the problems of attending church in the Valley. Some, like Maria Lee, approached despair. Faith was never contained by the institution nor did it find expression exclusively in institutional ritual. Nonetheless, the faith of the settlers, whether missionary, clergy, or laity, orthodoxy or heterodoxy, became far more expressive and secure within a supportive religious community. For the faithful, religion was essential.11

Novelty was no sin, concluded Gaustad nearly four decades ago; but, to add to his statement, neither was it a virtue. New expressions of faith which accompanied frontier development in Oregon were invariably set within the well-established traditions of large denominations which strove in a conservative way for their own perpetuation. The central experiences of faith—conversion and worship—continued to propagate along Eastern, Midwestern, and European patterns, although with a greater degree of pluralism. Belief in transcendent reality, though, also took shape in civic and domestic religion, in communal voluntary societies and individual prayer, in doubt, humor, and common sense, and in the search for signs and omens. Diverse beliefs emerging from an equally diverse set of cumulative traditions remained manifest for the immigrants who settled Oregon.

11Omens can be included in the generalization. The cumulative tradition of symbols and actions—looking in the coffee grounds for news of the future—expressed belief in a transcendent reality from which knowledge, power and sometimes fun (usually not comfort) could be gained. The rituals were used to access that knowledge; faith took shape within the cumulative tradition, not independent of it. In the absence of a professing community, those who spoke of omens either were guarded and hesitant in their language, hiding behind humor occasionally, or were regarded by others with some distance.
APPENDIX A

METHODOIST CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND CLERGY, 1849/1850:
OREGON AND THE UPPER MIDWEST COMPARED

State of Missouri. 1850 Population: 682,044

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Station/Circuit</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Probationers</th>
<th>Local Preachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Miss.</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>1498</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas Miss.</td>
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<td>225</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hannibal Miss.</td>
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<td>369</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Platte Miss.</td>
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<td>237</td>
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<tr>
<td>Osage Miss.</td>
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<td>432</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>11</td>
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2 All church membership information, except for Oregon, comes from: Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the year 1850* (New York: G. Land & L. Scott, 1850).

3 Conferences and districts did not always follow state boundaries. Erie Conference, for instance, included Districts in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. Similarly, Districts sometimes included Stations or Circuits which were outside the state. Information provided under these two categories (District and Station/Circuit) indicates which areas were included in the count for each state. Those areas which were outside the state boundaries I did not include.
Illinois Conference
District                  Station/Circuit  Members  Probationers  Local Preachers

German—St. L.¹       N. St. Louis   265       64       3
                    S. St. Louis   48        8       0
German—Missouri     all           664      134      13

Totals                  4759      904      88

Methodist membership (including probationers) as a percent of the population: 0.83.
Ratio of Clergy to Population: 1:7750

¹The German Mission Districts were separate districts which often spread over wide distances, crossing state borders, but which were included as part of the conference of a particular state. For example, the Ohio Conference included four German Mission Districts, one of which was the Pittsburg District. Several Stations in this District were in Pennsylvania, but others followed the Ohio River into Ohio—Marietta, Pomroy (Pomeroy), Portsmouth, and West Union.
State of Illinois. 1850 Population: 851,470

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<th>Rock River Conference District</th>
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<th>Probationers</th>
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<th>Loc. Preachers</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Galena</td>
<td>40</td>
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</table>

| Totals                        | 39,595         | 7,669   | 712          |

Methodist membership (including probationers) as a percent of the population: 5.6.
Ratio of Clergy to Population: 1:1196
State of Indiana. 1850 Population: 988,416

### North Indiana Conference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Station/Circuit</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Probationers</th>
<th>Loc. Preachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greencastle</td>
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<td>2835</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>3445</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
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<td>all</td>
<td>3146</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawfordsville</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>3507</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lafayette</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>2692</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
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<td>Logansport</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>2632</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>2649</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>499</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>all</td>
<td>2586</td>
<td>550</td>
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### Indiana Conference

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Members</th>
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<th>Loc. Preachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>2665</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
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<td>306</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connersville</td>
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<td>192</td>
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<tr>
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<td>all</td>
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<td>421</td>
<td>--</td>
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<tr>
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<td>320</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New-Albany</td>
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<td>493</td>
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<tr>
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<td>775</td>
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### Ohio Conference

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Loc. Preachers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German–Cin</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fort Wayne</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German–Indiana</td>
<td>Evansville</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mt. Vernon</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boonville</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Albany</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Madison</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Laughery</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td></td>
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**Totals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Probationers</th>
<th>Loc. Preachers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58,792</td>
<td>10,838</td>
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Methodist membership (including probationers) as a percent of the population: 7.0.
Ratio of Clergy to Population: Not Available
State of Ohio. 1850 Population: 1,980,329

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<tr>
<th>Erie Conference</th>
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<th>Members</th>
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<th>Local Preachers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>3021</td>
<td>249</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ravenna</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>1728</td>
<td>89</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Warren</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>North Ohio Conference</th>
<th>District</th>
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<th>Members</th>
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<th>Local Preachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>4725</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mount Vernon</td>
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<td>4444</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wooster</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>3263</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>193</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tiffin</td>
<td>all</td>
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<td>485</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2141</td>
<td>438</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sidney</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>3346</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>38</td>
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<th>Ohio Conference</th>
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<th>Local Preachers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East Cincinnati</td>
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<td>146</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>186</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>New-Richmond</td>
<td>1170</td>
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<td>398</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Columbus</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>57</td>
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<td>West Union</td>
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<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
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</table>

Totals: 88,594 9,794 801

Methodist membership (including probationers) as a percent of the population: **5.0**.

Ratio of Clergy to Population: 1:2472
Willamette Valley, Oregon Territory. 1849 Population: 8,779.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Station/Circuit</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Probationers</th>
<th>Local Preachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Oregon</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>Salem</td>
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<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calapooya</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mary's River</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Tualatin Plains</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Portland</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Totals, 1849</strong></td>
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<td><strong>444</strong></td>
<td><strong>--</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methodist membership (including probationers) as a percent of the population: 5.1.
Ratio of Clergy to Population: 1:627

5The Oregon and California Conference did not meet in 1850 and thus there is no record of membership for that year. A membership count is available for 1851, but the editors of the Minutes question its reliability: "We have not any official Minutes, except the stations of the preachers. The list of the numbers in society, which follows, we have taken from the latest accounts within our reach." (Minutes, 1851, 680). The 1849 membership comes from William Roberts (Superintendent of the Oregon Mission) in a letter dated April 1849. For population, I have used the Territorial Census of 1849. This provides as sound a correspondence as could be hoped for, for membership and population were both counted before the 1849 immigrants arrived.


APPENDIX B

NUMBERS OF CLERGY, ALL DENOMINATIONS, 1850: OREGON, THE UPPER MIDWEST, AND THE NATION COMPARED.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1850 Pop.</th>
<th>No. of Clergy</th>
<th>Clergy:Pop.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oregon²</td>
<td>13,293</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1:458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>682,044</td>
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<td>1:1111</td>
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<td>851,470</td>
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<td>1:832</td>
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<td>Indiana</td>
<td>988,416</td>
<td>1,063</td>
<td>1:930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2,440</td>
<td>1:812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U. S. Total</td>
<td>23,191,876</td>
<td>26,842</td>
<td>864</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


²The population used for Oregon includes the entire Oregon Territory. About 10% of the population of the Territory lived outside the Willamette Valley, so clergy density would rise to 1:409 if Bowen's population for the Valley was used. William A. Bowen, The Willamette Valley: Migration and Settlement on the Oregon Frontier (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), 15.
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Joseph Gervais Papers, Mss 83.

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Whitman Papers, Mss 1203.
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