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THE GODLY POPULISTS: PROTESTANTISM IN THE FARMERS'
ALLIANCE AND PEOPLE'S PARTY OF TEXAS

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Texas farmers and farm leaders played a prominent role in the southern agrarian protest movements of the 1880's and 1890's. Texas was the birthplace of the Southern Farmers' Alliance and a stronghold of the Populist, or People's party. The alliance began in frontier Lampasas County in the mid-1870's. Founded by cattlemen to deal with such problems as the locating of estrays and mutual protection against cattle thieves, the original organization lasted only a few years. However, it was reorganized in nearby Parker County in 1879. The alliance, like the grange, was a secret organization, complete with masonic-like ritual, password, and regalia. Although a state organization was established in 1879, membership was in fact limited to the West Texas counties of Parker, Wise, and Jack.¹

¹William L. Garvin and S. O. Daws, History of the National Farmer's Alliance and Co-operative Union of America (Jacksboro, Texas, 1887), pp. 14-16; Nelson A. Dunning, editor, Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest (Washington, 1891), pp. 13-22. This work contains material written by the editor as well as essays by other leading reformers. Unless otherwise cited, references to this work pertain to material written by the editor.

By the mid-1880's the alliance had expanded its objectives and had supplanted the grange as the principal agricultural reform group in the state.² The alliance established cooperative mills, stores, and other economic ventures designed to remove the middle man from agricultural economic affairs. Encouraged by President Charles W. Macune, an enthusiastic band of organizers and lectures spread the alliance gospel over the state. So effectively did they make converts that by 1888 the state alliance could claim 142,900 members in 300 sub-alliances.³

By 1886 the alliance felt strong enough to demand economic reforms from the legislature. Their proposals, several of which were adopted by the state government, included strict regulation of corporations and railroads.⁴

The alliance moved toward regional status through a series of mergers with similar groups in neighboring states in 1888 and 1889. By 1889 the National Farmers' Alliance and Laborers' Union, with Macune of Texas as president, was sending organizers into the southeastern states to

²Ralph Smith, "The Farmers' Alliance in Texas, 1875-1900: A Revolt Against Bourbon and Bourgeois Democracy," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLVIII (January, 1945), 354.

³C. W. Macune, "The Farmers' Alliance," typed manuscript in University of Texas Archives, Austin, 1920, p. 11; The Southern Mercury (Dallas), July 12, 1888.

⁴Dunning, editor, Farmers' Alliance, pp. 41-43.

established new state alliances and to link up with existing reform groups. From his Washington headquarters Macune directed the flourishing press and burgeoning organizational work of the alliance.⁵

The parent alliance in Texas, like the regional organization, demanded economic reform from the government, but maintained its nonpartisan purity. However, by 1886, insurgents in several alliance strongholds began mounting organized opposition to the Democratic party. In that year alliance men in Comanche County elected a slate of "Farmer Democrats" to county offices, and Fort Worth elected an independent mayor.⁶

Widespread opposition to the Democratic party broke into the open with the establishment of the People's party in 1891. The more radical alliance men, claiming they had been forced from the party of their fathers, were instrumental in the new party's formation. By 1892 a major wing of the alliance, dissatisfied with Governor Hogg and the Democrats, bolted to form the nucleus of the third party. Well-established alliance organization at the local level provided

⁵Comer Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913, Vol. IX of A History of the South, edited by Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter, 10 vols. (Baton Rouge, 1951), pp. 190-192, 194.

⁶Smith, "The Farmers' Alliance in Texas," p. 355; Ernest William Winkler, editor, Platforms of Political Parties in Texas (Austin, 1916), p. 256; Roscoe C. Martin, The People's Party in Texas (Austin, 1933), pp. 31-32.

the framework for rapid populist growth. The close correlation between the two groups is discernible in their widespread support from the same economic group, the poorer farmers, and in their concentration in the same geographic regions, the north-central cross timbers and the East Texas piney woods.⁷

Just as the rise of the alliance had caused the grange to decline in Texas, the rapidly spreading enthusiasm for the third party precipitated a sharp drop in alliance membership and activity. Some alliance men who opposed the efforts of many state leaders to align the alliance with the populists rejoined the grange, while others, such as Macune, stayed with the alliance but did not support the people's party.⁸

In Texas, as across the South and Midwest, populists made their presence known in the elections of 1892. The people's party of Texas fielded a slate of state and local candidates headed by the widely respected Thomas Lewis Nugent of Stephenville. The populists were encouraged by the outcome of the election even though their standardbearer finished third in a contest with two rival Democratic opponents.

⁷Martin, People's Party, p. 66.

⁸Ibid., p. 35.

Populists won some local elections and placed nine candidates in the state legislature.⁹

The year 1894 was the high point of the people's party in Texas. Nugent fared better than in 1892, even though poor health precluded a vigorous campaign. Substantial local victories as well as an increase of fifteen seats in the legislature pointed to major party status for the populists in the near future.¹⁰ But the death of Nugent in 1895 and the fusion of the national populist party with the Bryan democrats in 1896 weakened the position of Texas populists. Although in 1896 Jerome Kearby came closer to capturing the governorship for the populists than Nugent had, a substantial loss of strength in the legislature showed that the tide had turned against them. By the turn of the century a reorganized Democratic party, alerted to the threat from the agrarian insurgents, rallied to crush the third party movement.¹¹

To contemporary observers, southern farm protestors of the late nineteenth century often seemed like religious crusaders, or, more to the point, like frontier revivalists. Such a parallel is more than coincidental, for both in institutional structure and in ideology the agrarian protestors

⁹Ibid., p. 210; Winkler, editor, Platforms of Political Parties, p. 282; Chester Alwyn Barr, "Texas Politics, 1876-1906," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of History, University of Texas, Austin, Texas, 1966, p. 185.

¹⁰Barr, "Texas Politics," p. 185.

¹¹Martin, People's Party, pp. 210-211, 250.

utilized their religious heritage in the campaign to restore the farmer to what they considered his rightful place in society. Conversely, some clergymen, most of them with close ties to the farming population, joined or supported the various farm organizations.

Historians of agrarian America and of the farm protest movements have noted the religious aspects of rural thought in the United States. Paul H. Johnstone has shown in a series of informative essays how the American farmer inherited from the Enlightenment and from the Judeo-Christian tradition the belief that tillers of the soil were God's chosen people.¹² In his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, The Age of Reform, Richard Hofstadter reiterates Johnstone's findings and applies them to the populist movement. However, Hofstadter deals less with the ideas themselves than with what he considers to be their fruits--the conviction of farmers that they were the victims of a diabolical conspiracy.¹³

¹²Paul H. Johnstone, "Turnips and Romanticism," Agricultural History, XII (July, 1938), 226, 232, 242-245; Paul H. Johnstone, "Old Ideals Versus New Ideas in Farm Life," U. S. Department of Agriculture, Farmers in a Changing World, U. S. Department of Agriculture Yearbook (Washington, 1940), 116-129. See also, Charles E. Eisenger, "The Influence of Natural Rights and Physiocratic Doctrine on American Agrarian Thought During the Revolutionary Period," Agricultural History, XXI (January, 1947), 13-23.

¹³Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R. (New York, 1955), pp. 24-33, 62-93.

Some, although by no means all, students of southern farm movements have dealt with the influence of religion on populist ideologies and activities. Theodore Saloutos points out that pioneers in the agrarian revolt were often members of fundamentalist sects. Roscoe C. Martin, historian of the people's party in Texas, shows, from the perspective of a political scientist, the influence of protestantism on the third party movement in that state.¹⁴ However, two standard monographs which devote substantial space to the alliance and populist movements in the South, Comer Vann Woodward's Origins of the New South and John D. Hicks' The Populist Revolt, largely ignore this aspect of the movement. In light of the continuing debate on the social orientation of agrarian protesters¹⁵ more information is needed about their religious beliefs and practices and the influence of religion on their secular activities.

Most historians of social Christianity in America and of southern religion have found a minimum of concern among southern protestants of this period for economic ills and

¹⁴Theodore Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933 (Berkeley, 1960), p. 3; Martin, People's Party, pp. 82-87. See also, Stanley Parsons, "Who Were the Nebraska Populists," Nebraska History, XLIV (July, 1963), 97.

¹⁵Oscar Handlin, "Reconsidering the Populists," Agricultural History, XXXIX (April, 1965), 68-74; J. Rogers Hollingsworth, "Commentary: Populism: The Problem of Rhetoric and Reality," Agricultural History, XXXIX (April, 1965), 81-85.

social problems other than those dealing with some form of personal morality--drinking, Sabbath-breaking, or the like. Partially because of their focus on developments in the urban-industrial centers of the nation, the standard works of Henry F. May, C. Howard Hopkins, and Francis P. Weisenburger reveal little to break the revivalistic monotony of rural southern protestantism.¹⁶

Most students of the southern religious scene have little more to say for progressive social Christianity in their region. Studies by Kenneth Kyle Bailey, Comer Vann Woodward, Edwin McNeill Poteat, Jr., and Rufus B. Spain which deal solely or in part with southern protestantism in the late nineteenth century reach essentially the same conclusions as do studies of a national scope.¹⁷ Spain, in the most complete social history of Southern Baptists, argues that the farmers' alliance and populist party won little

¹⁶Henry F. May, Protestant Churches and Industrial America (New York, 1949), p. 198; Francis P. Weisenburger, Ordeal of Faith: The Crisis of Church-Going America, 1865-1900 (New York, 1959), pp. 136-137; Charles Howard Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1895-1915, rev. ed. (New Haven, 1967), pp. 329, 343, 344. Although Hopkins discusses the northern branches of the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches, he virtually ignores their southern counterparts.

¹⁷Kenneth Kyle Bailey, Southern White Protestantism in Twentieth Century (New York, 1964), p. 18; Woodward, Origins of the New South, p. 450; Edwin McNeill Poteat, Jr., "Religion in the South," Culture in the South, edited by W. T. Couch (Chapel Hill, 1935), p. 262; Rufus B. Spain, At Ease in Zion: A Social History of southern Baptists, 1865-1900 (Nashville, 1966), pp. 127, 131.

support from this denomination, which during the great social and economic debates of the period ". . . did little more than espouse the Puritan ethic."¹⁸ Social historians of Southern Methodists and Cumberland Presbyterians contend that they did show significant concern for socio-economic problems of the day, although their social activities did not match those of northern and midwestern adherents of the nascent social gospel movement.¹⁹

One possible explanation for the failure of southern religious historians to find a correlation between farm protest groups and the churches has to do with the kinds of sources they used. The rural preachers most likely to be involved in the agrarian movements left few marks on the denominational records and metropolitan-based church papers which form the basis of their research. As Timothy L. Smith has convincingly demonstrated in another period of American church history, students must look beyond official pronouncements to understand grass roots religious developments.²⁰

¹⁸Spain, At Ease in Zion, pp. 133-135.

¹⁹Hunter Dickenson Farish, The Circuit Rider Dismounts: A Social History of Southern Methodism, 1865-1900 (Richmond, 1938), pp. 331-333; Milton L. Baughn, "Social Views Reflected in Official Publications of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1875-1900), unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of History, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, 1954, pp. 128-129.

²⁰Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America (New York, 1957), passim.

Therefore, this study will follow the activities of these clergymen in part through non-religious sources.

CHAPTER II

RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION OF AGRARIAN REFORMERS IN TEXAS

In July, 1892, a large throng of alliance men and their families gathered at a campground near Bogy Springs, Texas, for a five-day encampment. According to one witness the emotional tone of their meeting was more like that of ". . . a good old-fashioned Methodist camp meeting in full blast . . ." than that of a political gathering.¹ At one of the sessions J. S. Carpenter, a populist candidate for the state legislature, drew prolonged applause when he concluded a campaign speech by announcing, ". . . God is on the move and the devil and the democratic party cannot prevail against it."²

At the beginning of another election year, the official journal of the Texas farmers' alliance similarly equated the cause of reform with the will of God. The editor of The Southern Mercury called the hosts of reform into battle with this challenge: "To your tents, oh [sic] Israel! Get on

¹The Dallas Morning News, July 25, 1892.

²Ibid.

the Lord's side, for the wrath of the people is great and their vengeance will shake the foundations of plutocracy."³

To these farm leaders and to most of their co-laborers in the agrarian reform movement the interests of the farmers were synonymous with the divine will. Farm protesters in Texas as in other states repeatedly drew on their religious heritage to vindicate and create support for their programs of economic reform. The religious orientation of their membership substantially influenced the objectives, methods, and philosophical rhetoric of the farmers' alliance and its offspring, the people's party. Therefore, an understanding of the religious ideas and activities of these men and women could shed some light on the origins of this phase of the agrarian revolt.

Writing thirty years after the heyday of the farmers' alliance, C. W. Macune recalled the objectives of the alliance had been so broad that ". . . every man who joined could easily persuade himself that it stood for his own ideas."⁴ Both the alliance and the third party attracted reformers of all stripes. Among other differences, leaders of the overlapping movements brought with them a variety of religious beliefs and differed in their loyalty to those

³The Southern Mercury, February 13, 1896.

⁴Macune, "Farmers' Alliance," typed manuscript in University of Texas Archives, Austin, 1920, p. 10.

beliefs. Most had some affiliation with one of the dominant Protestant denominations, but others were closer to transcendentalism than to the prevailing orthodoxy.

Protestant denominations, specifically the Baptist, Methodist, Disciples, and Presbyterian churches, were popular in the alliance and populist strongholds of northwest, central, and East Texas, while conversely, the reform groups made little headway in the predominately Catholic counties of extreme south Texas and the strongly Lutheran "German" counties of south central Texas. Obviously, these tendencies reflect ethnic as well as religious variables, but they do suggest the probability that most church-going alliance men and populists belonged to the popular evangelical protestant denominations.⁵

The spectrum of religious beliefs and practices among the alliance-populist leadership can be demonstrated by an analysis of several representative leaders. T. L. Nugent, twice gubernatorial candidate of the people's party, was atypical of farm leaders in that he rejected orthodox protestantism.⁶ By the time he became involved in reform politics Nugent had been converted to Swedenborgianism, a

⁵U. S. Census Office, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, Report on Statistics of Churches (Washington, 1894), III, 165, 352, 589, 666, 687; Martin, People's Party, p. 84.

⁶For a generally good discussion of Nugent and his social philosophy see Wayne Alvord, "T. L. Nugent, Texas Populist," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, LVII (July, 1953), 65-81.

spiritualistic philosophy which contained elements of Christianity and pantheism and paralleled transcendentalism at many points.⁷ He, more than any other major alliance or populist leaders, based his political activity on religious concepts.

Nugent came to Texas from his native Louisiana after graduation from Centenary College in 1861. He was a member of the Texas Constitutional Convention of 1876 and served as a district judge in the western part of the state before running as populist candidate for governor.⁸

As a young man Nugent accepted the Methodism of his family, and, according to a contemporary, exhibited a ". . . deeply religious turn of mind."⁹ For some time after moving to Texas he maintained his ties with the Methodist church, but by the early 1870's he could find little that was relevant to human needs in any of the existing churches. He came to believe that the organized church was about to fade away, to be replaced by a redeemed social order with the immanent Christ as its head.¹⁰ Protestant Christianity

⁷Catherine Nugent, editor, Life Work of Thomas L. Nugent (Stephenville, Texas, 1896), p. 34.

⁸Ibid., pp. 13-14; Roscoe C. Martin, The People's Party: A Study in Third Party Politics (Austin, 1933), p. 115.

⁹Nugent, editor, Life Work, p. 14.

¹⁰The Dallas Morning News, June 22, 1894; T. L. Nugent to his brother, March 11, 1873, cited in Nugent, editor, Life Work, p. 128; T. L. Nugent to A. B. Francisco, undated, ibid., p. 98.

he claimed, was hopelessly mired in its own theological interests and was unable to be of service in the coming Kingdom. Nugent lashed out against ". . . the clannishness of the churches and church members--the stupid conceit which makes them impervious to all reason and too often to all genuine charity."¹¹

Nugent rejected orthodox trinitarian beliefs, and in so doing thought he found justification for earthly reform. In his scheme of things a vaguely pantheistic, unitary God-head encompassed all of creation. According to a co-religionist because of Nugent's belief in the immanence of God, "He looked . . . for a slow but certain redemption of all mankind" ¹² Nugent thought the true believer must work through existing channels of social reform until the kingdom of this world becomes the Kingdom of God. Indeed, in his view, reform movements like the populist party were helping to usher in the kingdom.¹³ Yet Nugent was not completely optimistic about the possibilities of human reform. In one of his remarkable politico-religious speeches he voiced the limitations and the hope of human-initiated reform.

Human selfishness must, of necessity, place limitations upon every social or political

¹¹T. L. Nugent to his brother, January 2, 1883, cited in Nugent, editor, Life Work, p. 302.

¹²Ibid., pp. 83, 96.

¹³Ibid., p. 90.

movement. If it shall ever be transcended, the glorified industries will arise in orderly unity and harmony like the "City of God." As yet, such a state can only, as the millenium, exist in hope.¹⁴

In the historical Jesus, as in the spiritual Christ of the coming kingdom, Nugent saw a pattern for social reform. In 1893 he told an audience at San Marcos, ". . . in this wonderful man and his work I see the ideal reformer . . . giving his life to the work of arresting the evil tendencies inherent in the world's social and political institutions."¹⁵

Nugent seems out of place among the theologically conservative church-going farmers of the state. Yet until his death in 1895 he was the undisputed leader of the People's party. Indeed, to many populists he was more a saint than a political figure. One basis of his popularity among the religiously conservative farmers was his impeccable character. Not even his political enemies could argue with his last law partner, who noted after the Judge's death that he had lived by the Golden Rule.¹⁶ In spite of Nugent's

¹⁴The Dallas Morning News, July 22, 1893. For a more fundamentalist eschatological defense of reform see the article by Ebenezer Lafayette Bohoney, a member of the Church of Christ and a leader in both the prohibitionist and populist movements, in the Texas Advance (Fort Worth, Dallas), September 16, 1893.

¹⁵The Dallas Morning News, July 22, 1893.

¹⁶Nugent, editor, Life Work, p. 56.

theological unorthodoxy an old friend, the editor of a Baptist newspaper, remembered him as a ". . . man of superior character in every way."¹⁷

Perhaps Nugent's lack of concern for creeds was less damaging than might be expected. The farm protesters, although often openly religious in their appeal, maintained as an article of faith the belief that sectarian disputes must not disrupt their movement. The historian of Texas populism has correctly observed that "if they favored one church above another, it was the great church of populism, whose principles they considered to be those of Christianity and whose subjects were found among laboring men."¹⁸ Farmers, therefore, could support Nugent when he spoke as he did once when opponents challenged his orthodoxy. Nugent maintained that he believed ". . . most faithfully in the fundamental teachings of the Christian religion." "But," he added, "I believe that any effort to thrust religious controversies into the arena of party politics must be attended with evil consequences."¹⁹

Even more important than his personal character, however, was Nugent's identification of laborers, especially farmers,

¹⁷Ibid., p. 345.

¹⁸Martin, People's Party, p. 87.

¹⁹Texas Advance, June 2, 1894.

as the chosen instruments of God. Texas farmers absorbed a belief that farm life was the godly life as part of their cultural and religious heritage. Nugent, who dabbled in farming, added to the reform movement another, more sophisticated strain of the idea that agriculture is morally superior to other kinds of economic activity--an idea which dates at least to Aristotle's Politics.²⁰ Nugent knew of Tom Payne and John Tayler of Caroline, both of whom espoused the agrarian ideal. And he may have known that Emanuel Swedenborg himself adopted the popular eighteenth-century aristocratic avocation of gardening, and like later transcendentalists, saw something of the divine in his flowers and vegetables.²¹

To a fellow disciple of Swedenborg, Nugent wrote of the agrarian reformers: "They . . . are moving in the right direction, and best of all, are inspired by an unselfish desire to benefit and uplift humanity" He added, "They are faithfully toiling in the politico-economic field and, meanwhile, growing in mental and spiritual stature."²²

²⁰Paul H. Johnstone, "Turnips and Romanticism," Agricultural History, XII (July, 1938), 22.

²¹Alvord, "T. L. Nugent," p. 69n; Chester E. Eisenger, "The Influence of Natural Rights and Physiocratic Doctrine on American Agrarian Thought During the Revolutionary Period," Agricultural History, XXI (January, 1947), 197; A. Whitney Griswald, Farming and Democracy (New Haven, 1948), p. 23; Signe Toksvig, Emanuel Swedenborg: Scientist and Mystic (New Haven, 1948), p. 272.

²²T. L. Nugent to A. B. Fransisco, March 7, 1895, cited in Nugent, Life Work, p. 97.

In spite of his modesty, Nugent saw himself as the divinely appointed leader of God's people. Not long before his first foray into politics he confided to his wife

The people look to me like sheep without a shepherd Providence will raise up a leader, and when he comes no bugle blast of war will announce his coming. It will rather be heralded by a hymn of joy and praise that God has provided one to bring harmony to discordant counsels and wisdom to temper and direct the zeal of the long-awaiting, long-suffering sons of toil.²³

Combining a mystical faith in reform with the popular belief in rural virtue, the soft-spoken Nugent provided the charismatic leadership for which the "sons of toil" had long waited.

James Harvey (Cyclone) Davis was far more typical of Texas reformers in his religious views than was Nugent. Davis was the bearded, Bible-quoting, monopoly-baiting populist stump speaker par excellence. Unlike the average rank and file alliance man or populist, Davis came from a rather well-to-do family. When Davis was a small child his parents had moved from South Carolina to Titus County, Texas, and had become substantial farmers and sawmillers. Like many Texans of his socio-economic rank, Davis tried his hand at many professions. He was by turns a school teacher, newspaper editor, lawyer, and county judge.²⁴ Not surprisingly,

²³T. L. Nugent to his wife, April, 1888, cited in Ibid., p. 330.

²⁴James Harvey (Cyclone) Davis, Memoir (Sherman, Texas, 1935), pp. 317-319.

many people thought Davis was a minister. One of several nicknames he acquired was "Methodist Jim." He was in reality neither minister nor Methodist, but an active lay member of the Christian church in Sulphur Springs.²⁵

Although as a lawyer he was ineligible for membership in the alliance, he lectured for that organization and later spoke throughout the country for the people's party. When the third party collapsed he returned to the democratic fold, and later served one term in Congress during the Wilson administration.²⁶ All of his enemies and some of his friends thought Davis to be a political opportunist, and he had the reputation of espousing any dissenting cause which would support him. Davis lost the support of many Texas populists in 1896 because of his apparent opportunism in advocating fusion with the Democrats.²⁷

To view Davis merely as a colorful and opportunistic western orator is to miss the key he provided to the intellectual orientation of Texas alliance men and populists. The kinds of arguments which Davis repeatedly used and presumably found effective are more important than his beard or his unorthodox platform antics.

²⁵Colby D. Hall, Texas Disciples (Fort Worth, 1952), p. 273.

²⁶Davis, Memoir, pp. 3, 317-318.

²⁷Martin, People's Party, pp. 123, 246.

In a campaign tract written before the 1894 elections Davis used a wonderfully mixed metaphor to explain the foundation of the populist faith.

The Bible is our model, the Constitution our guide, the writings of Jefferson, Madison, Calhoun and Jackson and Lincoln our finger boards, and the People's Party platform is our vestibuled limited train with a compound engine, and those who stand in the way must clear the track or be run over.²⁸

On one hand "Methodist Jim" utilized the Bible as the infallible authority for reform ideas. For example in the campaign of 1894 he argued that in spite of the divine stamp of approval placed on labor the corporations had crushed the laboring class. "When God said, 'If any man will not work, neither shall he eat,' he meant to dignify labor. This and another divine declaration, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,' have been ignored in all ages and labor made a serf" ²⁹ The effectiveness of Davis' appeal to Biblical authority, evidenced by his great popularity and wide imitation, indicates the popularity among his hearers of the bibliocentricity commonly found in what was then orthodox southern protestantism.

²⁸James Harvey (Cyclone) Davis, A Political Revelation in Which the Principles of This Government, The Teachings of Its Founders, and the Issues of Today Are Brought to a Fair and Just Comparison With Each Other, by Means of Rigid Analysis, appendix by Harry Tracy (Dallas, 1894), p. 5.

²⁹Davis, Memoir, p. 230.

But on the other hand Davis offered the boys in the piney woods more than old time religion to justify their economic and political activity. Along with his Bible, Davis carried his volumes of Jefferson into the rostrum and used the latter as he did the former, as infallible scripture. In using Jefferson and other founding fathers who upheld the agrarian ideal, Davis, like Nugent, introduced a second strain of argumentation into the indigenous populist debate. If he had a copy of Jefferson's Notes From Virginia he no doubt read this passage to silence opponents of the alliance or populism.

Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which He keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth.³⁰

Jefferson, influenced by Locke and other thinkers of the eighteenth century as well as by the exigencies of life in Virginia, developed a philosophy of government of which the yeoman farmer was the moral and political backbone. Davis added to the deistic notions of Jefferson a liberal portion of literally interpreted scripture, but neither he nor his

³⁰Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. II (Washington, 1904), p. 229, cited in Johnstone, "Turnips and Romanticism," p. 245.

audiences thought the two incompatible.³¹ As with Nugent's Christian mysticism, Jefferson's belief in the divine election of farmers was more important than his lack of credal orthodoxy.

The weight of evidence suggests that the "typical" alliance or populist leader was more concerned with economic reform than with religion. He probably belonged to one of the major protestant groups, and like many other political and community leaders, advertised his church affiliation for personal gain.³² But his basic orientation was economic rather than religious.

C. W. Macune, the leading figure of the alliance during the critical mid-1880's, fits this pattern. Macune, who took charge of the divided alliance at its Cleburne convention in 1886, was born in Michigan, the son of a blacksmith and lay Methodist preacher. He was himself a life-long Methodist. Macune settled in Milam County, Texas, and took up the practice of medicine. He joined the local alliance, as did many rural

³¹Eisenger, "The Influence of Natural Rights and Physiocratic Doctrine," pp. 14, 21. Davis' major campaign tract juxtaposes Biblical quotations with passage from Jefferson and Madison. Davis, Political Revelation, pp. 104ff, 142ff.

³²However, not all claimed to be religious. When Barnett Gibbs, populist candidate for congressman in 1896, found his character under attack from his democratic opponent, he admitted that he lacked enough religion to get to heaven, but hastened to add that he had ". . . enough for an average congressman." The Southern Mercury, August 27, 1896.

doctors and ministers,³³ and was instrumental in the formation of the southern alliance, serving as president of the regional organization.³⁴

Like most alliance leaders Macune publicly acknowledged the moral benefit of the alliance to its members and thought the organization to be founded on Christian principles. He once said of the alliance: "It is a living, active, practical and present embodiment of the Cause of Jesus Christ. No man has yet taken the field and worked actively for the Farmers' Alliance who has not himself grown spiritually and morally."³⁵

Although he believed in the moral value of the alliance, Macune was at heart a business man, although never a very successful one. Under his leadership the Texas alliance embarked on an ambitious, although short-lived, venture in cooperative buying and selling. He was also a major proponent of the sub-treasury plan, a scheme designed to solve the farmers' storage and credit problems.³⁶ He stated emphatically

³³W. Scott Morgan, History of the Wheel and Alliance, and the Impending Revolution (Hardy, Arkansas, Fort Scott, Kansas, 1889), pp. 354, 356.

³⁴Frank M. Drew, "The Present Farmers' Movement," Political Science Quarterly, VI (June, 1891), 283; Ralph Smith, "'Macuneism,' or the Farmers of Texas in Business," Journal of Southern History, XIII (May, 1947), 220.

³⁵C. W. Macune, "The Purposes of the Farmers' Alliance," Farmers' Alliance History, edited by Dunning, p. 261.

³⁶Theodore Saloutos, Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933 (Berkeley, 1960), p. 120.

in 1891, "The first Farmers' Alliance was organized for business, and the entire order has been a business organization, for business purposes, from that day to the present."³⁷

Many other key leaders of the alliance and populist movement injected religious phraseology into their public statements but lacked the revivalistic zeal of doctrinaire religious reformers. For example, Evan Jones of Erath County, who was instrumental in establishing the southern alliance and, like Macune, was at one time its president, concluded his presidential address in St. Louis in 1889 by challenging all alliance men to be faithful to God and calling for divine aid in the proceedings of the convention. But his pastoral remarks, while probably reflecting a sincere belief that his organization had divine approval, merely formed an appendage to a speech on economic reform.³⁸

Some few alliance leaders were also leaders in their denominations. The most prominent of these was R. J. Sledge, a prosperous cotton farmer from Kyle, Texas.³⁹ His business ability gained him membership on numerous boards and committees in both the alliance and the Baptist church. Among

³⁷C. W. Macune, "Business Efforts of the Alliance," Farmers' Alliance, edited by Dunning, p. 356.

³⁸Dunning, editor, Farmers' Alliance, p. 105. Like Macune, Jones was an active Methodist. Morgan, History of the Wheel and Alliance, p. 357.

³⁹The National Economist Almanac, 1890: National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union Handbook (Washington, 1890), p. 72.

other alliance duties he was a director of The Southern Mercury and chairman of the southern alliance's Cotton Committee.⁴⁰ Sledge perennially served on various committees of the Baptist state convention, including from 1889 until 1896 the board of trustees of Baylor Female College in Belton. He was also a trustee of Kyle Seminary, a Baptist school in his hometown, during its seven years of operation.⁴¹ Significantly, the last president of the bankrupt school was Milton Park, a respected Baptist educator. When the Kyle school finally closed its doors Park moved to Dallas to become editor of The Southern Mercury.⁴²

Sledge saw a correlation between Christian teachings and the objectives of the alliance. In a widely circulated essay on the duties of alliance membership he contended that participation in the alliance should develop ". . . better and stronger men and women . . ." who are properly fitted to meet the responsibilities of life. In the same essay he affirmed "The common fatherhood of God and brotherhood

⁴⁰The Dallas Morning News, August 28, 1888; The National Economist, II (November 30, 1889), 116.

⁴¹Baptist General Convention of Texas, Proceedings, 1887 pp. 6, 14; Ibid., 1889, p. 45; Ibid., 1896, p. 3; San Marcos Baptist Association, Proceedings, 1884, p. 16; Ibid., 1891, p. 14.

⁴²San Marcos Association, Proceedings, 1889, p. 5; Texas Baptist and Herald, November, 27, 1890.

of man . . ." to be ". . . the ultimate end of true Alliance doctrine."⁴³

B. J. Kendrick of Waco was another leading Baptist who was also prominent in the alliance. A long-time leader in the alliance, he became its president in 1893. Although not a minister he served as moderator of the Waco Baptist Association for an unprecedented nine years from 1893 through 1901.⁴⁴

In addition to these denominational leaders, a substantial number of ministers and former ministers were active in both the alliance and the people's party. Most of them, like "Stump" Ashby, chairman of the populist executive committee, were rural preachers in one of the popular denominations. Like their parishioners, they saw the struggle to regain the rightful socio-economic standing of agriculture as a Christian endeavor.⁴⁵

Women, whom President Evan Jones called ". . . the crowning work of God,"⁴⁶ were accepted into the alliance on

⁴³R. J. Sledge, "The Duty of Membership," Farmers' Alliance, edited by Dunning, pp. 328, 330.

⁴⁴Smith, "Farmers' Alliance in Texas," p. 268; Waco Baptist Association, Minutes, 1893, p. 1; Ibid., 1901, p. 7.

⁴⁵See Chapter IV for a fuller discussion of these men.

⁴⁶The Dallas Morning News, July 31, 1888. A Kansas woman who was herself a populist speaker noted that in Texas ". . . women have been useful and prominent in the Alliance." Annie Diggs, "Women in the Alliance Movement," Arena, VI (June, 1892), 163.

an equal basis with their husbands. Alliance women, more apt than men to verbalize their feelings about religion and the home, helped give both the alliance and the third party their images of spiritual crusades in which the spreading of religion, the protection of home life, the conservation of rural values, and the advancement of economic reform were molded into a single righteous endeavor.

Bettie Gay of Columbus was among the leading alliance women of the state. Widowed in 1880, Mrs. Gay managed the family farm and still found time to speak and write for woman suffrage, prohibition, the alliance and the People's party.⁴⁷ She was a Baptist and represented her congregation at the Baptist General Convention of Texas in 1884.⁴⁸ Like many feminists both in and out of the alliance, she combined the reforming spirit with a distinctly religious zeal. In spite of her own prominent role in church affairs she pointed to the alliance as one of the few institutions where women were fully equal to men. Churches largely excluded women from positions of leadership, she argued, "But the Alliance

⁴⁷Diggs, "Women in the Alliance," p. 170; Smith, "Macuneism," p. 241n.

⁴⁸Baptist General Convention of Texas, Proceedings, 1886, p. 14.

has come to redeem woman from her enslaved condition, and place her in her proper sphere.⁴⁹

Fannie Leak, secretary of the state alliance in 1895, held the highest office of any woman in the organization. For her, as for Bettie Gay, the alliance movement was a moral crusade of the greatest urgency. To the secretary of one county alliance she wrote: "God be praised that our noble order is growing right along and the old ones [inactive local alliances] are still coming back continually. We must win, we dare not lose, or all human rights and human liberties will go down in the blackness of darkness."⁵⁰ To the same secretary she wrote: "Bless God, he has not forgotten his people, these reports show it" ⁵¹

The great host of alliance women, like Bettie Gay and Fannie Leak, frequently reflected the evangelistic zeal commonly found in the revivalistic sects. One sister, a member of the County Line alliance, wrote to The Southern Mercury: "I am going to work for prohibition, the Alliance and for Jesus as long as I live" Another professed:

⁴⁹Bettie Gay, "Women in the Alliance," Farmers' Alliance, edited by Dunning, p. 309.

⁵⁰Fannie Leak to Secretary, Gillespie County Alliance, August 4, 1895, inserted in Gillespie County Alliance Minute Book, University of Texas Archives, Austin.

⁵¹Fannie Leak to Secretary, Gillespie County Alliance, October 23, 1895, inserted in Gillespie County Alliance Minute Book, University of Texas Archives, Austin.

"I look upon the Alliance movement as the most potent abetter of Christianity that has ever been originate" And a third admonished her sisters: "It remains for Christian women everywhere to rise up and do the work of righteousness" --that is, alliance work.⁵²

The quasi-religious fervor of the alliance-populist rank and file clearly indicates a strong religious sentiment among supporters of the movements. But since membership in both groups was seldom accurately recorded, and since most available documents deal primarily with the leadership of the movement, generalizations about the religious positions and ideas of the rank and file must remain tentative.

Obituaries of alliance men published in The Southern Mercury sometimes indicated their church affiliation. Although too few obituaries were published to give a reliable picture of church alignment, those alliance men whose church membership was mentioned had for the most part been Baptists and Methodists.⁵³

⁵²The Southern Mercury, June 7, July 5, July 31, 1888.

⁵³Of 263 alliance men whose obituaries were published in The Southern Mercury between 1886 and 1893 in issues available for this study, thirty-two were Baptists, eighteen were Methodists, five were Disciples, two were Presbyterians, and one was Christadelphian. Forty-six others were listed as members of "the church" or praised as faithful church members. Of the remaining 159 many were no doubt church members, although from the wording of some obituaries others clearly were not.

If the type of propaganda directed toward the protesting farmers is a valid measure of their philosophy, then clearly a conservative form of evangelical protestantism prevailed. The "official" histories of the alliance not only stressed the religious aspects of the reform movement, but portrayed many alliance leaders as God-fearing members of the popular churches.⁵⁴ These histories had wide circulation among alliance men, and local alliance lecturers who used them as sources of inspiration spread their circulation even further. The reform newspapers printed a substantial amount of popular religious material, including sermons and inspirational articles by well known evangelists and ministers such as T. DeWitt Talmadge.⁵⁵

The religious orientation of the farm protesters and their leaders is evident in the arguments they used to justify reform. Agrarian leaders supported the commonly held idea that farmers were morally superior to urbanites and that their occupation was most pleasing to God. Thus The Southern Mercury editorialized: "The farm boy is nearer to nature's heart," and is better able to understand himself ". . . and to know his powers and limitations better than his urban prototype."⁵⁶ Reform leaders took the argument

⁵⁴Garvin and Daws, History of the National Farmers' Alliance, p. 127; Morgan, History of the Wheel and Alliance, p. 356.

⁵⁵See below, p. 36.

⁵⁶The Southern Mercury, November 12, 1896.

one step further and annointed the movement itself with the same divine blessing. As one pioneer of the alliance said, "No man can live up to the requirements of our order without being a Christian [;] if he will join us and strictly observe these principles we will make a pretty good Christian of him."⁵⁷ Most Texas agrarian reformers would agree with the editor of The National Economist, official organ of the southern alliance, who, when asked if the farmers' alliance were a holy alliance replied: "It is in the fullest sense of the term, because every objective it seeks to achieve is of such a nature that it is worthy of most sincere prayers for its success."⁵⁸

As might be expected from men who quoted deists such as Jefferson as readily as they did the Bible, the populists sometimes utilized the Enlightenment strain of the agrarian argument. When Harry Tracy, populist leader from Dallas, wrote that "a just and efficient government secures to every citizen the full enjoyment of every natural right vouchsafed by the Creator," his source could as easily have been a philosophe as a prophet.⁵⁹

⁵⁷W. L. Garvin, History of the Grand State Farmers' Alliance of Texas (Jacksboro, Texas, 1885), pp. 15-16.

⁵⁸The National Economist, I (April 27, 1889), 83.

⁵⁹Harry Tracy, appendix to Davis, Political Revelation, p. 292.

still, much of the philosophical justification for reform was Biblical. Quite naturally the protesters turned to scripture, the concepts of which were generally believed if not widely practiced among Texans⁶⁰ to document their case for reform.

Many farm leaders, like one writing in The Southern Mercury in 1890, traced the need for political reform back to the creation and fall of man. In an article to young readers he told how God had created the universe for man's use, but some greedy individuals, namely railroads and large corporations, had appropriated too much of creation for themselves.⁶¹ Other apologists for agrarian reform found in the Old Testament ample justification for reform. In 1896 a third party advocate prefaced a long list of scriptural proof texts for the cause with these remarks: "The Old Testament is full of Populist doctrine. The oppression of the strong against the weak has been in existence from the earliest history of man up to the present date."⁶²

⁶⁰A prominent Baptist leader and one time resident of Coryell County, an alliance stronghold, said of the citizens of that county: "The West Texans were not much afraid of hell, but they believed in it." James B. Cranfill, Dr. J. B. Cranfill's Chronicle: A Story of Life in Texas (New York, 1916), p. 310.

⁶¹The Southern Mercury, October 30, 1890.

⁶²Ibid., November 12, 1896.

The New Testament served as well as the Old in support of this latter day crusade. T. L. Nugent emphatically reminded a San Marcos audience that Christ would have been no friend of monopolists and bankers. His mission had been ". . . especially to the landless, moneyless toilers."⁶³ When President Evan Jones listed the accomplishments of the alliance in 1894 he gave the organization credit for implementing Christ's teachings. The alliance had ". . . taught the lesson of the Master who said: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself.'"⁶⁴ For some reform leaders like J. W. H. Davis of Navasota, the idea of a brotherhood of man under God led inevitably to Christian socialism.⁶⁵

Even though most church-going agrarian reformers were practitioners of the old time religion, the reform press in the 1890's showed an increasing awareness of the social gospel movement which was gaining strength among northern protestants. In the mid-1890's The Southern Mercury reprinted several poems on social gospel themes, mostly of northern origin. One, entitled "If Christ Should Come Today," was

⁶³The Dallas Morning News, July 22, 1893.

⁶⁴The Southern Mercury, September 13, 1894.

⁶⁵J. W. H. Davis, "Socialism and Human Brotherhood," unidentified clipping in John B. Rushing Papers, University of Texas Archives, Austin.

typical of the genre. In it the reincarnate Christ finds His followers neglecting their duty to the poor.

I turn from your altars and arches
and the mocking of steeples and
domes.
To join in the long, weary marches
of the ones you have robbed of their
homes.
I share in the sorrow and crosses
of the naked, the hungry and cold,
And dearer to me are their losses
than your gains and your idols of
gold.⁶⁶

The Southern Mercury favorably noted the publication of a book by W. H. Carwardine condemning the Pullman Company for its treatment of employees and its role in the Pullman strike. The author was pastor of the Methodist church in Pullman, Illinois, and a clerical champion of labor. Other similar books received favorable reviews in The Mercury.⁶⁷

The reform press sometimes published sermons by reform-minded preachers along with favorable comments on the author. The Texas Advance, for a time the official paper of the people's party, approvingly published part of a sermon by an Oregon Methodist minister upholding Christian socialism. The Southern Mercury published several sermons by Thomas Dixon, a crusading Baptist pastor from New York, which

⁶⁶The Southern Mercury, January 3, 1895. See also, Ibid., December 27, 1894; December 13, 1895; June 18, 1896.

⁶⁷The Southern Mercury, September 20, 1894; Henry F. May, Protestant Churches and Industrial America (New York, 1949), p. 110; The Southern Mercury, October 4, 1894.

dealt with matters of economic reform. In one sermon Dixon denounced capitalism as being incapable of solving the problems of a depression-ridden society.⁶⁸

Populist utilization of northern social gospel statements does not suggest an awareness of any major differences between the theology of the social gospelers and that of the predominately orthodox ministers of the state. The northern clergymen's views are presented in much the same manner as those of Cyclone Davis or any of the other local populist preachers--as proof that true ministers of the gospel recognize the moral rectitude of the populist position.

Not all religious material in alliance and populist papers had a direct bearing on the reform movement. Reform papers were often storehouses of inspirational literature and religious news. No doubt for many farm families they were the only available sources of religious information except for the Bible. The reform papers frequently published sermons by clerical celebrities like evangelist T. DeWitt Talmadge, who was noted for his lack of concern with non-celestial matters. His sermons and others of a similar nature dealt with traditional aspects of personal religion.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Texas Advance, July 7, 1894; The Southern Mercury, January 8, 1891. See also Ibid., August 1, 1895. See below, Chapter IV for similar statements by Texas clergymen.

⁶⁹Itasca Alliance Mail, May 26, 1887; The Southern Mercury, December 13, 1888.

Paradoxically, for every ministerial article appearing in the reform press which called for social action one could be found which discussed personal religion or stressed the Christian virtues and ultimate reward of hard work.⁷⁰

In addition to publishing sermons by famous clergymen, alliance and populist papers sometimes carried news or announcements of church activities. A typical notice in the Lampasas People's Journal announced that Elder George Truitt was conducting a revival meeting, presumably in Lampasas, and that several conversions had been recorded.⁷¹ Letters from young readers on the children's page of The Southern Mercury, like those appearing in similar columns of the state denominational papers, frequently contained Bible questions which other "cousins" were invited to answer in subsequent letters.⁷²

The frequent appearance in the reform press of religious ideas unrelated or even hostile to economic reform indicates

⁷⁰The Southern Mercury, July 3, 1890; April 4, 1889.

⁷¹Lampasas People's Journal, September 9, 1892. In 1899 speaking before the Southern Baptist Convention, the same George Truitt denounced ". . . the great itch abroad in the land demanding 'reform.'" Henry L. Louthen, editor, The American Baptist Pulpit at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century (Williamsburg, Va., 1903), pp. 254-275, cited in Kenneth Kyle Bailey, Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century (New York, 1964), p. 18.

⁷²Compare The Southern Mercury, October 31, 1889 and The Texas Christian Advocate, (Galveston, Dallas, Methodist), January 3, 1890.

the popularity which individualistic, orthodox protestantism enjoyed among farm protesters. Religion, even that which endorsed the reform movement, was popular not because it offered changes in theology or in the social pattern of farm life, but because it supported the farmers' struggle to maintain rural values. In a similar vein, populism sought to restore agriculture to its divinely appointed rank in society. "Old time religion and old time politics are good enough for The Southern Mercury," proclaimed its editor. "Stick to the old faith and prayer in the church, and honest efforts for the interests of the common people."⁷³ If farm protesters differed with the churches it was not because the clergy upheld the old-time theology, but because they failed to uphold what the farmers saw as the equally ancient rights of the common man.

Protestant leaders of Texas recognized the growing alienation of working men from the churches in the 1890's, but seemed to think that the phenomenon was restricted to industrial workers of the North.⁷⁴ Had these leaders listened closely to populist leaders in their own state they would have heard condemnations of the churches similar to those emanating from northern labor leaders. To be sure, most

⁷³The Southern Mercury, February 20, 1896.

⁷⁴The Texas Christian Advocate, August 11, 1892; May 3, 1894.

farm leaders did not reject Christianity or even the church, but many of them openly criticized the churches for their lack of social concern. Long before the populist groundswell Nugent had criticized the "religious interests" of the state for being more ". . . committed to clashing creeds and warring sects . . ." than to a theology of love.⁷⁵ Harry Tracy lashed out at the religious establishment in a speech in 1889. "The churches," he complained, "are built by the rich with increasing splendor; the forms only of religion survive, and are utilized mainly for political preferment . . ."⁷⁶ J. S. Brownson, former editor of the Texas Advance, criticized orthodox churches for leaving the work of reform to unorthodox thinkers like Nugent, and called for his evangelical brethren to preach ". . . the old-fashioned gospel of the brotherhood of humanity as Christ preached it."⁷⁷ Even Cyclone Davis complained in 1894 that laborers who built the ornate churches of the land were denied admission for worship in them.⁷⁸

By the mid-1890's the reform press showed an increasing hostility toward the protestant churches for their coolness

⁷⁵T. L. Nugent to his brother, March 11, 1873, in Nugent, editor, Life Work, p. 298.

⁷⁶The National Economist, I (Washington, September 14, 1889), 414.

⁷⁷The Southern Mercury, March 19, 1896.

⁷⁸Davis, Political Revelation, p. 132.

to reform. A writer for the Texas Advance claimed that the churches' oppression of the poor accounted for the sad moral state of the country.⁷⁹ Prominent evangelists T. DeWitt Talmadge, Dwight L. Moody, and Sam Jones received editorial criticism for their silence on economic issues. Critics hinted that financial support from "the money power" precluded their condemning the rich.⁸⁰

Alliance members, like their leaders, criticized the churches for their lack of concern with farm problems. Some called on ministers to show the same concern for social ills that they did for theological argumentation.⁸¹ Just before the election of 1894 a populist who belonged to the Methodist church asked the editor of his church's state paper to poll Methodist ministers on how they planned to vote. When his attempt failed he complained to The Mercury:

Being a poor man and struggling to keep my head above the tide of depression . . . I think I have a right to know how our preachers are voting It would be a poor consolation to console a man with soft words and at the same time vote him into bondage.⁸²

The leaders and membership of the Farmer's Alliance and People's party of Texas differed in their religious beliefs

⁷⁹Texas Advance, September 30, 1893.

⁸⁰Ibid., March 3, 1894; The Southern Mercury, March 7, 1895; Ibid., September 5, 1895.

⁸¹The Southern Mercury, May 2, 1895.

⁸²Ibid., October 25, 1894.

and in the extent to which their reform activity was based on those beliefs. For some reformers like T. L. Nugent and many of the female crusaders, religion apparently provided an essential motivation for reform. But to many leaders of the movement the philosophical support of divine approval, although important, was secondary in what was first of all an economic crusade. They used their religious frame of reference, as had many others in the South, to verbalize their commitment to a social cause.

The unifying thread which linked a mystic like Nugent with the fundamentalist preachers and which enabled the farmers to quote scripture and Jefferson in the same breath was the idea that the common people, specifically farming people, were the elect of God. This ancient idea appears in the late nineteenth-century Texas in several forms. The great mass of Texas agrarian rebels inherited it as part of their puritanical protestant heritage. Well-read lawyers like Cyclone Davis found it in the deistic writings of Jefferson and other American products of the enlightenment. And a small group of mystics, towered over by T. L. Nugent, discovered something similar to it in the writings of an eighteenth-century Swedish theologian.

CHAPTER III

SIMILARITIES OF STRUCTURE AND MORAL VIEWS BETWEEN RELIGIOUS AND AGRARIAN INSTITUTIONS

In 1890 an enthusiastic lecturer told a Texas County Alliance that ". . . the Farmer's Alliance is both handmaid and twin sister to the school and the church and like them is destined to play an important part in educating the people and elevating them to a high plain of intelligence, morality and independence."¹ If tillers of the soil were as they believed, the chosen people of God, then by extension the institutions which they established to combat what farmers thought to be the forces of evil must also be divinely sanctioned. For many reformers like this lecturer the function of the alliance and people's party paralleled that of the church. Both were bastions in the defense of rural virtue. Not surprisingly then, the institutional structure of the reform groups often paralleled that of protestant churches, and as a group alliance men and populists frequently expressed similar views on moral issues to those expressed by churchmen. Thus the agrarian

¹The Southern Mercury, December 4, 1890.

rebels, who for the most part were churchmen, drew upon their religious experience in developing their reform institutions to such an extent that those institutions often took on the characteristics of churches.

Such farm leaders as the county lecturer clearly went beyond the general identification of reform with righteousness and argued that the alliance was of God. William Garvin of Jacksboro ended his history of the alliance with a poetic statement of this conviction:

With Truth's proud banner o'er us,
 Our Creed "The Golden Rule,"
 Bright Honor's shield before us,
 United heart and hand,
 We know no sect or faction,
 No deeds that shun the light,
 But firm in truthful action,
 Trust God and do the right.²

Framers of the alliance constitution visualized their organization as undertaking the benevolent functions normally associated with the church. One constitutionally designated purpose of the order was ". . . to visit the homes where lacerated hearts are bleeding, to assuage the sufferings of a brother or sister, to bury the dead, care for the widows, educate the orphans" Yet this concern could certainly have come from sources other than the church, since the grange, to which many alliance men had formerly belonged, also sought

²William L. Garvin, History of the Grand State Farmers' Alliance of Texas (Jacksboro, Texas, 1885), p. 84.

to provide aid for members in need, as did the fraternal orders which included many Texas reformers in their ranks.³

Nevertheless alliance and populist meetings clearly reflected church influence, both in structure and in content. Members of these groups as well as visitors to their meetings commented on the similarity between reform and religious gatherings. After the state lecturer visited one local alliance a farmer reported enthusiastically: "We had an old-time Alliance revival."⁴ The reverence shown by the delegates at the populist convention in 1896 especially impressed one of the reporters there.⁵

In the early years of the alliance when the organization was limited largely to a few west Texas counties, state meetings were actually held in churches at Mineral Wells, Weatherford, and Chico.⁶ In 1893 after alliance membership had again declined to the point that all delegates to the state alliance could be seated in a rural church, the annual meeting was held in the Missionary Baptist church of Bazette, Navarro County.

³The Southern Mercury, July 17, 1890; Salon Justus Buck, The Granger Movement: A Study of Agricultural Organization and Its Political, Economic, and Social Manifestation, 1870-1880, Vol. XIX of Harvard Historical Studies (Cambridge, Mass., 1913), pp. 283-285; Catherine Nugent, editor, Life Work of Thomas L. Nugent (Stephenville, Texas, 1896), p. 397; Walter B. Wilson Scrapbook, p. 7, in Walter B. Wilson Papers, University of Texas Archives, Austin.

⁴The Southern Mercury, January 31, 1889.

⁵The Galveston Daily News, August 9, 1896.

⁶Garvin, History of the Grand State Farmers' Alliance, pp. 49, 58, 64.

Alliance men constructed an arbor near the church for the public speechmaking, and the private business of the alliance was conducted in the sanctuary.⁷ Local alliances also frequently met in church buildings, which, being among the few buildings in most rural communities suitable for large gatherings, were natural sites for such meetings.⁸

Credal statements on the separation of church and state did not prevent local populist clubs from meeting in churches. Often, as was the case when Stump Ashby addressed a third party rally in a Longview church, ministers filled the pulpits for such meetings.⁹ On one occasion a large tent being used by the local Christian endeavor group served as the meeting place for a people's party rally.¹⁰

Not only did the farmers occasionally borrow church buildings for meeting places; they consistently adopted elements of church services for their own needs. Alliance meetings typically opened with prayer, although the state alliance rejected the establishment of a formal pattern for invocations and benedictions.¹¹ Like its parent organization,

⁷The Dallas Morning News, August 16, 1893.

⁸The Southern Mercury, March 11, 1887; March 7, 1889.

⁹The Dallas Morning News, July 15, 1892.

¹⁰Ibid., June 20, 1894.

¹¹Garvin, History of the Grand State Farmers' Alliance, p. 56 (misprinted as p. 65).

the people's party often opened and closed its meetings with prayer. An observer at the populist convention in 1896 noted the sincerity of Chairman H. L. Bentley's benediction at the closing session: "It was not," the observer wrote, "a \$5 a day prayer [like] one hears in the legislature."¹²

In Texas, as elsewhere, singing was a common facet of worship. In the north central and eastern sections of the state where farm protesters abounded, a primitive type of church music prevailed which drew heavily on indigenous southern folk tunes and employed an unusual form of musical notation which lessened the need for instrumental accompaniment.¹³ Religious songs of the region were not highly stylized hymns, but, for the most part, easily sung melodies with words which related to the everyday experiences of rural life. The populists also drew on this same rich southern musical heritage which had so profoundly influenced southern hymnody in expressing their deep concerns about reform. The inclusion of music in their meetings was so common that when the People's party convention opened in 1891 without benefit of prayer or song the exclusion was noted by the press.¹⁴

¹²The Galveston Daily News, August 9, 1896.

¹³George Pullen Jackson, White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands: The Story of the Fiddle Folk, Their Songs, Singings, and "Buckwheat Notes" (Chapel Hill, 1933), pp. 112, 114.

¹⁴The Dallas Morning News, August 18, 1891.

Alliance men and populists sang popular religious and secular songs, sometimes adding new lyrics of their own, and sometimes singing them in their original form. Often the hymns or spirituals had no direct connection with the reform movement, as for example when the state alliance meeting opened in 1891 with the singing of "On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand," or when Chairman Stump Ashby led the delegates to the populist convention some years later in singing "Jesus, Lover of My Soul."¹⁵

Farmers readily adopted well-known hymns and spirituals to suit their own specific needs. An observer at one populist gathering noted that "The tunes to nearly all their songs are familiar to all Sunday school Attendants and church goers," but that the words were new. "All Hail the Power of Jesus Name" became "All Hail the Power of Laboring Men," and "Ring the Bells of Heaven" was converted to "Ring the Bells of Freedom." Hymnodical origins are also apparent in such alliance songs as "Labor's Ninety and Nine" and "To the Polls."¹⁶ The alliance even published its own song book, which included many hymn tunes with new words. "All the Way My Savior Leads Me" provided the tune for "My Party Led

¹⁵The Southern Mercury, August 27, 1891; The Dallas Morning News, June 21, 1894. See also The Dallas Morning News, July 23, 1891 for hymn-singing at an alliance camp meeting.

¹⁶The Dallas Morning News, July 25, 1892.

Me," and "The Runaway Banker" was sung to the tune of "The Kingdom Is Coming."¹⁷

On special occasions "congregational" singing as it was called might be supplemented with "renditions" by special musical groups. Sometimes special choirs added to the musical content of camp meetings and large gatherings. At one such meeting a large glee club sang, supported by a Negro brass band. In that instance an observer noted that music was used to tell ". . . of the downtrodden farmer and the bloated bondholders . . . and of the final glorious triumph of the man with the hoe over corporations, monopolies and capitalists."¹⁸

Just as the sermon was the focal point of rural protestant worship, so an address by the local lecturer was of great importance in alliance and populist meetings. Very early in its development the alliance organized a network of lecturers who carried on the work of educating the brethren in alliance objectives and programs. The state alliance maintained a staff of paid lecturers and organizers, and each local alliance had its own lecturer.¹⁹ The state alliance lecturers organized

¹⁷Ibid., August 18, 1891.

¹⁸Ibid., July 22, 1892; August 6, 1891.

¹⁹William L. Garvin and S. O. Daws, History of the National Farmer's Alliance and Co-operative Union of America (Jacksboro, Texas, 1887), pp. 138-139.

new groups, much as circuit riders might establish new churches, and also made the rounds of existing alliances to share the latest information about the order and to exhort the members to be faithful in the work of reform. One alliance leader, likening the lecturers to Christ's apostles, reminded them that ". . . the fields are white unto harvest . . ." and admonished them to ". . . go into the byways and preach the Alliance gospel in all its purity."²⁰

The people's party capitalized on this network of lecturers. As the populist movement gained support among alliance men, some alliance lecturers devoted part or all of their time to promoting the third party. The populists recruited others to support them and organized a lecture bureau to coordinate their efforts.²¹

Religious influence in the establishment of the alliance and populist lecture systems was largely indirect. The alliance apparently borrowed the idea from the grange,²² but the popularity of the lecturers was due in large measure to their ability to link old time religion with agricultural education.

²⁰The Southern Mercury, June 20, 1889.

²¹Roscoe C. Martin, The People's Party in Texas: A Study in Third Party Politics (Austin, 1933), p. 165.

²²Buck, Granger Movement, p. 285.

If lecturers and speakers of the alliance and populist party sometimes resembled rural protestant preachers, the similarity was understandable, since many of them had some connection with the ministry.²³ Lecturers usually emphasized the economic benefits of the alliance or political virtue of the third party, but for the farmer, support of political and economic reform were not far removed from support of religion. With a large number of preachers on the lecture circuit of what was for many a moralistic crusade, lectures and speeches often resembled revivalistic sermons. Lecturers constantly reminded their listeners that their organizations were based on ". . . equality, justice, and the golden rule," and that in this Christian nation God was on the side of righteousness--that is to say populism--in politics.²⁴ These exhortations to join the crusade to save rural America could produce similar emotional results to exhortations directed at sinners. One veteran alliance man commented on what he considered to be the best alliance meeting he had attended.

We had an old-fashioned experience meeting; we all owned up like men, told our respective shortcomings, and made resolutions for the future. In that meeting I saw brethren embrace each other in loving embrace, and to this day the effects of that meeting are clearly visible in Navarro County.²⁵

²³See below, Chapter IV.

²⁴Unidentified manuscript in John B. Rushing Papers, University of Texas Archives, Austin.

²⁵The Southern Mercury, December 20, 1888.

Perhaps the clearest indication of farm protesters using church practices for reform purposes was in their appropriation of the summer camp meeting. The camp meeting, a product of the frontier, had its beginnings in trans-appalachia during the first decade of the nineteenth century. To the western farmer the opportunity of breaking the monotonous farm routine by attending an extended session of preaching and socializing came as a welcome relief. But as the frontier receded so did the camp meeting. By the 1840's more refined indoor revivals replaced camp meetings in the East.²⁶ By the time farm protest groups became noticeable in Texas, camp meetings had largely disappeared among the major denominations of the state. Most of the meetings held in Texas during the 1890's were sponsored by holiness or adventist groups.²⁷

At a time when most protestant groups were forsaking the old-fashioned camp meetings for indoor revivals, the alliance and people's party adopted the practice and utilized it most successfully. During July and August farmers gathered by the thousands in campsites across the

²⁶Charles A. Johnson, The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time (Dallas, 1955), pp. 25, 242.

²⁷Walter M. Vernon, Methodism Moves Across North Texas (Dallas, 1967), pp. 116-117; Dallas Morning News, August 11, 1891, July 29, 1892, July 21, 1893.

state to sing and pray and listen to their leaders extoll the virtues of reform. To one such meeting a host of over 2,000 alliance supporters--men, women, and children--came and pitched their tents to live together for five days of spiritual, social and political refreshment.²⁸

Farm leaders saw a distinctly spiritual value in these meetings. In issuing the call for a county alliance camp meeting an officer of the Van Zandt alliance announced: "It is hoped that every alliance man in the County will meet together with his family and spend the two days in singing, praying and speaking, all of which is believed would greatly promote the general interests of the alliance" ²⁹

The daily routine followed closely that of church-sponsored meetings. At one meeting the day's activities began at 10:00 with a prayer by the chaplain, followed by group singing, which lasted until 11:30. After a recess for lunch the group re-assembled with the singing of a hymn and then listened to speeches until 5:00.³⁰ The speaking was often enlivened by debates between alliance or populist speakers and politicians of the major party. This practice also had its parallel in

²⁸The Dallas Morning News, July 22-23, 1892.

²⁹The Southern Mercury, August 3, 1889.

³⁰Ibid., August 10, 1889.

church circles, where theological debates between representatives of different denominations were commonplace.³¹

After the final session of the day the campers found time for various forms of social activity, just as participants in religious camp meetings had done. In spite of opposition from some, a dancing platform was usually constructed for the enjoyment of those who indulged in that practice.³² At the farmers' camp meetings the selling of liquor was not allowed on the grounds, but enterprising merchants usually managed to traffic in the vile substance just outside the limits of the camp within easy access of the more thirsty campers. A press report of one alliance camp meeting includes the information that ". . . one prominent speaker, on account of too much 'iced tea' was unable to fill the engagement last night."³³

In spite of such occasional lapses, not unheard of at church camp meetings, the farmers' encampments had a pronounced religious flavor. The observations of a reporter about one of the largest populist camp meetings could be repeated for numerous others.

³¹Martin, People's Party, p. 174; The Texas Christian Advocate, June 6, 1890.

³²Johnson, The Frontier Camp Meeting, pp. 208-28; The Dallas Morning News, July 29, 1891; July 31, 1891.

³³The Dallas Morning News, July 31, 1891.

To one coming suddenly and unexpectedly upon this encampment just before the opening morning speaking, the singing of the lively songs to popular sacred tunes would have much more the general appearance of a good old-fashioned Methodist camp meeting in full blast than that of a political gathering.³⁴

The farmers' camp meetings served much the same purpose for reform as similar meetings did for the churches. Living in community the farmers could renew their spiritual commitment to the cause of reform. In the excitement of the camp meeting reform and religious faith blended into a single righteous cause. Like the church gatherings, these meetings afforded the farmer social opportunities which rural life generally denied him. Even if he and his wife did not indulge in some of the social activities available at the camp meeting he nevertheless had ample opportunity to enjoy the fellowship of kindred minds.

In a similar way the reform groups, with their frequent meetings and elaborate organization, served much the same social function as did churches and fraternal orders. If the response of one young man from McKinney was typical, the reform organizations blended smoothly into the pattern of

³⁴The Dallas Morning News, July 25, 1892. Alliance camp meetings were not limited to the West. In 1890 the organizer of the Pennsylvania Farmers' Alliance announced that an encampment of farmers would be held at Mt. Gretna in an auditorium especially constructed for the occasion. Evangelist T. DeWitt Talmadge and the choirs of local churches were to help dedicate the structure. The National Economist, III (August 2, 1890), 315.

rural and small town social life. During the populist years Walter B. Wilson was active in the Methodist church, the Epworth League (Methodist youth organization), the Red Man's lodge, the alliance, and the People's party. Wilson's diary indicates that he faithfully attended the meetings of all these organizations, and while not indicating a correlation between his religious and reform activities, it suggests a common attitude toward the two. They were both unquestioned aspects of his social and civic life.³⁵

Not only did the institutional structure of farm protest groups frequently parallel that of protestant churches, but a similar parallel existed in attitudes on certain moral issues. In spite of their concern with saving souls, leaders of the major protestant groups did speak out on what they considered to be the great moral evils of the day. Churchmen provided much of the leadership and enthusiasm of the prohibition movement, and church leaders also spoke out on the presumed evils of dancing, prize fighting, and other private vices. In many instances the sentiment of individual farm protesters and of their organizations corresponded with those of churchmen and church groups.

³⁵McKinney Democrat, October 22, 1896, in Walter B. Wilson Scrapbook, p. 7, Walter B. Wilson Papers, University of Texas Archives; Walter B. Wilson Diary, January 4, 5, 10, February 1, November 4, 1896.

Texas protestant churchmen were extremely vocal on the issue of drinking. Many favored both individual temperance and collective prohibition. The farm protesters were also noted for their aversion to strong drink. In 1890 the state alliance passed a resolution requesting county alliances to send no delegate to the state convention who was ". . . a habitual drinker of ardent spirits, or addicted to the use thereof to the extent of becoming drunk."³⁶ That such a request was needed indicates that temperance was popular but not universal among alliance men. The appeal must have had its desired effect, since an alliance leader at the next annual convention attributed the delegates' ability to accomplish a great deal in a short time to their abstinence from liquor.³⁷ Similarly, one description of delegates to the people's party convention in 1892 probably overstated the facts but accurately pictured the general impression given by the assembled farmers. "Of the 1,000 delegates only one was seen to drink strong liquor and this was accounted for on the ground that the delegate was only recently converted [to populism] and had not passed through the probation period."³⁸

³⁶The Southern Mercury, September 4, 1890.

³⁷The Dallas Morning News, September 2, 1891.

³⁸Ibid., June 25, 1892.

Other actions in support of sobriety added to the reputation of agrarian temperance. In predominately German Gillespie County the alliance passed a resolution in 1888 calling upon its supporters not to vote for any candidate ". . . who is in the habit of becoming intoxicated."³⁹ Although peddlers often found a ready market just outside the perimeter of the camp ground, alliance men sometimes reacted strongly against them. When several men set up a saloon near one Collin County alliance encampment about 100 of the brethren confronted them with a demand that they leave within ten minutes.⁴⁰

For many alliance and populist leaders the personal aversion to drinking led them to support the organized temperance and prohibition crusades. John B. Rushing of Shady Grove was a charter member of both the local alliance and of the local council of the United Friends of Temperance.⁴¹ Several farm leaders of the first rank participated in the statewide prohibition campaign of 1887 or supported the Prohibitionist party. The campaign of that year was a non-partisan effort in which leading churchmen played a conspicuous role. Anti-liquor forces organized strictly for

³⁹The Southern Mercury, May 17, 1888.

⁴⁰The Texas Christian Advocate, July 17, 1890.

⁴¹Charters of Shady Grove Alliance and Shady Grove Council of the United Friends of Temperance, in John B. Rushing Papers, University of Texas Archives, Austin.

the special election held in August and did not field a slate in opposition to the major parties in the general election.⁴² T. L. Nugent, at the time a district judge, was a member of the prohibitionist central committee in 1887. Cyclone Davis, although not an advocate of prohibition in that year, was converted to the cause shortly thereafter and remained a lifelong supporter of the movement, in 1912 winning a congressional seat with the support of the Prohibitionist party.⁴³

Numerous rank and file alliance men supported the 1887 campaign. Letters read at the drys' convention in Waco voicing approval of prohibition included many from the draught stricken areas of the state where supporters had been too poor to send delegates. These same impoverished counties of west Texas were also alliance strongholds. Although prohibition was defeated statewide by a substantial margin, several counties where the alliance was strong voted dry.⁴⁴

⁴²Ernest William Winkler, editor, Platforms of Political Parties in Texas (Austin, 1916), pp. 247-248.

⁴³Ibid., p. 248; James Harvey (Cyclone) Davis, Memoir (Sherman, Texas, 1935), pp. 236-237.

⁴⁴The Dallas Morning News, March 16, 1887; Glynn Austin Brooks, "A Political Survey of the Prohibition Movement in Texas," unpublished master's thesis, Department of History, University of Texas, Austin, 1920, p. 75.

Some alliance men further supported the candidacy of Marion Martin, prohibitionist candidate for governor, in 1888. As distinguished from the non-partisan dry coalition of 1887, the Prohibitionist party began nominating candidates for state office in 1886. In 1888 Martin, a member of the alliance and already the gubernatorial candidate of the drys, accepted a similar nomination from a renegade democratic faction composed largely of alliance men after Evan Jones, president of the state alliance, declined the nomination.⁴⁵

In spite of these indications of support, alliance men remained divided on the prohibition issue. As the statewide campaign was gathering steam in 1887 the Harris County alliance passed a strongly worded resolution condemning prohibition and the ". . . hypocritical men and women . . ." who were trying to limit individual freedom.⁴⁶

Although most farm protesters apparently favored temperance and even legal prohibition, neither the farmers' alliance nor the people's party formed an open alliance with the prohibition forces, at least at the state level. Tactical necessities as well as the narrowness of objectives common to many reform groups militated against such a union.

⁴⁵Ralph Smith, "The Farmers' Alliance in Texas, 1875-1900: A Revolt Against Bourbon and Bourgeois Democracy," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLVII (January, 1945), 361.

⁴⁶The Galveston Daily News, June 7, 1887.

Still, the farmers and the prohibitionists could have found ample basis for political cooperation. In addition to their drawing from the same group of people for much of their support, the two movements had overlapping objectives. From 1886 when they first fielded a slate of candidates until 1896 when they retreated to the safety of a one-plank platform, the prohibitionists' state platform contained various proposals for social reform other than the outlawing of liquor. In 1886 the drys' platform denounced the Democratic party for favoring corporations over ". . . the laboring and producing classes," acknowledged the right of labor to organize and called for a revision of Texas land laws to aid settlers in their struggle against ". . . capitalists and cattle syndicates."⁴⁷

Yet alliance men were never sure of the prohibitionists' commitment to a broad-based program of reform. In 1888 drys withdrew their support from H. S. Broiles, reform mayor of Fort Worth, as candidate for lieutenant governor after he played a prominent role in a noisy convention of alliance men and Knights of Labor, which, among other proposals,

⁴⁷Winkler, Platforms of Political Parties, p. 245. See D. Leigh Colvin, Prohibition in the United States: A History of the Prohibition Party and of the Prohibition Movement (New York, 1926), pp. 191, 255, 257.

called for the nationalization of the railroads.⁴⁸ Many Texas alliance men probably agreed with a New Jersey minister who wrote in the official paper of the Southern Alliance that the Farmers' Alliance should not align itself politically with the drys, for, "apart from the principle of prohibition . . . it is not certain that the Prohibition party stands for anything new or progressive in politics"49

At the time when the Prohibition party began seeking to woo dissident elements away from the Democratic party, the controlling powers in the alliance remained committed to a policy of non-partisanship. In 1887 The Southern Mercury, whose editor strongly supported temperance, opposed open alliance participation in the prohibition campaign. While editorializing that the struggle was ". . . between virtue, honesty, peaceful homes, Christianity, happiness and contentment, and vice, corruption, desolated hearts, depravity and despair . . .," the Mercury nevertheless contended that prohibition should not become an issue of the alliance.⁵⁰

⁴⁸The Dallas Morning News, August 24, 25, 1888; Winkler, Platforms of Political Parties, pp. 256-257. See The Texas Christian Advocate, July 5, 1888 for ecclesiastical opposition to the farmers' convention.

⁴⁹The National Economist, IV (December 13, 1890), 209.

⁵⁰The southern Mercury, January 22, 1886; April 29, 1887; March 4, 1887.

Even after a sizable bloc of alliance supporters had bolted the Democratic party, alliance men were reluctant to support prohibition. In 1895 under the editorship of another temperance advocate, Milton Park, the Mercury contended that alliance men and reformers should not become involved in local option campaigns. Reversing the argument of the drys that removal of the liquor menace would bring about other reforms, the Mercury argued that realization of the populists' Omaha platform and the alliance legislative demands must come before other worthwhile social and spiritual reforms would be possible.⁵¹

Alliance men were warned by their official historians that involvement in partisan politics during the greenback era had caused the downfall of the original Lampasas alliance.⁵² Adhering to the orthodox alliance doctrine of non-involvement in political or sectarian affairs, alliance men as a group established no formal coalition with the political forces of prohibition. The heretics who moved the alliance into the political arena were populists, not prohibitionists.

⁵¹Ibid., April 28, 1895.

⁵²Garvin and Laws, History of the National Farmer's Alliance, p. 14.

Like the alliance, the people's party had a mixed relationship with the prohibitionist party. On one hand many of the populists, including Nugent, their patron saint, sympathized with the objectives of the dries. On the other hand a firm stand on the issue would have alienated some populist supporters. In addition, the two groups were in competition, albeit on extremely unequal terms, for major party status in Texas in the 1890's.

In 1892 when the populists were making their first effort to control state government, the prohibition issue came to the fore within the party. At a special convention held in February to ratify the Cincinnati platform of the national party, prohibition advocates managed to secure passage of an amendment to that platform which called for outlawing the importation of foreign liquor. Debate on the proposed amendment was heated. W. R. Lamb, chairman of the central committee, argued that the party should not become weighted down with minor issues but should stick to its task of economic reform. At one point an anti-prohibitionist told E. L. Dohoney and other dries that the delegates had not come to hear prohibitionist speeches.⁵³ When at the party's regular convention in June Dohoney introduced a resolution

⁵³The Dallas Morning News, February 1, 2, 3, 1892.

calling for liquor elections on a local option basis, it was tabled.⁵⁴

Many populists continued to sympathize with the prohibitionists, but the party tried to rid itself of the image of being the political ally of the anti-liquor forces. One observer at the populist convention in 1894 noted that while most populists were still prohibitionists, they no longer wished to " . . . be regarded as the administrator of the late prohibitionist party" ⁵⁵ Nevertheless leading prohibitionists continued to have influence in the people's party. Dohoney, who had been the drys' first gubernatorial candidate, was nominated by the populists to a position on the state Court of Criminal Appeals in 1894, and in the same year Marion Martin received the party's nomination for lieutenant-governor, a position he had held some years before as a Democrat.⁵⁶ But their influence in the party was never great enough to enable them to move it toward a coalition with the prohibitionists.

The political opposition of many populists to prohibition placed them in opposition to the large number of

⁵⁴Ibid., June 24, 1892.

⁵⁵Ibid., June 22, 1894.

⁵⁶Winkler, Platforms of Political Parties, p. 332.

protestant clergymen of the state, who joined the dry crusade. The overpowering necessity--in the eyes of the farmers-- for the kind of economic reform the alliance and people's party offered led them to forego the political expression of their convictions on prohibition.

Prohibition dominated the social thinking of Texas protestant churchmen in the 1880's and 1890's, but other issues received some attention. Among these was the question of business activity on Sunday. When alliance men spoke out on this issue they expressed the same sentiment as did many churchmen. On several occasions a county alliance passed resolutions calling for strict enforcement of existing Sunday closing laws and the enactment of new ones.⁵⁷ The Southern Mercury argued against business activity on Sunday for practical as well as religious reasons, claiming that working men needed one day of rest.⁵⁸ The Mercury also joined churchmen of the state in calling for the Chicago World's Fair to close on Sunday. The Mercury's endorsement of a resolution to that effect passed by the southern alliance in convention at Ocala, Florida, might just as easily

⁵⁷Gillespie County Alliance Record Book, April 14, 1888, in University of Texas Archives, Austin; The Southern Mercury, February 14, 1889.

⁵⁸The Southern Mercury, October 23, 1890.

have come from the state's Baptist or Methodist paper. "Let the nations' representatives that will be there from all parts of the civilized world know and realize that we are what we pretend to be--a Christian nation."⁵⁹ And when an exposition closer to home remained open on Sunday the Mercury was outraged. "The management of the Waco Cotton Palace have decided to keep open on Sundays, and sell refreshments too! How does this sound for a moral, church-going community like Waco? Even Godless Chicago did not do this bad!"⁶⁰

Alliance concern for what was essentially a religious matter indicates the degree to which alliance men considered themselves to be part of a sacred society. They could speak out with equal conviction on an issue such as Sunday closing laws and on laws to regulate the railroads, since they as a group were seeking to create, or rather to restore, a morally and economically just society.

Alliance men also joined church leaders in opposing prize fights in Texas. When in 1895 Jim Corbett and Robert Fitzsimmons staged a prize fight during the state fair at Dallas, The Southern Mercury and the state alliance joined

⁵⁹Ibid., January 8, 1891.

⁶⁰Ibid., January 4, 1894.

the church press in denouncing the affair. The grounds for objections, both among churchmen and the alliance, was the brutality involved rather than the betting which presumably would accompany the event.⁶¹

Alliance men were more equivocal on the presumed evil of dancing than were church leaders. Dancing often went on at alliance and populist camp meetings, although the assembled farmers at one alliance camp meeting passed resolutions condemning the dancing which was taking place in the evenings and warned good country people not to participate. But neither at that meeting nor at others did stern looks and harsh words from the more puritanical stop the merriment. An observer at one such meeting wrote, "Dancing is in progress tonight and the campers seem to be enjoying the occasion."⁶² An article reprinted in the Mercury from the New York Herald asked the question, "Is Dancing Clearly Wicked?" and reached a negative conclusion.⁶³ Opinions clearly were mixed among alliance men on this issue, but an investigation of the views of non-clerical church members might also reveal

⁶¹Ibid., July 4, 1895.

⁶²The Dallas Morning News, July 31, 1891; July 20, 1892.

⁶³The Southern Mercury, January 24, 1889.

less unanimity within the churches on the subject than the well-publicized views of ministers and church editors tend to suggest.

On one other social issue involving churchmen some populists differed with protestant leaders. In the mid-1890's a debate raged among Texas churchmen on the merits of the American Protective Association, an anti-Catholic organization. Many protestant ministers endorsed or at least defended the A. P. A.,⁶⁴ and in February of 1894, the Texas Advance, official organ of the people's party, entered the fray by indirectly defending the organization. However, T. L. Nugent took exception to the position of the Advance and openly denounced the A. P. A. He was, as he said, ". . . a protestant in every fibre of my nature," and for that reason he believed strongly in intellectual freedom. The Advance then endorsed the position taken by the party leader.⁶⁵ In an apparent response to discussion of the A. P. A. within the people's party the state executive committee of the party issued a statement in 1895 which said in part: "The People's

⁶⁴The Texas Christian Advocate, March 29, 1894.

⁶⁵Texas Advance, February 3, 1894; March 17, 1894; The Southern Mercury, June 6, 1895. The historian of the A. P. A. suggests that some reform leaders, including C. W. Macune, whom he erroneously identifies as being from Georgia, may have had A. P. A. connections, but he offers no proof. David L. Kinzer, An Episode in Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association (Seattle, 1964), pp. 225, 245.

party is not a prohibition party, now is it an A. P. A. party"66 Further investigation might well reveal support for the A. P. A. among the rank and file of the alliance and third party, as this statement by the executive committee obliquely does, but nevertheless, a major reform leader, an important reform newspaper, and the populist executive committee took a markedly more tolerant position on the issue than did most of the state's clergymen.

The utilization of religious practices by farm protest groups in Texas indicates that Protestant Christianity as practiced in the state had a substantial influence on the institutional development of these groups. Some practices probably stemmed indirectly from the church and came to the agrarian institutions by way of the grange, the masonic lodge, or other social institutions to which farmers frequently belonged. Other practices were borrowed directly from the churches. The ease with which agrarian rebels upheld morality as it was understood by religionists of the state indicates the extent to which the reformers saw themselves as defenders of the moral order in society. Both in providing for the emotional needs of the farmers through religious-like activities, and in acting as defenders of the moral order the Farmers' Alliance and People's party served as quasi-religious institutions in which old time religion and the defense of agrarian culture blended to form the Populist church.

⁶⁶The Southern Mercury, June 6, 1895.

The unwillingness of the agrarians to cooperate with the forces of organized protestantism on certain moral issues, especially prohibition, does not indicate a lack of concern with morality on the part of the farmers, but rather a difference in priorities and a concession to political realities. Like the churchmen, they sought to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, but from their perspective the economic salvation of the godly farmer was a prerequisite for other reforms.

CHAPTER IV

PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO AGRARIAN

PROTEST IN TEXAS

In September of 1894, when the populist crusade was reaching its peak in Texas and the state's campgrounds and courthouses were ringing with populist oratory, a leading metropolitan daily noted that a large number of those stumping for the third party were ministers or had some tie with the ministry. Such political behavior on the part of clergymen needed an explanation, and The Galveston Daily News provided this one.

They all hold that ideal Christianity is a beautiful thing in theory, but that this is a real world and must have practical things. They all say they can accomplish more for the moral welfare of the people by going to the people in their conventions and primaries on week days than by waiting for the people to come to them on Sundays.¹

Students of American religion might expect such a brief for social Christianity from social gospelers Washington Gladden in Ohio or George Herron in Iowa, but historians have for the most part assumed southern churchmen to be at home tending the ecclesiastical store during the turbulent 1890's.

¹The Galveston Daily News, September 28, 1894.

The presence of a fairly large and influential group of ministers in the people's party of Texas and its parent organization the farmers' alliance suggests that some southern clergymen were less preoccupied with personal salvation than has heretofore been believed.

In a state which was largely rural most ministers were naturally in contact with the farmers and familiar with their problems. At about the same time some northern clergymen like Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden were learning at first hand the problems of industrial workers while serving urban parishes. Students of American religion have identified the work of these men to ameliorate industrial problems as a principal manifestation of the social gospel movement, while similar efforts by rural southern clergymen have been largely overlooked. To many southerners the farm protest movements dramatized the ethical dilemma of industrial America, just as other secular and clerical movements did to northerners. The involvement of Protestant clergymen of one southern state in the crusade for social reform indicates the presence of a movement in the South showing marked similarities to the northern social gospel movement.

At least in its more populous regions Texas had an abundance of preachers as well as populists. In 1890 the

white, Protestant churches of Texas,² most of them Methodist and Baptist,³ still maintained the missionary excitement of the frontier, and at the same time had, for the most part, strong institutional ties with the Southeast. Each was orthodox according to its own lights, with the spectre of modernism still over the horizon. If there were farm protesters among Texas clergymen they were not of ". . . the most advanced school of religious radicalism . . ." as Hopkins found in the Midwest.⁴

For the three largest Protestant denominations of the state the 1880's and 1890's were turbulent years. In addition to bickering with each other they all suffered from severe internal dissension. The Methodists were divided on doctrinal issues. A substantial minority of Texas Methodists, disturbed by what they thought to be a growing lack of concern within

²Negro denominations and the Roman Catholic church are excluded from this study since Texas alliance men and populists were predominately white, excluding the hard to identify Colored Alliance, and almost exclusively protestant. Roscoe C. Martin, The People's Party in Texas: A Study in Third Party Politics (Austin, 1933), p. 86.

³In 1890 the largest white protestant denominations and the number of the communicants were as follows: Methodist Episcopal, South, 139,347; regular Baptists, 129,734; Disciples (including Church of Christ), 41,859; Cumberland Presbyterian, 22,297; Presbyterian Church in the United States, 10,744. U. S. Census Office, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, Report on Statistics of Churches (Washington, 1894), III, 165, 352, 589, 666, 687.

⁴Charles Howard Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915, rev. ed. (New Haven, 1967), p. 122.

the church for the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification, began a gradual withdrawal from the mainstream of Methodism which culminated in the establishment of the holiness sects.⁵ The Disciples were in the process of splitting into Christian and Church of Christ congregations over matters of inter-congregational cooperation and church polity.⁶ And serious splits were developing among Texas Baptists over denominational policy. Perhaps more than those of Methodists or Disciples, the Baptists' differences hinged on clashes between strong individuals.⁷

The dissension within the major denominations helps explain their general silence on non-ecclesiastical matters. Denominational leaders and church newspapers in Texas showed little open concern for social issues except those involving personal morality. Church leaders often kept their political views to themselves, or at least did not advertize them. That is not to say they were inactive in state politics.⁸ The statewide prohibition election of 1887 and the biennial efforts

⁵Timothy L. Smith, "The Holiness Crusade," in The History of American Methodism, Vol. II (New York, 1964), p. 623.

⁶Colby D. Hall, Texas Disciples (Fort Worth, Texas, 1952), pp. 135-158.

⁷James M. Carroll, A History of Texas Baptists, Comprising a Detailed Account of Their Activities, Their Progress, and Their Achievements, edited by J. B. Cranfill (Dallas, 1923), pp. 407-421.

⁸For an insight into the activities of a denominational college president as lobbyist see letters of Rufus Burleson to William Carey Crane, February 29, June 4, 1881, in Rufus Columbus Burleson Papers, University of Texas Archives, Austin.

of the Prohibitionist party attracted church leaders from all major denominations. James B. Cranfill, a future Baptist missions secretary and editor, was the Prohibitionists' vice-presidential candidate in 1892.⁹ Cranfill, a friend of T. L. Nugent, hoped the prohibitionists and the populists might eventually merge into one reform party. At least in print he contended that the populists would come into the prohibitionist fold, although from its inception the People's party was much larger than the Prohibitionist party.¹⁰

Few leading churchmen who were not political prohibitionists openly opposed the one party system. Some, like Methodist leader John H. McLean, a friend of John H. Reagan, apparently supported one or another faction of the Democratic party.¹¹

Some few church leaders made complimentary statements about the people's party and its leaders. Randolph Clark, president of the Disciples' Add-Ran University, eulogized T. L. Nugent as ". . . a just judge, safe counsellor, and a wise political leader." Said Clark, "The scholar or the day-laborer found a companion and a sympathizer in Judge Nugent."¹²

⁹The Dallas Morning News, July 5, 1892.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹John H. McLean, Reminiscences of Rev. John H. McLean (Nashville, n. d.), pp. 263-265.

¹²Catherine Nugent, editor, Life Work of Thomas L. Nugent (Stephenville, Texas, 1896), p. 350.

President Rufus Burleson of Baylor University, the principle Baptist institution of higher learning in the state, twice visited the state convention of the third party when it was held in Waco. Although his address to the convention in 1893 reportedly convinced his audience of his commitment to reform, it also must have convinced the populists that he was not one of them. He told the group that their problems would be solved if they would concentrate on production of needed goods at home. All would be well if somehow farmers and townspeople could combine ". . . to save the country from demagogues and monopolies."¹³

Like denominational leaders, church weekly newspapers had little to say about the farm movements or about economic affairs in general. The Texas Christian Advocate (Methodist) spoke for all the church papers when it ended a letter-writing argument on the Knights of Labor by stating: ". . . this paper has a specific work, and cannot enter very largely into the discussion of the many questions growing out of our industrial system."¹⁴ The Texas Baptist and Herald was typical in its inconsistency on economic matters. It could on the one hand condemn the trusts for creating millionaires while

¹³The Dallas Morning News, August 19, 1893.

¹⁴The Texas Christian Advocate, August 5, 1886.

". . . honest toil is made to plod," yet on the other hand praise Baptist John D. Rockefeller for his philanthropy.¹⁵

Local economic problems received some attention from the church press. Firm Foundation, the Church of Christ publication, noted the effects of drought in some areas of the state in 1886 and called for donations of food and seed grain which the paper would distribute to the needy.¹⁶ But when a reader of The Texas Baptist and Herald chided the church for its preoccupation with foreign missions while its own members were in need, the editor replied: "No one ever suffered in a Christian land for the means sent to carry the gospel to the heathen in foreign lands."¹⁷ Church papers, especially The Texas Christian Advocate, recognized the growing alienation of workers from the church, but did not think it to be a local problem.¹⁸

Church papers tended to approve ministerial political activity only when the political objectives were clearly moral. While voting or even campaigning for prohibition did not constitute an unwarranted mixture of religion and politics,

¹⁵The Texas Baptist Herald (Dallas), September 5, 1888; June 5, 1889.

¹⁶Firm Foundation (Austin, Church of Christ), II (September, 1886), 6, 7.

¹⁷The Texas Baptist and Herald, April 16, 1890.

¹⁸The Texas Christian Advocate, February 22, April 26, 1894.

Church of Christ ministers who took to the stump, presumably for the People's party, were admonished with the scriptural proof text, "Touch not, taste not, handle not."¹⁹

Alliance and populist news items appeared irregularly in the state news columns of most of the papers,²⁰ and farm leaders were seldom mentioned except when they had some connection with the church or when they took a stand on an issue of special interest to the editor. The Texas Baptist and Herald said of R. J. Sledge, Baptist lay leader and prominent figure in the Alliance: "Col. Sledge is a staunch Baptist, and while looking after Alliance matters is not forgetful of the great Baptist interest of Texas."²¹ Shortly after T. L. Nugent publicly denounced the American Protective Association, The Texas Christian Advocate accused him of ". . . pandering to the Catholic Church."²² Although the death of Nugent in 1895 was a major news story in the state, none of the church weeklies mentioned it.

¹⁹The Texas Baptist and Herald, October 21, 1886; Firm Foundation, XXII (June 9, 1896), 3. Such sentiment was by no means limited to this most other-worldly of the church publications. See also, The Texas Christian Advocate, May 19, 1892.

²⁰The Texas Christian Advocate, April 12, 1888; The Texas Baptist and Herald, April 3, 1889.

²¹The Texas Baptist and Herald, September 4, 1889.

²²The Texas Christian Advocate, March 29, 1894.

Editorial comment on the alliance and people's party was even more infrequent than on other secular topics. Occasionally church papers voiced limited approval of the alliance, especially when alliance men proved themselves to be friends of temperance.²³ The Texas Baptist and Herald noted approvingly the efforts of the alliance to solve farm problems, as did a Church of Christ minister writing to the Firm Foundation in response to criticism of the alliance. ". . .Whatever enables me to alleviate human suffering," he argued, "is not detrimental to my Christian growth, and does not, therefore, keep me from any Christian duty."²⁴

On the whole, the people's party did not fare so well editorially. The Christian Courier (Disciples) condemned those who opposed the third party simply because most of its members were poor. The editor reminded the party's critics of Jesus' poverty.²⁵ But The Texas Christian Advocate, which had in 1887 opposed a third party even to crusade for prohibition, took the Epworth Herald to task for printing an article by South Dakota Senator James H. Kyle which endorsed the

²³The Texas Baptist and Herald, August 29, 1890; The Texas Christian Advocate, July 17, 1890.

²⁴The Texas Baptist and Herald, January 16, 1889; Firm Foundation, VI (October 16, 1890), 3.

²⁵The Christian Courier (Dallas, Disciples), December 13, 1893.

people's party.²⁶ The most common editorial approach to the party was to ignore it.

Official church bodies were equally silent on the reform movement. Church conferences and conventions came no closer to statements on social action than the inevitable report of the committee on temperance.

Clearly the official documents of Texas Protestantism offer nothing to challenge the ideas of church historians about social Christianity in the region. For the most part ministers concerned about agrarian reform sought other means of expression than denominational publications and meetings. Either because they could not be heard or because they doubted the propriety of mixing their clerical and political roles, they did not address themselves primarily to the churches.

Texas wags of the populist era claimed that the people's party consisted of ". . . one gallus farmers and Cambellite preachers."²⁷ Preachers did not constitute a majority of the party, nor were they all of the Church of Christ-Disciples persuasion, but nevertheless, a substantial number of ministers were members and leaders of the people's party and the farmers'

²⁶The Texas Christian Advocate, August 4, 1887; October 4, 1894. Kyle was a minister of the Congregationalist church. John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party (Minneapolis, 1931), p. 181.

²⁷Martin, People's Party of Texas, pp. 85-86.

alliance. Alliances and populist clubs typically had a chaplain, and ministers and former ministers also assumed more substantial leadership roles than that of invoking divine blessings on the meetings. The inaccuracy and scarcity of records have precluded the identification of many of these clergymen, but enough are known, especially of those playing major roles in the farm organizations, to give a fairly clear profile of who they were, what their contributions were to the reform movement and the church, and how they understood the social aspect of Christianity.

The most prominent ministerial member of the alliance and people's party was Harrison Sterling Price (Stump) Ashby, who until 1887 was a Methodist circuit rider in western and northcentral Texas.²⁸ A native of Missouri, Ashby's pre-ministerial experience included service in the confederate army and amateur acting. After moving to Montague County, Texas, in 1869, he successively took up cattle driving and school teaching. Then in 1871 he enrolled in a theological reading course in preparation for the ministry.²⁹ One of Ashby's first assignments was in Stephenville, where T. L. Nugent was a member of his congregation.³⁰

²⁸North Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Minutes, 1887, p. 13.

²⁹The Dallas Morning News, September 16, 1894.

³⁰Ibid., June 22, 1894.

Both in Stephenville and in later assignments Ashby was apparently too fond of drink for some Methodist sensibilities. He passed a conference investigation of his character when his presiding elder reported that ". . . rumors derogatory to the character of H. S. P. Ashby [sic] were false and unfounded."³¹ At the same conference he was granted supernumerary status; this release from ministerial duties was usually reserved for ministers who were physically or mentally unable to continue their work.³² According to Ashby, he quit the active ministry because his community had five preachers, more than the poverty-stricken farmers could support.³³ However, Ashby was not yet out of trouble. The following year the conference "located" him for "secularity."³⁴ He could still preach, but could not hold regular circuit appointments. The conference could take such action when a minister was ". . . complained of as being so unacceptable, inefficient, or secular, as to be no longer useful in his work."³⁵ Neither church records nor Ashby's

³¹North Texas Conference, Minutes, 1887, p. 13; The Dallas Morning News, February 29, 1892.

³²North Texas Conference, Minutes, 1887, p. 6; The Texas Christian Advocate, January 2, 1890; W. P. Harrison, editor, The Doctrines and Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (Nashville, 1890), p. 97.

³³The Dallas Morning News, September 16, 1894.

³⁴North Texas Conference, Minutes, 1888, p. 13.

³⁵Walter M. Vernon, Methodism Moves Across North Texas (Dallas, 1967), p. 137; Harrison, editor, Doctrines and Disciplines, p. 153.

own statements suggest that his political activity caused the official censure. Eight years after he left the active ministry he told a reporter: "I believe in the Christian religion and I have no quarrel with the churches."³⁶

Ashby was a prominent member of both the alliance and the People's party. For a time the state lecturer of the alliance, he was a popular speaker at alliance and populist gatherings, where he combined populist economic rhetoric with scriptural injunctions to prove his points.³⁷ However, Ashby did much more than provide platform oratory for the cause. He served as chairman of the executive committee and permanent chairman of the convention of the people's party, and 1896 was the party's nominee for lieutenant governor.³⁸

Ashby said he could do more to improve the conditions of mankind as a populist than as a minister. He saw no inconsistency in his two callings. "I preach politics during the week and religion on Sunday," he said.³⁹ Temporal reform was for Ashby an integral part of Christianity. He told the assembled state alliance in 1891 that rejection of the two

³⁶The Dallas Morning News, September 16, 1894.

³⁷The Southern Mercury, January 18, 1894.

³⁸The Galveston Daily News, September 28, 1894; Ernest William Winkler, editor, Platforms of Political Parties in Texas (Austin, 1916), pp. 293, 380; The Dallas Morning News, August 7, 1896.

³⁹The Galveston Daily News, September 28, 1894.

great principles of religion, love of God and love of man, was the source of poverty.⁴⁰

Ashby and other populist preachers liked to heap Biblical anathemas on contemporary political and economic malefactors. At a populist camp meeting in Comanche County, he likened the major parties to the Pharisees, who could not reform themselves if they wanted to.⁴¹ In spite of his professed loyalty to the church, he criticized its neglect of the harsh side of the gospel. Had Christ been like most modern preachers, Ashby said, He would have handled the rich young ruler differently. Instead of commanding him to sell all he had and give to the poor, ". . . he would have advanced down the aisle, seized him with both hands and said Colonel, come up and consider yourself saved."⁴²

Albert B. Francisco, pastor of the New Jerusalem Church in Galveston, was an important, although unusual, populist preacher. Francisco, like Ashby, was a native of Missouri. He taught school and dabbled in reform politics in his native state before entering the ministry of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian) church.⁴³ In theology Francisco and his

⁴⁰The Dallas Morning News, August 21, 1891.

⁴¹Ibid., August 5, 1892.

⁴²Ibid., August 21, 1891.

⁴³Ibid., August 9, 1896.

co-religionists were much closer to the New England transcendentalists than to Bible-thumpers like Ashby. Just before accepting the Galveston pastorate he ran on the third party ticket for congressman in the sixth district of Missouri.⁴⁴

In Texas, Francisco became a correspondent and friend of T. L. Nugent, whose wandering soul had found rest in the Swedenborgian faith.⁴⁵ Nugent, having long since given up the Methodist church, may have attended Francisco's church in Galveston.

At the People's party convention of 1896, held eight months after Nugent's death, Francisco introduced a resolution of tribute to the deceased leader. Perhaps in respect to Nugent's memory, the convention nominated his friend for Superintendent of Public Instruction.⁴⁶ Francisco's nomination sheds more light on the attitudes of populists in general than on the role of ministers in the party. That the populists were willing to entrust the educational system of the state to him rather than to E. L. Dohoney, a lay leader of the Church of Christ and a leading prohibitionist, suggests more tolerance in the "populist mind" than some historians have been willing to admit.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Nugent, editor, Life Work, pp. 97-98.

⁴⁶The Dallas Morning News, August 7, 8, 1896.

In Texas, unlike the Midwest and East, few scholars in denominational colleges endorsed the reform movement. The calibre of schools, and therefore of professors, was well below that of schools in the more settled regions. The growing revolt of reform-minded social scientists against classical economics made little headway in Texas colleges.

Marshall McIlhaney broke the academic silence on economic reform. McIlhaney was at one time president of Centenary College, a short-lived Methodist institution in Lampasas, and was later the first president of Stephenville College. He was a Methodist and an alliance member, holding at least some minor offices in the latter organization.⁴⁷ Both in Lampasas and in Stephenville he was among the most outspoken champions of economic reform among representatives of religion in Texas. In 1895 he wrote

I am an Alliance man, and am a Christian.
No Christian, when he shall know them, can
fail to endorse the principles of the Al-
liance; and no man, if a true and all around
Alliance man, is other than a Christian.

.
The Farmer's Alliance is of God; the People's
Party is of the Farmer's Alliance, therefore
the People's Party is of God.⁴⁸

For McIlhaney the true basis of social reform was a belief in the ". . . immeasurable . . . value of man."⁴⁹ He argued

⁴⁷Ibid., July 29, 1892; Nugent, editor, Life Work, p. 6.

⁴⁸Nugent, editor, Life Work, pp. 100, 104.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 104.

that alliance men, being "Bible people," understood this concept, unlike ". . . modern scholars, statesmen, and divines." Alliance men, said McIlhaney, understood that aiding in the social and economic regeneration of mankind was part of their Christian responsibility.⁵⁰

McIlhaney carried the fight for reform to his own church. In 1892 he wrote to the editor of The Texas Christian Advocate that the common people of the state had a just grievance against the economically powerful, and that the church should help them in their struggle for justice.⁵¹

The arguments of Ashby, Francisco, and McIlhaney were repeated across the state by many preachers and former preachers. Their rhetoric seemed to give divine sanction to the cause of reform, and, from the perspective of the church, built a case for a social gospel of sorts. Although not as refined as the arguments of northern social gospellers, their statements contained many of the basic tenets of social gospel literature.

Texas reform preachers liked to cast themselves in the role of Old Testament prophets, come to pronounce judgment on social unrighteousness. At one alliance meeting J. S.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 102.

⁵¹The Texas Christian Advocate, October 20, 1892; See also The Dallas Morning News, July 29, 1892.

Brownson read from the fifth chapter of Nehemiah, in which usury is denounced, and said, "This is the Alliance gospel. It is the gospel for the masses. You may call me a calamity howler if you will, but if I am one so was Nehemiah. So was Jesus."⁵² Thomas J. Morris, writing in the official organ of the southern alliance, warned men who grew wealthy by making paupers of the farmers that God would require justice at the hands of labor's oppressors. "Think of it, all ye Christian philanthropists who have not yet touched with your little finger to relieve the heavy burden you have helped to bind . . . upon the laboring man"⁵³ Populist preachers likened the crusading farmers to the armies of Israel engaged in holy combat. F. V. Evans, in his opening prayer at the 1896 convention of the people's party, prayed that the populist forces be ". . . armed with might in their war on the agonizing plutocracy of the country."⁵⁴

⁵²The Dallas Morning News, July 22, 1892. According to this account Brownson moved from Michigan to become editor of the state populist paper. He had been a Methodist preacher, but apparently did not practice his profession in Texas, although his speeches reflected his ministerial mannerisms.

⁵³The National Economist, VII (March 19, 1892), 4-5. Morris was a minister from Columbus, Texas. For a similar warning see The Southern Mercury, July 30, 1896.

⁵⁴The Dallas Morning News, August 6, 1896. Evans retired from the Methodist ministry in 1888, but remained active in reform work. In 1895 he discussed "Religion in Politics at a meeting of the State Reform Press Association. North Texas Conference, Minutes, 1888, p. 7; The Southern Mercury, April 4, 1895.

Populist preachers who applied prophetic judgments to American society often assumed, as did other populists, a unique relationship between the United States and the children of Israel. America was the new Zion. Redden Andrews pointed out America's mission as God's chosen messenger. "It [America] is the teacher of all the nations with reference to the grandest things of politics and religion--duty to God and duty to man."⁵⁵ A. S. Bunting wrote of the Plymouth settlers: "They were not seeking great wealth, but peace and prosperity, and a commonwealth whose God is the Lord." Said Bunting, this and other observations on American history served ". . . to prove that our nation is and ought to be a Christian nation."⁵⁶ Men like Bunting argued that divine annointment of the United States made oppression of the poor all the more intolerable.⁵⁷

⁵⁵The Southern Mercury, November 27, 1890. Andrews was reportedly a Methodist minister in Belton until 1893. Methodist conference records do not substantiate this, although he, like many other populist preachers, may have been a "local" preacher whose name would not appear on the conference roll. The Galveston Daily News, September 28, 1894.

⁵⁶The National Economist, I (March 30, 1889), 27. When he wrote this article, Bunting was pastor of the Baptist church in Kyle. Milton Park, soon to become editor of The Southern Mercury, was a member of his church. Park was president of Kyle Seminary, a short-lived Baptist school, of which Bunting was financial agent. San Marcos Baptist Association, Proceedings, 1887, p. 9; Ibid., 1890, following p. 13.

⁵⁷The National Economist, I (March 30, 1889), 27.

If the Old Testament could judge arrant society, so could the New. In a poem entitled "The Mission of Life" Redden Andrews reminded his fellow reformers of Jesus' command to love God and man. It said in part, "With sacred love, with broad philanthropy/should life and strength to God and man be given."⁵⁸ Some saw their involvement in the reform movement to be a means of fulfilling the command to love one another. The words of one alliance man's eulogy could be repeated for many. "A preacher of the gospel, he long since realized that he could not be a true follower of Christ without pleading the cause of the poor."⁵⁹

Ministerial involvement in the movement can of course be explained in less altruistic terms. Rural ministers, like their parishioners, were part of an agrarian culture in which the interests of the farmer were of paramount importance. If their parishioners joined the crusade to preserve the values of rural society, these ministers might be expected to follow, just as many of their ministerial descendants of the 1920's followed their congregations into the Ku Klux Klan in what they thought was an attempt to uphold law and order and to foster public morality. In identifying Christianity with

⁵⁸The Southern Mercury, November 20, 1890.

⁵⁹Ibid., May 16, 1895. The deceased minister, W. P. Martin, had been chairman of the alliance state executive committee.

cultural goals these southern churchmen once again paralleled their northern counterparts who, as H. Richard Niebuhr points out, based their Christology on the belief that Jesus is above all moral man's ally in the struggle to subdue nature. Men like Rauschenbusch, said Niebuhr, ". . . find in Jesus the great exponent of man's religious and ethical culture."⁶⁰

Preachers who supported the alliance and People's party often found divine sanction for the specific programs and activities of those groups. A. W. Dumas, a Presbyterian minister, found ample scriptural justification for the populist position. At the 1894 People's party convention he delivered a series of addresses on "Biblical Endorsement of Populism." His exegesis left something to be desired (he read "populist" for "populous" in several Old Testament passages), but his mass of supporting quotations convinced most of those who heard him.⁶¹

In a related vein, reform-minded preachers contributed greatly to the religious fervor which prevailed in alliance and populist meetings. One alliance man who heard S. O. Daws speak at Bonham reported, ". . . we were reminded of an old

⁶⁰Charles C. Alexander, The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest (Lexington, Kentucky, 1965), pp. 85-91; H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York, 1951), pp. 100-101.

⁶¹The Galveston Daily News, September 28, 1894; The Dallas Morning News, June 21, 1894.

fashioned experience meeting; the brethren began to rise up and say, 'I expect to be a better Alliance man than ever before.'⁶² The religious spirit which they added to the proceedings transcended denominational differences. If the alliance were to be a quasi-church there must be no denominational bickering within it such as characterized Texas religious groups. Daws reportedly warned an alliance camp meeting crowd to ". . . get all the religion they could, but to leave out sectarianism."⁶³

Like the groups they aligned themselves with, the reform-minded preachers of Texas were a heterogeneous lot, yet their similarities make possible some tentative generalizations. Coming largely from the popular pietistic denominations, few of them departed from the theological orthodoxy common to southern Protestantism; they brought a revivalistic fervor to this new work of the Kingdom. Their orthodoxy was not of the pessimistic stripe often found among their colleagues. They could preach original sin on Sunday, then with no misgivings lecture on the perfectability of society through economic reform on Monday. Their ability to overcome sectarian

⁶²The Southern Mercury, July 11, 1889. Daws was the first lecturer of the alliance. According to one biographical sketch he was ". . . a regularly ordained Baptist parson." William L. Garvin and S. O. Daws, History of the National Farmer's Alliance and Co-operative Union of America (Jacksboro, Texas, 1887), p. 141; The Galveston Daily News, September 28, 1894.

⁶³The Dallas Morning News, July 22, 1892.

differences for a common cause is not surprising in the light of E. McNeill Poteat's comment on southern denominationalism. "Scratch any sectarian skin and the same orthodox blood flows."⁶⁴

Their insistence on the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man sprang not from any theological enlightenment, but from a personal and sympathetic contact with those who sought reform. Most who were pastors led rural or small town congregations. Many were lay preachers or for some other reason were not involved in regular pastoral ministry. The distinction between regular clergy and lay preachers was often more one of formality than fact, since educational requirements were low or non-existent, and since most supplemented their clerical income by farming or other secular work. What Robert M. Miller says of the southern preacher is doubly true of these men. "As often as not, the Southern preacher did not merely resemble the Southern tobacco farmer or cotton 'cropper or textile mill 'lint head,' he was that man."⁶⁵

Populist preachers were seldom denominational leaders, although some were respected and even influential in local

⁶⁴Edwin McNeill Poteat, Jr., "Religion in the South," Culture in the South, edited by W. T. Couch (Chapel Hill, 1935), p. 261.

⁶⁵Robert Moats Miller, "Fourteen Points on the Social Gospel in the South," Southern Humanities Review, I (Summer, 1967), 132.

church circles.⁶⁶ They often criticized churches in general, if not their own specifically, for their lack of response to the farmers' demands. They could agree with Isom P. Langley of Arkansas, chaplain of the Southern alliance, when he said, "What a shame it is that the churches of the country do not lead in these great reforms."⁶⁷ However, this investigation has uncovered no evidence of major debates within the denominations on the reform issue. While the populist preachers advocated ministerial involvement in the reform effort, they seemingly had no plan for organized church support of alliance or populist demands.

Preachers were active in the farm movements at all levels. They filled various administrative positions and were sometimes candidates for office.⁶⁸ Their importance as ideologists of reform should not be neglected, for these clergymen played

⁶⁶A. S. Bunting and Elihu Newton, both Baptists friendly to reform, held offices in their respective county associations. Parker County Baptist Association, Minutes, 1895, p. 5; Tarrant County Baptist Association, Minutes, 1891, p. 11.

⁶⁷Isom P. Langley, "Religion in the Alliance," Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest, edited by Nelson A. Dunning (Washington, 1891), p. 317.

⁶⁸U. M. Browder, until 1894 pastor of the Christian church in Gainesville, opposed Democratic stalwart Joseph Weldon Baily for a congressional seat in that year. The Galveston Daily News, September 28, 1894; Disciples of Christ, Yearbook of the Disciples of Christ: Their Membership, Missions, Ministry, Educational and Other Institutions (Cincinnati, 1895), p. 76.

a major role in projecting the movement as a religious one. Certainly most populists from the leadership on down had connections with organized religion, but most leaders and rank and file members were most enthusiastic about economic and political means of improving their lot. If C. W. Macune, Harry Tracy, and other alliance-populist leaders prophesied the salvation of God's elect, the farmer, it was salvation through economic cooperation and political pressure, not the power of brotherly love and the persuasiveness of infallible scripture. The philosophical Nugent and the Bible-quoting Cyclone Davis were exceptions in this respect among lay populist leaders.

These reform-minded preachers were in some ways different from the social gospelers of the North. They naturally had little concern for industrial problems. Their reform spirit was not kindled by a reformation of theology. They were more likely to be Methodists or Baptists than Episcopalians or Congregationalists. They created no church-related reform agencies, nor did they permeate the education institutions of their denominations.

Their similarities with the spokesmen of the northern movement are perhaps more significant. Like many of the most influential social gospelers such as Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden, the Texas reform preachers gained their interest in social Christianity through personal contact with

those who suffered because of the sins of society. Seeing the needs of the poverty-stricken in Hell's Kitchen, in industrial Columbus, and in rural Texas, they all called for social as well as individual salvation. The Texans, like their northern counterparts, had faith that society could be redeemed, or at least substantially improved, through human effort. Even more than many of the northern reformers, they identified themselves with secular programs of reform. While the nascent social gospel movement bypassed Protestant officialdom in Texas, a small but vocal minority of local clergymen acted on the premise that the agrarian reform movement was a legitimate manifestation of the coming Kingdom. They left little imprint on organized protestantism, but substantially influenced the tenor of the agrarian crusade in Texas.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Texas alliance men and populists were for the most part a religious lot. Most leaders as well as rank and file members who were church members belonged to one of the popular pietistic Protestant denominations, although a few identified themselves with the less orthodox groups such as the New Jerusalem church. The ideological thread which linked Baptist with Methodist and Disciple with Swedenborgian was a common belief in the divine election of the farmer. The reformers drew on orthodox southern Protestantism, the deistic notions of Jefferson, and, through men like Nugent, on the mystical thought of Emanuel Swedenborg in their defense of agrarian culture. While most of these reformers looked to the economic and political schemes of the alliance and People's party for salvation, such specific economic and political objectives were to them divinely sanctioned.

Quite understandably, agrarian reform organizations frequently assumed the characteristics of religious institutions. For example, both the reformers themselves and observers of the movement noted that the structure of alliance and populist meetings reflected a pronounced church influence. Frequently the reformers collectively and individually

expressed similar opinions on widely discussed moral issues to those expressed by representatives of organized protestantism, although reform groups sometimes disagreed with church groups, particularly when taking a stand on a moral issue might jeopardize the farmers' solidarity. These institutional and ideological similarities between religious and reform organizations substantiates the contention that most reformers identified with the religious community and that they found justification for economic and political reform in their religious heritage.

Despite the basic politico-economic orientation of the agrarian reform movement, some participants and leaders in both the alliance and people's party were quite concerned with the religious and cultural aspects of reform. More frequently than their male counterparts, women in the movement expressed concern for the preservation of rural society as a moral way of life rather than as an economically profitable venture. The same sentiment was often expressed by the substantial group of rural ministers who aligned themselves with the cause of secular reform. They too were inheritors of the agrarian ideal. These clergymen were not theological revolutionaries, but preservers of what they understood to be the old time religion. Their stand on the reform issue was to them entirely compatible with the role as ministers of the orthodox gospel. They sought by spiritual and secular

means to preserve a sacred society. Evidence suggests that these ministers were equally instrumental as lay reformers in giving the movement the aura of a spiritual crusade.

Protestantism influenced the general direction of the reform movement only indirectly; it was an integral part of the agrarian culture which inspired the movement and which farm protesters sought to preserve. But if popular religion had only an indirect influence on the essence of the reform movement, it profoundly influenced the form which that movement took. Texas farm protesters consistently turned to their religious experience to find the means of expressing their deep concern for the future of rural society and to find divine justification for their reforming crusade.

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