

“In the Name of Civilization and with a Bible in Their Hands:” Religion and the 1846–48 Mexican-American War

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Religion was crucial to how Americans and Mexicans saw their enemies and motivated themselves to contribute to the 1846–1848 war. The very strength of religious attitudes made controlling their effects difficult. Some U.S. troops attacked Mexican Catholicism, inspiring Mexican resistance. Conversely, Mexican authorities sometimes sought to limit religiously inspired resistance. Furthermore, at a key moment some Mexicans felt their religious concerns required them to violently oppose their own government. Mexican negotiators gained protections for Catholics in the territory transferred by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, but anti-Catholic politicians in the U.S. Senate eliminated these protections before ratifying the treaty.

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La religión constituyó un factor crucial en la manera de concebir al enemigo y de animarse a participar en la guerra de 1846–1848 entre estadounidenses y mexicanos. La misma fuerza de las actitudes religiosas dificultaba el control de sus efectos. Algunas tropas estadounidenses atacaban el catolicismo mexicano e inspiraban así la resistencia. A su vez, las autoridades mexicanas a veces buscaban limitar la resistencia inspirada por la religión. Además, en un momento clave, algunos mexicanos sintieron que sus preocupaciones religiosas les exigían oponerse violentamente a su propio gobierno. Los negociadores mexicanos obtuvieron protección para los católicos en el territorio transferido mediante el Tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo, pero los políticos anticatólicos del Senado de Estados Unidos suprimieron esta protección antes de ratificar el tratado.

Key words: Mexican War, religion, expansionism, Manifest Destiny, religious tolerance, nativism, anti-Catholicism, Catholic Church, nationalism, sacrilege, Polkos Rebellion, church-state conflict.

Palabras clave: La Invasión Norteamericana, religión, expansionismo, Destino Manifiesto, tolerancia religiosa, nativismo, anticatolicismo, Iglesia católica, nacionalismo, sacrilegio, Rebelión de los Polkos, conflicto Iglesia-Estado.

Observers of the 1846–1848 war between the United States and Mexico often imagined it as a conflict between a backward, traditional Mexico and a rapidly modernizing United States; however, it is important to avoid the temptation to see Mexico as a religious society and the United States as a more modern, secular one. Many Mexicans *and* Americans believed their countries had religious destinies, and their religious beliefs were important to their identities as citizens of nations. Participants on both sides of the war saw their opponents as religious Others, and thus religion shaped their experiences during the conflict.

This article argues that examining religion in both countries can help bring the war into better focus. The Polk Administration was determined to expand the United States to the Pacific Ocean, and many Americans supported expansionism because they felt that new territories would increase their economic opportunities. They were quite aware, however, that expansion came at the expense of Mexicans. Justifying expansionism was only possible if Americans could cast Mexicans as inferior and unworthy of holding those territories. Mexicans' Catholicism was crucial to the ways in which Americans justified their aggression, and in this way religion made the war possible. Religion was also crucial to how soldiers and civilians on both sides saw their enemies and motivated themselves to contribute their blood or treasure to the struggle. As potent as religious motivation

was, at times, religious feelings undercut the war efforts of both countries. The very strength of religious attitudes made controlling their effects difficult. The attacks some US troops made on Mexican Catholicism hampered the American war effort by inspiring Mexican resistance. It is unlikely that a Mexican political system plagued by political instability and fiscal weakness could have fielded army after army and prolonged centrally organized resistance for more than sixteen months without winning a single battlefield victory if politicians had not been able to argue plausibly that domination by the United States threatened Catholicism itself. Conversely, Mexican authorities sometimes sought to reign in religiously inspired resistance. At a key moment in the war, some Mexicans felt their religious concerns required them to violently oppose their own government. Finally, religion also figured into the negotiations that ended the war.

Considering the role of religion in both countries helps us understand national identity. National governments and political leaders in both nascent countries worked hard to make this a war about what it meant to be a Mexican and what it meant to be an American. In both countries, many people believed that religion was an essential part of their national identity and the national identity of their enemies. The religious differences between Mexico and the United States were critical to the way in which Mexicans saw Americans and vice versa. Moreover, when Americans wrote about Catholic Mexico, they were simultaneously making arguments about the Protestant nature of the United States, and when Mexicans wrote about the Protestant United States, they were simultaneously making arguments about the Catholic nature of Mexico. The only group in either country that systematically critiqued this binary opposition consisted of American Catholics. Ironically, American Catholic leaders supported the war in order to argue for a more secular version of American nationalism, one in which they could fully participate.

The first part of this article explores some of the myriad ways in which religion shaped how various Americans and Mexicans understood and experienced the war. It begins with background on how religious and social changes in the United States shaped American expansionism and how Americans saw Mexico. Then it analyzes the attitudes of both kinds of troops that the United States sent to the war. After that, it turns to how Catholicism shaped Mexicans' ideas about their national identity and the way Mexicans interpreted the conflict with the United States.

Religious beliefs were important in motivating and justifying American expansionism. Most Americans saw Protestantism as essential to American republicanism and successful Anglo-Saxon civilization,

and this sense of religion's importance was increasing, not decreasing. By the 1840s two recent developments had reinvigorated the feeling that the unique character and expansionist destiny of the United States were tied to Protestantism. The first was the Second Great Awakening, a surge of evangelical fervor that swept much of the nation beginning in 1800. The second was a dramatic increase in anti-Catholic sentiment, which, although it owed something to the Second Great Awakening, was driven mostly by the suddenly larger and more visible presence of Catholic immigrants in US cities.¹

In the Second Great Awakening, waves of Protestant revivals and camp meetings swept different regions. Meetings were often occasions of great emotional power, as people sought to remake their relationship with God and, to a lesser extent, with each other. Historians have written about how this fervor fed antebellum reform movements, including abolitionism. The Second Great Awakening also revived an almost millenarian belief that America had a uniquely Protestant and republican destiny, one that fed directly into the expansionism of the 1840s.²

The Second Great Awakening was intimately related to the second development that reinvigorated the ties between US expansionism and Protestantism. American culture had inherited anti-Catholic attitudes from its English forebear, but anti-Catholicism was surprisingly muted in the new republic until large numbers of relatively impoverished Catholic Irish and German immigrants arrived in the 1830s and 1840s. These new immigrants were seen as racial Others, subject to vicious attack in the media, and their Catholicism was crucial to this characterization.³

Before this wave of immigrants, Protestant clergy attacked Catholicism in theological tracts with relatively limited readership.

1. John Pinheiro, "Crusade and Conquest: Anti-Catholicism, Manifest Destiny, and the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–48" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2002), 151.

2. Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of the Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 5; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 285–286.

3. John Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith: Bringing Catholicism to the West in the Early Republic* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 170–171; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 320. The literature on nativism and race is, of course, vast. See, at a minimum, Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1996); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); and Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (London: Verso, 1990).

As nativism gathered steam, however, anti-Catholicism became popularized. Authors and journalists published dozens of sensationalist articles and books about Jesuit designs on the US republic, greedy priests and bishops, and, above all, unnatural sexual relationships in convents and monasteries. The most famous tale was that of Maria Monk, a woman who claimed to have been sexually exploited in a Montreal convent. This widely believed tale sold more than 300,000 copies and was the best-selling American book before the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.⁴

This anti-Catholicism was intimately linked with nativism. The arrival of thousands of Catholic Irish and German immigrants further unsettled a society already in flux because of the market revolution and rapid urbanization. In a Jacksonian America taken with the idea that all white men were equal, many Americans simply did not see the immigrants as white. The immigrants' Catholicism was the most important component of their non-white racial identity. Nativists argued that Catholics were barbaric, superstitious, and subject to the dictates of the Pope. They represented not simply an underclass, but a threat to American democracy. Samuel Morse wrote popular anti-Catholic tracts arguing that Catholics were conspiring against civil and religious liberty. It was Lyman Beecher, however, one of the most prominent preachers of the Second Great Awakening, who most fully elaborated the connection between American expansion and anti-Catholicism. In a best-selling tract, Beecher argued that America's destiny to populate the continent was being hindered by hordes of Catholic immigrants who were bent on destroying free American institutions by establishing their own schools and convents in the West. European Catholic priests were sending "swarm upon swarm upon our shores." Beecher believed that this immigration was part of a Papal plot to dominate North America. Catholics were dangerous to democracy because they would vote as their priests demanded they vote.⁵

Thousands of Americans read anti-Catholic, nativist literature, but they did not merely read. The United States experienced a series

4. John Pinheiro, "Crusade and Conquest," 14; Maria Monk, *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk; as Exhibited in a Narrative of her Sufferings during a Residence of Five Years as a Novice . . .* (New York: Howe and Bates, 1836); Jennie Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 154–161.

5. Quote from Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West*, 2nd Ed. (Cincinnati: Truman and Smith, 1835), 162. Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, 100, 109; Beecher, *A Plea for the West*, 59; Brutus [(Samuel Morse)], *Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States: The Numbers of Brutus, Originally Published in the New York Observer* (New York: Leavitt, Lord, 1835), 25–94; Pinheiro, "Crusade and Conquest," 16–17.

of anti-Catholic riots, from the 1834 mob burning of a Massachusetts convent to the 1844 riots in Philadelphia that left more than thirty people dead. Untangling nativism from anti-Catholicism in these riots is generally impossible. Many Americans believed that immigrants were ignorant, lazy, and barbaric because they were Catholic, and they believed that Catholicism was evil because it held people in the thrall of a religion that was emotional rather than logical and a religion in which obedience to hierarchical authority was central to religiosity. Immigrants were unfit to become true American citizens because they were Catholic. Beecher, for instance, argued that the political doctrines and practice of the Catholic church had always been “hostile to civil and religious liberty.”⁶

Nativists viewed the struggle against Catholicism as crucial to the preservation and furthering of American liberty. As John Pinheiro explains, “all nativists and anti-Catholics believed that a strong republic guaranteeing civil and religious liberty could only be built upon a Biblical foundation.” Thus, it is not surprising that the Philadelphia riots stemmed from the efforts of nativists to ensure that only the King James version of the Bible be used in public schools. Nativists were trying to minimize the influence of Catholicism in public life, and Beecher himself had argued that the battle for America would take place in education.⁷

The Texas Revolution occurred almost simultaneously with the surge in American nativism and anti-Catholicism. Not surprisingly, its advocates argued that Mexico’s Catholicism was the root of the Texas Revolution. This rhetoric became more heated in subsequent years as the issue of Texas annexation advanced. Advocates of annexation denigrated Mexicans in the same terms they used for Catholics and immigrants. Mexico’s Catholicism and the way it was antithetical to liberty and progress dominated American writing about Mexico from the 1830s to the Mexican War. Even William Prescott, the popular American author who was least critical of Catholicism, argued that it lacked substance and was designed to appeal to the senses rather than reason. Waddy Thompson, former American minister to Mexico, wrote in an influential book published just before the war that Catholicism, with its rituals, was dominated by “mummeries.”⁸

6. Quote from Beecher, *A Plea for the West*, 92; Pinheiro, “Crusade and Conquest,” 14–15; Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*, 25.

7. Pinheiro, “Crusade and Conquest,” 50.

8. Waddy Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 110; Pinheiro, “Crusade and Conquest,” 30–40.

Reginald Horsman has argued eloquently that racism was essential to Manifest Destiny's assertion of superior American right and that a key part of this racism was the construction of the United States as an Anglo-Saxon civilization. The notion of Mexican inferiority was based not solely on indigenous or African or even Spanish biological ancestry, but also on Mexicans' adherence to Catholicism. Many Americans saw Catholicism as the principal obstacle to liberty and progress in Mexico, and they believed that if Catholicism were allowed to dominate the West, it would also threaten liberty and progress in the United States. Moreover, spreading Protestantism from sea to shining sea was part of Manifest Destiny because Protestantism was essential to liberty and republican institutions. Thus, many anti-Catholic Protestant ministers argued that one of the Mexican War's positive effects would be to spread Protestantism to Mexico. Some took active steps to this end, giving Spanish-language Protestant Bibles to volunteer troops bound for Mexico. For these men, the war would be an opportunity to redeem Mexico religiously.⁹

The United States sent two very different kinds of soldiers to the Mexican War, and the difference between them was important to how these soldiers understood the war and how Mexican civilians experienced it. After the war began, the US government issued a call for volunteer units. Politicians and other notables recruited companies of soldiers in their localities, and these companies were then organized into state regiments. These men served with their peers from their home towns and regions, and they elected their own officers.¹⁰

Many volunteers only witnessed Catholic practices for the first time after their arrival in Mexico, but they were already fully equipped with the anti-Catholic attitudes that were so prevalent in the United States. They saw Catholic beliefs about the Eucharist and the veneration of images as evidence of un-Christian superstitions. They were alienated by the open gestures of respect and religious fervor that they saw in processions, and some believed that such devotion had to be feigned. For instance, Lieutenant W. E. Blackburn of Kentucky wrote the following in a letter home:

9. Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Pinheiro, "Crusade and Conquest," 92, 101–104.

10. James McCaffrey, ed., *Surrounded by Dangers of All Kinds: the Mexican War Letters of Lieutenant Theodore Laidley* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1997), 13; Pinheiro, "Crusade and Conquest," 130–131.

I was at church yesterday in Matamoros, it was a great day with the Catholics, such ringing of bells and firing of guns you never heard. Their ceremonies are characterized by the greatest superstition. It was a singular scene to see hundreds of men and women kneeling with strange gestures & mock gravity.¹¹

Many volunteers believed that these religious practices approached primitive idolatry. They felt that these superstitions helped the clergy deceive the people, enriching the clerics and contributing to Mexico's economic backwardness. Many argued that Mexico was a pagan or "heathenish" country.¹²

Popular anti-Catholicism in the United States stressed the ways in which Catholic ceremonies and Catholic spaces sought to impress the senses rather than the logical mind. Volunteers who signed up to go to Mexico were primed by American travel accounts about Mexico and Prescott's historical writings to expect churches full of gold and silver devotional objects. These objects surely could be liberated from their owners—after all, the religion they served was a set of superstitions and, moreover, a set of superstitions that threatened the American way of life. Recruiters offered potential volunteers the possibility of plundering Mexican churches, an opportunity that they summarized with the phrase "Golden Jesuses."¹³ Samuel Chamberlain, attempting to win election as an officer of an Illinois volunteer unit, offered the men "the Golden Jesus's of Mexico."¹⁴ Kentucky volunteer George McCormic promised to bring his sweetheart a "little Gold God and silver Jesus" from Mexico, and she, in turn, vowed to marry him.¹⁵ Volunteers, to the tune of Yankee Doodle, sang:

We're the boys for Mexico
Sing Yankee Doodle Dandy
Gold and silver images,
Plentiful and handy.
Churches grand, with altars rich
Saints with diamond collars

11. Lt. W. E. Blackburn to Mrs. Henrietta Blackburn, June 11, 1846, Blackburn Family Papers (Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky).

12. Ferdinand Van Derveer to John Gano, October 2, 1847, Gano Family Papers, Mss qG198P RM Folder I 22 (Cincinnati Historical Society Library, Cincinnati, Ohio). [Au: See note 21—should they both refer to the Cincinnati Historical Society Library? or are these two different institutions? ce]

13. *National Intelligencer*, June 17, 1847.

14. Samuel Chamberlain, *My Confession: Recollections of a Rogue* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996), 50.

15. C. M. Lillard to John Lillard, February 2, 1847, Lillard Family Papers (Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky).

(That's the talk to understand,
With lots of new bright dollars.¹⁶)

Not only did volunteers fantasize about plundering Mexican churches, but also they fulfilled their fantasies. Volunteers stripped many churches of their ornaments and religious utensils.¹⁷ Volunteers also deliberately engaged in other outrages against Catholicism. Then, as now, Mexicans used crosses to mark places where people had died, and volunteers used these crosses for target practice. Volunteers also disrupted masses and religious processions, tore crosses out of churches and dragged them through the streets, and robbed priests and stripped them of their robes.¹⁸ In March 1848, a volunteer unit pursuing Mexican guerrillas looted and burned the village of Zacualtipan in central Mexico. They devoted great attention to the village church, destroying the tabernacle and defecating in the church, breaking the statues, emptying vessels of chrism and holy oils onto the floor, stealing all of the chalices and other religious utensils, and stabling their horses in the church overnight.¹⁹ These actions were clearly informed by an already existing disdain for Mexican religious beliefs. If venerating a sacred image or the Eucharist held in a chalice was idolatry, why not make those objects more useful? If one could not find a Golden Jesus, why not take a chalice? In fact, anti-Catholic ministers and editorialists in the United States had written that eliminating Catholicism would help Mexicans. Destroying these objects of superstition could be seen as part of this reformist effort. One volunteer wrote to a cousin that he wished he could strip Mexican churches:

...bring off this treasure hoard of gold silver and jewels, and to put the greasy priests, monks, friars and other officials to work on the public highways as a preliminary step to mending their ways . . . It is perfectly certain that this war is a divine dispensation intended to purify and punish this misguided nation."²⁰

Certainly not every volunteer who stole from a Church or mocked Catholic ceremonies saw his actions as an effort to reform Mexican culture, but an anti-Catholic version of Manifest Destiny clearly

16. Pinheiro, "Crusade and Conquest," 142–143; see also 135–141; Paul Foes, *A Short, Offband Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict during the Mexican-American War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 128.

17. Foes, *Short, Offband Killing Affair*, 130–131.

18. Pinheiro, "Crusade and Conquest," 164, 200–208.

19. Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico), Justicia y Negocios Eclesiásticos, vol. 154, folio 264.

20. Cited in Foes, *Short, Offband Killing Affair*, 128.

shaped and justified the volunteers' behavior. They identified American civilization with Protestantism and denied the legitimacy of Catholic beliefs. From there, it was a short step indeed to acts that Mexicans considered sacrilege. There was nothing random about these attacks, and they served no military purpose at all. American volunteers repeatedly demonstrated in very physical ways the importance of American anti-Catholicism in shaping their experience of the war.

The volunteers were not the only soldiers in the American army. Before the war, the United States had a small regular army. The social origins of these soldiers and their attitudes toward Catholicism were very different from those of the volunteers. The regular army recruited its rank and file soldiers in American cities, looking for men willing to pledge five years of service in exchange for a modest wage, a clothing allowance, and room and board. The men who signed up for this deal were those who had a difficult time moving ahead or even surviving in the rough and tumble world of the market revolution. They hailed from the urban poor, and at least 40 percent of them were recent immigrants, generally Catholics from Ireland and Germany. Most Americans despised regular army soldiers. They believed that the regular army was a refuge for those too lazy, drunk, violent, and profligate to prosper, and soldiers in uniform often faced jeering crowds.²¹

Regular Army officers often agreed quite fully with the nativist and anti-Catholic sentiments of the time and treated immigrant soldiers more harshly than they did the native born. They saw their Irish and German soldiers as, in fact, little better than Mexicans. Immigrant soldiers complained that officers tried to coerce their men into attending Protestant services where preachers denounced Catholicism. Faced with such pressure, one Irish soldier replied that it would be a sin to go and "hear a swaddling preacher mocking the holy religion." This religious division in the regular army shaped its experiences in Mexico. Catholic soldiers quite regularly sought out opportunities to attend Mexican church services, and, despite their

21. Francis Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783–1846* (London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1969), 320–326; Paul Foss, "Mexican Wars: Soldiers and Society in an Age of Expansion" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1997), 177; George Ballentine, *Autobiography of an English Soldier in the United States Army* (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1986), 34–35; C. M. Reeves, "Five Years Experience in the Regular Army of the United States, including the War with Mexico," manuscript, n.d. (Cincinnati Historical Society Library, Cincinnati, Ohio).

reputation in the United States as ruffians, regular soldiers generally behaved much better toward the civilian population of Mexico.²²

Religion was important in the most striking episode that the regular army experienced during the war. Catholic immigrant soldiers faced a situation with unusual problems and possibilities when they entered Mexican territory. Their Protestant officers treated them with extreme severity, trying to mold an army that would hold up under the strains of battle. Simultaneously, the Mexican government flooded their camps with leaflets arguing that the invasion was unjust and anti-Catholic. It offered deserters land and other economic opportunities. Soldiers who also agreed to join the Mexican army were offered higher pay and the chance to advance in rank. The vast majority of regulars who deserted during the war sought to become civilians, either in Mexico or the United States, but a significant minority took up arms for the Mexican cause, forming a unit that came to be called the St. Patrick's Battalion. This unit fought in several of the bloodiest battles of the war and acquitted itself well. Knowing to what degree these men were motivated by religion is difficult. Different historians and contemporaries also cite the harsh discipline of the American army, the excesses of nativist officers, economic inducements, and Irish nationalism. Religion was clearly part of this equation, however. Although the various appeals Mexican officials made to induce desertion from the US army only sometimes mentioned religious motivation, Mexican press descriptions of the Saint Patrick's soldiers and other potential deserters often emphasized their Catholicism.²³

Mexican interpretations of the Saint Patrick's soldiers were a manifestation of a general belief that Catholicism was crucial to Mexico's

22. Quote from Ballentine, *Autobiography of an English Soldier*, 44. See also 332–333 and the testimony of deserter Colin Dangale in Archivo de Defensa Nacional (hereafter ADN), Exp. 2699, folio 11, México City.

23. Peter Stevens, *The Rogue's March: John Riley and the St. Patrick's Battalion 1846–1848* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1999), 107; Jorge Belarmino, *Cuestión de sangre* (Mexico: Planeta, 2008); Michael Hogan, *The Irish Soldiers of Mexico* (Guadalajara: Fondo Editorial Universitario, 1997); Robert R. Miller, *Shamrock and Sword: The Saint Patrick's Battalion in the U.S. Mexican War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989); Robert R. Miller, "Los San Patricios en la guerra de 1847," *Historia Mexicana* 47 (October–December 1997), 345–385; Dennis Wynn, *The San Patricio Soldiers: Mexico's Foreign Legion* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1984). For an appeal soliciting desertion that mentions religion, see Gen. Pedro Ampudia's proclamation of September 15, 1846, in ADN, Exp. 2250, folio 18. For others, see Gen. Juan Alvarez's undated proclamation in ADN, Exp. 2505, folio 86. For a typical depiction of the San Patricios in the Mexican press, see *Alcance al Diario del Gobierno de la República Mexicana*, September 10, 1847.

identity. Many Mexicans had a strong sense that their national purpose was to fulfill a particular religious destiny. This idea had deep roots in the early colonial period. Evangelizing friars believed that they had been called to expand the reign of God by converting indigenous people to Catholicism and restoring the ideals of the primitive Church. Much more recently, Mexico's war of independence had been initiated by Catholic priests who argued vociferously that one of their purposes was to preserve a pure Catholicism threatened by religious, ideological, and political developments in Europe. Independence leaders Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos, both priests, insisted that Mexicans were more religious than the people of Spain, and this, in the words of Brian Connaughton, "bestowed on their political movement, and eventual independence, a transcendent mission." The religious interpretation of Mexican identity became more popular after Mexico became independent in 1821. Dozens of writers and politicians, both religious and secular, argued that Catholicism was inseparable from Mexicanness. Some went so far as to say, echoing the millenarian preoccupations of the sixteenth-century friars, that Mexico was fated to regenerate man morally in the New World, providing an example to redeem a decadent and materialist Europe.²⁴

Most Mexicans believed that Catholicism was essential to Mexico's national identity. Mexican constitutions enshrined Catholicism as the official religion, and religious metaphors abounded in politics. Prayer was a key part of every civic ceremony, and public officials worked with religious authorities to arrange for special prayers during droughts, epidemics, and wars. To many Mexicans, one of the most important functions of government was to establish conditions that would allow the Catholic Church to assure the eternal salvation of souls. Laws prohibited other religions and required immigrants, including American immigrants to Texas, to convert to Catholicism.²⁵

Many Mexicans saw the United States with its plethora of denominations as an example of the worst kind. Religious tolerance and liberty of conscience were not bringing Americans closer to God but instead leading them away from God and putting their souls at risk. How could Americans, surrounded by diverse and sometimes bizarre

24. Quote from Brian Connaughton, "Conjuring the Body Politic from the Corpus Mysticum: The Post-Independent Pursuit of Public Opinion in Mexico 1821–1854," *The Americas* 55 (January 1999), 464, see also 462–473; and Osvaldo Pardo, *The Origins of Mexican Catholicism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

25. Peter Guardino, *The Time of Liberty: Popular Political Culture in Oaxaca, 1750–1850* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 159–160.

religious creeds, find the one true way to the Divine? As one Mexican author put it, “without a guide, without hope for the future, the heart cannot find the stopping point among the innumerable sects that teach pretending to know the way to worship Divinity.”²⁶

Catholicism was a central theme in the efforts of politicians and intellectuals to inspire resistance to the American invasion. Literate Mexicans were well aware of anti-Catholic riots and the toxic anti-Catholic press in the United States. Moreover, the Mexican press widely publicized the many acts of violent sacrilege committed by American volunteer soldiers during the war. Hypocrisy was a major theme. One editorial called American troops “bandits, who in the name of civilization and with a Bible in their hands, dig the grave of humanity.”²⁷

Most calls to resistance combined three threads of argument: They appealed to a relatively general form of patriotism, often by invoking the memory of independence war heroes. They called on Mexicans to defend the honor and bodies of their wives and daughters. And, most importantly for this article, they stressed the need to protect Catholicism and its sacred objects from the rapacity and impiety of American soldiers. Dozens of documents combined these last two elements, including an April 1847 proclamation of the Zacatecas town council, which speaks of Americans “destroying, occupying and burning our cities, trampling on our altars, stealing our property, and sacrificing to his brutal customs our chaste maidens, our faithful wives.”²⁸ Even nuns would not be safe from rape. Leaders repeatedly

26. *Boletín Oficial del Gobierno de San Luis Potosí*, May 9, 1846. See also *Con-testación del Illmo. Sr. Vicario Capitular del Arzobispado a la Circular de 19 Mayo del ministerio de Justicia, suscrita por El. Sr. D. Luis de la Rosa* (Mexico: Imprenta del Católico dirigida por Mariano Arevalo, 1847). Flor de María Salazar Mendoza and Sergio Cañedo Gamboa point out the fierce determination of the Mexican clergy to maintain Catholicism as the only religion in Mexico in “El discurso de la unidad del clero potosino frente a la Invasión Norteamericana: Patriotas y defensores irrestrictos de la religión católica, 1846–1847,” in Brian Connaughton and Carlos Rubén Ruiz Medrano, eds., *Dios, religión, y patria: Intereses, luchas e ideales socio-religiosos en México, siglos xviii y xix* (San Luis Potosí: El Colegio de San Luis, 2010), 212.

27. *Boletín Oficial del Gobierno de San Luis Potosí*, April 11, 1846.

28. This quote is from Archivo Histórico del Estado de San Luis Potosí (hereafter AHESLP), Secretaría General del Gobierno, Impresos, 1847, Vol. 3, exp. 18. See also Vol. 19; *La Época, Periódico Oficial de San Luis Potosí*, March 16, 1847, April 6, 1847, April 15, 1847, May 6, 1847, and May 8, 1847; Sergio Cañedo Gamboa, *Los festejos septembrinos en San Luis Potosí. Protocolo, discurso y transformaciones, 1824–1847* (San Luis Potosí: El Colegio de San Luis, 2001), 150; *A las armas ciudadanos, que el enemigo se acerca* (San Luis Potosí: Imprenta de M. Escontría, 1847); AHESLP, Secretaría General del Gobierno, Impresos, 1847, Vol. 3, exp. 28; Salazar Mendoza and Cañedo Gamboa, “El discurso de la unidad,” 212, 220, 226–230.

criticized the conduct of American troops. A National Guard commander cited “their depraved conduct, immoral and irreligious conduct, seen as they profane churches and use in a savage way the sacred vessels in which our priests consume the mysteries of our Holy Religion.”²⁹ Religious authorities argued that in occupied territory Catholic ceremonies would have to be hidden to avoid confrontations with anti-Catholic American troops. This would limit the availability of the sacraments needed to assure access to eternal life. An 1847 pamphlet explained that the Americans would turn churches into barracks, steal chalices and vestments to use for impure purposes, expel monks and nuns from convents, and impose religious tolerance.³⁰ To Mexicans, these kinds of acts were not mere signs of disrespect. They would have lasting consequences because they endangered Mexicans’ access to eternal life.

Many Mexicans interpreted the military successes of the United States as a divine test or a divine punishment. President Antonio López de Santa Anna, for instance, commented that “Divine Providence, which rules the destinies of nations, has given Mexico a difficult test.”³¹ For some Mexicans, the war, more than a test, was a punishment for Mexico’s sins. This idea was expressed more forcefully when American armies were nearing the center of the country. Of course, this punishment need not be lethal. God certainly would help Mexico owing to the justice of its cause. Defeats had to be seen, according to an anonymous resident of Puebla, as “the healthy punishment of a father to his child and a proof of God’s love.” The punishment was designed to reform the country, not to destroy it.³²

What could Mexicans faced with American military successes do? For the pious, both civilians and soldiers, one obvious response was prayer. Sometimes governments asked church authorities to lead public ceremonies and sometimes the clergy itself initiated efforts. These ceremonies included the litany of the saints, novenas, rosaries, masses, and processions. Mexicans took sacred images out in procession and said masses for the souls of fallen soldiers. These were all public rites. Their religious purpose was to awaken God’s mercy, convincing Him to intervene in the war as “the God of Battles,” an often-invoked phrase, or to grant eternal life to the dead, even if they

29. *La Época, Periódico Oficial de San Luis Potosí*, January 12, 1847.

30. AHESLP, Secretaría General del Gobierno, Impresos, 1847, Vol. 1, exp. 1.

31. AHESLP, Secretaría General del Gobierno, 1846, Vol. 14, exp. 22. See also Vol. 5, exp. 28.

32. Quote from AGN, Justicia y Negocios Eclesiásticos, Vol. 160, folio 77. See also Vol. 160, folio 53; AHESLP, SGG Impresos, 1847, Vol. 3, exp. 28.

had died in the violence of battle without the opportunity to confess their sins. Yet, as public ceremonies, these acts also served to construct and reinforce the Christian solidarity of a nation in danger and to underline the differences between Catholic Mexico and its impious Protestant neighbor.³³

Both secular authorities and the clergy recognized the importance of the pulpit in forming Mexican opinion. Thus, politicians sent letters to religious authorities asking them to encourage resistance, and the latter responded with great enthusiasm. In October 1846, Governor Manuel José Othón of San Luis Potosí explained to parish priests that the American invasion imperiled both national independence and Catholicism, and he asked them to use their pulpits to exhort the faithful. Many priests responded that they had already begun preaching resistance, but they would renew their efforts. A typical response was that of Father Anastacio Escalante of Río Verde, who wrote

Considering the imminent danger in which are found our nationality and the religion that we profess . . . I cannot but fulfill my duties as a minister . . . and as a citizen. . . . I will urge them to defend with ardor the very holy maxims of the only saving doctrine of the crucified, and the sacred rights of the great Mexican family.³⁴

For priests, who believed that Catholicism was the only path leading to the salvation of souls, stopping the invasion was a way to protect Mexicans' chances of attaining eternal life. The war was not purely political; it was eminently religious.

The previous paragraphs showed how religious identity shaped the ways in which many people on both sides saw the war and how it could inspire both conquest and resistance. The next part of the article reveals how the emotional power of religion sometimes hampered the efforts of the US and Mexican governments to fight the war effectively. In both countries, religion was important in internal debates during the war. Finally, the article concludes with an examination of how religion shaped critical debates about how the war should end.

The strength of religious attitudes may have contributed to successful efforts to mobilize Americans for war, but it was not an

33. For a use of the phrase "God of Battles" by an American volunteer soldier, see Allan Peskin, ed., *Volunteers: The Mexican War Journals of Private Richard Coulter and Sergeant Thomas Barclay* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1991), 162. AHESLP, Secretaría General del Gobierno, 1846, Vol. 5, exp. 28; AGN, Justicia y Negocios Eclesiásticos, Vol. 160, folios 53, 77, 67, 55, and 52.

34. AHESLP, Secretaría General de Gobierno, 1846, Vol. 20, exp. 44.

unmitigated blessing for the American government. The Polk Administration was fully aware of the importance of religious emotions. Whatever its leaders felt about Catholicism, they realized that it would be exceedingly impolitic to stress the religious dimensions of the conflict. American urban Catholics had significant weight in the Democratic Party. More importantly, Polk wanted to achieve his expansionist ambitions with as little fighting as possible. He first sought to intimidate Mexico into making territorial concessions without armed conflict, and when that gambit failed, he hoped to fight a war against the Mexican government, not the Mexican people. Polk wanted to minimize popular resistance to the invading armies and also popular support for the Mexican government's war effort. Religion increased the stakes of the conflict, and the resulting intensity fueled the support many Mexicans gave to continuing the war to the bitter end.

Polk and his generals tried to reassure Mexicans that the American army would respect the Catholic Church and Mexican religious beliefs. Polk appointed Catholic chaplains to the invading army. American regular officers repeatedly told the Mexican public that their religious beliefs and Church property would be respected. More importantly, American generals, especially Winfield Scott, sought to control the behavior of American troops. Ordered to invade Central Mexico, Scott was very aware that in the highly populated regions where his army would have to operate his small force would be extremely vulnerable to popular mobilization. For this reason, he ordered his troops to respect the civilian population in general and Catholicism in particular. His fame as a disciplinarian helped him, and so fewer outrages occurred in the center of the country than did in the north.³⁵ Scott also made a determined effort to gain the confidence of Mexico's church hierarchy in areas that his troops occupied through acts like paying his respects to the Bishop of Puebla. One of Scott's officers, Thomas Childs, went so far as to participate in a Catholic procession, accompanying the transfer of the Eucharist through the streets of Puebla. Childs marched in the procession hatless with a candle in hand and ordered American troops to kneel and remove their caps when the procession passed. Notably, the regular troops present complied without hesitation, but the volunteers

35. Timothy Johnson, *A Gallant Little Army: The Mexico City Campaign* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2007), 59; Foos, *Short, Offband Killing Affair*, 127, 131; Irving Levinson, *Wars within War: Mexican Guerrillas, Domestic Elites and the United States of America, 1846–1848* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2005), 69–71.

refused, offering further proof of the skepticism with which many volunteers viewed Catholicism. Anti-Catholic newspapers in the United States widely reported this incident, criticizing officers for forcing soldiers to participate in a Catholic ceremony.³⁶ The Polk Administration apparently also made covert overtures to the Church hierarchy through confidential agent Moses Beach. Beach claimed to have successfully persuaded Mexican bishops not to continue their moral and financial support for the Mexican government, although reality never quite matched his reports. In general, American protestations of good will paled beside the vivid acts of sacrilege committed by American volunteers. Fierce resistance continued during the entire period in which US troops occupied Mexican soil.³⁷

Religion was also important in internal US politics during the war. This war, like many wars in the history of the United States, sparked discussion about what it meant to be American and who might be included among Americans. Catholic clergy and immigrant leaders supported the war and encouraged the recruitment of volunteer units from immigrant communities. Catholic leaders argued that the willingness of immigrant Catholics to volunteer for war service was evidence that they, contrary to the critiques of anti-Catholic nativists, were loyal and patriotic Americans. The war offered these leaders a chance to take on nativist, anti-Catholic arguments and stake out a claim to American identity. They were the largest group to reject systematically the juxtaposition of a Catholic Mexico and a Protestant United States. Still, only a few companies of volunteers were recruited from among Catholic immigrant groups. The experience of these small groups of men, embedded among the thousands of Protestant volunteers who were often anti-Catholic and nativist, was not always comfortable. In August 1846, a bloody brawl erupted within Georgia's volunteer regiment between a company composed mostly of Irish Catholics and a more typical volunteer company. The conflict became the subject of intense coverage in Catholic newspapers.³⁸

36. Ballentine, *Autobiography of an English Soldier*, 227–229; Pinheiro, “Crusade and Conquest,” 69, 197–199.

37. A. Brooke Caruso, *The Mexican Spy Company: United States Covert Operations in Mexico* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1991), 142–143.

38. Tyler Johnson, “Punishing the Lies on the Rio Grande: Catholic and Immigrant Volunteers in Zachary Taylor’s Army and the Fight against Nativism,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 30 (Spring 2010), 63–84. Johnson has also published a general history of immigrant volunteers in the war. See Tyler Johnson, *Devotion to the Mother Country: U.S. Immigrant Volunteers in the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012).

We have seen how the strength of religious feelings helped the Polk Administration by inspiring the recruitment of volunteers and political support for the war, but it could also be problematic. Religious feelings were too intense to be easily harnessed to the kind of limited war the Administration wanted to fight. Religion was also a double-edged sword for the Mexican government. One of the many ironies that surround the war is that the Mexican Catholic Church became known afterward, not for its contribution to the defense of Mexico, but instead for encouraging armed resistance against the government to protect Church property. Moreover, Mexican politicians sometimes found the religious fervor that inspired resistance to the Americans to be inconvenient and even terrifying.

From the beginning of the war, the Church provided enormous financial resources to pay for the armies Mexico raised to fight the United States. Priests donated their personal wealth and contributed church bells to be remade into cannons or ammunition. Convents and churches were also used as barracks or fortifications. The Church loaned the government several million pesos during the war, seriously damaging its economic health even before the government tried to confiscate church wealth for the war effort. Several church organizations had already begun to sell real estate to satisfy the needs of the government. Although these sums were at least nominally loans, no one was foolish enough to believe the government would ever be able to repay them.³⁹

Despite the Church's economic contributions, in early 1847 the government's fiscal situation was dire. Santa Anna had collected a formidable army, but he did not have funds to pay and feed his soldiers. He complained incessantly to Vice President Valentín Gómez Farías. The Catholic Church was the only place Gómez Farías could possibly have gone for more funds. On January 11, the government decreed the nationalization of church property to raise 15 million pesos for the war effort.⁴⁰

The Church hierarchy sought the law's repeal. During January and February, the clergy published many pamphlets and articles.

39. Sergio Cañedo Gamboa, *Los festejos septembrinos*, 135; AHDF, Guerra, Vol. 2264, exp. 8; *La Época, Periódico Oficial de San Luis Potosí*, December 17, 1846; AHESLP, Secretaría General de Gobierno, 1846, Vol. 20 s/e; Brian Connaughton, "Agió, clero y bancarrota fiscal, 1846–1847," *MS/EM* 14 (Summer 1998), 263–285; Salazar Mendoza and Cañedo Gamboa, "El discurso de la unidad," 230–233.

40. Carlos Rodríguez Venegas, "Las finanzas públicas y la Guerra contra los Estados Unidos, 1846–1848," *México al tiempo de su guerra con los Estados Unidos (1846–1848)*, ed. Josefina Vázquez (Mexico: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, El Colegio de México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997), 124–125.

Their tone was severe. The writers argued that if all real estate held by Catholic organizations was sold at once, property prices would plummet, and the government would receive little cash. They also pointed out the Church was simply not as wealthy as it might seem. More than that, denying the Church the right to own property would make it totally subordinate to the government, keeping it from fulfilling its mission on earth. Without financial resources, the Church would not be able to organize religious ceremonies or fund Catholic education. Souls would be put at risk. The government's policy was seen as a threat to the Church's existence and, thus, a threat to the souls of the faithful.⁴¹

In February, National Guard units revolted in Mexico City, demanding the abolition of the law. A civil war took place in the capital, even as the country sought to defend itself from the United States. Although the conflict was the culmination of several months of tensions between moderates and radicals in local politics, few doubted the rebels had the backing of the Church hierarchy. Michael Costeloe has shown that various clergy provided the necessary funds for the revolt and very highly placed members of the hierarchy approved it. Without this money and without the fierce publicity campaign against the law, there would have been no possibility of a revolt.⁴²

The unrest seriously damaged the ability of the government to respond to the landing of Winfield Scott's army in Veracruz, which effectively opened a new front much closer to the capital. The rebellion prevented the government from sending reinforcements to the coast—reinforcements who might have been able to stall Scott's army enough to keep it in the lowlands until the onset of the yellow fever season, a serious threat to the army's strength. Santa Anna returned from the north to negotiate an agreement with the Church and the rebels under which the decree was revoked, but the Church also immediately provided a 1.5 million peso loan for the war. This agreement was acceptable to the hierarchy because even if the wealth of the Church continued to melt away, at least the government still

41. Reynaldo Sordo Cedeño, "El faccionalismo en la Guerra con los Estados Unidos 1846–1848, in *Symposium La Angostura en la Intervención Norteamericana 1846–1848* (Saltillo: Secretaría de Educación Pública de Coahuila, 1998), 29; Moisés Guzmán Pérez, *Las relaciones clero-gobierno en Michoacán: La gestión episcopal de Juan Cayetano Gómez de Portugal* (Mexico: LIX Legislatura Cámara de Diputados, 2005), 187–195, 190; *Contestación del Illmo. Sr. Vicario Capitular*, 14–15; Guardino, *The Time of Liberty*, 216.

42. Michael Costeloe, "The Mexican Church and the Rebellion of the Polkos," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 46 (May 1966), 170–178.

recognized that the wealth belonged to the Church and not the nation.⁴³

How do we reconcile the efforts of the Mexican Church to oppose the American invasion with backing for a revolt that weakened Mexican resistance? The clergy's patriotism during the war was interwoven with their vision that Mexico's Catholic religious destiny was the key component of its national identity. For clerics and many other Catholics, the government's principal role was to provide the conditions necessary for souls to be saved by guaranteeing the social order and protecting Mexicans from heresy. For them, the government was betraying the Mexican nation by confiscating Church wealth. The Church supported and encouraged resistance to the Americans primarily because the Americans represented a religious threat. An American victory, more than putting into question the existence of a secular nation, would endanger the ability of the Church to save Mexicans' immortal souls. Seen this way, the attitude of the Church toward the nationalization law and the Church's work against the Americans stem from a single source. It was not a contradiction to oppose the Americans and foster armed resistance to a government measure that threatened the ability of the Church to continue its religious work.

The ability of religion to inspire resistance to the Americans was sometimes inconvenient, however, and even frightening for some members of the political elite. We can see this in the popular reaction against the American occupation of Mexico City. After a series of bloody battles, the American army marched into Mexico City on the morning of September 14, 1847. A massive popular rebellion began minutes after troops arrived at the center of the city. Many city inhabitants fought the Americans not only with the few firearms available, but also with improvised weapons, including cobblestones, boiling water, and clubs.⁴⁴

A key element in preparing the ground for popular resistance was a publicity campaign designed to show the city's population the damage that an American occupation would do to Catholicism. From the beginning of the war, Mexico City, as center of the Mexican press, had seen the publication of many pamphlets and editorials that criticized

43. Costeloe, "Mexican Church."

44. Luis Fernando Granados, *Sueñan las piedras: Alzamiento ocurrido en la ciudad de México, 14, 15 y 16 de septiembre de 1847* (Mexico: Ediciones Era/Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes/Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2003), 94; Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal (hereafter AHDF), Guerra, Vol. 2265, exp. 27, folios 3, 19, 36–43; exp. 25, folio 12.

the religious disorder seen in the United States, with its impiety and the sacrilegious excesses of American soldiers. During the Church-inspired rebellion of February and March, the Church continued its criticism of the Americans, and even government supporters printed pamphlets and editorials that emphasized the idea that the Americans were the true enemies of religion. The sense of danger increased after the Americans began their invasion of Central Mexico, arriving at a critical level when the Americans neared Mexico City.⁴⁵

On September 7, President Santa Anna made his final efforts to arouse popular ire against the Americans. He sent the archbishop a letter advising him to order priests to tell the people that they should be prepared to defend Catholicism with their lives. Santa Anna added that if the Americans entered the capital, “their thirst for gold and their anxious desire to trample our religion will make the Sacred Image of our Lady of Guadalupe vulnerable.”⁴⁶ This message, although addressed to the prelate, was clearly intended for the population of the city: the government printed 300 copies and posted them on the street corners.⁴⁷ That same day the city council of Mexico sent a circular to the city’s convents, ordering the friars to preach resistance to the invader “in the neighborhoods, in the streets, or in any other convenient place, exciting the people to the common defense of our religion and our country.” Various convents responded that they had already begun to do this.⁴⁸

The capital’s priests were not content with only preaching against the Americans. At least five different priests, two them brandishing the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe, led crowds fighting the Americans. On September 15, municipal leader Manuel Reyes Vera-mendi told the archbishop that

a friar from the convent of the Merced is riding a horse through the neighborhoods of Santa Catarina and Santa Anna with a lance in his hands, urging the people to rise up against the American army. Various other ecclesiastics are doing more or less the same, continuing to incite the people to defend themselves.

45. *Infame política de los Estados Unidos de América, y suerte que nos espera si no defendemos nuestra independencia* (San Luis Potosí, Imprenta del Palacio, n.d.); AHESLP, Secretaría General del Gobierno, Impresos, 1847, Vol. 3, exp. 28.

46. *La Época, Periódico Oficial de San Luis Potosí*, September 14, 1847.

47. AHDF, Guerra, Vol. 2265, exp. 28, folio 5.

48. AHDF, Guerra, Vol. 2265, exp. 27, folio 32. See also Jesús Cosamalón Aguilar, “Léperos y yanquis: el control social en la Ciudad de México durante la ocupación norteamericana, 1847–1848,” *Culturas de pobreza y resistencia: Estudios de marginados, proscritos y descontentos. México, 1804–1910*, ed. Romana Falcón (Mexico: Colegio de México/ Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, 2005), 118.

Reyes Veramendi reported the same thing to the American commanders, blaming the resistance on these priests.⁴⁹

The desperate fighting in the city streets caused the invading army serious casualties. American soldiers used heavy artillery to destroy houses from which people resisted, and they also sacked those houses. Winfield Scott told the city council that he would allow his soldiers to sack the entire city if resistance did not stop. He also contacted religious authorities, telling them he would make sure every church in the city was sacked if they persisted in their open confrontation with the Americans. Both civil and religious authorities responded. Reyes Veramendi tried to end the uprising, and the archbishop sent new instructions to priests, telling them to stop preaching resistance and instead exhort their flocks to keep the peace. This sudden change of heart on the part of the authorities did not stop the fighting immediately, but slowly calm was reestablished. Nevertheless, the American military authorities continued to fear religion's power to inspire resistance. On Sunday September 19, the churches of the city did not ring their bells to summon the faithful to mass, a ritual the Americans were familiar with from other cities they had occupied. American officers saw this as part of a plot to incite a new uprising by denying Mexicans the sacraments. Again, they threatened to allow their soldiers to sack the churches, so the priests opened church doors for mass.⁵⁰

The importance of religion in shaping the attitudes and experiences of participants during the Mexican War is also seen in the very outcome of the war. During the war, Mexican priests and the faithful had agonized over the religious consequences of a defeat. Their worries were justified. The records document a bitter litany of sacked churches, disrupted ceremonies, Mexican soldiers who died without confession, and other religious horrors. Nevertheless, American soldiers did not stay in Central Mexico forever. For the Catholic Church in most of Mexico, the war had two long-term consequences. The war even further weakened the Church's finances, and the war also greatly sharpened the conflict between the Church and some Mexican politicians, taking Mexico one step closer to the cataclysmic civil war that would shake Mexico a decade later.

49. Quote from AHDF, Guerra, Vol. 2265, exp. 28, folio 30. See also Granados, *Sueñan las piedras*, 69, 92–93, and 150; Cosamalón Aguilar, "Léperos y yanquis," 119–120; Johnson, *Gallant Little Army*, 241.

50. AHDF, Guerra, Vol. 2265, exp. 28, folios 21, 26; Levinson, *Wars within War*, 72; Johnson, *Gallant Little Army*, 242–243.

Serious negotiations to end the war began after the Americans took Mexico City. Just as religion shaped the racialization of Mexicans that prompted the American aggression, now that same intense sense of difference limited the scope of American territorial gains by scuttling the efforts of some politicians to annex all of Mexico. Both supporters and opponents of annexing the entire country featured religion very prominently in their arguments. Supporters argued the Mexican people could be elevated to US standards if American religious freedom were allowed to reign there. Opponents of complete annexation worried about adding so many members of an inferior race to the US populace. Some also argued that Catholicism was a serious obstacle to bringing American civilization to Mexico's people because Catholicism was simply incompatible with liberty, democracy, and progress. Opponents of annexing the entire country described Mexico's population in the same disparaging terms that nativists used to characterize Catholic German and Irish immigrants. The arguments against annexing all of Mexico won the day.⁵¹

Religion was also a crucial issue in the negotiation, modification, and eventual approval of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This treaty transferred a very extensive part of Northern Mexico populated by thousands of Catholics to the United States. The Mexican negotiators made a strong effort to defend the religious rights of those Mexicans. They succeeded in making sure that Article IX of the treaty included specific guarantees for the property and work of Catholic religious corporations in the territories that passed to the United States and free communication between the faithful of those territories and their bishops in Mexico. Unfortunately for the Mexicans, the treaty had to be approved by the United States Senate, and there the guarantees of Catholic rights ran into a brick wall of anti-Catholic sentiment. Article IX was the most hotly debated article of the treaty. In the end, the Senate modified the treaty, removing all specific guarantees for Catholicism, inserting instead a simple pledge to respect religious freedom. Polk, who was well aware of Mexico's attachment to Catholicism, was extremely worried that the Mexican government might reject the modified treaty. It did not, as by the spring of 1848, little hope of successful resistance against the American occupiers remained. There is a palpable irony in the

51. John Pinheiro, "'Religion Without Restriction': Anti-Catholicism, All Mexico, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23 (Spring 2003), 85-90.

removal of specific guarantees for Catholics from the treaty. In the end, the only hope that Mexicans in the newly annexed territories had for their future as Catholics lay in the very same religious tolerance that many Mexican clergy and faithful had seen as a threat to Mexico's religious future.⁵²

52. Pinheiro, "Religion without Restriction," 91–94; Pinheiro, "Crusade and Conquest," 223–228.